

ROMANIAN-FRENCH RELATIONS AND THE ENTENTE POLICY TOWARDS ROMANIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIRST BALKAN WAR

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Abstract: *Romanian-French Relations and the Entente Policy towards Romania in the Context of the First Balkan War.*

The study examines the Romanian-French relations and Entente policy towards Romania during the First Balkan War. The author highlights the factors that formed the basis of the French-Romanian relations: the French-Russian alliance, the general interests of the Entente in South-Eastern Europe, relations between Romania and Bulgaria, Romania's relations with the Central Powers, public opinion in Romania, which showed sympathy for France, the pro-Entente orientation of Romanian politicians, the events during the "Balkan crisis" and others. Connecting its diplomatic actions with those of Russia, France proved to be a very active factor in influencing the political actions of the Romanian government, in accordance with the general interests of the Entente in South-Eastern Europe. The diplomatic steps taken in the Romanian capital were characterized by realism, but gradually highlighting a differentiated attitude from that of Russia toward the Romanian state. Like the English diplomacy, which turned out to be less active in Bucharest, the French diplomacy understood that Romania's strategy in its Balkan policy was based on its links with the Central Powers, which is why it was deceived by the assurances given by the Romanian authorities regarding the exclusive existence of an independent foreign policy of the Romanian state, in the context of the "Balkan crisis." That is why both France and England expressed skepticism about the possibility of attracting Romania in the Entente and opposed its participation at the Peace Conference in London. Finally, France and England accepted Russia's attitude towards Romania, its interests being more significant in this geographical area compared to its Western partners. The geo-strategic position of Romania in particular was very important in case of war between Russia and Austria-Hungary, and it forced the Russian government to require perseverance in the policy of separation of Romania from the political orbit of the Central Powers and its attraction on the side of the Entente.

Keywords: *Spheres of influence, alliance, Balkan confederation, neutrality, independent foreign policy, status quo, geo-strategic position.*

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Romania's relations with France during the First Balkan War were caused by the French-Russian alliance, but also by the general interests of the Entente in Southeastern Europe, which were generally favorable to the liberation struggle of the nations of this geographical area that were under Ottoman rule. In this context, the evolution of the Romanian-Bulgarian relations was to influence France's attitude towards Romania, since Bulgaria was part of the Balkan states alliance, created under Russia's aegis, while Romania, despite an official independent policy and improvement in relations with the Triple Entente, still gravitated in the Central Powers' sphere of influence. Therefore, Romania's relations with the Central Powers represented the real political barometer against which France's policy towards Romania developed. Romanian-French relations during the First Balkan War were also influenced by favorable public opinion in Romania, which showed sympathy for France, and by the pro-Entente orientation of Romanian politicians. The factors listed, to which we add the events during the "Balkan crisis" will shape Romania's relations with France in the following period.

France appreciated the attitude Bucharest's decision of neutrality towards the Balkan war. C. Blondel, French Minister in Bucharest, informed R. Poincaré, the Foreign Minister of France, on October 23 1912, that the neutrality policy was supported by most Romanian politicians. Some, however, including Take Ionescu, spoke for mobilization when Turkey attacked Bulgaria, to determine King Ferdinand to make formal commitments towards Romania. King Carol I, "*whose will is predominant in matters of foreign policy*" did not seem willing to listen to advice from people who would like to engage Romania directly in conflict. C. Blondel believed that King Carol I would not take any measures if the Great Powers failed to locate the war in the Balkans and if none of them intervened in combat.¹

On October 28 1912, M. Guillemin, the French delegate to the European Danube Commission, informed R. Poincaré, following a meeting with King Carol I, that the Romanian ruler gave assurances that Romania has not concluded any military agreement with Turkey, despite its requests, and that the Romanian state was fully preserving its freedom of action. Meanwhile, King Carol I said that Romania could not accept the territorial growth of Bulgaria without receiving compensation. Carol I was aware that a mobilization of the Romanian army, even partial, would have serious repercussions in relations with the Great Powers but also kept stating that he could not put the vital interests of the country entirely in the hands of these Great Powers, which themselves do not know yet whether they will agree. In this context, Carol I appreciated the personal efforts of French Prime Minister R. Poincaré, who had taken "*the most useful action*" to maintain the contacts between the Great Powers.²

On 28 October 1912, C. Blondel informed R. Poincaré inform about the setting up of the new Romanian government. The French Minister appreciated that the solution adopted by the inclusion of Take Ionescu in government represented the surest guarantee of a peaceful foreign policy that Romania would

¹ *Documents diplomatiques français* (to be cited *D. D. F.*), 3^e série, tome 4, p. 236-238.

² *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome 4, p. 263-266.

adopt in the context of a "Balkan crisis"³ And on 31 October 1912, C. Blondel informed that during an audience granted by King Carol I, he declared that during the future European Conference Romania would energetically reclaim its place⁴.

It is significant that, at the initiative of France, the Great Powers agreed to convene a conference of their ambassadors together with those of the belligerent powers in London, with the purpose of solving the crisis erupted in the Balkans. In a circular sent on 1 November 1912 to the French ambassadors, Poincaré included Romania among the conference participants⁵. The French proposal to include Romania in the forthcoming conference was important and gathered the support of the Romanian government. It responded to the desire of King Carol I, who wanted Romania to take this opportunity to manifest itself as an important factor in South East European politics. He would be more favorable to the suggestions of the French government, the more his friendship with Austria-Hungary proved ineffective even in matters regarding Romania's relations with Bulgaria⁶.

In a talk on 2 / 15 November 15 1912 with the Romanian minister in Paris, Al. Em. Lahovary, R. Poincare, the French Foreign Minister, declared that "*the Great Powers have not abdicated their right to regulate Eastern affairs, but they remain faithful to their program which consists of dividing the Turkish possessions in Europe, leaving the Balkan Peninsula to the Balkan people*"⁷. In this framework which reflected the prospect of solving the "Balkan crisis" only from the Triple Entente's point of view, R. Poincaré supported the Romanian claims and stated that, as far as he knew, Russia was also favorable to them⁸.

It seems that the French diplomacy, just as the Russian one, noticed in the new circumstances the deep contradiction between Romania and Austria-Hungary in their Balkan policy and sought to exploit this situation to attract Romania in the Entente. Given that maintaining the Balkan *status quo* was impossible as a result of military operations, the Romanian government requested Austria-Hungary for support to rectify the south eastern border. As it is known, despite an officially expressed diplomatic support, Austria-Hungary's attitude to Romania, because in the perspective of Serbia's victory, it attached to the idea of maintaining the situation in the Balkans. On the contrary, Russia and France, now convinced that "*the Balkans must belong to the Balkan people*", noticed the rift in relations between Romania and Austria-Hungary and agreed for Romania to receive some territorial concessions and participate in the conference⁹.

On 3 November 1912, Blondel transmitted through a telegram in Paris Romania's thanks to the French government, in connection with the position

³ *Ibidem*, p. 270.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 314-315.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

⁶ V. Vesa, *Romania and France at the Beginning of the 20th Century. 1900-1916*, Dacia Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 1975, p. 35.

⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (to be cited M.F.A.A.), Stacks 21. Political reports from Paris. 1908-1913, vol. 74, p. 222.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 222.

⁹ N. Iorga, *Comment la Roumanie s'est détachée de la Triplice*, Bucarest, 1933, p. 17-19; I. Gheorghiu, *Relations between Romania and Austria-Hungary in anii 1908-1914*, "Studies and Historical Articles", 1968, nr. 11, p. 142-143; V. Vesa, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

taken by France towards Romania's claims¹⁰. On the same day he was received in long audience by King Carol I, who made a statement on the Balkan situation. Among other things, King Carol I declared that "*Bulgarian ambitions are in fact a danger not only for us but also for Russia, which would see a Great Slavic Power around Constantinople with anxiety, since one day it could be threatened*". The Romanian ruler added that "from this point of view, our interests are close to those of the Russian Empire; you can see that, on this point, we can and we will be able to reach an agreement"¹¹.

Because in the meeting with King Carol I the Romanian ruler had alluded to "*external requests made for Romania's mobilization*", C. Blondel, in awe of these, obtained a meeting with Maiorescu to obtain a clarification on the very same day. In the report sent to the French foreign minister following this meeting, C. Blondel reports that the Romanian Prime Minister revealed that pressure came from Germany, specifically from Kiderlen-Wachter, who wondered why Romania had not taken immediate steps against Bulgaria, once it entered the war. Titu Maiorescu sought to reassure the French minister, calling Germany's informal approach an "incident", to which he himself "*quelque peu paraissait froissé*". Moreover, Maiorescu said, King Carol I himself appeared stunned, highlighting the repercussions that a mobilization, even partial, of the Romanian army could have from Russia. Reiterating the thanks to the French government for the position it adopted towards Romania in the context of the Balkan war, Titu Maiorescu surprisingly expressed hope to be able to discuss "*serious issues*" relating to "***happy changes in our general policy*** (author's underlignment)¹²". C. Blondel ended his report with the observation that, in fact, he was not surprised, because "***amendments were made to Romania's 30-year armed policy of Romania, in the sense of a closer understanding with Russia*** (author's underlignment)"¹³.

On 6 / 19 November 1912, Al.Em. Lahovary, the Romanian ambassador in Paris, met with M. Paléologue, Director of Political Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of France, who said that he considered it as an absolute necessity for Silistra to be occupied and did not understand why Romania had not addressed the Great Powers in a memorandum on the Romanian point of view which France could join, since in a lack of accurate information, the French public opinion had been hostile at first to Romanian claims. M. Paleologue examined, even in this respect, together with the Romanian Minister, on a map in a German atlas, the Bulgarian-Romanian border. He expressed hope that Bulgaria will have willingness to sacrifice what is asked of it and that the French Government will do everything possible to help Romania¹⁴.

¹⁰ *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome 4, p. 340.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 343-347.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 347-348. Significant is that in the collection of the cited French documents, in the critical apparatus there is a mention of the renewal of a secret treaty between Romania and Austria-Hungary, towards which the Romanian government "*paraît beaucoup hésité*".

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 348.

¹⁴ M.F.A.A., Stacks 21. Political Reports from Paris. 1908-1913, vol. 74, p. 227-228.

From Sofia, on November 7 1912, Panafieu, the Minister of France in Bulgaria, transmitted to Prime Minister Poincaré information his from Nekliudov, his Russian counterpart, according to which Bulgaria was willing to give Romania some satisfaction since Romania's claims did not seem to exceed the concessions Bulgaria was willing to make. In this context, S. Danev, upon returning from Vienna, would have preferred to go through Bucharest to employ direct negotiations with the Romanian government. Significant is that the French diplomat informed that "*there is some dissatisfaction with Austria in Bucharest*", which did not start talks with the Great Powers except about its own projects. "*Intimate relations between the two countries and their analogous interests would allow Romania to hope for more confidence.*" In these circumstances, "*direct conversations between Romania and Bulgaria would undoubtedly be better received than through the Austrian-Hungarian government, which would likely arouse the Romanians' susceptibilities*"¹⁵.

On 7 / 20 November 1912, the day in which negotiations for the armistice on the Balkan front were opened, the Romanian minister in Paris, Al. Em. Lahovary, met with R. Poincaré, who had said that Bulgaria is very strongly opposed to handing over Silistra. The French Prime Minister assured him that the Great Powers are certainly favorable to Romania, particularly France and Russia. Poincaré reiterated the promise to support Romania, adding that he will also count on the complexity of the issues to be discussed, in order to find possibilities of pressure and compensation. For example, Poincaré considered, Bulgaria could be given Adrianople. The only way to conduct a fair and impartial regulation of multiple issues raised by the disappearance of European Turkey, Poincaré added, was subjecting all of them to the conference of the European powers¹⁶.

Very favorable provisions of the French Prime Minister, R. Poincaré, to Romania were reiterated on 9 / 22 November 1912. He further added that the attitude of benevolent neutrality of Romania and Bulgaria allowed the allies to reach the gates of Constantinople and that this great work deserves reward¹⁷.

During a private meeting with Guillemin, the French delegate to the European Danube Commission, Take Ionescu made known, as strictly confidential, and his view on Romania's policy towards Bulgaria. The content of the discussions was reported to the French Foreign Ministry and R. Poincaré, given the importance of this report, specifying confidentiality, communicated it through a circular on 18 November 1912, to the French embassies in London, Petersburg, Constantinople, Berlin, Vienna and Rome. Among other things, Take Ionescu confessed to the French diplomat that, although he fully agreed with King Carol I, he believed that he came to power a month too late. Take Ionescu wanted a very clear understanding with Bulgaria before the war. No doubt, he did expect any more quickly than the others Turkey's defeat, but a possible hypothesis of a victory for Bulgaria had to be envisioned. Romania demands, reasonable and moderate, would have been obtained without difficulty before. It is true that Bulgaria would have counted on Russia, but "*Russia itself would have*

¹⁵ *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome 4, p. 390-391.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 233-234.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 229.

urged Bulgarians to make an agreement with us if we had made our requests immediately clear from the beginning". Showing concern for future good relations with Bulgaria, Take Ionescu also made Romania's claims known, with which even King Carol I was in full agreement: the strategic position of Silistra, with a small territory of 10,000 to 12,000 square kilometers in addition. Take Ionescu argued that *"the region should be attributed to us by the Treaty of Berlin, it is not Bulgarian, neither geographically, nor ethnographically; because it is inhabited by Turks, it forms the natural border of Dobrogea and it is completely necessary."* Take Ionescu also emphasized that if the Romanians' view had recently been calm; this was due to the promises which were made in Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg especially the compensation to which Romania is entitled. They are not, in fact, an absolute guarantee of peace in regard to Romania. We do not want to challenge the fruit of Bulgaria's victory, but *"even the allies' entrance in Constantinople would not change our provisions."* Take Ionescu warned that *"what we cannot do is to wait too long for compensation that we believe we have the right to and we are determined to obtain". "If Bulgaria refuses us what we were not able to obtain from them upon entry into the campaign, after the victory we will not commit the mistake of waiting to renew our request, so that they can reconstruct their army, restore their finances, in other words, so that they can easily prepare for a new war"*¹⁸.

On November 18 1912, C. Blondel, in a report to R. Poincaré, made an extensive presentation of the mood of Romania in the context of the "Balkan crisis." Referring to the impression made by Sazonov's declaration in favor of Romania, also reproduce in the Romanian press, C. Blondel remarked that it *"has led a movement of opinion favorable to Russia". "Even within the Council of Ministers, **the possibility of a radical change in Romania's foreign policy is seen** (author's underlignment)".* Blondel reported that one of the cabinet members went so far as to declare that if Russia gave Romania a pledge, however small, of its sincere desire to unite closely with it, it would cause a ministerial crisis on this issue, in order *"to compel the king, if he did not willingly consent, **to rule on a possible Romanian-Russian alliance** (author's underlignment)."* Blondel warned that the opportunity is *"**the most suitable to detach Romania from a policy towards which it begins to feel danger** (author's underlignment). *The Bulgarian victory made Romanians reflect on the situation in which they will be, between Russia and Bulgaria, which has become stronger, when at their western border they can count less on the Austrian-Hungarian friendship. Regrets of not having listened to advice from those who wanted to see Romania enter the Balkan Confederation are added to the fear of being surrounded by this Confederation united with Russia"*.*

Blondel, although showing that his Russian counterpart in Bucharest considers the moment to be a good one, did not know if the Russian government *"will decide to make this decisive step." "If the Russian government does not know how to take advantage of the current provisions they found in Romania and the Romanian government, it will leave an open field for action from Austria"*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 495-496.

Blondel was aware that the attitude of Austria-Hungary towards Romania during the "Balkan crisis" caused in the Romanian public opinion an increase in adversity to Romania's alliance with the Central Powers, asserting the desire to be closer to Entente. By spreading the Romanian public's mood to the French government, Blondel insisted on the opportunity for detaching Romania Triple Alliance, because - he emphasized - **"it would be useless to repeat that the Romanian people in a great majority, are not in favor of an understanding with Austria-Hungary; he accepted this policy that could have been explained 30 years ago, but today he will be happy to abandon it** (author's underlignment). To this end he added: "Romanians have turned their eyes to their Latin brothers in France; they would turn to our allies and if they were encouraged by them and us. We have the most interest in this part of Europe, whose map will be recomposed in the future, **to count on the friendship and competition of a nation whose support is not to be neglected, who loves France more than any nation** (author's underlignment) *and which reproaches that we respond with indifference to testimonies of sympathy that they are quick to offer*". Blondel was convinced that **"a joint action by Russia and France, to pull the Romanian people in their orbit was still possible under the current circumstances** (author's underlignment)" and *"this approach is desired by politicians of the current leadership, we can achieve this with their help"*¹⁹.

It is significant that the diplomatic representatives of the Central Powers in Bucharest noticed the possibility of a fundamental change in the orientation of the Romanian foreign policy and sought to counter this alternative. Count Fürstenberg's reports in November of 1912 are alarming, the Austrian-Hungarian Minister in Bucharest stressing that the situation favors Russia and France's attempts to remove Romania from the Triple Alliance. In a report of November 14, 1912 by Berchtold, Fürstenberg wrote: *"Today it is not too late and many things could change. We can count on the loyalty of factors have to say a word in the country, but one should not ask what is not possible to obtain [...] If Russia today [...] assures Romania of the prospects for territorial expansion beyond the Carpathians or even in Dobrogea [...], no politician could resist such a temptation* (author's underlignment). *For now, freedom of movement is restricted by our treaty, but it will prove resistant to any attempt only if both parties will benefit from it, otherwise it will remain but a dead letter. [...] The situation became such that Romania seems to be at a turning point of its foreign policy* (author's underlignment) *and it would be good if the monarchy showed its ally the way forward at this critical moment"*²⁰. Consequently, Prince Fürstenberg urged his superiors in Vienna to declare publicly that they did not give consent on a final settlement of the "Balkan question" if the point of view of the government in Bucharest is not satisfied²¹.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 497-499.

²⁰ *Osterreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914 (to be cited O.U.A.)*, Vienna and Leipzig, 1930, vol. IV, doc. 4418, p. 871.

²¹ Also see Gh.N. Căzan, Ș. Rădulescu-Zoner, *Romania and the Triple Alliance (1878-1914)*, Scientific and Enciclopedic Publishing, Bucharest, 1979, p. 329.

The French diplomatic offensive continued at a sustained pace, as the Russian one, in the second half of November, in spite of Austrian-Hungarian actions aimed at countering it, the French and Russian diplomats' clear objective being removing Romania from the sphere of influence of the Central Powers and attracting it on the side of the Triple Entente. The new French military attaché in Bucharest, in his report of November 27 1912, indicated that it would not be useless to find a land of friendly understanding between the Slavs and Romanian, so as to detach the latter from Austrian clientele, which would have considerable importance as a support in the case of a European conflict²².

C. Blondel, French Minister in Bucharest, made for this purpose a series of contacts with influential political figures, such as I.I.C. Bratianu and Take Ionescu, known for their positions pro-Entente positions²³. From their discussions, the skepticism concerning the benefits of Romania's alliance with Austria-Hungary is evident, emphasizing instead the support that Romania could get from Russia²⁴. Since Take Ionescu's position as expressed on another occasions was outlined above, it is appropriate to dwell below the position expressed by I.I.C. Bratianu during the meeting that he had with C. Blondel on 30 November 1912. The content of the discussions was the subject of a comprehensive report sent to R. Poincaré, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France²⁵, and is particularly enlightening to the fact that the president of the Liberal Party in opposition, wanted a change in Romania's foreign policy orientation. *"You know, Bratianu said, that during my last ministry I worked hard to improve our relations with Russia and that we have not neglected any opportunity to create an atmosphere of mutual trust between the two countries. Mr Giers, moreover, has facilitated this task and I received from him all the kindness possible"*²⁶. *"We feel very good - Bratianu said, referring to the Balkan Crisis- that we will not be able to remain neutral, with a care of being neglected, and that we must take place while the war map of Oriental Europe is changed"*²⁷. Showing that *"our interest was not to remain completely outside the Balkan union,"* Bratianu did not hide from Blondel hiding the dangers of Pan-Slavism arising from Russia's Balkan policy: *"If Russia gave us a form acceptable pledge its good will, especially if we can be sure that its current activity is not a prelude to a panslavist action, dangerous for anyone not accepting it, we will not be willing to accept its advances"*²⁸. *"We must not lose sight of, Bratianu said, the fact that in Russia there are two schools of opinion animated by different provisions: official Russia is pacifist, you tell me, today it keeps in check the turbulent elements for which Slavism is a dogma, but are you sure that these elements will not one day make the government take steps now it now abhorrs?"*²⁹.

²² Apud V. Vesa, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²³ Vezi *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome IV, nr. 599 și 608.

²⁴ V. Vesa, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

²⁵ *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome IV, p. 618-621.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 619.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 619.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 619.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 620.

Meanwhile, Bratianu wanted to add: "... ***I understand very well the economic and territorial advantages that we could have through the closeness with Russia and the Balkan states, to you*** [France – author's note] and the Triple Entente (author's underlignment). *We will not count on the friendship of the Hungarians [...] the day will come when the Austrian-Hungarian edifice will collapse and the disparate elements making up their aspirations will be fulfilled; for this day we will have to be ready to receive, without anyone being able to object, our brothers in Transylvania and Russia's support can serve our projects* (author's underlignment)"³⁰.

Bratianu was aware that these were projects "*whose achievement is still very distant and, for now, we must consider closer eventualities. A cordial understanding with Bulgaria is one of the first in the horizon*" and, in this regard, "*the help that Russia agrees provide and which is favorable to preserve is precious, of course*"³¹.

A realist, I.I.C. Bratianu also highlighted to Blondel the importance that King Carol I had in a radical change in Romania's foreign policy orientation: "[...] I repeat, *given the provisions of the king, who will hesitate for a long time before radically changing the line foreign policy which he followed for nearly 35 years, it is essential that Russia give us the means to influence, in time, in a decisive manner, the spirit of the Sovereign* (author's underlignment)"³².

In turn, Blondel showed that a strengthening of Romania's relations with Russia will result in a closer connection of Romania with France. In this respect, Blondel gave assurances that "*the Government has only sympathy for the Romanian people, that it has already provided this evidence in the current events and **nothing that could lead to a close tie with Russia would leave us indifferent*** (author's underlignment)"³³.

Interesting to note is that Blondel counted on the importance that the Romanian public opinion can have on the decision to reorient the country's foreign policy: "*Politicians, wrote Blondel, who were part of various ministries in recent years and have left the king the stewardship of foreign policy are concerned today, more than so far, about the situation that the Balkan events are creating in Romania and, through their newspapers, through the meeting which they organize, are implying that **the nation must now be consulted when it comes to decide on its international political orientation*** (author's underlignment). *The two trends which appear, one in favor of an alliance with Austria-Hungary, one in favor of a rapprochement with Russia, are emerging ever more clearly and will not delay the time when this public issue should be addressed frankly and finally decided*"³⁴.

But beyond the positions expressed by some political leaders and the currents of ideas which were manifested in public opinion, essential for countries that

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 620.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 620.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 620.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 621.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 618.

formed the Triple Entente was King Carol I and the Government's position. If at the level of the government there were, as we have seen, some differences in the orientation of foreign policy positions, King Carol I and Prime Minister Titu Maiorescu continued to support the "Balkan policy", and especially Austria-Hungary and Germany. This orientation, which involved formal affirmation of favorable views of the Central Powers in the Balkan problems, contrary to those of members of the Triple Entente, caused a certain distrust of the latter in the possibility of attracting Romania and therefore a decrease in support that they were willing to give in the issue of the dispute with Bulgaria.

Under these conditions, both England and France opposed the admission of Romania to the Conference of Ambassadors, on the grounds that the warring states were not participating either, following the opposition from Germany and Austria-Hungarian. Although Romania's moderate policy, its wish to help in locating the war were appreciated by the English government which was also interested in protecting the Straits and avoiding a military disaster in Turkey³⁵, in an interview with Austrian Ambassador Mensdorff, in which the proposal for Romania's participation in the conference was discussed, Ed Grey, British foreign minister, said that, if necessary, it would be better for Romania to be consulted in another stage of the negotiations. *"It would be better - Grey noted - to start only with ambassadors of the states which signed the Treaty of Berlin. Albania will probably one of the first issues to be discussed and it would be better to overcome this problem before the Romanian representative is present"*³⁶. Of note is Mensdorff's statement that the Austrian Government does not make Romania's admission an absolute condition³⁷.

In Paris, R. Poincaré also opposed Romania's participation because he assume that it will support the Austrian point of view regarding Albania³⁸. In a telegram sent on December 7 1912 to French Ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, R. Poincare said: *"As concerns Romania, we have always thought that it should be represented in a general conference, but in a reunion at which the Balkan states will not participate its presence would be difficult explain"*³⁹. Next, Poincaré said to the French ambassador's: *"I would like you to know that Romania intends to support Austria's view on the border of Albania and to ask that the kuço-Vlahks be included if possible in Albania and not in Serbia, Greece or Bulgaria. It would take Austria's side against the Balkan states and against Russia. I think it would be better to tell it, without hurting it, that it cannot attend a meeting that would only include the ambassadors and from which the Balkan states would be excluded"*⁴⁰.

³⁵ Central National Historical Archives (to be cited C.N.H.A.), England Microfilms, roll 253, F.O. 371/1742, f. 106V; Barclay, Annual report on 1912.

³⁶ **British Documents on the Origines of the War. 1898-1914** (to be cited **B. D. O. W.**), vol. IX, London, 1929, p. 270. Grey to Cartwright, 9 december 1912.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p.270.

³⁸ R. Poincaré, **Au service de France, Neuf années de souvenirs**, tome II. **Les Balkans en feu 1912**, Paris, 1928, p. 380.

³⁹ **D.D.F.**, 3^e série, tome V, p. 24.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

Dissatisfied with Romania's foreign policy, which was closely linked to the Central Powers, Poincaré denied that France had a policy that aimed at attracting Romania on the side of the Entente, an attitude clearly expressed through reading a report sent by C. Blondel, French ambassador in Bucharest on 10 December 1912⁴¹. The report informed the R. Poincaré about the press campaign launched by "Bukarester Tagblatt" in favor of the Central Powers, in order to fight *"the French intrigues for attracting Romania in the Triple Entente"*. C. Blondel exemplified this campaign with an excerpt from an article stating that not only did French official media support Romanian efforts seeking to remove Romania from the Triple Alliance, but even R. Poincaré showed in the plenary Council of Ministers of France, *"the serious inconvenience that would result for Romania from a too exclusively German policy"*. True, these efforts of some Romanian politicians were real and "Bukarester Tagblatt" illustrated in an article published by "Matin" of an old Romanian senator, Boldur Epureanu, who carried out an active campaign in France to form a close tie between Romania, Russia and France, *"the only policy able to unite Transylvania and Bucovina with Romania"* (author's underlignment)." R. Poincaré denied that he had such an initiative in the Council of Ministers. Therefore he noted on the report received from Blondel the following: *"This statement is absurd and has never been said. Blondel will need to be told that, if he thinks necessary, he should declare that **we have not taken interest in the advantages and disadvantages that Romania may have by following a certain policy or other*** (author's underlignment)".

If this issue was not discussed in a meeting of the Council of Ministers, it did not mean that the French diplomacy was indifferent to Romania's policy. Based on information received from the French military attachés in Vienna and Bucharest, Hallier, and Pichon, respectively, the French ambassador in St. Petersburg, Georges Louis, informed the French Prime Minister on December 12 1912, that *"Austria-Hungary and Romania are considering a policy of intimidation against Serbia and perhaps against Russia"*⁴².

The French diplomacy has closely followed the implications they Grand Duke Nicolae Mihailovici's visit in Romania could have. The very next day after the departure of Russian guests in Bucharest on 13 December 1912, C. Blondel, the French Minister in Bucharest, sent a report to Paris in which he reported all the details of the visit⁴³, and on 14 December another report⁴⁴ in which he aimed to analyze its political significance. Despite the cordial atmosphere in which the visit of Grand Duke took place, the French diplomat was skeptical about a possible reorientation of Romanian foreign policy. Thus, Blondel, referring to the speech uttered by King Carol I on the occasion of receiving the baton of Marshal of the Russian army, which had been sent to Paris on 13 December 1912, with the

⁴¹ C.N.H.A., France microfilms, roll 25, vol. VI, c. 566; also see *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome V, p. 54.

⁴² C.N.H.A., France microfilms, roll 25, vol. VI, c. 567-568. This information was sent, due to its importance, by R. Poincaré to all French ambassadors in the Great Powers capitals and in Balkan countries. See *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome V, p. 79-80.

⁴³ C.N.H.A., France microfilms, roll 25, c. 865-866; also see *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome V, p. 71-72.

⁴⁴ C.N.H.A., France microfilms, roll 25, c. 874-876; also see *D.D.F.*, 3^e série, tome V, p. 79-80.

above-mentioned report, showed that he did not share *"the feeling of those who want to see in the king's words more than they really are"*. The French diplomat showed that King Carol I could not escape the obligation to warmly thank the Tsar for highest distinction given to deliver a toast in honor of the Russian army. But while King Carol I praised the Russian and Romanian armies collaboration in 1877, he did **"not make the slightest allusion to a rapprochement between the two countries, although the Tsar reminded the Duke in an autographed letter of the friendship that united the two sovereigns and which must serve to strengthen the ties of brotherhood between the two nations"** (author's underline). Blondel added: **"The King's constant concern was to avoid any public statement that could be interpreted as a concession to the party seeking a rapprochement with Russia"** (author's underline)". With regard to the attitude that Romania would take in the case of a spread of the Balkan conflict, the Grand Duke received an unsatisfactory response from the point of view of the Russian diplomacy. Blondel mentioned that **"the Grand Duke found the King animated by the desire to maintain peace, but he could not obtain a formal statement on Romania's attitude in the case of a general conflict"** (author's underline)". Blondel mentions that, because during discussions with the Grand Duke, the King *"preferred to keep to generalities"*, the Russian guest wanted to address two key issues in the international context: Romania's attitude towards Russia and the nature of relations between Romania and Austria- Hungary. The content of the discussions, reported by Blondel, is relevant to identify the orientation of foreign policy promoted by King Carol I, despite the undeniable diplomatic tact shown by the Romanian ruler:

"What should I report to my Sovereign, he asked (the Grand Duke – author's note), after I will have fulfilled my mission? Can I assure him completely of Romania's friendly provisions?"

"Undoubtedly, the King said."

"At the same time, the Grand Duke resumed, the recent visit of General Conrad Hoetzendorf led Russia in such a strong emotional state; is it not possible that it is an indicator of an attempt from Austria to join it in military action?"

At this precise question the King replied: **"Nothing new has resulted from the general's approach, I give you my word."**

Blondel saw in this *"more elusive"* response, **"the proof that the King continues to remain faithful to personal commitment that he could create regarding Emperor Franz Joseph"** (author's underline), *but he hesitates to take a stand today (for a policy with Austria Hungary – author's note), despite the efforts made by the Austrian Government through General Hoetzendorf and which were about to be taken by my Austrian colleague"*.

Blondel found the King to be hesitant and, according to very confidential sources, this explained the opposition the Romanian ruler faced even within the Council of Ministers regarding the continuation of the Romanian foreign policy with Austria Hungary. In this regard, Blondel reports the content of the discussions held in the Council of Ministers, which were also attended by King

Carol I. Blondel implied that the talks were due to the insistence with which prince Fürstenberg asked the King about Romania's attitude in the case of a generalization of the Balkan conflict. The French diplomat reported that, in this context, *"several ministry officials called for a declaration of absolute neutrality."* The King, supported by the Crown Prince, who attended the meeting said that, on the contrary, *"Romania should not remain neutral"* and tilted ***"towards military cooperation with Austria-Hungary against Serbia"*** (author's underlignment)", although the Romanian ruler was aware that this could lead Romania into a war against Russia. Blondel reports that *"the discussion was one of the most animated ones and was only over after the threat made by one or more of the ministers, that they would resign if the King opinion should prevail. Therefore, no final decision has been made and they agreed to avoid any decisive answer, if the Austrian Minister resumed his approach"*.

Blondel concluded: ***"The king, as so many times I have expressed my opinion, still remains faithful to his personal policy"*** (author's underlignment)." Summarizing the efforts the French and Russian diplomacy made to detach Romania from the Central Powers and attract it on the side of the Triple Entente, Blondel compared Romania's situation ***"to that of a besieged fortress, which still stands, although the people who are defending it are in the hands of the besiegers"*** (author's underlignment)". Blondel was convinced that in Romania ***"the cause of neutrality, if not that of an alliance with Russia, is making progress, gaining ground up to the most influential spaces, but has not yet won against the King's spirit"*** (author's underlignment)."

Thus, near the Conference in London there was a significant change in the attitude of member-states of the Tripartite Entente towards Romania, in a negative way, which would be extended for the entire period of its development.

In conclusion, we assert that France proved to be a very active factor in influencing the political actions of the Romanian government, in accordance with the general interests of the Entente in South-Eastern Europe. The diplomatic steps taken in the Romanian capital were characterized by realism, but gradually highlighting a differentiated attitude from that of Russia toward the Romanian state. Like the English diplomacy, which turned out to be less active in Bucharest, the French diplomacy understood that Romania's strategy in its Balkan policy was based on its links with the Central Powers, which is why it was deceived by the assurances given by the Romanian authorities regarding the exclusive existence of an independent foreign policy of the Romanian state, in the context of the "Balkan crisis". That is why both France and England expressed skepticism about the possibility of attracting Romania in the Entente and opposed its participation at the Peace Conference in London. Finally, France and England accepted Russia's attitude towards Romania, its interests being more significant in this geographical area compared to its Western partners. The geo-strategic position of Romania in particular was very important in case of war between Russia and Austria-Hungary, and it forced the Russian government to require perseverance in the policy of separation of Romania from the political orbit of the Central Powers and its attraction on the side of the Entente.

