

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE ENTRY OF ROMANIA INTO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Rezumat. În studiul de față am încercat să scoatem în evidență locul ocupat în politica Marii Britanii de România în anii neutralității (1914-1916) și interesul manifestat de cabinetul britanic pentru atragerea statului român în război de partea Antantei. Imposibilitatea obținerii unei victorii decisive pe Frontul de Vest i-au determinat pe liderii britanici, precum Lloyd George, Arthur Balfour, Maurice Hankey, să propună diverse planuri de acțiune pe alte fronturi, inclusiv în Balcani. În acest context, importanța României a fost apreciată la adevărata sa valoare la Londra.

Abstract. This article deals with the British policy towards Romania in the years of 1914 to 1916. The stalemate on the Western Front convinced British diplomacy of the importance of the Balkans states. The members of War Cabinet, such as Lloyd George, Arthur Balfour and Maurice Hankey drafted a series of plans for inducing the states from the Balkans Peninsula to join the Allies. By his geographic position, Romania could play a decisive role in an offensive against Austria-Hungary. Even though she didn't take the lead in the negotiations with the Romanian Government, His Majesty's Cabinet proved to be interested in the active participation of Romania into the Great War.

Keywords: war, diplomacy, negotiations, Great Britain, Balkan Peninsula, Romania

The entry of the Romanian Kingdom in the Great War beside the Entente, in August 1916, has been the subject of various articles, scientific studies and books. The Romanian historians focused mainly on the question of the great internal debate between the politicians who sustained that Romania must enter the war against Austro-Hungary to liberate Transylvania and those who feared a Russian hegemony in Eastern Europe after the war. The implication of British diplomacy into the negotiations between the Entente and the Romanian Prime Minister, Ion I.C. Brătianu, has been only marginally treated. The purpose of this article is to reveal, on the basis of documents from the archives, the attitude of Great Britain towards Romania in the years of neutrality (1914-1916).

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Romania's dilemma: Transylvania or Bessarabia?

The Romanian politics, in the years which followed the proclamation of the neutrality in August, 3rd, 1916, and until the decision for joining the Entente in the war against the Central Powers, was dominated by a vivid debate concerning the best political and military option for the little kingdom situated between Austria-Hungary and Russia who both owned territories inhabited by Romanians. Faced by a moral dilemma – to liberate the Romanians of Transylvania in a war beside France, Great Britain, the allies of Russia or the Romanians of Bessarabia, subjected to a unmercifully denationalization by the Russians, with the help of the armies of Germany and Austria-Hungary – the Romanian political scene divided into to definite camps. In what concerns the public opinion, all pleas were for a war against Austria-Hungary.

For Ion I.C. Brătianu the main concern was to secure the most favourable terms for Romania's entry into the war and to obtain the recognition by formal treaties her territorial aspirations. During the negotiations between the Allies and the Romanian Government, both sides had different interests: Romania's purpose was to liberate the territories inhabited by the Romanians (Transylvania, Bukovina, and Banat), as for the Entente, and mainly for France, suffocated by the war trenches, the main goal was the opening of a new front against the Central Powers.

At the starting of the war in Europe in the summer of 1914, Romania was bound to Austria-Hungary and Germany by the treaty from 1883¹. By declaring the war against Serbia in July 1914, the Habsburg Empire released Romania of her obligations as an ally. At the Crown Council held at Sinaia at 3rd August 1914, Romania decided, as before her Italy, to proclaim the neutrality of the country. As it was shown, the refusal of Romania to carry into effect the treaty with the Central Powers meant actually the expression of the official option of Romania: the liberation of Romanian territories subjected by Austria-Hungary².

The first step of the Prime Minister, Ion I.C. Brătianu, was to clarify the relations with Russia. After discussions at Bucharest and Petrograd, it was signed the so called Sazonov-Diamandy note, a document based on two principles:

¹ An interesting analysis of the motives which determined Romania to sign a treaty with Austro-Hungary is to be found to Gheorghe N. Cazan, Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, *Tratatul secret de alianță între România și Austro-Ungaria din 1883*, în "Revista Română de Studii Internaționale", 1973, nr. 1, pp. 175-194.

² C. Botoran, I. Calafeteanu, E. Campus, V. Moisuc, *România și Conferința de Pace de la Paris (1918-1920). Triumful principiului naționalităților*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1983, p. 53.

Russia recognized to Romania the right to annex the territories inhabited by the Romanians from Austria-Hungary; Romania commit herself to preserve a benevolent towards Russia. The signature of this agreement represented an important success for the Romanian diplomacy and deprived the Entente of an instrument to put pressure on Bucharest for intervention into the war¹. Despite this achievement, the Romanian Prime Minister was determined to ensure the recognition of national aspirations by Russia's Western Allies, France and Great Britain².

Secondly, Romania engaged negotiations with Italy who has also declared its neutrality. From these negotiations emerged the agreement from 23rd September 1914 – a treaty of consultation and cooperation between Bucharest and Rome³. By this agreement, Romania and Italy bond the selves „à ne pas sortir de la neutralité sans un avis préalable de huit jours⁴”. Also, the two governments „se tiendront en relations constants et suivies dans le but d'examiner la situation, au fur et à mesure qu'elle se modifiera et de décider si elle comporte la nécessité d'accords plus précis au sujet de l'attitude que les deux états auront à tenir⁵”.

Ion I.C. Brătianu intended to expand the agreement signed in September 1914 in order to coordinate the entry into the war of his country against Austria-Hungary with that of Italy. The 30rd December 1914, baron Fasciotti, the Italian ambassador in Bucharest asked the Romanian Prime Minister: „Qu'est ce que Mr. Brătianu entend par développement de notre accord? Il semble qu'en lui-même il est complet puisqu'il prévoit à l'Art. 3 les trois attitudes possibles: Neutralité, Médiation, Action. [...] Pour une entrée en action nous devons constater aussi que la Roumanie aussi bien que l'Italie ne seront militairement prêtes que le 1 Mars. Tout fois le Gouvernement italien déclare de tenir ferme l'accord établi et de vouloir être en contact continu avec le gouvernement roumain⁶”. The Romanian Prime Minister understood from the beginning at the war that the fate of the

¹ C.J. Lowe, *The failure of British Diplomacy in the Balkans, 1914-1916*, in “Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire”, 4:1 (1969:Mar.), p. 81.

² *Ibidem*, p. 84.

³ A very documented study concerning the negotiations between the two countries is to be found at Glenn Torrey, *The Romanian-Italian Agreement of 23 September 1914*, in *Romania and World War I. A Collection of Studies*, Iași, Oxford, Portland, The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998, pp. 75-94; see also V.Fl. Dobrinescu, Ion Pătroi, Gheorghe Nicolescu, *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare româno-italiene (1914-1947)*, Craiova, Editura Intact, 1999, pp. 15-16.

⁴ *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale*, fond Casa Regală, dosar nr. 61/1914, f. 1.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 2.

Habsburg Empire was at stake. Ion I.C. Brătianu replied to Baron Fasciotti that „[...] la guerre actuelle avait posé le problème du démembrement partiel de l'Autriche et que ce procès ne pouvait arriver à sa fin sans leur participation conformément aux intérêts qui les y attachent¹”. Even though at 6th February 1915 it was signed another agreement between the two countries, Italian diplomacy saw in the rapprochement to Romania only an instrument in his own secret negotiations with the Entente².

Great Britain, the Balkans and Romania

At the outbreak of the First World War, British policy was mainly concerned with Greece and Turkey, the other countries from South-East Europe enjoying a minimal interest in London³. The stalemate on the Western Front who became a mincing machine convinced British politicians such as David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill that the time has come for a different strategy. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George sustained in the War Council, in January and February 1915, the importance to send a British army in the Balkans⁴. He also emphasized the necessity for the allies to hold regularly a joint military conference to co-ordinate the war policy⁵.

The 1st of January 1915, Lloyd George sent to War Council a memorandum – a detailed analysis of the first year of war⁶. The document conceived by him is at the origin of British participation in the expedition from Salonika⁷. The Chancellor of the Exchequer started by pointing the fact that: „After three or four months of the most tenacious fighting, involving very heavy

¹ *Ibidem*.

² H. James Burgwyn, *A Diplomacy Aborted: Italy and Romania Go Their Separate Ways in May 1915: A Reassessment*, in “East European Quarterly”, 21§3, (1987:Fall), p. 307; see also Anthony di Iorio, *Italy and Romania in 1914: The Italian Assessment of the Romanian Situation, 1907 to 1914*, in “Rumanian Studies. An International Annual of the Humanities and Social Sciences”, Volume IV, Leide, E.J. Brill, 1979pp. 169-170.

³ An interesting explanation of Great Britain's diplomacy the Balkan Peninsula is due to H. Seton-Watson, *British Policy towards the South-East European States. 1914-1916*, in *Greece and Great Britain during World War I*, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1985, pp. 65-76.

⁴ C.J. Lowe, *The failure of British Diplomacy in the Balkans, 1914-1916*, in “Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire”, 4:1 (1969:Mar.), p. 75.

⁵ David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War*, London, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1998, p. 5.

⁶ Lloyd George, *Mémoires de Guerre*, Vol. I, Paris, A. Fayard & C^{ie}, Editeurs, 1934, p. 355.

⁷ Lynn H. Curtright, *Muddle, Indecision and Setback. British Policy and the Balkan States, August 1914 to the Inception of the Dardanelles Campaign*, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1986, p. 71.

losses, the French have not at any one point on the line gained a couple of miles. Would the throwing of an additional half-million men on this front make any real difference? To force the line you would require at least three to one; our reinforcements would not guarantee two to one, or anything approaching such predominance. Is it not therefore better that we should recognise the impossibility of this particular task, and try and think out some way by which the distinct numerical advantage which the Allies will have attained a few months hence can be rendered effective?¹”

In his opinion, it was important „to win a definite victory somewhere” – a necessity political as well military of immediate urgency for the Allies: „A clear, definite victory which has visibly materialised in guns and prisoners captured, in unmistakable retreats of the enemy's armies, and in large sections: of enemy, territory occupied, will alone satisfy the public that tangible results are being achieved by the great sacrifices they are making, and decide neutrals that it is at last safe for them to throw in their lot with us²”. One of the propositions of Lloyd George to gain a victory was an attack against Austria-Hungary, considered to be the most vulnerable from the Central Powers: „I suggest that our new forces should be employed in an attack upon Austria: in conjunction with the Serbians, the Romanians, and the Greeks. The assistance of the two latter countries would be assured if they knew that a great English force would be there to support them. Romania could put 300,000 men in the field, whilst retaining a sufficient force to keep the Bulgarians in check. As this move might decide the Bulgarians to remain honestly neutral, the Romanians could spare another 200,000. The Greeks and Montenegrins have an army of 200,000 available³”. For Lloyd George the success of his scheme was possible only by the agreement of Greece and Romania to join the Entente. In order to achieve this goal, he thought that a British military presence is needed in the Balkan Peninsula by sending „our troops up either through Salonika or, I believe, by landing them on the Dalmatian coast⁴”.

¹ The British National Archives, Kew, CAB 24/1, Dept Records of the Cabinet Office Series War Cabinet and Cabinet: Memoranda (GT,CP and G War Series) Piece Papers nos. 1-46, G 2, D. Lloyd George, *Suggestions as to the Military Position*, 1 January 1915, p. 2. An exposition of this memorandum at Andrew Suttie, *Rewriting the First World War, Lloyd George, Politics and Strategy. 1914-1918*, Hampshire, New York, 2005, pp. 47-50.

² *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

If successful, such a plan would have the advantage of forcing „the Austrians to detach a considerable army from the defence of Cracow, and thus leave Silesia undefended. The Austrians could not withdraw the whole of their army to face this new attack, because in that case the Russians could pour through the Carpathians and capture either Vienna or Budapest. The front which would be developed would be much too lengthy for the Austrian forces to entrench and hold. The Germans would be compelled either to send large forces to support their Austrian allies or to abandon them. In the first case the Germans would have to hold an enormous length of extended front, in the aggregate 1,200 miles, and the Allies would, for the first time, enjoy, the full advantage of the superior numbers which by that time they can put into the field. The Germans would also render themselves liable to a dangerous attack in the rear from the immense forces which by that date Russia will have placed in the field. Oh the other hand, if the Germans decline to quit their own frontiers, and leave the Austrians to their fate, that empire would be rapidly disposed of as a military entity and about 2,500,000 men (including Russians), engaged in the task of attacking, it would be free to assail the Germans¹”. The target of an operation of such a kind was not only to induce the Balkan states to join the Allies but also to encourage Italy to enter the war against Austria-Hungary².

A second plan envisaged an attack against Turkey, on the premises that such an operation shouldn't „[...] involve the absorption of such a large force as to weaken our offensive in the main field of operations; that we should operate at a distance which would not be far from the sea, so as not to waste too many of our troops in maintaining long lines of communication and so as also to have the support of the Fleet in any eventualities; that it should have the effect of forcing Turkey to fight at a long distance from her base of supplies and in country which would be disadvantageous to her; that it should give us the chance of winning a dramatic victory which would encourage our people at home, whilst it would be a corresponding discouragement to our enemies³”. The Chancellor of the Exchequer urged the importance of a decision of the War Council. He also reiterated the fact that: „It might be desirable to send an advance force through Salonika to assist Serbia. Military arrangements would have to be made with Romania, Serbia,

¹ *Ibidem.*

² *Ibidem.*

³ *Ibidem.*

Greece, and, perhaps, Italy. All this must take time. Expeditions decided upon and organised with insufficient care and preparation generally end disastrously¹”.

The secretary of the War Cabinet, Maurice Hankey, drafted a document sent to the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, at 2nd February 1915. Maurice Hankey analyzed the arguments in favour of a military operation in the Dardanelles. By a victory in the Narrows, the Allies would be able to open a line of communication with Russia, vital for the latter in order to receive supplies „indispensables to an offensive attack²”. The secretary of the War Cabinet added that „there are two secondary strategically advantages to be obtained by operations in these waters if successful: 1.) The attitude of the Balkan nations now hanging back will be definitely cleared up, and over 1,000,000 troops may be placed at the Allies’ disposal (Romania, 600,000; Bulgaria, 400,000; Greece, 200,000); more if Italy is drawn in. (2.) A line of communication up the Danube will be provided, bringing British sea power into the heart of the enemy's country, and enabling a British army, if desired, to operate against Austria³”. Great Britain could also benefit from a successful operation in South-East Europe by the opening of the trade at the mouths of the Danube and, as a result, by the lowering of the grain prices⁴.

The 14 February 1915, War Council decided to send the 29th Division at Dardanelles, agreeing for a naval operation⁵. A few days later, Lloyd George pointed out once more the importance of the Balkans states for the Entente: „There are only two directions in which we can turn for any prospect of assistance – the Balkan States and Italy⁶”. In his opinion, „to bring Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece in with Serbia means throwing an aggregate army of 1,500,000 on to the Austrian flank. This will not only relieve the pressure on Russia, but indirectly on France. It will tend to equalise things, and thus give us time to re-equip the Russian Army⁷”. A failure of the naval operations in the Dardanelles could have catastrophic results for the allied diplomacy in the Balkans: „[...] not merely Bulgaria, but Roumania and Italy have a good deal to gain in the way of territory

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-6.

² *Ibidem*, G 8, M. P. A. Hankey, *Attack on the Dardanelles*, 2 February 1915, p. 1.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Edward Grey, *Mémoires*, Paris, Payot, 1927, p. 379.

⁶ The British National Archives, Kew, CAB 24/1, Dept Records of the Cabinet Office Series War Cabinet and Cabinet: Memoranda (GT,CP and G War Series) Piece Papers nos. 1-46, G 7, Lloyd George, *Some Further Considerations on the Conduct of the War*, 22 February 1915, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

by throwing in their lot with Germany¹”. To avoid such a possibility, Lloyd George emphasized the importance that: „There must be a strong British force there available to support our friends²”. He also suggested that a special diplomatic mission should be sent immediately to Greece and Romania to negotiate a military convention, „based on our readiness to despatch and maintain a large expeditionary force in the Balkans³”.

It is at Arthur Balfour – who became First Lord of the Admiralty after the Unionists joined Asquith's coalition government in May 1915 – that we find for the first time the idea that Great Britain must have a „Balkan policy”. In a memorandum presented in front of the members of the Committee of the Imperial Defence at 24 February 1915, he pointed out that: „This policy aims at nothing less, than bringing into the struggle at least Romania and Greece, possibly Bulgaria, and uniting the whole of the South-East of Europe with Britain and France in a combined action against the Central Powers⁴”.

Arthur Balfour was aware of the difficulties of the Balkans states to choose a side or another given their geographical position. In his opinion it was impossible to guess the policy of the Balkans states for the immediate future: „The course of events depends upon the policy of three small States, who, from the very necessities of their position, are obliged to incline to that side in the European struggle which they think is likely to win, and whose views are largely swayed by the small local hopes and hatreds. It is impossible in such circumstances clearly to think out a course of a military campaign in these regions until we know *who* is going to fight on our side and *when*⁵”. At the same, he was too pessimistic as concern „the number of Anglo-French troops which could take part in the Balkan operations would only be a relatively small fraction of the troops which the Balkan States themselves have at their disposal⁶”. Even though he believed that „the Romanian, Bulgarian, and Greek armies are not only separately and collectively larger than any that the Allies, for a long time to come, can put into this theatre of operations”, he agreed that „they form very efficient fighting units⁷”.

¹ *Ibidem.*

² *Ibidem.*

³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibidem*, G 6, A. J. Balfour, *The Dardanelles and Balkans Operations*, 24 February 1915, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ *Ibidem.*

Finally, A. Balfour remarked the necessity „to know whether it would be to our interest that Romania, for example, should declare war within the next month. Would it not expose her to being crushed before Russia was strong enough to come to her assistance? And would any force which we could conceivably send through the Bosphorus be sufficient to turn the scale?¹” His conclusion was that „if these questions, and other parallel questions with regard to Greece, be answered in the negative, it would seem that the maintenance for the present of Balkan neutrality is to our advantage, and that nothing would be gained by sending to the East more troops than are required for what I have called the Bosphorus operation²”.

The discussions in the War Council in the next period were focused on the evolution of the operations in the Dardanelles whose immediate object was to open the sea road to the Black Sea and, the most important, „to bring in the Balkan States”.³ Lloyd George advocated repeatedly that „the employment of British military forces in the Balkans is probably indispensable if we are to secure the adherence of the Balkan States to the cause of the Allies⁴”. During these discussions aroused the idea of despatching of „a naval flotilla to the Danube immediately after the opening of the Dardanelles” that could convince the Balkan states of the „earnest” intention to intervene effectively⁵.

Maurice Hankey drafted in March 1915 the main ideas of an operation in the Balkans: „A British force, supported by a powerful flotilla, would form the centre of the Allied army. On the left the Serbians and Greeks would penetrate into Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the right the Romanians would form a connecting link with the Russian armies in the Carpathians. The British forces would turn the flank of the enemy's forces opposing the Romanians, which would enable the Romanians to threaten the communications of the enemy's forces operating in the Carpathians. All the time the Franco- British armies would be exerting continual pressure in the west, and the Russians, even if driven back to the line of the Bug, should be able to contain considerable armies of observation⁶”.

¹ *Ibidem*.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*, G 10, M.P.A. Hankey, *After the Dardanelles. The Next Steps*, 1 March 1915, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 2-3.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

The position of the Balkan states is maybe the best illustrated by an article published in “L’Indépendance Roumaine” of May, 18, 1915: „It is most essential that, should neutral countries decide to enter the European war, their first duty should be that of asking beforehand explicit and definite guarantees from the powers that solicit their assistance. Without such guarantees not one of the Balkans States would be willing to enter the war, because there is not a statesman who in like circumstances would plunge his country into an action which, on the face of it, is only an adventurous enterprise¹”. These lines printed by the newspaper who expressed the official position of the Romanian government contain the essence of the policy followed by Ion I.C. Brătianu during the years of the neutrality.

The entry of Romania into the Great War

The failure of the Allied operation in the Dardanelles and the enhancement, in the autumn of 1915, of military preparations of Bulgaria who was expected to join the Central Powers entailed the Foreign Office to ask to Sir George Barclay, the British Ambassador in Bucharest, to sound the Romanian Prime Minister „as to the feasibility of a defensive understanding between Romania, Serbia and Greece²”. Sir Edward Grey, Secretary of the Foreign Office, wrote in his telegram to Sir George Barclay that: „La mobilisation en Bulgarie rends urgente la question d’une entente défensive entre la Roumanie, la Serbie et la Grèce. Il faudrait en particulier M. Bratiano de me faire savoir ses vues sur ce point³”.

The Secretary of the Foreign Office pointed out that: „Une manque d’accord entre ces trois États risque fort d’engendre une confusion absolue dans les Balkans, qui permettrait aux Puissances Centrales de jouer un État contre l’autre, et de traiter les intérêts de chacun d’eux comme autant de pions dans le jeu allemand⁴”. To prevent this danger, a coalition of the Balkan states was envisaged

¹ “*Balkan Neutrality – As Seen by the Balkans: Inspired Press Opinions from the Capitals of Greece, Bulgaria, and Rumania (With Map)*”, in “New York Times Current History”, 2:4, (1915:July), p. 757.

² The British National Archives, Kew, CAB 24/1, Dept Records of the Cabinet Office Series War Cabinet and Cabinet: Memoranda (GT,CP and G War Series) Piece Papers nos. 1-46, G 26, *Précis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, September 1 to 28, inclusive, 1915*, Foreign Office, No. 548, to Bucharest, Sept. 22, p. 4;

³ Sir Edward Grey, *Mémoires*, p. 509.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

envisaged who „ferait de l’invasion un effort trop formidable pour être tenté¹”. If such a plan failed by a Bulgarian attack against Serbia whilst Greece and Romania remain neutral, it would mean that „l’Autriche et l’Allemagne pourraient fort bien y trouver l’occasion d’obtenir avec de faibles contingents un succès qui dépasserait absolument leurs possibilités, si l’on empêchait la Bulgarie de se joindre à elles ou si on la maintenait dans la neutralité par l’action de la Grèce et de la Roumanie²”. The next day, Sir George Barclay informed Foreign Office that Ion I.C. Brătianu „could not adopt our suggestion” regarding a defensive alliance with Greece and Serbia in the event of Bulgaria’s rejecting the Allies’ proposals: „[...] Roumania, he said, had always intended to enter the war by an attack on Austria-Hungary and not on Bulgaria. He was also skeptical regarding any Greek move against Bulgaria³”.

British diplomacy continued his efforts to persuade Romania to join the Allies. In October 1915, it was taken the decision to open a credit of the Bank of England in favour of the National Bank of Romania. Nicolae Mișu ensured London that „loan would now be granted in the assurance that it would never be used against us or our Allies by his Government”. At the same time, the Romanian Minister at London „was also informed that, should mobilisation be decided on, it could be accompanied by the intimation that it was a precautionary measure called for by the mobilisation of the other Balkan States; otherwise the Central Powers would take advantage (should they not mobilise) of their unpreparedness, and would join with Bulgaria in presenting an ultimatum⁴”. The decision to offer a loan to Romania represents, in our opinion, an indubitable sign that Great Britain was convinced that sooner or later Romania would join the Entente.

The 7th October 1915, Sir George Barclay informed from Bucharest the Foreign Office that „if the Allies would only take steps immediately to establish themselves in force in the Balkan Peninsula, it would only be a question of a few weeks before the Prime Minister decided in favour of intervention on their side”.

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 509-510.

² *Ibidem*.

³ CAB 24/1, *Précis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, September 1 to 28, inclusive, 1915*, Bucharest, No. 597, Sept. 23, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibidem*, G 26a, *Precis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, September 29 to October 5, 1915*, Foreign Office to Bucharest, No. 566, p. 7.

At the same time, the British commercial attaché was warned by Take Ionescu, president of the Democratic-Conservative Party that, „in his opinion, the whole issue of the war would be decided by the progress of events in the Balkans during the next two months, and in view of the unfavourable turn of the events in Bulgaria and Greece, nothing but prompt and determined action on the part of the Allies could save the situation¹”.

Eventually, the lack of determination of the Allies proved to be disastrous to the fate of Serbia. The 5th October 1915, the army of the Central Powers under the command of general Falkenhayn started a vigorous offensive against the Serbian Army. A few days later, Bulgaria declared war to Serbia. Thus, the Serbian Army was forced to withdraw towards South and was finally transported by the Allied fleet to the island of Corfu. The failure of the Entente to help Serbia and also to preclude Bulgaria to join the Central Powers represented a serious coup for the image of the Allies in the Balkans.

The newspapers from England and France criticized the allied diplomacy. “Le Sémaphore de Marseille”, printed by “L’Éclair des Balkans”, the 15th October 1915, pointed out that „La diplomatie de la Quadruple-Entente a commis dans les Balkans une faute grave; elle se doit à elle-même et elle doit aux peuples dont elle veut server les intérêts de la reconnaître pour la réparer²”. The French newspaper emphasized that: „L’idée de réaliser à nouveau l’union balkanique apparaissait donc comme une chimère à tous ceux qui connaissaient bien la question. C’est à la poursuite de cette chimère pourtant que les diplomates de la Quadruple-Entente se sont acharné depuis de longs mois³”. In the end it was pointed that: „Or, que voient les Grecs et les Roumains: d’un coté la décision germanique de l’autre l’indécision alliée, d’un côté les actes et de l’autre les palabres⁴”.

The proposition of Great Britain that Romania mobilizes „at once on the Bulgarian frontier and let the Bulgarian Government knows that she would regard attacks on Serbia as an unfriendly act⁵” was rejected by Ion I.C. Brătianu. The British proposition contained also the necessity of an „immediate declaration of

¹ *Ibidem*, G 26 (b), *Precis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, October 5 to 14, 1915*, Bucharest, No. 637, Oct. 7, p. 8.

² “L’Éclair des Balkans”, Mercredi, 28 octobre/10 novembre 1915, *La victoire dans les Balkans*, p. 2.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Precis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, October 5 to 14, 1915*, Foreign Office to Bucharest, No. 577, Oct. 12, p. 16.

war by Roumania and Greece against the Austro-Germans and Bulgaria¹". In that event, London promised „to sign forthwith a military convention with Romania whereby Great Britain will guarantee to bring into action in the Balkan theatre, not including the forces already in Gallipoli, an army of at least 200,000 men²". In the reply to the British note, the Romanian Prime Minister showed that the rejection of the proposal made by the Foreign Office had the following reasons: „(1.) It involved what for two or three months could be no more than a demonstration on our part, during which period Romania would have to fight unsupported. (2.) He was more than ever convinced from his latest information that Greece would not move with us at this moment. (3.) The strength of the force we offered was insufficient to bring up the total arrayed on our side to the available forces of our enemies³".

Later, the Foreign Office instructed Sir George Barclay to associate himself with his French and Russian colleague in the request to the Romanian Government to consent to the passage of Russian troops through Romanian territory⁴. In the light of the information which indicated the fact that Romania „would probably refuse the request if made now", Sir Edward Grey transmitted to Sazonov that „it would therefore desirable to say nothing till all was ready, and then simply notify the Romanian Government⁵". At the same time, London considered that „Russian troops should not pass through Romanian territory without an arrangement with the Romanian Government⁶".

Until the summer of 1916, the negotiations of the Allies with Romania didn't improve too much. The Allies and especially Russia wasn't willing to accept the demands of the Romanian Government led by Ion I.C. Brătianu. London didn't involve directly in these negotiations carried out by Petrograd and she only supported the proposals of France and Russia. The difficult situation at Verdun determined French diplomacy to take the lead of the negotiations and put pressure on the Romanian Government for an immediate intervention. France

¹ *Ibidem*, Foreign Office to Athens, No. 884, Oct. 12.

² *Ibidem*.

³ CAB 24/1, *Precis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, October 14-21, 1915*, Bucharest, No. 659, Oct. 16, p. 4.

⁴ CAB 24/1, *Precis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, October 21-25, 1915*, Foreign Office to Bucharest, No. 597, Oct. 23, p. 5.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁶ CAB 24/1, *Precis of Documents and Proceedings connected with the Political and Military Developments in the Balkan Peninsula, October 25-30, 1915*, Bucharest, No. 676, Oct. 25, p. 3.

took also care to convince Russia to accept the demands of Ion I.C. Brătianu. In these circumstances, it was signed a political and military convention between the Entente and Romania, the 17th August 1916¹. At 27th August 1916, Romania declared war to Austria-Hungary and the Romanian Army entered in Transylvania².

The interest of Great Britain in the Romanian intervention into the war beside the Allies lies in two considerations: the military offensive of the Central Powers against Serbia who provoked the defeat of the Serbian Army and her withdraw in the Corfu island; the German pressure on the Western Front who could be diminished only by a new front of combat in the East.

¹ “*The Treaty under which Romania entered the War*” in “*Current History*” (New York), 10:1:2 (1919:May), pp.346-348; an analysis of the political and military convention from 17th August 1916 see at Dumitru Preda, *România și Antanta. Avatarurile unei mici puteri într-un război de coaliție. 1916-1917*, Iași, Institutul European, 1998. pp. 81-85.

² Constantin Kirișescu, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României. 1916-1919*, București, ediția II-a, Editura Casei Școalelor, f.a., pp. 182-184