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**ROMANIA AND THE ALLIED POWERS (BRITAIN
AND FRANCE) AT THE BEGINNING AND DURING
THE FIRST YEARS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR
(1938-1941)**

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**Synthesis of scientific publications,
drafted in order to obtain the title of habilitated doctor in history**

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The synthesis paper for obtaining the title of habilitated doctor in history, as well as the works on which it was developed, can be consulted at the Central Library of the State University of Moldova (60 Alexe Mateevici Street, Block I, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova), at the National Library of the Republic of Moldova (31 August 1989 Street, No. 78A, Chisinau), on the page of the Institutional Repository of USM, on the ANACEC website, as well as in Open Source Databases.

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Conceptual benchmarks

Relevance and importance of the topic. Background and previous research. Romania's relations with Great Britain and France in 1938–1941 are essential for understanding both the collapse of the European international order of that period and the dismemberment of Greater Romania, as well as the processes that turned Romania from an ally of the Western democracies into an ally of Germany. The subject belongs to the broader crisis of the Versailles system, linked to the rise of German and Soviet revisionism and to the reconfiguration of relations between the great powers and the small states of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The research topic intersects with the history of international relations, security studies, international law, and the history of political mentalities.

Domestically and regionally, the subject remains topical through debates concerning Great Britain's attitude towards the dismemberment of Romania, the guarantees of 13 April 1939, and the causes of the loss of Bessarabia, northern Bukovina and the Herța region, as well as parts of Transylvania and Dobrogea. Understanding the processes of the reference period, including the great powers' perspectives on them, their mode of action, and their interaction with smaller states, is all the more important today, since, following Russian aggression against Ukraine, Europe is once again entering a period of systemic conflicts that are bringing the current international order to an end and will lead to a new global security architecture.

In relation to the research carried out on the reference topic, to one degree or another, we note that Romanian specialized literature includes a series of works dealing with British policy towards Romania and various aspects of Romanian-British relations. Given the limited size of this synthesis, only those specifically devoted to the issues of the present research have been examined in a succinct and analytical manner. Specialized research on this issue was initiated by Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu and Ioan Pătroiu, whose work, “Britain and Romania between 1939–1947”, opens the series of specialized studies on the reference topic[11]. Using Romanian and British archival sources, the authors analyze the evolution of political and diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Romania during 1939–1947, from the context of the Second World War to the loss of British influence in Romania with the establishment of post-war Soviet domination. In 2005, Marian Zidaru's work appeared, “Romanian-British Political and Economic Relations

1939–1947”, which deals with the evolution of political and economic relations with Great Britain between 1939 and 1947, analyzes the impact of the Anglo-French guarantees, the pressures of Germany and the USSR, the territorial losses in 1940, the failure of British initiatives in the Balkans, Romanian-British relations in the context of the 1944 armistice, and, finally, the decline of British influence with the consolidation of Soviet control over Romania up to the Groza government and the Potsdam Conference [83]. In a study published in 2006, Silviu Miloiu researched Romanian-British relations in the regional East European context defined by the British attitude towards the states that suffered as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [24]. Bogdan Schipor's work, "British Policy on the Western Frontier of the Soviet Union, 1938-1941", published in 2007 [31], represents an indirect research of Romanian-British relations in the period of interest to us, written on the basis of Romanian and British diplomatic sources researched by the author in the archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, respectively, the Central National Historical Archives, as well as on the basis of volumes of published British documents; analyzing these sources, Bogdan Schipor also published some articles directly related to Romanian-British relations [32]. Marusia Cârstea's work, "From the history of Romanian-English relations (1936-1939)", published in 2011 [9], analyzes the Romanian-British political - diplomatic, economic and military relations from 1936–1939, being useful for researching the period 1938–1941 in that it treats, based on important documentary material, the immediate preceding context and places particular emphasis on the economic and military dimension of these relations. Denis Fabian's 2008 doctoral thesis, "Romanian-English relations (1918-1940)" [14] examines the evolution of Romanian-British relations during the period 1918–1940, providing a useful general framework for understanding the climate of the years 1938–1941, but it devotes limited space to this stage and is based on relatively limited archival research. Here too, mention can be made of the works of Sorin Arhire, mainly his book, "Great Britain and Romania (1936-1941). Political, Economic and Cultural Relations", which, although based on relatively limited research of documents, nevertheless has the merit of providing a broader perspective on Anglo-Romanian relations [1].

As for Romanian-French relations in the reference period, they were the subject of a significantly smaller number of specialized studies. This situation is explained by at least two main reasons: on the one hand, France's defeat in 1940 considerably limited its influence in the following years, until the conclusion of peace, which reduced the historiographical interest

compared to the case of Great Britain; on the other hand, during the period of interest to us, the foreign policy of Great Britain and that of France were subsumed under a common strategy of the Western Allies, within which the British point of view usually had a determining role. For this reason, even within the present synthesis, the impression of a “shadowing” of France in relation to Britain could arise, explainable by the fact that French policy was largely subordinated to the British one in 1938–1940. However, at least two works must be mentioned, one of them, “*Vue de France. Recherches dans les archives françaises*” [5], published by Maria Brătianu in 1996. This work is particularly useful because it is based on French diplomatic documents from the archive and provides information on the political-diplomatic and economic relations between the two states during January 1938 – December 1940. The work of Georgiana-Margareta Scurtu, “*International Relations in the Context of the Second World War. Case Study: Romania's Relations with France (Oct. 38 – Jun. 40)*”, published in 2006, analyzes the political-diplomatic relations between Romania and France in the context of the outbreak of the Second World War, using Romanian, French (military), and British archival documents to highlight the evolution of bilateral relations in the last years of peace and at the beginning of the conflict [34].

In the research that we have published and that is summarized in this synthesis, we have used numerous works that, although they do not specifically refer to the issue of the thesis, have nevertheless made important contributions to its understanding. Thus, we have relied on the works of Alexandru Murad-Mironov [26], Octavian Țîcu [42] and Ion Șișcanu [34; 39], who studied Romanian-Soviet relations and the problem of Bessarabia; on those of Ioan Scurtu and Constantin Hlihor [33], Gheorghe Buzatu [6; 7], Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu [11; 12], who addressed the entire political and diplomatic context of 1940; and on that of Viorica Moisuc [25], who dealt with the economic component and dependence on Germany. We also consulted the volume of Ottmar Trașcă, who approached the processes of the reference period from the perspective of Romanian-German relations [41]. From international historiography, we used the works of Maurice Pearton [29] and Paul D. Quinlan [30], who examined British and Anglo-American policy towards Romania respectively; Keith Neilson [27] and Anna Prazmowska [28], who analyzed British policy towards the USSR and Eastern Europe; Rebecca Haynes [16; 17] and Andreas Hillgruber [18] on Romanian-German relations; Ioanis Stefanidis [36], who studied British propaganda in the Balkans; Onur Isci, on the role of Turkey [21]; Keith Sword [37] and Derek

Watson [80], on British reactions to Soviet expansion and the Anglo-Franco-Soviet tripartite negotiations, etc. These contributions, as we have noted, generally dealt with segments of the general theme addressed in the present synthesis; our aim was to integrate them into a coherent picture, centered on Romanian-Anglo-French relations. The published works were used to complete and contextualize the data extracted from the archival documents and to confront the different interpretative perspectives existing in historiography.

The research summarized in this synthesis was based on the complex use and critical interpretation of an extensive volume of unpublished diplomatic documents from British, French and Romanian repositories, as well as published German, American and Soviet sources. Our approach is based on direct research in the “Foreign Office”, “War Office” and “Cabinet Papers” holdings of the British National Archives (The National Archives - T.N.A.), on unpublished British and French diplomatic documents from the “Microfilms France” and “Microfilms England” collections of the Central National Historical Archives in Bucharest (ANIC), as well as on other Romanian holdings there - “Presidency of the Council of Ministers”, “Royal House”, “Vasile Stoica”, “Grigore Gafencu”. We also examined the archival holdings of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (“Romania 1920-1944”, “E.9 World War II”, “71/England”, “71/Germany”, “71/USSR”, “71/1920-1944 Special Files”, etc.) and collections of documents published in London (“Documents on British Foreign Policy” and “Cabinet Papers”), Paris (“Documents Diplomatiques Français”), the series “Documents on German Foreign Policy (DGFP)”, Moscow (“Year of Crisis. 1938-1939: Documents and Materials” and “Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR”) and Washington (“Foreign Relations of the United States”). The list of all volumes consulted can be found in the “Bibliography” section of this synthesis.

Originality of the research. This resulted from a comparative study carried out by confronting reports and correspondence from Romanian, British, French, German and Soviet sources in order to coherently reconstruct the main episodes of the international crisis between 1938 and 1941. In this framework, Romania's relations with Great Britain and France were constantly related to Western policy towards Germany, the USSR, Italy, Turkey, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, from the perspective of a systemic history of international relations. Thus, the advantage and originality of the works summarized in this synthesis, in relation to the existing Romanian historiography concerned with Bucharest's relations with the Western Allies at the beginning of the Second World War, lie in placing those relations in a more clearly outlined and

detailed international context. Romania's relations with France and Great Britain were, therefore, pursued not only within a strictly bilateral framework, but also far beyond it, in the international and multilateral one. Working with the sources mentioned above, we understood that Romania's relations with the Western Allies cannot be analyzed outside the general framework of European international relations, since they were deeply integrated into, and often subordinated to, the dynamics of relations between the great powers. In particular, the attitude of Britain and France towards Romania was conditioned primarily by their relations with Germany, but also, to varying degrees, by relations with the Soviet Union, Turkey, Italy or Poland. Consequently, we have shown that Western policy towards Romania reflected a complex system of interdependencies, articulated on multiple levels. In this context, an adequate understanding of Romanian-Western relations requires their analysis in connection with these broader relations, which were sometimes even more relevant than the bilateral interactions themselves. The originality of our work therefore lies in the detailed and contextualized reflection of these interdependencies. Unlike the prevailing approaches in Romanian historiography, often limited to internal documentary sources and a narrow analytical framework, our perspective highlights the structural constraints, both external and internal, that shaped Romania's policy towards the West and vice versa. Therefore, the present work proposes an original integrated approach which, beyond the Romanian-British and Romanian-French bilateral relations, also includes the analysis of Romania's relations with other relevant international actors in relation to those relations, as well as Romania's place in the West's relations with various third powers, while also making room in this equation for Romanian internal structural factors and thus offering a more comprehensive interpretation, better suited to the complexity of historical reality.

Research goal. The general goal was to reconstruct and reinterpret Romania's relations with Great Britain and France during 1938–1941, on the basis of unpublished and published primary sources, so as to explain both the dynamics of those relations and their connection with the processes and events that led to the collapse of Greater Romania in 1940 and, later, to the political and diplomatic rupture with the West. The approach aimed to integrate into a unified perspective the preceding crises (Anschluss, the Sudeten crisis, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia), the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the outbreak of war, the system of guarantees and collective-security projects, the pressures exerted by Germany and the USSR, the territorial cessions and the

reorientation of Romanian foreign policy, these landmarks motivating the choice of the chronological framework between 1938 and 1941. At the same time, by confronting them with information from primary sources, the research aimed to verify and assess the dominant interpretations in Romanian historiography, which privileged explanations based on the supposedly duplicitous attitude of the West and on the “unlimited” character of the 1939 guarantees, to the detriment of the analysis of internal causes: 1) the structural weakness of the state, expressed by its inability to transform available resources into real resilience; 2) the capacity of Romanian political elites to interact with the Western Allies in order to preserve an international system among the principal beneficiaries of which was the Romanian state.

Research objectives. A first objective of the research was to reconstruct the evolution of Romanian-British and Romanian-French relations in the major crises of 1938–1939, capturing Bucharest's reactions and the way in which they were assessed in London and Paris, as well as the constant framing of Western policy towards Romania in relation to the dynamics of relations with Germany and the USSR. The second objective was the analysis of the security guarantees of 13 April 1939: the context of their emergence, their actual content, and the divergences in their interpretation, that is, between the purpose for which the great Western powers offered them to Romania and the way in which, in Bucharest, they were assigned a meaning and scope different from the original intention. A third objective sought to identify the place and role of Romania in the system of collective-security initiatives in South-Eastern Europe: the Anglo-Franco-Turkish treaty, the Allies' projects in relation to the Balkan Entente, the idea of a Balkan front, and the relations of the Western powers with the USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria. The fourth objective was to understand and explain Great Britain's reaction to the collapse of Greater Romania in 1940, in the international atmosphere created by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The last objective concerned the need to explain the irreversible decline of Romanian-British relations in the context of the change of political regime, the German military presence in Romania, the rupture of Romanian-British relations and the preparation of the war against the USSR, while also identifying and presenting the main determinants of Great Britain's attitude towards Romania as a result of the evolution of Anglo-Soviet relations between June 1941 and August 1944.

Research hypothesis. We formulated the following hypothesis: the evolution of Romanian-British and Romanian-French relations depended to a greater extent on a series of internal causes, such as institutional weakness,

elite decisions and indecisions, the illusion of unconditional allied support, etc., than is generally understood by the existing Romanian historiography, which privileges explanations based on external circumstances. This hypothesis was led to by the observation (which we reached during the doctoral research stage) that there is a significant difference between the picture resulting from documentary sources (primarily Western, but also some Romanian) and the image portrayed by Romanian historiographic narratives regarding the processes taking place internationally, but also in Romania, and which are at the forefront of the research synthesized in this work.

Synthesis of the research methodology and justification of the methods. The research methodology was determined by the complexity of the proposed objectives and is based on the basic principles of scientific investigation, such as objectivity, historicism and the systemic approach to international relations. The approach has a predominantly qualitative character and is based on the critical analysis of archival and diplomatic sources from various political and institutional spheres, which allows for a comparative and balanced perspective. The analysis is carried out by combining several methods specific to historical research. General methods of scientific knowledge, such as analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, are used to organize and interpret the material and to formulate conclusions. The diachronic method allows for the tracking of the evolution of events and decisions during the period 1938–1941, facilitating the reconstruction of a coherent sequence of historical episodes. In parallel, the thematic analysis structures the documentary material around major issues, such as diplomatic crises, political-military negotiations or transformations of power relations in the region. The comparative-historical method is used systematically by confronting information from different sources, belonging to different state actors. The comparison is made both at the factual level, with reference to events, decisions, chronology, and at the interpretative level, in relation to the way in which the same events are perceived and presented in distinct documents. The analysis criteria target convergences and divergences of position, the context of the production of the documents, as well as the intentions of the authors. The approach is completed by the critical analysis of the sources, which involves the assessment of the credibility, limits and conditions of production of the documents, as well as the constant correlation between the Romanian internal documentary sources and the external ones, in order of their preponderance: British, French, German, Soviet and American. This approach allowed not only to verify the information, but also to identify

any distortions or omissions. At the same time, the methodology included a critical dimension oriented towards re-evaluating the existing interpretations in historiography, by relating them to the documentary evidence and the results of the comparative analysis. Thus, through the applied methodology, we aimed not only at reconstructing the facts, but also at a more nuanced interpretation of them in the broader context of international relations.

The results obtained and their practical importance. The published works show that the guarantees of April 13, 1939 had a limited and conditional character, being thought out in the logic of the great powers' own interests and not as an "absolute policy" for Romania, even if they were formulated precisely in the manner desired by the Romanian Government, which constantly refused real integration into a collective security system, relying on comfortable declarative formulas. The central conclusion is that the disaster of 1940 and the irreversible decline of Romanian-British relations were determined primarily by the structural weakness of the state and the inability of the elites to transform external resources and opportunities into internal power and resilience. The scientific results of the published research will determine the creation of a new research direction in which future efforts will have to focus primarily on understanding and explaining the internal, Romanian causes of the processes and developments that led to the events that Romanian society went through in 1940, and external causes will be analyzed as secondary circumstances. Beyond the applicability of the results in general scientific and didactic activity (their use in writing textbooks, special courses, future research related to the topic), their practical importance also lies in the fact that the lessons learned from them can serve as benchmarks in the current international situation which, in many respects, resembles that of 1938-1941. The results of the synthesized research highlight how the concessions made to the revisionist powers in the 1930s led to the collapse of the international order and demonstrate that, in a systemic conflict, political guarantees become obsolete, if they are not backed up by a solid internal base and a demonstrated will to resist. The assimilation of the historical lessons of the period 1938-1941 can serve as an academic foundation for the adoption, within international forums, of a firm position of Romania and the Republic of Moldova against any form of modern *appeasement* towards Russian aggression.

Content of publications

Chapter I. The international context and Romania's relations with the Western Allies until March 1939

In the studies summarized here, we have shown that, long before the issue of guarantees and defensive alliances in 1938–1939 reached the center of relations between Romania and the great Western democracies, the question of Europe's eastern borders and, within it, the question of Bessarabia, had already placed the Romanian state in an area of geopolitical concern for Paris, London, and Washington: especially in the last of these capitals, attempts were made to reconcile the principle of self-determination with the intention of preserving, as far as possible, the territorial integrity of the defunct Russian Empire [43, pp. 97-100]. The documentary sources we have researched show that, from the period immediately following the end of World War I, in the West (primarily in the USA), Romania's eastern border was seen more as a provisional solution to an open question, based on the understanding that the foreign policy of the new regime in Moscow was radically revisionist and long-term. The analysis of the Western diplomatic documents we consulted shows that this perspective was also influenced by the perceptions formed in the 1920s and 1930s about the subversive actions supported by Moscow in Bessarabia and the long-term risks of Soviet revisionism [48, pp. 199-202]. Thus, for example, many years before the events at the center of this research, the Americans were shaping their policy toward Romania on the basis of the expectation of a reordering of relations with the new regime in Moscow and of a new East European balance in which, one way or another, Russia would once again become the center of gravity [44, pp. 90-93]. In this sense, since the 1920s, some Western diplomatic documents suggested that the Prut-Dniester area and, in general, Romania's eastern borders were perceived as a fragile link in the security architecture of Eastern Europe [45, pp. 243-248]. This perspective was maintained, at least in some segments of the ruling circles in the West, in the mid-1930s as well [46, pp. 270-275].

The interwar borders of Romania with Bulgaria and Hungary were contested by Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism, first tacitly and covertly, and then openly. The issue of these borders, however, did not weigh nearly as heavily as that of the Romanian-Soviet border in Western calculations, given its relatively limited importance in the European balance of power. Its

significance began to grow only after Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism began to be instrumentalized, first by Germany, then by the Soviet Union and Italy, and, to a lesser extent, by Poland.

In the research we have been able to establish that the occupation of Austria by Nazi Germany constituted the first in a series of blows with fatal geopolitical consequences for the framework of cooperation between Romania and the Western Allies. In Bucharest, its consequences were perceived with quite good clarity, but the Romanian Government lacked, at the same time, the political courage and the practical instruments to initiate measures to correct the situation and consolidate those ties. In Paris, the meaning of the Anschluss was, broadly speaking, better understood than in London, but there was also a lack of will to assume the initiative and push Great Britain towards a common rapprochement with Romania. As for the British, there are no indications that that “family affair” had been analyzed with a concern proportional to its implications for Romania’s foreign policy [63, pp. 104-105]. However, the effect on Romanian politics and, implicitly, on relations with the Western Allies was profound: the Anschluss considerably diminished the potential of these ties. Beyond the erosion of Bucharest’s trust and respect for Britain and France, as we have shown in published research, the Anschluss directly hit the positions of the Little Entente and, through it, Romania’s international position: Czechoslovakia found itself, following the events, practically surrounded by Germany (to which were added the Hungarian and Polish revisionist claims), and Yugoslavia, already neighboring fascist Italy, gained the “benefit” of a new neighborhood with the Reich [63, p. 105]. In addition, the transformation of Germany into a direct neighbor of Hungary opened, in the absence of firm objections from Budapest, the prospect of easy military access for Berlin to Romania’s borders. Under such conditions, the leadership in Bucharest suddenly rediscovered the existence of an army with acute needs for equipment and maintenance and, therefore, the need to urgently identify the necessary resources and support.

The Sudetenland crisis, triggered by the pressure exerted by Germany on Czechoslovakia through predominantly non-military instruments, amplified the sense of urgency regarding the reconfiguration of relations between Romania and the Western powers. The documentary evidence that we have researched shows that this urgency was more noticeable in the attitude of the Romanian Government than in that of London or Paris [63, pp. 106-108], which is explained by the fact that, compared to the two major capitals, Bucharest perceived itself, and rightly so, as much more exposed and

vulnerable in relation to the dynamics of the ongoing processes. In that context, the Romanian ruling circles were aware that only the constraint generated by a general conflagration would have forced them to adopt those decisions that, in peacetime, they did not have the political capacity and courage to take. Despite this inclination and as we have seen, Bucharest ended up, in some respects, indirectly serving Berlin's interests, exerting pressure on the Czechs to induce them to accept concessions [76, p. 35]. The dominant tendency remained, however, that which privileged the early outbreak of war, based on the essentially correct intuition that a conflict started then would have occurred in more advantageous circumstances for the Romanian state and would have pushed, with great probability, Romania into the camp of Great Britain and France. This orientation was manifested, among other things, by Romania's tacit offer made in the summer of 1938 to the Soviet Union to allow (or, at least, to turn a blind eye to) military air transit in support of Czechoslovakia [67, p. 84], in the hope that such a gesture could have stimulated a firm reaction by France against German aggression and would have accelerated the outbreak of a confrontation capable of ending the escalation. The Soviet reaction was, however, as we have observed, duplicitous: Moscow invoked procedural conditions – for example, the need for a public decision by Romania, taken on the recommendation of the Council of the League of Nations – and, in doing so, revealed the more rhetorical nature of its commitments towards Czechoslovakia [76, pp. 44-45].

The perception of the heightened danger and the rather theoretical option for a war “sooner rather than later” as an alternative to a postponement considered particularly costly also had echoes in Paris, although in a more attenuated form than in Bucharest, in line with the lower degree of French vulnerability. Our research confirms that it was from France that the Romanian leadership expected the decisive step and the demonstration of the capacity to go beyond declarative formulas. The French minister in Bucharest, Thierry, assured the Romanian foreign minister, Petrescu-Comnen, on 22 May 1938, that Paris was, if necessary, willing to assume responsibility for a firm policy on its own, without constantly looking to London; these promises, however, proved to be devoid of substance. France could not, in the final analysis, act independently, accepting to be immobilized by British restraints. For their part, the British felt the least German pressure: protected by the strength of a naval fleet superior to the German one and by geographical isolation from Germany, they had a relatively comfortable situation and allowed themselves to underestimate Hitler's real intentions and psychological profile. We have

shown in published works that, in those circumstances, the British elite chose to privilege an illusory image of the Reich, adapted to its own assumptions, almost willfully ignoring the signals that revealed the real intentions of the Nazi regime [63, p. 107]. From this perspective, London's refusal, in the context of the events evoked, to resort to deepening Romanian-British economic relations as a foreign policy instrument is explained by its decision to cede to Germany the predominant control over the Danube economic space, based on the irrational belief that such a generous concession could have defused Berlin's expansionist appetite. The subsequent course of events would soon disprove these optimistic projections. The collapse of those illusions occurred under the well-known impact of German political and military brutality, causing London to worry belatedly about the harsh reality it had preferred not to see in time.

In our research we have revealed that, while – in the context preceding the German occupation of Prague – a state of increasingly pronounced anxiety in London regarding European developments was gradually beginning to take shape, Romania had already taken a series of seemingly limited but significant steps toward an economic rapprochement with Germany. Immediately after the Munich Agreements, King Carol II, taking note of the fate reserved for Czechoslovakia with the help of Great Britain and France, had come to the conclusion that orientation toward the Reich had become, in essence, inevitable and that under those conditions the most rational course of action was to simulate a deliberate adherence to the German camp. At the same time, we have shown that during his November 1938 visit to London and Paris, the king tried to balance that recently crystallized inclination, but the British Government, which had just signed the Munich Agreement, was skeptical of the prospect of deepening Anglo-Romanian economic relations, limiting itself to accepting wheat deliveries in a volume far below the expectations of those who wanted to deepen Romanian-British ties and almost reproaching the Romanians that that acquisition, made on political criteria, risked seriously affecting its own relations with Germany [70, p. 62]. In February 1939, however, as the illusions with which Prime Minister Chamberlain returned from Munich were shattered and the situation in Czechoslovakia became increasingly worrying, and in the context of information regarding the steps that would lead to the Treaty of 23 March 1939, the British and French rushed to propose to Romania negotiations similar to those already underway with Berlin. The Romanian response was firm: the priority belonged to Germany, and the opening of negotiations with the Western powers could not be

envisaged before the conclusion, under satisfactory conditions, of the discussions with the Reich, which happened with the signing of the Romanian-German economic agreement [70, pp. 61-62].

In the published works, we came to the conclusion that this manner of managing relations with the great powers, in which Romania supported, in January-February 1939, without British objections, the acceptance of Germany into the European Danube Commission [76, pp. 67-69], appeared, from the perspective of Carol II, as a logical solution given that London, incapable of adopting a determined attitude toward Hitler and failing to discern his real intentions, being, at the same time, internally divided in these respects, did not undertake anything effective to counteract the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia with the participation of Poland and Hungary, nor did it show any sign of dissatisfaction with Slovak separatism, openly encouraged by Berlin. All this was happening despite the fact that, on 19 September 1938, Great Britain had publicly offered to guarantee the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia, provided that it accepted German claims regarding the Sudetenland region.

In our research we have emphasized that the Romanian Government was also discouraged by the lack of any British reaction to its calls to temper Hungarian territorial claims toward Czechoslovakia, especially toward its eastern extremity, Ruthenia, where there was a compact territory inhabited by Romanians and where the railway line that ensured the direct connection between Romania and the Czechoslovak state passed. The same lack of reaction was also observed in relation to the attitude of Poland, which at that time was rather in the camp of the revisionist states and actively involved in stimulating Hungarian revisionism [76, pp. 55-63]. In our studies we have clearly shown how Germany, in order to give an appearance of legitimacy to its own claims and the means used, chose to encourage Polish claims, leaving Warsaw with the impression that it could play the role of a small regional hegemon. Against this background, the Polish ruling circles had come to imagine that they would be able to build and lead a Polish-Hungarian-Romanian alliance, for the realization of which they even considered the hypothesis of Romanian territorial cessions in favor of Hungary [76, pp. 55, 101]. All these projections collapsed, however, the moment when, from the shadows, Germany returned to the forefront of the unfolding events.

As we have shown in the published works, France remained, at this stage, closer to the Romanian positions than Great Britain and supported, through diplomatic approaches that, it is true, had no practical effect, the point

of view of Bucharest both in Warsaw and in Budapest. However, failing to secure British support, Paris's capacity to move to effective action again proved limited. Ultimately, however, the Romanian attitude did not fundamentally differ from the French one: toward Czechoslovakia and in relation to Hungarian claims, Romania had precise obligations as an ally that it did not honor, and in the issue of Ruthenia, despite some strong declarations addressed to Budapest, the Government in Bucharest avoided taking any concrete step. The reasons for this hesitant approach to the situation were both internal (institutional weakness and previous neglect of the army) and external (the duplicitous position demonstrated by the British and French in Munich, as well as the hostile attitude of the Germans and Poles in this regard) [76, pp. 77-80].

Conclusions to Chapter I. Our published works show that Romania's vulnerability, especially on the eastern border, was known early on in the West, where the problem of Bessarabia and Romanian-Soviet relations were considered the main source of instability for the Romanian state. In contrast, Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism was initially secondary, becoming relevant only when it became, in turn, an instrument of the German one, which highlights that regional developments must be understood in the broader context of power shifts in Europe.

Internationally, the conclusions of our studies highlight the limits of the policy of conciliation promoted by Great Britain and, to a certain extent, by France, as well as their inability to correctly assess the intentions of Nazi Germany. This error of assessment directly contributed to the destabilization of Central and Eastern Europe and to the restriction of the strategic options of the states in the region, including Romania. We have highlighted the decisive impact of the events of 1938 on the deterioration of relations between Romania and the Western Allies. The Anschluss and the Sudeten crisis marked the beginning of an accelerated erosion of confidence in the ability of France and Great Britain to guarantee the European order, significantly reducing the political and strategic value of these ties for Bucharest.

We concluded that Romania's foreign policy during the analyzed period was deeply conditioned by the interaction between external pressures and internal limits, which led to a predominantly reactive strategy, lacking long-term coherence, and to a reduced capacity to anticipate and influence major developments in the European space. Our studies reveal the hesitant and often contradictory nature of Romanian foreign policy, determined both by internal constraints, such as institutional weakness and insufficient care given

to the army by the state, and by the unfavorable external context. Romania did not honor its obligations toward Czechoslovakia and avoided taking firm decisions, preferring solutions of compromise and adaptation.

Chapter II. Franco-British attempts to integrate Romania into security architecture projects at European level (March-August 1939)

The occupation of Prague on 15 March 1939 was, according to the general consensus in historiography, the action that finally pushed London away from the policy of appeasing Germany. In our work, however, we have shown that there were important nuances in this regard: although that act represented the most obvious violation of the Munich Agreement - an agreement of which Chamberlain had been particularly proud, if only for a few months - it did not lead the British Government to resort immediately to military action. Chamberlain considered that the security guarantees previously promised to Czechoslovakia could not be invoked in a situation in which it had yielded to "moral pressure", thus shifting responsibility elsewhere, as if his own role in producing that "moral surrender" had not existed [76, p. 81]. The abandonment of the Reich's appeasement policy was also influenced by the diplomatic incident of March 1939 known as the "Tilea affair", when the Romanian minister in London, Viorel V. Tilea, informed the British Government that Germany had presented Romania with an ultimatum, contributing to the change in British policy of conciliation toward Hitler. The "Tilea affair" served as a trigger for a British diplomatic effort to gradually build a European security architecture. In our works we have shown that, within this attempt, it became clear from the beginning that only France was willing to join Great Britain unequivocally in the event of German aggression against Romania, while the reactions of Paris's Balkan allies were negative. Poland's attitude, although less decisive, remained at least as evasive, and the position of the Soviet Union was indecipherable [76, pp. 92-107].

Our analysis highlighted that, since Romania and Poland refused any form of cooperation that would have included the USSR, the Western Allies proposed that the two states sign an Anglo-French-Polish-Romanian quadripartite pact, built around two components: the transformation of the Polish-Romanian alliance into one with an *erga omnes* character and the granting of security guarantees by Great Britain and France to Romania and Poland, provided that they accepted the first component [60, pp. 59-60]. The British project, as we have shown, failed for two reasons. First, in the context of information about the German ultimatum regarding Danzig, the British decided to offer Poland (which had signed an alliance treaty with France in

1921) unilateral security guarantees, thus significantly reducing Warsaw's interest in the quadripartite formula, perceived as an obstacle to its regional great-power ambitions and privileged relations with Hungary. In Warsaw's view, Romania would even have had to accept some territorial concessions in Hungary's favor in order to attract Budapest into a regional bloc that the Poles imagined they could set in motion and lead. Second, the Romanian Government also did not want to assume a political and military commitment that would have imposed on it, in relation to Germany, obligations comparable to those that Great Britain, France and Poland were ready to accept. Carol II was, it seems, sufficiently aware of the state of the Romanian army and of his own leadership capabilities and considered, in these circumstances, that prudence required refusing the responsibilities proposed by the British and French. Instead, he insisted, in a manner that London found excessive, on obtaining a unilateral public promise of military aid in the event of an attack on Romania [59, p. 98]. We have shown that Great Britain initially rejected this request, finding no reason to offer such a unilateral commitment to a partner who was not willing to contribute effectively to the construction of the European security system pursued in London and at a time when the Poles and the Turks were, in turn, showing considerable reservations about supporting Romania. Paris, however, proved more receptive to Bucharest's arguments and exerted pressure on London to formulate unilateral guarantees in terms that corresponded almost entirely to Romanian wishes. At the time, according to our assessments, that result was interpreted as a notable success of the diplomacy of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grigore Gafencu [59, p. 99] (and is still sometimes presented as such), although, by the summer of 1940, the Romanian government's assessment of the usefulness and significance of these guarantees had changed to such an extent that it came to reproaching Great Britain for granting a support that had been insistently requested and, practically, without any compensation. There are clear indications that, relatively quickly, doubts arose in Paris as to the wisdom of having followed the Romanian requests: when the French tried to move toward a military convention that would establish, in clear terms, the modalities of implementing the guarantee and sent General Maxim Weygand to Bucharest for this purpose (4-6 May 1939), the Romanian side refused to engage in discussion [59, p. 104]. We can see that, through this attitude, Romania missed the opportunity to define explicitly the concrete content and limits of the guarantees received, thereby contributing decisively to a situation it would later regret [59, pp. 109-110].

In the research summarized in this paper, we have highlighted the fact that in the period between the granting of the guarantees and the end of the summer of 1939, Romania pursued two main objectives in its relations with the Western Allies. The first, with limited results, aimed at obtaining credits and a significant volume of British and French armaments. The economic treaties signed with Paris (31 March 1939) and London (11 May 1939) indeed provided for the granting of credits, but their amount proved to be far below the level desired by the authorities in Bucharest. Moreover, it soon became evident, including from the explanations given personally by the British Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Halifax, to Gafencu, that, within the framework of these agreements, the Western Allies were not willing "by any means" to satisfy the armament orders that Romania intended to place, since their own military needs had priority [56, pp. 46-53].

The second objective, achieved much more successfully, consisted in avoiding any real involvement in the system of alliances that Great Britain sought to build around Germany, as a safety net intended either to deter aggression or, in case of failure, to allow the mobilization of sufficient potential for a two-front war, following the model applied in World War I. Studying diplomatic documents and historical literature, we observed that if, at the previous stage, Bucharest had refused to establish bilateral security relations with London and Paris, of the type that the British and French were negotiating with Turkey and Poland, considering that it did not have the necessary strength for such commitments, in this new phase, through Gafencu, Romania blocked any way of its indirect engagement with the Western Allies through the treaties that they sought to conclude with Poland, Turkey and the Soviet Union [76, pp. 263-267]. This line of conduct was frequently noted with satisfaction by German diplomacy, which showed practically no concern about Romania's foreign policy, not even regarding the security guarantee offered by the Allies to a state that was, de facto, in a position of territorial isolation from them. The only eventuality that generated anxiety in Berlin - and on which Hitler insisted in his warnings addressed personally to Carol II and Gafencu - was a possible return to Titulescu's line of political rapprochement with the USSR, for the obvious reason that such a scenario would have led to a potential reiteration of the situation in World War I, in which - allied simultaneously with Britain, France and Russia - Romania could not be so easily subdued by Germany as in those months of 1939 when Bucharest relied on nothing other than declarations made in the British and French Parliaments [76, p. 156].

Thus, for the reasons we have mentioned, Bucharest rejected the request of the Western Allies to transform the alliance with Poland of 1921, oriented against a potential Soviet aggression, into an *erga omnes* agreement, an attitude to which was added the identically hostile one displayed by Warsaw in relation to this possibility [60, p. 65]. The Romanian leadership feared that such a step could provoke the irritation of Germany, since, by generalizing the provisions of the Polish-Romanian alliance, Romania would have become, politically and militarily, indirectly linked to Britain and France through their treaties (signed or in the process of being signed) with Poland [60, p. 62], which would have implied the automatic entry into war against the Reich, including in the event of a German attack directed toward the West. Thus, we concluded that the Romanian Government was not only not prepared to act as a security provider, but also wanted to benefit, without costs and risks, from the security architecture designed by Western democracies, without assuming, in turn, corresponding obligations [59, p. 98].

We have revealed in our investigations that the same logic applies to Bucharest's opposition to the Franco-British plans to extend the powers of the future security treaty with Turkey to the Balkan region, influenced also by the presence of the Yugoslav factor, also hostile to that project, in Romanian politics. Although British and French diplomats explicitly emphasized to Gafencu that such an extension directly served Romania's interests, as it would have determined Ankara to assume support for a possible Anglo-French military effort in favor of Bucharest, as a result of the guarantees offered on 13 April, the Romanian foreign minister protested against the Anglo-Turkish public declaration of 14 May and the Franco-Turkish declaration of 23 June 1939, which stated that their security concerns also extended to the Balkan Peninsula [76, pp. 205-223]. Moreover, to the frustration of the West and the satisfaction of Ankara, Gafencu opposed the request formulated in June 1939 by London that Turkey grant Romania direct security guarantees, although such a step would have clarified, in the most concrete terms, the modalities of applying the guarantees of 13 April, which were decisively dependent on Turkish agreement and on the access of the British fleet through the Straits. We have emphasized in our research that the Anglo-French projects of understanding with Poland and Turkey did not take into account the Soviet threat, being oriented exclusively toward containing the German danger. The Romanian hesitations and refusals were therefore not determined by fear of the USSR, but by the concern not to provoke Germany. The Soviet factor and the fears related to it, as we have seen, hardly appeared at all in Bucharest's

official argumentation during this period, and the public statements of the main Romanian decision-makers clearly indicated that, at that time, it was not the threat from the east that dominated the political calculation. This state of affairs illustrated, among other things, the effectiveness of Stalin's policy in diverting the attention of the Central and Eastern European states from the expansionist ambitions and projects of the USSR [76, p. 695].

Also, in our published works we have shown, regarding the Western attempts to integrate Romania into a security system that would include the Soviet Union, materialized through political and then military negotiations in the spring and summer of 1939, that Bucharest's initial position was categorically negative. Romania was even opposed to the signing of an Anglo-Franco-Soviet treaty of mutual assistance, because such an arrangement, indirectly linking it to the USSR on the basis of the guarantees of 13 April, would have constituted a gesture that would be difficult to justify to Germany [76, p. 228]. This attitude began to change toward the end of May 1939, when the prospect of a Soviet-German agreement began to take shape. From that date, both the Romanians, the Poles and the British showed greater openness to the possibility of cooperation with Moscow [76, p. 237]. Bucharest no longer opposed the idea of an Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance agreement, provided that Romania was not explicitly mentioned and that the text contained provisions that would have allowed the rejection of a Soviet request for military access to its territory, although the Romanian Government did not rule out, in the event of a conflict, the possibility of requesting Soviet aid itself. In the end, however, as we have shown in our studies, it turned out that the USSR was not interested in the possibility of such scenarios materializing: after it was established in Moscow that the Allies, especially the British, were not prepared to offer any kind of "rewards", such as the explicit recognition of the right to intervene or occupy neighboring states, in exchange for cooperation against Germany, the Soviet leadership preferred to obtain such concessions from Berlin, which abruptly ended the sterile Anglo-Franco-Soviet trilateral negotiations of the spring and summer of 1939.

I have also shown that, in the same period, starting at the latest from May 1939, the Romanian option to maintain neutrality in a future major conflict was becoming increasingly clear [59, p. 106], being, at that time, in contradiction with the role that the Western Allies attributed to Romania in the event of war [70, pp. 64-65]. Relations with the Western Allies, although formally cordial, had already become marked by deep mutual distrust. This was fueled, on the one hand, by the authorities in Bucharest through the

systematic avoidance of the most important Franco-British initiatives to build a security architecture and, on the other hand, by the well-founded suspicions of the Romanians regarding the willingness of the Westerners, especially the British and to a lesser extent the French, to sacrifice the territorial integrity of Greater Romania in order to secure the support of Bulgaria and Hungary.

From a comparative perspective, in our opinion, the strategy of the Western democracies toward South-Eastern Europe in general, and toward Romania in particular, did not differ essentially from that of National Socialist Germany. Both camps, already outlined and resigned to a future confrontation, understood that the side that managed to impose a new regional political order (and this could not be done without sacrificing the territorial integrity of Romania) thereby gained control over the Balkans and blocked the access and expansion of the adversary. Our conclusion is that, consequently, both the Allies and the Axis entered into a discreet competition to win the goodwill of Sofia and Budapest, by fueling or encouraging revisionist hopes, primarily Bulgarian and, to a lesser extent, Hungarian, at Romania's expense. Both in London and in Berlin, however, the conviction persisted that excessive pressure exerted in this direction risked pushing Bucharest into the arms of the opposing camp, which explained the still cautious tone of this competition at that stage [70, p. 64].

Conclusions to Chapter II. In our studies we have come to the conclusion that the change in orientation of British policy after March 1939 was gradual rather than decisive, and the attempts to build a collective security system were marked by the reservations and divergent interests of the actors involved. Romania constantly sought to obtain guarantees and material support from the Western Allies, but without assuming corresponding obligations, preferring a cautious strategy oriented toward avoiding direct engagement in a conflict. This foreign line led to ambiguities and missed opportunities to consolidate its security. At the same time, relations with Great Britain and France were affected by mutual distrust and differences in strategic vision, while Romanian foreign policy increasingly revolved around the objective of maintaining neutrality and avoiding provocation by Germany. Taken as a whole, these developments show that Romania was in a defensive and reactive position, trying to benefit from external protection without effectively integrating into the European security architecture, in a context in which the great powers pursued their own strategic calculations, often to the detriment of regional stability and Romanian territorial integrity.

Chapter III. The deterioration of Romania's relations with Britain and France after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (September–December 1939)

In our works published so far, we have emphasized that the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact put an end to all British attempts to build a security architecture on a European scale and marked, for Romania, the moment when both its internal fragilities and weaknesses, as well as the precariousness of its entire international position, became visible to itself and to external actors [65, p. 120]. Bucharest's declared option for neutrality, determined by these vulnerabilities on which, for two decades, only partial and insufficient intervention had been made, coincided, in the short and medium term, with the interests of the Western Allies. British and French analyses converged on the conclusion that Romania's entry into the war was undesirable at that stage: in the absence of substantially superior means of support to those they had at their disposal in the case of Poland, London and Paris estimated that Romania would have been quickly defeated and occupied, and the subsequent exploitation of Romanian resources by Germany would have negatively influenced the evolution of the conflict [70, pp. 66-67]. At the same time, as we have observed, Romania's neutrality also corresponded to Berlin's interests: in the context of the economic agreements with the USSR and the unreserved execution by Bucharest of the obligations assumed by the Treaty of 23 March 1939, the clauses of which were soon to be modified once again in Germany's favor, the Nazi leadership had no reason to pursue an invasion of Romanian territory.

As we have highlighted, the Soviet invasion of Poland was the moment when the issue of the applicability of the guarantees of 13 April 1939, in the event of a Soviet aggression, was, for the first time, explicitly formulated, through Gafencu requesting an assurance to this effect from the British government on 27 September 1939 [62, p. 121]. However, Tilea had been informed, even before the public announcement of those guarantees, that they did not concern a scenario of conflict with the Soviet Union; but, at that time, he chose to hide the British clarification from the Romanian Government and even asked that it not be communicated to Bucharest. This explains why, when, at the end of September 1939, Gafencu asked in Paris and London how the Allies intended to support Romania in the event of a Soviet attack, he was presented, without any ambiguity, with exactly the limit that Tilea had silently

crossed [52, pp. 96-97]: the guarantee had been conceived exclusively in relation to the Axis danger [62, pp. 122-123], and the British Government meeting of 6 October 1939 approved and reaffirmed this position [52, p. 97]. Subsequent developments showed that the British and French would have considered an intervention in favor of Romania and against the USSR justified only if it became indisputable that Moscow was acting in an irrevocable alliance with Berlin. It is from this point of view that their attitude toward the Turkish-Soviet negotiations of September–October 1939 must be viewed, when, first of all, the British, but also the French, had initially been willing to give the Soviets very clear assurances that they would not intervene through the Straits in the event of a Soviet attack on Romania. The failure of those negotiations, caused mainly by Moscow's attempt to take control of the Straits and to introduce into the draft treaty a "German clause" that would impose neutrality toward the Reich on Ankara, in accordance with Article 4 of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, which stipulated that "none of the contracting parties may be part of any group of powers that directly or indirectly targets the other party", however, changed the facts of the problem: once the USSR appeared as an active advocate of German interests in relation to Turkey, the willingness of the Westerners to accommodate Soviet claims against Romania decreased accordingly [67, p. 115]. In that climate, as we have noted in our studies, Turkish, French and British diplomats began, in October–December 1939, to send Bucharest declarations that suggested that Britain, France and Turkey could have intervened against the USSR on the basis of the guarantees of 13 April. The fluctuations of the Westerners reflected, in essence, the way in which the degree of rapprochement between Moscow and Berlin was perceived; in the case of Paris, they were also linked to the idea of preparing an "eastern front" in the Balkans. However, in the end, the Allies (and, first of all, London) correctly relied on the premise that the fundamental interests of Germany and the Soviet Union were incompatible and that, once the division of the Eastern European space was completed, the latent antagonism between them would inevitably reappear [65, p. 121]. Based on that calculation, the British and French informed Bucharest that they were prepared to honor their guarantees of 13 April 1939 only on the condition that Romania could guarantee, at least, the cooperation of Turkey and the benevolent neutrality of Italy. The answer given to the Romanians on 13 December 1939, formulated, as we have specified, in extremely diplomatic language, perfectly corresponded to the interests of the Allies in any scenario: the conditions could be met only in a situation in which the Soviet-German

collaboration took the form of a de facto or even de jure alliance, in which case neither Ankara nor London and Paris would have had any reason to continue the policy of appeasing Moscow, and Rome would have been pushed to seek rapprochement with the Western democracies. At the time of the communication of the answer, however, there was no certainty in this regard, and the British and French were aware that, under the existing circumstances, Turkey would not have consented to approve a military action in support of Romania, which they themselves did not want. Therefore, the formula proposed to Bucharest amounted, in fact, to a polite refusal [65, p. 121]. On the other hand, it was difficult to imagine, even hypothetically, how London and Paris could have effectively supported Romania against the USSR without Ankara's agreement for the passage of the Allied fleet through the Straits and in the tense conditions of Romanian-Bulgarian relations [52, p. 98].

Our analysis shows that, as long as the Soviet Union acted independently of Germany, even within the limits set by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Western powers had no motivation to ask Turkey for access through the Straits in order to intervene in Romania's favor and would never have taken such a step [52, pp. 98-100]. If such a hypothesis had been taken into account or had been of real interest to the British and French, the initiative to define a plan of action should have come from them themselves, and not by requiring the Romanians to obtain the Turks' consent in advance. The lack of interest in the Soviet threat to Romania was also confirmed by the content of the secret protocol no. 2 of the Anglo-French-Turkish tripartite treaty of 19 October 1939 [67, pp. 115-116], which exempted Ankara from any obligation to support London and Paris in the event of a Western intervention in favor of Romania and against the USSR. This provision demonstrates, beyond any doubt, that the great democracies did not conceive of a military confrontation with the Soviet Union in defense of Romania except, as we have shown in our studies, under the conditions of a Soviet-Nazi alliance close enough to fundamentally redefine the strategic framework [62, p. 117].

In our investigations we have followed how, faced with a veiled refusal, the Romanian authorities reacted in several ways. Thus, we have shown that almost immediately, Romanian diplomats resumed their efforts to accelerate deliveries of military equipment, but, also due to the intensification of Romanian oil deliveries to Germany, without achieving significant results, especially with regard to the most desired equipment: anti-aircraft weapons, anti-tank defense and fighter aircraft [58, pp. 136-141]. At the same time, the

Romanians tried to consolidate their position by initiating the establishment of a bloc of neutral states formed by Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary, to which the members of the Balkan Entente would have been added. That group was to function as a neutral pole of power in Europe, with the declared aim of limiting the expansion of the war in the region. London and Paris viewed Gafencu's project favorably, seeing in it an instrument for neutralizing, and possibly attracting, Italy to their side [69, p. 132], as well as a possible preliminary stage in the implementation of another plan, supported especially by France: the opening, through an Allied landing in the Balkans, of a second continental front. Respectively, Berlin and Moscow strove to block the project, which they considered, not without reason, favorable to the interests of the Allies, especially in the conditions in which Turkey, linked to the Western powers by the Security Treaty of 19 October 1939, should have been part of the new construction. Under direct pressure from Germany, Italy ultimately rejected the initiative [69, p. 133].

Conclusions to Chapter III. The research we conducted highlights that, following the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, Romania's vulnerability was obvious, and the option for neutrality was not the result of a solid autonomous strategy, but the expression of the limits of internal capacities and external constraints. This neutrality temporarily coincided with the interests of the great Western powers, as well as those of Germany, without offering Romania real security guarantees. At the same time, Romanian diplomatic efforts during this period revealed the restrictive and conditional nature of Western guarantees, which clearly excluded the scenario of a Soviet aggression, the only possible exception in this regard appearing only in the hypothesis of the finalization of an alliance between Moscow and Berlin. The ambiguity and fluctuations of the British and French position in this regard essentially reflected their own strategic calculations and not firm commitments toward Romania. In this context, the Western response in December 1939 to the approaches mentioned above represented, in fact, a diplomatic refusal, confirming the lack of real willingness to intervene in Romania's defense against the Soviet Union. Moreover, geopolitical constraints and dependence on factors such as Turkey's agreement or Italy's position made effective support practically impossible. The reactions of the Romanian authorities demonstrate awareness of these limits, but also the inability to overcome them: late attempts at armament with Western support remained without significant results, and Romanian projects to consolidate ties with regional actors were blocked by the opposition of the totalitarian powers. Thus, the conclusion was imposed that Romania's situation

at the end of 1939 was one of strategic isolation. The powers subordinated their decisions exclusively to their own interests, while Bucharest's options were drastically limited.

Chapter IV. Romania's Tendency to Maintain Cooperation with the Western Allies (January–May 1940)

We have shown in our studies that, faced with the Allies' refusal to honor their security guarantees in relation to the Soviet threat, Romanian diplomacy, starting from the end of December 1939, carried out a series of approaches to Rome and Ankara in an attempt to satisfy the conditions set out by the Allies for the materialization of the guarantees of 13 April, in the event of a Soviet aggression. As regards Italy, we have emphasized that these efforts were supported by London and Paris, which continued to seek to detach Rome from the orbit of Berlin and to this end speculated on the perception that Germany was adopting a line too close to the Soviet one in the Balkans, contrary to Italian interests - an argument with additional weight after the experience of the Soviet-Finnish war [71, p. 131]. French diplomacy insisted, in particular, that Italy make explicit commitments to Romania on the issue of Bessarabia, going so far as to promise Ciano Paris' support for such a formula on 9 January 1940 [69, p. 136], although the degree of sincerity of these promises remains difficult to assess. According to the sources consulted, Ciano seemed more receptive than Mussolini to the Anglo-French opening and to Romanian appeals; however, in March 1940, in the context of the end of the Soviet-Finnish conflict, the Italian dictator firmly opted for deepening relations with Germany, which quickly brokered a reconciliation between Rome and Moscow. Although, at that time, London and Paris were already convinced that the fascist regime did not intend to offer Romania any concrete help against the USSR, they nevertheless noted that Rome continued, until April, the practice of illusory assurances addressed to Bucharest [71, p. 134].

In the case of Turkey, we found a similar situation: in the first months of 1940, Ankara sent Bucharest declarations that fueled the hope of military support against the USSR, but in confidential discussions with the Allies it implied that it would have no objections to a possible Soviet annexation of Bessarabia [65, p. 118]. At the same time, the authorities in Ankara constantly refused, despite Romanian proposals, to negotiate or sign a military convention that would clearly provide for the mechanisms of a Turkish intervention in support of an Allied action, in the event of a Soviet attack on Romania [75, pp. 442-443]. However, as we have seen, by the beginning of May 1940, the prevailing belief in Bucharest, or at least the desire to believe that the efforts to obtain Turkish and Italian support had yielded results, was an impression

supported by some internal diplomatic documents and by Gafencu's personal notes, although Gafencu himself showed a much more lucid appreciation of reality [76, p. 448]. In the French and British reports, the situation was assessed realistically: both Rome and Ankara were considered, in essence, unavailable for a real involvement in favor of Romania [57, pp. 58-70].

In our research we have noted that, as it became clear that it could not count on effective Allied support against the Soviet Union, Romania moved closer and closer to Germany, at increasing cost to its relationship with the West. In December 1939, this reorientation materialized through a new trade agreement that guaranteed the Reich an increased share of Romanian oil exports, and the Romanian state began to create the instruments through which it would later coerce Western oil companies to sell oil products to Germany - export quotas and the National Oil Commissariat [76, p. 503]. On the diplomatic front, Bucharest sought Berlin's mediation, requesting in December 1939 the opening of Soviet-Romanian negotiations based on a limited territorial cession in Bessarabia [53, pp. 87-88]. In the same month, the Romanian authorities proposed, through the Italians, the conclusion of a treaty with Hungary, based on a limited Romanian territorial concession in western Transylvania; Budapest, however, rejected the proposal as insufficient. Berlin ignored the initiative [55, pp. 88-92], and Bucharest did not return to it, especially since the initial failures of the Red Army in Finland fueled, for a short period, an unexpected courage among the Romanian political and military leadership, which was quickly dissipated after the victory of the USSR [65, p. 71]. According to British and French sources, at the Balkan Entente conference in Belgrade in February 1940, Gafencu seemed willing to consider a cession in Dobrogea as well, but the hasty manner in which the Turkish side sought to push things in that direction, as well as Sofia's lack of willingness to join, in compensation, the Balkan Entente, blocked any development in the direction desired by the West [55, pp. 92-99].

After studying British sources, we came to the conclusion that London's position on the issue of Bessarabia experienced a temporary favorable nuance for Romania in March–April 1940 [75, p. 438]. On the one hand, the outcome of the Winter War temporarily strengthened the impression in London that the Soviet-German association was not just a tactical understanding, but tended toward a *de facto* alliance; on the other hand, Romanian steps convinced some British diplomats that Bucharest would have been willing to defend itself with arms in hand against Soviet aggression. In this context, within part of the British diplomatic corps, there was a brief

tendency to recalibrate London's policy toward the Bessarabian issue, based on the idea that it was in Great Britain's interest to contribute, if certain conditions were met, to Romania's defense against the USSR [76, pp. 480-493]. Some prospective steps were also taken in Ankara to convince Turkey to study this possibility. The Turks, however, as is evident from the documents examined, rejected the initiative, maintaining their refusal to engage in any concrete arrangement for the defense of Romania [75, pp. 439-440], and France adopted, in turn, a negative position, for reasons that do not emerge with the same clarity from the documents examined, especially since in Paris it was considered, at that time, that the Soviet-German tandem had evolved toward a de facto alliance [76, pp. 485, 495]. The actual level at which the new British approach was discussed and accepted remains unclear: there are no conclusive indications that it was officially communicated to Romania or that it was ratified by the Government in London, which suggests that it remained, at most, at the stage of a working initiative within the British diplomatic apparatus [76, p. 485].

Conclusions to Chapter IV. The analysis carried out in the published works shows that Romania's diplomatic approaches during the period under study took place in a profoundly unfavorable international context, characterized by the lack of coherence and real commitment on the part of the Allies, as well as by the duplicitous attitude of regional actors. Both Italy and Turkey maintained, through ambiguous declarations and unfulfilled promises, the illusion of support that, in reality, did not exist, a fact clearly recognized in French, but especially British assessments. At the same time, the continued unwillingness of London and Paris to transform the guarantees offered into an effective security mechanism contributed to the accentuation of Romania's isolation in those months. Against this background, we found Bucharest's gradual orientation toward Germany as a direct consequence of the lack of viable alternatives, even if this reorientation involved economic concessions and the willingness to explore some limited territorial concessions in relation to its neighbors. Romanian negotiation initiatives with the USSR, Hungary or Bulgaria within the framework of the Balkan Entente did not produce concrete results, being either ignored, rejected or blocked by the divergent interests of the great powers. As for the position of Great Britain, although we could observe a certain temporary tendency to re-evaluate its policy toward the Bessarabian problem, this did not go beyond the level of internal reflections and did not materialize in official actions or commitments.

Chapter V. The decline of Romanian-British relations against the backdrop of territorial losses and Romania's external realignment (June-September 1940)

Against the backdrop of the intensification of the Soviet threat on Romania's eastern and northeastern borders, the collapse of France and the open alignment of Italy with German policy, the military successes of the Reich in northern and western Europe appeared in Bucharest all the more impressive and discouraging for any foreign policy other than a pro-German one [76, p. 494]. In those circumstances, toward the end of May 1940, Carol II decided to abandon the policy of neutrality and the declared orientation toward Germany, in the hope that such a repositioning could bring new security guarantees, this time German, intended to replace the British ones, which had become inapplicable from the Romanian point of view. We have shown that the only one who opposed this option was Gafencu, convinced that Germany did not constitute a credible support against the USSR; that is precisely why he was replaced on 1 June 1940 with Ion Gigurtu [53, p. 78]. We have emphasized, however, that it remains difficult to specify what type of guarantees Carol II, Prime Minister Tătărescu, or Foreign Minister Gigurtu believed they could obtain from Berlin, since at the time of the decision to abandon neutrality it was hard to imagine that they had not understood that such guarantees could not concern Romania's territorial integrity. The sources researched clearly show that the Germans had repeatedly indicated, up to 26 June 1940 - sometimes veiled, but sufficiently transparent - that they saw as inevitable Bucharest's resort to territorial concessions in favor of all its revisionist neighbors, a scenario that Tătărescu and Gigurtu did not reject, in principle, in relation to any of the borders of the Romanian state [76, pp. 518-520].

At the level of real motivations, the stakes of the problem consisted for us in determining whether the priority was to ensure Romania's security, from the perspective of maintaining territorial integrity, or, rather, to preserve at all costs a deeply corrupt regime with strongly eroded internal legitimacy [61, p. 30]. The analysis of the available evidence and indications demonstrates that the second hypothesis is closer to reality: protecting the personal power of Carol II and the small circle around him represented the criterion according to which the monarch and his regime imposed the known territorial costs on the population. Since, in essence, neither the king nor his camarilla sacrificed their

own positions or assets, but transferred the burden entirely onto society - onto that "Romanian people" with whom they maintained limited and often purely rhetorical ties - the strategy of docile alignment with Berlin's demands seemed, in their logic, acceptable. This orientation was presented to public opinion as a logical and rational adjustment to a new geopolitical context, and, in order to justify the decisions and conceal the real objectives, the myth of saving the state through limited territorial sacrifice was constructed [61, p. 31].

It is true that, as the sources consulted show, on 17 July 1940, Hitler threatened Carol II in very direct terms with the disappearance of the Romanian state if Bucharest did not accept concessions in favor of Budapest and Sofia, a threat later repeated by Ribbentrop. However, we have shown that Carol II had already resorted to the evacuation of Bessarabia before this explicit pressure, and Berlin began to invoke the danger of Romania's "disappearance" only after 28 June, when it had become clear that the country was led by a government incapable of organizing even minimal resistance and easy to maneuver and intimidate through simple threats [61, p. 36]. Germany's respective attitude was, in this sense, the consequence of the Romanian Government's conduct of 28 June 1940, and not its cause.

As we have shown in our publications, the central motivation for accepting the Soviet ultimatum of 28 June 1940 without a fight lay in Carol II's objective of preserving his personal power. To this end, his regime promoted the myth - later taken up and amplified by part of Romanian historiography [61, pp. 34-64] - according to which, if Romania had chosen to militarily defend the territories east of the Prut, it would undoubtedly have been attacked simultaneously by Bulgaria and Hungary, and the very existence of the state would have been put at stake [61, pp. 33-63]. In reality, as we have emphasized, the main fear of the king and his entourage was related to the unpredictability of internal developments in the conditions of armed resistance: the camarilla was aware of the degradation of state institutions, primarily the army [58, pp. 142-144], and feared open conflict from the perspective of its interest in remaining in power. That is why a narrative was elaborated for which there is no documentary evidence, meant to conceal the fact that, out of concern for their own safety and position, Carol II and his camarilla imposed the evacuation of Bessarabian territory. For the same reason, criticism of this decision was later stigmatized as "unpatriotic" [61, p. 71], and, as the British sources we studied show, the government of Carol II was the first to try to convince the Romanians in Transylvania that the Romanian army would not have been able to oppose the Hungarian one and

that a new surrender was, therefore, once again "necessary" [76, pp. 616-617]. As we have emphasized in our studies, the monarch's main objective remained, until the end, the preservation of his own power and his regime [53, pp. 94-95]. The result of the chain of surrenders, however, contradicted the initial calculations: the strategy of territorial sacrifices imposed without a fight produced the opposite effect to that sought, even if the king ultimately managed to flee the country at a much lower cost to himself than the gravity of his responsibilities suggests [61, p. 31].

I have drawn attention to the fact that, during the crisis generated by the Soviet ultimatum, the Romanian Government did not consider it necessary to consult with the representative of the British Government in Bucharest, Reginald Hoare, and the formal invocation of the guarantees of 13 April was not even discussed, especially since a potential invocation of this kind presupposed, in advance, the demonstration of the will to resist militarily against Soviet aggression, a will that Carol II's conduct between 26 and 28 June categorically refuted. In contrast, after the evacuation of Bessarabia without a fight, the king publicly denounced the guarantees of 13 April 1939, considering that such a demonstrative gesture could have contributed to winning Hitler's goodwill [53, pp. 89-90]. But that act of repudiation of the guarantee contained an element of mystification, assuming an interpretation of the guarantees according to which they had been granted to Romania through a deceptive maneuver or even against its will, given that the diplomacy in Bucharest had made intense efforts to obtain them exactly in the form in which they had been, in the end, formulated [68, p. 83]. We have also shown that a significant element in the reformulation of the official discourse in this regard was the adoption by the Romanian leadership of the German propaganda narrative that attributed to Great Britain a decisive role in the "intrigue" that would have led to the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia. In the official and semi-official Romanian sources after 26–28 June, the suggestion frequently appears, in an insinuating rather than explicit manner, that the responsibility for the difficult position Romania had found itself in should have been attributed to London. This thesis, taken and adapted from the German discourse, claimed that Bucharest had adhered to the political line of Great Britain, only to be "betrayed" and abandoned in the face of its enemies, primarily the USSR [66, p. 64]. In our publications, we have shown that in reality, the policy of Carol II, through Gafencu, had systematically sought to avoid integration into a collective security architecture built to contain Germany. The Allies were repeatedly informed that Bucharest did not intend to assume concrete military

obligations, neither within multilateral formats nor through firm bilateral agreements with London or Paris. The critical situation in which Romania found itself in 1940 was, as we have concluded, the result of decisions taken by its political leadership, which it subsequently refused to recognize [59, pp. 104-110].

We have mentioned, therefore, that immediately after the annexation of Bessarabia, Carol II deliberately and ostentatiously adopted a policy of subordination to Germany, hoping that he would thus obtain Hitler's support to retain his throne [53, pp. 98-99]. The same register also included measures directed directly against British interests in Romania: the confiscation of transport ships under British, French and other Allied flags on the Danube, which were then made available to Germany, or the expulsion of British engineers accused of sabotage intentions [53, pp. 86-87]. Domestically, the monarch tried to give Berlin the image of an ideological alignment, announcing the formation of a party designated by himself as "totalitarian" and resorting to the partial co-optation of the Legionary Movement into government [68, p. 84].

We have noted in our studies that decision-makers in London perceived these gestures as deeply offensive and concluded that there was no longer any valid reason to accommodate Romanian interests [68, pp. 83-84]. Consequently, London tried, in its own interest, to capitalize on the trend of radicalization and materialization of Hungarian and Bulgarian territorial claims. After the public denunciation of the guarantees, the British encouraged, in a more or less direct form, revisionist claims against Romania: in the case of Hungary, already considered firmly integrated into the Axis sphere, London adopted the strategy of refraining from any advice of restraint or warning against "dangerous adventures", while toward Bulgaria the position was more explicit, London recognizing, through diplomatic channels, the legitimacy of Bulgarian claims in Dobrogea and making it clear that it would have no objections even in the event of resort to force [54, p. 57].

I have shown that, in parallel, the British launched, through their own press and propaganda channels, and in Romania, through the available networks of influence, a campaign aimed at stimulating Romanian resistance to Hungarian claims in Transylvania [54, p. 47]. The motivations for that strategy were found in several anticipated and pursued scenarios: if, unexpectedly, Carol II had discovered some capacity that would have allowed him to reject Hitler's ultimatum, it was expected that Hungary would attack Romania, and the conflict, through the logic of interests, could have drawn

Germany and the USSR into different camps - the central objective of British projects in the Balkans (along with that of preventing a Turkish-Soviet conflict) [64, p. 12] after the failure of the previous attempt to create a pole of apparent regional neutrality. It was also considered that, in the event of a conflict, Romania would resort to destroying the oil industry or, at least, to seriously disrupting the communication networks and trade flows through which Germany economically exploited the Balkans, which would have directly affected the Reich's war capacity and forced Hitler to intervene militarily, with potentially destabilizing effects on German-Soviet relations. Another hypothesis was that stimulating the spirit of resistance in public opinion, given that Carol II persisted in his line of concessions, could have led to the fall of the regime and the installation of a government favorable to a return to a policy of neutrality [54, p. 46].

As we have highlighted in our published research, despite these calculations, none of the scenarios projected by the British analysts was realized in the imagined form. The main cause of that failure resided in the overwhelming influence exercised by Germany in Budapest, Sofia and Bucharest, sufficient to prevent the situation from getting out of control in the direction desired by London. However, the failure was a partial one, since some of the consequences anticipated in almost all of these plans manifested themselves as an effect of the Vienna Dictate of 30 August: under the pressure of the internal public reaction, Carol II did indeed leave the throne, but the government led by Antonescu did not return to the policy of neutrality, in the conditions of a persistent Soviet threat and continuous pressure on the eastern border [54, pp. 47-48], which made it difficult to adopt such an external position. Furthermore, the arrangement imposed in Vienna did not satisfy either Romania or Hungary, and the Soviet leadership, in turn, declared itself dissatisfied with the way Berlin handled the crisis, including the security guarantees granted to Romania, which were clearly aimed at the Soviet threat. Moscow's attitude, as we have mentioned, was defined by the refusal to recognize the exclusivity of German interests in Hungary and Romania, which in turn fueled tensions within German-Soviet relations [54, p. 48].

We have shown in our studies that London welcomed the Craiova agreement as a model for the peaceful settlement of territorial disputes, insisting that Great Britain was not absolutely opposed to border changes as long as they were the result of agreements between the states directly interested, in the absence of external pressure and without resorting to the threat or use of force. On the other hand, proceeding from the same declared

logic, the British Government announced that it did not recognize the Vienna Dictate, considering it the product of coercion from the Axis [54, pp. 56-57]. However, beyond this declarative framework, it can be observed that, although London publicly condemned revisionism that resorted to military pressure, it had not hesitated, however, to encourage Bulgaria behind the scenes to try to satisfy its territorial claims against Romania, including by force. Also, the British did not react publicly against the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia, imposed under the threat of force and carried out with German cooperation, with the same firmness demonstrated in their Parliament in London against the Vienna Dictate [53, p. 93], which shows that the principles officially invoked had, in reality, a completely different foundation than the one declared.

Regarding the analysis of the internal factors that made possible the territorial disintegration of Romania without organized resistance, we have shown in our publications that British observers identified as the fundamental internal cause the state of disunity in society, generated by the inefficiency and corruption of the administrative apparatus, as well as by the deepening of social inequalities that had undermined the cohesion and mobilization capacity of the state [66, p. 62].

Conclusions to Chapter V. The research results that we have published show that the abandonment of neutrality and the orientation toward Germany represented the expression of the bankruptcy of the previous strategy, but also of the inability to formulate a more adequate external course. The expectations regarding obtaining real guarantees from Berlin proved illusory, given that Germany had indicated the inevitability of territorial concessions, and the Romanian leaders were, in essence, aware of this fact. From the evaluation of the motivations of this decision, it follows that the central objective of the regime of Carol II was not the defense of territorial integrity, but the preservation of power and, implicitly, the protection of the structure on which it was based, that is, the existing political regime. The major decisions regarding the acceptance of the Soviet ultimatum and the policy of successive concessions were determined by this logic, being subsequently justified by propaganda constructions intended to legitimize the adopted options and to transfer responsibility to external factors or to constraints presented as inevitable. Precisely for this reason, subordination to Germany was doubled by a reconfiguration of the official discourse and concrete measures directed against ties with Great Britain, without these bringing real benefits in terms of security. London's reaction, characterized by a combination of hostility, pragmatism and strategic calculation, contributed to the worsening of

Romania's situation, including by indirectly encouraging the territorial claims of its neighbors and by pursuing its own scenarios that did not take Romanian interests into account. The general conclusion regarding the events and processes examined in this chapter is that the territorial disintegration of Romania in 1940 was the combined result of external pressures and internal decisions, in which the structural weaknesses of the state and the political choices of its leadership played the determining role. The lack of internal cohesion, corruption and institutional incapacity drastically limited the capacity to react, facilitating the imposition of external solutions and amplifying their effects on the Romanian state.

Chapter VI. The rupture of Romanian-British relations under the Antonescu regime: causes and consequences

Regarding the end of Romanian-British relations in the context of the deepening world conflict, our research focused on two levels: first, we analyzed the way in which Antonescu configured his foreign policy between Germany, the USSR and Great Britain, and, second, the way in which London gradually reconsidered its attitude toward Romania, toward the Soviet annexations, and toward the post-war architecture of Eastern Europe. We showed that the combination of these two developments ultimately led both to the rupture of Romanian-British relations and to British recognition - more or less formal or tacit - of Soviet domination in the region [76, pp. 651-654].

We have observed how, at the beginning of this stage, after the collapse of the Carlist regime, London hoped that Antonescu would allow a return to “normality” in Romanian-British relations. The favorable British attitude toward Romania in the context of the Vienna Dictate, as well as the hostility toward the policy of Carol II, created the premises for a new regime in Bucharest to be able to reopen the door to cooperation. Antonescu himself tried, in the first months, to correct Carol’s mistakes: he admitted that the seizure of the British fleet on the Danube was an error with direct economic costs for Romania and ordered the return of those ships, requesting, in return, the release of the Romanian ships detained by the British. London, as we have noted, however, rejected any “conditional” negotiation, demanding the unconditional release of its ships as the starting point of any dialogue [68, p. 87].

In the published works we have emphasized that, behind these gestures of limited goodwill, the fundamental course of Antonescu's policy was incompatible with any prospect of improving Romanian-British relations. He started from the premise that Romania had no alternative to total alignment with Germany, invoking two arguments: 1) the constant threat of the USSR at the new temporary eastern border and 2) the desperate need to equip the Romanian army, especially after the losses of equipment suffered by the withdrawal of the army from Bessarabia. From these considerations flowed the decision to preserve the German guarantees obtained in Vienna and, moreover, to request (like the former regime) and accept the entry of German troops into Romania. In his relations with the British, Antonescu, however, concealed reality, presenting the German presence to the British Legation in Bucharest as a simple "technical mission" of training [68, pp. 85-86], a line

that was, in essence, incompatible with maintaining a relationship of trust with London.

His legionary governing partners also contributed decisively to the rapid deterioration of Romanian-British relations. The kidnapping and torture of British engineers from the oil industry, accused of sabotage, provided London with an additional argument for considering Romania an "enemy-occupied" area. Although he did not deny the accusation of sabotage, Antonescu disavowed the Iron Guard's methods and ordered the engineers' release. For the British, as we have seen, this gesture was not enough: on 11 February 1941, they declared Romania an enemy-occupied territory and broke off diplomatic relations. In fact, Antonescu did not consistently pursue maintaining relations with London either. As early as December 1940, he was considering entering the war against Great Britain, and the presence of German troops on Romanian territory was seen not only as a "shield" against the USSR, but also as a starting point for the future German campaign in the Balkans [76, p. 680]. The "Mărița" plan - the German intervention in Greece after Mussolini's risky adventure - seemed convenient to Antonescu precisely because it aimed to block British penetration into southeastern Europe and prevent the establishment of a British air base from which the oil fields in Romania could be bombed. In our studies, we highlighted that on 18 February 1941, only a few days after the severance of diplomatic relations, he openly explained to the American minister in Bucharest, Mott Gunther, that the purpose of German troops in Romania was to prevent a British intervention in the Balkans and to prevent London from strengthening its positions in the region [49, pp. 300-301].

At the same time, Antonescu took over and perpetuated a false discourse regarding Great Britain's responsibility for Romania's disaster in 1940. Thus, for example, before the Americans, he attributed the collapse of the borders not only to the "cowardice" of the Carlist government, which did not oppose the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia and Bukovina, but also to the "British guarantee" that would have "led to the loss of the borders" [49, p. 301]. This was, in essence, a narrative that could also be found in the official Romanian discourse at the end of the regime of Carol II: Romania had somehow been tricked by London into accepting a guarantee meant, in reality, to draw it into a policy of "encirclement" of Germany. This interpretation was at odds with reality: we have shown in our publications and in the previous chapters of this synthesis that the British guarantee had been insistently, almost obsessively, requested by the leadership in Bucharest and had been received

by the Romanians on the terms they themselves had requested, not as a result of a British conspiracy.

The external perspective of the Antonescu regime remained, in essence, that of the previous regime: the USSR was perceived as the main danger, and Germany as the only power capable of offering, at that moment, security guarantees. The difference, from our point of view, was that, unlike Carol II, Antonescu applied this logic without hesitation and to the end. In January–March 1941, in discussions with the Germans, he formulated this position very clearly: Britain was not considered an enemy as long as it did not openly align itself with the USSR or directly strike German interests in Romania; but, since only Germany could guarantee the security of the Romanian state, any weakening of the Reich through British actions was interpreted in Bucharest as an indirect attack on Romanian interests [76, p. 745]. At his meeting with the President of the Reichstag and the head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring, on 8 March 1941, Antonescu declared that he feared less a British air attack on the oil installations than a Soviet attack, invoking information about massive concentrations of Soviet troops and aircraft at the temporary border on the Prut. Even though Berlin did practically nothing to prevent the repeated Soviet aggressions in northern Moldavia and the Danube Delta, Antonescu continued to insist that his policy had no alternative: Romania could not align itself with the policy of London, on whose support it could not count, and such a step would have led, in his opinion, to the "collapse of the country" [76, p. 708].

In our works we have shown that, against the background of this categorical option for Berlin, a part of the Romanian diplomacy was nevertheless trying to maintain discreet bridges with London. In Moscow, Grigore Gafencu, who had meanwhile become Minister Plenipotentiary, maintained cordial personal relations with the British ambassador, Cripps, contrary to the instructions received from Bucharest. From the British documents that we have analyzed, it emerges that Gafencu conceived his own "mission" in that capital: as long as London trusted him, his task was to try to be "useful" to it by influencing public opinion in Romania, stimulating anti-German sentiments and facilitating a rapprochement with the USSR [76, p. 708]. This attitude of Gafencu was encouraged, as results from the examined sources, by some Soviet advances, undertaken, for example, by the deputy Soviet commissar for foreign affairs responsible for Eastern European issues, A. Vyshinsky, who was probing Bucharest, promising to renounce any other territorial claims and suggesting a "quick and friendly understanding" on all

border issues [76, p. 708], even though the Soviets categorically refused to return Herța and the territories in the Delta arbitrarily occupied after the ultimatum of 26 June 1940. London encouraged, in principle, this attitude of Gafencu, but the Foreign Office was skeptical of its potential results, considering that a Romanian-Soviet rapprochement, even if it would have reduced dependence on Germany, risked reinforcing among the Romanian elites the idea that the only alternative to German domination was Soviet domination. The British also tried to “seduce” Gafencu immediately after the break in relations with Romania, offering him a large annual salary to leave the Legation in Moscow and become one of the leaders of a movement of “free Romanians”, financed by London. Gafencu initially refused, and when Cripps revived the idea in 1941, the Foreign Office and SOE concluded that, having no real political base in the country, the former foreign minister could only possibly serve as a simple advisor on Balkan issues. From those assessments, it transpires London's inability to identify a Romanian figure with sufficient domestic authority to become the pole of a credible opposition to Antonescu [76, pp. 710-711].

Conclusions to Chapter VI. Research on this stage of Romanian-British relations confirms that their rupture was not the result of a single diplomatic step or gesture, but of the convergence between the Antonescu regime's strategic option for Germany and London's gradual reassessment of its position toward Romania and the political order that was emerging in Eastern Europe. Although at the beginning of this stage there were attempts on both sides to re-establish a "normality" of relations, they quickly proved incompatible with the realities of the war and with the logic of Romanian foreign policy at the time. Antonescu viewed Germany as the only power capable of providing security guarantees, and Great Britain came, under these conditions, to be perceived either as a power without practical relevance for Romania's defense or even as a risk factor for Romanian interests. At the same time, our analysis shows that the diplomatic rupture of February 1941 was prepared by several elements that fed off each other: the presence of German troops in Romania, the Soviet danger, legionary actions against British interests and the persistence of an official discourse that transferred responsibility for the 1940 disaster to London. From this perspective, we have come to the conclusion that Romanian-British relations did not collapse only because of specific incidents, but because Antonescu's regime consistently opted for a foreign policy line incompatible with any real rapprochement with Great Britain.

Chapter VII. The problem of Romania's territorial integrity in Anglo-Soviet relations until the end of the war

Based on documents from British archives, we also researched Great Britain's attitude toward the issue of the Romanian territories occupied in 1940, within the framework of Anglo-Soviet relations. Although the research, significantly reduced in volume, of these sources brought us up to 23 August 1944, that is, outside the chronological framework of the postdoctoral thesis, we nevertheless considered this approach necessary in order to complete knowledge and understanding of Great Britain's attitude towards Romania until the end of an important historical stage. The research undertaken shows how, during the same period, the process by which the British Government was building, step by step, an East European policy increasingly closer to the interests of the USSR was beginning to gain more and more traction. Stafford Cripps, appointed ambassador to Moscow precisely because of his "internationalist" convictions, perhaps best exemplifies the British tendency to "appease" the USSR at all costs, in order to ensure its participation or, at least, its benevolent neutrality in the war with Germany. By 22 June 1941, Cripps justified the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as a Soviet defensive measure, described the annexation of Eastern Poland and Romanian territories as a prevention of German advance, relativized the occupation of the Baltic States and blamed the war with Finland on Finnish "stubbornness" in rejecting the Kremlin's ultimatum. Deportations, mass executions and the policy of ethnic cleansing in the territories annexed by the Soviets from the Baltic to the Black Sea were minimized under the formula of removing "hostile elements" from the border regions. From this point of view, our investigations show that, against the backdrop of the British's increasingly insistent attempts to bring the Soviets closer, part of British diplomacy was becoming a vehicle for Soviet propaganda discourse [72, pp. 66-67].

In our publications we have shown that the main problem in the way of a Soviet-British political-diplomatic rapprochement was, between October 1940 and the summer of 1941, London's refusal to recognize *de jure* the annexation of the Baltic countries by the USSR. Even though, as early as the summer of 1940, London was tempted to "sacrifice the principles" later enunciated in the Atlantic Charter in order to achieve closer military cooperation with Moscow [64, p. 10], it could not simply recognize as legitimate those conquests made in collusion with Hitler, without the Soviets

offering, in return, a substantial modification of their foreign policy in relation to Germany. Despite Cripps' insistence that the British Government take that step, Prime Minister Churchill and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden, decided, as we have shown, to display an attitude of "firm sobriety" toward Soviet claims, considering that giving in in this regard would have been interpreted in Moscow as weakness [74, p. 371].

In our works, we also addressed the issue of the contemporary debate about the "offensive intentions" of the USSR, supported by authors such as Suvorov or Meltiukhov, which we confronted with the British documentary material. The services and ministries in London had a remarkable capacity to anticipate events using an enormous volume of fragmentary information: the British had intuited the content of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact without seeing it, had foreseen the German invasion of the USSR, had understood the failure of the Molotov-Hitler negotiations of November 1940, organized to explore the possibility of the USSR entering the war against Great Britain, had detected in advance the entry of German troops into Romania, etc. In this light, the absence of any serious indications in British documents regarding an imminent Soviet plan of attack against Germany or Romania weighs heavily: London noted massive military preparations, a concentration of troops in the Kiev and Odessa regions, a "quiet" mobilization, but the dominant conclusion was that the USSR was seeking to postpone the confrontation with the Reich as long as possible and was willing to make major concessions to avoid it. It was admitted that, in a hypothetical scenario in which a large part of the German forces were, for example, caught up in hostilities with British troops in the Middle East, the Soviets could have taken advantage to occupy Western Moldavia, but nothing suggested the imminence of the implementation of a concrete offensive plan in 1941. In contrast, information about Germany's aggressive preparations was abundant, precise and convergent to the point where Churchill considered himself obliged to send Stalin direct warnings in April 1941 [72, pp. 73-80].

Our analysis shows that, after 22 June 1941, with the outbreak of the German-Soviet war and Romania's involvement in that conflict with the aim of liberating Bessarabia, Bukovina and the Herța region, occupied by the Soviets in 1940, Anglo-Soviet relations entered a new phase, which had a specific impact on Great Britain's attitude toward Romania. As early as the summer of 1941, the British military mission in Moscow provided the Soviets with detailed information about Romanian oil installations, in order to bomb

them. In the autumn of the same year, Stalin insisted that Britain declare war on Romania, Hungary and Finland, treating this issue as a test of the "authenticity" of the alliance. London hesitated: the dominions, especially Canada, were reluctant; Western public opinion deeply sympathized with Finland; the United States was still suspicious of any step that would legitimize Soviet territorial annexations and was reluctant to consider a British declaration of war on Romania, reasoning that such a step would irrevocably push the Romanians to Hitler's side [50, pp. 293-295, 305]. However, Churchill and Eden believed that the political advantage of strengthening Stalin's confidence outweighed the costs [74, pp. 374-375]. Hence the British ultimatum addressed to Bucharest on 30 November 1941, demanding the cessation of military operations on the territory of the USSR by 5 December, under threat of a declaration of war, followed by the declaration of war made to Romania on 7 December 1941 [49, p. 325].

The official Romanian response to that declaration, as we have seen, showed that Romania had joined Germany in order to defend itself from Soviet aggression and to liberate Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Herța region, territories from which, in a single year of occupation, the USSR had exterminated and deported a large number of Romanian citizens and on which it had concentrated thirty infantry divisions, eight cavalry divisions and fourteen motorized brigades with a view to a new aggression against the Romanian state. The advance of the Romanian army beyond the Dniester was justified by the establishment of an extended "security zone" to block Soviet bombings of Romania. Antonescu publicly deplored London's gesture as an expression of "misunderstanding" of Romania's situation, but stated that he was ready to accept the challenge and declared himself convinced that, by fighting against communism, he was defending the same civilization for which the British claimed to be fighting [76, pp. 723-724].

I then examined the circumstances and results of Eden's visit to Moscow in December 1941, undertaken in an attempt to fix, by treaty, the new Anglo-Soviet relationship created by the outbreak of German-Soviet hostilities. We showed that Stalin, however, put the issue in very clear terms: without Britain's recognition of the Soviet borders resulting from the pact with Hitler - in Finland, the Baltic States and Romania - there would be no agreement [74, pp. 378-379]. Furthermore, he demanded that London recognize the USSR's right to impose binding alliance treaties and military bases on Romania and Finland, in exchange for a "guarantee" of their territorial integrity. For Romania, this Soviet request translated into British

recognition of the annexation of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Herța region by the USSR and, at the same time, British support for the return of Northern Transylvania to the Romanian state. Eden refused to sign such a document, invoking the Atlantic Charter and the obligation to consult with Washington and the dominions, but he acknowledged in internal reports that, in the absence of an agreement on the USSR borders, Moscow's suspicions would persist and that, in any case, if the Soviets were to arrive with armies in Central Europe, they would de facto impose their own arrangements, regardless of the British position on those matters [73, pp. 45-47].

We have shown in our research that part of the British Cabinet and diplomats believed that since, in the event of the defeat of the coalition led by Germany, the USSR would anyway occupy the territories "recovered" in 1939–1940, it would have been better for Britain to accept this fact earlier and to obtain, in return, Soviet collaboration on other issues that directly interested London. Another part insisted that recognizing the annexation of the Baltic States was a flagrant violation of the Atlantic Charter and would have undermined the moral credibility of the West. Above all, the importance of the American position was pressing: President FD Roosevelt was opposed to concluding secret agreements during the war, although he did not oppose the Soviet demands in principle. The position formulated by the American Government was that territorial decisions should be postponed until the post-war peace conference [74, pp. 380-381].

In those circumstances, as we mentioned in our studies, a compromise solution gradually crystallized at the level of the British leadership. Thus, on 26 May 1942, Britain concluded a 20-year alliance treaty with the USSR, without explicit territorial clauses, although it tacitly agreed not to contest the Soviet borders of 22 June 1941, with the exception of those with Poland, which, as an exception, had to be regulated separately. Soviet attempts to introduce a secret protocol by which London would recognize the USSR's "prerogative" to dictate the foreign policy of Romania and Finland were rejected by Eden, but that rejection was more due to formal scruples [73, pp. 48-50]. In October 1943, the same Eden noted that, although there could be no "written agreement" like the one requested by the Soviets, the British Cabinet did not intend to raise objections to the USSR's return to the 1941 border and to its claims on Finland, the Baltic States and Romania, declaring itself willing to examine after the war the idea of binding alliance treaties through which Moscow intended to control the foreign policy of the authorities in Bucharest and Helsinki [74, p. 386].

In the research we have shown that, from this point, the road to the Moscow percentage agreement of October 1944 was a short one. As early as the spring of that year, Eden suggested to the Soviet ambassador in London, Gusev, that if the Soviets wanted to “take over the reins in Romania”, the USSR should agree that the British would be the ones to “play the games” in Greece. The Soviets approved the move, and on 13 June 1944 Churchill noted with satisfaction that Roosevelt agreed to this “division of responsibilities” [76, pp. 733-734]. In fact, however, Great Britain no longer had any real leverage over developments in Romania, a fact explicitly acknowledged in the British diplomatic correspondence to which we had access; the only area where London tried to exert pressure was the text of the armistice convention, managing to insert into the text signed on 12 September 1944 a mention of Romania's formal sovereignty, contrary to the Soviet preference to eliminate such references. Regarding Transylvania, the British internal position was even less favorable to Romania than the Soviet one: in London the idea of leaving some territories with a Hungarian majority to Hungary was seriously discussed, while Stalin seemed more willing to support the return of the entire Northern Transylvania to Romania [74, p. 387].

Research into Romania's relations with the Allied Powers ultimately brought us back to the issue of Antonescu's attitude toward Germany and Great Britain. We have shown how the narrative of “Britain's guilt” for the losses of 1940, initially a German construction meant to justify the treatment given to Romania, was internalized by the elites in Bucharest, first under the regime of Carol II and then under Antonescu's. By accepting the idea that London had offered “deceptive” guarantees, Romanians could perceive themselves as duped victims, not as actors who had demanded and obtained exactly the kind of guarantee they wanted. In contrast, Germany - the accomplice and even architect of the territorial dismemberment of 1940 - became, in Antonescu's discourse, the “honorable” ally to whom Romania had a “moral duty”. Hence, inappropriate gestures such as the unprovoked declaration of war made to the Americans, justified by the general through the “laws of honor of war” and through the obligation of gratitude toward the only power that helped Romania regain its territories lost to the USSR [50, pp. 307-308]. Although it cannot be disputed that the German army fought together with the Romanian army to regain the Romanian territories occupied by the Soviets, the general's “logic” does not stand up to the reality recorded in the documents that we have researched: in June 1941, Hitler explained to Antonescu, without any detours, that through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact,

accompanied by the secret protocol, he had decided that Bessarabia, Finland and the Baltic States were part of Moscow's "sphere of influence". Hitler, however, placed the responsibility for this on Poland and Romania because they had joined the "anti-German front", which would have pushed him toward an understanding with Stalin. We have shown in our studies that there is no doubt that, following those discussions, Antonescu must have fully understood Germany's role in the loss of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Herța region. And yet, he continued to invoke "honor" and "moral duty" toward Berlin to justify not only participating in the war to liberate the territories occupied by the Soviets in 1940, but also crossing the Dniester and getting involved in a war beyond that border. These reasons and concepts no longer had any real correspondence: they were, in essence, rhetorical tools and mechanisms of justification, just as, elsewhere, Churchill's appeals to the "cause of freedom" coexisted with the practical acceptance of the territorial claims of a totalitarian regime with which he had temporarily allied himself against Germany. In this way, our research confronts two similar distortions of reality: the Romanian one, which shifted internal blame onto British guarantees and transformed Germany into Romania's moral creditor, and the British one, which, in the name of geopolitical "realism" and the need to win the war, ended up de facto legitimizing the Soviet Union's policy of annexations and aggression in Eastern Europe, even though this was incompatible with the principles that London declared it was defending.

Conclusions to Chapter VII. Our publications in this section of the synthesis show that, in its relations with Romania, Great Britain acted based on the logic of giving absolute priority to the alliance with the USSR, even at the cost of abandoning the principles it claimed to defend. The initial British refusal to recognize the Soviet annexations of 1940, followed by their tacit acceptance and then by the de facto acceptance of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, confirms that British diplomacy preferred compromise solutions designed to formally preserve the appearance of adherence to the declared principles of British foreign policy, but, in fact, to ensure Moscow's cooperation. In this framework, Romania was a secondary piece in a diplomatic game dominated by the great powers, and its territorial rights were treated as negotiable variables. At the same time, we have highlighted the way in which political and diplomatic discourses distorted reality to make it compatible with the options determined by the conjuncture of the moment. London minimized the Soviet aggressions and annexations carried out in complicity with Hitler in order to maintain open cooperation

with Stalin, while Bucharest transformed the ineffectiveness of British guarantees into a foreign policy argument and elevated Germany to the rank of an "honorable" ally, although its responsibility for the dismemberment of Romania was obvious to Ion Antonescu. It follows that Romanian-British relations and their place in Anglo-Soviet relations cannot be understood only as a succession of diplomatic decisions, but as part of a process of systematic reinterpretation of circumstances and interpretation of the truth, depending on the interests dictated by the evolution of the war.

General conclusions and recommendations

Our research dedicated to Romania's relations with the Allied Powers (Britain and France) in the period 1938–1941 attests, first of all, the illusory nature of many of the expectations and hopes of the political elite in Bucharest. Starting from the formulated working hypothesis, we demonstrated that the projection of a "special" role for Romania in the European security architecture, as well as the belief in a firm and rapid intervention by Great Britain and France in the defense of the territorial status quo in Central and Eastern Europe, were, to a large extent, the result of a distorted perception - both of the real capabilities of the Western Allies, as well as of their strategic priorities, but also of their capacities to capitalize on their own resources.

The analysis based on unpublished British and French sources has facilitated a much clearer reconstruction than before of the degree of improvisation, hesitation and ambiguity that characterized the policy of London and Paris towards Central and South-Eastern Europe after the Anschluss and the breakup of Czechoslovakia. The guarantees of April 13, 1939, perceived in Bucharest as a solid basis for security, appear, through the prism of British documents, as the result of a combination of Romanian desires and requests, on the one hand, and internal pressures, propaganda considerations and limited strategic calculations, on the other hand, of the Allies, without a firm political will to support them militarily in case of crisis. Consequently, we have come to the conclusion that the discrepancy between the Romanian perception and the real policy of London and Paris became a central factor in the degeneration of the situation in 1940.

Our research demonstrates that the evolution of Romanian-Anglo-French relations cannot be understood without placing them in the broader context of relations between the Allies, Germany and the Soviet Union. The failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet tripartite negotiations, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and London's priority to consolidate the southern flank, relying on Turkey, drastically reduced the strategic value and importance of Romania for the Allies and, implicitly, its room for maneuver. The files consulted show that Romania was viewed, both in Paris, but especially in London, as a secondary element in the equation of relations with the USSR and Germany, rather than as an ally whose security constituted an autonomous priority of Anglo-French policy.

The results of our investigations reveal the responsibility for the situation in 1940 of the Romanian leadership. The authoritarian political regime of Carol II, corrupt and incapable of valorizing the human potential and resources of the Romanian state, the lack of strategic vision, the incoherence and inconsistency of foreign policy, and the dependence on backstage games and internal power calculations limited Romania's capacity to make the most of its relationship with the Allied Powers. The "balance policy", often invoked as a skillful solution, appears, in the light of the researched sources, more like a succession of reactive tactical adjustments than a clearly articulated strategic project. We concluded that the ambiguity of the Romanian message addressed to London and Paris, doubled by contradictory signals transmitted to Berlin, contributed to diminishing Romania's credibility in the eyes of the Allies, without succeeding, on the other hand, in gaining the trust of the Germans or identifying means of influencing the Soviet attitude.

Another conclusion of the research refers to the role of economic factors in Romanian-Franco-British relations, in the context in which the issue of Germany's access to Romanian oil and other strategic resources was not just a secondary element of Bucharest's interaction with London or Paris, but one of the central pillars of the Allied interest in Romania. The analyzed documents clearly show the tension between two objectives of the Allies' policy in relation to Romania that could not be fully reconciled: on the one hand, that of limiting German access to those resources; on the other hand, that of avoiding a commitment to supporting Romania, perceived as too isolated and impossible to support effectively by military means. From this point of view, many of the decisions of the Western Allies, otherwise difficult to explain at a discursive level, become coherent.

Our conclusions confirm the "breaking point" character of the summer of 1940. The defeat of France and the dismissal of Gafencu, the successive territorial cessions, the denunciation of Western guarantees, the accelerated orientation toward the Berlin-Rome Axis, followed by the establishment of the Antonescu regime, transformed the framework of Romanian-British relations as quickly as they were fundamental. The detailed reconstruction of the process of degradation and then the breaking of diplomatic relations highlights that, although the rupture was formalized only in 1941, the real political distancing had begun much earlier, against the backdrop of radical divergences of perception and interest. At the same time, the set of unpublished documents analyzed allowed us to distinguish new nuances regarding the British position toward the Antonescu regime and toward the Romanian

army's campaign in the East. We concluded that London's attitude toward Antonescu was, at the beginning of his regime, a complex one; it oscillated between condemnation of military collaboration with Germany and pragmatic interest in possible changes of orientation in Bucharest, which, however, would never come.

The coherent integration of French and British military and diplomatic sources in a comparative study with Romanian sources and existing historiography has served to dismantle shaky narratives and to reconstruct a more complex, less comfortable image of our own history. From this perspective, our research represents not only a documentary complement to the subject of reference, but also a critical intervention in the historiographical debate regarding the internal and external processes and responsibilities for the territorial and political disaster suffered by Romania in 1940–1941.

Following the research conducted, we formulated a set of recommendations, namely:

- expanding the investigations into Soviet and German archives. The research relied mainly on British and Romanian holdings, on some unpublished French documents and on several published French, British and, to a lesser extent, German and Soviet sources. A natural next step is a systematic investigation into German diplomatic and military archives, and also Soviet archives (at some currently unpredictable point in the future). Such an approach would allow the perspective "from London and Paris" to be balanced with that "from Berlin" and "from Moscow";

- developing a comparative study of the Allies' policies toward the small states of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The results obtained suggest the usefulness of a broader comparative framework, which would approach Romania together with Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece or Turkey. A comparative analysis of the political-diplomatic treatment applied to these states by Britain and France would allow the delimitation of the specific elements (related to the geographical position and the Romanian political regime) from the general ones (related to the overall strategies of the Allies);

- integrating the societal and cultural dimension of reporting to the Allies. The present research has mainly addressed the political-diplomatic and strategic level, integrating important economic and military landmarks. Starting from what has been achieved, a future direction could target the perceptions of Romanian society toward Britain and France: the press, propaganda (present to a limited extent in the research targeted in this synthesis), intellectual circles, the church, political parties, the peasant masses and the urban environment.

The analysis of the cultural and symbolic representations of the Allies among the Romanian people would complete the "top-down" image with a "bottom-up" perspective, necessary for understanding the mechanisms of internal legitimization of foreign policy options;

- deepening the study of economic-commercial and energy factors in Anglo-French-Romanian relations. Although our works have emphasized the importance of economic factors (in particular, Romanian oil) in Romanian-Anglo-French relations, a research program dedicated strictly to the economic dimension - contracts (including military procurement), trade negotiations, infrastructure, companies, lobby networks - could provide an even more precise reconstruction of how these interests influenced political decision-making. In such an endeavor, the investigation of French, British and Romanian commercial archives, as well as the archives of oil companies, would be essential;

- using the results of our research in the development and writing of textbooks and special courses in history, foreign policy, diplomacy and international relations;

- deepening our research on the period 1941–1944, with an emphasis on British policy toward Romania in the context of Anglo-Soviet relations after 22 June 1941, which would allow us to follow to the end the consequences of the decisions analyzed in the current project.

Based on the results of our research, we formulate the following recommendations, applicable in fields beyond the scientific and teaching spheres:

- focusing national policy on the binomial of internal preparation and active external alliances, within which internal preparation should remain at the forefront of national attention and effort, avoiding the trap of paper security and reactive approaches, which proved fatal in 1940. In the current context, Romania and the states in the region must not rely exclusively on external guarantees (NATO/EU), but should invest primarily in strengthening their own military, scientific-technical and economic capacities. The study's findings warn that, in a systemic conflict, political guarantees become obsolete if they are not underpinned by a solid internal base and a demonstrated will to resist;

- learning the historical lessons of the 1938–1941 period, which show that the strategic interests of the great powers (Britain and France) have always prevailed over "moral" or politico-diplomatic obligations toward small states. Current decision-makers must use these lessons to maintain rigorous

pragmatism in alliance relations. Continuous monitoring of breaking points in allied unity is necessary, as is anticipating scenarios in which great powers might prioritize de-escalation over the integrity of states in the geopolitical confrontation zone, such as Ukraine or the Republic of Moldova;

- adopting, within European forums, a firm position by Romania and the Republic of Moldova against any modern form of “appeasement” toward Russian aggression. It must not be forgotten that neutrality or the so-called “politics of equilibrium” of the time isolated Romania in 1940, with disastrous consequences; hence the need for a decisive and timely commitment to the side of the order based on international law;

- including the model for analyzing the behavior of small states under conditions of extreme crisis in the training programs of diplomats and security analysts. Our publications and synthesis provide a case study of how internal vulnerabilities can be exploited by aggressive external actors, offering benchmarks for avoiding the repetition of strategic assessment errors from the eve of the Second World War;

- disseminating the research results in order to explain to the general public that national security is not an external given, but above all a product of internal capacities. In the context of the current hybrid war, understanding the internal causes of the 1940 disaster can strengthen society’s resilience against propaganda that undermines trust in state institutions and in the European Union.

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Annotation

Identification data: Mihai Țurcanu. Romania and the Allied Powers (Britain and France) on the eve of and in the early years of the Second World War (1938-1941); a synthesis dissertation of publications in view of obtaining the title of habilitated doctor in the specialization History of the Romanians (611.02), Chișinău, 2026.

Structure of the synthesis: The synthesis dissertation was prepared in accordance with the standards established by ANACEC ("Guide to drafting the doctoral/doctor habilitation thesis", approved by ANACEC Decision no. 5 of 18.XII.2018; "Recommendations regarding the elaboration and defense of the habilitated doctor thesis / synthesis dissertation", approved by ANACEC Order no. 10-A of 25 February 2021). The dissertation was structured as follows: Introduction and conceptual framework, content of the publications – consisting of seven chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography, abstract.

Keywords: Romania, Bessarabia, Britain, France, the Second World War, diplomacy, international relations.

Scope and objectives of the research: Purpose: Reconstitution and reinterpretation of Romania's relations with Great Britain and France (1938-1941), on the basis of primary sources, in order to explain: the dynamics of these relations; their link with the collapse of Greater Romania (1940) and with the subsequent political/diplomatic rupture; the historiographical interpretations of Romania's relationship with the Western Allies in the context of security guarantees. Objectives: 1) reconstruction of the evolution of Romanian-British and Romanian-French relations during the crises of 1938-1939 and of the way they were perceived in London and Paris, in relation to Germany and the USSR; 2) analysis of the security guarantees of 13 April 1939: context, actual content, and the difference between their purpose for the great powers and Bucharest's interpretation; 3) identification of Romania's place in collective security projects in South-Eastern Europe; 4) explanation of Great Britain's reaction to the collapse of Greater Romania in 1940; 5) interpretation of the irreversible decline of Romanian-British relations after the regime change, the stationing of German troops, the diplomatic rupture and the preparation for war against the USSR, including the examination of Great Britain's attitude toward Romania in the context of Anglo-Soviet relations in the period that followed until the signing of the Armistice Convention with Romania.

Scientific novelty and originality. The novelty and originality of the research lie in the comparative approach to Romanian, British, French, German and Soviet sources, which made it possible to reconstruct more rigorously the international crisis between 1938 and 1941. The research went beyond the bilateral framework of Romania's relations with Great Britain and France, placing them in the broader context of Western relations with Germany, the USSR and other regional actors. In comparison with earlier Romanian historiography, the research synthesized in this work offers a broader perspective, better contextualized and more faithful to the real complexity of Romanian foreign policy.

Results obtained. The central conclusion is that the disaster of 1940 and the irreversible decline of Romania's relations with the West were determined first and foremost by the structural weakness of the state and by the inability of the elites to turn external resources and opportunities into internal power and resilience. The scientific results of the published research will lead to the creation of a new research direction in which future efforts will have to focus especially on understanding and explaining the internal, Romanian causes of the processes and developments that led to the events through which Romanian society passed in 1940, while external causes will be examined as secondary circumstances.

Theoretical significance. The study proposes a paradigm shift: the collapse of Greater Romania is explained through the relationship between the state's internal capacity and the constraints of the international system, offering a model for analyzing the policy of a small state toward the great powers.

Applicative value. The results of our investigations can be used in drafting courses and textbooks on Romania's international relations and as a case study for the current analysis of foreign and security policy, illustrating the limits of "security through guarantees" in the absence of a solid internal base.

Implementation of scientific results. The results are implemented through the monograph and published articles, made available to the academic community as research and teaching tools, in university courses, seminars and historiographical debates concerning the years 1938-1941 and the 1940 crisis.

Disclaimer

The undersigned declare on personal responsibility that the materials presented in the synthesis paper are the result of my own research and scientific achievements. I am aware that, otherwise, I will bear the consequences in accordance with the legislation in force.

Name and surname: ȚURCANU Mihai

Signature

Date - April 28, 2026.

MIHAI TURCANU

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