

THE BALKAN PACT – HISTORY AND MODERNITY

Diana Cristiana LUPU, Daniel Silviu NICULAE

“Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest
(diana_c_lupu@yahoo.com, danielniculaie@yahoo.com)

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***Abstract:** The paper is aimed at discussing some of the attempts to form alliances in the Balkan space throughout time, without intending to be exhaustive, and considering especially those including Romania. Mention should be made that the systems of alliances existing during the Balkan Wars and the two world wars are not covered in the paper, as they have been extensively discussed in the literature. Confronted with different threats, generated by the geopolitical and geostrategic context as well as by the divergences between them, the peoples in the Balkans have perceived establishing alliances as necessary, either to prevent or to manage the crises in the region. The conclusion is an invitation to reflection whether it is the commonalities or the divides that have troubled the Balkan space for so many years.*

***Keywords:** Balkan space, Triple Alliance, Triple Entente, Balkan Pact, Warsaw Treaty Organisation, entangled history*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the Balkans have been referred to as the powder keg of Europe, the crossroads of civilisations, the land in between, the community of fate, to mention some of the tropes related to this space. Despite the debates on the borders of the region as well as on the peoples inhabiting the area, the majority of scholars have agreed upon at least one aspect, namely its entangled history. It is probably the perception of the mentioned characteristic that has resulted in the numerous attempts to establish different alliances between the entities in the area depending on the circumstances in history. Nowadays, most of the countries in the Balkans or Southeastern Europe are either NATO or EU member states, some of them enjoying the membership of both international organisations that promote cooperation, partnership and mutual assistance, proper to the concept of an alliance.

Confronted with different threats, generated by the geopolitical and geostrategic context as well as by the divergences between them, the peoples in the Balkans have perceived as necessary to establish alliances, either to prevent or to manage the crises the region has had to face. The present paper is aimed at discussing some of the attempts to form alliances in this space, without intending to be exhaustive and considering especially those including Romania. Mention should be made that the systems of alliances existing in the two world wars are not covered in the paper, as they have been the extensively discussed in the literature.

2. ALLIANCES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

Alliance formation pertains to international relations, being a topic largely addressed in the literature. The most relevant ideas related to the topic are summarised in what follows as the different systems of alliances established in the Balkan space can be illustrations of one or another of the presented theories. Thus, alliances are formed to oppose a threat, accommodate a threat to a pact of restraint or provide the great powers with a tool of management over weaker states [1]. Alignment may express ideological or ethnic affinities and opportunistic alignments may occur when a state believes that the effort to balance power will fail. Moreover, small powers are forced to play a perilous game, moving quickly from the lighter to the heavier side of the balance [2]. Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side they are both more appreciated and safer, provided, of course, that the coalition they form achieves enough deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking [3]. When confronted by a significant external threat, states may either balance or bandwagon. Balancing is defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat; bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger. If balancing is more common than bandwagoning, then states are more secure, because aggressors will face combined opposition. But if bandwagoning is the dominant tendency, then security is scarce, because successful aggressors will attract additional allies, enhancing their power while reducing that of their opponents [4]. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the origins of alliances so that they can be enduring and profitable.

3. BALKAN PACT ATTEMPTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Considering the above-mentioned theoretical aspects, some of the attempts and achievements in the field of alliances in the Balkans throughout time will be presented.

It is obvious that we can speak about alliances between independent, sovereign or autonomous entities so, in the case of the Balkan space, most of them emerged following the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878, a conflict between the Ottoman Empire and a coalition composed of Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, led by the Russian Empire. Following the armistice and the end of the war, the Treaty of San Stefano was signed. Its provisions were soon modified by the Treaty of Berlin. The signing of the Treaty of Berlin was dominated by the presence of Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of Germany and a fervent promoter of the status quo and the balance of power in Europe, and especially in the Balkans, as a modality to maintain peace. However, the provisions of the treaty failed to lead to the settlement of the crises the entities in the region were confronted with, as their aspirations were not taken into consideration, the period of time between 1898 and 1908 being marked by the European policy realignment because of imperialism, which resulted in deepening the crises in the Balkans. The realist way of maintaining peace entailed the establishment of political-military alliances to prevent one power, independent or in coalition, from taking control over another state or alliance. Nevertheless, the struggle for power, in the context of the balance of power, was to influence, sometimes dramatically, the policy, especially the foreign one, promoted by the newly-established or newly-independent states in the Balkans, which proved to be a highly destabilising factor in the region.

One of the first expressions of the destabilising potential was the war Serbia declared on Bulgaria in 1885. Romania remained neuter although not passive.

Against the background of the rumours related to the possible participation of Romania in the war, Cîmpineanu, the foreign minister, sent a telegram to all the Romanian legations abroad, except the ones in Belgrade and Athens, reading: Deny as formally as possible any alliance or understanding with Greece or Serbia. The rumours spread by Havas agency are obviously ill intended [5]. In this context, on 14/26 October 1885, Prince Alexander of Battenberg expressed his gratitude towards the Romanian government for the correct attitude adopted during the Balkan crisis, considering that the Serbian government suggested a Serbian and Romanian joint military action against Bulgaria, and the occupation of Silistra and possibly of a larger area including Sumla-Varna by the Romanian troops, offer that was not accepted by the Romanian government. Moreover, Alexander of Battenberg visited Romania, in 1886, suggesting King Carol I the establishment of a Romanian-Bulgarian Federation, having separate governments and enjoying internal autonomy, in order to free Macedonia from the Ottoman yoke and to counter the interference of Tsarist diplomacy in the Balkan Peninsula, proposal that was not accepted [6]. In the same vein, a less common attempt to form an alliance was that in 1887, following the military coup that resulted in forcing Alexander of Battenberg to abdicate. Stambolov, the main regent, came to the Romanian agency declaring that Bulgarian regents truly intended to elect King Carol I as the successor of Alexander of Battenberg but they did not make that official request considering the King of Romania would refuse the offer as he did not want to expose his country for Bulgaria [7]. Mention should be made that Romania became party to the Triple Alliance in 1883 by signing a secret treaty with Austria-Hungary.

The Triple Alliance was a secret agreement between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy established in 1882 and renewed periodically until the First World War. The renewal of the treaty in 1901 seriously considered the territorial claims related to Bulgarian nationalism. That is why, in April 1901, the Minister of Romania in Berlin submitted a request to the German Chancellor, Bernhard von Bülow, to extend *casus foederis* to a possible armed conflict with Bulgaria when the alliance between Romania and the Central Powers was to be renewed. Moreover, the Romanian government insisted on the possibility to conclude separate treaties with each and every member of the Triple Alliance, requests that were not admitted. In the same context of alliances, it could be mentioned that, in March 1907, the Ottoman Empire Ambassador in Paris, Munir Paşa, conducted a poll in Bucharest regarding the possibility of concluding a Turkish-Romanian alliance against Bulgaria, but the King and the Romanian government remained committed to maintaining the status quo and not engaging in any alliance against any country in the Balkans [8]. Therefore, it is obvious that the main coordinates of the Romanian foreign policy were to become party to alliances able to guarantee its national security, to tailor its neighbourhood policy in compliance with such alliances, and to maintain the status quo and peace in the region.

The period between 1878 and 1908 was marked by European imperialism, as it has already been mentioned. Between 1908 and 1913 empires still played an important part but national states became increasingly powerful defining the transition and division in Europe, which had consequences on alliance policies, especially as rivalries in the Balkans got stronger. The Ottoman Empire lost much of its power and territories, especially following the war with Italy. Thus the Macedonian question was again at the forefront, and Balkan ambitions were revived. There emerged problems in Austria-Hungary as Hungary intended to become a national state. Russia also faced similar problems, although Pan-Slavism was important. Actually, Russia feared that the Balkan states could not oppose the Ottoman Empire, despite the fact that it was involved in an open conflict with Italy between 1911 and 1912.

Thus, to the end of the mentioned period the Balkan League was established, which represented a major concern for both European governments and Russia. It was an alliance between Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro directed against the Ottoman Empire. However, the problems in the Balkans were not considered to require international negotiations as Russia could not sustain a war, and France and the UK did not intend to support Russia to solve those problems. Moreover, Russia considered that it made too many efforts to back the Slavs in the Balkans and it received too little in exchange, the major concern of Russian diplomacy being to balance the territorial claims of the states in the region – Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Montenegro and even the Ottoman Empire [9]. In addition, when the negotiations between Belgrade and Sofia to establish an alliance were initiated, the Russian diplomacy regarded it as a strictly defensive alliance, although it was almost clear that the Serbs and the Bulgarians intended it to be an offensive one. However, Russia, even confronted with the above-mentioned problems to which poor industrialisation and the discontent of own population were added, promoted an alliance policy with France, which was surprising for many leaders of the time, mainly because the evident differences between the two countries in terms of economy, religion and ideology. Thus the Triple Entente was established.

The Triple Entente was an alliance between Russia, France and the UK, to counterbalance the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, to which Romanian was also a party. France initiated the secret defensive alliance in 1891, as a political agreement meant to contribute to maintaining peace, followed by a military convention, in 1894. Nevertheless, up to 1910, France did not consider Russia a valuable military ally, and Russia did not consider France provided it with the expected aid in the difficult years following 1905. In 1912, the two countries concluded a naval agreement and, the same year, France promised to support Russia's interests in the Balkans, which made the alliance more valuable to Russia. Therefore, it can be said that between 1894 and 1914 the Franco-Russian alliance evolved from a defensive secret agreement to a militarily coordinated alliance, defensive only in theory. Moreover, the Entente Cordiale concluded in 1904 consolidated the relations between France and the UK leading to the latter inclusion into the Triple Entente, contrary to the diplomacy promoted by Russia in the 19th century and to the fears of the UK related to the erosion of its position in Asia and especially in India. The Bosnian crisis represented the most critical point in the relations between Russia and France, also affecting the balance Austria-Hungary and Russia succeeded in maintaining in the Balkans since 1897, when Franz Josef and Tsar Nicholas II agreed to cooperate to freeze the conflicts in the region. In contrast to what happened during the Bosnian crisis in 1908-1909, in the case of the Moroccan crisis in 1911, the Triple Entente proved to have learned the lessons of the past, remaining united and succeeding in limiting the aspirations of Germany. Following the Moroccan crisis, the struggle for power moved back to the Balkans. In this context, Russia's policy in the Balkans and Pan-Slavism represented key elements that contributed to the instability in the region. In addition, the states in the Balkans managed to exploit the rivalry between Russia and Austria-Hungary to meet their interests [10], the main consequences being the Balkan wars and the involvement in the First World War alongside different allies.

Following the Balkan wars, the main problem that arose was that the idealised national states that wanted to be ethnically homogenous were confronted with ethnical complexity that generated exacerbated nationalism and conflict [11], a problem that persisted in the region. Thus, after the First World War, the main concern of the governments of the states in the region was still represented by the frontiers.

As far as the Romanian governments were concerned, they intended to protect the frontiers of Greater Romania. Moreover, Romanian diplomacy advocated the principle of collective security and defended the international system resulted from the signing of the Treaty of Paris. France and the UK were thus seen as the main guarantors of post-war international order as the relations with the Soviet Union continued to be strained taking into account the question of Bessarabia. In this context, Romania continued to consider alliances, even regional ones, very important. Thus the Little Entente was established in 1921.

The Little Entente was a mutual defence agreement between Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, supported by France, which was directed against the German and Hungarian domination in the Danube basin. Moreover, it was intended to protect the member states territorial integrity and political independence. A Permanent Secretariat and a Permanent Council were established to discuss foreign policy matters and agree upon a common policy. However, after Germany occupied the Rhineland in 1936, France ceased to be seen as a valuable supporter, and the three states started to adopt different foreign policies. The Little Entente definitely lost its political significance in 1937 when Czechoslovakia, threatened by Germany and considered a victim of aggression, requested aid from Yugoslavia and Romania, which was denied, and collapsed in 1938 when Germany annexed the Sudeten area.

A less common pact that also involved some states in the Balkans was the Kellogg-Briand Pact, officially the General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy, which was signed in 1928. The signatory states agreed to not use war to resolve disputes of whatever nature or origin, the pact calling for the peaceful settlement of disputes, provisions further incorporated into the UN Charter. The main signatory states were Germany, France and the USA. Among the countries in the Balkans and adjacent regions, it was signed by Czechoslovakia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, the Soviet Union, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Turkey and Greece [12]. This pact, often ridiculed for its idealism, soon proved to be ineffective, although still important in terms of conflict legitimacy, especially when it comes to self-defence or collective defence.

The Balkan Pact was a treaty signed by Greece, Turkey, Romania and Yugoslavia in Athens, in 1934. It was aimed at maintaining the status quo in the region following the First World War [13]. Considering the fact that the signatories agreed to suspend all disputed territorial claims, the states in the region that sought territorial expansion such as Italy, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Soviet Union refused to sign the document. The Balkan Pact should be seen in the larger context provided by the Treaty of Neuilly, the Treaty of Lausanne, and the Agreement in Salonika. The Treaty of Neuilly was signed with Bulgaria, considered a defeated country, in 1919. Among its provisions, which were found outrageous by the Bulgarians, the following can be mentioned: Western Thrace was eventually handed to Greece. Part of western Bulgaria was given to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Bulgarian armed forces were limited to 20,000 troops, Bulgaria could not be re-armed, and it had to pay war reparations. The Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923, officially settling the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the allies at the onset of the First World War. Among other provisions, it established the boundaries of Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey. The Salonika Agreement was a non-aggression pact between Bulgaria and the Balkan Pact member states signed in 1938. The agreement was initiated by the UK in an attempt to block the increasing influence of Germany and Italy in the Balkans. It also resulted from the improvement of Bulgaria's relations with Belgrade, due to the 1937 Bulgarian-Yugoslav Pact "For Eternal Friendship".

The Salonika Agreement annulled the articles of the 1919 Treaty of Neuilly concerning armament and allowed Bulgaria to again have an army of its own. In exchange, Greece was allowed to remilitarise Western Thrace [14]. The agreement thus allowed Bulgaria to rearm and occupy the demilitarised zones bordering Greece and Turkey, as the members of the Balkan Pact considered that Bulgaria alone did not represent a threat to them united. In fact, it can be said that the Balkan Pact was concluded by states that did not have territorial claims, intended to their collective protection against the states that considered their territorial disputes unsettled. It has been written a lot on this topic. Question arises if it succeeded in striking a balance, in terms of integration, or in awakening the "Balkan ghosts". Considering the position adopted by the states in the region in the Second World War, the latter statement seems more appropriate. Nevertheless, between the Axis hammer and the Soviet anvil, the prospects of getting involved in another war seemed threatening for the countries in the Balkans, thus the attempt in 1939 to harmonise their conflicts by establishing the Balkan Bloc of Neutrals. The plan was launched by Romania, through the voice of its foreign minister, Grigore Gafencu, after preliminary talks with decision-makers in the Balkan countries. The plan was aimed at maintaining the countries neutrality, signing a non-aggression pact with each other, demobilising the military units along common frontiers, and protecting the interests of neutral countries. Moreover, King Carol was considered to hope for a rapprochement between France and Germany to avoid the Soviet Union taking control over Eastern Europe [15]. Unfortunately, as it is well known, it was impossible for the mentioned countries to remain neutral during the Second World War.

Following the Second World War, Europe got divided, the so called Iron Curtain separating the West and the East, governed by different ideologies and regimes. Thus the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, a political-military alliance between the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania, was established in 1955 to counterbalance the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a collective security alliance established in 1949 between the USA, Canada and several Western European nations. Mention should be made that, among the countries in the Balkans, Albania stopped participating in the actions of the treaty in 1962, but remained nominally a member until 1968, and Yugoslavia remained neutral. On the other hand, Greece and Turkey became NATO member states in 1952.

The bipolar world resulted following the mentioned division was considered by many experts to be more stable. In this regard, Waltz mentions that the Soviet Union, led by a possibly psychotic Stalin, and the United States, flaccid, isolationist by tradition, and untutored in the ways of international relations might well have been thought unsuited to the task of finding a route to survival. How could either reconcile itself to the coexistence when ideological differences were so great and antithetical interests provided constant occasion for conflict? Yet the bipolar world of the postwar period has shown a remarkable stability. There are four factors conjoined that encourage the limitation of violence in the relations of states within a bipolar system. First, with only two world powers there are no peripheries. Second, the range of factors included in the competition is extended as the intensity of the competition increases, which is exposed in a reluctance to accept small territorial losses. The third factor in the bipolar balance is the nearly constant presence of pressure and the recurrence of crises. Fourth, the consistency of effort of the two major contenders combined with their preponderant power, which makes for a remarkable ability to comprehend and absorb within the bipolar balance the revolutionary, political, military and economic changes that have occurred [16].

In this context, as far as the topic of our paper is concerned, mention should be made that after Turkey and Greece became NATO member states, in 1952, in 1953, in Ankara, the Treaty of Friendship and Collaboration between the Turkish Republic, the Kingdom of Greece, and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was signed. It was intended to act as a dam against Soviet expansion in the Balkans. The cooperation between the General Staffs of the contracting parties was also stipulated, being even discussed the eventual creation of a joint military staff for the three countries [17]. Thus, Yugoslavia, a non-aligned state, associated itself with NATO indirectly, which could have important consequences for the region. However, the alliance was weak from the very beginning and it increasingly demonstrated its vulnerability considering the different views of Yugoslavia and Turkey, especially related to the situation in Cyprus.

Under the circumstances of the Iron Curtain, the Cold War, the existence of the two mentioned political-military alliances, as well as considering Yugoslavia non-alignment policy, Turkey and Greece NATO membership, and the issues within the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, especially following the de-Stalinisation tendencies, it is interesting to discuss some of the attempts made by the countries in the Balkan space to get united, under different forms, in order to meet their interests.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the agreement signed in Timisoara, in 1955, related to the reconstruction and cleaning of the border line between Romania and Yugoslavia. Taking into account that a strong and expensive military logistic system was built there in 1948, the agreement can be seen as a sign of détente before the meeting between Tito and Khrushchev in order for the relations between Yugoslavia and the USSR to be resumed.

Considering the above mentioned aspects, it is obvious that the Balkan region was the theatre of many exercises conducted by both military organisations in the field or on the map. Their goals were almost similar in nature. To exemplify, we would like to mention a NATO exercise in the '60s to verify the Lower Danube operation plan. Romania was naturally regarded as an enemy country. That is why it was supposed to be attacked by a Turkish armed group and a Greek one, while an US army corps was to occupy Bulgaria and then cross the Danube in Romania [18]. A Warsaw Pact exercise to verify its multilateral coordination regarding reconnaissance and evaluation of NATO large-scale exercises was Wintex-75. Bulgaria was assigned the task of reconnaissance of Greek and Turkish armed forces, Hungary of the Italian ones, Czechoslovakia and the GDR of NATO armed forces in Central Europe, Poland of NATO armed forces in Central and Northern Europe, and the USSR to observe NATO Allied Commands [19]. As it can be seen, the Warsaw Treaty Organisation regional defence policy had an important southwestern direction. It was one of the arguments often invoked by Ceausescu to support the idea of establishing a Balkan Pact in the '70s, which was strongly opposed by Moscow and other allies.

Taking into consideration the recently discovered documents in the archives in Romania, the Russian Federation and Bulgaria, as well as the literature in the field, the concerns raised in Moscow in the '70s and the '80s regarding the Romanian foreign policy related to the Balkan region become obvious. In a study developed by the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System of the USSR Academy of Sciences, entitled *The Role and Place of Romania in the Balkan States Mutual Relations*, Romania was considered the most active promoter of cooperation in the Balkans, mention being made that it was in close connection with the Romanian foreign policy that was different from the one of the USSR. In the same document, it was shown that Romania's cooperation with its neighbours, and a possible Balkan alliance led by Romania could support it in opposing the USSR and other Warsaw Treaty Organisation member states.

In this context, Romania's good bilateral relations with Yugoslavia and Albania, as well as with China were mentioned. That is why, it was recommended for the USSR to strengthen its relations with Romania and the states in the region, to provide political support for the development of cooperation, limited to the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Balkans, and thus to counter some elements of opposition to the USSR. Following the meeting of socialist heads of state in Yalta, in August 1971, to which Romania was not invited, it was expressed the fear that Romania, Yugoslavia and Albania, together with China, could form a distinct group in the Balkans to weaken the Warsaw Treaty Organisation southern flank, which could become a regional Balkan bloc, an alternative to the Balkan Pact during the interwar period. In this regard, it was also shown that Bulgaria feared isolation, in the context of the presupposed establishment of a Balkan bloc, labelled as the Beijing-Tirana-Belgrade-Bucharest axis. Mention should be made that Romania suggested convening a Balkan summit in 1972 to discuss demilitarisation and cooperation, including the establishment of a special body responsible for economic cooperation. However, important Soviet-Bulgarian naval exercises were conducted in the Black Sea in 1976, which were regarded by Romania as a show of force meant to discourage the initiative of Balkan cooperation. The idea of establishing a stable and peaceful climate in the Balkans continued to be discussed in the '80s, although in slightly different terms [20, 21, 22, 23].

Following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, the Balkan region came into focus again, especially considering the situation in former Yugoslavia. Of the countries in the region, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey are currently NATO member states, while Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia are European Union member states, so the paradigm is different.

CONCLUSIONS

All aspects considered, it is obvious that the destiny of the Balkan region is entangled and attempts to different forms of cooperation have been perceived as necessary throughout history. For historians, historical regions may represent something virtual that fluctuates in space and time and is subject to revisions, but in the public realm, regions stand for something real and a frame of reference for current events and processes, yet the two realms cannot be hermetically separated [24]. In this context, it has often been suggested using the term Balkan space, mainly considering the fact that significant aspects of international relations are historically and socially constructed, international organisations being involved in the process of social construction. The term space is not necessarily territorial, as there are symbioses, mixed phenomena, commonalities that are above local differences, having thus a symbolic dimension. That is why "mental maps" and "symbolic geographies" are connected to legacies as perception, often discursively substantiated, which are even more enduring than legacies as continuity [25]. Actually, it has been a tradition to see the Balkans as a legacy of civilisations. One of the most prominent advocates of the idea was Nicolae Iorga, who, as an expression of the conclusion that everything connects the people living this space, sometimes beyond their will, founded the Institute of Southeast European Studies in Bucharest. Actually, grasping the significance of a common heritage, the historian pleaded for the study of great territorial entities defined by specific historical evolution, life forms and culture. In his view, the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Romanians, Albanians and Turks had been subject to the same great Western, Eastern, racial and religious influences.

Moreover, Iorga invoked the heritage, the commonalities of experience and the fatalities of geography as the main triggers in studying national history on a broader basis that would view the various common Balkan traditions as one whole [26, 27]. Therefore, the idea of getting united in one way or another, even often seen as utopia, gets substantiated in the presented geopolitical construction of space. Thus, the question arises whether it is commonalities or divides that have troubled the Balkan space for so many years.

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