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ROMANIA AND BULGARIA – IN SEARCH OF A GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD (1878–1914)

РУМЪНИЯ И БЪЛГАРИЯ – В ТЪРСЕНЕ НА ДОБРОСЪСЕДСТВО (1878–1914 г.)

В продължение на три века и половина отношенията между Румъния и България били белязани както от моменти на солидарност, добросъседство и разбиране, така и от такива на подозрителност, спорове, недоверие и дори враждебност. Що се отнася до втората група от гореизброените, невралгичен проблем в двустранните отношения представлявало установяването на южната граница на Добруджа, тъй като и двете страни били недоволни от решенията на Берлинския конгрес от 1878 г. В определени моменти тези решения били оспорвани още по-яростно под влиянието на окуражително поведение, обещания, съдействие и интереси (преки или не) на фактори извън територията на Балканите в лицето на някои от великите сили на Европа.

Ключови думи: Берлински конгрес, международни отношения, Южна Добруджа, добросъседство, разбирателство, подозрителност, спорове, европейски сили.

Often, when the Balkans are mentioned, the area is labelled with the now already known slogan of „dynamite barrel of Europe”. A population of a great ethnical, religious and cultural diversity was living in this geographical area, which was still in its great majority under Ottoman domination and which was disputed by powerful neighbouring Empires. For a long time, nobody has thought at the “disintegration of Turkey for the sake of nationalities” and that because “all the nations were so badly known, so little fixed within their own borders, so little understood in their rights” (Iorga 1916: 15).

In the Balkans, the borders of new states were decided by treaties and agreements between European powers and it was here where the national problem took new shapes and the form of combative or, rather aggressive nationalism. Distrust, intransigence, doubt prevailed over dialogue, arguments and logical explanations. They were generated by a common history, disillusion and dramas for which the characteristics of this area were not the only ones to blame. Real or imaginary disputes have generated either armed or diplomatic and economic conflicts. All these have become even more evident after 1878 as a result of political and territorial changes brought by the war.

The decisions adopted in Berlin in 1878 have been received with discontent by both Romania and Bulgaria. In this context, the relations between the two countries did not lack a sort of roughness generated not only by their own wishes and hopes but also by the manoeuvrings of their powerful neighbours. For Bulgaria, the borders drawn at the

Congress represented an injustice after the San Stefano Treaty which gave to it completely different coordinates and the fulfilment of the dream of a Great Bulgaria. For Romania, the loss of the South of Bessarabia was not compensated by Dobrudzha, a land which was also wanted by the Bulgarians despite its aridity, lagging behind and lack of population. The measures taken for integrating this province in Romania have strengthened Bulgarians' conviction that their fellow countrymen were treated differently. They accused Bucharest authorities that the Law of organising real estate was detrimental to the Bulgarian ethnos and forced them to emigrate. Accusations of "Romanising" the Dobrudzha, supported by press and politicians became soon credible.

On the other side, Romania was accusing the government in Sofia of breaching the international law and the Treaty of Berlin by contesting the right to consular jurisdiction for Romanian citizens and by the project of naturalization. The last gave the right to citizenship not only to those who were born on the Bulgarian territory and who did not benefited of foreign protection but also to "former Ottoman subjects of Bulgarian nationality" living in the territories which were now part of Romania and Serbia and who, undecided for the moment, were about to emigrate to Bulgaria in the following two years¹. The project was withdrawn after one month due to the pressures made by European powers, among which was also Russia who initially supported the project. The recognition of consular jurisdiction became the object of an agreement signed by the Sabranie in November 1880. After centuries of living in good neighbouring relations, suddenly a dangerous tension emerged between Romanians and Bulgarians, the origins of which should be looked for in "the delicate moment of the process of building the national consciousness in both countries. Bulgarians are feeling betrayed by their neighbours in the North while the last ones are accusing Bulgarians of perfidy" (Bulei 2007: 138).

Another sensitive issue in the mutual relations that of the Southern border of Dobrudzha was born due to ambiguous provisions in the Treaty of Berlin. The discussions on drawing the border took two years due to misunderstandings among members of the Committee for drawing the borders, created and supported by Russia. Finally, the solution proposed was "not satisfactory for the both parties: it gave to Bulgaria strong fortresses with which it dominated over Dobrudzha and to Romania the ownership of the land" (Miller 1927: 400). The consequence was translated in the border incidents of 1884 and of spring of year 1900.

Despite these misunderstandings, the relations between Romania and Bulgaria have developed within the limits of a normal neighbourhood: visits and meetings of the two kings, of different politicians, signing of trade, postal and telephone arrangements, and so on. As acknowledged by the Prince of Battenberg, the Romanian government displayed a friendly and correct attitude towards Bulgarians in the context of the severe Balkan Crisis generated by the unification of Bulgaria and all the more by the reaction of Balkan states and European Powers who denied the natural act of Bulgarian people. The attachment to the Bulgarian cause can be noticed from the reserved but still easy to be

seen sympathy of political leaders, from the articles in the press full of understanding and solidarity towards the neighbours from the South of Danube, during the entire Bulgarian crisis.

Until the end of the 19th century, the political and trade relations between Bulgaria and Romania were good despite some rumours meant at bringing back the old tension. The visits of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha to Romania in 1897 and 1898 represented clear proofs of the good relations between the two countries.

Unfortunately, a state of tension started to set in at the beginning of the 19th century. Some older problems such as the preservation of the status quo combined with newer ones like the rights of Aromanians concentrated in a great number in Macedonia – a territory disputed by Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece – have augmented the number of disagreements and generated violent altercations and outbreaks. A point of extreme tension was reached in the summer of year 1900, when Professor Stefan Mihaileanu, a Macedonian-Romanian from Ohrid, redactor of the newspaper “Balkan Peninsula” was murdered in Bucharest by a member of the Macedonian-Bulgarian Committee from Sofia. The endeavours of government in Bucharest for a recognition of the rights of Aromanians was often seen by the Bulgarian press and politicians as attempts to form a state subordinated to Bucharest in the centre of the Balkan Peninsula.

On the other hand, Bulgaria’s look on Russia, which became even more evident at the beginning of the 19th century, was a source of concern for Bucharest, which knew about the secret agreement between Russia and Bulgaria of 1902 and 1909 on the issue of Dobrudzha.

The tension in the Bulgarian-Romanian relations reached its peak in 1912–1913. The setting up of the Balkan Alliance and the first Balkan War underlined “the ambiguity in the relations between the two countries” (Bulei 2007: 138). The victories of the allies have driven away any doubt concerning the preservation of the *status quo* and the disagreements on the areas received have warned about the danger of a new conflict. The perspective of “excessive increase of one Balkan state against its neighbours” has led Romania to reconsider its previously announced total neutrality and to ask for “new security guarantees and territorial compensations” (Macuc 1999: 210). The dialogue between Bucharest and Sofia pointed out at the different position of the parties as regards the modification of the Southern border of Dobrudzha and the intervention of European powers could not satisfy the parties. The mirage of building a big state to which many Bulgarians adhered, convinced being by the truth of their cause, the claims of Serbians over Macedonia, the dispute between Greeks and Bulgarians over Thessaloniki as well as the interests of the European powers in the area have all precipitated the outbreak of the Second Balkan War². In this context, Romania had the proof of a damaged Balkan equilibrium and at 26 June/9 July “it was going out of the reserve imposed to it until that moment in the interest of peace”³ and was declaring the state of war against Bulgaria. The modification of the Southern border of Dobrudzha as a result of the Treaty of Bucharest

of 1913 through the inclusion of the Quadrilater in the territory of Romania was far from bringing the harmony between the two neighbours. The relations between the two were often altered by their wish to take back this territory

In 1914 a period of three and a half decades was coming to an end. During this period moments of solidarity, good neighbourhood and understanding have alternated with others dominated by suspicion, dispute, distrust and even adversity.

NOTES

¹ The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fund of Historic Archive (Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, fond Arhiva Istoric), vol. 195, f. 300, r. 141, Sofia, 8/20 aprilie 1880, Al. Beldiman ctre Boerescu.

² The Second Balkan War broke as a result of the surprising decision of the Bulgarian Tsar Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha to undertake an attack by surprise over the Greek-Serbian troops at the border with Macedonia. The attack was ordered by General Mihail Savov, with the agreement of Prime Minister S. Danev. The action was seen as a “criminal madness” by politicians and Bulgarian historians. – Cf. Jordan 2004: 102.

³ See the war statement to the Bulgarian government passed on by the plenipotentiary minister of Romania to Sofia, D. I. Ghica in Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, fond Casa regal National (Central Historic Archives, Fund of the Royal House), dos. 37/1913, f.1.

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