

POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: REALISM VS. IDEALISM IN MARSHAL ION ANTONESCU’S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Abstract: This work looks at the political discourse of Marshal Ion Antonescu from the perspective of international relations theory, specifically realism and idealism. There is no agreement yet among historians and political scientists regarding the nature of the regime of Ion Antonescu. Some have called him a nationalist, a fascist dictator, others see in him a moderate dictator, or simply an opportunist politician. Therefore, further exploration of his political personality from the lenses of international relations theory should not be dismissed. One way of conducting this exploration can be done by comparing his personal writings, diplomatic letters and political correspondence with the main features of realism and idealism. The existent literature on the subject is also used in order to provide insight into how other scholars have perceived Ion Antonescu. The study is first concerned with identifying the main characteristics of realism and idealism, afterwards it analyses Ion Antonescu’s political ideas as selected from his published volumes, correspondence, political statements and actions. The conclusion shows how despite the existence of serious examples where Ion Antonescu displays an idealist ideology (most of these are found in the pre-1939 period), the circumstances of his political activity have led to this aspect of his political thinking being replaced with realism.

Keywords: Axis powers, Ion Antonescu, realism, idealism, political discourse analysis, Romania, World War II

Rezumat: Această lucrare analizează discursul politic al mareșalului Ion Antonescu din perspectiva teoriei relațiilor internaționale, în special a realismului și idealismului. Nu există încă un acord între istorici și politologi cu privire la natura regimului lui Ion Antonescu. Unii l-au numit naționalist sau dictator fascist, alții văd în el un dictator moderat sau pur și simplu un politician oportunista. Prin urmare, explorarea în continuare a personalității sale politice din perspectiva teoriei relațiilor internaționale nu ar trebui respinsă. O modalitate de

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a efectua această explorare se poate face raportând scrierile sale personale, scrisorile diplomatice și corespondența politică la principalele trăsături ale realismului și idealismului. Literatura consacrată pe această temă este utilizată, de asemenea, pentru a oferi indicații despre cum l-au perceput ceilalți savanți pe Ion Antonescu. Studiul este preocupat mai întâi de identificarea principalelor caracteristici ale realismului și idealismului, ulterior urmând analiza gândirii politice a lui Ion Antonescu așa cum se poate percepe din volumele sale publicate, din corespondență și din declarațiile și acțiunile sale politice. Concluzia arată că, în ciuda existenței unor exemple importante în care Ion Antonescu afișează o ideologie idealistă (majoritatea acestora se regăsesc în perioada anterioară anului 1939), circumstanțele activității sale politice au dus la înlocuirea acestei orientări a gândirii sale politice cu realismul.

Cuvinte cheie: Puterile Axei, Ion Antonescu, realism, idealism, analiza discursului politic, România, Al Doilea Război Mondial

Introduction

Marshal Ion Antonescu was the *Conducător*, Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of External Affairs of Romania for much of the World War II period. He is one of the most controversial¹ Romanian leaders. Antonescu was also one of the four war criminals executed by the People's Tribunal in Bucharest on 1 June 1946. In the Romanian historiography, after the Communist regime put the anathema of fascism and Nazism over his name, his rehabilitation or praise as a national hero by some right-wing historians (not without the blessing of the political²), attracted criticism due to the Marshal's collaboration in the *Sboab*. Most Western scholars have discussed Marshal Ion Antonescu in the context of his involvement in applying Hitler's Final Solution in East-Central Europe³. This

¹ For a nearly exhaustive bibliography on Ion Antonescu see Gheorghe Buzatu, *Mareșalul Ion Antonescu. Biobibliografie* (Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2010), 48-66.

² Charles Gati, "East-Central Europe: The Morning After", *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 5 (1990): 135-136.

³ See, for example, Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania: Facts and Documents on the Annihilation of Romania's Jews 1940-1944* (Safety Harbor: Simon Publications, 2000); Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime 1940-44* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 102-229; Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of the Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, I-XIII (New York: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986); Jean Ancel, *Preludiu la asasinat. Pogromul de la Iași, 29 iunie 1941* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005). A notable exception is Larry L. Watts, *Romanian Cassandra: Ion Antonescu and the Struggle for Reform, 1916-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); there are also several works in military studies:

study aims to discuss the same leader under the lenses of international relations theory and, particularly, from a realist and idealist angle. From the perspective of political science, he is considered “para-fascist”, and “authoritarian conservative”⁴. The late Romanian historian and academician Florin Constantiniu called Antonescu’s regime “a moderate dictatorship”⁵ though this should not hinder further exploration of his political thought regarding international relations and the fate of Europe.

In the field of international relations theory, nationalism, realism, and idealism represent well known, opposite and frequently discussed theories. More so, the theory of international relations especially holds both idealism and realism as part of its tradition⁶. Around the half of the 20th century, the doctrine of idealism, or liberal internationalism⁷, was based on the belief in the natural harmony between states. This harmony was maintained by international institutions (such as the League of Nations) and international law (treaties). Realism, on the other hand, is based on the state’s national interest, measuring success in international policy by achieving power, the anarchy of the international system, and the centrality of states⁸.

Marshal Ion Antonescu is often seen as the nationalist, traditionalist, conservative and trustworthy ally of Hitler, or as a “German stooge”⁹. Despite this, before assuming leadership of the country, “like most Romanian officers, he was pro-French and pro-English”¹⁰. This statement is important. It can be explored and better understood by studying Antonescu’s position between idealism and realism. Ion Antonescu was not a consistent doctrinaire. Here, idealism stands for the identification with France, Britain and the League of

Alexander Statiev, “Antonescu’s Eagles against Stalin’s Falcons: The Romanian Air Force, 1920-1941”, *The Journal of Military History* 66, no. 4 (October 2002): 1085-1113; Mark Axworthy, Cornel Scafes, and Cristian Craciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally. Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941–1945* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1995).

⁴ Peter Davis and Derek Lynch, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (London: Routledge, 2002), 196.

⁵ Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului roman* (București: Univers Enciclopedic, 2002), 371-372.

⁶ Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 6.

⁷ See Chris Brown, *Understanding International Relations* (Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 20.

⁸ Jack Donnelly, *Realism & International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.

⁹ Rebecca Ann Haynes, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State, September 1940”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 77, no. 4 (October 1999): 710.

¹⁰ Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Șerban Papacostea, and Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României* (București: Editura Corint, 2007), 379.

Nations, while a realist approach would mean sacrificing Romania's former allies for an understanding with Germany, or in internal politics, with the Iron Guard.

Larry L. Watts appears as a supporter of the honest, patriotic and orderly character of Ion Antonescu¹¹. He states that Carol II was actually the architect of the alliance between Germany and Romania, to which Antonescu had to conform. The aim of the present work is not to provide excuses for the political decisions taken during those times. It is merely a further exploration of the complexity of the situation in which Ion Antonescu found himself during his rule by using the theory of international relations. It is not expected that the international political thought of a political figure identified by most with authoritarianism, extreme nationalism, fascism and the Holocaust would show overwhelming idealistic traits. But this should not exclude idealism from the discussion.

A work by Rebecca Ann Haynes¹² has a similar scope. The reluctant alliance between Iuliu Maniu and the Iron Guard is proved by using the historical method. Perhaps what ought to be drawn from this research is that the complex situation in which Romania found itself around the beginning of World War II has led many leaders to serious compromises. The violent end of Ion Antonescu's own "reluctant" alliance with the Iron Guard in January 1941 is well known.

For the purpose of the present article, the sources used will be the writings of Marshal Ion Antonescu, published correspondence, diplomatic documents and notes as well as the established literature on this subject¹³. One of Antonescu's first writings was *Românii. Originea, trecutul, sacrificiile și drepturile lor* (Eng. trans.: *The Romanians, their Origin, Sacrifices and Rights*, 1919). This book allows us to analyze his thoughts regarding the ongoing Paris Peace Conference. The Wilsonian principle of national self-determination is brought in discussion here, as well as the ideals of international liberty and justice.

Later, this aim of classifying Antonescu's international political thought is made difficult by a few aspects regarding his rule from 6 September 1940 to 23 August 1944. First, starting from 23 November 1940, Romania joined the

¹¹ See Watts, 1993.

¹² Rebecca Ann Haynes, "Reluctant Allies? Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu against King Carol II of Romania", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 85, no. 1 (Jan. 2007): 105-134.

¹³ In one of the landmark monographs on political discourse analysis, Henrik Larsen shows how methodologically, it is easiest to analyze the political discourse of individuals, Henrik Larsen, *Foreign policy and discourse analysis* (London: Routledge, 1997), 4; it should be taken as an encouragement for the present research.

Tripartite Act, a fact which might be seen as a definitive realist change in Romania's foreign policy. Not few have suggested that, in actuality, Antonescu might have shown serious sympathy for the Western democracies, France and Britain. In almost the same manner, Antonescu's "cohabitation" with the extreme-right Iron Guard until January 1941 would encourage the same simplistic view of Romania's foreign policy. Therefore, this episode will also require to be more deftly scrutinized. Last, the end of Antonescu's regime will be analyzed in order to determine whether the status of his negotiations with the Allies vouches for a return to his earlier pre-1941 – sympathies for idealism. For example, in 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Gheorghe Magherescu, one of Antonescu's aides, described him as an outdated fanatic and an idealist¹⁴. Before the actual analyses of Antonescu's international political thought, a clear delimitation of both realism and idealism as theories of international relations is required.

I. On Realism, Idealism and Political Discourse

For the present study it is necessary to briefly identify the main characteristics of realism, idealism, and to discuss the topic of political discourse analysis in historical research. Due to the diversity found in many ideologies or currents, numerous researchers have noticed that it is not very facile to define either realism or idealism¹⁵.

Realism is not at all specific only to international relations theory; a monograph on this subject enumerates as many as five definitions. According to the realist paradigm, states are bound to follow their own interest, in the absence of an international government¹⁶. Realism means to view the world according to its true image, while realists consider being realistic an important quality and are

¹⁴ Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareșalul și evreii* (București: Editura Rao, 2010), 484.

¹⁵ See, for example, Donnelly, *Realism & International Relations*, 6. Also see Jeffrey W. Legro, Andrew Moravsik, "Is Anyone Still a Realist?", *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 5-55; Michael Nicholson, "Realism and utopianism revisited", in *The Eighty Years' Crisis: International Relations 1919-1999*, ed. Tim Dunne, Michael Cox, and Ken Booth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 65-82.

¹⁶ Jack Donnelly, "Realism," in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit, and Jacqui True (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 30-31.

generally opposed to idealism, utopianism or liberal internationalism¹⁷.

Many theorists of realism¹⁸ have each identified characteristics of realism, but this should not be daunting for the present research. The most common features of realism are: the supremacy of state interest¹⁹, perpetual competition or conflict between states²⁰, the centrality of acquiring more power for the state²¹, little use for ethics or morals in international relations²², policy based on reason²³, states cannot know exactly when other states might use their army²⁴, and international relations heavily involving a balance of powers²⁵.

As a concluding remark about realism, allow me to return to Edward Carr once more and quote: “The exposure by realist criticism of the hollowness of the utopian edifice is the first task of the political thinker”²⁶. Since the “hollowness of the utopian edifice” was ultimately responsible for World War

¹⁷ Brown, *Understanding International Relations*, 28. This vocabulary specific to international relations is attributed to Edward Carr’s article titled *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, first published in 1939.

¹⁸ “Classic” theorists such as Kenneth Waltz, Hans Morgenthau, John Mearsheimer, Robert Gilpin, Robert Keohane and many others.

¹⁹ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), 117; Robert Gilpin, “No One Loves a Political Realist”, *Security Studies* 5 (1996): 7-8; Frank Wayman and Paul Diehl, “Realism Reconsidered”, in *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, ed. Frank Wayman and Paul Diehl (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 5; Georg Schwarzenberger, *Power Politics. A Study of International Security* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1951), 13; Robert Keohane, “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond”, in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 164-165; Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 219-221; Benjamin Frankel ed., *Roots of Realism* (London: Frank Class, 1996), xiv-xviii.

²⁰ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 117; John Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994/1995): 9-10; Frankel, *Roots of Realism*, xiv-xviii; Smith, *Realist thought from Weber to Kissinger*, 219-221; Wayman and Diehl, “Realism Reconsidered”, 5; Randall Schweller, “New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, Not Refuting, Waltz’s Balancing Proposition”, *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4 (1997): 927.

²¹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 117; Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace* (New York: Knopf Press, 1954): 4-10; Schwarzenberger, *Power Politics. A Study of International Security*, 13.

²² Schweller, “New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, Not Refuting, Waltz’s Balancing Proposition”, 927; Edward Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1946), 63-64.

²³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 117; Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions”, 9-10; Keohane, “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond”, 164-165.

²⁴ Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions”, 9-10; Frankel, *Roots of Realism*, xiv-xviii; Gilpin, “No One Loves a Political Realist”, 7-8.

²⁵ Gilpin, “No One Loves a Political Realist”, 7-8; Keohane, “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond”, 164-165, Wayman and Diehl, “Realism Reconsidered”, 5.

²⁶ Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, 89.

II, one can imagine how Carr was influenced by that recent tragedy of international turmoil when he wrote those lines. It is interesting to ponder whether the argument between idealism and realism was this decisive²⁷.

Edward Carr also goes on to warn that there is no such thing as a “consistent and thoroughgoing realist” and finally admits that “any sound political thought must be based on elements of both utopia and reality”²⁸, because uncontrolled idealism would ultimately promote the masked interests of a few privileged, while pure realism would merely result in a power struggle. Both these conditions would be incompatible with the existence of an international society.²⁹

Because of its present identification with utopianism and liberal internationalism, the exact definition of idealism has caused confusion too, much like in the case of realism³⁰. The most basic meaning of idealism involves representing something as it should be rather than as it is, or an impractical search for perfection³¹.

The international relations doctrine of idealism has its roots in European liberalism which is a philosophy specific to the Enlightenment³². It must be noted that this doctrine of international relations was first named liberal internationalism. Afterwards, Edward Carr renamed it utopianism or simply, idealism, in his famous work³³. With his book, that is most famous for criticizing idealism, the idea that the interwar period was dominated by idealism started taking root. The interwar period even appeared as the idealist “phase” of international relations³⁴.

Woodrow Wilson, the president of the United States of America, held the Fourteen Points speech in January 1918 in which we can find the precepts

²⁷ Ashworth shows that the debate between realism and idealism was not a general “great” debate but one focused on three points: the morality of the United States’ isolationism, the best way to respond to aggressive states, and whether capitalism is a generator of conflict. See: Lucian Ashworth, “Did the Realist-Idealist Great Debate Really Happen? A Revisionist History of International Relations”, *International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2002), 33-51.

²⁸ Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, 93.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Peter Wilson, “Introduction: The Twenty Year’s Crisis and the Category of ‘Idealism’ in International Relations”, in *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis. Inter-war Idealism Reassessed*, ed. David Long and Peter Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3.

³¹ “idealism”, *Oxford Dictionaries*, April 2010, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/idealism>, accessed August 12, 2018.

³² Scott Burchill, “Liberalism”, in Burchill et al., *Theories of International Relations*, 55.

³³ Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, 14.

³⁴ Peter Wilson, “Introduction: The Twenty Year’s Crisis and the Category of ‘Idealism’ in International Relations”, 4.

of liberal internationalism: free trade, the establishment of a “general association of states”, promotion of democratic governments and the principle of national self-determination³⁵. Theorists of international relations call this development “Wilsonianism”³⁶. The mentioned “general association of states” was the League of Nations. It introduced collective security and it was based on international law, unlike the old system of “balance of power”³⁷. Several studies of liberal internationalism identify the following major characteristics of idealism: the morality and inclination towards peace – through education – of the individual³⁸, collective security³⁹, preference for liberal-democratic regimes, free market economy⁴⁰, and the avoidance of war through the elimination of the anarchical conditions which would bring it about⁴¹.

Now that the precepts of realism and idealism have been shortly exposed, a brief clarification on political discourse analysis⁴² is in order. Ole Wæver shows how political public discourse is important in uncovering what he calls “the inner layers” of decision logics in foreign policy⁴³. Henrik Larsen draws on the works of sociolinguists to define discourse as the corpus of suppositions and thoughts included into language⁴⁴. Discourse, like any other type of text, is open to interpretation⁴⁵, but this should not be discouraging.

³⁵ OurDocuments.gov, “President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points (1918)”, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=62>, accessed 03 May 2018.

³⁶ Tony Smith, *America’s Mission, the United States and the World Wide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 84.

³⁷ Brown, *Understanding International Relations*, 24.

³⁸ John MacMillan, “Liberal Internationalism”, in *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century. An Introduction*, ed. Martin Griffiths (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), 21; Charles Kegley, “The Neoliberal Challenge to Realist Theories of World Politics: An Introduction”, in *Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge*, ed. Charles Kegley, (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1995), 4; Weber, *International Relations Theory. A Critical Introduction*, 38. The theory that democratic states do not go to war against each other is tested in the case of Romania and Hungary in Ronald H. Linden, “Putting on Their Sunday Best: Romania, Hungary, and the Puzzle of Peace”, *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (2000): 121-145; Burchill, “Liberalism,” 58.

³⁹ MacMillan, “Liberal Internationalism”, 22-23; Weber, *International Relations Theory. A Critical Introduction*, 40.

⁴⁰ MacMillan, “Liberal Internationalism”, 22, 25-27.

⁴¹ Kegley, “The Neoliberal Challenge to Realist Theories of World Politics: An Introduction”, 4.

⁴² Not to be confused with language analysis, see Barbara Johnstone, *Discourse Analysis* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 2-6.

⁴³ Ole Wæver, “Identity, communities and foreign policy. Discourse analysis as foreign policy theory”, in *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States*, ed. Lene Hansen and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2001), 30.

⁴⁴ Larsen, *Foreign policy and discourse analysis*, 4.

⁴⁵ Jane Caplan, “Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians”, *Central European History* 22, no. 3/4 (September 1989), 272.

Teun A. van Dijk notices how political discourse analysis would be a useful approach regarding numerous topics in political studies⁴⁶. In the following subsections I will identify the most agreed-upon characteristics of realism and idealism in Ion Antonescu's political discourse. As stated, the “discourse” to be analyzed consists of the personal writings, scholarly works, and diplomatic correspondence of Ion Antonescu, found in collections of documents and archives. The opinions expressed in scholarly literature regarding the realism or idealism of Ion Antonescu will also be taken in consideration.

II. Ion Antonescu and the Paris Peace Conference

Returning to the main subject of the present study, one cannot help but notice the complexity of the personality of Ion Antonescu. Born and raised in a Romanian military aristocratic family, he earned his fame mostly during World War I, when he served on the Transylvanian front.

In 1919, when the Paris peace negotiations were taking place, he published *Români. Originea, trecutul, sacrificiile și drepturile lor*. This 112 page-long volume demonstrates a nationalist character regarding the Romanian demands at the peace negotiations. The work itself is divided into five chapters: “Generalities”, “Historical Arguments”, “The Last Sacrifice. Greater Romania”, “Ethnographic arguments”, and “Contestations”. The first part is a very subjective view on the Romanian struggle for national unity and the opportunity offered by World War I. It is notable that Antonescu shows that when “the Entente powers upheld justice [and] respected the principle of nationality”⁴⁷ as one of their main purposes, the Romanians decided who would they support during the war. This is a clue regarding the fact that Ion Antonescu had idealist sympathies and that he was inspired by the international political model of Romania's Western allies.

The rest of the volume offers very little in respect of Antonescu's adherence to idealism. It is an enumeration of historical facts and figures supporting Romania's claim over the provinces acquired after World War I, and also a eulogy of the Romanian army. The debate whether Romania betrayed her allies when she signed separate peace in May 1918 is briefly dismissed with the

⁴⁶ Teun A. van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis?”, in *Political linguistics*, ed. Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1997), 42.

⁴⁷ Ion Antonescu, *Români. Originea, trecutul, sacrificiile și drepturile lor*, with an „Argument” by Ilie Schipor (București: Editura Clio, 1990), 20.

argument that it was a consequence of the Russian Revolution⁴⁸.

Overall, this writing of Marshal Ion Antonescu has a realist character if we accept that it was written with the purpose of maximizing the territorial gains of Romania following the Paris Peace Conference of 1919-1920. It can be seen as a volume which lobbies among Romanian dignitaries and possibly Romanian-speaking diplomats for the merits of the country after its struggles during World War I. Since Ion Antonescu was a lieutenant colonel in 1919 it would be safe not to over-estimate the impact of this writing, but its importance for analyzing his political thought remains. Returning to the content, some rare occurrences seem to indicate that Antonescu identified with the idealistic principles of international justice. In 1917 he said: “we are fighting for the triumph of liberty and justice”⁴⁹. In the “Argument” written by the editor of the book, it is found that Ion Antonescu took a middle stance between Wilsonianism and those who argued that Romania should receive new territories based on the treaties between her and her allies⁵⁰. Nevertheless, the general tone is subjective, nationalist, defeatist, and the purpose is clearly stated. Ion Antonescu serves the interest of his country by bringing a wide range of arguments for Greater Romania. These arguments do not omit the principles of Wilsonianism and of liberal internationalism, even if they appear rarely. Thus, one could state that in 1919, Ion Antonescu proved a very limited adherence to idealism.

III. Interwar Developments

After the war, Antonescu became the Romanian military attaché in Paris, which might have caused him to become closer to the French idealist view of European international relations. He also served as military attaché in Britain and Belgium. In the 1930s he befriended Nicolae Titulescu, the Romanian paragon of liberal internationalism and twice president of the League of Nations. Rising in the Romanian military hierarchy (he reached the position of Chief of the General Staff in 1933), he was appointed Minister of Defense in Octavian Goga’s short-lived government (28 December 1937 – 30 March 1938). Andreas Hillgruber argues that Ion Antonescu was appointed Minister of Defense as a guarantee for France and Great Britain, where he had served as

⁴⁸ Antonescu, *România. Originea, trecutul, sacrificiile și drepturile lor*, 87.

⁴⁹ Ion Antonescu, „Constatări și aprecieri asupra situației actuale a armatei și Țării Românești”, no. 5, 369, 1 December 1917, in Antonescu, *România. Originea, trecutul, sacrificiile și drepturile lor*, 96.

⁵⁰ Ilie Schipor, „Argument”, in *Ibid.*, 9.

attaché, that Romania would not break away from her pro-Western, hence idealist, external policy⁵¹.

It is interesting that Antonescu “conditioned his participation in the Goga government on the latter’s avoidance of strong relations with Germany”⁵². This clause of his participation in the government is an indication that Antonescu preferred the Versailles system in opposition to the new rising powers of Europe. This might be a reflex of loyalty since the times of World War I, but furthermore “...he even agreed that Romania should have joined the efforts of the Western countries in stopping Hitler to destroy Czechoslovakia”⁵³. If we admit that appeasement belonged to the realist camp, Antonescu’s opposition to it brings forward his idealistic sympathies.

Before his participation in the Goga government, Ion Antonescu was unknown to German officials⁵⁴. Wilhelm Fabricius, the German Minister in Romania, is the first one who informs about a meeting between Antonescu and the Polish Ambassador, Arciszewski, during which the first’s admiration for the French army was revealed. Fabricius also adds that Antonescu speaks French perfectly, that he has studied in France, and that efforts should be continued where he is concerned⁵⁵. These reports confirm that in 1938 Antonescu’s sympathies lay with Romania’s Western allies, at least according to the reports of the German diplomats in Romania at the time.

After his time as Minister of Defense, he wrote a memoir explaining his resignation. In the first part of the memoir he takes the opportunity to hark back to his merits during and after World War I. He negatively appreciates Romanian interwar politics, together with the “camarilla” that was surrounding King Carol II, confessing that “I am anxiously waiting for the normalization of the state and the instauration of a regime purged of the sins of the past...”⁵⁶. This is an indication that Ion Antonescu preferred a strong hand regime to Romania’s feeble democracy in 1938, which moves him away from the philosophy of idealism. The rest of the memoir presents the same nationalistic style (also found in his other writings), and does not deal with foreign policy,

⁵¹ Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu, Relațiile germano-române (1938-1944)* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1994), 48.

⁵² Bărbulescu et al., *Istoria României*, 379.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu*, 48-49.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ion Antonescu, *Citiți, judecați, cutremurați-vă* (București: Editura Tinerama, 1991), 23. The original is found in Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (A.N.I.C.), fund *Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri*, file no. 62/1940, 59-91.

besides a few remarks regarding the Romanian-French World War I collaboration.

IV. During the Antonescu Regime

In 1940, following the Soviet ultimatum of 26 June, the Second Vienna Award of 30 August, and the Treaty of Craiova (7 September), Romania had to renounce Bessarabia, Northern Transylvania and Southern Dobrogea. In early July, Ion Antonescu addressed King Carol II a letter in which he underlined the precarious situation of the country and offered to save “whatever could be saved of the Crown, order and borders”⁵⁷. Written in a respectful manner, the document still gave Antonescu the image of a prophet of doom. In the end, he warned the King against the dangers of listening to his camarilla. The result of his request to be entrusted with the office of Prime Minister was fit for a medieval setting: banishment to the Bistrița Monastery.

In spite of bitter quarrels with King Carol II, and because of the direness of the situation in which Romania found itself, on 5 September, General⁵⁸ Ion Antonescu is invested as Prime Minister with extended powers. The King thought that Antonescu would be the best choice for this position because he was better seen by the Germans and the Iron Guard⁵⁹. In his daily notes, Carol II wrote that “I have found out today that he visited Fabricius, who defended him while he was consigned to Bistrița. After this visit his attitude changed, it is a sign that he sided with the Germans⁶⁰, and that he looks to rely on the Iron Guard, which, clearly today, not only do they practice Nazi policies, but they are a hundred per cent their agents”⁶¹. This is in open contradiction with the image of a supposed idealist, but still Antonescu’s negotiation with Germany is seen as some sort of betrayal of earlier beliefs. This indicates that although he made the realist choice, Ion Antonescu’s support for the Axis was

⁵⁷ ***, *Pe marginea prăpastiei. 21-23 ianuarie 1941, vol. I* (București: Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, 1941), 64-66.

⁵⁸ Later, King Mihai I would sign the decree of promotion to the rank of Marshal, at Ion Antonescu’s proposal.

⁵⁹ Wilhelm Fabricius, the German Minister in Romania, had suggested to the Romanian executive that Germany would be disappointed if any harm would come to Ion Antonescu. Dinu C. Giurescu, and Florin Șperlea, *Istoria Românilor. Vol. IX. România în anii 1940-1947* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2008), 64.

⁶⁰ In original, “s-a dat cu nemții”.

⁶¹ King Carol II, *Între datorie și pasiune. Însemnări zilnice. Vol II (1939-1940)* (București: Casa de editură și presă “Șansa” S.R.L., 1996), 256.

not one which he took pride in, or one which he premeditated.

Carol II subsequently left the throne and the second reign of Mihai I began. On 6 September, Ion Antonescu became *Conducător* of Romania, the young new king only retaining a ceremonial role⁶². At that time, Germany was guaranteeing the territory of Romania as part of the Second Vienna Award. Regarding the collaboration with Horia Sima's Iron Guard in the new government, it is notable that because of disagreements, Ion Antonescu had to delay the formation of the cabinet until 14 September 1940⁶³. It is important to note that he did not look forward to the political alliance with Horia Sima's Iron Guard⁶⁴, which makes him more of a realist than a conservative nationalist. He had a deep dislike for the chaos and impulsiveness of the legionaries exacting justice on their old enemies⁶⁵. Horia Sima's background of having fled to Germany back in February 1939 did matter at the time of reckoning in January 1941. A calculated realist diplomat, Ion Antonescu only acted against the Iron Guard after having spoken personally to Hitler at Obersalzberg on 14 January.

Another source for calculating Antonescu's international political thought is the minute of his meeting with von Ribbentrop on 22 November 1940 in Berlin. This was recorded by the translator Paul Otto Schmidt, and has been published both in German⁶⁶ and Romanian⁶⁷. After Ribbentrop presents the Reich's perspective on the Second Vienna Award and the current status of the war efforts, Antonescu responds in a few clear remarks. First, he asserts, quite theatrically, that Romania is ready to sacrifice herself on the battlefield for the Axis, which would be a benefit considering that the United State is close to joining the war, thus prolonging hostilities. Then, Antonescu asks for help against the Soviet Union, which he accuses of trying to take hold of the Danube Delta by promoting the creation of a mixed Russian-Romanian commission⁶⁸.

⁶² Giurescu et al., *Istoria Românilor*, Vol. IX, 63-65.

⁶³ Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu, Relațiile germano-române (1938-1944)*, 133.

⁶⁴ Even though Romania was declared a "National Legionary State", Antonescu also proclaimed himself "chief of the legionary regime". The Iron Guard ministers controlled External Affairs, Internal Affairs, the Police and *Siguranța* [Eng. trans.: Safety]. Because of this, the *Conducător* had a difficult time trying to control his government partners (Bărbulescu et al., *Istoria României*, 379; Giurescu et al., *Istoria Românilor*. Vol. IX, 67.

⁶⁵ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 59.

⁶⁶ *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945*, D:Band XI/2 (Bonn: Hermes, 1964): doc. no. 380, 548-553.

⁶⁷ Florin Constantiniu, coord. ed., Vasile Arimia, Ion Ardeleanu, and Ștefan Lache, eds. *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite (1940-1944)*, vol. I (București: Editura Cozia, 1991), doc. no. 3, 24-33.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-33.

Antonescu also speaks about the mistakes of the old generation, adding that presently Romania is under the leadership of a new generation. Knowing that this would mostly please the Führer, he surprisingly names “the Soviets and the Jews”⁶⁹ as being the sinister forces behind the old regime. In the case of the Soviets, he might be referring to Nicolae Titulescu’s relationship with Maxim Litvinov⁷⁰, or the episode when Romania was contemplating allowing Soviet passage to Czechoslovakia⁷¹, but this is not clear. Certainly, blaming the Jews for the evolution of interwar Romania is a proof of cruelty and crude Machiavellianism. The “occult forces”⁷² which he complains about in his correspondence to Carol II were known references to the King’s camarilla⁷³, not the Soviets or the Jews, hence the surprise and opportunism that this remark brings. It is curious how during the first Hitler-Antonescu meeting, the Führer assures his guest that “World history has always shown an understanding for a people who has made use of faithful idealism⁷⁴ and fanatic dedication in its purpose...”⁷⁵.

A useful step for the present research would be that of analyzing the correspondence between Antonescu and what was left of the Romanian democratic opposition⁷⁶, respectively, Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the National Peasants’ Party (PNȚ), and Constantin I. C. Brătianu, president of the National

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See Bărbulescu et al., *Istoria României*, 374; Paul D. Quinlan, “Review of *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933-1940* by Dov. B. Lungu”, *The International History Review* 13, no. 4 (November 1991): 841-842; Ioan Scurtu and Petre Out, eds., *Istoria Românilor. Vol. III. România întregită (1918-1940)* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 504-505. Also see: Albert Resis, “The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 1 (2000): 33–56.

⁷¹ See Hugh Ragsdale, “The Munich Crisis and the Issue of Red Army Transit across Romania”, *Russian Review* 57, no. 4 (October 1998), 614-617. No direct proposal has been documented or forwarded to the Soviets and the suggestion has been made that Romania’s poor railway infrastructure would have been almost useless in the transport of troops between Ukraine and Czechoslovakia. Also see Hugh Ragsdale, “The Butenko Affair: Documents from the Soviet-Romanian Relations in the Time of the Purges, Anschluss and Munich”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 79, no. 4 (October 2001): 720 (who points to Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 194-201). The subject is treated extensively in Viorica Moisuc, *Diplomația României și problema apărării suveranității și independenței naționale în perioada martie 1938 – mai 1940* (București: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1971).

⁷² ***, *Pe marginea prăpastiei*, 64-66.

⁷³ Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 59.

⁷⁴ Hitler’s idealism was, of course, of a very different nature than the idealism of IR theory applied to interwar European politics.

⁷⁵ BAR, Arhiva istorică, fund no. XIII, file 1263, 1-2.

⁷⁶ Rebecca Ann Haynes, “Reluctant Allies? Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Zelea”, 105.

Liberal Party (PNL). Iuliu Maniu was one of the most experienced Romanian politicians, being heavily involved in the efforts of the Romanian Transylvanians for unification prior to 1918. He saw it as a duty to express his opinions regarding what he saw as political mistakes. Direct dialogue between him and Ion Antonescu lasted between the autumn of 1940 and January 1942, when the latter refused to receive any further memorandums from the leaders of the PNȚ or the PNL⁷⁷.

It is interesting that with the occasion of National Day celebrations on 1 December 1940, Ion Antonescu held a speech in Alba Iulia in which he accused the political leaders of the country of not rising against the authoritarian regime of King Carol II⁷⁸. This might suggest that Antonescu was not an enemy of democracy and multi-party systems.

Despite this fact, Antonescu himself did not hesitate to impose a totalitarian regime, which he saw as necessary during times of war: “In internal politics I represent an authoritarian regime, while in external politics I am and I remain as one with the Axis powers, having the conviction that the actual and permanent interests of Romania can only be served by such an orientation”⁷⁹. This is a clear identification with political realism. Even more staunchly realist, he shows Iuliu Maniu that using the British guarantees against Germany would mean “sacrificing the very country for the sake of your democratic ideology”⁸⁰, and that he could not agree to the return of democratic rule, “...because of the intrinsic faults of our democracy, which cultivated liberties until the most heinous abuses...”⁸¹.

Referring again to the idealist system of international relations of which Romania was part until 1939, Ion Antonescu states that “the system of the democratic Western states” was based on “the pacifist illusions of the institution in Geneva”⁸². For the present research it is very important to note that Ion Antonescu was not only *Conducător*, but also Minister of External Affairs between January and July 1941. It is from this position that he wrote the

⁷⁷ Ion Calafeteanu, “Cuvânt înainte”, in Iuliu Maniu, Ion Antonescu, *Opinii și confruntări politice 1940-1944*, ed. Ion Calafeteanu (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1994), 5.

⁷⁸ Iuliu Maniu to Ion Antonescu, 4 December 1940, in ANIC, fund *Cabinet Militar Ion Antonescu*, file 25/1940, 14-15. Also found in Iuliu Maniu, Ion Antonescu, *Opinii și confruntări politice 1940-1944*, 26-30; and ***, *23 August 1944. Documente, vol. I, 1939-1943*, ed. Ion Ardeleanu, Vasile Arimia, and Mircea Mușat (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 157-160.

⁷⁹ Ion Antonescu to Iuliu Maniu, 22 June 1941, in ANIC, fund *Cabinet Militar Ion Antonescu*, file 48/1940, 42-97. Also in Iuliu Maniu, Ion Antonescu, *Opinii și confruntări politice 1940-1944*, 41-80.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

clarifications above to Iuliu Maniu.

Antonescu's correspondence with Constantin I.C. Brătianu is equally explicit in regards to the Marshal's international political thought. In his first memoir, which is dated September 1940, Constantin I.C. Brătianu was concerned with the fate of the multiparty system in Romania⁸³. Similar correspondence follows on 9 November 1940 and 20 November, while in a memoir dated 26 November 1940, C.I.C. Brătianu shows his dismay at Romania's adherence to the Tripartite Pact⁸⁴. Other exchanges followed suit especially after the removal of the Legionaries from power in January 1941, moment in which Antonescu finally responded in a very long letter⁸⁵, similar to the one he would send to Iuliu Maniu on 22 June 1941.

The letter has a short introduction and conclusion and is structured in two main parts: foreign affairs and economic policy which length wise, are almost equally split. In the first part, after summing up Constantin I. C. Brătianu's requests and observations, Ion Antonescu begins by arguing that democracies do not always adhere to diplomatic conventions. This comes as a response to Brătianu's assertions that Germany should not be trusted even in the case of a victory in the following war. Surprisingly for a statesman formerly seen as sympathetic to Britain, Antonescu reminds Constantin I.C. Brătianu that it was this "country of traditional democracy"⁸⁶ which did not want to recognize Romania's status as allied country after World War I. He then shows how the American delegate to the Paris Treaties, future President Herbert Hoover, "proposed, on 4 September, the exclusion of Romania from the ranks of the allied and associated powers"⁸⁷. The tone of this letter is very similar to that of his first writing, *Românii. Originea, trecutul, sacrificiile și drepturile lor*. Regarding Constantin I.C. Brătianu's second assertion that Romania should not count on Britain or Germany in her external affairs, Antonescu agrees that it would be impossible to rely on either Britain or France, but that Romania needs "an active collaboration with one of the great powers"⁸⁸. This is Antonescu's justification for his abandonment of any Western allegiance. He shows how Romania's

⁸³ C.I.C. Brătianu, Carol II, Ion Antonescu, *Amintiri. Documente. Corespondență*, ed. Ion Ardeleanu, (București: Editura Forum-SRL, 1992), 112.

⁸⁴ C. I. C. Brătianu, Carol II, Ion Antonescu, *Amintiri. Documente. Corespondență*, 114-115, 116, 118.

⁸⁵ Ion Antonescu to C. I. C. Brătianu, March 1941, ANIC, fund *Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri*, file no. 61/1940, 16-39.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

neutrality in the past years had led to her losing 1/3 of her territory in 1940, because according to a document retrieved from the Royal Palace, Germany had offered to guarantee the territory of Romania “if we had accepted to keep a straight line”⁸⁹.

In the part regarding economic policy, Ion Antonescu argues that democracy is not a preferable regime because it has led to the enrichment of the foreign investors, not of the Romanian population. This rejection of capitalism moves him closer to political realism. As if cognizant of the short way from realism to opportunism, Ion Antonescu assures Constantin I.C. Brătianu that his policy is not opportunistic⁹⁰, by bringing in discussion two rather dubious arguments: the permanent and tight connection between Germany and Romania as parts of the Danube region, and the peril posed by the Slavic vicinity doubled by anarchist threats. Lastly, he concludes that “nobody does politics without an interest”, assuring Constantin I.C. Brătianu that at least he is trying to obtain “real benefits”⁹¹ (sic!), from the collaboration with Germany. Also regarding Romania’s role in the Axis, there is proof that some Romanian officers contemplated the thought of turning against their ally, Hungary, rather than continuing the assault on the Caucasus⁹², so Antonescu must have at least been informed about this current, to say the least. For example, as early as 18 September 1940 he had ordered that “the European atmosphere must be handled so as to create an unfavorable current for Hungary”⁹³.

It is likely that after this letters exchange, Ion Antonescu spared his energies for the future war, so he ceased correspondence with the leaders of Romania’s traditional interwar political parties, which he more or less began seeing as irrelevant. Regarding his impassionate, calculated realism, another example would be Antonescu’s reaction in 1940, when the Soviets moved against the mouths of the Danube⁹⁴. Ion Antonescu, who was in Berlin, subsequently scolded the Iron Guard Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihail Sturdza for having ordered a violent response, and told Romania’s representative in

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ In original, “politică fără interes nu face nimeni.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Such as the case of Colonel Radu Korne, see Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (AMAE), fund 949, file no. 90, 53.

⁹³ This was in response to his information that Hungarian officials have been complaining to German officials regarding the poor treatment of Hungarian nationals in Transylvania. Mareșalul Ion Antonescu, *Secretele guvernării. Rezoluții ale Conducătorului Statului (septembrie 1940–august 1944)*, ed. Vasile Arimia and Ion Ardeleanu (București: Editura „Românul,” 1992), 13; ANIC, fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file no. 119/1940, 88-89.

⁹⁴ Giurescu et al., *Istoria Românilor*, 205.

Moscow, Grigore Gafencu, to assure the Soviet Union that he wishes to maintain good neighborhood relations⁹⁵.

Another important source of information on Antonescu's international political thought is his daily journal⁹⁶. This document is actually a combination of diary notes, government minutes and annotations from his time in captivity. For the present research it is noteworthy that the editors of the journal appreciate in the "Introduction" that Ion Antonescu "did not at all prove himself as an idealist, being rather a realist leader, even opportunist"⁹⁷. The letter addressed by him to the German military attaché in Bucharest, dated 26 November 1942, provides a revelatory example in this regard⁹⁸. In this document Antonescu explains to the military attaché, quite coolly, that despite Romania being one of the smallest members of the Axis, the whole war effort of her greatest allies would be in vain without the Romanian oil refineries. Antonescu even emphasizes this point: "*we will lose the war, no matter the genius of the German command and the greatness of the bravery, tenacity, skill, energy and power of the German people and army...*"⁹⁹.

Perhaps as expected, the correspondence between Ion Antonescu and the highest authorities of the Third Reich tends to prove his political realism. We have seen how he found it very difficult to explain the violent removal of the Iron Guard following January 1941. Then, the next pressing matter between Antonescu and the German leaders was the Second Vienna Award. In Romania's case, from the standpoint of international relations theory, a realist leader would try to attract all support in his favor before attempting to regain the lost territory, while an idealist would use public opinion, plebiscites or collective security. Not surprisingly, the latter methods were never attempted, given the circumstances of the time. Ion Antonescu did not spare any effort in convincing the Third Reich of the necessity of cancelling the Second Vienna Award.

In this respect, upon his arrival in Bucharest immediately after having travelled to Rome and Berlin to officially join the Axis, Ion Antonescu informed his ministers that "I have shown that Romania would never accept the situation

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Gheorghe Buzatu, Stela Cheptea, and Marusia Cîrstea, *Pace și război (1940-1944). Jurnalul mareșalului Ion Antonescu: comentarii, anexe, cronologie, vol. I., Preludii. Explozia. Revanșa (4.IX.1940-31.XII.1941)* (Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2008).

⁹⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁸ Ion Antonescu to Alfred Gerstenberg, 26 November 1942, Arhivele Militare Române (AMR), fund 951, file 12, 116.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

which was created in a difficult time, caught in a bad moment, and that when the time would come, she will claim back all the rights she believes are her”¹⁰⁰. On 14 January 1941, in a conversation with Hitler, Antonescu added again that “regarding Hungary, the political problems remain open”¹⁰¹. On 11 June, after the defeat of Yugoslavia, Ion Antonescu addressed a lengthy memoir to Hitler in which he tried to convince the Führer of the usefulness of Romania’s geostrategic position for the future of Europe. Among other things, he also referred to the “one million three hundred thousand Romanians in Hungarian territory”, adding that “the diminishing of Romania in favor of her neighbors [...] is not in the interest of the new European order”¹⁰². Then, in the same telegram Ion Antonescu assured Hitler of his loyal support against Russia, and that he had “complete trust in the justice which the Führer Chancellor Adolf Hitler will confer to the Romanian people and their century-old abiding rights”¹⁰³.

The next step in this direction was the memoir sent to the Romanian envoys in Berlin and Rome denouncing the abuses of Hungary against the Romanian population inside her territory. The document noted that these abuses were proof of Hungary’s repudiation of the Second Vienna Award. Consequently, Antonescu instructed his foreign delegates to warn that “the Romanian government reserves itself the consequences which follow this ascertainment”¹⁰⁴. The same “Hungarian issue” was repeated in: a telegram of Antonescu to Colonel Spalke in December 1941¹⁰⁵, in another telegram to Hitler on 5 January 1942, a memorandum addressed to Hitler on 11 February 1942, and during the personal conversations between Antonescu and Hitler on 12 February 1942¹⁰⁶. In the latter, Antonescu is concerned mostly that Hungary might be conserving her energies inside the Axis so as to be able to invade the rest of Transylvania¹⁰⁷. Perhaps this was his own realism coming to surface as a warning that he was not the only player at that table. It is probable that due to the harshening of the situation on the Russian front, Ion Antonescu ceased to bring up the Second Vienna Award in his conversations with the leaders of the

¹⁰⁰ Biblioteca Academiei Române (BAR), Arhiva Istorică, fund XIII, file 3542, 1.

¹⁰¹ *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945* D:XI, doc. no. 652; in Hillgruber, *Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu*, 433.

¹⁰² ANIC, fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file no. 10/1941, 172-174.

¹⁰³ AMAE, fund 71/1920-1944, Romania, vol. X, 461.

¹⁰⁴ AMAE, fund Transilvania, 1941, vol. 65, 242-243.

¹⁰⁵ ANIC, fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file no. 109/1941, 2-3.

¹⁰⁶ ***, *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite (1940-1944)*, I, 1991, 161-163, 176-179, 180-188.

¹⁰⁷ According to the minute taken by Paul Schmidt, BAR, Arhiva Istorică, fund XIII, file 1263, 27-30.

Third Reich after the second half of 1942. Another interesting aspect which speaks to Ion Antonescu's realism is his constant concern, starting as far back as 1940, regarding "the Romanian need for credit"¹⁰⁸. In 1941 the same concerns for "gold and currency"¹⁰⁹ are repeated by Antonescu's delegate to Joachim von Ribbentrop. The last meeting between Antonescu and Hitler took place on 5 August 1944, where Antonescu avoided answering the question whether he would stand by Hitler's side until the very end.¹¹⁰

In relation to the alliance between Hitler and Ion Antonescu, Professor Dennis Deletant writes in the beginning of his book that "Antonescu had, of course, his own country's interests uppermost in his mind"¹¹¹. This is a clear mark of realism and is consistent with the nationalist writing style of the Marshal. But the inconsistency of Antonescu's character is also emphasized¹¹². The inconsistency and paradox of some of the features of Antonescu's regime allow one to suspect that partially he might have held beliefs that belong to the idealist camp. Deletant rightfully shows how Antonescu "inherited the Axis alignment"¹¹³ and while he cannot be made responsible for taking the initiative of joining the Axis, he did cultivate his relationship with Hitler and earned his respect. Germany was also especially interested in securing Romania's allegiance for economic reasons, as its military campaigns needed oil, which could be found in Romania¹¹⁴. This could have been done competitively – definitely in the same spirit of realism – Antonescu hoping to be able to revert some of the terms of the Second Vienna Award¹¹⁵.

If Ion Antonescu's dialogue with the German leaders is a testimony of his realism, his diplomatic initiatives vis-à-vis the Allies point to his however small dose of idealism, or deference for the Western democracies. A window which allowed for a limited manifestation of warm neutrality towards the United States was seen in the fact that Romania's adhesion to the Axis did not immediately call for a declaration of war between Bucharest and Washington. On 14 January 1941, Antonescu informed Hitler that "Romania maintains very

¹⁰⁸ BAR, Arhiva Istorică, fund XIII, file 1263, 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ ANIC, fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file 106/1941, 2-3.

¹¹⁰ Hillgruber, *Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu*, 250.

¹¹¹ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime 1940-44*, 1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Giurescu et al., *Istoria Românilor, vol. IX*, 179.

¹¹⁵ Professor Deletant concludes that this strategy was mainly unsuccessful, as Hitler only gave vague reassurances to Antonescu and did not clearly speak against Hungary (Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime 1940-44*, 73).

fair relations with the United States [...] and their attitude is rather anti-Russian”¹¹⁶. Still, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, Romania had to declare war to the United States on 12 December 1941. It must be said that the entire Romanian political class actually shared lack of enthusiasm in declaring war upon Germany’s adversaries from the Western front ¹¹⁷.

Only after a long period, when Germany started showing signs of weakness, could Romania engage again in diplomatic initiatives involving the Allies. When Antonescu met Hitler again on 12-13 April 1943 he was scolded for having allowed the opposition of Maniu and Brătianu to subsist, and Mihai Antonescu¹¹⁸ to engage in diplomatic negotiation with Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Switzerland and the Holy See for the purpose of taking Romania out of the Axis¹¹⁹. Regarding the opposition, Antonescu answered that Maniu’s popularity among the Romanian peasantry would not allow any action against him¹²⁰, thus admitting to a principle of democracy. Hitler also refused to take in consideration Ion Antonescu’s proposal of a separate peace with the Western democracies¹²¹. None of Mihai Antonescu’s initiatives were successful, but the fact that Ion Antonescu gave his approval for such endeavors is important in highlighting the Marshal’s political thought.

In his messages to the representatives of the United States and Great Britain, Antonescu argued that he was conditioned by political guarantees, because if Romania would follow the example of Mussolini’s Italy, then the country would be first occupied by the Germans, subsequently falling to the Soviets¹²². It is rather impressive how Antonescu, the military dictator, is either concerned with his country falling under a totalitarian power¹²³, or maybe he simply would not dare break his engagement with Germany, which stated that

¹¹⁶ *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945*, D:XI, doc. no. 652; also in Hillgruber, *Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu, Relațiile germano-române (1938-1944)*, 432-441.

¹¹⁷ Bărbulescu et al., *Istoria României*, 384.

¹¹⁸ He was Professor of International Law at the Bucharest Academy of Commercial and Industrial Studies and second-in-command to Ion Antonescu. The fact that they shared the same family name is a coincidence.

¹¹⁹ Initiatives started during the winter of 1942-1943 and were two-folded: there was an attempt to convince Italy to negotiate the exit of all of Hitler’s European allies from the Axis, which failed, and then the Allies were contacted via their representatives in neutral countries (Andreas Hillgruber, 1994, 206).

¹²⁰ ***, *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite (1940-1944)*, Vol. I, 12.

¹²¹ Hillgruber, *Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu*, 208.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 218.

¹²³ The Marshal refused Soviet peace proposals peace starting from 15 May 1944 and after since he rather wanted to negotiate with the Western democracies.

there was supposed to be no separate peace with the direct enemy¹²⁴. In the first case, this would come as a reinforcement of his pre-1939 sympathies for the Western democracies.

At Ion Antonescu's order, the Romanian military attaché in Ankara promised, on 30 September 1943, to A.C. Arnold, his British counterpart, that Romania was willing to offer the Allies “forty-two railway cars filled with gold, two with currency, four hundred with grain, three hundred with corn, twenty-two fully equipped divisions [...] a great number of trained pilots and aviation personnel, substantial oil reserves...”¹²⁵. This offer also found no echo, as according to the understanding within the United Nations, there could be no British or American politics regarding Eastern Europe. Still, it remains as a demonstration that Ion Antonescu was serious in his negotiations. Despite this, it was not sufficient to allow him to go as far as to open discussion with the Soviet Union.

By 23 August 1944, after visiting the Romanian front, Ion Antonescu understood that all chances were lost and an armistice was necessary. Following the coup in the afternoon of that day, he was removed from power and arrested¹²⁶. On the same date, at midnight, Hitler ordered that “the coup should be repressed; the King and his palace camarilla should be arrested, and a new government should be formed under a pro-German general, in case that Marshal Antonescu would no longer be available”¹²⁷. This trust that Hitler maintained in Ion Antonescu from the beginning¹²⁸ weighs heavily in distancing the Marshal from idealist, and even from realist aspirations. The German leadership either was led to believe that Romania was its implacable ally, based on a realist rationale, or Romania really had been a staunch supporter of the Third Reich. We have seen how Marshal Ion Antonescu personally agrees, in his letters to the leaders of PNȚ and PNL, that no one does politics without an interest. On the other hand, since 624,740 Romanian soldiers perished in World

¹²⁴ Giurescu et al., *Istoria Românilor*, vol. IX, 211.

¹²⁵ Florin Constantiniu, Alesandru Duțu, and Mihai Retegan, *România în război, 1941-1945* (București: Editura Militară, 1995), 67.

¹²⁶ Bărbulescu et al., *Istoria României*, 390-391.

¹²⁷ ***, *23 August 1944. Documente*, vol. II, ed. Ion Ardeleanu (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1995), 446.

¹²⁸ Adolf Hitler to Ion Antonescu, 7 September 1940, in ANIC, fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file no. 331/1940, 14. Also see György Ránki, “Hitlers Verhandlungen mit osteuropäischen Staatsmännern, 1939-1944”, in *Deutsche Frage und europäisches Gleichgewicht*, ed. Klaus Hildebrand and Reiner Pommerin (Cologne: Böhlau, 1985), 195-228.

War II until 23 August 1944¹²⁹, it becomes more difficult to argue that this engagement was merely speculative¹³⁰ and due to an exclusively realist policy, which was aimed at the recovery of Bessarabia and later at the reconsideration of the Second Vienna Award. When the German General Richard Ruoff, who was inspecting the Romanian units in the autumn of 1942, asked the soldiers what is their purpose in Russia, he received the answer that they were there for Transylvania¹³¹. Similarly, General Erik Hansen would be reporting on 5 March 1943 that Romanian soldiers had almost no idea of their purpose on the Eastern front, since they had been lead to believe that Hungary is still the enemy and that they are present there in order to earn the future recovery of Transylvania¹³². It is interesting that General Hansen considered Iuliu Maniu, who allegedly relied on Transylvanian officers in order to spread these ideas, responsible for this¹³³.

Regarding Ion Antonescu's involvement in the Holocaust, it is acknowledged that he was implicated in the deportation and death of up to 310,000 Jews and Romas¹³⁴. Those who argue that he was not an enthusiastic supporter of the Final Solution show that he also allowed the survival of up to 375,000 Jews in Southern Transylvania, Moldova and Walachia. There is no question of the malevolence and iniquity of willingly sending 310,000 people to their death, in a very cynical bid for the benefit of one's own cause. The fact that he chose to allow some of the Jews to leave the country proves that he was not entirely dedicated to Hitler, and thus might mean that his realism did not go as far as to completely support the Final Solution. He was also determined to limit German involvement in Romania as a whole, wanting to avoid a *de facto* occupation¹³⁵. His different treatment of Jews on Romanian territory could be seen as part of this strategy. On the question of his anti-Semitism, despite some

¹²⁹ Giurescu et al., *Istoria Românilor*, IX, 296.

¹³⁰ Alex Mihai Stoenescu argues in his book that Romania's involvement over the Dniester was a poor decision because there had been no prior clear understanding with Germany regarding a division of the spoils of war. (See Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareșalul și evreii*, 483-484).

¹³¹ Ottmar Trașcă, „Ocuparea orașului Odessa de către armata română și măsurile adoptate față de populația evreiască, octombrie 1941 – martie 1942”, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «G. Barițiu» din Cluj-Napoca* XLVII (2008): 380. Trașcă also cites Ion Gheorghe, *Un dictator nefericit. Mareșalul Antonescu. Calea României spre Statul satelit* (București: Editura Machiavelli, 1996), 243.

¹³² Jürgen Förster, *Stalingrad. Risse im Bündnis 1942/43* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Rombach, 1975), 137-142.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ See Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareșalul și evreii*.

¹³⁵ This was almost constantly expressed in his correspondence to Hitler. (see ***, *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite (1940-1944)*, vol. I).

scholars showing that Ion Antonescu was not defined by it, there are multiple examples of him engaging in cruel aspersions against Jews¹³⁶, even holding them responsible for the territorial losses of Romania in 1940¹³⁷. His xenophobia was especially directed against the Jews, Hungarians and Slavs, and is seen as part of the failure of his politics¹³⁸.

Conclusions

A fit conclusion to the present study would be re-discussing Ion Antonescu's political thought directly in reference to the major theorists of international relations. We have seen how one of Antonescu's first writings, *Români. Originea, trecutul, sacrificiile și drepturile lor*, displays a nationalist and realist character, with almost insignificant clues underwriting some idealist tokens. The realist elements found here concern the supremacy of state interest and the policy based on the reason of state, while the rare idealist elements relate to a sense of international justice and approval for the principle of nationalities (quite convenient for Romania at the time) especially as regards the interwar period. During the interwar years, not few have noticed that Antonescu's serving as military attaché in France and Britain changed his political views towards supporting the system based on collective security, i.e. brought him closer to idealism. Some have argued that specifically because of this, he was appointed as Defense Minister during the Goga government. Therefore, right before the great crises of 1939, one could find an Ion Antonescu who displayed idealist characteristics: pro-Western, basically unknown to the German Reich, one who stood up for collective security and for morality in international relations (after all, he kept his promise of not negotiating with the Soviets in spite of the war being a lost cause for the Axis¹³⁹). Furthermore, after acceding to power in 1940, he accused the leaders of the PNȚ and PNL of not having

¹³⁶ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime 1940-44*, 118;

¹³⁷ For example, on 8 October 1940, as a reaction to perceived hostility in Hungarian newspapers in Transylvania, he decreed, among other measures, that “a statistic should be made about our Hungarian newspapers [...] and what lies behind them (communists, Yids, masons)”. (ANIC, fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file no. 333/1940-1941, 71-72). More so, when explaining the deportation (i.e. death sentence) of the Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, he states: “I care more about repairing a crime which threw an entire nation into dreadful suffering, and which was of Jewish essence and inspiration” (ANIC, fund Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file no. 104/1941, 145).

¹³⁸ Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareșalul și evreii*, 492.

¹³⁹ Or this might have been another expression of his acute anti-communism.

opposed King Carol II's infringement of democratic rules. Then, he did not show haste in dividing state power with Horia Sima's legionaries or in declaring war against Britain or the United States. When it became apparent that the Reich faced serious problems in Russia, he instructed Mihai Antonescu to negotiate indirectly with the Western democracies, to which he promised substantial incentives. But these attempts to return to the more liberally-minded international community would not prove to be successful.

Regarding the realism of Marshal Ion Antonescu, the study presented various examples. He expressed his dislike for the faulty Romanian democracy with the occasion of leaving the government in 1938 and during the period 1941-1944 in his letters to Iuliu Maniu, Constantin I. C. Brătianu, and Hitler. Regarding his communication with the Führer, Ion Antonescu also promoted his country's interest by: mentioning and giving plenty of reasons for the necessity to reconsider the Second Vienna Award, emphasizing the Romanian need for German credit, blaming the Soviets and the Jews for the international orientation of interwar Romania, declaring that without the Romanian oil, all the efforts of the *Wehrmacht* would be useless, and allowing Jews and Roma to be sent to Hitler's death camps. He also spoke about the threat of a Hungarian attack, or the threat of Slavic vicinity, which are similar to the concept of anarchy in the realist international relations theory. Realist might also seem his view that after World War I, the Western democracies questioned Romania's status as an allied state. Also, like most realists, he dismissed the system of international relations centered on the activity of the League of Nations as being based on illusions. Ion Antonescu also rejected capitalism as an element of peace formation (as seen by the idealists), opining that in Romania it has led to the economic discrimination of the local population. Marshal Antonescu even personally admits that there must always be an interest which is driving politics.

The evidence gathered here shows how Ion Antonescu, besides being a nationalist dictator, also stands as a politician which displayed at various points during his lifetime a mix of idealist ideas. The existing evidence for the idealist case, which is just enough to maintain the validity of the question of Antonescu's idealist political thought, pales in comparison to the evidence for his realist tendencies. History does not accept "what ifs". If that were the case, upon pondering what would have happened provided that Ion Antonescu inherited the alliance of a strong France instead of that of Germany¹⁴⁰, one

¹⁴⁰ Larry L. Watts poses this question in *Romanian Cassandra. Ion Antonescu and the Struggle for Reform. 1916-1941*, 378-379.

might venture to assert that he would have felt more at ease given his early views on Germany during the interwar period. Also, in case that the Western democracies accepted Ion Antonescu's bids for separate peace in 1943, his connections with Hitler would have probably been severed due to his pursuit of national self-interest.

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