

Romania, Bulgaria and the Dobrujan Issue in the First Year of the Great War (1914-1915)

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Abstract

The problem of the Dobrujan land frontier between the Bulgarian and Romanian national states, which officially came up after the San Stefano and Berlin (1878) peace treaties and was aggravated by the Peace of Bucharest (1913), dominated the bilateral relations for a few decades. The hereby study focuses on the period August 1914 – September 1915, when both South-Eastern European states were neutral towards the Great War. This context led to various proposals, projects and scenarios concerning the Romanian-Bulgarian relations and implicitly related to the fate of Dobruja. Our effort deals with three levels: the positions of the Great Powers, their relations with Bucharest and Sofia, and the direct relations between the two South-Eastern European states. Chronologically, this period is divided into several stages, marked by the Ottoman Empire's entry in the war (1 November 1914), the deadlock of the negotiations between Bulgaria and the Entente (March 1915), Italy's option to renounce neutrality (23 May 1915) and the onset of the final talks concerning Bulgaria's option to join the Central Powers (July 1915). Among the most relevant sources, we need to mention the Romanian Military Archives from Pitești and the works of synthesis written by the Bulgarian historians Georgi Markov, Ivan Ilčev and Žeko Popov, dealing with the period 1913-1919.

Keywords: territorial claims, European context, evaluations (forecasts), contacts, negotiations, agreements.

The end of Ottoman rule in the Balkans meant, among other things, the beginning of rivalries between the movements and then the nation-states of South-Eastern Europe, having the stake in the division of former possessions of the declining empire. Among the territorial problems that arose in this part of Europe, in the conditions of the decline and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, is that of Dobruja, which, roughly speaking, dominated the Romanian-Bulgarian relations since the end of the Russian-Romanian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, until the Second World War.¹ The beginning of the First World War placed the Romanian-Bulgarian territorial dispute over Dobruja in a new context, particularly complex and dramatic. As, for more than a year, both Romania and Bulgaria were neutral, during this period numerous plans, projects and scenarios

¹ A useful working tool for knowing and understanding the contemporary Bulgarian historiographical perspective on this issue: Constantin Iordan, *Dobrogea (1878-1940) în istoriografia bulgară post-comunistă [Dobruja (1878-1940) in post-communist Bulgarian historiography]*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2013, 326 pages.

were circulated regarding the evolution of the Romanian-Bulgarian relations and the possibilities of solving the Dobruja problem, within broader combinations and arrangements.

The period between the outbreak of the conflagration and the entry of Bulgaria into the war (15/28 July 1914 / 27 October 1915) is marked by several more important events:

- the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war (1 November 1914);
- the Macedonian rebellion (March 1915), concomitant with the beginning of the fighting at Gallipoli;
- Italy's entry into the war (10/23 May 1915);
- conclusion of the secret treaty of alliance between Bulgaria and the Central Powers (24 August / 6 September 1915).

Following the Treaty of Berlin, signed on 1/13 July 1878, most of Dobruja (northern and central areas), with an area of 15,625 km², became part of the Romanian state, while the southern part reverted to Bulgaria, which was to gain full independence in 1908. The verdict issued by the European Areopagus has aroused dissatisfaction in both states, which, in combination with other factors, will negatively affect bilateral relations, except for the years of Stefan Stambulov government (1887-1894). In parallel, both parts of post-Ottoman Dobruja experienced important economic, social and ethno-demographic changes at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the next.

Thus, immediately after 1878, Romanian Dobruja was a province impoverished and devastated by wars and epidemics, with a sparse population, in total, in 1880, about 150,000 inhabitants of which 31% Turkish-Tartars, 27.5% Romanians and 20 % Bulgarians, but after three and a half decades, the population of the province amounted to 384,000 inhabitants, of which 56.2% ethnic Romanians, 13.4% Bulgarians and 11% Turkish-Tatars. Constanta had become the main port of Romania, linked with the territories of the left bank of the Danube by the railway to Cernavoda, continued by the famous bridge built under the guidance of engineer Anghel Saligny (b.1854-d.1925); also, Dobruja was the most urbanized province among the four of the Romanian kingdom and the only one in which the share of Romanian ethnics was higher in cities than in villages.² At the same time, in the southern part of Dobruja, initially inhabited by an overwhelming Turkish-Tatar majority, the ethno-demographic share of the Bulgarians was growing rapidly, as well as, even faster, their share in the economic and social life.³

The latent Romanian-Bulgarian dispute reappeared in the forefront of political and diplomatic events on the old continent in the context of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), when, invoking geopolitical and geostrategic reasons, Romania openly demanded the modification of the land border with Bulgaria. After a series of postponements, failures and semi-failures, the government in Bucharest, led by Titu Maiorescu (b.1840-d.1917), achieved this goal, following the Second Balkan War, through the treaty concluded on 28 July / 10 August 1913, right in the capital of Romania.

In the summer of 1913, Romania obtained a territory of 7,700 km², called *Cadrilater*, due to its almost quadrilateral shape, or *New Dobruja*, to distinguish it from *Old Dobruja*, obtained by Romania in 1878, or *Southern Dobruja*. The population of the region was, according to a Bulgarian statistic from 1912, of 282,207 inhabitants, of which 48.1% Turkish-Tatars, 43.1% Bulgarians (including Gagauz, Christian-Orthodox Turks who speak Bulgarian), 4% Gypsies, 2.3

² George Ungureanu, Cornel Popescu, "Modernizare și românizare în Dobrogea post-otomană" ["Modernization and Roumanianization in post-Ottoman Dobruja"], in the volume *Românii și Europa (secolele XIV-XX) [Romanians and Europe (14th-20th centuries)]*, coordinating editor: Constantin Augustus Bărbulescu, Cluj-Napoca, Mega Publishing House, 2014, pp. 57-65.

³ *Ibidem*.

% Romanians.⁴ Almost identical percentage weights also indicate a pro-Bulgarian North American statistic from 1919, quoted by the Italian researcher Alberto Basciani.⁵ However, the economic and social realities in the area were much more favorable to the Bulgarian ethnics than the demographic ones, which was to considerably hinder the efforts of the Romanian authorities to integrate the area in their own national-state edifice. The loss of Southern Dobruja in 1913 aroused in the Bulgarians a feeling of frustration much more intense than the satisfaction felt by the Romanians, marking the opening of a new chapter of territorial litigation with the Romanian state.

At the turn of 1913 and 1914, the conservative and Germanophile government of Titu Maiorescu was replaced, by the will of the old king Carol I (b.1839-d.1914; 1866-1914, until 1881, prince), with the liberal government led by Ion I. C. Brătianu (b.1864-d.1927), an antantophile.⁶

In Bulgaria, the pro-Austrian liberal government led by Vasil Radoslavov (b.1854-d. 1929), set up in the hot days of July 1913 and reshuffled a few months later, succeeded, by not exactly orthodox but unusual means in the Balkans, to secure a parliamentary majority, following the January 1914 elections.⁷ Although inclined to the Central Powers, Radoslavov sent as diplomatic representatives to Paris, London and St. Petersburg three prestigious personalities, namely: Dmitry Stančov (b.1863-d.1940), Mikhail Madžarov (b.1854-d.1944) and, respectively, General Ratko Dimitriev (b.1859-d.1918).⁸ However, this did not change Bulgaria's position on the European political and diplomatic scene. Tsar Nikolaj II (1894-1917) told Ratko Dimitriev that the improvement of Bulgaria's relations with Greater Russia depended on the evolution of relations between Sofia and Belgrade, and a much-needed loan to Bulgaria, after laborious negotiations with France, was finally granted by Germany.⁹

After the conclusion of the Third Peace in Bucharest (28 July / 10 August 1913), Romania promoted a policy of balance in the Balkans. In October 1913, Take Ionescu (b.1858-d.1922) managed to settle the Greco-Ottoman tensions, which threatened to lead to the third Balkan War.¹⁰ At the beginning of 1914, Ion I. C. (Ionel) Brătianu rejected the offers of his counterparts his Serb, Nikola Pašić (b.1845-d.1926), and the Greek, Eleutherios Venizelos (b.1864-d.1936), to conclude a regional alliance against Bulgaria.¹¹ Romanian government also let unanswered the polls undertaken by the Radoslavov government¹² regarding a Romanian-Bulgarian rapprochement under the aegis of the Central Powers.

In the same regional context, in February 1914, the Romanian Minister in Sofia, Gheorghe Derussi (b.1870-d.1931), had a meeting with Nikola Genadiev (b.1868-d.1923), former

⁴ Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Craiova Treaty* fund, vol. I, leaf 261; Simion Mehedinți, "Observations on Dobruja", in "Convorbiri literare", Bucharest, LI, 1919, pp. 78-79.

⁵ Alberto Basciani, *Un conflitto balcanico. La contesa fra Bulgaria e Romania in Dobrugia del Sud*, Conseza, Editura Periferia, 2001, pp. 43-44.

⁶ *Istoria României în date [History of Romania in data]*, coord: acad. Dinu C. Giurescu, 3rd edition, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 2010, pp. 323-324.

⁷ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Istoria Balcanilor (1804-1945)*, [*History of Balkans (1804-1945)*], translated by Andreea Doica, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2002, p. 201.

⁸ Ivan Ilčev, *Bălgarija i Antantata prez p̄rvata svetovna vojna*, [*Bulgaria and the Entente during the First World War*] Sofia, State Publishing House for Science and Art, 1990, p. 36.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰ C. Iordan, *Venizelos și românii [Venizelos and Romanians]*, second edition, Bucharest, Omonia Publishing House, 2010, pp. 116-119

¹¹ *Istoria politicii externe românești în date*, [*History of the Romanian foreign policy in data*], coord. I. Calafeteanu, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 2003, p. 210.

¹² *Ibidem*.

head of Bulgarian diplomacy in the second half of 1913.¹³ In talks with the Romanian diplomat, the Bulgarian politician tried to convince him that Bulgaria had resigned itself to the loss of Southern Dobruja, hoping to win Romania's friendship. Asked about the possibility of Bulgaria joining the Triple Alliance, N. Genadiev offered an evasive answer.¹⁴

The summer of 1914 found, however, the Romanian-Bulgarian relations, in a phase of strong tensions, manifested mainly by a series of border incidents, resulting in several dead and several wounded and seasoned with press controversies, partly occasioned by the visit of Tsar Nikolaj II to Constanța, by the words of praise of the Russian sovereign for the conduct of Romania in the Balkan wars, but especially by the acceptance of the title of honorary commander of the 5th Cavalry Regiment, stationed at Bazargic (Dobritch), in Southern Dobruja.¹⁵

Ever since the outbreak of the conflagration that was to become global, both belligerent blocs have sought to attract both Romania and Bulgaria. However, there were differences in the approach to the relationship with the two Danubian-Pontical states, within each military bloc.

Thus, among the Powers of the Entente, Tsarist Russia was more reluctant to Romania and insisted on an ethnic, linguistic, religious and geopolitical approach to the southern Slavs, Serbs and Bulgarians ("the danger of Germanism"). On 5 August 1914, the head of Russian diplomacy, Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov (b.1860-d.1927), proposed to Nikola Pašić to form an alliance with Bulgaria, to which he would cede part of Vardarian Macedonia, according to the 1912 bilateral agreement (area to the SE of the Ohrid-Veles-Kriva Palanka line). In the event of a victory of the Entente, the concessions made to the allied Bulgaria could, in Sazonov's view, be even more substantial, including the whole of Vardarian Macedonia, with Serbia to be compensated at the expense of Austria-Hungary. If Bulgaria boiled down to benevolent neutrality towards Serbia and the Entente, then the concessions were to be limited to the Štip-Radovište-Kočani region. On suggestions from St. Petersburg (Petrograd), the head of the Serbian government gives a long and ambiguous answer, alluding to East Thrace (Ottoman) and Dobruja.¹⁶

In fact, as the Balkanologist Stevan K. Pavlowitch noticed in the summer of 1914, "the Russophilia of the Bulgarian population had not completely died out,"¹⁷ a fact known to Russian diplomats and politicians who made statements and launched initiatives accordingly. For example, the Armenian prince (*kneaz*) Abamalek Lazarëv (b.1857-d.1916), a famous Russian archaeologist, geologist and anthropologist, published, shortly after the outbreak of the war, in Petrograd, the pamphlet entitled "Conditions for a Glorious and lasting Peace."¹⁸ According to Prince A. Lazarëv, the recognition of Romanian aspirations in Transylvania had to be linked to the return of Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria, a gesture considered essential for good solidarity and

¹³ Tašo V. Tašev, *Ministrite na Bălgarija (1879-1999). Enciklopedičen spravočnik [The ministers of Bulgaria (1879-1999). Encyclopedic guide-book]*, Sofia, Academic Publishing House „Profesor Marin Drinov” & Ministry of Defence Publishing House „Saint George, The Bearer of Victory”, 1999, pp. 111-112, 570.

¹⁴ C. Iordan, *Dobrogea (1878-1940)...*, p. 71

¹⁵ Romanian Military Archives - Pitesti (hereinafter, R.M.A.-P will be cited), General Military Staff (hereinafter, G.M.S. will be cited) - *Section 2 Information*, fund, file no. crt. 277/1914, *passim*.

¹⁶ Georgi Markov, *Goljamata vojna i Bălgarskijat ključ za evropenskijat pogreb (1914-1916) [The Great War and the Bulgarian key of the European treasure]*, Sofia, Academic Publishing House „Profesor Marin Drinov”, 1995, p. 52.

¹⁷ St. K. Pavlowitch, *op.cit.*, p. 201

¹⁸ A copy of the brochure can be found at R.M.A. - P., G.M.S.. - *Office of Military Attachés (1896-1941)*, file no. crt. 40/1914, leaves 3-20 (on leave 20, there is an ethnic map of Europe, from which the Bessarabian Romanians, not even mentioned as "Moldovans") are almost completely missing).

Romanian-Bulgarian neighborhood: regarding Vardarian Macedonia, the author was less categorical and recommended some concessions in favor of Bulgaria in the Ohrid and Monastir areas.¹⁹ Russian nationalist MP Pavel N. Krupenski advanced the idea of an exchange of territories: Romania to return to Bulgaria Southern Dobruja, obtained in 1913, receiving in return, from Russia, Southern Bessarabia (Bessarabia, in the original sense of the word), under the conditions of Russian supremacy recognition in the Strait area.²⁰

On 18 September / 1 October 1914, in the Russian imperial capital, the Sazonov-Diamandy agreement was concluded, through which the Great Power of the East recognized the right of Romanian state to annex its territories populated by the Romanian ethnics, under the rule of Austria-Hungary (rather vague provision).²¹

The head of French diplomacy, Théophile Delcassé (b.1852-d.1923), even before the Ottoman Empire entered the war, considered it appropriate for Bulgaria to be promised East Thrace, up to the Enos-Midia line, and Greece, Northern Epirus without Valoon (Vlorë).²² Britain wanted to lure Bulgaria along with the Entente while maintaining Greece's territorial integrity, while Russia demanded that Greece pay part of the price of Bulgaria's rally.²³ Greek Prime Minister E. Venizelos did not respond to suggestions to cede or pledge some Bulgarian territory, "preferring the sparrow in his hand to the dove in the air."²⁴

On the other side of the barricade, German diplomats advised Sofia's leaders to prove their peaceful intentions towards Romania.²⁵ On 26 July / 8 August 1914, at *Ballplatz*, a draft alliance treaty between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria was finalized, which provided for the final renunciation of Bulgaria to Dobruja, as a precondition for the rapprochement with Romania.²⁶ After a few days, the position of the Double Monarchy suffered a certain nuance: to the government of Sofia is sent a draft alliance treaty, with the maintenance of the border in Dobruja, if Romania remained in the same alliance; In case of Romania's alliance with the Entente (Russia), Bulgaria could claim the return of Southern Dobruja.²⁷

The entry into the war of the Ottoman Empire (16/29 October 1914), by the Central Powers, was followed, on 29 October / 11 November 1914, by the transmission of a collective note of the Entente Powers to Bulgaria; due to differences and divergences of Franco-British-Russian interests, it had an inaccurate content,²⁸ being rejected as unsatisfactory by the Bulgarian government on 11 November 1914.²⁹

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, filele 4, 16.

²⁰ Hadrian G. Gorun, *Relatiile politico-diplomatice și militare ale României cu Franța în Primul Război Mondial* [Romania's political-diplomatic and military relations with France in the First World War], Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut Publishing House, 2009, p. 47.

²¹ *Istoria politicii externe românești* [History of the Romanian foreign policy]..., p. 212.

²² I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

²⁴ L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, New York-Chicago-San Francisco-Toronto-London, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963, p. 561.

²⁵ G. Markov, *op.cit.*, p. 53

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

²⁷ Žeko Popov, *Dobrudža (1913-1918): Okupirana, osvobadena, otneta* [Dobruja(1913-1918),occupied, liberated, stolen] Velbuzhd, self-edited, 2008, p. 103.

²⁸ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

²⁹ Vasil Radoslavov, *Bălgarija v svetovna kriza* [Bulgaria within world crisis], introduction by Milen Kumanov, Sofia, Bulgarian Academy for Science Publishing House, 1993, p. 188.

How did the Romanian-Bulgarian relations and the relations of the three states with the other Balkan states evolve in the first three months of the Great War?

On 16/29 July 1914, when the Austro-Hungarian military fleet was bombing Belgrade, King Carol I had a meeting with Al. Marghiloman (b.1854-d.1925), moderate Germanophile and leader of the Conservative Party. During the discussion, the sovereign pointed out that the state of public opinion and the army was anti-Austrian, but considered that a war against the Double Monarchy would have been dishonorable for Romania and expressed fear of a possible coup by Russophiles in Bulgaria, which would have exposed Dobruja to a combined attack of the two Slavic states.³⁰

The day before, the head of government Ion I. C. Brătianu had had a secret meeting with the Bulgarian minister in Bucharest, Simeon Radev (b.1879-d.1967). According to the Bulgarian diplomat, the Romanian Prime Minister offered a benevolent neutrality in the event of Bulgaria's attack on Serbia and demanded that the offer not be sent by telegraph, but verbally, which involved a trip to Sofia; Instead, Brătianu demanded that Bulgaria not raise the issue of Southern Dobruja. On his return from Sofia, Radev sent a positive but conditional response, requesting that the official Romanian declaration of neutrality be made public on the day of the mobilization of the Bulgarian army.³¹

Among many ideas, at that time, Vasil Radoslavov intended to start talks with the Romanian government, in order to conclude a treaty of friendship and mutual aid and to facilitate armament efforts.³² Also, in the first days of the conflagration, the Bulgarian prime minister was dissatisfied with the movements of Turkish troops in Eastern Thrace and Romanian troops in Dobruja.³³

In the Crown Council of Sinaia (21 July / 3 August 1914), a series of references to Bulgaria and the intentions of the government in Sofia were heard, the most categorical coming from Ion Lahovary: "I do not kill Romanians, for Austria to make a Greater Bulgaria, to the detriment of a small Serbia!"³⁴

The next day, Al. Marghiloman has had a meeting with Simeon Radev, who tells him about a discussion with Brătianu; In this way, the Bulgarian diplomat informed the interlocutor that his main objective is Macedonia and that he will pursue a policy of loyalty to Austria-Hungary and friendship to Romania. Radev also refuted rumours of an imminent coup by Russian-speaking Russian forces in the context of Ratko Dimitriev's return from Petrograd, and in turn expressed suspicion of Brătianu's true intentions: "Can I fulfil my mission?" [...] I don't want to play Mr. Kalinkov role" (n.n.: Bulgarian minister in Bucharest during the Balkan wars).³⁵

From Al. Marghiloman's notes, we also know the opinions about Bulgaria expressed by Ion C. Grădișteanu (b.1861-d.1932) and N. Filipescu (b.1862-d.1916), antantophile conservative

³⁰ Al. Marghiloman, *Note politice [Political notes]*, edited by Stelian Neagoe, vol. I, Bucharest, Scripta Publishing House, 1993, p. 158.

³¹ *Izvori za istorijata na Dobrudža, Tom I (1878-1919) [Sources for the history of Dobruja]* editors : Žeko Popov, Kosjo Penčikov, Petăr Todorov, Sofia, Bulgarian Academy for Sciences Publishing House, 1992, *vtoračast (1913-1919) [second part]*, p. 268, doc. 25; see also: G. Markov, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

³² Ž. Popov, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

³³ G. Markov, *op.cit.*, p. 52; see also: Tiberiu Velter, *Marea Britanie și Balcanii. Pagini de diplomatie: 1914-1915 [Great Britain and the Balkans. Diplomacy pages, 1914-1915]*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 2004, p. 19.

³⁴ Ion Mamina, *Consilii de coroană, [Crown Councils]*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1997, p. 36.

³⁵ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, pp.162-163.

leaders. At the meeting of 20 August / 2 September 1914, Grădișteanu considered that a Bulgarian attack on Serbia would be a *casus belli* for Romania. N. Filipescu considered the territorial enlargement of Bulgaria inevitable, a fact possible both in case of German victory, in order to isolate and weaken Serbia, as well as in case of victory of the Entente, but in this eventuality, with the compensation of Serbia on behalf of Austria-Hungary, for the cessions made to Bulgaria (Bosnia and Herzegovina against Vardarian Macedonia).³⁶ Three weeks later, N. Filipescu was convinced that Bulgaria would not attack Romania in the event of its war against Austria-Hungary, and on 17/30 September at the meeting of the Conservative Party's Steering Committee, he stated that it was possible to involve Bulgaria on the side of the Entente. Therefore, it was necessary for Romania to start a bilateral alliance with the southern neighbor even, under the aegis of the Entente, including the participation of a Bulgarian division in the war effort.³⁷

In Istanbul, Turkish leaders expected an Ottoman-Bulgarian-Romanian collaboration in favor of the Central Powers. In this sense, Enver Pasha (b.1881-d.1922), the main craftsman of the Ottoman Empire's rally to the cause of the Central Powers, addressed Vasil Radoslavov, who, however, expressed some uncertainties about the type of neutrality adopted by Romania, at 21 July / 3 August 1914.³⁸ On 6/19 August 1914, in Sofia, a secret treaty of alliance and friendship was signed between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. The text of this official document stated in Article V: "Bulgaria declares that the provisions of this Treaty concerning its entry into an offensive, in cooperation with Turkey, may not enter into force until Bulgaria has secured enough guarantees from Romania, either through a Bulgarian-Turkish-Romanian tripartite agreement, or through a special Romanian-Bulgarian agreement, based on neutrality."³⁹ In parallel, the Russophobic newspaper "Kambana" (The Bell), led by Krastjo Stančev, a cousin of Christian (Hristo) Rakovski (b.1873-d.1941),⁴⁰ launched a call for Romanian-Bulgarian solidarity because of the expansionists trends of tsarist Russia.⁴¹

In fact, the decision-makers in Sofia had taken the initiative of surveys by their Romanian counterparts. With the news and approval of the government of Vasil Radoslavov, on 8/21 August 1914, King Ferdinand I of Saxe-Coburg Gotha (b.1861-d.1948, 1887-1918, until 1908 prince), sent a telegram to Carol I of Romania; the document does not mention Dobruja, but insists on the need to face together the challenges of the international context.⁴² According to Vasil Radoslavov, in his response, the Romanian sovereign would have sent thanks and assurances of devotion, which was not enough to initiate direct (and fruitful) negotiations between the two states. This result of the Bulgarian king's approach is attributed by V. Radoslavov to Bratianu's policy, considered oscillating and duplicitous, King Carol I expecting a German victory, which would convince his prime minister to accept the rally to the Central Powers.⁴³ However, researcher Žeko Popov writes that, in his reply to the message of Ferdinand I of Bulgaria, Carol I of Romania would have asked for peace in the Dobruja border.⁴⁴

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 185-187, 193.

³⁸ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁹ Veličko Georgiev, Stajko Trifonov (editors), *Istoriija na Bălgarite 1878-1944 v dokumenti [History of Bulgarians (1878-1944) in documents]*, T. II (1912-1918), Sofia, Prosveta Publishing House, 1996, pp. 376-377.

⁴⁰ Information personally communicated to the author by Mr. Daniel Cain, researcher at the Institute of South-Eastern European Studies at the Romanian Academy.

⁴¹ R.M.A. – P., *G.M.S.-Section 2 Information fund*, file no. crt. 277/1914, leaf 317.

⁴² V. Radoslavov, *op. cit.*, p. 97(full text of the telegram).

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

⁴⁴ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

During the period of Romania's neutrality, a series of secret meetings took place between Ion I. C. Brătianu and Al. Marghiloman. During the confidential discussions between the two-party leaders, with different visions regarding the country's internal and foreign policy, solutions were sought in order to obtain, from the two belligerent blocs, favorable terms for Romania. For Brătianu, Bulgaria represented, in August 1914, a factor of uncertainty, being considered a potential threat, both in the event of Romania's rally to the Entente, and of the alliance with the Central Powers.⁴⁵ In the discussion with Marghiloman, held on 7/20 August 1914, in the house of the lawyer and diplomat Victor Antonescu (b.1871-d.1947), Brătianu mentions some Bulgarian proposals, to which he would have responded with the request to specify if Bulgaria considers Romania's disinterest in the Macedonian issue as a sufficiently important friendly gesture.⁴⁶

On 12/25 September 1914, the head of the Romanian government was inflexible on the Dobruja issue, in a discussion with Simeon Radev, emphasizing the importance for Romania of a broad exit to the Black Sea and advising the rulers in Sofia, through the Bulgarian minister in Bucharest, to seek territorial expansion in Macedonia and the Aegean Sea. Eight days later, Vasil Radoslavov instructed Simeon Radev to talk "little and rarely" about Bulgaria's neutrality, in order to obtain a much better price in exchange for this attitude.⁴⁷

At the end of September, the Bulgarian Ministry of War, General Ivan Fičev (b.1860-d.1931), declared to the Romanian charge d'affaires in Sofia, Al. Gurbănescu, that the return of Dobruja (Southern Dobruja, our note.) to Bulgaria is the precondition for any bilateral arrangement, especially for a cooperation agreement.⁴⁸ V. Radoslavov himself had raised the issue, before the representatives of the Central Powers, on 22 September / 5 October 1914, that, in exchange for neutrality and abstention from the war against Romania, Bulgaria should be territorially rewarded in Dobruja; on the same day, Count Forgacsi, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Double Monarchy, concluded that "Bulgaria and Romania accuse each other and neutralize (their) actions". He also believed that Romania would not attack Bulgaria if the latter would go to offensive in Vardarian Macedonia, against Serbia.⁴⁹

Bulgaria's interest in Vardarian Macedonia, which was in the possession of Serbia, was a factor that diminished Romanian fears about the southern neighbor's conduct, with assurances from Russia.⁵⁰

But also from Petrograd, there came suggestions in the sense of territorial concessions to Bulgaria, which were rejected by Ion I. C. Brătianu, invoking the importance of Dobruja for Romania, in very categorical sentences ("you can live without Transylvania! But not without Dobruja!"), as well as the possible effect of some territorial promises ("The promise of small territorial restitutions, would make unrealizable hopes be born in Bulgarians").⁵¹

Turkey's entry into the war by the Central Powers, recorded *de facto* on 16/29 October 1914, by the participation of Turkish military vessels in the attack on Sevastopol,⁵² offered the

⁴⁵ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, p. 165 (note from 30 July / 12 August 1914) and p. 168 (note from 7/20 August 1914).

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 77-78.

⁴⁸ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁴⁹ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁵¹ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, p. 215 (note dated 12/25 October 1914).

⁵² Mircea N. Popa, *Primul Război Mondial (1914-1918) [The First World War (1914-1918)]*, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1979, pp. 195-196, 484.

Entente Powers the opportunity to make offers to Bulgaria involving the owning of East Thracian territories. However, Bulgaria's most important and pressing demands were on Macedonia, and Dobruja was not missing from the list of Bulgarian claims.

On 4 November 1914, the Russian minister in Sofia, Al. Saviski, received from Sergei Sazonov the disposition not to forget the territorial compensation of Bulgaria, in case of alliance of the small Slavic state with the Romanian state; previously, the Russian diplomat promised Bulgarian hosts support for the regaining of Southern Dobruja, without Silistra, by applying the St. Petersburg Protocol (26 April / 9 May 1913).⁵³

On 12 November 1914, the head of British diplomacy, Sir Edward Gray (b.1862-d.1933), asked his Russian counterpart to urge the Serbian refugee government in Niš to renounce the whole of Vardarian Macedonia in favour of Bulgaria, following that Serbia to receive Bosnia, Herzegovina and direct access to the Adriatic Sea.⁵⁴ On 24 November the Entente promised Bulgaria compensation for benevolent neutrality, but at the end of the war,⁵⁵ and the collective verbal note of 9 December 1914 provided for concessions in Macedonia and Thrace, Dobruja being qualified by Al. Saviski as "a problem of Bulgaria".⁵⁶ At the same time, in December 1914, the new Russian minister in Serbia, Prince Trubetskoi, devised a plan according to which, in exchange for benevolent neutrality, Bulgaria would obtain, at the end of the war, the whole of Vardarian Macedonia (provided Serbia won Bosnia and Herzegovina), part of Southern Dobruja (Dobritch and Balchik areas), as well as Eastern Thrace, up to the Enos-Midia line.⁵⁷

In reply to the Entente's offers, on December 16, 1914, in a speech held in *Săbranje* (Parliament), Vasil Radoslavov shows that, in exchange for neutrality, only minimal concessions can be obtained; The head of the Bulgarian government mentions Macedonia twice, and the Kavalla-Dramos-Serres region only once, without making any reference to Dobruja.⁵⁸

In the winter of 1914-1915, as a result of the lobby undertaken by Noel Buxton (b.1869-d.1948), Britain's interest in attracting Bulgaria to the Entente increased; To this end, at the end of 1914, G. Trevelyan (b.1876-d.1962) and R. Seaton-Watson (b.1879-d.1957) were sent to Niš and Bucharest, respectively, with the mission to urge compromises with Bulgaria in the context of David Lloyd George's (b.1863-d.1945) plans to initiate a landing in Thessaloniki.⁵⁹

The Bulgarian demands in relation to the Entente remained exorbitant. Thus, on 29 January 1915, in response to a report from the diplomat Pančo Hadžimišev (b.1874-d.1957), M. Madžarov's successor as minister in London, who showed that, in exchange for benevolent neutrality, Bulgaria could regain, with the help of the Entente, "the lost parts of Macedonia and Dobruja", V. Radoslavov expresses himself very categorically: "Not to negotiate, but only to repeat what neutral Bulgaria has made, in its time, all the sacrifices for which it has to get in exchange Dobruja, Macedonia and Kavalla!"⁶⁰ The Bulgarian claims on Macedonia and Dobruja, in exchange of the benevolent neutrality towards the Entente, are reiterated by V. Radoslavov in the instructions sent in February 1915 to P. Hadžimišev and D. Stančov.⁶¹ However, Mikhail Madžarov

⁵³ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁵⁴ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁵⁵ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*

⁵⁷ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁵⁸ V. Georgiev, St. Trifonov, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

⁵⁹ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁶⁰ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.

⁶¹ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

was sceptical about obtaining the concerted support of the Entente Powers over Dobruja, especially after the United Kingdom granted a loan to Romania.⁶²

In the same month (February 1915), two meetings of Hadžimišev with David Lloyd George took place. At the first meeting, the British politician promises Bulgaria, in exchange for an alliance, with a view to starting operations in the Dardanelles, the whole of Vardarian Macedonia, Southern Dobruja and East Thrace, up to the Enos-Midia line. The second meeting brought with it an amendment: Kavalla and the whole of Dobruja were still promised, but on the condition that Russia gave up Bessarabia, in favor of Romania.⁶³

In the spring of 1915, the current state of South-Eastern Europe was dominated by the operations undertaken by the Entente at the Dardanelles, which ended in a resounding failure. This failure, in the opinion of L. S. Stavrianos precipitated Bulgaria's focus on the Central Powers, driven by the fact that these ones could offer more on the account of Serbia than the opposing coalition.⁶⁴ Guy Gauthier also links the final choice of the Bulgarian King Ferdinand and the Radoslavov government to the events of March 1915, but from a partially different perspective: "When, in March 1915, the Franco-British declared that, in case of victory, they supported the Russian claims on Constantinople, the blow was strongly felt by Ferdinand I. The Central Powers could not promise Constantinople, but at least they could assure him that Bulgaria would be able to annex the entire Serbian part of Macedonia and that, should Romania and Greece choose the Entente, it would be possible to return to the San Stefano borders." Romanian researcher Constantin Iordan notes that negotiations between Bulgaria and the Entente were interrupted in the spring of 1915, (and) as a result of the bloody incidents in Vardarian Macedonia, where a rebellion initiated by local pro-Bulgarian armed groups had been severely suppressed by the Serbs.⁶⁵

Between November 1914 and March 1915, the talks between the Brătianu government and the representatives of the Entente, concerning the South-Eastern Europe, were dominated by the problem of attracting Bulgaria to a regional combination favorable to France, Great Britain and Russia and the opportunity and scope of territorial concessions. In general, as we showed in an article published a few years ago, Ion I.C. Brătianu proved a certain flexibility (limited, which is true) regarding Southern Dobruja, but constantly conditioned any territorial concession in favor of Bulgaria, by a prior Bulgarian-Serbian-Greek agreement on Macedonia, a veritable Gordian knot of inter-Balkan relations.⁶⁶ Very eloquent in this sense is the reply given by the ambitious Romanian politician to the Russian diplomat Mikhail Nikolayevich of Giers (b.1856-d.1932), later transmitted to Al. Marghiloman: "You regulate the affairs between Serbs and Bulgarians; I will then settle our affairs with Bulgaria!"⁶⁷.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 134.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, pp. 151-154.

⁶⁴ L. S. Stavrianos, *op. cit.*, p. 560.

⁶⁵ C. Iordan, "Naționalism, comunism, terorism în Balcani. Organizația Revoluționară Internă Macedoneană și sfârșitul lui Todor Aleksandrov" ["Nationalism, communism, terrorism in the Balkans. The Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organization and the End of Todor Aleksandrov"], in Idem, *Minorități etnice în Sud-Estul Europei: dimensiunile unei probleme europene [Ethnic Minorities in Southeastern Europe: The Dimensions of a European Problem]*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2001, pp. 88-89.

⁶⁶ G. Ungureanu, "Ion I. C. Brătianu și încercările Antantei de a crea un bloc balcanic (noiembrie 1914-martie 1915)", [Ion I. C. Brătianu and the Entente project to create a Balkan Bloc (November 1914-March 1915)], in *Argesis. Studii și comunicări. Seria Istorie [Argesis. Studies and Communications. History Series]*, Pitești, Argeș County Museum, XX, 2011, pp. 253-260.

⁶⁷ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, p. 222, note of 27 October / 9 November 1914.

In a summary report prepared and sent to Sofia in April 1915, but referring to the entire period of the last six months, Simeon Radevmade an assessment of the willingness of some Romanian politicians for territorial concessions to Bulgaria. Thus, Take Ionescu agreed that Romania should give up most of the territory obtained in 1913, Nicolae Filipescu appreciated that it was necessary to give up only the Dobritch/Bazargic and Balchik areas, while Emil Costinescu (b.1844-d.1921) was of the opinion that the entire Quadrilateral should be returned and stated that, beyond the inflexibility displayed, Ionel Brătianu would have been, however, willing to cede the Bazargic and Balchik areas.⁶⁸ In the resolution found on the document, the head of the Bulgarian government (who also owned the foreign portfolio), concluded that Romanians were too unwilling to make concessions, including Minister Gh. Derussi at Sofia, limiting himself to general statements such as: “there are possibilities for compromise”.⁶⁹

On 9/22 November 1914, Brătianu accused, in front of Al. Marghiloman, the intransigence of the Serbian and Greek governments in the issue of the redistribution of historical Macedonia, the government in Athens going so far as to threaten Serbia with political and diplomatic retaliation, in case of concessions towards Bulgaria.⁷⁰ The fact that Brătianu insisted on his Greek counterpart, E. Venizelos, for a more conciliatory attitude towards Bulgaria,⁷¹ shows that the head of the Romanian government did not raise the issue of an agreement between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria, only to avoid any territorial concession in Southern Dobruja. In fact, in January 1915, the Greek Prime Minister would accept Sir Edward Gray’s plan to help build the pro-anti-Balkan bloc by ceding to Bulgaria the Kavalla, Dramos and Serres areas in exchange for territorial advantages in Asia Minor, at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.⁷² Meanwhile, Ion I. C. Brătianu had also nuanced his attitude towards Bulgaria, showing himself willing, in a discussion in December with Camille Jean Blondel (b.1854-d.1935), the French minister in Romania, to territorial concessions in Southern Dobruja, but only in exchange for Bulgarian neutrality. However, the Romanian prime minister maintained the precondition for an agreement between Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece on Macedonian territorial issues.⁷³

On 21 January 1915, V. Radoslavov had a discussion with the Romanian diplomat Al. Gurbănescu, on the subject of a bilateral agreement, under the aegis of the Entente, involving the return to Bulgaria of the cities of Dobritch / Bazargic, Balchik and Turtukan / Turtucaia (probably also of Cavarna, not explicitly mentioned, our note), but not of Silistra.⁷⁴ In fact, the Bulgarian prime minister was only conducting a survey on Romania’s availability for territorial concessions and, as a result, did not involve much. In his mind, another plan had taken shape: forcing Russia (by the Central Powers, through war) to return Bessarabia to Romania, which, in its turn, in return, would accept the Bulgarian territorial demands.⁷⁵ In addition, the head of the government in Sofia did not believe in the possibility of Italy or Romania joining the Entente, but only considered it possible to maintain the neutrality of these (former) allies of the Central Powers.⁷⁶ Independent

⁶⁸ *Izvori za istorijata na Dobrudža [Sources for the history of Dobrudža]...., I (1878-1919), vtorá část [second part] (1913-1919), pp. 271-272, doc. 30.*

⁶⁹ *Ibidem.*, pp. 271-272, doc. 30.

⁷⁰ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

⁷¹ H.G. Gorun, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁷² Richard G. Clogg, *Scurtă istorie a Greciei, [A short history of Greece]*, translated by Lia Brad Chisacof, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2006, p. 99.

⁷³ H.G. Gorun, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 110.

or not of this conviction of Vasil Radoslavov, in February 1915, Gheorghe Derussi noticed a decrease in the interest of his Bulgarian interlocutors, for an agreement with Romania.⁷⁷

On 4 March 1915, Nikola Genadiev made a statement before the Council of Ministers, in which he started from the idea that Bulgaria's attack on Serbia was a moral impossibility, and then he presented several potential scenarios. The speaker concluded that the most advantageous option would be the direct involvement of Bulgaria against the Ottoman Empire (the secular enemy), a gesture likely to bring great territorial benefits to the whole of Vardarian Macedonia, part of Aegean Macedonia, and most of Dobruja. South, past East Thrace, to the Enos-Midia line), with Serbia and Romania to be compensated by Austria-Hungary, and Greece by the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁸

Ion I. C. Brătianu also insisted on the Serbian representatives for an agreement with Bulgaria, based on the 1912 treaty, prior to the Balkan Wars; this conduct was perceived as irritating by the Serbian minister in Bucharest, Pavle Marinković (b.1866-d.1925), who did not refrain from noticing, maliciously, that the 1912 treaty, constantly invoked by Brătianu, also included clauses directed against Romania.⁷⁹

In the few months that separated the Ottoman Empire's entry into the war from the episode of the Dardanelles operation, Romanian-Bulgarian relations continued to be burdened by two questions:

- (1) What will Romania do if Bulgaria attacks Serbia?
- (2) What will Bulgaria do if Romania attacks Austria-Hungary?

On 24 October / 6 November 1914, the German minister in Bucharest, *von dem Bussche*, declared to Al. Marghiloman that Brătianu had communicated to Simeon Radev his decision to withdraw the previous assurances regarding Romania's neutrality in case of a Bulgarian attack on Serbia, as well as the decision not to attack Austria-Hungary.⁸⁰ A few days later, S. Radev asked for explicit instructions from Vasil Radoslavov, in case Brătianu would question him about Bulgaria's attitude, in the event of Romania's action against Austria-Hungary. In the reply telegram, sent the next day (30 October / 12 November 1914), the head of the Sofia government instructed the Minister in Bucharest to declare that no decision had been taken in this regard.⁸¹

However, Ionel Brătianu took into account the eventuality of Bulgaria's alliance with the Central Powers. Consequently, at the meetings of November 1914 and January 1915 with the army leadership, a strategy was established according to which the Romanian army was to remain defensive on the border with Bulgaria, the bulk of the forces being directed towards Transylvania.⁸² Notified on 7/20 November 1914 about the change of attitude of Brătianu, in the event of a Bulgarian attack on Serbia, Vasil Radoslavov reaffirmed, before the British Minister in Sofia, Henry Box-Ironside (b.1859-d.1929), the good intentions regarding Romania.⁸³

⁷⁷ A. Basciani, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁷⁸ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁷⁹ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, p. 278 (note dated 10/23 April 1915).

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 212.

⁸¹ *Izvori za istorijata na Dobrudža [Sources for the history of Dobruja]*, T. I (1878-1919)....., *vtora čast [second part] (1913-1919)*, p. 270, doc. 27-28.

⁸² Glenn E. Torrey, *România în Primul Război Mondial [Romania in the First World War]*, translated from English by Dan Criste, Bucharest, Meteor Publishing House, 2014, pp. 36-37

⁸³ C. Iordan, *Venizelos și românii [Venizelos and Romanians]*..., p. 133.

The Romanian-Greek connivance in relation to Bulgaria and its intentions to attack Serbia did not remain without consequences at the level of military developments in the area. Thus, on 27 November / 10 December 1914, the Bulgarian Minister in Berlin, General Petar Markov (b.1858-d.1943), declared to the Secretary of State Gottlieb von Jagow (b.1863-d.1935) that his country was fully sympathetic with the Central Powers, but they could not take action against Serbia unless they received guarantees for the eventuality of a Romanian-Greek conjugate (counter) attack. The German dignitary declined the answer, Bulgaria remained neutral, and the Serbian armies successfully continued their counter-offensive.⁸⁴

In this context, problems also arose in the development of trade and transport activities to or from Bulgaria, on the Romanian territory. On 22 November / 5 December 1914, Simeon Radev complained to Al. Marghiloman that they were hampered by the transit of “goods” and “products” from Central Europe to Bulgaria, and in early 1915 oil, arms, and ammunition shipments towards Bulgaria,⁸⁵ as well as Bulgarian exports to the Western European market, were blocked.⁸⁶

In turn, the Romanian authorities were dissatisfied with Bulgaria’s permissive attitude towards ethnic Turkish groups in the Quadrilater, which allowed them to transit the country of affinity, where, once they arrived, they enlisted as volunteers in the Ottoman army.⁸⁷ The exodus of Dobruja Muslims was a very present theme in the Bulgarian press and propaganda, in addition to a whole series of negative facts imputed to the Romanian administration in Dobruja.⁸⁸

Following the events of March 1915, we previously mentioned, on 10 April 1915, Hadžimišev urged the Sofia government to grant him the power to communicate Bulgaria’s readiness to ally with the Entente and to take military action against The Ottoman Empire, in Eastern Thrace, to obtain, instead, the Enos-Midia line, the undisputed area of Macedonia (Vardarian Macedonia to the Ohrid-Veles-Kriva Palanka line), the Struma Valley and Kavalla, the mediation of the Entente in the Dobruja issue, as well as guarantees against Romania and Greece; In the case of an extension of Serbia to the west, at the expense of Austria-Hungary, the Bulgarian claims increased, targeting the whole of Vardarian Macedonia.⁸⁹ The official proposal made 16 days before, by Sir Edward Gray, included only East Thrace, up to the Enos-Midia line, and the advice for a direct agreement with the Romanian state regarding Dobruja, without any reference to Kavalla or Vardarian Macedonia.⁹⁰

While waiting for a new official proposal from the Entente in April 1915, V. Radoslavov wrote to the Bulgarian Minister in Paris, Dmitry Stančov: "Bulgaria has not given up and will not give up historical and ethnic law, it cannot live without Macedonia, for which it shed so much blood. Bulgaria demands all of Macedonia and Kavalla, Serres, Dramos, Dobruja, as well as the Enos-Midia line. When you speak, do not forget to emphasize these things! Bulgaria will ally with the one that guarantees its right!"⁹¹ All these demands were the price of Bulgaria’s neutrality, not

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 138-139.

⁸⁵ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

⁸⁶ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁸⁷ R.M.A.-P. fond M.St.M.- *Office of Military Attachés (1896-1941)*, file no. crt. 39/1914, leaf 49.

⁸⁸ Al. Marghiloman, *op.cit.*, p. 237 (note dated 17/30 November 1914).

⁸⁹ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁹⁰ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁹¹ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

of the Entente's entry into the war, according to the telegram sent on 15 May 1915, by Vasil Radoslavov to the Bulgarian minister in Constantinople, Nedjalko Kolušev (b.1870-d.1925).⁹²

On 24 April 1915, V. Radoslavov had made the same demands on the Entente, invoking the possibility of the complete annexation of Transylvania and Banat to Romania.⁹³ On 29 April 1915, Sir Edward Gray declared to Hadžimišev that the claims to the disputed areas of Macedonia (the north-western half of Vardarian Macedonia, beyond the Ohrid-Veles-Kriva Palanka line) would meet major difficulties; consequently, the head of British diplomacy reiterated the previous offer (Enos-Midia line) and the recommendation that Bulgaria negotiate directly with Romania on the Dobruja issue.⁹⁴

Irritated by certain references to Bessarabia, on the part of some Romanian (or French or British-Romanian) interlocutors, on 29 April 1915, S.D. Sazanov exclaimed: "If the Romanians continue to come with exaggerated claims, they could lose all of Dobruja, in favor of the Bulgarians and not regain Bessarabia!"⁹⁵ In the opinion of the head of Russian diplomacy, Romania should have returned to Bulgaria the entire territory obtained in 1913, which was considered quite easy; the head of French diplomacy, Th. Delcassé, however, defended Ion I. C. Brătianu, on 14 May 1915.⁹⁶

In parallel, N. Genadiev, on tour in France, spread, on 11-12 / 24-25 May 1915, the following plan: the Entente to persuade Romania to return to Bulgaria Southern Dobruja (except Silistra), and Bulgaria not to attack Romania in the event of the latter joining the war.⁹⁷ Dr. Georgi Nikolov, one of the leaders of the Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organization, wrote on 27 May 1915, from Constantinople, to his comrade-in-arms, Al. Protogerov (b.1867-d.1928): "If Romania does not cede Dobruja to us, then Russia will not cede (recognize, our note) Bukovina."⁹⁸

The possible future foreign policy gestures of Romania were also an object of discussions between the representatives of Bulgaria and those of the Central Powers. Thus, in April 1915, General Andrej Tošev (b.1867-d.1944), the Bulgarian minister in Vienna and future head of government, sent a telegram to V. Radoslavov, reproduced in the latter's memoirs; the sender appreciated that Bulgaria was able to obtain from the Central Powers a written commitment, in the sense of Macedonia's conquest by the Bulgarian state, at the end of the conflagration, in exchange for maintaining a benevolent neutrality that would keep Romania in check.⁹⁹ On 25 April 1915, the head of the Bulgarian government demanded assurances from Germany that, in exchange for benevolent neutrality, Bulgaria should obtain, at the end of the war, the whole of Vardarian Macedonia, as well as if Greece or Romania had joined the Entente, important parts of Aegean Macedonia, respectively Dobruja. In its reply, the German side stated that, in exchange for neutrality, Bulgaria could obtain no more than the "undisputed zone" of Vardarian Macedonia (up to the Ohrid-Veles-Kriva Palanka line), the other territories claimed by Sofia being obtainable only on the path of weapons.¹⁰⁰

⁹² V. Radoslavov, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106; G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 127; see also *Izvori za istorijata na Dobrudža, I...*, *vtora čast*, p. 273, doc. 31 (V. Radoslavov's telegram to D. Stančov, dated 4 May 1915).

⁹³ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

⁹⁴ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁹⁵ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

⁹⁷ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁹⁸ C. Iordan, *Dobruja (1878-1940)...*, p. 111.

⁹⁹ V. Radoslavov, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

In the spring of 1915, there were direct Romanian-Bulgarian contacts. On 29 April Brătianu told Simeon Radev that he was ready to start talks “for a joint action of the two states”; Unsurprisingly, V. Radoslavov made it a precondition for the application of the St. Petersburg Protocol of 26 April / 9 May 1913 (the recapture of Southern Dobruja by Bulgaria, with the exception of Silistra): “If this problem is solved, we can conclude a defensive alliance!”¹⁰¹

Italy's entry into the war on 10/23 May 1915, (initially only) against Austria-Hungary, in exchange for predictable promises regarding the Adriatic coast, further reduced Serbia's willingness for territorial concessions in other areas (Macedonia). This fact, corroborated with the magnitude of the demands expressed by the Bulgarians in the discussions with the representatives of the Entente, against the background of the serious defeats suffered by the Russian armies,¹⁰² led to a new regional context, very unfavorable to the intentions of Bulgaria to win the Entente.

On 16/19 May 1915, the Entente Powers submitted a collective note to the government in Sofia. In exchange for Bulgaria's entry into the war against the Ottoman Empire, they were promised:

- Eastern Thrace, up to the Enos-Midia line;
- The “undisputed area” of Vardarian Macedonia (the South-Eastern half of the today territory of North Macedonia, our note), at the end of the war, provided that Serbia obtains Bosnia, Herzegovina and exit to the Adriatic Sea;
- diplomatic efforts to persuade the Greek government to cede Kavalla, and Greece to receive compensation in Anatolia;
- the facility of direct Romanian-Bulgarian negotiations, in the Dobruja issue;
- granting financial aid.¹⁰³

In fact, the Franco-Russian divergences regarding Bulgaria, in particular, the Romanian-Bulgarian territorial dispute, continued to manifest itself in July 1915, and Th. Delcassé was reluctant to Sazonov's suggestions, which supported Sofia's point of view.¹⁰⁴

The Entente's offers were far below the level of Bulgarian claims. Thus, according to Ivan Ilčev, at the beginning of the summer of 1915, prestigious Bulgarian politicians posed the problem of obtaining the whole of historical Macedonia, of Pomoravia (Serbian Timoc / Krajna-Morava-Timok area), of North Dobruja (the southern one was probably taken for granted), as well as part of Kosovo; there were also heated heads (the expression belongs to the quoted Bulgarian historian: *gorešti glavi*), who dreamed of the coronation of a Bulgarian prince in Albania.¹⁰⁵

The Romanian government did not react directly and explicitly to the gesture of the Entente of 16/29 May 1915. In the opinion of academician Georgi Markov, the best contemporary Bulgarian specialist in World War I, in the spring of 1915, Brătianu was striving to obtain for his country, Transylvania and Banat, without making any concessions in Dobruja.¹⁰⁶ However, the above assessment should be (at least) nuanced, in the light of diplomatic events in June 1915. Thus, at the beginning of the first calendar summer month, the head of the Romanian government

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*; see also Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹⁰² M. N. Popa, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-281.

¹⁰³ V. Georgiev, St. Trifonov, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

¹⁰⁴ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁶ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

agreed to the return to Bulgaria of the Bazargic / Dobritch and Balchik,¹⁰⁷ and on 23 June, the same Brătianu conveyed to Sazonov that he accepted the return to Bulgaria of the entire Southern Dobruja territory lost two years before; According to the Romanian Prime Minister, in exchange for this concession, Bulgaria had to moderate its claims against Serbia, which, in turn, had to accept the annexation of the entire Banat to the Romanian state.¹⁰⁸ In parallel, the representatives of the Entente evoked, in front of the Bulgarian interlocutors, the possibility of applying the St. Petersburg Protocol (26 April / 9 May 1913), with some territorial rectifications in favor of Romania.¹⁰⁹

The demands of the Radoslavov government were too great for the Entente to meet. Consequently, on 12 July 1915, Colonel Petăr Gančev was secretly sent to Berlin, with a mandate to negotiate an alliance to bring to Bulgaria the entire Vardarian Macedonia and Pomoravia, then held by Serbia, and in the event of Romania's defeat by the Central Powers, all of Dobruja.¹¹⁰

From the first half of July 1915, there are also two reports prepared by the Romanian military attaché in Sofia, Captain Florea Țenescu (b.1884-d.1941), future general and Chief of the General Staff, in the tragic summer of 1940.

The first report bears the number 80 and the date of 8 July 1915¹¹¹ and included the translation of articles from the Bulgarian press. Thus, the newspaper "Nov Vek", of the Stambulovists (Russophobic) Liberals, from the governmental coalition, in its July 2 issue, hosted an article entitled "The military importance of Romania at the moment", having as starting point a series of statements – non-reproduced explicitly, but attributed to the Romanian general Grigore Crăiniceanu (b.1852-d.1935). The basic idea of the text was that Romania was, from a military point of view, with its hands tied, after losing three favorable opportunities to attack Austria-Hungary, in October 1914, March 1915 and May 1915, respectively; by contrast, Bulgaria was described as the holder of the Tsarigrad key. Towards the end of the article, the following paragraph was inserted: "For the capture of Constantinople, the collaboration of the Anglo-French fleets is enough for us: General Crăiniceanu also knows this. But what we still know from our generals is that, as soon as we decide to open the Dardanelles, the first to be drowned by the first wave will not be the Romanians, but the Bulgarians, because the Balkans are the walls of Tsarigrad."¹¹² The above ideas are repeated by the same newspaper, on 15 July in the article "Bulgaria, Romania and Greece", published in the "Military Rubric". The call for the Bulgarians to attack Constantinople was described as a call for national suicide, as it would expose the country to an attack by Romania. Romania's position on Austria-Hungary, from a military point of view, was described in the following terms: "Today, no one, not even the Albanian Take Ionescu, dares to plead for a war against Austria-Hungary." Bulgaria's entry into the war by the Central Powers was seen as a means of isolating Romania and Greece, at the end of the text being evoked the scenario of Romania's transformation into a theatre.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Ema Nastovici, "Intensificarea eforturilor Antantei de atragere a României și Bulgariei în război, în anul 1915" ["Intensifying the efforts of the Entente to attract Romania and Bulgaria to war, in 1915"], in "Analele Universității din București" ["Annals of the University of Bucharest"], 1976, p. 90.

¹⁰⁸ Constantin I. Kirîțescu, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României (1916-1919)*, [History of the war for the national unification of Romania (1916-1919)], Bucharest, School House Publishing House, 1922, vol. I, pp. 177-178

¹⁰⁹ E. Nastovici, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹¹⁰ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

¹¹¹ R.M.A.-P., fond G.M.S.-Office of Military Attachés (1896-1941), file no. crt. 73/1915, leaves 1-15.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 2-4.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 11-14.

In the report no. 95 of 11 June 1915, various hypotheses of Bulgaria's war were briefly presented, without any assessment of the degree of probability of each of them. Consequently, there were main hypotheses against each neighbor (Romania, Serbia, Turkey, Greece), and each hypothesis included two situations: security, respectively insecurity of the other borders.¹¹⁴ Regarding Romania, Captain Florea Țenescu estimated that Bulgaria could mobilize about 500,000 soldiers against it, the main attack targeting Dobruja, not in the north of the Danube.¹¹⁵

After 12 July 1915, when Radoslavov made the decisive statement before the German diplomat Mihaeles, alliance negotiations between Bulgaria and the German-Austro-Hungarian-Ottoman camp went in a straight line. On 19 July Colonel Petăr Gančev, the Bulgarian military attaché in Berlin, presented the draft treaty of alliance. In exchange for benevolent neutrality, Bulgaria claimed "undisputed and disputed areas of Macedonia" (the whole of Vardarian Macedonia), in case Bulgaria's benevolent neutrality towards the Central Powers overlapped with a hostile attitude towards them on the part of Romania and Greece, the Bulgarian state claiming Southern Dobruja and the south-eastern part of historical Macedonia, respectively. In exchange for direct involvement in the war against Serbia, Bulgaria requested, in addition to Vardarian Macedonia, other territories ruled by the Serbian state (Pomoravia, etc.), and in the version in which Romania and Greece would have joined the Entente, the demands of the government in Sofia extended over Dobruja and Aegean Macedonia as a whole.¹¹⁶

Given the amplitude of the Bulgarian exigencies, the approach of the Entente Powers of 3 August 1915 could not have any chance of success. France, Russia, Britain and Italy promised the "undisputed zone" of Vardarian Macedonia, without further details, and the statement on Kavalla was even more confused, while Dobruja was not even mentioned.¹¹⁷ It goes without saying that such offers could not change the choice of Vasil Radoslavov and King Ferdinand I of Saxe-Coburg Gotha.

On 9 August 1915, Colonel Petăr Gančev was empowered to sign a draft convention with the Central Powers, including the following clauses, based on two hypotheses:

- in exchange for benevolent neutrality, Bulgaria received Vardarian Macedonia from Serbia, South-East Macedonia, from Greece (if the Greek state had joined the Entente), and Southern Dobruja, respectively, from Romania (if the Romanian state had fought against the Central Powers);
- in exchange for participating in the war against Serbia, in the conditions of neutrality of Romania and Greece, Bulgaria was to gain in addition Pomoravia, but also the territories promised by the treaties of 1912, but lost in favor of Greece by the Peace of Bucharest (1913), and the Southern of Old Romanian Dobruja, towards the Cernavoda-Constanta line, according to the Treaty of San Stefano (19 February / 3 March 1878); the involvement of Greece or Romania in the war, against the Central Powers, would have cost them even more, in terms of territory.¹¹⁸

Finally, on 24 August / 6 September 1915, Bulgaria concluded a secret treaty of alliance with the Central Powers, signed by V. Radoslavov and G. Mihaeles. In exchange for Bulgaria entering the war against Serbia, it was promised the whole of Vardarian Macedonia and Pomoravia. As for Dobruja, Bulgaria was promised only the restitution of the territory lost in 1913, and this only if Romania would ally with the Powers of the Entente. A similar provision referred to Greece. Germany and Austria-Hungary also promised Bulgaria financial aid of 200 million

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pages 16-53.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pages 19-29.

¹¹⁶ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

¹¹⁷ I. Ilčev, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

¹¹⁸ G. Markov, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164.

francs in four instalments over a three-month period from the day of the mobilization¹¹⁹. Also, on 24 August / 6 September 1915, a convention on the rectification of the Turkish-Bulgarian border was signed by V. Radoslavov and Fehti-bey.¹²⁰ Through this document, Bulgaria gained about 160 localities in the western part of Eastern Thrace, starting with Adrianople.¹²¹

The conditional acceptance by the Serbian Parliament (*Skupština*) on 1 September 1915 of the surrender of the south-eastern half of Vardarian Macedonia towards Bulgaria under the bilateral agreement of 29 February / 13 March 1912,¹²² one could not change the course of events. This was followed by the mobilization of the Bulgarian army (10/23 September), the rupture of diplomatic relations between the Entente Powers and Bulgaria (28 September / 5 October), coinciding with the beginning of the landing of French and British troops in Thessaloniki, then the Bulgarian declaration of war addressed to Serbia (30 September / 13 October 1915).¹²³

The decision of Tsar Ferdinand and the government of V. Radoslavov was not agreed by an important part of public opinion and political forces.¹²⁴ Russophile politicians were impressed by the possibility of direct Russian-Bulgarian military clashes in Dobruja and, however, by virtue of their affinity for the largest Slavic country, could not approve the decision of the sovereign and the prime minister. The most vehement opposition came from the young party leader Aleksandăr Stamboliiski (b.1879-d.1923), the leader of the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union (BZNS). During the collective audience granted to the leaders of the Opposition parties by the monarch, on September 17, 1915, Al. Stamboliiski warned the king that the choice made could cost him not only the crown but also the head under it, receiving instead the advice to take care of his own head, considered younger and more precious, followed by an imprisonment, for the crime of lese majesty.¹²⁵

The choice of the Bulgarian political leaders in 1915 would prove to be profoundly detrimental to their country. Seduced by the opportunity for large and rapid territorial gains, Bulgarian decision-makers did not properly assess the global balance of power and overestimated their own economic and military possibilities in the face of a war of attrition. In addition to errors of opportunity, those of principle were added. Based on their own historical vision, the rulers of Sofia ignored the ethno-demographic data of the claimed territories, as well as, in the case of Macedonia, the self-perception of identity of the inhabitants there.

Regarding the Romanian-Bulgarian relations, for the period preceding the entry of Bulgaria into the war, we can notice the lack of information and insight of the Romanian military attaché in Sofia, Captain Florea Țenescu. Thus, in the report no. 97 of 23 July 1915, unofficial information about territorial concessions from the Ottoman Empire to Bulgaria and Bulgarian preparations for the offensive against Serbia are seen as baseless “mere rumors” and the prospect of Bulgaria entering the war is considered quite distant.¹²⁶ Report no. 124 of 15 August concludes that: “However, it is premature to consider that Bulgaria has decided to attack Serbia definitively

¹¹⁹ V. Georgiev, St. Trifonov, *op. cit.*, pp. 382-383.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 383-384.

¹²¹ Nicolae Ciachir, *Istoria popoarelor din Sud-Estul Europei în epoca modernă (1789-1923)*, [History of the peoples of South-Eastern Europe in the modern era (1789-1923)], second edition, Bucharest, Oscar Print Publishing House, 1998, p. 460.

¹²² T. Velter, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 79-80.

¹²⁴ St. K. Pavlowitch, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹²⁵ L.S. Stavrianos, *op. cit.*, pp. 561-562.

¹²⁶ R.M.A.-P., *G.M.S.-Office of Military Attachés (1896-1941)* fund, file no. crt. 73/1915, leaves 5-7.

and that military measures have been taken in this regard.”¹²⁷ Report no. 125 of 20 August 1915 mentioned a number of reasons for Bulgaria’s neutrality: unpreparedness for the army, depletion of economic resources following the Balkan Wars, lack of ammunition, the impossibility of overcoming the Russophile-Russophobic dichotomy, the heavy burdens of war, and “other causes of internal and external political order, which, as a military man, we cannot discern and know enough.”¹²⁸ Continuing the mentioned report, Captain Tenescu argues that, for Bulgaria, entering the war with the Entente would be an easier option from a military point of view and more profitable on a political-territorial level.¹²⁹

Having, in all probability, access to information from other sources, Ion I. C. Brătianu again changes his attitude towards the possibility of a Bulgarian attack on Serbia; on 28 July 1915, the head of the Romanian government declared to Simeon Radev that, in such a situation, Romania would remain neutral.¹³⁰

According to Al. Marghiloman’s memoirs, in an attempt to obtain the military support of Romania, in the conditions of an imminent Bulgarian attack, Serbia would have proposed, in the summer of 1915, a plan aiming at the drastic territorial diminution of Bulgaria, including by extending the Romanian rule over a long strip of territory, to Dedeagači, on the shores of the Aegean Sea.¹³¹ On 4/17 September 1915, Camille Jean Blondel proposed to Ionel Brătianu to conclude an alliance with Serbia and Greece, against Bulgaria, whose joining the Central Powers camp had become imminent; the head of government in Bucharest rejects this plan, as well as the idea of hiring the Romanian army in a campaign in the South, by promising, however, to take action, but across the Carpathians, in a more favorable context.¹³²

At the beginning of September 1915, the visit to Romania of the German Duke Johann Albrecht von Mecklenburg-Schwerin, brother-in-law of the King of Bulgaria, took place. Received by Ferdinand I of Romania, at Măcin, on the yacht named *Ștefan cel Mare*, the guest reproaches the sovereign-host for keeping Brătianu in power, after which he launches into an eulogy for Bulgaria and Tsar Ferdinand.¹³³

The Romanian and Greek governments reacted differently to the Bulgarian attack on Serbia. Ion I. C. Brătianu, kept his country neutral, while Eleutherios Venizelos, returning to the leadership of the government in Athens, tried to involve Greece in the war, on the side of Serbia, in reaction to the gesture of Bulgaria, but was blocked by King Constantine and his supporters.¹³⁴ After a series of internal turmoil, the effects of which would last for two decades, the Greek state would officially declare war on Bulgaria on 30 June 1917, after the abdication of King Constantine, following pressure from the Entente.¹³⁵

Meanwhile, on 19 August / 1 September 1916, as a result of Romania’s declaration of war on Austria-Hungary of 14/27 August 1916, the state of war between Bulgaria and Romania had also intervened.¹³⁶ On this occasion, the King of Bulgaria issued a manifesto in which the

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, file 74/1915, leaf 3.

¹²⁸ R.M.A.-P., *G.M.S.-Office of Military Attachés (1896-1941)*, file 72/1915, leave 1.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, leaves 2-34.

¹³⁰ Ž. Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

¹³¹ Al. Marghiloman, *op. cit.*, p. 321, note of 22 August / 4 September 1915.

¹³² *Istoria politicii externe românești.. [History of the Romanian foreign policy]...*, p.215.

¹³³ I. Gh. Duca, *Memorii. Neutralitatea (1915-1916), Partea II-a, vol. 2* [Memories. Neutrality (1915-1916), Part II, vol. 2], edited by Stelian Neagoe, Timișoara, Helicon Publishing House, 1993, pp. 34-35

¹³⁴ C. Iordan, *Venizelos și românii [Venizelos and Romanians]...*, pp. 54-55.

¹³⁵ M. N. Popa, *op. cit.*, pp. 365, 503-504.

¹³⁶ *Istoria politicii externe românești [History of the Romanian foreign policy]...*, p. 218.

moment of 1913 was evoked and Dobruja was mentioned twice, without any distinction being made between Northern Dobruja and Southern Dobruja.¹³⁷

Over the next two years (September 1916 – September 1918), Bulgaria's aspirations to win the whole of Dobruja hit by objections from the partners of the Quadruple Alliance, and when this obstacle was overcome (Berlin Protocol, 25 September 1918), defeat in the war was already a certainty. The illusions of keeping Dobruja, fueled by some provisions of the Thessaloniki Armistice (16/29 September 1918), would gradually crumble over the next 14 months. Although very active and not without echoes, especially in the Anglo-American circles, the Bulgarian propaganda regarding Dobruja would not bring any practical gain, in territorial terms, Bulgaria's membership to the coalition of the defeated was finally obvious. The Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine (27 November 1919), considered by the Bulgarians "the second national catastrophe" (after the Peace of Bucharest, in 1913), provided for the maintenance of the existing Romanian-Bulgarian border on 1 August 1914.¹³⁸ After 62 years, marked by successive changes, with a maximum of drama and frequency between 1913 and 1919, the fate of the Dobruja lands in political-territorial aspect was to be established in 1940, when the Romanian-Bulgarian border was re-established during 1878-1913.

From a historical perspective, the time interval corresponding to the first year of the "Great War" represented, for Romania and Bulgaria, a favorable moment for the final settlement of the bilateral territorial problems (the so-called "Dobruja problem"). However, this opportunity was missed, due to the divergent orientations of the two governments (Ion I. C. Brătianu and Vasil Radoslavov) in foreign policy, orientations that will translate into opposite politico-military options, which will make it impossible to solve the Southern Dobruja problem, despite its relatively low importance for both South-Eastern European states (*Old Dobruja* had an exceptional importance for the Romanian state, from a geopolitical, strategic and economic/commercial point of view). At the origin of the divergent foreign policy options of the two states were other territorial aspirations from them (Transylvania, in the case of Romania, respectively, *the whole of Vardarian Macedonia*, in the case of Bulgaria), as well as some calculations regarding the fate of the war.

It should be noted, however, that the Romanian claims on Transylvania were, at least *grosso modo*, justified, not only historically, but also ethno-demographically and, especially, in the national-identity way, and Brătianu's assessments on the outcome of the conflagration will prove to be, broadly speaking, realistic. Regarding the Radoslavov government, we notice serious errors, both in terms of principle and of opportunity. The much-coveted Macedonia was an extraordinary ethnic, linguistic and religious mosaic, and many Slav-speaking Macedonians did not identify themselves as Bulgarians. The German military successes on the Eastern Front, from 1915, as well as those from 1917, could only postpone the victory of the Entente Powers, predictable, in fact, in terms of their demographic and especially economic-financial superiority.

In conclusion, the reckless and unrealistic desire of the rulers of Sofia, in the years 1914-1915, to occupy a large part of Macedonia as fast as possible, had among its effects the postponement by 20-25 years of regaining the southern territory of Dobruja, lost in 1913.

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¹³⁷ V. Georgiev, St. Trifonov, *op. cit.*, pp. 439-440.

¹³⁸ *Istoria politicii externe românești [History of the Romanian foreign policy..]....*, p. 235.