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THE TRIPARTITE NEGOTIATIONS FAILURE IN THE SUMMER OF 1939. THE ISSUE OF THE “INDIRECT AGGRESSION”

(Summary)

Once given the guarantees for Poland, Greece and Romania at the 31st of March, respectively the 13th of April 1939, the Western powers and especially Great Britain, despite the fact that they had a deep disbelief and a reticence toward Moscow, they had understood that they needed a constant and active Soviet support to create an efficient “barrier” against any foreseen German action in Eastern Europe. Without all these, the guarantees would have become inoperable, all the more so that Poland was proving to be a difficult and capricious partner.

What followed next was to be translated as an almost endless row of offerings and counter offers. The British and the French, reticent about the real purposes of the Soviet foreign policy, constantly tried to keep under control the way and the conditions of an eventual Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe. On the other side, the Russians wanted to obtain an engagement that would guarantee their security interests in Eastern Europe and, extremely important, the mutuality according to their relations with France and Great Britain. During this period of diplomatic anxiety, elements like Maxim Litvinov’s replacement with Vyacheslav Molotov as Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars for Foreign Affairs at the 3rd of May 1939 or London, Paris and Moscow’s divergent interests in Eastern Europe and in the Baltic area affected directly the attitude and the positions of the powers inside of these negotiations.

But there was also another element that mostly determined the failure of the tripartite negotiations among Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union in the summer of 1939. It is about the issue of the “indirect aggression”, a matter less debated in the Romanian historiography and on which we focused in the present study. Further more, if in most of the works there was the point of view according to which the Russians talked about the “indirect aggression”, the diplomatic documents of that time, especially the British ones, seem to contradict this statement. In fact, the various interpretation of this term, as well as the numerous assays of reaching to a compromise in what concerns its definition became the main attraction of the tripartite negotiations during July and August 1939. As it happens or not, the dispute over this concept and the Western refusal, especially the British one, of accepting the Soviet interpretation were simultaneous to the approach between the Soviet Union and Germany, fatally concretized by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

Keywords: pre-war negotiations, international guarantees, anti-German policy, “indirect aggression”.