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**THE RIBBENTROP-CIANO
DIKTAT,
TRANSYLVANIA
AND THE ROMANIAN-HUNGARIAN RELATIONS
(1940-1944)**

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Transylvania as a Compensatory Territory (1940-1944)

Introduction

William L. Shirer was a brilliant American journalist and war correspondent. He was born in Chicago in 1904 and lived for almost nine decades. From 1925 to 1932 he has lived in Paris, being the European correspondent of *The Chicago Tribune*. In 1934, he began broadcasting reports in Berlin about the rise of Adolf Hitler, for various news agencies and even for American radio stations. He drew the attention of the public opinion to the consequences of Germany's re-entering into the Saarland and then to the re-militarization of the Rhine. From 1937 he set up his correspondent's office in Vienna, as the Nazi censorship was becoming harsher, and continued to report on the Hitler's *Blitzkrieg*. He also accurately recorded episodes of the Munich Agreement and the occupation of Czechoslovakia (1938). In 1941 he published the *Berlin Diary. The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934 - 1941* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf) in which he recounted his experiences and perceptions in Nazi Germany. And two decades after leaving Berlin he published a monumental work (*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1245 pages), printed in several editions, translated and published in many countries, being considered even today as one of the best books about the epoch of Adolf Hitler. The "secret" of the success of this historiographical reconstruction consists not only in the extensive documentation and rigorous scientific approach, but especially in the interpretive and historical nuances, rendered by the journalist/observer/ historian, and sometimes even participant in many of the events he described. As an introduction to our subject, I propose a recollection of the days that preceded the Munich Agreement (September 30, 1938). Trying to bring Hitler to pacifism, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Neville Chamberlain, visited the German Chancellor at his residence in Berchtesgaden on September 15, 1940. He flew to Munich,

and from there by train to the meeting place. William L. Shirer reports that from the train window, the British Prime Minister saw trains loaded with German army troops and artillery pieces flowing in the opposite direction all along the way. Hitler wanted to incorporate into the Reich the German population of the Sudetenland, which belonged to Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain had acted as an intermediary and mediator between the Führer and the Czechoslovak government. After several rounds of negotiations, the Prague government agreed to cede the Sudetenland, with a German population majority. On the evening of September 23, during a new meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain (the Dreesen Hotel on the Rhine), the Nazi dictator handed the British prime minister a memorandum demanding that Czechoslovakia renounce at the entire Sudet region and withdraws in three days from that territory which was to be handed over to Germany until September 28, 1938. The Führer's guest was stunned by this new claim and said that he was just a "mediator" and could only send the document to Prague. And he continued: "But this is simply an ultimatum!" Hitler denied and impertinently and ironically replied: "This is not a *Diktat*. Look, the document! It is called a memorandum."¹ Moreover, in a public speech (Sportpalast in Berlin, September 26, 1938), Hitler announced that he was determined to enter that territory with the army, and told Western negotiating partners that in a few days Germany would start the war. In this situation, Chamberlain asked Benito Mussolini to be the mediator between Hitler and England plus France (on behalf of the Czechoslovak government). The conference of the four states (Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy) was organized in Munich (September 29-30, 1938) and it decided to give total satisfaction to Hitler. It was not until late in the evening, on September, 29, that two representatives of the Czechoslovak government were invited to receive the settlement of the agreement of the Four. A map of the Sudetenland was placed in front of them, along with a request that the region shall be immediately evacuated by the Prague government authorities and troops. And to make the cynicism of the Great Powers even more visible, Hitler and Mussolini committed Chamberlain and Daladier themselves to present to the Czechs the

¹ William L. Shirer, *Le Troisième Reich : des origines à la chute*, Tome 1, Ed. Stock, Paris, 1972, p. 521.

Munich Agreement (September 30, 1938). When a Czech diplomate has tried to ask a few questions, he was received with great apprehension by the British and French leaders, one of Daladier's collaborators showing that "the Four" were very tired and no longer had the availability of conversations, considering the Munich proposal as being accepted by the representatives of the Czechoslovak government. But the Czechoslovak drama was not just played between the "Four" countries under consideration. During the political preparations for the final decision in Munich, and after the Hitler-Chamberlain meeting in mid-September, Berlin urged Hungary and Poland to put pressure on the Czechoslovak government with their own territorial claims, and on September 20, the Slovaks were urged to pour gas on fire. On the same day, September 20, 1938, Hitler received Béla Imrédy, the Prime Minister of Hungary, who was accompanied by the Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya to urge them to intervene in the arrangements against Czechoslovakia. The Führer called on Hungarian leaders to immediately demand Prague to hold a plebiscite in the territory it was claiming. Budapest was not to offer Czechoslovakia any guarantees for the new borders.² In fact, the total disintegration of Czechoslovakia was being planned and at the same time, the preparation of the base for launching the attack on Poland. The latter would take place less than a year after the Munich Agreement had become operational. Berlin encouraged the Slovaks to establish their own state, but on November 2, 1938, Ribbentrop and Ciano forced them, through a so-called arbitration in Vienna, in the Belvedere Palace, to cede to Hungary territories in the southern part of Slovakia and then the south-western part of the Subcarpathian Ruthenia. "It was a shocking decision." - states Ladislav Deák, who describes the brutal and violent manner in which the Horthy military administration was installed in the occupied territory.³ On the morning of March 15, 1939, Hitler's army entered Bohemia and Moravia, and on March 16 he took over, under his "protection", Slovakia, from which he had detached the areas decided by the first "Arbitration" in Vienna. Hungary had also been granted the

² *Ibidem*, p. 512.

³ Ladislav Deák, "Slovaks in Hungarian Politics from 1918-1939", in Vladimír Mináč et al, *Slovaks&Magyars-Slovak-Magyar Relations in Central Europe*, Vydala Sprava, Bratislava, 1995, pp. 58-59.

Subcarpathian Ruthenia (on March 13, 1939, Horthy sent Hitler an enthusiastic letter assuring him that on the morning of March 16 he had scheduled an incident at the border with Slovakia). Germany was already about to occupy territories where there was no German population. Hungary was no longer guided by the principle of ethnicity, as Budapest justified its entry into the Subcarpathian Ruthenia by a "sentimental explosion" (as explained by Minister Kánya), as noted by German Ambassador Otto von Erdmannsdorff (November 19, 1938).⁴ Hitler's preferred method in foreign policy was to pursue his goal by using the threat of using force and even by starting a war. The appeal to various diplomatic tools and methods was equally simulated, in order to give a signal of legality. But he mostly used the well-known *divide et impera*, by manipulating the interests or misunderstandings between certain European states (more extensively in Central and Eastern Europe). In this respect, one of the methods frequently used by Hitler and Ribbentrop was the territorial compensation, accompanied by forcing compromise.

E.H. Carr, a historian and analyst of international politics, is really helpful to a better knowledge of the theoretical framework and political mentality of that era. Referring to the years of the interwar period, he shows that states and political leaders sought to bring innovations to the international system and most particularly to propose methods, procedures and laws, as effective as it was possible for resolving conflicts and avoiding war. Therefore, starting from the League of Nations Agreement, the creation of the International Permanent Court was initiated and several arbitration treaties, especially those from Locarno were concluded. This required the application of a judicial procedure based on political agreement, which made arbitration almost unfeasible.⁵ Especially because the mentality of political leaders was still dominated by the conceptions of *Realpolitik* and the balance of power of the nineteenth century. This meant that a change in the European or international order was possible depending on the role of power, which was most often assessed on the basis of the ability to use force in the regulation of international relations. And E.H. Carr gave the example of

⁴ Magda Ádám, "Documents relatifs à la politique étrangère de la Hongrie dans la période de la crise tchécoslovaque (1938-1939)", in *Acta Historica*, X, Nr. 3-4 (1964), p. 380.

⁵ E.H. Carr, *Criza celor douăzeci de ani (1919-1939)* [The Twenty Years' Crisis (1919-1939)], Polirom, Iași, 2011, p. 195.

the Berlin Congress (1878), which was able to revise the Treaty of San Stefano (1878) only after Russia was threatened with war by the two Powers.

Carr frames the Munich Agreement (1938) in the same dialectic, the redrawing of borders being possible only as a result of the threat with the use of force. He concludes by defining the international political atmosphere at the end of the interwar period: "Power, whether used or retained as a tacit threat, is a key factor in international change; and the change will be achieved, generally speaking, only in the interests of those who can invoke the element of power".⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, a promoter of the political realism from the same period of time, also thought that it was difficult to apply the so-called institutional arbitration because it required the general consent of the parties, but also a particular agreement. And diplomacy, in the process of preserving peace, had three means: "persuasion, compromise and the threat of force". More specifically, Morgenthau put it this way: "No diplomacy that is based solely on the threat of force can be both intelligent and peaceful. No diplomacy that relies on persuasion and compromise deserves to be called intelligent. The foreign policy of a great power can seldom, if ever, justify the use of one method and the exclusion of the others."⁷ Therefore, we will have to note, as J. Craig Barker does, that the practice of states, in the modern age of international relations, has make use of the threat of force in the diplomatic actions, under certain circumstances.⁸ Let us simply mention that arbitration in international relations of the twentieth century has always been considered (see *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations*, 1998) a method of conflict resolution through which the disputing parties agree and submit the differences of opinion to a third party who will make a binding decision for the appellants. Mediation is also a form of action in support of conflict resolution, but the mediator acts rather as a facilitator of communication and negotiation between the parties, who are themselves in a position to seek the most appropriate solution to resolve the dispute. The role of the

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 215.

⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politica între națiuni. Lupta pentru putere și lupta pentru pace* [Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace], Polirom, Iași, 2007, p. 553.

⁸ J. Craig Barker, *International Law and International Relations*, Continuum, London, 2001, p. 135.

mediator can be essential in establishing the principles and procedures of the negotiation, but also in defining a viable solution.

Through the prestige of the qualities of impartiality and neutrality, the mediator creates an atmosphere able to favor the option of the parties for the application of the solution agreed.

„Transylvania and Transylvania Again"

Transylvania, as a territory with its history, and its cultural and economic structure of the population has been in the twentieth century, and continues to be one of the topics much frequented by academics, the media and, above all, by certain political entities. This topic is often approached with great passion, not only in Romania or in Central Europe, but also in Western Europe (including North America). Everywhere there are interested parties who dedicate to the Transylvanian area manifestations from different spheres: literary, artistic, geopolitical, geostrategic and, of course, historiographical. These concerns could be precisely explained by the passions' extension from Central Europe to Western Europe, but also by the "game" played (past and present) by the Great Powers of the world with certain emotions of the peoples of Central-South-Eastern Europe. Transylvania has been under the scrutiny of the government chancelleries and of the political and intellectual media during the recent centuries and in the 21st century as well. Transylvania is being stirred by more and more analysts of the general European and international issues in the amplified crucible of their interest. The research on the history of this Romanian territory – Transylvania – could be resourceful for those who analyze the history of European relations and the phenomena of the modern and contemporary international system. There are many prolifically dedicated studies regarding this topic in the whole world. It was obvious in the twentieth century – and still is – the interest of the Great Powers to get involved, directly or indirectly, in the developments around Transylvania. The motivation for this attitude is connected to the conduct of what, at certain stages, has been defined as and - noteworthy - is intended to be the Central Europe. Of course, not as a monadic individuality and not only as an aspect of the German-Russian relations, but often in view of the regional policies or the projection of the whole continent. One such case was the attitude towards Transylvania at the beginning and the end of the Second

World War. Our research considers a series of aspects, in the context generated by the second so-called Vienna Diktat (August 30, 1940), when Transylvania was divided, one part being incorporated by Hungary, the other continuing to remain within the Romanian state. That Vienna arrangement, which Hitler and Mussolini included in the action of changing the "Versailles system" (i.e., the treaties concluded at the post-World War I Peace Conference), is called in the political, legal and historiographical literature: "arbitration", "award", "agreement" and "diktat". Ribbentrop and Ciano, the "arbitrators", used procedures and methods inconsistent with the arbitration method, in issuing the Vienna decision (August 30, 1940) to Romania and Hungary. Also, because the perception of the public opinion of the time was that Transylvania was divided by Germany and Italy through a dictatorial measure, I proposed the use of the term "Vienna Diktat"⁹. In fact, the two Axis Powers considered Transylvania as a compensation territory, which helped them to design the instrumentation of the Hungarian-Romanian relations. Before approaching the topic itself, we believe that a few historiographical and methodological explanations could be useful. There are historiographical writings that make a direct reference to the policy of certain Great Powers towards Transylvania. As an example, in a study published by the Center for Soviet and Eastern European Research at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (July 1977), Yehuda Lahav insisted on the Soviet policy in the "Transylvanian Question" (1940-1946). Even if the author does not always show clear perceptions about what Transylvania means, from a historical point of view and as a population, cultural structure, etc., his analysis is noteworthy because it reveals the reasons and methods of what he calls "the effective exploitation by the USSR of the differences between Romania and Hungary in the Transylvanian Question"¹⁰. Lahav's study was continued by the Russian

⁹ Mihail Manoilescu, *Dictatul de la Viena* [The Vienna Diktat], Enciclopedică Publishers, Bucharest, 1991 and Valer Pop, *Bătălia pentru Ardeal* [The Battle for Transylvania], Colosseum Publishers, Bucharest, 1992, described the meeting in Vienna (August 30, 1940) in a manner confirmed by the account of R.G. Waldeck, *Athénée Palace*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2000, p. 125: "It seems that Ribbentrop and Ciano did not take care to go through the arbitration procedure, but put before the Hungarians a proposal that did not allow a discussion, and the Romanians were given an ultimatum that German, Hungarian and Russian troops would attack them if they did not accept the arbitration within six hours."

¹⁰ Yehuda Lahav, *Soviet Policy and the Transylvanian Question (1940-1946)*, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1977.

historians T.V. Volokitina, T.M. Islamov and T.A. Pokivailova who, in 2000, published a volume of documents, with an introductory study by Islamov and Pokivailova on the "Transylvanian question" and the Romanian-Hungarian relations - from a Soviet perspective - between 1940 and 1946 (the volume was translated and published in Romania, in 2014, under the supervision of Professor Onufrie Vințeler).¹¹ This collection of archival documents demonstrates the Kremlin's insistent concern for Transylvania, and especially for the characteristics of the Romanian-Hungarian relations - which have interested Russian leaders since the 19th century. *The Transylvania Study - A Key Problem* (1943), published by R.W. Seton Watson, shows the attention paid by Great Britain to the same relations/ animosities between Romania and Hungary¹². Among the more recent studies, the paper on Romanian-German relations, published by Rebecca Haynes in the second half of the fourth decade of the last century, seems to be interesting and useful.¹³ And Professor Paul D. Quinlan, one of the contemporary American analysts of Western relations with Central Europe (especially Romania), wrote that although the problem of Transylvania was secondary to the United States, American officials were nevertheless interested in the subject, in order to prevent Transylvania from continuing to be "a major source of friction in Eastern Europe"¹⁴. This thesis has been embraced since the fall of 1940, when Philip E. Mosely published in *Foreign Policy* (October 1940) his well-documented study: *Transylvania Partitioned*¹⁵. The journalistic memorial volume of Rosa G. Waldeck, a correspondent of the *Newsweek* publication, seems relevant to the Romanian political atmosphere of 1940, including the dramatic days

¹¹ *Problema transilvană. Disputa teritorială româno-maghiară și URSS, 1940-1946. Documente din arhivele rusești* [The Transylvanian Question. Romanian-Hungarian Territorial Dispute and USSR, 1940-1946. Documents from the Russian Archives], Edited by Ovidiu Vințeler, Diana Tetean, Comments: O. Vințeler, Eikon Publishers, Cluj-Napoca, 2014.

¹² R.W. Seton-Watson, *Transylvania - A Key Problem*, Classic Press, Oxford, 1943, p. 20.

¹³ Rebecca Haynes, *Politica României față de Germania între 1936 și 1940* [Romania's Policy Towards Germany between 1936 and 1940], Polirom, Iași, 2003.

¹⁴ Paul D. Quinlan, „The United States and the Problem of Transylvania during World War II”, in *Romania between East and West*, Publishers S. Fischer-Galați, Radu Florescu, George Ursul, New York, 1982, p. 372.

¹⁵ See the study of Philip E. Mosely, in English and Romanian, in Vasile Pușcaș, *Philip E. Mosely despre Transilvania și Basarabia* [Philip E. Mosely about Transylvania and Bessarabia] Școala Ardeleană Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2017, pp. 257-284.

of territorial losses in the summer and autumn of that year.¹⁶ Germany showed the greatest concern for Transylvania among the Great Powers of that time, and not only for its interest in ethnic Germans, but especially because of the strategic significance of the region in the context of European territorial and geopolitical redefinitions at the end of the fourth decade. Many historiographical studies are mainly dedicated to the moment of the Vienna decision (August 30, 1940), with the presentation of some preamble elements and effects. Otherwise, the Romanian historiography does sporadically mention the fact that the problem of Transylvania and the Romanian-Hungarian relations were discussed during the Antonescu-Hitler meetings. The monographic essay of Cornel Grad (1998) brought an additional documentation to the work of Aurică Simion (1972), but also a better systematization of the events' logic of the second Vienna Diktat.¹⁷ The historian Ottmar Trască diligently researched German, Austrian and Hungarian archives and brought additional information about Nazi Germany's intervention in Central Europe and in Romanian-Hungarian relations, with a special emphasis on German and Hungarian interpretations.¹⁸ Hungarian historiography,

¹⁶ R.G. Waldeck, *Athénée Palace*, With an afterword by Ernest H. Latham Jr., Humanitas, Bucharest, 2000.

¹⁷ Cornel Grad, *Al doilea arbitraj de la Viena* [The Second Arbitration in Vienna], The European Institute, Iași, 1998, A. Simion, *Dictatul de la Viena* [The Vienna Diktat], Dacia, Cluj, 1972.

¹⁸ Ottmar Trască published, after 1995, several studies based on the content of the Altenburg-Rogeri and Hencke-Rogeri German-Italian Commissions' reports. He adopted different interpretations regarding the Romanian-Hungarian relations during the Second World War and incorporated some of the conclusions in his doctoral thesis, published in 2013, dealing with the topic of Romanian-German relations (1940-1944); see O. Trașcă, "Aspects of the Romanian-Hungarian Relations between 1940-1944", in *Transylvanian Review*, 1995, no. 4, pp. 45-59; Idem, "The Transylvanian Question in the Context of the Romanian-German Political and Military Relations", in *Transylvanian Review*, 2002, No. 1, pp. 132-140; Idem, "Romanian-Hungarian Relations and the Question of Transylvania" (I, II), in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A.D. Xenopol”*, 2004 (pp. 311-349), 2005 (pp. 377-408); Idem, "Romanian-Hungarian relations and the situation of minorities in the investigation of the German-Italian Hencke-Rogeri Commission", in Sorina Paula Bolovan et al (Coord.), *Population Movements and Demographic Aspects in Romania, in the First Half of the 20th Century*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 2007; Idem, *Romanian-German Political and Military Relations, September 1940-August 1944*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut Publishers, 2013. The Director-General of the National Archives of Hungary, the historian Béni L. Balogh, presented in 2009 a doctoral thesis, in Budapest, published in 2011 in the USA, on the Romanian-Hungarian relations and the issue of minorities, in the period 1940-1944, referring also to the work of the same German-Italian Commissions. Meritorious is the