

# **Romania-Allies Relationship During the First World War and the Treaty of Bucharest: French and Romanian Archives Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyses Romania's situation after the armistice of Focsani (signed on December 9, 1917) and at the beginning of the year 1918. It valorises mainly documentary evidence from both French and Romanian diplomatic and military archives. The necessary documentation for the elaboration of the article consisted mainly of telegrams and military reports. The most significant and important documents were selected. So the paper makes a critical analysis of the sources, resorting to a comparison between documents. The study also used a few concepts belonging to the theory of international relations. For a better understanding, the paper highlighted and analysed briefly the premise, namely the period of Romanian neutrality. The research paper explained as well why the Romanian Kingdom could not remain neutral in the First World War, why its situation in the international system was completely different from that of Switzerland. At the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, Romania's situation worsened very quickly due to the unfavourable external circumstances. Under the influence of Bolshevik ideology, Russian soldiers had refused to fight since the fall of 1917. The armistice of Brest Litovsk, signed by Soviet Russia in early December 1917 placed Romania in a critical situation. On January 13/26th, 1918, Russia broke all diplomatic relations with the Romanian government from Iași. The Romanian Kingdom would be surrounded only by hostile forces. Ukraine, which had served as a buffer zone for the Romanian state, concluded, in turn, a separate peace with the Central Empires, on February 9, 1918. Although the Romanian army needed military aid, war material, and ammunition, and faced pressures of the Central Powers, the Allies asked for resistance. Among the four powers of the Entente, France was the most intransigent. In fact, all these states strongly rejected the separate peace but the French attitude was more clearly defined than the English attitude for instance.

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**Keywords:** Romania, separate peace, Allies, Central Powers, power, survival, realism, national interest, World War I, theory of international relations

### **Introduction : a few aspects concerning the sources and methodology**

This short study analyses Romania's situation after the armistice of Focsani (signed on December 9, 1917) and during the first months of the year 1918. The paper valorises mainly documentary evidence from both French and Romanian diplomatic and military archives. The necessary documentation for the elaboration of the article consisted mainly of telegrams and military reports. The telegrams were sent from the Romanian government to its plenipotentiary ministers from Paris (Victor Antonescu), London (Nicolae Misu) and Rome (Emil Lahovari). I also studied telegrams received by Allied representatives in Iasi (the count Charles-Auguste de Saint-Aulaire, Sir George Barclay, the baron Carlo Fasciotti, Charles Vopicka) from the allied authorities. From the large amounts of documents the most significant and important were selected. The article made a critical analysis of the sources, resorting to a comparison between documents. The short study used a few concepts belonging to the theory of international relations such as realism, neorealism, survival, power, national interest, alliances, etc. The paper attempted also to resort to an approach from the perspective of the theory of international relations. Thus, this scientific contribution tries to establish a *sine qua non* connection between the history and theory of international relations.

### **Premises**

The Romanian Kingdom entered World War I in August 1916, following two years of neutrality or so-called armed expectation with the defence of the frontiers, a concept also used in historical literature and documents from archives. (See Iordache, 1998; Arhiva Nationala Istorica Centrala a Romaniei, Fund Microfilms, France, roll 101, p. I: 267).

The Romanian neutrality could not be perpetual because Romania's situation was completely different from other neutral countries in World War I. It could not adopt a position of permanent neutrality like Switzerland, for instance. The international community had unanimously recognized Switzerland's perpetual neutrality, concluding the Peace Treaty of Westphalia (1648). Romania's neighbouring countries were all belligerent ones. Romania carried out intense negotiations with both alliances, the Entente and the Central Powers. Finally, the government headed by Ion I. C. Bratianu decided to join the block that promised the achievement of Romanian national interest. The national interest is an essential concept for realism in international relations. The Romanian state performed as a rational actor acting for the achievement of its national interest. The Romanian authorities strove to obtain

the greatest advantages possible from the war with the lowest losses. (Gorun, 2018: 226-211)

What did national interest mean for Romania in the years of the Great War (at least until the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution and the collapse of Russian Empire)? In those difficult circumstances, national interest meant the union of Transylvania, Banat and Bukovina with the Old Kingdom. This was the main objective for Romanian foreign policy immediately after the outbreak of the war. Another fundamental concept in realist theory of international relations is power. Any state actor in the international arena strives to maximize its own power, its own capabilities. Realist thinkers stressed the great importance of military power. (Morgenthau, 2007: 202-67)

During neutrality but also following intervention in the Great Conflagration, the Romanian army was poorly equipped and not very well trained. (Grandhomme, 2018: 52-51) The need for effective war materials, ammunition, and modern weapons was stringent. (Torrey, 2014: 35-29). That is why the Romanian government delayed the intervention into the war for so long. But this is just one reason for this major decision. (Gorun, 2018: 48; Idem, 2013: 334-323; Idem, 2007: 318-303). Romanian authorities and diplomacy strove to receive certain guarantees from Entente concerning the fulfilment of Romanian national aspirations. I share the opinion of the historian Gheorghe I. Bratianu, who considered that two major questions had been the main topics during Romania's negotiations for the accession to the Entente: a question of principle concerning the territorial claims and a problem of opportunity, regarding the decision which had to be taken and the optimal moment for a military intervention. Of course, between the two issues, there was a relation of interdependence. (Bratianu, 1998: 260-258; Gorun, 2018: 221).

After the Romanian army obtained a few easy victories, the following defeats forced the authorities and King Ferdinand to leave Bucharest for Iași. A large part of the country was occupied by the Central Powers' troops. In the following year, 1917, the royal army was particularly reorganized due to the contribution of the French Military Mission commanded by General Henri-Mathias Berthelot. Thus, Romanian troops were able to achieve the outstanding victories of Marasti, Marasesti and Oituz, in the summer of 1917. Unfortunately, the Romanian Kingdom could not exploit these successes due to the unfavourable international circumstances and also because of certain events that had happened on the front starting earlier that spring. (Preda, 2017: 160-129)

## **The way to peace and considerations on relations with the Allies Survival: the main objective**

Being under the influence of Bolshevik ideology, Russian soldiers had refused to fight from the beginning of the 1917 fall. They had also begun the retreat from Romanian front in disorder. (Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, Carton 4N40, D. 3, Telegram no. 1077 of General Berthelot to the Minister of War, December 19th 1917; Cipaianu, 1993: 61-60). Romania's situation worsened continuously due to the armistice signed by Soviet Russia with the Central Empires in Brest-Litovsk, at the beginning of December 1917. (Torrey, 2014: 288-275). From that very moment, Russia ceased to be an allied power. (Gorun, 2010: 193). Russia became somehow even a more dangerous enemy than the Central Powers for the Romanian Kingdom. Russian policy was characterized by unpredictability. (For this issue, see also Besançon, 2013).

The attitude of the new Bolshevik government, concerning the war in general- and particularly regarding Romania- was eloquent. In Vladimir Ilici Lenin's opinion, World War I was an imperialist conflict. All peoples should have the right to self-determination and thus, the Romanian state will be perceived by Soviet Russia as a multi-ethnic state, a prison of the peoples. In fact, in the interwar period, the Russian authorities acted for the dismantling of the Romanian state. The incidents that took place at Tatar Bunar, in 1924, were significant.

The armistice of Brest-Litovsk placed Romania in a desperate situation as it was going to be surrounded almost only by hostile forces. Taking into account these realities, Romania's main foreign policy objective soon became the survival of the state. The survival concept is widely-spread in structural realism theorised by Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer. Rather than John Mearsheimer, who proposed an offensive neorealism, according to Kenneth Waltz, the main concern of the states was not the maximization of their power, but the maintenance of their positions in the system. (Waltz, 2006:176). Therefore, in the opinion of the famous representative of structural realism, the fundamental goal of the states is the assurance of their security and survival. In this context, Kenneth Waltz spoke about the "self-help" principle, which could be linked to John Mearsheimer's postulate. Mearsheimer wrote that the primordial purpose of all state actors was survival and that is why the states cannot trust other state actors to guarantee their national security. The representative of the offensive neorealism defined eloquently the alliances, starting from this thesis. According to him, the alliances represent: "*only temporary marriages of convenience, where today's alliance partner might be tomorrow's enemy, and today's enemy might be tomorrow's alliance partner.*" (Mearsheimer, 2003: 27; Idem, 1994/1995: 11). To assure their

survival, the states will tend to form a balance of power. This balance contributes to the preservation of the system. (Waltz, 2006: 172-165)

Thus the Ion I. C. Bratianu, Alexandru Averescu and Alexandru Marghiloman governments strove as much as possible to preserve the existence of the state, its survival. Their ingrate task required them to keep close, friendly relations with the Allies, while also resisting pressures exerted by Central Powers for the conclusion of the peace. The main goal of the German military authorities was to obtain a decisive triumph in the East, to seize war material and then to move all the forces in the West. (Gorun, 2010: 197)

The Romanian armistice of Focsani (signed on December 9, 1917) has to be perceived as a natural and unhappy consequence of the Russian armistice, as the Russian and Romanian fronts were closely related. In other words, the Romanian front was a part of the Eastern front. If Russia had left the war, Romania would not have been able to keep up the front alone, using only its army. Since the fall of 1917, the Soviet authorities have intercepted and confiscated all war materials and ammunition destined to Romania. (*Ibidem*)

The relations between Iasi and Petrograd worsened fast, as well. On January 13/26, 1918, Sovnarkom broke diplomatic relations with the Romanian government and ordered Constantin Diamandi's (the Romanian minister from Petrograd) imprisonment. He was liberated only after the protests of Entente's ambassadors in Russia. (Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères français, D. 349: 92, 95, 113, 127, 149).

At the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, the Western Allies attempted to create a centre of military resistance in South Russia. The reorganized Romanian army had to be the piece of resistance in this project. The paper shares the point of view of American historian Glenn E. Torrey. He categorically stated that the sine qua non condition for the success of this plan was the stability of the situation in Bessarabia. This region enjoyed an important strategic position. It was situated at the back of the front and housed the provisions and weapons storages. But unfortunately, as Ion I. C. Bratianu had feared, the turmoil and disorder from Moldavia passed to the territory between Prut and Nistru, due to the Russian soldiers marching East (Torrey, 2014: 289)

Willing to maintain Romanian belligerency at all costs, Paris, London, Rome and Washington rejected any negotiation of peace with the Central Powers. The French government, headed by the minister of war, Georges Clemenceau urged Romania to continue the resistance *until the end and by all means*. (Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al Romaniei, Fund Paris, vol. 36: 110). In fact, according to diplomatic and military documents I researched, Clemenceau was probably the most radical French official.

General Berthelot shared a quite similar attitude, despite Romanian military difficulties. In his opinion, the Romanian army should continue to fight even beyond the Nistru river, not just between Prut and Nistru. However, he complained that Russia was unfriendly towards Romania and willing to conclude peace with the Central Powers. Moreover, in Bessarabia the lack of raw materials was obvious. There was no coal and no oil. (Grandhomme, Roucaud, Sarmant, 2000: 347; Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Série Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, Carton 4N40, Telegram no. 1165 of General Berthelot to the Minister of War, January 3rd 1918; *Ibidem*, Telegram no. 1023, December 8th 1917; See also Cipaianu, 1997).

In the first months of 1918, the French Military Mission's commander did his best to prevent negotiations for peace (See Grandhomme, Roucaud, Sarmant, 2000), a behaviour shared by any other diplomatic or military representative of the Entente. According to Stephen Pichon, the minister of Foreign Affairs, the Allies should have reiterated commitments concerning Romania, in order to encourage Romanian resistance. (Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères français, Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, D. 349: 204.) Of course, the Allies were aware that an armistice represented a prelude for a peace treaty. This kind of treaty was to be avoided. For the reasons I expressed earlier, they strongly opposed peace negotiations.

Surely, the plenipotentiary minister, Saint-Aulaire, got better acquainted with Romanian realities. He had to respect all the instructions received from his government, the same way the other diplomatic agents did. Among the Allied powers, France was the most intransigent. The count Saint-Aulaire complained to Stephen Pichon that he (the French minister in Iasi) had the monopoly over the threatening demarches concerning relations with the government of Iasi. (*Ibidem*: 85) Unlike the French ambassador in Rome, Camille Barrère, Saint-Aulaire told that Romania's situation was totally different from that of Serbia or Belgium. The Romanian Kingdom was completely isolated, but the two countries could go on to communicate with Allies. The sending of some Czech divisions on the Romanian front failed. (*Ibidem*, D. 358: 254)

The Romanian minister in Paris, Victor Antonescu was afraid that if Romania disappointed the Allied powers, being unable to carry on the struggle, the public opinion in those countries would be badly influenced. (Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al Romaniei, Fund Paris, vol. 36: 110) But this paper does not fully subscribe to this point of view, although the role of the public opinion was stressed by a few theories in international relations such as liberal idealism. (Guzzini, 2000: 50-45) The foreign policy decision-makers do not consider the public opinion's wishes too much. Moreover, public opinion from a state could be dominated by different emotions. The emotions of the actors should not be seriously taken into consideration when

talking about the foreign policy process, as the realist thinker Hans Morgenthau emphasized. (Roche, 1999: 32)

On February 2, 1918, the German General August von Mackensen informed Constantin Prezan, the chief of the Romanian General Staff that the maintenance of the armistice convention on December 9, 1917, was impossible following the new developments. Meanwhile, Romania had broken diplomatic relations with Russia and Russian troops had left the Romanian front. (Arhivele Ministerului de Externe al României, Fund Paris, vol. 37, Telegram sent from Iasi, signed Bratianu, January 31, 1918; Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères français, Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, D. 358: 306).

A new international event happening in the proximity of Romanian borders complicated, even more, Romania's situation. Ukraine, which had served as a buffer zone for the Romanian state signed, as well, a separate peace with Central Powers, on February 9, 1918. Romania's situation became critical. (Cipaianu, 1993:78) Any effort for a military resistance could mean a suicidal act. The lack of ammunition was also obvious.

The government led by Ion I.C. Bratianu had to resign in favour of the cabinet headed by General Alexandru Averescu. The new government tried not to break the ties with the Allies. But the president of the Council of ministers had to deal with the Central Powers as well. The Romanian diplomacy attempted to get the maintenance of all commitments regarding its territorial integrity and the new frontiers of the state from the Entente's authorities. (Oprescu, 1979: 161). General Averescu was not able to avoid the conclusion of peace with Germany and its allies. (Gorun, 2013: 142). The ministers of France, Great Britain, Italy and the U.S.A. from Iasi received recommendations from their governments to disagree with all negotiations between Romania and Central Powers. (Idem, 2009: 289). The negotiations between Averescu's cabinet and the enemy might have concluded, in the opinion of Entente's authorities, with a separate peace.

## **Conclusion**

The position of Entente's diplomatic and military circles oscillated. In fact, all these states forcibly opposed separate peace. Still, we can see some differences between France and Italy on one hand, and Great Britain on the other. The French attitude was more clearly defined than the English attitude. The instructions received by Saint-Aulaire from Paris were more categorical than the recommendations sent from the Foreign Office for George Barclay. We can also perceive differences on this topic between the Entente's diplomatic representatives in the Romanian capital and their governments. The four ministers in Iasi knew the Romanian realities much better. They all proposed a common declaration of the Entente's countries. Thus, Romania

had carried out all its obligations as an allied state and all the actions of the enemy taken in the occupied territory should be condemned. The Romanian military resistance became impossible due to the lack of ammunition. The new government headed by Alexandru Marghiloman tried to keep cordial relations with the Entente but it could not avoid the peace treaty with the Central Empires. However, the peace treaty signed in Bucharest on April 24/ May 7 was never promulgated by King Ferdinand. Moreover, Romania joined the Entente again and re-entered the war on November 10, 1918, before the end of the Great War.

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