

**THE GALLANT WARS OF THE NEIGHBOURS.
STEREOTYPES OF THE ROMANIAN-BULGARIAN
HISTORY IN 1913**

**ДОБЛЕСТНИТЕ ВОЙНИ НА СЪСЕДИТЕ – СТЕРЕОТИПИ В
РУМЪНСКО-БЪЛГАРСКАТА ИСТОРИЯ ПРЕЗ 1913 г.**

Румънско-българският фронт нямал нищо общо с класическата представа за война: окопи, сражения, мъртви и ранени, засади, офанзивни и дефанзивни. След като пресекли Дунав, румънските войски на практика не срещнали никаква съпротива и напреднали толкова бързо, че на помощните части били необходими седмици, за да се справят с разстоянието, изминато от тях.

Тази *галантна война*, съпътствана от много аристократични прояви зад фронтната линия, които напомняли поведението на френските крале, се оказала важна част от събитията, в които участвали почти всички румънски политически актьори: през юни–юли 1913 г. всички, от които зависели политическите решения, се чувствали отговорни за съдбата на Балканите.

Присъединяването на Южна Добруджа през 1913 г. представлявало добра проверка за наличните сили за придобиването на нещо, което стратегически и обективно представлявало в голяма степен идеала за национална идентичност. *Конфликтът* като тема, откривана в дискурса дори там, където тя понякога липсвала, бил подновен след 1913 г., за да бъде дефинирана цялостна стратегия за външна политика, фокусирана върху обединението на Румъния през 1918 г.

Ключови думи: Румъния, България, галантни войни, 1913, мемоари, стереотипи.

1. Justification as argumentation: stereotypes of the conflict in the Romanian political discourse (1913)

The Punctual Mythologies (Dubois 2006: 313), Claude-Gilbert Dubois dubbed them in one of his texts, are the so-called “local extensions” of some founding identity myths and that is why they could not exceed the frontiers of a linguistic group or a nation. Our case study dwells on the *Second Balkan War*, more specifically on the brief Romanian-Bulgarian military conflict of June–July 1913, which had as pretext the justification of the argumentation of a *strategic frontier*, based on an inconsistent hypothesis of the historic continuity and of a demographic predominance. This war is the end of an intense period of continuous and constant accumulations of bilateral political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, mental conflicts, after almost half a century since the beginning of a *history of vicinity*, rather with notes of trust, collaboration and aid during the time of *Bulgarian national rebirth*¹. Nevertheless, one must not hope for too much: if we were to paraphrase Robert

Kaplan, “*as always in the Balkans, the simple survival does not offer too much room for moral options*” (Kaplan: 100).

Already from the last decade of the 19th century, after the end of the Serbian-Bulgarian War (1885) and the abdication of Prince Alexander of Battenberg (1886), Romanian political discourse experienced an evident deterioration in what concerns the South-Danubian neighbour². A massive volume of Romanian diplomatic correspondence, issued in the course of the year 1883, reflects an actual concern, extremely favourable, from the part of the personnel of the Legation from Sofia for the Bulgarian political life and for the restrictions imposed by the courageous Prince to the Russian strategies of influence expansion in the region (Documente Diplomatice Românești 2006: *passim*). Sofia’s previous actions have fundamentally modified Bucharest’s attitude: Hristofor Hesapciev, a good diplomat of his country in the capital from the banks of the Dâmbovița River thought he knew for certain that “*in 1885, Romanians have been unpleasantly surprised by the wild outbreak of the vital forces of the Bulgarian people, manifested by the proclamation of the union of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria and exaltedly set into bold and bright relief during the victorious war with Serbia*” (Hesapciev 2003: 26).

Although our approach intended to have a critical look at the stereotypes of the Romanian political discourse of 1913, we thought to start with a few remarks of the dialog partners of the decision factors from Bucharest, namely the diplomatic clerks of the Bulgarian Legation. Thus, this same Hesapciev that we have mentioned before does not hide his disappointment and disgust at the moment of finding out that he had been appointed minister of his country in Bucharest: in 1905, when he left to take up his function, he was sure he would find in the Romanian capital “*leaders with a totally different mentality, with megalomaniac political inclinations, larger than the size of their state, and with a conceited arrogance about Romania’s cultural supremacy of compared to the neighbouring Bulgaria*” (Hesapciev 2003: 11). Another Bulgarian diplomat, Petăr Neikov, born in Brăila, saw everywhere “*wellbeing and waste, social prejudice and debauchery, self-indulgence and indulgence towards others, intrigue on a great scale. The vices of the regime and of life itself were evident. People lived in superficiality and vanity up to complete saturation. (...) Crumbs from the feast also fell on the army of intermediaries-parasites, pimps and buffoons, which filled, like they did in decadent Rome, the palaces of their millionaire masters, deeply sunk in debt.(...). And Bucharest lacked personality and was not interesting at all. No impressive traces of the past, no remarkable contemporaneous monuments and no kind of distinctive architectural style. And the few wide boulevards connected prosaically, through bleak buildings, in the flat and dusty space, without drawing the attention of the human eye*” (Neikov (II) 2006).

The conflict is the one that defines, in a major way, the discussion theme of the Romanian forming and decisional elite, deeply disregarded in Sofia: more often than not, there are efforts to remain within the framework of imposed and induced fads. The

political culture of the vicinity (regardless of whether or not it concerns smaller states or European Powers) was perceived, in Bucharest, at the beginning of the 20th century, as a competitive spirit, often in adversity, especially in the exhausting race to obtain the support of one or more European Powers and in beneficent capitalizing of the few essential products of external commerce. The same Petăr Neikov remembers how, when he arrived in Bucharest, in 1906, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jacques Lahovari, “*extremely mad at the megalomaniacal Greeks*”, asked Bulgaria for “*a small correction of Dobrudzha’s borders*”, in exchange for “*the friendliest sentiments*”, because „*Bulgaria had to pay something in order to gain Romania’s friendship*” (Neikov (I) 2006).

The same semantic structure – *intransigence/megalomania* – can be easily found, in parallel, in the speech sample of King Carol I, a very skilled and experienced politician and strategist. Despite all these qualities, which are fully acknowledged, the sovereign insisted, during a not-so-private conversation with France’s Minister, the one of June 20th 1913, in his conviction that “*Romania has no obligation towards Bulgaria, only towards Europe, because it gave us Silistra, even if the solution was unsatisfying*”³. “*Bulgarian politics – continued Carol I, imperturbable - is megalomaniacal and intransigent and, in another conflict, Bulgaria would come out plus meurtrie qu’elle l’est déjà*” (Zbucnea 1999: 259-260). We must also state that the King of Romania rarely made such disclosures to foreign diplomats, any others than Germany’s. The fact was also known to the Bulgarian Legation of Bucharest, since the aforementioned Petăr Neikov, referring to the Minister of the Reich, von Kinderlen-Waechter, asserted that he “*supported by the old king, governed Romania as much as the royal ministers did*”⁴. On the other hand, Carol I had acquired, during his 48 years of rule, excellent knowledge both of the political situation in Sofia, and on the thinking of Tsar Ferdinand I. Furthermore, the sovereign had instituted an annual ceremonious pilgrimage in Plevna (Plevna), a place that kept the memory of the war of 1877–1878, which became, in the Romanian royal, public and political imagination, a genuine *sacred* territory⁵.

The justifications stated by King Carol I are strengthened, more than two decades after the start and end of the Second Balkan War, by the military attaché of the Legation from Sofia, G. A. Dabija: he considered that the political decision of the sovereign to cross the Danube and annex the *Cadrilater* was absolutely logical. Victory in this regional conflict – thought the diplomat – would have led to an incontestable statute of primordial nature in the Balkans. In what concerns territorial expansion, Dabija justifies it by the idea that “*Romania, in the interest of keeping the balance in the Balkans, must demand compensation; if Bulgaria expands towards the South, Romanian too must expand towards the South*” (Dabija 1936: 367).

Naturally, adhesions appear in the leaders’ discourse: the reading of the information journals or political party journals indicates a great media campaign for justifying the actions of the decision factors. The main argument that we must discuss would be the one utilized a few years later during the campaign of the Romanian army in Hungary (1919), the one of “*bringing and imposing order in the confusion provoked by the ones south of the Danube*” and especially of “*protecting civilization and bringing*

*peace and tranquillity*⁷⁶. Neutral analyses, at some distance in time, casually reveal the idea that the essential reason for Romania's participation in the war was connected to *glory and national pride*: it considered itself "*the first power in the region, a guiding light for the Balkans*" (Bocholier 2001: 65).

The Conservative Prime Minister, Titu Maiorescu, artisan of Romania's foreign policy during the two Balkan Wars and also during the negotiations and the signing of the Bucharest Peace Treaty, started from the premise of "setting in order" the bilateral proximity relations, by obtaining important territorial compensations for Romania, absolutely necessary for legitimizing the irrefutable regional prestige that he thought it would obtain. The Bulgarians – Maiorescu justified himself – had to be "*stopped from the madness of a new war*", when this could only have been decided by Romania, the one "*which plays the preponderant part that it deserves today in the Balkans*" (Maiorescu 1995: 125).

The unusual inflexibility of the Prime Minister is reflected anytime the idea of *territorial expansion* appears: the Romanians, thought the high dignitary, were forced to claim victory. On January 12th 1913, in a telegram sent to all the chiefs of the Romanian diplomatic missions, the Foreign Minister insisted on the fact that "*Romania can accept no more procrastinations and subterfuge. You have the necessary instructions that comprise our demands regarding the frontier: maximum Turtucaia – Dobrich, minimum Silistra – Balchik, without Dobrich*"⁷⁷.

Maiorescu's gestures, at the Peace Conference, are the ones of a person who is a complete sovereign in the region: in the elevator of the "Continental" Hotel, together with Alexandru Marghiloman, walking three times up and down, told Petăr Neikov, member of the Bulgarian delegation, that "*as an expression of his friendly sentiments towards Bulgaria, intervened and asked the Serbian government to stop the military operations around Vidin, and the Serbians decided to give an order in this direction*"⁷⁸.

The justificatory paradigm of the military conflict and of the territorial annexing into the *Cadrilater* exceeded the framework of the public and political discourse, rapidly crossing to the level of the scientific one and thus becoming an unbeatable argument in the diplomatic dispute. One G. Murgoci, a famous geographer, presented the entry of the *Cadrilater* within the Romanian state as a successful strategy and a dialectic solution to the walk of history. Because, as G. Murgoci writes in a beautiful presentation brochure of the new territory, "*by the unswerving will of God and by the power of our army, in the year 1913, we have broadened the country's lands towards the south, in the area of Dobrudzha*"⁷⁹.

2. The gallant war: "the war started and ended with cheers and songs" (Stere 1913: 183; Zbucea 1999: 223)

On June 20th 1913, Romania decreed general mobilization, having as objectives the greatest advance possible towards the South, occupying the Balkan straits and the road to Sofia, until the joining with the Serbian army. Only 18 days after this moment, the Romanian army was twenty kilometres away from Sofia¹⁰. *What kind of war is this?*

The Romanian troops entered Silistra, Turtucaia (Tutrakan), Bazargic (Dobrich) and Balcic (Balchik), on June 28th – 30th 1913, and then, on July 2nd, they occupied Varna. Titu Maiorescu's conservative government issued an official *Declaration*, also sent to the Bulgarian officials, in which he alleged that "*Romania's military action is first and foremost caused by the obligation to ensure a secure frontier now, for its territory situated across the Danube. (...) Romania's essential interests in the Balkan Peninsula prevent us from remaining simple spectators*" (Buer 2007: 212–213).

The Romanian-Bulgarian front has nothing to do with the classical image of war: trenches, battles, dead and wounded, ambushes, offensives and defensives. The Romanian troops, once they crossed the Danube, practically did not meet any resistance whatsoever and have advanced so quickly that the auxiliary services needed weeks to keep pace with the distances they had covered. The tactics and strategies issued by the Chief of Staff, General Alexandru Averescu, have rapidly acquired exclusively theoretical features: Bulgarian soldiers and officers – tired, demoralized and confused – preferred retreat without a fight or mass surrender.

"*Our troops* – writes an eyewitness of the al campaign from summer 1913 – *had no encounter with the enemy troops, because the small squads seen here and there, and even larger units gave up without a fight or after a simulacrum of resistance. (...) Usually, the surrender of the Bulgarian troops is always made in mass by the soldiers, who relinquish their weapons immediately after they see the Romanian army*" (Zamfirescu 1914: 23–24).

This *gallant war* – with plenty of genteel details behind the frontline – which can remind you of the ones of the Louis, the kings of France, proved to be a significant part in the piece that almost all the Romanian political actors have played: all the decision makers from Bucharest felt themselves, in June–July 1913, at least once responsible for his fate or the one of the Balkans. Heroic gestures can be recorded, like the entrance of Minister N. Filipescu in Silistra, alongside the Romanian troops, the crossing of the Danube, by the same places as in 1877, by King Carol I, the presidency of the Peace Conference ensured by Titu Maiorescu, the achievements of the liberal opposition in convincing that the technical and strategic success of the army are their merit. The same King Carol I allowed himself an unusual *political decision*, integrally and immediately appropriated by all the military factors, through which the *deliberate slowing down of the Romanian troops' advance* was obtained. General C. N. Herjeu explained the sovereign's decision as having the best premises, as the King "*did not wish to precipitate the events, to unleash the revolt (n.n. – in Bulgaria) and to overthrow the Bulgarian dynasty*" (Herjeu 1921: 32).

The gallantry of the Romanian-Bulgarian conflict also arises profusely from the private correspondence between the two sovereigns, during the summer nights of 1913. When, on July 7th, the Romanian troops entered Sofia's suburbs, Tsar Ferdinand wrote to his much more influent "cousin" that he had no other wish than to end "forever" the "*embarrassing situation*" (italics belong to us) (Zbucea 1999: 270–271). "*I and My government* – the Tsar continued, in his epistle – *will see in this act of Your Majesty*

(n.n. – the immediate obtaining of a *de facto* armistice, so as to stop the advance towards Sofia) a happy omen of the close and cordial resuming of the relations between our peoples, established through so many common memories and interests, and we regret that we have seen them disturbed for a moment” (Zbucea 1999: 270–271). Just as elegant, a message from King Carol I for his southern neighbour, who was in great danger, left from Peleş Royal Palace, in Sinaia, towards Sofia, urgently and confidentially, that same day: “*I am animated by the same wish to end, as quickly as possible, a situation that I deplore. Your Majesty can be certain that the friendly sentiments that I had for him for so long could not be altered by the recent events that were imposed on us by the circumstances*” (Zbucea 1999: 270–271).

On the front, because of the absence of first class genteel details and the accelerated advance, the *gallant war* managed to give to the young Prince Carol the sensation of a “hateful idleness”. He wrote to his mother, Princess Maria (the future Queen), on July 15th 1913, that it was awfully boring on the battlefields. “*What would be done the following day always becomes a mystery – Carol wrote down – and so there is nothing to prepare and food is the main thing*” (Zbucea 1999: 146). Probably advised by his august mother, so as to please his grandfather, King Carol I, who got to be the key figure of the Balkans, the young prince chose crazy automobile races on Bulgarian dirt roads, under the pretext of visiting the main places and monuments connected to the Romanian participation to the War of Independence of 1877–1878.

The soldiers and officers spent their time according to preferences and possibilities. One of the non-commissioned officers, Eugen Petit, sent home a long epistle, towards the beginning of July 1913, in which he narrated his daily routine which normally should have been traumatizing. “*We live fairly well – wrote Petit – in this vacation spent in foreign places. The officers, during the day, visit one another, offering themselves tea and coffee. Invitations to lunch are not absent either, on the condition that each messmate brings his own fork and knife. The meals are succulent and, as proof, I will write in what follows the lunch we had today, offered by an officer: cheese cracklings; pork galantine, fried potatoes and garlic sauce; green beans and chicken; rice and milk; wine and coffee* (Petit 1913: 52).

“*The music continues to play – narrates another combatant – and it plays tunes that are increasingly beautiful. And, as the weather is fine and pleasant, and the music is playing, if you would not see soldiers, cannons and rifles around, you could say that you find yourself in a resort, where you came so as to forget some of the troubles of this life*” (Zamfirescu 1914: 146).

“*No blood was shed – Mihail Sadoveanu, young officer mobilized in the summer of 1913, ensures us – and our expedition had a somewhat prosaic aspect*” (Sadoveanu 1928: 5). Somebody else, Nicolae Ștefănescu-Iacint, remembered that, once the start of the war against the southern neighbour was announced, “*the citizens and villagers left their homes in a sublime momentum. The ones that had the occasion of looking through train stations at the trains teeming with people and with the roofs full of*

soldiers have understood not only that this host was going towards victory, but also that it had the promise of the completion of the national ideal" (Ștefănescu-Iacint 1914: 86–87).

Regret is nowhere to be seen: the gregarious opinion in a society that was used to be politically ruled accepted, maybe not with enthusiasm, but with evident satisfaction, the possibility of the settling of scores. A solution that was not expected, but it was desired so as to prove, in facts, the reality of the permanently instilled discourse, namely the one concerning superiority and pre-eminence. An unexpected fact, undoubtedly silly, if it would not have been for the almost two thousand victims, was the fact that, lacking the dead and wounded on the front, *cholera* was free to claim its number of lives. Without remorse, the aforementioned young diplomat Constantin Argetoianu wrote about the bad luck that had befallen the country on the apex of political and military glory: *"the campaign of 1913 would have been a mere walk in the park, as we did not even have the occasion to fight one single battle. Cholera cut down many people and proved to us that our health services were worthless"*¹¹.

Thus, behind the highfaluting speeches on the civilizing role that the Balkans would have expected from Romania, the grave inconveniences and deficiencies from the organization of the army and its action forces have appeared. The first cases of cholera have been seen in mid-July 1913, when, in Ferdinandovo and Vratsa, Romanian troops had contact with the local communities, which were sick. The most numerous notes of the campaign medics reveal the weak equipment, professional training and technique of the health services, the food insufficiency and their poor making (for the campaign kitchens, naturally), the blatant lack of organization from the level of the different commands, the slowness of making decisions by the responsible factors (Zamfirescu 1914: 44; Gerota 1913; Papillian 1914: 15). The Minister of Agriculture and Domains, the temperamental Nicolae Filipescu, would declare to the officious governmental journal "Epoca" (*The Epoch*), on August 8th 1913, that all the accusations concerning the precarious situation of supplying the troops with food proved to be real. But the causes were not connected to financial deficiencies or deficiencies from the deposits: *"I believe – said the Minister, unequivocally, while still in Silistra, – that the soldiers could have suffered of stupidity, but not of hunger"* (Zbucea 1999: 150).

Another kind of ending, different from the splendid reception thrown by Romania's royal pair and the conservative Prime Minister Titu Maiorescu in honour of the signatories of the Bucharest Peace Treaty, thought N. Iorga too, displeased by all the unanswered questions that remained after the war in Bulgaria. In "Neamul românesc" (*The Romanian Folk*) of August 20th 1913, the savant spoke of the general sentiment formed after the summer turmoil: *"what can we read in our papers? The doctors' quarrel on the cholera that they cannot vanquish; the liberals' quarrel with general Averescu, whose war plans do not satisfy them; the quarrel of Mr. Carp's true believers with the Mr. Maiorescu's non-believers; the quarrel of the civilians with the officers because of the defeat in the campaign and because of the new horrors; the quarrel*

*of the summer's famished people with the military intendancy, who did not know about it or simply did not want to feed them; the quarrel of the public opinion with the health services*¹².

The annexing of the *Cadrilater* in 1913 constituted a good test of forces on the road towards the confrontation for obtaining that which, strategically and objectively, represented the major ideal of the national identity project. The *conflict* as a theme, found in the discourse even there where it was absent erstwhile, was resumed, after 1913, so as to define an entire strategy of foreign policy, that which was focused on the Unification of Romania, in 1918.

NOTES

¹ The most significant in Romanian historiography: Velichi 1980.

² A good review of the Romanian-Bulgarian relations at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, in Bușă 2007: 57–88.

³ Zbucea 1999: 259. Another Romanian monograph dedicated to this issue: Iordache 1998.

⁴ **Neikov, P.** *Diplomat la București (I)*.

⁵ We have approached the idea of the *sacred territory* from Balchik, as a creation of the will of Queen Maria, following the war of 1913, in Florin 2007: 245–256 (an English version: Florin 2008: 321–329). On the same Inter War, King Ferdinand (1914–1927) and Queen Maria insisted on dynastic marriage between young Boris III, Tsar of Bulgaria, and one of the Romanian princesses, Ileana. For whole evolution: Cîțirigă, Florin 2009: 171–190.

⁶ Parfeni 1915: 11. In the same fashion: Anastasiu 1925.

⁷ Zbucea 1999: 166. For the entire diplomatic process, see also the volume *Cartea Verde* 1913.

⁸ **Neikov, P.** *Diplomat la București (V)*.

⁹ Murgoci 1913a. From the same author: Murgoci 1913c; Murgoci 1913b. Also: Lascu 1995: 957–975 (for theoretical debate between concepts *Cadrilater* versus *Southern Dobrudzha*).

¹⁰ Zbucea 1999: 144. Daniela Bușă, utilizing a well-known formula of the Bulgarian political life of the time, advances the appraisal “*criminal madness*” for the decision of Tsar Ferdinand to attack the Greek-Serbian troops from the frontier with Macedonia, a fact that started the Second Balkan War. – See Bușă 2007: 79.

¹¹ Argetoianu 1925: 11. For a debate, see also Papillian 1914; Lascarov-Moldovanu 1915; Brătescu 2002.

¹² Iorga 1913a. For N. Iorga impressions about 1913 Romanian-Bulgarian war: Iorga 1913b.

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