

SOME ASPECTS REGARDING ROMANIAN-BULGARIAN AND ROMANIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN WORLD WAR I

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ABSTRACT

AFTER 1913, WHEN ROMANIA OBTAINED SOUTH DOBRUDJA (CADRILATER) FROM BULGARIA, THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WORSENE. THE GOVERNEMENT LEADED BY VASIL RADOSLAVOV WANTED TO REVISE THE TREATY SIGNED IN 1913 AT BUCHAREST. IF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN BUCHAREST AND PETROGRAD BECAME BETTER AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, ROMANIA’S RELATIONS WITH ITS SOUTHERN NEIGHBOUR REMAINED STRAINED. IN THE AUTUMN OF THE YEAR 1915, BULGARIA JOINED CENTRAL POWERS. ROMANIA, STILL IN NEUTRALITY, FEARED AND REJECTED THE POSSIBILITY TO FIGHT ON TWO FRONTS. THE PROBABILITY OF A BULGARIAN OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE SOUTHERN BORDER OF THE COUNTRY DELAYED THE DECISION OF INTERVENTION OF THE ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT. IN ORDER TO ENTER THE WAR, THE AUTHORITIES FROM BUCHAREST ASKED FOR RUSSIAN TROOPS IN DOBRUJA. AS THE MILITARY AGREEMENT OF AUGUST 1916 STIPULATED, THE ALLIED ARMY OF SALONIKA HAD TO BEGIN AN OFFENSIVE IN ORDER TO PREVENT A BULGARIAN ATTACK AGAINST ROMANIA. ROMANIA’S ENTRY INTO THE WORLD WAR I HAD TO BEGIN EIGHT DAYS AFTER THE OFFENSIVE FROM SALONIKA. THIS ARMY HAD ALSO TO COUNTERACT THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE BULGARIAN TROOPS. SOME OF ROMANIA’S APPREHENSIONS REGARDING RUSSIA PERSISTED AS WELL.

KEY WORDS: ROMANIA, WORLD WAR I, ION I. C. BRĂȚIANU, RUSSIA, BULGARIA

After the declaration of neutrality, Romanian diplomacy held talks with both belligerent blocks, but especially with the Entente. Romania’s main goal was the achievement of the national ideal, which involved the union of Transylvania, Bukovina and Banat with the Ancient Kingdom. In those circumstances, we could not talk about the obtainment of Basarabia, because this region was incorporated in the Russian Empire and Russia was a member of the Entente. [1]

Romania’s adhesion to Entente in World War I was also delayed because of the Empire of Tsars presance in this military alliance. [2] Russia’s unfair attitude from the past weighed decisively. The domination on the city of Constantinopole and the control over Bosphorus and Dardanelles reprezented the objectives of war for the Romanovs’ Empire, but Russians’ way to the Straits passed through Romania, another reason of concern for the Romanian authorities. So, at the beginning of the world war, Romania’s relations with Russia were not so cordial, despite the visit of the tsar Nicholas II at Constanța, in June 1914. [3] If French Republic reprezented the

state of the Entente which wanted the most the obtainment of Romanian collaboration in the war, the Empire of tsars was rather reluctant on this topic. Some Russian officials wanted more Bulgaria's military cooperation. Moreover, the cabinet from Bucharest expressed his will to have all freedom in choosing the moment of the intervention.[4]

The relations between Bucharest and Sofia were characterized by a growing tension after the second Balkan war. A military action of Bulgaria directed against the Romanian Kingdom was possible. The regaining of Cadrilater from Romania, lost in 1913 was a great challenge for the authorities from Sofia. On 10 August 1914, one year after the event that consecrated Romania's most important moment as regional power in Balkans, the French plenipotentiary minister in the capital of Romania, Jean-Camille Blondel reported to Quai d'Orsay: *I continue to believe that for this moment, the Romanian neutrality is better than its entry into campaign and its interest- and ours as well- is to maintain its forces [...]. Wouldn't it better that Romania should decide itself to enter the war, if Bulgaria or Turkey forced it? [...]* [5]. Blondel waited for the events to develop. In his opinion, the Romanian intervention could be the result of the hostile circumstances, of the actions directed against it by its neighbours. The indefinite attitude of Bulgaria and the indecision of Romania were also underlined by the military attaché of the France in Bucharest, the captain Jules Pichon, on 28 July/10 August 1914. He realized that Bulgaria's policy had held in suspension the Romanian action. Romania hesitated between the possibility of passing the Danube for the second time, to stop the Bulgarians on their way to Macedonia and the risk of crossing the Carpathians with the Bulgarian threat at its back. [6] So, we can conclude that Romania itself could take the initiative of an attack against its Southern neighbour. We also know that Bulgaria had strong territorial disputes with Serbia and Greece concerning Macedonia. If Romania's relations with Russia could hardly be considered as relations of trust and friendship, the Romanian-Bulgarian relations were characterized by a sinuous evolution, which ended with the entry of the two countries in opposite belligerent camps. Nevertheless, during the summer of 1914, there were some tendencies to a rapprochement between Bucharest and Sofia, taking into account the rather good relations before 1913.[7]

Russia's policy towards Romania changed quite suddenly. If immediately after the declaration of neutrality the Russian authorities seemed to be satisfied with the solution adopted in Bucharest, on 23 July/5 August 1914, Stanislas Poklevski-Koziell, the Russian minister from Petrograd's legation delivered to Ion I. C. Brătianu's government a Russian-Romanian project of convention. This project stipulated Romania's cooperation with Russia using all its forces against Austria-Hungary. The military collaboration would have begun after the date of the signing of the armistice in exchange for Russia's obligation not to cease the war against the Double Monarchy only after the territories inhabited by Romanian population will be taken by Romanian Kingdom. On its turn, Romania would engage not to conclude peace with Austria-Hungary only with Russia's approval and together with it. The Romanian and Russian General Staffs will establish the ways of cooperation, and this convention would remain into force until the conclusion of peace between Russia and Austria-Hungary. The prime-minister Brătianu had an objection concerning the Russian proposal, rightly noting that a military convention should be the fruit of a political treaty. But this project of convention referred only to the military cooperation.[8] The project of convention allowed Romania to choose the suitable moment for the military operations to liberate the Romanian territories incorporated in the dual empire. The limits of these territories would have to be determined later. The principle of the population

majority will be the most important for the establishment of the frontiers. The minister of Foreign Affairs, Serghei Sazonov, declared that Russia would guarantee the territorial integrity of Romania from that moment in the case of a Bulgarian attack during Romanian-Russian military cooperation. [9]

On 7 October 1914, Bulgaria's minister from Bucharest, Radev declared to Jean-Camille Blondel, his French colleague, that Bulgaria would remain neutral even if Romania intervened in war. If we give credit to the words of the Sofia's representative, Bulgaria had not decided to attack Serbia until that moment, trying to avoid a conflict with the Entente. In fact, the Bulgarians could not fight allegedly against the Russians and their will was to reach an agreement with Romania. But the latter would not have taken into account the Bulgarian initiatives. Given these realities, Blondel thought that, in fact, if Romanian cabinet wanted sincerely to reach a *modus vivendi* with Bulgaria, this would be possible thanks to Russia's arbitration. Unfortunately, the Romanian government disagreed the idea of such an agreement, keeping to invoke the Bulgarian danger in order to explain its lack of action. An agreement with Bulgaria was possible only by giving up Cadrilater. Bucharest rejected from the very beginning this alternative. However, at the end of October 1914, Sazonov foresaw the possibility of an alliance between Romania and Bulgaria, if Romania's southern neighbour consented to intervene against Turkey. [10]

In November 1914, a new event inflamed much more the spirits in Balkan area. Anyway there was a lot of tension in this zone, on one hand due to the war between the Austria-Hungary and Serbia and, on the other hand, due to divergent interests, which don't unite the Balkan states, but on the contrary they aggravated the contradictions and the rivalries between them. The tsar Nicholas II's proclamation of 8 November 1914 caused an escalation of disagreements and unrest especially in Bucharest. This proclamation expressed the hope that Russian-Turkish war would finish marking the triumph of the hegemonic program initiated by Peter the Great. There were many fears that Russia could extend its rule over the Black Sea and Straits. Therefore, Blondel requested an official explanation from the Russian government to end these assumptions and not to allow any doubt on the principles of freedom and internationalization of Straits Bosphorus and Dardanelles. [11]

Thus, the Romanian-Russian and Romanian-Bulgarian relations were quite cold and this reality was a cause for the failure of the reconstruction of the Balkan block. The national interests remained essential. They were too important and that's why the concessions could hardly be agreed. The dialogue and the negotiations demonstrated their inefficiency in the attempt to bring together and simultaneously in the same camp all the states from Balkan region. Romania will remain neutral more than a year, while Bulgaria, although the Entente's diplomacy made a lot of efforts to attract it, finally it will join the Central Powers in October 1915. Turkey had also joined the same military block since November 1914. [12]

In the autumn of 1915, in the eve of Bulgaria's entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers, Russia continued to be quite permissive toward Bulgaria. We do not see the same attitude concerning Romania. Later, the Russian military authorities admitted the psychological errors of their government. These mistakes generated the failure of all the projects which aimed at joining to Entente all the states from Balkan area. Russia perceived the states from the Balkan space as "younger children" who needed protection. From this perspective, Russia has always proved hegemonic tendencies towards the Straits and the city of

Constantinople and attempted to hide its expansionist intentions, merely claiming it had been the natural protector of the Slavic and orthodox peoples and states from Balkan zone. Petrograd did not tolerate the interference of the other countries of the Entente in the matters regarding this region. At the same time, it did not dissimulate the sympathy for Bulgaria and the distrust for Romania. [13]

Even though Bulgaria had already signed the treaty of alliance with the Central Powers, the Foreign Minister of Romania, Emanoil Porumbaru, received from Simeon Radev, the Bulgarian diplomatic agent in Bucharest, peaceful assurances that Bulgaria, despite its mobilization driven by the overall situation, actually continues to negotiate with the two groups of powers and that, consequently, Romania “did not have to fear any attack against Serbia”(sic!). But Blondel by proving caution and presence of mind has put the Romanian authorities immediately on guard about Entente's opponents shunting, designed to fall asleep the vigilance of Romania. [14]

On 1st November 1915, France, Russia and England have negotiated with the Romanian Government to obtain the permission of passing through Moldova and then across the Danube of an army of 200,000 Russian soldiers in order to provide support to Serbians. Three days later by a formal declaration, Romania categorically refused to allow this crossing through Romanian territory. With the same occasion, the executive from Bucharest also pointed the military conditions of the Romanian cooperation. Among these was also included the wish that a Russian army of 200,000 men to be concentrated in Basarabia. Together with English-French army of 500,000 soldiers which was to be formed in the Balkans, it had to carry out actions against the Bulgarians. Also, the Russian army had to attack forcefully the Austro-German troops from Baltic Sea to Bukovina. [15]

Considering the risk for Romania to be surrounded by the armies of the Central Powers, the French diplomats had become aware of the need for presence of some Russian forces in Basarabia, troops which could be easily mobilized and whose aid was extremely useful for Romanian case of certain pressures. The Prime Minister Brătianu considered as being vital for Romania the concentrating of these military forces in order to provide protection against a Bulgarian attack in Dobruja.[16]

In early 1916, the relations between Romania and Bulgaria were colder than ever. The strain was increased with the concentration of the Central Powers' army at the Bulgarian-Romanian border. Bulgaria ordered the closure of its landborder and in agreement with Germany, the troops were directed to Dobruja. The Central Powers were deeply unsatisfied because of the grain sales made by Romanian Government to England. They even threatened to organize attacks of German and Bulgarian armies if Romania did not remain neutral. [17] A more pronounced deterioration of the Romanian-Bulgarian relations was also reflected in the new Regulation of the Bulgarian police for foreign subjects, whose exit from the country had become almost impossible. The targeted ones were Romanians and Greeks. As a response to these actions characterized by deliberate hostility, the Romanian government adopted a series of measures designed to regularize the situation of foreigners in Romania. Those decisions created critical situation in relations with Bulgaria. [18]

In the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief of French army, General Joseph Joffre, it was inconceivable engaging Russian military operations against Bulgaria without Romania taking part in them. Russian forces could not reach the border with Bulgaria without entering the

Romanian territory and it was obvious that the formation of a Russian army in Dobruja would cause the opening of hostilities. It was essential that before beginning such an "adventure" the Russian army of support had the certainty of counting on the Romanian army. [19]

One of the purposes of Entente's conference from London, which opened in June 1916 was the dispelling of Romanian Government's anxieties regarding the potential Bulgarian danger. Through the Protocol adopted on 11th August 1916, the Allies decided that the English and French governments perfectly agree the terms of the Romanian belligerence. The Allied troops were to have as essential aim the blocking of Bulgarian forces to facilitate actions for the Romanian troops. The French and British governments were to ask the Russian authorities to send against Bulgaria enough troops, once the military and political agreements between Romania and the Allies will have been signed. [20]

General Joffre considered that the Allies had a huge interest to undertake an immediate military effort against Bulgaria and remove this power from battle. The main action was to be taken from north by Russian- Romanian forces with the help of the army from in Thessaloniki, which was to fight in the south. [21] Brătianu asked the Allies on 26th July not to insist that Romania to declare war on Bulgaria, Turkey and Germany. The Romanian Prime Minister wanted to preserve and spare all forces of the army with the purpose of conducting the operations in Transylvania and Banat against the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. 50,000 Russians were to protect Romania against of a possible threat from Bulgaria in the region of Danube. Meanwhile, the military French-English army from Salonika was about to keep the Bulgarians in south. [22]

Article I of the Political Convention stipulated that France, Great Britain and Russia should ensure territorial integrity of Romania, into the whole extent of its current borders. If Romania is committed to declare war only to Austria-Hungary, in return it was going to break the economic relations and interrupt the trade with all enemies of Entente, therefore with Bulgaria too. The Military Convention made it obligatory for Romania to attack Austria-Hungary no later than 15/28 August 1916. Among other things, Russia undertakes that, at the time of mobilization for the Romanian army, it will send in Dobruja two infantry divisions and a cavalry division against the Bulgarian troops. The same article, the 3rd one, which concerned Russia's commitment to send troops in Dobruja, stated: "Allies are committed that the entrance into the war of Romania to be preceded by at least eight days. The army from Salonika will launch an energetic offensive. Its action was meant to facilitate the mobilization and concentration of the Romanian army. This offensive was to begin at 7/20 August 1916." [23]

But things were not just as in the political and military agreements. The East Army from Salonika remained inactive. Numerically reduced despite the official statements and poorly equipped, it was not able to conduct an effective offensive action against Bulgaria. The army from Salonika did not proceed to attack the Bulgarians, helping this way the military intervention of Romania. This is one of the tasks which Entente has assumed, but did not respect it. Moreover, sometimes military cooperation between Romania and Russia worked rather poorly and it was held in unsatisfactory parameters. The collaboration was marked by a strong distrust between the two sides. The above mentioned are two of the key factors that led to the defeat of the Romanian army. [24]

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- [2] I exhaustively approached the topic regarding the evolution of relations between Romanian Kingdom and the two Slavic states in other two studies published in academic journals from Romania and Russia. See Hadrian Gorun, “Considerations on Romanian-Russian and Romanian-Bulgarian Relations at the Beginning of the World War I. A few Romanian and French documentary evidence”, in *Analele Universității din Craiova*, Seria Istorie, An XIX, nr. 1 (19)/2014, pp. 67-78 and Idem, “Romania’s relations with France and Russia and Bucharest’s fears concerning a Bulgarian offensive (fall of 1915-August 1916). Some French documentary evidence”, in *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, No. 1/ 2015, pp. 29-41. In fact, this article represents a synthesis of the two mentioned papers.
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