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R O M A N I A

The Centenarian of the Great Union 1918-2018

An events' approach

Translation of Radu Iancu

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*Crown Prince of the
Kingdom of Romania, Ferdinand I -
Berlin October 10, 1914*

Romania and 'The Great War'

An event like the accomplishment of the Great Union – synonym with the setup of the Greater Romania – should be properly discussed in an events' approach.

1914-1916

Romania's neutrality in the First World War

1914

Two days after the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war against Serbia, on 17/30 July 1914, the Allied Powers' representatives informed the Bucharest authorities the agreement of their countries (France, Great Britain, Russia) regarding the union of Transylvania with Romania, in exchange of its participation to the war, together with the Allied Powers (the Triple Understanding) and against the Central Powers (Germany, Austro-Hungaria).

On the day of 19th july/01st August, Germany declared war against Russia, and emperor Wilhelm 2nd of Hohenzollern (1888-1918) telegraphed King Carol

the 1st of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1866-1914, King starting with 1881), and demanded him in an urgent manner to join his side. The Austro-Hungarian emperor, Franz Joseph of Habsburg (1848-1916), would take the same approach the following day.

21st of July/03rd August – The Crown Committee decides that Romania remains neutral.

On the 21st of July/03rd August 1914, the day in which Germany declared war against France, the Crown Committee had a gathering at the Peleş Castle of Sinaia; there they participated: King Carol the 1st, the Crown Prince Ferdinand, the Prime-Minister Ion. I.C. Brătianu (governs between 1914-1918) and all the members of the liberal party, as well as all the ex prime-ministers, no matter the political variety. King Carol the 1st, supported by the Conservative Petre P. Carp – which had a different opinion and considered that Romania's biggest threat came from Russia – just like his ex prime-minister, he declared himself an adept of Romania's entering the war alongside the Central Powers.

After some fiery debates – in which it was called down the reasoning of betraying by the Central Powers of the defensive nature of the Romanian-Austro-Hungarian Treaty of 1883 – it was decided that Romania remains neutral. In these circumstances, King Carol the 1st, in his constitutional monarch position of Romania, submitted to the majority of the Crown Committee, as well as to the people's will, and decided to abdicate. His death, having been occurred on the 27th of September/10th of October 1914, held Carol the 1st back from making a gesture that seemingly came at the turn of two centuries: the one in which the King saw the daylight on German lands/ the one in which the dawn presented itself to the Greater Romanian nation.

*

During two years (1914-1916), the Romanian political scene has been 'ripped apart' by the confrontation, at the élite's level, regarding Romania's participation to the 'Great War' (the First World War, 1914-1916): the partisans of the national security (like Petre P. Carp and Constantin Stere), by rubbing into the threat of transforming the country in a Russian province/gubernya, wished Romania to join the Central Powers; adepts of accomplishment, by the incorporation of Transylvania, of the national unity (like Ion C. Brătianu, Take Ionescu, Nicolae Filipescu and Nicolae Iorga), were 'craving' for Romania to join the Allied Powers' cause.

This way, P.P. Carp, C. Stere and their adepts were drawing attention over the threat represented by Russia for Romania, found in its way after Țarigrad (Istanbul) and Strâmțori. Feeling ran high in Stere's ('the Siberian', born in Bessarabia, deported in Siberia during the tsar's government) speech to another liberal, such as himself, Ion G. Duca:

Russia can only lose. The tsar's armies, which are now retreating, (the talk had taken place on 21st of May 1915 – n.n.) will never be able to reorganize [...]. Russia will not give us Transylvania, Russia wants Strâmțori, it is willing to pass over our dead bodies to get this territory. An alliance with them will only lead to slavery. You don't have to work in politics, but be blind, stupid to not see, to not understand a thing so sure, so clear [...]. Think about the responsibility you take before history, you ruin the work of all the generations from 1848 until now. They left you a free State, and the power to play a role here, in the Eastern Europe, you turn it into a Russian province. There won't be enough courses to punish till doomsday the crime you are preparing today against the

Romanian people.’ (*apud* Florin Constantiniu, *An honest history of Romanian people*, Bucharest, Univers Enciclopedic, 1997, p. 273; hereafter: CONSTANTINIU, p. ...).

The followers of the Allied Powers, in fact followers of the national unity – but without Bessarabia, because the Russian Empire, together with France and Great Britain, had established together the Triple Understanding – made out a case that Romania couldn’t but take advantage of the opportunity given by the great conflagration to regain the territories occupied by the romanians in Austro-Hungaria:

‘[...] I don’t know how the war will go – said, on the 8th of August 1916, Ion I.C. Brătianu to his son, Gheorghe <the great future hystorian> –, we could have Serbia’s fate <completely occupied by the Central Powers at the time> but we would have indefeasibly confirmed our rights over our land. You see, the present moment is decisive. If they make peace without us, we will be crushed between a great Hungaria and an even greater Bulgaria. The world has to see what we want and why we want it for.’ (*apud* CONSTANTINIU, p. 274).

Once the ‘The Great War’ has begun, the two fighting sides – The Allied Powers and The Central Powers *Puterile Centrale* – strived to draw the neutral States on their side by using a wide range of persuasive means (starting from tempting promises and going to hard pressures). In 1915, after Italy joined the war (on the Allied Powers’ side) and Bulgaria (on the Central Powers’ side), Romania – as a consequence of its strategic placement (Lower Danube and the Istru’s Openings), its soil treasures (wheat) and subsoil (oil) – it became the aim of some persistent requests. The Central Powers hoped for Romania to remain

neutral, in the most fortunate case. The Allied Powers wished for Romania to join the war to weaken the german army on the western front (France); facing the pressures carried by the Allied Powers, the Prime-Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu would have exclaimed on the 25th of March 1915: ‘When you see the tone which the Allied Powers use to speak to us, I regret the time when Germany used to have supremacy in Europe’ (*apud* CONSTANTINIU, p. 275).

Dealing with the political ambiguity (maneuvers and protractions) adopted by the liberal cabinet of Ion I.C. Brătianu, the Allied Powers faced Romania with a restraining choice in the summer of 1916: ‘now or never’.



Romanian troops in the First World War



The war to unite the romanian people

1916-1918

Romania in the First World War

1916

04th/17th of August – signing the alliance Treaty between Romania and the Allied Powers.

The Liberal Ministers' Committee lead by Ion. C. Brătianu (rules between 1914-1918) prepared for two years – by mistakenly believing, though, that Transylvania would be freed in 15 days (!) – and negotiated with the Allied Powers the entering of Romania of the war, greatly preoccupied that the satisfaction of its personal territorial claimings would make the object of the firm commitment of the Allied Powers.

After two years of neutrality (1914-1916), facing the pressures of the Allied Powers, on the 04th/17th of August 1916, Romania signed, in Bucharest, the alliance Treaty with the Allied Powers, diplomatic