

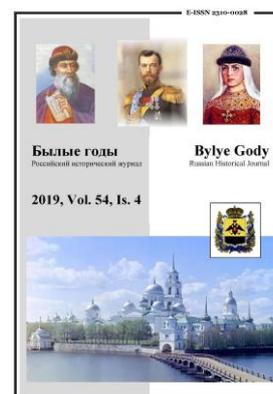
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## The Russian-Romanian Diplomatic Negotiations between 1914 and 1916 for Romania's Entry into the First World War

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### Abstract

Although it had adhered to the Triple Alliance since as early as 1883, when the First World War broke the Romanian Kingdom proclaimed its neutrality, a decision that was favourable to the Entente. The negotiations between France, Great Britain and Russia on the one hand and the Romanian Kingdom on the other hand were only conducted by Russian and Romanian diplomats, while the French and British representatives were merely “kept up to date” with the evolution of the discussions. On 18 September/1 October 1914, a secret Russian-Romanian convention was signed whereby Russia recognised the territorial integrity of Romania and its right to incorporate within its borders the territories inhabited by the Romanians in Austro-Hungary. For almost two years, Romania maintained a state of neutrality that was benevolent towards Russia, in spite of the commercial relations that existed between the kingdom on the Danube and the enemies of the Entente. In the summer of 1916, under the circumstances of the offensive of General Alexei Brusilov in Galicia, but also of an advance of the French-British troops in Verdun, the government in Bucharest decided to enter the war alongside Russia, France, Great Britain and Italy, with whom he signed both a political and a military convention. On 14/27 August 1916 Romania attacked Austro-Hungary, as the Romanian troops relied on their cooperation with the Russian military.

**Keywords:** neutrality, negotiations, secret Russian-Romanian convention, Transylvania, Bukovina, S.A. Poklevski-Koziell, I.I.C. Brătianu, political convention, military convention.

### 1. Introduction

The assassination on 15/28 June 1914 of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Duchess of Hohenberg, by a 19 years old student offered Vienna the pretext to attack Serbia in order to re-build the prestige of Austro-Hungary in the Balkans but also to ensure the continued existence of the two-headed monarchy. The humiliating nature of the ultimatum given to Serbia by Austro-Hungary, considering that the Serbian state was supported by Russia, led to its non-acceptance and then to the war declaration given by Vienna as well as to the beginning of the hostilities between Austro-Hungary and Serbia. What was thought to be a mere local confrontation rapidly turned into a world war which lasted over four years because, in Europe, the two military political blocks, the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austro-Hungary, Italy) and the Entente (Great Britain, France and Russia), were already formed.

On 15/28 July 1914 Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Russia and Germany, and Great Britain joined the conflict, too; all these actions ended the “Century of Peace” which had managed to astonish three generations from 1815 to 1914 (F.-G. Dreyfus et al., 2006: 293).

The outbreak of the war determined the Romanian government to define its attitude and all the previous problems moved to the background. Thus, on 21 July/3 August 1914 the Crown Council was convened to the Peleş Castle in Sinaia. The council was attended by 20 people, among them King Carol I and the Heir Prince Ferdinand. In spite of being an ad-hoc institution whose existence was not foreseen by the

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1866 Constitution, but convened under exceptional circumstances to guide the government's policy, the above-mentioned Crown Council decided to maintain Romania's state of neutrality, which constituted an act of friendship towards Russia<sup>1</sup>, although the Romanian Kingdom had joined the Triple Entente as early as 1883. This non-intervention was justified by the fact that the text of the 1883 Treaty had specified that Romania had the obligation to help Austro-Hungary only if the latter had been attacked, which was not the case. On the contrary, the Austro-Hungarian army was the one which entered the Serbian territory. Besides, the government in Vienna had started the war without previously asking for the opinion of the government in Bucharest. Even if Romania did not ally with Russia, France and Great Britain in 1914, the decision not to join the Triple Alliance may be seen as an action favourable to the Entente, which somehow foresaw a tighter collaboration of the kingdom at the mouths of the Danube with the three great powers. An important role in the adoption of this neutrality was certainly the visit to Constantza of Tsar Nicholas II, of the imperial family and of several high Russian officials on 1/14 June 1914 (Arhire, 2019: 1386–1390).

## 2. Discussion

### The Sazonov-Diamandy Secret Convention (18 September/1 October 1914)

Even though it is a less known fact, between 1914 and 1916 the Russian-Romanian relations had an overwhelming importance both for the establishment of Romania's neutrality after the outbreak of the First World War and for its entry into the war two years later, since the negotiations between the government in Bucharest and the representatives of the powers of the Entente were actually held with Russia, while Great Britain and France were only "kept up to date" about their evolution. In his notes kept at the Romanian National Archives, Constantin Diamandy<sup>2</sup>, the Romanian Minister Plenipotentiary to Saint Petersburg, also stressed the decisive role of the Russian-Romanian talks. "At first, the western allies would let Romania negotiate directly with Mr Sazonov while they contented themselves with supporting Russia, inviting us to be conciliatory, pressuring Romania without any direct involvement" (Guzun, 2016: 26). Ion I.C. Brătianu (Arhire), who was prime minister and who actually carried all the negotiations of accession to the Triple Entente, had a point of view that was similar to that of the chief of the Romanian diplomatic mission to Saint Petersburg and was mentioned in a telegram sent by the Minister Plenipotentiary Poklevski-Koziell. According to the mentioned facts, immediately after the outbreak of the war, I.I.C. Brătianu sought to make an agreement with Russia alone without any additional guarantees from France or Great Britain, as the head of the Romanian government was fully aware of the exceptional importance of Romania's relations with its great eastern neighbour (Ardeleanu et al., 1983: 566. Telegram sent by S.A. Poklevski-Koziell to S.D. Sazonov, 2/15 January 1915).

Being a significant wheat exporter and having an army of approximately 650,000 militaries, Romania had become important for the warring states from the very start of the war; each of the two political-military blocks was trying to draw the small kingdom on the Danube to its side. As emphasized by an article published in the "Petersburger Herald", Romania's entry into the war on the side of the Triple Alliance could have influenced Bulgaria and Turkey, and Serbia would have been attacked by the Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish armies while Austro-Hungary could have directed itself towards Russia (FAMR. F. 71/1914 E, Petrograd. D 50. Petersburger Herald, 29 July 1914). On 16 July, only one day away from Austro-Hungary's declaration of war, King Carol of Romania received two personal telegrams. In the first one, sent by Emperor Franz Joseph, the Romanian monarch was reminded of the old friendship to encourage the approval of the decision to attack Serbia while in the second, signed by Tsar Nicholas II, there was another appeal to friendship with the purpose of maintaining peace (Marghiloman, 1993: 158). "There have been attempts from all sides to bribe us, buy us – draw us to their cause" (Marie, 2014: 101–102), wrote Queen Marie of Romania on the day when neutrality was adopted, 21 July 1914.

Since the neutrality adopted by the government in Bucharest was a positive aspect for the powers of the Entente and especially for Russia, the imperial government in Saint Petersburg sought to preserve this situation as long as they could not draw Romania into a conflict on its side. In consequence, shortly after the organization of the Crown Council at Sinaia, the Romanians and Russians started negotiations to conclude a military convention between the Russian Empire and Romania. Russia's tendency to negotiate and even make concessions was determined by its need to consolidate its strength by attracting new allies which, although they could not play a decisive role in the outcome of the war, could not be neglected either. "Russia is strong enough to trust God and its own strength, but it must not despise its small neighbours' tendencies of getting closer", as Menshikov used to say, talking especially about the Romanian Kingdom (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12).

<sup>1</sup> Right on the eve of the Crown Council on 21 July 1914, following the instructions he had received, Russia's Minister Plenipotentiary to Romania, S. A. Poklevski-Koziell, informed the Romanian Prime Minister, Ion I.C. Brătianu, that Romania's neutrality would be seen by Saint Petersburg as an act of friendship (Oprea, 1998: 69–70).

<sup>2</sup> Constantin Diamandy entered the diplomatic service in 1892, first as a legation attaché in Berlin and as a Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to Rome from 1912 to 1914. In February 1914 he was appointed head of the Romanian Legation to Saint Petersburg, a position that he held until December 1917 (NARDCHA, inventory 1530 Constantin Diamandy: 3).

As a result of the negotiations between Sergey Dmitriyevich Sazonov, Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ion I.C. Brătianu, Romania's Prime Minister, the head of the Russian diplomacy submitted the draft convention from 23 July/5 August 1914 to the Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to Saint Petersburg, Constantin Diamandy. Written under the influence of the military operations unfolding between the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian army, the project foresaw a military cooperation between Russia and Romania against the Central Powers for the maintenance of the balance of forces in the Balkans, which Austro-Hungary threatened to destroy. Accompanied by a map, the draft convention also mentioned that the Russian troops would fight until the territories of the dualist monarch, inhabited mostly by Romanians, would unite with the Romanian Kingdom, establishing the limits of these territories. At the same time, it was mentioned that Romania could conclude an eventual separate peace concomitantly only with Russia, as well as the fact that this convention was to be valid until the end of the war. Besides, S. D. Sazonov gave the Romanian government assurances that the literal enforcement of the convention would be supported by France and Great Britain, Russia's allies (Oprea, 1998: 71).

On 13/26 September 1914, S.D. Sazonov and C. Diamandy finalised a new draft convention between Russia and Romania. At the request of the Romanian Prime Minister, Ion I. C. Brătianu, its text included a provision that said that the government in Saint Petersburg recognised the territorial integrity of the Romanian Kingdom as it was in the autumn of 1914 and also mentioned the need to perform a territorial delineation between the Russian and the Romanian sides on the principle of nationality. As there was no discussion about Bessarabia, the head of the Romanian government suggested that after the defeat of Austro-Hungary, the Romanian side of Bukovina should be delineated from the Russian one by the Prut River, a solution that the Russian part could not accept. Through the same project, in exchange for a benevolent neutrality, Russia recognised Romania's right to integrate the territories inhabited by the Romanians in Austro-Hungary inside its borders "as soon as this shall be considered necessary" which gave the Romanian state a freedom to decide and to act (Scurtu, 1992: 32). Like in the text of the previous project, the Russian side undertook to get the approval of France and Great Britain for everything that had been agreed, which proved yet again Russia's prime importance in the negotiations of the Entente aimed at drawing Romania to its side.

Once completed, the draft convention was enforced through an exchange of diplomatic notes on 18 September/1 October 1914. Known as the Sazonov-Diamandy Secret Convention, as its conclusion was confidential, this understanding should have rather been called Sazonov-Brătianu, since, after the organization of the Sinaia Crown Council, the management of Romania's foreign policy was entirely taken over by the Romanian Prime Minister, who did not consult anyone on his decisions, not even Emanoil Porumbaru<sup>1</sup> who was the Foreign Affairs Minister. In spite of his personal ambitions, Constantin Diamandy, who had been appointed a Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania to Saint Petersburg rather recently, was nothing more than a mailman between Sazonov and Brătianu, as he carried out precisely the instructions coming from Bucharest.

### **Diplomatic Negotiations for Romania's Entry into the First World War**

Invoking the 1877-1878 Russian-Turkish War, a conflict where the Romanian army fought alongside the Russians, and also the fact that both the Russians and the Romanians were mostly of the Orthodox Christian faith, the Russian press had asked Romania to enter the war as early as the summer of 1914. Considering that in September 1914 the Tsarist troops had already occupied a significant part of Bukovina that was mainly inhabited by Ruthenians, in an article published in "Vecherneye Vremya" Romania was insistently asked to enter the war, as the Romanian-Russian collaboration against Austro-Hungary was considered extremely timely and favourable to the interests of the Romanian people (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D 12. Vecherneye Vremya, 3 September 1914). Pointing out the military successes of Russia against the Austro-Hungarian army, the "Herald Petersburger" was even more categorical with regard to the attitude that the kingdom on the Danube was supposed to adopt by saying no more and no less than, "Romania must pull the sword out" (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. Petersburger Herald, 3 September 1914). Noting the major interest of the government in Bucharest towards the acquisition of Transylvania, a province that had never been part of the Romanian state but whose population was largely Romanian, the Russian newspapers considered that the autumn of 1914 might offer a unique opportunity for Romania to acquire this territory, to the detriment of Austro-Hungary. On the contrary, a victory of Austro-Hungary in the war would have meant "the annihilation of the Romanian ideals" because it would have eliminated any perspective of uniting

<sup>1</sup> "Porumbaru had been completely set aside. All he did was current bureaucracy work, business correspondence and salary payment orders. The true Ministry of Foreign Affairs was his office at home [Brătianu's home], in Lascăr Catargiu Street or better yet in his living room. Romania's narrowest Ministry of Foreign Affairs ever – 4 people, Brătianu and his three intimate secretaries [...]. That was all. Brătianu would personally receive all foreign affairs ministers and communicate with all our delegations. He would type the telegrams himself. [...] Besides the official code with the main legations, Brătianu also had personal codes. Only the telegrams that could be sent without this strictly confidential code would pass through the foreign affairs and be communicated to them" (Duca, n.y.: 32).

Transylvania with Romania, as was underlined in a Petrograd<sup>1</sup> newspaper (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. *Novoye Vremya*, 29 October 1914).

The Russian media, however, issued a warning for all non-Slavic peoples with populations to be freed from Austro-Hungary, which also applied to Romania: “There is no payment without a fight”. This statement from the “*Russkoye Slovo*” was bolstered by explanations that Transylvania and the Italian provinces from Austro-Hungary were not linked to Italy or Romania by history or politics as their entire previous evolution had unfolded outside the Italian or the Romanian state; this, in the vision of the author of that article, could justify a separate political evolution of such territories in the future, too (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. *Russkoye Slovo*, 27 September 1914). However, one may note that this observation referred more to Romania than to Italy since only one year before, the Romanian army had gotten involved in the end of the Balkan Wars and its advance into the Bulgarian territory did not encounter any resistance, thus leading to territorial gains.<sup>2</sup> The article published by the “*Petrograder Zeitung*” in August 1914 leaves no doubt about this:

“This concerns particularly Romania which seems to fancy another stroll like the one it took Bulgaria, this time in Transylvania, and take home a huge spoil without shedding a drop of blood. This cannot be allowed under any circumstances. Romania only has the liberty to perform its liberation with arms in hand as long as our troops have not occupied any Hungarian territory with Romanian population on it yet, i.e. as long as Transylvania is there to be conquered. But as soon as Transylvania is taken over, we can no longer talk about a transfer of this province to Romania both for reasons of justice and for political reasons. Because if Romania takes possession of Transylvania so easily, it will immediately think of acquiring Bessarabia just as easily. It is of no use to us to whet such appetite” (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D 12. *Petrograder Zeitung*, 29 August 1914).

Russia was still at war with Austro-Hungary and wanted to weaken or even eliminate the latter, but the same newspaper, the “*Petrograder Zeitung*” drew attention to the fact that the Tsarist army should pay attention to how far it wanted to go with the fulfilment of its objectives as “the desire to crush the enemy with all its powers must not go as far as doing the liberation work of other peoples, too and then giving them what we gained by shedding the precious Russian blood. [...] Russia must be careful not to play the undignified role of doing the dirty work of others. That is as far as the duties of Russia go” (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D 12. *Petrograder Zeitung*, 29 August 1914).

Right after the outbreak of the 1914 conflict, which has endured in history as the First World War or the Great War due to its size, Germany and Austro-Hungary did not abandon hope that they would draw Romania to their side. The steps taken by Berlin and Vienna continued even after the government in Bucharest adopted a strict neutrality in relation to the war that had just begun in Europe, and these attempts to draw the Romanian Kingdom to the side of the Central Powers also continued after the signing of the secret Russian-Romanian convention on 18 September/1 October 1914, as neither the Germans nor the Austro-Hungarians knew anything about the signing of this diplomatic act. In fact, since a military balance had been established between the two warring camps, the attempts to draw Romania to the German and Austro-Hungarian side did not stop until the summer of 1916 when the government in Bucharest declared war on Austro-Hungary (Nastovici, 1979).

In the summer of 1914, at war with Russia, Germany and Austro-Hungary promised that Romania would acquire Bessarabia, a territory that was part of Russia, in exchange for the cooperation of the Romanian army with the Central Powers’ camp. To make this promise even more tempting, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs insisted on explaining to Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu that control over Bessarabia would have been extremely beneficial to Romania, as it was synonymous “to the unlimited control of the Danube Delta and to a very important increase in power” (Oprea, 1998: 77). Because the small kingdom on the Danube remained neutral, the German and Austro-Hungarian offers were subsequently improved; besides the promise to give away the province between the Prut and the Dniester, they also added the Negotin from Serbia and even a part of Bukovina. To avoid an intervention of the Romanian army in Transylvania, in the summer of 1914 Count István Tisza used the Hungarian press to make statements according to which Transylvania was to regain its autonomy and be managed by a provincial council, as it had been until 1849. Moreover, the Austrian diplomacy announced that it would withdraw the objections it

<sup>1</sup> On 1 October 1914, the name of the Russian capital was changed from Saint Petersburg [Sankt Petersburg] to Petrograd through an imperial decree as the old name sounded too German, considering that the Russian Empire was at war with the Second Reich.

<sup>2</sup> In 1912, following the First Balkan War between Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece, on the one hand, and the Ottoman Empire on the other hand, Bulgaria enlarged its territory. Romania perceived this enlargement and implicitly the strengthening of its southern neighbour as a threat to its own security, and so the government in Bucharest asked the government in Sophia to accept a rectification of the border from Dobruja in favour of Romania. Receiving an offer far below their expectations, the Romanian government opted for a military settlement of the dispute. The offensive of the Romanian army from the summer of 1913 into the Bulgarian territory was a “fast-forward campaign” which determined the Bulgarians to ask for peace so as to avoid the entry of the enemy troops in Sofia. The Bulgarian army did not fight back and so the Romanian army was not tested at all during this campaign. Peace was signed in Bucharest and Bulgaria gave away Southern Dobruja to Romania, which increased Romanian prestige on the international stage. However, this fast and easy victory did have some negative consequences as it hid the serious shortcomings of the Romanian army, which became apparent immediately after its entry into the First World War (Constantiniu, 2008: 253-254).

had had against the Treaty of Bucharest signed in 1913, while also stating that it no longer thought of reviewing it (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D 12. *Novoye Vremya*, 13 August 1914). The governments in Berlin and Vienna even promised Odessa the creation, after the war, of a Great Duchy of Ukraine, a vassal of Austria, which was to separate Romania from Russia (Guzun, 2016: 161–162. Telegram sent by S. A. Poklevski-Koziell to S. D. Sazonov, 9/22 September 1914). However, all these proposals and actions were left without any effect as the large majority of Romanians favoured the Triple Entente; in Bucharest and in other cities there were almost daily demonstrations of sympathy of the population towards France, Russia and Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> Besides, as Stephan Burián von Rajecz, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Austro-Hungary noted:

“Upon a superficial analysis it was thought that Bessarabia could be a compensation for Romania, but this is not a counter value for Transylvania and Bukovina. [...] in the soul of the Romanians, the scale of the aspirations it aims at is ranked in such a way that the first place is taken by Transylvania and Bukovina while Bessarabia comes second as its value is small considering that they must definitely keep in mind that Russia will take it back by force of arms on the first occasion” (Oprea, 1998: 77–78).

During 1914 there were two internal events which favoured the alienation of Romania from the Triple Alliance and its closeness to the Triple Entente. The first happened on 4 January 1914, when the war had not started yet and the Conservative government of Titu Maiorescu was replaced by a Liberal one led by Ion I.C. Brătianu, who, as is well known, was favourable to the camp made up of France, Russia and Great Britain. The second event was represented by the death of King Carol I. Even if the latter proved to be a good Romanian throughout his lengthy reign lasting 48 years, he could never forget his homeland, or the fact that he belonged to the Hohenzollern dynasty, which made him believe in the strength of Germany and in its capacity to impose itself in the freshly started conflict.

As was expected, during the Crown Council held in July 1914 in Sinaia, King Carol showed his desire for Romania to fight alongside Germany and against Russia. In his speech, kept at the National Archives of Romania, the Romanian monarch excluded the neutrality and the cooperation with the Triple Entente states and could only see the possibility of the Romanian Kingdom participating alongside the Triple Alliance, as shown by the following lines: “So we are only left with a third option: to join the Triple Alliance. The latter boasts military forces so huge that it is beyond any doubt that it will come out as the winner of this formidable war” (Mamina, 1997: 32).

Under these circumstances where the king was clearly for Romania joining the Central Powers’ camp<sup>2</sup>, while the Liberal government formed in the early 1914 was favourable to the Triple Entente, it is no wonder that in the summer and autumn of 1914 the divergences between the Romanian monarch and Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu grew wider. There were even persistent rumours, according to which in mid-August the king was preparing an order to send four army corps to the Romanian-Russian border; the head of the government in Bucharest never agreed to such proposal, as Brătianu believed that this action would do nothing but expose Romania to a great danger (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. *Peterburgskiy Kur’yer*, 12 August 1914). It is, however, to be noted that not only the government would oppose the Russophobe politics of King Carol I but also the majority of the members of Parliament, who all believed that the Romanian sovereign must be forced to reject the claims of Emperor Wilhelm II, whereby the latter had asked Romania to enter into the war immediately alongside Germany and Austro-Hungary. This is how an open conflict emerged between the king and the head of the government, and so the former threatened to abdicate as, after having reigned for almost half a century, Carol I saw himself forced to accept the fact that the government, the parliament and the majority of the population wanted something different from what he wanted. The death of the Romanian sovereign on 10 October 1914 ended this conflict as well as the idea of abdication. The arrival of Ferdinand I on the Romanian throne meant a lot for this country’s closeness to France, Russia and Great Britain, as the new sovereign was favourable to the Triple Entente and his wife, Queen Marie, was a granddaughter of the glorious Queen Victoria and also of Tsar Alexander II. In his diary, Maurice Paléologue, the Ambassador of France to Petrograd, mentioned the difference between the two Romanian sovereigns, emphasizing the positive role of the new king from the perspective of the Entente.

“The King of Romania, Carol I, died yesterday at the age of 76.

Entirely dedicated to the Germanic powers, living always with the admiration, I would say almost with the fetishism of their military, political and moral superiority, he could not have the weakest doubt about their close victory. So that for as long as he lived, we did not stand any chance to rally Romania to our cause.

Ferdinand I, the new king, will have a freer spirit and freer hands.” (Paléologue, 2017: 216)

<sup>1</sup> To give just two examples to this end, it is worth mentioning that in early September, in Galatz there was a “noisy demonstration” in favour of the Triple Entente, attended by people from various professions (teachers, attorneys, craftsmen, traders and secondary school pupils) who shouted on the streets “Long live France, England and Russia” (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D 12. *Vecherneye Vremya*, 2 September 1914). The return of the political leader Nicolae Filipescu from the Peleş Castle in Sinaia where he had been in an audience with the king triggered the formation of a crowd of almost 20,000 people, who waited for him for several hours at the North Station in Bucharest to ask for the immediate entry of Romania into the war on the side of the Triple Entente (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D 12. *Petrograder Zeitung*, 13 septembrie 1914).

<sup>2</sup> The Russian press was even writing about “the king’s stubbornness” (FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. *Birzhevyye Vedomosti*, 21 August 1914).

While still preserving their decency towards the demise of Carol I, the Russian press also highlighted the possibility of making a major change in the Russian-Romanian relations with the disappearance of the old king. Emphasizing the fact that the former sovereign was a Catholic, as was most of the population of Austria and a good part of Germany, the articles of the Russian newspapers forecasted major changes in the foreign policy of the government in Bucharest, where all actions contrary to the interests of the Entente should no longer find echo in the monarchy, as had happened until then ([FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. Birzhevyye Vedomosti, 21 August 1914](#)). In spite all that, the Russian newspapers also published some articles that did not grasp the drama of King Carol I when the war had started. Because he had proven his loyalty to his country of adoption since his arrival to Romania in 1866, but because he had never forgotten Germany,<sup>1</sup> his homeland, the solution was simple for Romania's first king: Romania had to join the Second Reich, and thus the two countries would have been in the same camp. As Russia was interested in making Romania's entry into the war occur as soon as possible alongside the Entente, the "Novoye Vremya" presented the former Romanian sovereign in an entirely unfavourable light whereby his feelings took priority over those of the country, which was not true.

"The personal feelings of the deceased King Carol were so much against the vital interests of the Romanian people. The welfare of the nation was sacrificed to the feelings of kinship of King Carol towards Emperor Wilhelm. The logo of the Romanian politics was the following: better let the entire Romanian people perish than disturb the family ties between the two lines of the Hohenzollern family" ([FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. Novoye Vremya, 29 October 1914](#)).

According to the Russian press, but also to the politicians in Petrograd, although Ferdinand I was still a Hohenzollern, through his arrival on the Romanian throne, the politics of dynastic interests that had been promoted in the past were replaced with politics that relied on the promotion of national interests, which benefited Russia. Hence, the request for an audience made by a committee consisting of university professors with the purpose of determining the monarch to support Romania's entry into the war alongside the Entente was favourably received by King Ferdinand I, who even encouraged the intervention of professors into political life, while Carol I would have seen it as a mere offence to the institution of the monarchy ([FAMR. F. Petrograd. D. 12. Novoye Vremya, 29 October 1914](#)).

Raised in the shadow of his uncle<sup>2</sup>, Heir Prince Ferdinand was proclaimed a king on 28 September/11 October 1914 when he was sworn in. At that time, little was known about him; Nicolae Iorga, Romania's greatest historian of all times described him as "an unknown and ignored individual, for some a mystery, for no one a certainty" ([Scurtu, 1992: 33](#)). In this new political context, Ion I. C. Brătianu became the central figure of political life, and his decisions had an overwhelming importance for the destiny of Romania. Across the country there were almost daily demonstrations; most people were asking for the country to join the war alongside the Entente while others, fewer in numbers, were in favour of the Central Powers. Few were for the maintenance of neutrality, but nevertheless I.I.C. Brătianu kept discretion and did not reveal any of his plans for the future. "The Sphynx," as he was named by his contemporaries, used silence as his main weapon, assimilating himself to the "engineer who works in silence on a piece of safety work" ([Iorga, 1972: 473](#)).

The signing of the convention from 18 September/1 October 1914 clearly showed a tightening of the Russian-Romanian relations, but the government in Petrograd wanted certain clarifications with regard to the attitude of the government in Bucharest. After the signing of this convention, Ion I. C. Brătianu authorised the Minister Plenipotentiary C. Diamandy to declare to the Russians that Romania would keep an attitude of "benevolent neutrality" until the moment when its army would occupy the Austro-Hungarian territories inhabited by Romanians. Only two days after the signing of the above-mentioned convention, in a telegram addressed to the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, S. D. Sazonov asked for clarifications from Prime Minister Brătianu with regard to the status of "benevolent neutrality" he had proclaimed. The Foreign Affairs Minister would have wanted this wording to make clear that, on its territory, the Romanian government would forbid any transports of war materials and food supplies by states that were enemies of Russia and, at the same time, that the Romanian territory was open to the transit of Russian

<sup>1</sup> Even if from his very first day in Romania (back then known as the United Principalities of Moldova and Walachia) on 20 May 1866, Prince Carol declared that "upon setting foot on this holy land, I became a Romanian," he could never integrate the Byzantine-Oriental morals that were so inherent to the Romanian political class and remained loyal to Germany and to his ethnic origins. In his memories, I. G. Duca described King Carol I as having precisely the attributes that the Romanians lacked. "In a country which did not have the notion of time, King Carol brought the sense of mathematical accuracy [...]. In a country where everything was an approximation, he brought the conscientiousness imposed to the verge of German meticulousness. In a country of twitches, of violent enthusiasm and of hasty discouragement or at least rapid boredom he brought an unflinching, peaceful and steady perseverance like the ticking of the countless clocks that filled his apartments. In a country full of impatience and restlessness he brought patience which knows to get ready and the peace that knows to maintain its serenity [...], in a country with an eastern mentality, he brought a western spirit precisely at a time when that country was striving to rush itself into the great whirlpool of the western civilisation [...], in a country which, due to its historical vicissitudes, was not used to well-defined plans made in advance, he came with a precise purpose, made a programme and fulfilled it to the letter" ([Constantiniu, 2008: 234–235](#)).

<sup>2</sup> As King Carol I and Queen Elisabeth had just one girl, Mărioara, who died when she was only 4 years, Prince Ferdinand, to whom Carol I was an uncle, became the Heir Prince.

military equipment towards Serbia ([Guzun, 2016: 168. Telegram sent by S. D. Sazonov to S. A. Poklevski-Koziell, 20 September/3 October 1914](#)). Brătianu's answer was rather vague and unsatisfying for the Russian side, as the head of the Romanian government only promised that he would try to limit as much as possible the transfer of war materials to Turkey and Bulgaria but without forbidding it completely as, he would say, otherwise Romania would reveal its intentions to join the Entente too soon, and in consequence it would no longer receive projectiles and military equipment from Germany. Continuing on the same line, Brătianu argued that Romania's intensified preparation for the war would fully compensate the German transit to Bulgaria and Turkey, but Poklevski-Koziell did not agree to this statement ([Guzun, 2016: 171. Telegram sent by S. A. Poklevski-Koziell to S. D. Sazonov, 23 September/6 October 1914](#)). Rightfully considering that Romania was doing business with the Central Powers, which had a direct effect on Russia's military operations, the Foreign Affairs Minister in Petrograd requested additional clarifications from the Minister Plenipotentiary C. Diamandy through the head of the Imperial Chancellery, the baron Schilling, in a discussion that he had with him on 1 October ([Guzun, 2016: 66](#)). They did not reach any result this time either, as the problem of the transit across the Romanian territory remained a very thorny one, which was only settled when Romania entered into the war alongside the Entente, in the summer of 1916.

Although Russia's proposal for Romania to join the camp of the Entente came immediately after the outbreak of the war, the attitude of the kingdom on the Danube was rather unclear, as shown by a few telegrams sent by the Minister Plenipotentiary Poklevski-Koziell. In order not to exhaust its forces from the beginning of the conflict, the Romanian government headed by Ion I.C. Brătianu further postponed Romania's entry into the war by invoking either the Romanian army's lack of preparation<sup>1</sup> or the unfavourable circumstances on the Eastern Front. An important obstacle against the signing of a political treaty between the Entente and the Romanian Kingdom came from the exaggerated territorial requests formulated by the Romanian Prime Minister, which the Russian diplomats found excessive. Because France and Great Britain did not have any territorial possessions in South-Eastern Europe, all the claims of the Romanian party were to be supported by Russia. Hence, in a discussion between the head of the Russian diplomatic mission in Bucharest and I.I.C. Brătianu, the latter stated that besides Transylvania the Romanian government also wanted the entire Banat and the entire Bukovina through the establishment of the Romanian-Serbian border on the Tisza and of the Romanian-Russian border on the Prut River,<sup>2</sup> a solution which could not be accepted by the Russian side as it would have breached the principle of nationality in both cases. The Banat had an extraordinary ethnic diversity which prompted the British historian R. W. Seton-Watson to state that "there is no district in all of Europe where races are so chaotically mixed as they are in Banat" ([Seton-Watson, 1988: 752](#)); besides the four main national groups (Romanians, Germans, Serbs and Hungarians), there were also Jews, Albanese, Armenians, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians and even a small number of French and Spaniards.<sup>3</sup> Bukovina, in its turn, also had four main ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Romanians, Jews and Germans) with the Ukrainians being the largest majority, 38.4 % and placed compactly to the north of the province ([Livezeanu, 1995: 49](#)). Under these circumstances, Russia was not at all willing to sacrifice the Ukrainians from Bukovina or its Serbian ally (considering that Serbia was very interested in the west of Banat) only to yield to Brătianu's claims. The territorial claims made by the head of the Romanian government and their excessive nature made Russia suspect that Romania did not want to enter the war, as S. D. Sazonov mentioned in a telegram. "The way in which Brătianu operates starts raising the suspicion that he intentionally claims what he knows can't be accepted to make it impossible for us to reach an agreement and to avoid entering the war while making us responsible for the failure of the negotiations" ([Guzun, 2016: 221. Telegram sent by S. D. Sazonov to S. A. Poklevski-Koziell, 1/14 May 1915](#)).

As was to be expected, this constant postponement and prevarication triggered an animosity between Petrograd and Bucharest; in the telegrams sent by the Russian diplomats, the attitude of the Romanian government was characterised as "questionable" or "very enigmatic" and the honest desire of the Romanian Kingdom to join Entente in the war was questioned. Although Russia and Romania on 18 September/1 October 1914 had signed a secret convention, in Petrograd they were considering the possibility of the Romanian Kingdom remaining neutral throughout the entire First World War or even joining the Central Powers.

<sup>1</sup> Although Romania spent over two years in neutrality, when it did enter into the First World War it was proven that its army was not at all ready for the conflict that had started in 1914. The drafting of the campaign plan focused more on the state of the spirit of the population than on the military needs, and so they decided on an offensive action in Transylvania and a defensive one along the Danube and in Dobruja. The logical plan would have been to do it exactly the other way around. The underestimation of the enemy and the overestimation of their own forces were other errors to which we must add, last but not least, the generalised corruption that existed during the Liberal governing, as most of the money intended for the army was embezzled. "As 1915 began, so many possibilities were indeed made available to those who had some leverage with the government to make a fortune overnight through exports and imports of favours, through the army supplies and public works that only those with a strong character or a slow mind did not make a fortune," wrote C. Argetoianu in his memoirs ([Argetoianu, 1991: 151-152](#)).

<sup>2</sup> As he believed that Romania's entry into the war deserved some special reward, Ion I. C. Brătianu asked Poklevski-Koziell to be given the following territories: Bukovina all the way to the Prut, Transylvania, Banat all the way to the Tisza as well as part of Hungary along the line from Szeged to the confluence between the Someș and the Tisza and further along the Carpathians to Bukovina ([Guzun, 2016: 204](#)).

<sup>3</sup> For further details, see ([Moga, 2015: 106-108](#)).

In 1915, faced with German pressure on the Western Front where a balance had been established between the French-British and the German troops and where there were bloody confrontations for only a few square kilometres, France intervened in the Russian-Romanian negotiations and asked both sides to show moderation since it was interested in Romania entering into the war as soon as possible. Since the French wanted an offensive of the Eastern Front to force the Germans to transfer some divisions from the West, the Quai d'Orsay made some proposals about Romania's territorial claims. Considering that the Russian-Romanian negotiations were at a standstill and there was even a certain tension between the two sides, it was not easy for the French to come up with a compromise. Through several talks in Paris, but also in Petrograd and Bucharest, the French diplomats managed to a certain extent to mitigate the animosities between Sazonov and Brătianu which had gotten quite extreme at a certain point, as proven by the words of Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, noted down by Maurice Paléologue on 18 May 1915:

"Brătianu claims to dictate to us; he speaks of Russia with an air of arrogance which I shall not tolerate... I even know that he gave himself away in front of several foreign diplomats when he said that: 'Now it is not the time for Russia to raise its voice!'... Well, he is wrong! Russia is a great power and a passing failure of its armies won't make it forget what it is, what it means through its past, which is its future and its historical mission" (Paléologue, 2017: 444).

Faced with the perspective of a new winter of war, the French decided to "buy" Romania's cooperation at any cost, thus putting pressure on Russia, which public opinion in France would have blamed if the negotiations with Romania had failed (Guzun, 2016: 240–241. Telegram sent by the Russian Ambassador in France, A. Izvolsky, to S. D. Sazonov). Brătianu's point of view that Romania was to have its natural borders along the Danube, the Tisza and the Prut was replaced by the French diplomacy with a reconciliatory solution whereby the Romanian Kingdom was to receive most of the Banat, including the north-eastern side of the Torontal district and Bukovina up to the Siret, while the southern border set by the Danube was left unchanged. Against the backdrop of Russia's military defeats suffered at the hands of the German army, the pressure of France was successful and S.D. Sazonov accepted this point of view, as proven in a discussion that he had with the French Ambassador in Petrograd, Maurice Paléologue:

M. Paléologue: "Let's speak frankly, my dear minister! Think of your military situation, as well! Aren't you frightened by this hasty, unforeseen withdrawal? Can't you see that you are about to lose Przemysl; that maybe even tomorrow the Austro-Germans will mass cross the San and the Vistula? Finally, are you certain that within two or three weeks' time you won't be bitterly regretting having negotiated the Romanian participation so fiercely?"

S.D. Sazonov: "I shall look, he says, for the terms of a new concession in Bukovina and along the Danube bank of the Banat. But I shall set the immediate intervention of the Romanian army as an absolute requirement..." (Paléologue, 2017: 445).

Quai d'Orsay made huge efforts to get the Romanian government to accept Russia's proposals but, faced with "Brătianu's stubbornness", as it was often mentioned in the Russian telegrams, in June 1915 they were forced to accept all Romania's territorial claims, on the condition that the latter entered into the war. In its turn, Russia, whose army had suffered a long series of defeats in Galicia, losing Warsaw, adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Romanian Kingdom and agreed in its turn to Romania's claims. There was even an interesting episode in Bucharest around this time, as S. A. Poklevski-Koziell even had I.I.C. Brătianu sign a written commitment that the Romanian army would join the war alongside the Entente within four weeks, by the beginning of August (Duca, n.y.: 28). As Romania's military involvement relied on the Russian front, this was a thoughtless promise of the Romanian head of government, considering that the tsar's troops were defeated and were withdrawing inside Russia, and Petrograd even considered evacuating the city. The Romanian Prime Minister had gotten himself into an overly delicate situation, as he could not engage the country into a conflict at such an unfavourable moment, but still he had signed a commitment that could not be twisted and so the only solution left was his resignation. In the end, following discussions of the Romanian politicians with the Ministers Plenipotentiary of Russia, France and Great Britain to Bucharest, the latter accepted to release Brătianu of his promise, as the setting up of a new government in Romania would have been a thing shrouded in uncertainty and the position of prime minister could have been taken by someone who was less favourable to the Entente or even had pro-German views (Duca, n.y.: 29–30). Following this event, the three great powers recognised all the territorial claims of the government in Bucharest and left it with them to decide the right time for Romania to join the war.

This extension far beyond the expectations of the negotiations between Russia and Romania had a direct impact on the situation of the Minister Plenipotentiary S. A. Poklevski-Koziell, who already was not well-regarded at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Petrograd since he was a Pole and a Catholic; his superiors constantly suspected him of lack of loyalty towards the interests of Russia. In their turn, the Russian militaries blamed him directly for the failure to draw Romania to the side of the Entente. In his statements, General Nikolai Yanushkevich, the chief of Staff of the Russian Army High Command, was extremely critical towards the chief of the Russian diplomatic mission to Bucharest, saying that "he is not trustworthy" and "... is dangerous", that "he didn't accomplish anything in Russia's interest", going so far as to almost use the word "treason" (Guzun, 2016: 58–59. Note 67). In his turn, General Mikhail Alexeev believed that Poklevski-Koziell's attitude was too pro-Romanian; the Russian diplomat had the habit of discussing with the generals

“military issues that he doesn’t understand and the Romanians can convince him of what they want. Then he supports their view on things!” (Guzun, 2016: 62). All these negative opinions about the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary had their consequences, as the issue of his replacement was raised in 1915 and 1916.

The landslide victories of the German and Austro-Hungarian army against Russia in the second half of 1915, when the Central Powers conquered Austrian Galicia, Warsaw, Vilnius and the fortified camps from Grodno and Brest-Litovsk, caused a certain cooling of the negotiations for Romania’s entry into the war as the times were no longer favourable to such a decision. Italy’s declaration of war against Austro-Hungary on 23 May 1915 reduced the importance of attracting the Romanian Kingdom to their side, while the Central Powers realised that they could no longer draw Romania to their side and were just content with its neutrality. For a while it was believed that the future operations of the Romanian army could be synchronised with an offensive of the British, French, Australian and Neo-Zealand troops landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula on 25 April 1915, but the resistance of the Turkish troops led to the failure of this operation in the Balkans. As S.A. Poklevski-Koziell himself mentioned in a letter sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Petrograd, the Romanian government, politicians and public opinion showed no enthusiasm for their country joining the war, but, quite the opposite, their state of mind was rather depressed (Guzun, 2016: 257-258. Telegram sent by S.A. Poklevski-Koziell to S.D. Sazonov, 2/15 November 1915). Bulgaria’s participation in the First World War, decided through the declaration of war on 11 October 1915, complicated things even further as the Bulgarian army attacked Serbia, which made it even less likely for Romania to join the war on the side of the Entente.

#### **Political Convention and Military Convention (4/17 August 1916)**

Even though the offensive of General Alexei Brusilov did not benefit from the support of the artillery, it did manage to inflict a catastrophic failure upon the Austro-Hungarian troops through an attack launched on 4 June 1916. The success of the Russian troops in Galicia combined with an offensive of the French-British troops in Verdun provided favourable circumstances to Romania’s entry into the war. Within this context, General Mikhail Alexeev, the chief of Staff of the Russian Army High Command, sent a telegram to Bucharest in which he argued that it was the right time for the Romanian army to join the war, supporting his recommendation with the military situation on the two main battlefields (Ardeleanu et al., 1983: 708. Telegram sent by General M. Alexeev to Colonel A. Tatarinov, 5/18 June 1916). Addressing King Ferdinand I, Tsar Nicholas II was also in favour of Romania’s engagement in the conflict that had started in 1914, arguing that “the intervention of the Romanian army is, for the time being, very auspicious; later on, it will cease to be of interest for Russia” (Oprea, 1998: 92). Given the conviction of the French that the war could be ended within a couple of months if the Romanian army joined the conflict alongside the Entente, the government in Paris, through its Minister Plenipotentiary Jean Camille Blondel, ensured the government in Bucharest that France would provide Romania with supplies through Russia (Guzun, 2016: 287. Telegram sent by S.A. Poklevski-Koziell to S. D. Sazonov, 16/29 June 1916). Even I.I.C. Brătianu himself, who had always postponed the moment of entry into the war, realised that this time neutrality was no longer an option. On 1 July 1916, General M. Alexeev authorised Colonel A. Tatarinov, the Russian military attaché to Bucharest, to tell the Romanian Prime Minister that Romania should join forces with Russia “now or never”. General Joseph Joffre, Chief Commander of the French army, spoke in almost identical terms, arguing the very second day that “the situation is commanding the Romanian army to intervene now or never” (Oprea, 1998: 92).

Cautious as always, on 21 June/4 July 1916, I.I.C. Brătianu showed himself willing to engage Romania in the war, provided that Russia, France, Great Britain and Italy complied with certain conditions; the Romanian army was to be mobilised only if the following prerequisites were met:

- 1) A first train of ammunition had to be stationed at the border, and Russia and Italy were to guarantee the constant supply of military equipment throughout the war in an approximate amount of 300 tons per day;
- 2) The military offensive of the Allies was not to be interrupted;
- 3) The situation of the Russian army in Galicia and Bukovina should be at least what it was in June 1916;
- 4) Romania was to be secured in front of any Bulgarian attack (Ardeleanu et al., 1983: 730–731. Telegram sent by S.A. Poklevski-Koziell to S. D. Sazonov, 21 June/4 July 1916).

Moreover, the Romanian head of government wanted to sign a political treaty whereby the states of the Entente would guarantee Romania the awarding of the territories established during the 1915 conversations.

Engaged in the confrontation from Verdun, France proved to be very interested in Romania joining the war on the side of the Entente this time, too. A diversion would have been welcome on any European front, considering that “Quai d’Orsay was hypnotised by the idea of attracting Romania into the war” (Duca, n.y.: 124). The President of France himself, Raymond Poincaré, sent a telegram to the tsar, whereby the latter was summoned to accommodate the requirements of the government in Bucharest. In the opinion of the French head of state, the participation of the Romanian army could have accelerated the defeat of Austro-Hungary, which would have entailed the isolation of the Second Reich, thus making it easier to defeat (Ardeleanu et al., 1983: 758–759. Report drawn-up by Captain I. Lambert, 2/15 August 1916). All this pressure coming from France did nothing but confirm the words of the Minister Plenipotentiary S. A. Poklevski-Koziell, who had stated in a briefing sent in early June that “it will be no secret that our allies are the supporters of the

Romanian claims in Petrograd” (Guzun, 2016: 301. Telegram sent by S. A. Poklevski-Koziell to B. Stürmer, 23 July/5 August 1916).

Precisely as in 1914 and 1915, the negotiations between the Entente and Romania for the latter’s entry into the war were conducted by Russia, while France, Great Britain and Italy in the meantime did nothing but wait for the result of the discussions. Having accepted all the territorial claims of the government in Bucharest, on the morning of 4 August 1916, Romania on the one hand and Russia, France, Great Britain and Italy on the other hand signed the political and the military convention; this important event was attended by only five people, as they wanted the Central Powers to find out the decision only when the declaration of war was to be issued. Since the Ministers Plenipotentiary and the Military Attaches of France, Great Britain and Italy had signed in advance, Russia was represented by S. A. Poklevski-Koziell, the Minister Plenipotentiary to Bucharest, while Romania was represented by the Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, Vintilă Brătianu, the brother of the Romanian Prime Minister who was to become a War Minister shortly, Constantin Diamandy, the head of the Romanian diplomatic mission to the Russian capital, and I. G. Duca, the Minister of Instruction and Cults.

Within the text of the Political Convention, through its seven articles, France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia recognised Romania’s territorial integrity as it was in the summer of 1914 and the right of the Romanian Kingdom to annex territories from Austro-Hungary; the borders were set on the Danube, the Prut and the Tisza. In its turn, Romania undertook to attack Austro-Hungary on the date set in the military convention and to terminate all economic relations and commercial exchanges with the enemies of the Entente. Both parties, the four states and Romania, committed “not to sign any separate or general peace in any other way than together and at the same time” as well as to keep the convention secret until the general peace was signed. Moreover, it was said that Romania would have the same rights as the great signatory powers in all that had to do with the future peace conference, which was a significant achievement for the Romanian diplomacy.<sup>1</sup>

The Military Convention established that Romania was to attack Austro-Hungary no later than 15/28 August 1916, while the Russian army was to launch an offensive against the Austro-Hungarian troops, especially in Bukovina. As Russia was to receive the right to use the port of Constantza, it was specified that it was the duty of the Russian war ships to secure this port and prevent any landing of the enemy on the Romanian shore. In order to prevent Bulgaria from attacking Dobruja, Russia committed to send two infantry divisions and one cavalry division to this province; these military units were to cooperate with the Romanian army. The text also spoke of an offensive of the French-British troops in Thessaloniki, and of the fact that France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia committed to supply Romania with ammunition and war equipment through a continuous flow of at least 300 tons per day.<sup>2</sup>

On the morning of 14/27 August 1916, a new Crown Council was held at the Cotroceni Palace; besides King Ferdinand I and the Heir Prince Carol, this was also attended by government members, parliament representatives, former prime ministers and party leaders. If, more than two years before, King Carol I had convened the council to decide between joining the war or staying neutral, this time the Romanian political leaders were summoned by the new sovereign to be informed of a decision that had already been made, i.e., that Romania was to enter the war alongside Russia, France, Great Britain and Italy.

### 3. Conclusion

The declaration of war given by Romania to Austro-Hungary on the same 14/27 August 1916 opened yet again the route of cooperation for the Romanian and Russian armies, as had occurred in 1877–1878 during the Russian-Turkish Wars, when the Romanian state had gained its independence for the first time. One year, 10 months and 17 days had passed since the signing of the secret convention between Russia and Romania on 18 September/1 October 1914, and the route had not been easy. The Romanian-Russian diplomatic negotiations for the entry of Romania into the war ended, and diplomacy made room for military cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> For the full text of the Political Convention between the Entente and Romania from 4/17 August 1916, see (Ardeleanu et al., 1983: 763-765).

<sup>2</sup> For the full text of the Military Convention between the Entente and Romania from 4/17 August 1916, see (Ardeleanu et al., 1983: 767-771).

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