

ROMANIA AND THE GREAT POWERS DURING WORLD WAR I. A HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS

Hadrian GORUN¹

ABSTRACT

OUR ARTICLE IS A SHORT ANALYSIS OF ROMANIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE TWO ALLIANCES OF WORLD WAR I, MAINLY WITH THE ENTENTE. WE TRIED TO EMPHASIZE THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE ROMANIAN FOREIGN POLICY, USING SOME IMPORTANT CONCEPTS BELONGING TO THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS' FIELD. ROMANIAN KINGDOM HAD TO BEHAVE AND PERFORM AS AN INDEPENDENT AND RESPECTED ACTOR IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA. STATES TEND TO FULFILL THEIR FOREIGN POLICY GOALS EITHER CONSOLIDATING THEIR OWN INTERNAL CAPABILITIES, EITHER BY JOINING THE ALLIANCE SYSTEMS. THEREFORE, THE DECISION MAKERS FROM BUCHAREST HAD TO STRENGTHEN THE MILITARY TRAINING AND TO IMPROVE THE SUPPLY WITH WAR MATERIAL, WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION. IN TERMS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR, THE ROMANIAN AUTHORITIES SHOULD HAVE CHOSEN THE ALLIANCE THAT SUPPORTED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ROMANIA'S NATIONAL INTEREST. THE NATIONAL INTEREST INVOLVES THE PERPETUATION OF STATE, THE THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF THE STATE BUT ALSO MAINTAINING THE STATE INDEPENDENCE SO IT ENJOYS PRESTIGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE. ALSO, AS RATIONAL ACTORS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, THE STATES ARE PURSUING A POLICY DESIGNED TO MAXIMIZE THEIR ADVANTAGES.

KEYWORDS: ROMANIA, FOREIGN POLICY, NATIONAL INTEREST, ENTENTE, WORLD WAR I.

Our article is a brief analysis of Romania's relations with the two belligerent groups of the First World War, mainly with the Entente. Using several concepts belonging to the theory of international relations, we tried to highlight the guidelines of the Romanian foreign policy. The adopted conduct of foreign policy should have allowed the Kingdom of Romania to perform as an independent and respected actor in the international arena.

¹ Ph. D. , Associate Professor, "Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgu-Jiu. A Romanian version of this article was published in *Annals of "Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgu-Jiu, Series Letters and Social Sciences*, Supplement 1/2017, pp. 113-116.

States tend to fulfill their foreign policy goals either consolidating their own internal capabilities, either by joining the alliance systems. Therefore, the responsible decision makers from Bucharest had to strengthen the military training, being vigilance of an adequate endowment with war materiel, weapons and ammunition. In terms of participation in the war, the Romanian authorities should have chosen the alliance that supported the achievement of Romania's national interest. The national interest involves the perpetuation of state, the protection the territorial integrity of the state but also ensuring and maintaining the state independence so it enjoys prestige on the international stage.² Also, as rational actors of international relations, the states are pursuing a policy designed to maximize their profits. The representatives of realist school of international relations have defined the national interest in terms of power. In this context, in the opinion of Hans Morgenthau, the quality of diplomacy and military training are essential constituent elements of national power.³

In the complicated international circumstances during World War I perfecting the Romanian's national interest was involving the unification of Transylvania, Banat and Bukovina with Romania. The issue of Bessarabia takeover could not be counted since the Romanian land between Prut and Nistru was part of the Russian Empire, and Russia was part of the Entente. Claiming the province from beyond Prut would be translated into an affront to the great power in the East.

During the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, and subsequently, both in the brink of World War, and during the great conflagration, the Romanian Kingdom acted to maintain its freedom of movement. It has reserved the right to take the most important decisions without being influenced by external diplomatic pressure. After the peace treaty from Bucharest on August 10, 1913, which ratified Romania's status as the main and most important actor of the Balkan region, the Romanian diplomacy has campaigned for perpetuating the relations of the existing forces and the establishment of a territorial *status quo* in accordance with their interests. We can state that in the functioning of the power balance from the area of Balkan and Eastern Europe, Romania has successfully assumed the role of moderating element (balancer), not only during the Second Balkan conflict, but also during the World War I. In 1913, Romania's intervention was decisive and leaving the temporary neutrality and the intervention in the war in August 1916, will bring Entente a military and demographic surplus in the competition with its opinion opponent and will facilitate the war effort, causing the movement of troops from the West to the Eastern battlefield.

Entente has used specific mechanisms to establish a favorable balance of power in the competition for supremacy with the rival alliance. For example, in order to weaken the camp of the Central Powers, it has adopted the principle of *divide et impera*, seeking to attract the neutral states which were gravitating into the orbit of Germany and its allies, such as Romania, Italy, Bulgaria and Greece. Another way designed by the Triple Understanding to establish and maintain a balance of power consistent with their own interests consisted of the *principle of compensation*.⁴ The principle of multiple territorial compensation between the Balkan states was meant to be the cornerstone of a new Balkan block following the model of the alliance that existed during the First Balkan War and managed to defeat the Ottoman Empire. This time the Balkan block, constituted under the patronage

² Frederic Pearson, Martin Rochester, *International Relations*, (New York:Mc. Graw-Hill, 1998), 177.

³ See Hans Morgenthau, *Politica între națiuni. Lupta pentru putere și lupta pentru pace*, (Iași: Polirom, 2007).

⁴ 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", *Analele Universității Craiova, Istorie*, XIX, nr. 1/2014, 71-76.

of the Entente would incorporate, if it had been possible, Turkey too. The association of states once constituted, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey would have intervened in the war for the Triple Entente. But the *sine qua non* condition of achieving this was that the states meant to be part of the alliance to proceed with mutual territorial concessions. According to the plenipotentiary Minister of Romania in Paris, Alexander Emil Lahovari, it was recommended that the Romanian government would declare that it was willing to return to Bulgaria the Southern Dobrogea (Quadrilateral). Greece had to agree to cede Cavalla to Bulgarians and Serbia would give up a part of Macedonia. In return, Romania would have been entitled to receive Transylvania, Greece the biggest part of Epirus and Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵ The Balkan block recreation project was doomed to failure since each state's national interest from the region prevailed both on subsystem's interest represented by the Balkan space and the interest of the system, represented by the Entente military grouping.

Among the powers that made up the Triple Understanding, France wished most ardently Romania's entrance in the war. Both Romania and France had territorial ambitions, France with regard to Alsace and Lorraine, Romania regarding Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina. The similarity of the two Latin sisters' aspirations will lead, eventually, to a final closure between France and Romania. If France was representing a great power, the most important state actor member of the Entente, with great decisional power, Romania was perceived by the two belligerent camps only as a pawn-what was rightly having a key position - on the European chessboard. Even if in principle, the Romanian Kingdom could not manifest as an active geostrategic player, at least it was an important geopolitical pinte⁶ in Southeast Europe and the Balkans.

Generally speaking, the points of view of France and Great Britain have coincided with respect to the need to attract Romania to strengthen the alliance. Instead, Russia was having the tendency to put above the coalition's interest their own expansionist goals and eventually to subordinate to their personal goals the entry into action of the Romanian Kingdom.

Romania has always sought to preserve its freedom of movement during the negotiations with the Entente, Central Powers and the Balkan countries. The Romanian authorities wanted to establish themselves the country's foreign policy priorities without the interference of other powers.

The Romanian kingdom held a similar policy when, in 1915, it asked the Member states of Entente, certain guarantees for the acquisition of the Romanian territories incorporated to the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy and the related frontiers. Into this issue, were often clashed the divergent views of the Romanians and Russians⁷. France has successfully played a difficult role as a mediator, often reconciling the divergent positions of Bucharest and Petrograd, so Russia was finally compelled, not without regrets, to accept Romania's territorial grievances.

In the nineteenth century, at the beginning of the twentieth century and during World War I, Russia has arrogated the quality of protector of orthodox nations of the Balkans. Under this self-assumed statute was actually hiding its hegemonic tendencies. The main war objective of the Russian Empire was the domination over Bosphorus and Dardanelles' Straits and Constantinople city. In 1915,

⁵Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères Français (A.M.A.E.F.), Série Guerre 1914-1918, Sous-Série Roumanie, D. 337, f. 19.

⁶ The concepts "geopolitical pivots" and "geostrategic players" were used by the political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de șah. Geopolitica lumilor secolului XX*, (București:Univers Enciclopedic, 2000), 53-69.

⁷ Hadrian Gorun, "Les pourparlers russo- roumains de 1915 au sujet des futures frontières de la Roumanie", *Transylvanian Review*, vol. XVI, no. 1, Spring 2007, 93-112.

Romania considered necessary for defending its vital interests, to oppose Russia in its march towards the Straits. Moreover, in Bucharest was spreading the news that Russia, following an alleged understanding with England on the Straits, would get the entire Bosphorus along with Constantinople. Dardanelles would have become neutral. Later on, the Romanian authorities found out that the Romanov Empire would have been promised just the northern part of the Bosphorus, and Constantinople would become neutral, thing that tempered spirits in a certain way.⁸ The War aims of the Czarist Empire were perceived at Bucharest as a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. This is also the reason why in late 1915 the Royal Government has categorically opposed to transiting the Romanian territory by a Russian army that would provide support to the Serbs⁹, considering that permission would have given the opportunity to the Russians to damage the territorial integrity of the country.

The Romanian government has worked to maintain the secrecy of negotiations carried out for joining the Entente in order not to raise the susceptibilities of the rivals and avoid exposing an attack of the Central Powers. For tactical considerations the Romanian state proceeded to signing a trade agreement with Germany.

Entente and Romania differently perceived the necessary involvement of the latter in action. For instance, the Triple understanding needed Romania's contribution according to the situation on the battlefield. But Romania was obliged to complete the military training and complete the equipping with war materials and munitions. This is one reason why it was not engaged in fighting in May 1915 when Italy signed the Protocol in London with the Entente. The Romanian authorities have shown unquestionable diplomatic and political tact when, last negotiations to arrange the signing of the political and military agreements with the Entente were conducted. The powers of the alliance recognized Romania's right to join to the national state Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina. Due to the insistence of the Romanian state, the policy Convention laid down the signatories' obligation to close the general or separate peace only together and simultaneously. Romania also earned the right to be treated on a par with the Great Powers during preliminaries, peace negotiation and at peace general conference. Despite all these promises and others, even before the alliance being sealed, Russia managed to obtain secretly the consent of France related to the review at a later date of the commitments made to Romania and the reservation of judgment in this matter.¹⁰ The Great Powers were not always willing to respect their commitments to the smaller states and take into account their legitimate aspirations.

The allies have not honored some of the obligation undertaken by the two Conventions, political and military, and Romania's situation will become very difficult at the end of 1916. Among the measures through which Romania has tended to maintain its decisional independence in dealing with the Great Powers in World War I, it is worthy to note the refusal of the Russian proposal on restructuring the Romanian army in the south of Russia as well as rejecting any tendency of Russians to subordinate the Romanian army during the military cooperation, anyway punctuated by moments of misunderstandings and disputes.¹¹

⁸ Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (A. N. I. C.), Diamandi, D. 29, f. 11.

⁹ A. M. A. E. F. , Guerre, Roumanie, D. 353, f. 171.

¹⁰ Glenn E. Torrey, "The Years of Engagement, 1916-1918", in *Romania and World War I*, (Iași, Oxford, Portland, Center for Romanian Studies), 213.

¹¹ See H. Gorun, *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare ale României cu Franța în primul război mondial*, (Cluj-Napoca:Argonaut, 2009), 119-208.

The King and the Romanian government did everything they could to continue the fight against the Central Powers at the end of 1917 and early 1918, but external factors, beyond their control, such as the closing of the armistice and peace from Brest-Litovsk by Soviet Russia and invasion of Ukraine by the troops of the Central Powers, which until then had served as a buffer zone for Romania, have made any resistance inconceivable. However, even if continuation of the armed struggle meant committing suicide under the given conditions, the Allies, France, England, Italy and U. S. A. have put pressure for maintaining the belligerence. The conclusion of peace preliminaries from Buftea on February 20 / March 5 and of peace with the Central Powers from Bucharest on April 24 / May 7, 1918 gave the Entente Powers a pretext to get rid of the obligations assumed through the political Convention from August 1916. It is true that Romania had breached the article regarding a separate peace, but the Great Powers did not take into account the critical situation. Allied powers have not granted extenuating circumstances considering that Romania has fulfilled most of the obligations, while the Entente eluded his own. But by re-entering the war from November 10, 1918 Romania finally made part of the victorious camp and regained the right to enjoy the promises made in August 1916.¹²

¹² Gorun, *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare ale României cu Franța în primul război mondial...*, 229-302.

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