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The Image of King Carol I of Romania as Reflected in the Russian Diplomatic Reports, 1888–1898

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Abstract

The reports drawn up by the members of the Russian Legation to Bucharest analysed several aspects of the Romanian state with King Carol I being a major topic thereof. Given that the Romanian sovereign belonged to the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty, he was often perceived by the Russian diplomats accredited in the kingdom to the north of the Danube as making a strong contribution to the intensification of German and Austro-Hungarian influence in Romania, especially between 1888 and 1893 when Russian-Romanian relations were particularly tense. Although not unanimously, most reports depicted the Romanian king as a ruler who could not adapt to his new country, often describing him as a “foreigner” or a “German” with some even predicting his abdication. Since the king was a decisive factor in the promotion of Romania’s foreign policy, he was often described as a worthy representative of Germanophilia and hostile to Russia. As a Catholic in a country whose population was overwhelmingly Orthodox, the Romanian sovereign was often shown as an “agent of Catholicism” in Romania although there were also cases when the reports emphasised the balance that he was able to strike between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

Keywords: Carol I of Romania, Russian diplomats, diplomatic reports, the Romanian Orthodox Church, Romania’s foreign policy, Russian-Romanian relations, Bessarabia, the Triple Alliance, Germany, Austro-Hungary.

1. Introduction

Russia, just like all the other great European powers, had a complex network of diplomatic offices abroad from as early as the second half of the eighteenth century. Towards the late nineteenth century, more precisely in 1885, the Tsarist Empire had 6 embassies, 18 legations and 2 diplomatic agencies (Ceobanu, 2012: 295). Since the embassies were only located in the capital cities of the great powers, i.e. London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome and Istanbul, in Bucharest they had a legation which, as only natural, was headed not by an ambassador but by a minister plenipotentiary. Knyaz Leon Urusov was the first head of the Russian Legation to Bucharest from late 1880 to 1886.¹ In the decade prior to the visit of King Carol I to Saint Petersburg, the Russian diplomats in Romania drew up countless reports; among the authors of these documents one can find Mihail A. Hitrovo,² extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary, Alexandr Lodiĵenski, chargé d’affaires, Alexandr A. Giers, consul in Jassy, Nikolai A. Fonton, extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary, and A.S. Somov and V.E. Lvov, legation secretaries. Romania’s foreign policy, the Romanian society, the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Royal House are only a few of the topics

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¹ For further details about his activity and about the other members of the Russian Legation to Bucharest at the time, see (Ceobanu, 2012: 295-308).

² He was the head of the Russian Legation to Romania between 3/15 November 1886 and 2/20 October 1891 (Ceobanu, 2011: 151). For further biographic details about M. A. Hitrovo, see (Solomon, Cuşco, 2014: 28).

tackled in the reports drafted by the Russian diplomats in Romania, to which we could also add their perceptions on King Carol I.

The history of Moldova and of Wallachia had seen a constant battle between the boyars' camps to impose the person they were supporting as head of state¹; then, once they took the throne, the rulers of the two principalities would support the camp that had put them in office to the detriment of the other camp; so already at the end of the third decade of the nineteenth century the political class of the two principalities agreed on the idea of bringing a foreign prince from one of the West's ruling families. This wish of the political class took shape in 1857 with the request for a foreign prince to inherit the throne, chosen from one of Europe's ruling dynasties whose heirs were to be raised in the country's religion. Not privy to the previous political battles, and with no relatives or protégés in his new country, the foreign prince could ensure the implementation of the principle that "a king rules but doesn't govern." In addition to that, his ties with a great European dynasty were to increase the prestige of the Romanian monarchy at a time when the republics that had emerged following the revolutionary movements had been short-lived, as proven by the European Revolutions of 1848 (Ivănescu, 2011: 22-23). Under these circumstances, after a failed attempt to bring Philip of Flanders,² the brother of King Leopold II of Belgium, and following a plebiscite organised between 2 and 8 April, in April 1866 Prince Carol of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was proclaimed head of state of the two united principalities, although he was only 27 years old. It is, however, difficult to believe a better solution could have been found since the potential candidates were quite few and through his coming Carol brought precisely what the Romanian society lacked: order, rigour, discipline, punctuality and perseverance. Certainly, the arrival of a Hohenzollern on the Romanian throne was also a blow to the image of the state to the north of the Danube, which was still a vassal of the Ottoman Empire, because Prince Carol was a relative of the Prussian king (and soon of the future emperors of the German Empire) and of Emperor Napoleon III of France (Boia, 2014: 23, 38).

2. Discussion

The adaptation/failure to adapt of Prince Carol of Romania

Due to the fact that after 1871 the influence of Germany and Austro-Hungary in South-Eastern Europe increased and Russia found itself in some sort of diplomatic isolation, especially after 1882 when the Triple Alliance was created, the existence of a German prince at the helm of Romania was not seen by the diplomacy in Saint Petersburg in the brightest of lights; people in the capital of the Tsarist Empire believed that all this situation did was contribute even more to the increased German and Austrian influence over the Romanian kingdom while the Russian-Romanian relations remained very tense until 1893. Therefore, between 1888 and 1898 most of the reports drawn up by the Russian diplomats in Romania were not favourable to the role played by the Romanian king in the leadership of his state even though they unanimously recognised his personal qualities.

Thus, in a report sent to Nikolai K. Giers, Nikolai A. Fonton,³ who had been appointed extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary in Romania in 1891, said that the king had not grown accustomed to the position he was in although over 25 years had passed since his coming to Romania.

"Despite all of the above, King Carol still remains a 'foreigner' in this country; so far, he has not managed to get familiar with the people who called him to the throne, in whose eyes he remains a 'German,' just like in the past. He speaks Romanian – and French for that matter – with a strong German accent. From what I have been told, sometimes while he was reading the Message of the Throne, his pronunciation even raised hilarity among the attendees. His cold disposition, his methodical, pedantic character, his proneness to loneliness and isolation, even his simplicity, do not fit with the local customs. There is no ardour or

¹ Between 1716 and 1821 the rulers appointed by the Ottoman Empire to both principalities came from among the members of the noble Greek origin families from the Phanar district of Istanbul. Although in theory the position was for life, those appointed to rule over Moldova or Wallachia held it for a short period of time, which made them collect riches as fast as possible as they had gotten the title in question against the payment of huge amounts of money to the sultan and his advisors. A contemporary of those days noted that "it is from the Phanariots that we have inherited this cruelty towards the people, this indifference to the needs of the country, this disrespect for the law, this contempt towards an honest job to the benefit of the people, this mistrust in everything ethnic, this praise and imitation of everything foreign." Besides, historian Ulcini states that "The throne had become an auctioned item. As soon as he'd take over his principality, the Phanariot was guided by one thought alone – make a fortune, collect wealth for himself and his aides who followed him like a flock of greedy birds of prey and pounce over the wretched country. For fear they'd soon be overthrown, they wreck their brains for new plans to squeeze out of the country as much as they can in the shortest time possible to pay the huge debts they made in order to get the throne" (Lindenberg, 2003: 32).

² The first option was Philip of Flanders because already in April 1866 when debates on the adoption of a constitution were organised, the Belgian constitution of 1831 was used as a model. Given that the Romanian fundamental law was largely a copy of the Belgian one, Romanian politicians believed it had better chances to work in Romania too if the prince came from the same country as the constitution.

³ He held this position from 12/24 June 1891 until 1/18 June 1901 (Ceobanu, 2011: 155).

passion in the king's nature. His Majesty only finds some indulgent appreciation in those few people who are extremely close to the king and who can make a direct judgment of the subtleness of his intelligence, his multilateral development and his hardworking nature" (Solomon et al., 2014: 266-267).

In most of the reports sent from Bucharest to Saint Petersburg, Russian diplomats emphasise the absence of a mystical connection between the Romanian king and his subjects, in contrast with the situation of the Tsarist Empire, as the issue of the foreign dynasty was a constant topic of the documents they drew up. Besides, the same reports concluded that the existence of a German-born ruler in Romania only symbolised and strengthened the uprooting of the elites from the people, thus deepening the imported nature of the modernisation process of the Romanian society which covered the last third of the nineteenth century (Solomon, Cuşco, 2014: 37). This piece of information which was constantly sent to the Russian Foreign Ministry with regard to the modernisation of Romania did not seem to depict the reality at all as even the Romanian society itself was faced with a fierce dispute over the rush with which Western laws and institutions were copied although they did not fit the local realities at all. The "theory of the form without substance" was outlined by Titu Maiorescu in 1868 (Maiorescu, 1868) and to a certain extent it is still valid for contemporary Romania, as in 1989 the Romanian society made a sudden shift from Europe's toughest Communist regime to the values of democracy; there were other important personalities of Romanian culture who wrote about it, such as Mihai Eminescu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Constantin Stere, Garabet Ibrăileanu and Mihail Manoilescu.

Even though he did acknowledge the personal qualities of King Carol, among them his vast intelligence and political skills, which exceeded those of many "born Romanians," the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary Mihail N. Hitrovo was consistent in highlighting the Romanian monarch's status of "foreigner," his lack of popularity and the failure of his acclimatisation to the Romanian realities, as well as the fulfilment of an ill-fated role of promoting the Austrian-German interests on the Romanian territory (Solomon, Cuşco, 2014: 38). The Russian diplomat, whose thinking was dominated by an unconditional attachment to the Romanovs' dynasty, a deep religiousness and the conviction of the exceptional role of the Tsarist Empire on the international stage and especially in the Balkans, considered that the late nineteenth century saw a confrontation between two worlds – the Slavic-Orthodox one (represented by Russia) and the Western-German one (represented by Germany and Austro-Hungary) (Solomon, Cuşco, 2014: 28-29). Within the context of the peasants' revolt of 1888, when the Romanian king and political class were confronted with a serious problem, the same M.A. Hitrovo believed that the revolt broke out due to the "sheer weakness of the current administrative and military construction of the kingdom" as well as due to the Romanian sovereign's lack of popularity:

"As far as political ideals are concerned, ideals such as the adoration of the king's authority, these have never even existed; in the eyes of the Romanian peasant, the German King Carol has been and still is just some random non-believer who has nothing categorical to offer except for submission to something that's foreign and loathed by their natural, historical instincts" (Solomon et al., 2014: 139, 142).

Given the constant reports sent to the Foreign Ministry in Saint Petersburg underlining the maladjustment of Carol I to his new position as head of the Romanian state, it is no wonder that the members of this ministry adopted an official belief that the king had not developed a long-lasting connection with his people, as one understands from a piece of instruction given in August 1888 and mentioned seven years later in the report drawn up by V. E. Lvov.

"In spite of his long stay in Romania, King Carol could not adapt to the country which entrusted him with its own destiny; he sees the current situation as ephemeral and that's why he'd rather serve those interests to which he harbours a certain personal sympathy instead of the properly understood interests of the Romanian people with whom he has no solid bond whatsoever" (Solomon et al., 2014: 344-345).

Even though he replaced Minister Plenipotentiary M. A. Hitrovo as head of the Russian Legation to Bucharest for a short time period, in his capacity as chargé d'affaires, Alexandr Lodijski sent reports to Nikolai K. Giers, the foreign minister in Saint Petersburg, depicting King Carol as a monarch who had not managed to grow accustomed to his adoptive homeland; the Russian diplomat stated that in Romania the anti-dynastic tendencies were strong and there were even voices anticipating the abdication of the Romanian sovereign.

"In society and among the deputies the abdication of King Milan made if not a great impression, then at least a very clearly expressed one. Special attention was given, among others, to an occasional newspaper note published in no. 4665 of the "Novoye Vremya" from last 23 February hereby sent by telegraph, which reminded that after Prince Alexander and King Milan¹ it was now the turn of King Carol of Romania. The same note argued that all these monarchs were following a hostile policy towards Russia which was why two of them had already fallen" (Solomon et al., 2014: 176).

Nevertheless, there were also exceptions in the texts of these reports by the Russian Legation to Bucharest, like the one drafted by V. E. Lvov on 6 August 1895 where the head of the Romanian state was

¹ On 22 February 1889, the Serbian King Milan Obrenović abdicated in favour of his son, Alexander. Since the latter was still a minor, the ruling of the country was entrusted to a 3-person regency.

presented as very well accustomed to his duties with no issues between himself and the political class of the Romanian kingdom.

“I, however, will allow myself to express the opinion that the king has long since accustomed to Romania entirely, that his Majesty sees the current situation as rather safe and long-lasting, that *all circumstances are favourable to the total overlapping of the visions of this country’s ruling class with the visions of their monarch*” [emphasis in original] (Solomon et al., 2014: 345).

Although between 1888 and 1898 the Russian diplomatic reports depicted King Carol as a “foreigner” in Romania and as a monarch who had not adapted to the country’s realities, things were not like that. In reality, King Carol¹ was only confronted with significant adaptation issues from 1866 to 1871 when his running-in was cumbersome and the political cooperation between him and the Romanian political class seemed to be extremely difficult if not impossible. During these five years, Bucharest saw no less than 10 governments with about 30 governmental reshuffles (Maiorescu, 1994: 19), a testament to the deep political instability which existed in Romania during that period. The primary character of the country’s political life also reverberated to Prince Carol; there were countless anti-dynastic² newspapers that used very strong language against the head of state, even though the bringing of a foreign prince to rule the United Principalities of Moldova and Wallachia had gathered the unanimity of the Romanian political class.

Although Carol did show a lot of patience, caution and tolerance, a big part of the problem came from the fact that Romanians had no dynastic sense whatsoever as for generations they had been used to ephemeral rule and were also indifferent to the frequent throne ascents that had happened over the years. As Alexandru Ioan Cuza, a popular ruler, had just been forced to abdicate in 1866, one extra change to the head of state did not seem to matter too much (Maiorescu, 1994: 16, 21). In this unstable political atmosphere, on 8/20 August 1870, a group of radical liberals led by Alexandru Candiano-Popescu, a former artillery captain, took over the Ploiești Prefecture, army post and telegraph office and proclaimed the republic and the overthrowing of Prince Carol. But the “Ploiești republic”³ only existed for a day as the conspiracy was rapidly annihilated by an army battalion, thus proving the non-viability of the conspirators’ action. To understand the lack of firmness of Romania’s political beliefs back then, it is worth mentioning that in 1880, only 10 years after his failed attempt to install the republican regime, Alexandru Candiano-Popescu, who had been a virulent opponent of the foreign dynasty almost his whole life, accepted to become King Carol’s aide, a position that he was to hold for 12 years.

During the French-Prussian War, which broke out in the summer of 1870 and ended in the spring of the following year with the absolute victory of Prussia, the anti-dynastic movement reached its peak, with most Romanian politicians and journalists showing their support for France, although considering that the country was led by a Hohenzollern, it should have done the opposite and wished for Prussia to win. As the military conflict between the two great European powers extended, the Romanians’ enthusiasm towards France was growing⁴ and their aversion for everything German was also on the up. Under these circumstances, in January 1871 Carol even made an attempt to abdicate, as expressed in a letter sent to one of his friends, who has remained unidentified; the text of the letter was published in the “Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung” newspaper in 15/27 January 1871 and then taken over by the Romanian newspapers.

The establishment of the conservative government led by Lascăr Catargiu on 11 March 1871 brought much-needed political stability since it functioned for over five years and so, after the establishment of this government, the Romanian monarchy went through a consolidation process. The participation of the

¹ On 9/21 September 1878, after the declaration and the acknowledgement of state independence, it was decided to grant Prince Carol the title of Royal Highness. On 14 March 1881 Romania was proclaimed a kingdom and on 10 May 1881, following a vote in Parliament, Carol and his wife Elisabeth of Wied were crowned as monarchs.

² Firstly, we may mention the socialist newspapers “Munca,” “Adevărul,” “Lumea nouă” and “Lumina,” plus the “Telegraful,” a media outlet of the nihilists and anarchists. In 1899 when the liberals moved to the opposition, the “Românul” newspaper took on a deeply anti-dynastic stance. The renowned Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, who was a philologist, a historian, a journalist, a legal consultant and a political figure, also published antimonarchic ideas in the publication he edited, “Traian.” In his turn, Alexandru V. Beldiman, the manager of “Adevărul,” publicly recognised that he had an anti-dynastic attitude as proven by the motto of the Bucharest publication: “Down with Carol, a stranger to our people, a stranger to our law.”

³ For further details about this event as well as about the ensuing process, see (Onescu, 2011: 189-203).

⁴ To give just two examples of the Romanian’s Francophile nature, it is worth mentioning that between 17 February and 1 April 1871 the “Românul” newspaper was printed with a black frame and its frontispiece titled “the Teutonic hoards step on the sacred land [of France]” while the prominent liberal leader Ion C. Brătianu stated in a speech held in the Chamber of Deputies on 24 February that “In the unfortunate case that the power of the government in Berlin grows bigger and it forcefully imposes on us to pay the coupon, then it should be known that we are not paying a debt, but rather the requisition of the sympathies we had and still have for the French nation. We shall pay, gentlemen. But even if we’re poor, even in tatters, even crushed, our sympathies for France will not weaken, on the contrary, they will grow stronger” (Maiorescu, 1994: 26).

Romanian army in the Russian-Turkish War from 1877 to 1878, where the Russian-Romanian troops from Plevna were led by Prince Carol, led to the development of a strong bond between the prince and his people; there were no more problems after that and the ruler of the Romanian state was no longer perceived by his subjects as a “German” and, of course, there was no more talk about abdication, either.

Carol I and Romania’s foreign policy

Given that King Carol I played a decisive role in Romania’s foreign policy, an aspect which was also noted by Al. Lodijski in March 1889, many reports drawn up by the Russian diplomats accredited in Romania referred to their role in modelling the diplomacy of the kingdom between 1888 and 1898 and to how Russian-Romanian relations were influenced by the Romanian sovereign’s attitude. The leadership exercised by the king on Romanian diplomacy while going around his ministers, as N. A. Fonton stated in 1896 (Solomon et al., 2014) may be explained both by the fact that he made use of the prestige of his family, the House of Hohenzollern, and by the significant weight of his home country, Germany, in the field of international relations considering that after the 1871 unification, it had become the main force on the European continent (Damean, 2011: 59).

“On the one hand, the foreign policy which has such a significant influence on the state’s domestic life has been left in the king’s hands, out of any control, and on the other hand, the political parties which had seemed united until then crumbled and the prestige of Parliament could only fall significantly in the eyes of the people. However, these successes seem to have come at a rather big cost [...] in transferring to the king, cautiously for now but certain nonetheless, although there is no explicit mention of it anywhere, the responsibility which under normal circumstances should have fallen entirely and exclusively on the shoulders of His Majesty’s ministers” (Solomon et al., 2014: 170).

In March 1889, seen from the perspective of the Russian interests, the largest number of documents drawn up in the abovementioned period are not at all favourable to the role played by Carol, as one may also notice from the report drawn up by M. A. Hitrovo at the end of 1888:

“Of all the debates currently taking place in the Chambers, of this whole political battle between the parties which we witness today in Romania and of all the intrigues accompanying it, what has become crystal clear to us is the irreconcilable and already undisguised attitude of King Carol and his loyal government towards us. Romania’s allegiance to an alliance that is hostile to us, its acceptance, in front of this alliance, of certain positive obligations, are realities which can no longer be questioned” (Solomon et al., 2014: 153).

Two years after the report sent in 1888, M. A. Hitrovo sends another one drawn up in pretty much the same terms but this time with many more details about the antagonistic position of King Carol against Russia in the Romanian foreign policy:

“Romania has developed a whole constellation of political figures who are utterly blinded by the greatness of Germany and trust the indestructibility and the almightiness of its politics. To the forefront of these fanatics of the German influence are average individuals like Dimitrie Sturdza, Carp and others. These alleged Romanian politicians have created a whole political theory based on the supposed incompatibility between Germany and Russia [...]. According to this theory, as per its authors, by tying its fate to the interests of the Central-European league, Romania will soon have to gain supremacy on the Lower Danube and in the Balkan Peninsula, a supremacy that Russia would never have given it. [...] In the eyes of all these supporters of pro-German politics, already convinced or yet to be convinced, King Carol represents the best available impersonation” (Solomon et al., 2014: 233).

Alexandr Lodijski, who briefly replaced Mihail A. Hitrovo as head of the Russian Legation to Bucharest, also emphasised the pro-German attitude of the Romanian political class from those days and depicted it as in opposition with how the masses saw things.

“Educated in Jena, Heidelberg or Vienna, overly enthusiastic about the force of Germany, not knowing anything about Russia and not being able to understand the politics of the Imperial Government, the current rulers of Romanian destinies believe that by showing an especially unfriendly behaviour towards us they would get the praise and trust of their allied protectors. The needs of the people, their aspirations and traditions seem to have no importance for them, as far as this question is concerned, especially since they have never studied them in an impartial way [...]. The tension between their political tendencies and the sacred, intimate aspirations of the Romanian people is the premise of an inevitable perdition both for their chimerical theories and for themselves” (Solomon et al., 2014: 165-166).

What is interesting is that in very many reports sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saint Petersburg the Russian diplomats repeatedly said that there was a genuine precipice between the ruling elite of the Balkan kingdom and its people. While the elites were described as “alienated” as they had uncritically taken over Western development models, the peasants were perceived as representing an “authentic” and truly “national” part of the Romanian population which indirectly sympathised with Russia due to their common affiliation to Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the same peasants who were seen as the only chance to bring Romania onto the route of collaboration with Russia were being described as resigned, submissive and without any influence on the affairs of the state, except for in some violent, irrational outbursts like the 1888 revolt. “[T]he [Romanian] people remain silent and submissive to their own destiny which is unknown to them” concluded Al. Lodijski (Solomon et al., 2014: 175).

The difficulties encountered by the government in Bucharest with regard to the international recognition of its independence in the year of 1878 as well as the tense Russian-Romanian relations made the political class and Prince Carol himself understand that Romania's international isolation was extremely dangerous and it was necessary to become part of a system of alliances (Damean, 2011: 84). Even though several million Romanians lived in Austro-Hungary and the Romanian government and society from the Old Kingdom¹ were showing an increased interest in their fate, within the context of the pan-Slavic policy promoted by Russia, Romania looked for some support for "its national existence within the sphere of action of a multi-language Austria who had formed with Germany (and soon with Italy) a strong shield of defence against the European expansion valences of the Northern giant precisely at that time" (Măiorescu, 1994: 118). As such, 30 October 1883 saw the secret signing of the Treaty of Alliance between Austro-Hungary and Romania;² Germany also joined the Treaty on the same day. It is certain that the head of the Romanian state would have wanted a direct alliance with Germany, his home country, which had proven at that time that it was the continent's greatest power, but he had to content himself with one by "ricochet" (Ciupală et al., 2006: 451). What mattered a lot in Romania's accession to the Triple Alliance was the fact that King Carol belonged to the great Hohenzollern dynasty and that certain Romanian politicians had been educated in Germany, plus the economic situation of the young kingdom situated to the north of the Danube as 50 % of its imports came from Austro-Hungary compared to only 5% from Russia (Ceobanu, 2017: 118). This was not a unilateral approximation; Romania and Austro-Hungary took steps "towards each other, sometimes supported by Germany, too" (Platon 1972: 171-172).

Although the accession of the Romanian state to the Triple Alliance was secret and the Russian diplomats in Romania did not know anything certain, they did sense that a political or military agreement had been reached between the kingdom on the Danube and the two Central European powers as one may notice from the reports sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saint Petersburg, especially starting with the last years of the 9th decade of the nineteenth century. Neither the visit of Emperor Franz Joseph to Romania in September 1896 nor the return visit by the Romanian king who was the guest of the Austrian monarch in Budapest in October 1897 were perceived as random events. Nor did they miss the warming of German-Romanian relations from the late nineteenth century. In a report sent to the head of the Russian diplomacy, Al. Lodijski had little doubt that Romania was in the sphere of Austro-German interests, while V. E. Lvov believed that the foreign affairs vision of King Carol overlapped with that of the political elite, which had established their inclination towards Germany and Austro-Hungary (Solomon et al., 2014: 165, 345).

Formed in 1882, the Triple Alliance was directed especially against Russia as the signatory states promised one another mutual help in the case of a Russian attack even though this was not mentioned anywhere in the text of the treaties. Under these circumstances, the forming of the alliance contributed to the worsening of the diplomatic isolation of the Tsarist Empire, a phenomenon which had already started showing since the unification of Germany and the proclamation of the Second Reich. As such, the matter of Romania joining the camp of the Central Powers or not represented a constant concern for the Russian diplomats; most of them believed that something had been signed, although officially nothing was known for certain. At the helm of a government which lasted for less than a year, Lascăr Catargiu was not informed about the accession to the Triple Alliance, as he confessed to M. A. Hitrovo in 1889 when the Romanian prime minister was asked by the minister plenipotentiary in Bucharest. The report drawn up by the Russian diplomat mentions the words of Catargiu, who truly did not know anything at the time,³ although he had been prime minister.

"When I expressed my consent to form a cabinet at the king's request' – he said to me [L. Catargiu] – , 'I asked him to tell me clearly if His Majesty had not by any chance had some earlier obligation that would have limited his freedom to act on foreign policy issues and the king replied that he had no formal commitments and that his hands were free' ('Il m'a répondu: Je n'ai aucuns engagements formels et j'ai les mains libres')" (Solomon et al., 2014: 221).

In 1891, when it had been almost eight years since the king had signed the accession to the Triple Alliance but without making his decision public, the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saint

¹ Syntagm used for designating the Romanian state which existed between 14 March 1881, the day when the kingdom was proclaimed, and 1 December 1918, when the Romanian population of Transylvania decided to union this province with Romania.

² The Alliance had a defensive and secret nature and was operational for five years with an automatic extension for another three years if not denounced by any signatory state one year before its expiry or if no one asked for its revision. The treaty had seven articles and the main provisions were the fact that in the case of a war, the signatory parties could not negotiate separately with the enemy nor were they allowed to sign a separate peace. In case of an unprovoked attack by a third power, the two states undertook the obligation to help each other mutually (Dinu, 2011: 123).

³ Lascăr Catargiu had not been informed by the king in any way about the treaty signed by Romania with Austro-Hungary to which Germany had also acceded. He would, however, learn about its existence one year later on the occasion of the renewal of Romania's Treaty of Accession to the Triple Alliance signed on 25 July 1892 (Solomon et al., 2014: 222, note 3).

Petersburg had no doubt about the orientation of the Romanian state in foreign affairs matters, as illustrated by the instructions given to Nikolai A. Fonton, who had been recently appointed minister plenipotentiary of Russia to Romania:

“During the extended governing of Ion Brătianu [1881–1888], Romania has distinguished itself through a rather strong penchant towards the Central Powers despite the fact that even during the most confidential confessions King Carol has always denied the existence of a written agreement with the Triple Alliance formed by Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy” (Solomon et al., 2014: 254).

Although King Carol repeatedly denied the fact that he had signed any formal agreement with Germany and Austro-Hungary, these statements did not prevent the Russian diplomats to Romania from understanding that the Romanian foreign policy had significantly aligned itself to the one promoted by Germany and Austro-Hungary. The official visit of Emperor Franz Joseph to Romania between 15/27 and 18/30 September 1896 was seen by the members of the Russian Legation to Bucharest not just as an act of courtesy, but as a confirmation of the proximation of the Romanian kingdom to the states of the Triple Alliance. Less than a month after this visit, in a report sent to the ad-interim foreign minister in Saint Petersburg, Nikolai A. Fonton argued that the purpose of the Austrian Emperor’s visit was either the signing of a separate convention with the Austro-Hungarian Empire or Romania’s formal accession to the Triple Alliance with Franz Ferdinand acting as a proxy for his other two allies (Solomon et al., 2014: 399). The organisation of a big military parade on the occasion of the emperor’s visit to Romania and the fact that he visited numerous forts gave the impression of a general inspection aimed at showing the top guest the armed forces available to the Romanian state (Solomon et al., 2014: 399).

Bessarabia together with the three counties to its south – Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail – are rarely mentioned in the Russian diplomatic reports sent to Saint Petersburg; this fact confirms that these territories were not a priority for Romania’s foreign policy.¹ An important role in the adoption of this attitude was played by Prince Carol, who already in 1878 considered that the three counties annexed by Russia had been irrevocably lost. With regard to Dobruja, the head of the Romanian state had a realistic attitude, although apparently this decision was rather painful for him because in 1866 he had sworn to defend the territorial integrity of the Romanian state in accordance with the text of the Constitution adopted that same year. Besides, in 1877 this integrity had been guaranteed by the great European powers and reconfirmed through the Russian-Romanian Convention signed on 4/16 April 1877. The forced Magyarisation policy deployed by the government in Budapest against Romanians from Transylvania, however, turned the attention of the king and of the Bucharest government to the intra-Carpathian province to the detriment of the one between the Prut and the Dniester. Even though the loss of the three counties to the south of Bessarabia, considered more important than Dobruja, was initially deplored, the possibilities that came with holding the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea were later on discovered. These aspects are also evident in the manner in which A. S. Somov, the secretary of the Russian Legation to Bucharest, drew up a report in 1898:

“Besides that, one cannot ignore the encouraging fact that the matter of Bessarabia no longer interests the public opinion and that this aspect is mentioned increasingly rarely by the media. Such a change may be explained by the fact that all the kingdom’s attention is currently absorbed on the one hand by the truly unprecedented discrimination applied by the Hungarian Government to its Romanian subjects and on the other hand, by the interest raised by Dobruja with its new Constanza harbour and its commercial and military fleet which the Romanians are working on with this childish passion that is so specific to them. And it is very unlikely for them to agree to trade Dobruja for Bessarabia now. Under these circumstances, their only option is to silently go around the latter. Finally, one cannot miss the wise actions of the king in this matter; having understood from the very beginning the sheer futility of whining over Bessarabia, he firmly disapproves of any fuss and manages to raise the Romanians’ interest in Dobruja and channel their activity in the direction of this new, rich region” (Solomon et al., 2014: 432).

In 1894, following a discussion between Casimir Leyden, minister plenipotentiary of Germany to Bucharest, and King Carol I, the German diplomat expressed his conviction that the Romanian sovereign was not a fan of bringing the Bessarabian issue to the fore due to the success of the Russification process that had taken place in that province.² Considering it a lost territory, the Romanian king “has never had any illusions concerning the fate of his former subjects of the territory ceded through the Berlin Treaty” (Ardeleanu et al., 1983: 242). This giving up on the territory between the Prut and the Dniester and on the three counties to its south is also made visible by the fact that in 1897 Carol I met the governor of Bessarabia, Lieutenant General

¹ In 1812, following the Bucharest Peace, Bessarabia was integrated into the Tsarist Empire. After the 1878 Berlin Congress Romania received Dobruja, the Danube Delta and the Snake Island but lost the three counties to the south of Bessarabia – Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail – to Russia.

² After having become part of the Tsarist Empire in 1812, in the late nineteenth century Bessarabia had somehow found its place in the order of the empire and its development followed a path different from Romania’s. This may be explained both through the important role played by Russian language and culture and through the fact that there was an identity of religion between the population of Bessarabia and the representatives of the Russian administration. For further details about the situation of this province between 1812 and 1918, see (Livezeanu, 1995: 89-97).

Alexandr P. Konstantinovici,¹ in Jassy. Not only was this the first visit of a governor of this province to Romania, but the Romanian king also insisted on decorating the high Russian dignitary with the Order of the Star of Romania, rank Grand Cross.

The province between the Prut and the Dniester is mentioned in two reports: one from 1889 and the other from 1892, both within the context of the monitoring of the activities of Russian socialists in Romania by the members of the Russian Legation to Bucharest, considering that the socialist movement from the Romanian kingdom had been formed due to the arrival of emigrants from the Tsarist Empire, including from Bessarabia, in the 1870s. The report sent by Al. Lodijski shows his concern about the development of socialism in Romania, about the strong influence exercised by the anarchists arrived from Russia and his discontent with the attitude of the government in Bucharest.

“On this occasion I will allow myself to remind you that in Romania there is no Russian socialist who has not already successfully taken part in the criminal actions committed in Russia in the past and that the Romanian government could not have assumed under any circumstances that these were just some free-thinking theoreticians (Solomon et al., 2014: 180).

The same Lodijski also deplors the fact that Carol I allowed these socialists to live in Romania following the intervention of the manager of the Romanian State Archives, Professor B. P. Hasdeu,² who argued that some were from Bessarabia and would have allegedly suffered because of their sympathies towards Romania (Solomon et al., 2014: 182). The existence of such a significant number of Russian emigrants on the territory of Romania who “have found harbour and safety here” is also signalled by N.A. Fonton in 1892; the latter also made some interesting remarks about the reasons of those who were in Bucharest for studies.

“[H]ere there are also some young fellows who declare that they have left Russia because of their special appreciation for everything that’s Romanian and of the impossibility to live anywhere else than in the middle of the ‘highly developed Romanian society.’ Such flattering words that strike the ego of the Romanians offer these young fellows who use to register as students at the local university certain financial means together with the possibility to make a living. Often times, this also offers them the protection of university professors who are characterised, with no exception, by extreme liberalism” (Solomon et al., 2014: 269).

Carol I – A Catholic King in a Mostly Orthodox Country

In the reports sent by the Russian diplomats accredited in Romania between 1888 and 1898 a special place is given to the matter of Orthodoxy, which is considered an essential part of Romanian traditional identity but also a binder between the Russian and Romanian peoples. As Carol I was Catholic, the link between Orthodoxy and the Romanian collective identity is often analysed through the lenses of the Romanian king’s attitude towards the majority religion. The “Catholicism” of Carol I was perceived as a fundamental element of the consolidation of Western influence in Romania and its distancing from Russia (Solomon, Cușco, 2014: 41), considering that the Romanian society was perceived by the Russian diplomats as strongly polarised. On the one hand, there were the westernised elites who had taken over and replicated liberal models, mostly from France, and on the other hand there was the large mass of peasants representing the “authentic,” truly “national” layer of the Romanian population, attached to the values of Orthodoxy, who represented a resilient link between the kingdom to the north of the Danube and Russia.

Although Carol I was frequently accused by the Russian diplomats of being an “agent of Catholicism” in Romania and the topic of royal Catholicism was recurrent and frequent throughout his reign, there was no unanimous opinion in the reports drawn up by them. Even though most descriptions wanted to emphasise the difference of religious beliefs between Carol I and the Romanian people in order to strengthen the non-autochthonous character of the dynasty, there were also positive communications sent to Saint Petersburg (Solomon, Cușco, 2014: 42). Hence, in February 1892 when there was a rumour that the metropolitan bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church was supposed to take part at the sanctification of an Orthodox church in Paris, the Russian minister plenipotentiary Nikolai A. Fonton depicted the Romanian king as having a balanced attitude:

“[...] in spite of his religion, King Carol undoubtedly understood his duty and has constantly held an irreproachable attitude towards the Orthodox Church. While having the possibility to inaugurate a Catholic chapel in his palace, the king has never made use of this right” (Solomon et al., 2014: 266).

The matter of succession to the Romanian throne was also covered by the reports sent to Saint Petersburg since, as is well-known, King Carol I and Queen Elisabeth had had only one child, a girl, who had died when she was 4 during a scarlet fever epidemic. Under these circumstances, on 18 March 1889 Ferdinand, the second son of Prince Leopold de Hohenzollern, was proclaimed heir to the throne; the latter was the older brother of the Romanian king. As a Catholic, the marriage of Crown Prince Ferdinand was not

¹ Alexandr Petrovici Konstantinovici was the governor of Bessarabia between the years 1883 and 1889.

² B. P. Hasdeu was a director of the Romanian State Archives between 1876 and 1901 and for a brief time period he was an officer in the Russian army. In 1890 he created a special organisation aimed at assisting students from Bessarabia with insufficient financial means which he named “Milcovul.”

simple, since according to the 1866 Constitution, the children of the crown prince had to be baptised “in the Orthodox religion of the East” (Mamina, 2000: 22). As Mihail A. Hitrovo reported to Nikolai K. Giers, if the future wife were Catholic, the situation would have caused endless complications and the pope’s approval was unimaginable. Nor was marrying a Protestant seen as a solution since the Russian minister plenipotentiary in Bucharest believed that “a family made up of a Catholic father, a Protestant mother and Orthodox children is a nonsense anomaly” (Solomon et al., 2014: 238). Nevertheless, after 1893, the year when Prince Ferdinand married Princess Mary of Edinburgh, the Russian diplomats’ viewpoint changed in spite of the fact that the prince’s bride was a Protestant; this could certainly be explained by the fact that the future queen of Romania was of Russian origin through her mother (and British through her father), her maternal grandfather being Tsar Alexander II himself.

3. Conclusion

Due to the fact that after the 1878 Berlin Peace Congress most South-Eastern European states had been drawn to the orbit of Germany and Austro-Hungary and the Tsarist Empire had lost its influence in the Balkans while also having wasted the moral high ground granted by the war against the Ottoman Empire (Solomon, Cușco, 2014: 22), the reports drawn up by the Russian diplomats in Romania almost unanimously depicted King Carol as still unfamiliarised with his new country although, in reality, as one could see from the above, these problems had only existed in the period 1866–1871. This state of affairs was toppled by the tense relations between Russia and Romania immediately after the military cooperation of the two states in 1877 and 1878; the tension did de-escalate to a certain extent in 1893 when Crown Prince Ferdinand of Romania married Princess Mary of Edinburgh, a descendant of the Russian imperial family. The improvement of the Russian-Romanian relations in the 1890s was also helped by the proximation between France and Russia which started in 1891 and took the concrete form of a military alliance signed the following year and ratified in 1894. The forming of the Franco-Russian alliance directed against the Triple Alliance – as the Tsarist Empire committed itself to provide military support to France if the latter were attacked by Germany or Italy and the Hexagon promised its military help if Russia were attacked by Germany or Austro-Hungary – determined King Carol I to harness relations with the French-Russian camp too, even though Romania had secretly joined the Triple Alliance. This context explains the official visit made by the Romanian king to Saint Petersburg in the summer of 1898.

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