

ROMANIA, RUSSIA AND THE GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STRAITS (1914-1915)

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Abstract The present study tries to focus on several aspects regarding the relations between Romania and Russia, as they were reflected in French and Romanian documents, mainly from the French diplomatic and military archives and the Romanian National Archives. Regarding its methodology, we tried to make a rigorous selection of the appropriate documents for our topic. We also used several geopolitical concepts and a series of concepts belonging to the theory of international relations. The issue of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits represented an essential topic of the negotiations between Bucharest, Petrograd and Paris during the period of the Romanian neutrality in World War I. We can ask ourselves why this was a truly delicate, sensitive problem. Naturally, one of the Russian main war objectives consisted in obtaining the control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Thus, the Empire of Tsars was able to exert its domination over the Constantinople city as well. The Romanian authorities acted for the principle of the internationalization, commercial neutrality and free navigation. The problem of the Straits generated tension and distrust. The Romanian-Russian relations were rather strained and cold. The growing apprehensions of the Romanian Kingdom regarding Russia's intentions were obvious. We must take into account that the Russian path to the Straits crossed the Romanian territory. Russian expansionist tendencies in the Balkan region were undeniable. Peter the Great's hegemonic program represented an irrefutable argument. We must also underline the fact that the key concepts of the Russian Empire were pan-Slavism and pan-Orthodoxism - a mask concealing its expansionist and annexational tendencies. The issue of the Straits also represented one of the reasons for which Ion I. C. Brătianu's government often delayed Romanian intervention in the Great War.

Keywords Straits, Romania, Russia, geopolitics, pan-Slavism, hegemony, Balkans.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2022.27.2.05>.

An unpublished version of the paper was presented on the occasion of the First St. Petersburg International Historical Forum, 29 October – 3 November 2019.

The present study aims to emphasize and analyze several aspects of the Romania-Russia relations at the beginning of the Romanian neutrality, while also focusing on the Russian Empire's undissimulated claims to the control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits and implicitly over the city of Constantinople. Russia's ambitions were by no means accidental, considering the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of these navigable routes.

Moreover, given the proximity of the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, the domination over the Straits would have been for Russia not only a huge advantage, but also the possibility of becoming a maritime power, not only a continental one. Thus, Russia would have become a very strong competitor for the other European maritime powers, namely Great Britain and France.

During the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, Russia's foreign policy to present itself as a protector of the Slavic peoples and states from the Balkan region always created the premises of a hegemony. From its viewpoint, this quality of being a "protector" can legitimate all interferences and interventions. The Convention of Akerman (1826) and the Treaty of Adrianopole (1929) established the so-called Russian protectorate over the Romanian Principalities. Later, during the Congress of Paris (1856), the unilateral protectorate exerted by Russia over Moldavia and Wallachia was substituted by the collective guarantee of the great European powers.

In fact, the control on the Straits and Constantinople represented the primordial objective of war for the Empire of the Tsars. The Bosphorus and Dardanelles were disputed by Russia (a continental power *par excellence*, but expressing ambitions of maritime power¹) and Great Britain, the greatest maritime power in Europe.

Russia aimed to dominate the Straits in order to prevent the maritime powers from imposing their influence over the Black Sea.² From the very beginning of the neutrality, the Romanian authorities acted for the preservation of the national interest. Thus, they pleaded for the principle of the internationalization and commercial neutrality of the Straits which allowed the free navigation. Bucharest's concerns immediately grew, based on the rumours regarding the

¹ The dichotomy *continental powers vs. maritime powers* was analysed by famous geopoliticians such as Halford Mackinder and Karl Ernst Haushofer. The latter elaborated the theory of the continental block. The most important continental powers were Russia and Germany, while U.S.A. and France were the representative maritime powers. See Paul Dobrescu, *Geopolitică* (Bucharest: Editura Comunicare.ro, 2008); Hadrian Gorun, "Realism and Decisional Dilemmas in Romania's Foreign Policy during Neutrality," *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, XXIII, no. 2 (December 2018): 219-220, <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2018.23.2.05>. For the text in Romanian and on the topic of Russia's panslavism and its hegemonic tendencies as well, see also H. Gorun, *România și Marele Război. Introducere la o istorie și teorie a relațiilor internaționale*, forwarded by Dumitru Preda, afterworded by Adrian Ivan (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut&Mega, 2021), 82-90.

² Aymeric Chauprade, François Thuail, *Dicționar de geopolitică. State, concepte, autori*, transl. by Șerban Dragomirescu (Bucharest: Editura Corint, 2003), 454.

conclusion of a secret agreement between Great Britain and Russia. The latter would have received the implicit approval for taking over the northern part of the Bosphorus.³

Tsarist Russia always tried to gain access to a warm water sea. This was one of its fundamental goals.⁴ Even much later, almost thirty years after the end of the First World War, the Truman Doctrine (announced in the speech held by the American president Harry S. Truman in front of the Congress, in March 1947) bears an important geopolitical meaning. The short distance between Greece and the Mediterranean Sea, as well as that between Turkey and Straits represent incontestable arguments in the favour of our assertion.

In the fall of 1914, several Russian circles, represented by the nationalist deputy Krupenski, suggested a diplomatic bargaining between Russia, Romania and Bulgaria, applying the principle of territorial compensations. The Russian Empire had to concede Bessarabia to Romania. As compensation, Russia would impose its control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.⁵ Obviously, we do not need to give too much credit to this kind of proposals found in a few diplomatic documents. The proposals did not coincide with the official point of view of the Petrograd government. Russia has never formally expressed its openness to discuss the issue of Bessarabia's restitution during the negotiations for Romania's joining of the Entente. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to believe that the Romanian authorities would have so easily agreed to the Russian control over the Straits. In the context of the well-known tendencies of domination shown by Russia regarding these key-points, Romania was very interested in the conclusion of an agreement between Russia and Great Britain. That agreement should have solved the problem. The Romanian government was anxious because certain sources had informed its legation from London about the existence of an agreement concerning the occupation of Constantinople by Russia. In exchange, the Russian Empire would have to agree to the complete freedom of navigation through the Straits.. In fact, the news that strongly worried Bucharest was not verified and confirmed,⁶ although Alexandru Marghiloman expressed his concern in this respect at the beginning of September 1914: "*What are Russia's proposals? I know that it reserved the Dardanelles; The Black Sea, - Russian lake!*"⁷ Meanwhile, the Empire of the Tsars was making all efforts to solve the problem of the Straits according to its own interests. In an interview given to the Greek newspaper *Nea Alitia*, a Russian diplomat explicitly presented his country's main plans for the Balkan region:

³ H. Gorun, *România și Aliații (1915-1918)* (Târgu-Jiu: Editura "Academica Brâncuși", 2010), 5-6.

⁴ John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publisher, 1999), 233.

⁵ Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale [The Central Historical National Archives] (thereinafter ANIC), Fond Diamandi, d. 30, I, f. 279. Hadrian G. Gorun, *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare ale României cu Franța în primul război mondial*, forwarded by Lucian Nastasă (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2009), 47.

⁶ Gorun, *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare*, 60.

⁷ Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice* (Bucharest: Editura Scripta, 1993), 180.

“Russia tenaciously follows the intention of becoming the de facto leader of the all politics from the Balkan area [...]. It aims to become the mediator of all disputes that could occur between the states of the Balkan region, whose moral protectorate is entitled to exert de jure. It took this action in order to achieve a lasting equilibrium in the Balkan Peninsula. That is why, despite its friendly relations with Serbia, Russia has no intention of creating a greater Serbia, because this is not in Russia’s interest. However, it’s interests lie in creating greater Bulgaria”⁸ [translation mine].

Afterwards, the Russian diplomat stated that Romania would be forced to give back to Bulgaria all the territories taken over at the Peace Treaty of Bucharest (1913), except for Silistra, along with an area of three kilometers. The Russian dignitary ended the interview declaring that, in fact, the Entente did not aim to destroy Austria-Hungary, whose existence was seen as necessary.⁹ Therefore, one can distinguish Russia’s intention to support the Bulgarian interests and territorial claims to the detriment of Romania. The official circles of Petrograd felt much closer to Sofia than to Bucharest. Beyond the image of a protector, Russia insistently promoted the legitimacy of this image, while hiding its expansionist tendencies concerning Constantinople. Eager to fulfil the South Slavic peoples’ wishes, Russia supported the Bulgarian territorial claims. Obviously, Romania was reluctant towards a possible future military collaboration with the Russian Empire.

Russia’s Philo-Bulgarian affinities can be explained by the Pan-Slavist policy that Petrograd had always promoted. The pan-Slavism was doubled by a pan-Orthodox policy. Pan-Slavism tended to identify with pan-Orthodoxism, as a characteristic of the Balkan policy of the Russian Empire.

However, the *panism* concept could identify with that of the *pan-idea* (a term invented by Karl Haushofer). Its meaning is that of a geopolitical representation founded on the ethnic or/and religious community.¹⁰ In accordance with pan-Slavism and pan-Orthodoxism, Russia assumed the role of a protector for the Slavic and Orthodox peoples from the Balkan area. In fact, under the mask of pan-Orthodoxism, the Empire of the Tsars disguised its expansionist tendencies.

The essential features of the Russian foreign policy during the age of the Tsars were very well analyzed by the former ambassador in Moscow, George Kennan (an excellent expert and observer of the Russian realities) in his famous *The Long Telegram* at the beginning of the Cold War. Russia was always reluctant with regard to the relations with Western Europe. An acute feeling of fear, repulsion and insecurity determined all the acts of Petrograd. Moreover, Eastern Europe was always within the sphere of interests of Tsarist Russia. Peter the Great’s

⁸ Anastasie Iordache, *Reorientarea politicii externe a României și neutralitatea armată* (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 1998), 135.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁰ A. Chauprade, F. Thual, 463-464.

testament is extremely relevant in this respect.¹¹ In his outstanding book, Alain Besançon considered that, in the opinion of the Russian Tsars, Orthodoxy had maintained the cohesion of the empire.¹² At the end of the 18th century, the Tsars perpetuated the formula of unlimited power and of another, unreligious messianism, of unfettered domination.¹³

The territory of Eastern Europe and, implicitly, of the Balkan region also played a fundamental role in the *heartland* theory, elaborated by Halford Mackinder. He was considered to be the father of the English geopolitics: “Who rules East Europe commands the heartland; who rules the heartland commands the World-Island [...]”.¹⁴ The Balkans and Eastern Europe were vital from a geopolitical and a geostrategic point of view. Thus, one could explain the continuous tendencies of the Russian Empire and later of the U.S.S.R. to exert domination over this area. We must also mention that the famous article titled *The geographical pivot of history*¹⁵ had been printed just a decade before the outbreak of the Great War. On the Western front, Germany, a land power, confronted Great Britain and France, two maritime powers.

To some extent, this reality confirmed the idea expressed by the English geopolitician concerning the battle for territorial domination.¹⁶ Later, at the end of the world conflagration, in 1919, Mackinder published the volume entitled *Democratic ideals and reality: a study in the politics of reconstruction*,¹⁷ in which he demonstrated the geopolitical utility and necessity of a buffer-zone of independent states situated between Germany and Russia. The respective buffer-zone, created after the end of World War I, would include independent states such as Greater Romania, The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland. Its task was to moderate the tensions between the two great continental powers.¹⁸ By no means accidentally, on 27 October 1914, in Romania there was a growing anxiety regarding the issue of the Straits. Bucharest wanted to obtain guarantees or even commitments on this topic.

¹¹ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomația*, transl. by Mircea Ștefancu and Radu Paraschivescu (Bucharest: Editura BIC ALL, 2002), 393-395.

¹² Alain Besançon, *Sfânta Rusie*, transl. by Vlad Russo (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2013), 63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴ Robert D. Kaplan, *Răzbuarea geografiei. Ce ne spune lumea despre conflictele viitoare și lupta împotriva destinului*, transl. by Mihnea Gafița, forwarded by Paul Dobrescu (Bucharest: Editura Litera, 2014), 122.

¹⁵ Halford J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal*, 23. No. 4 (1904): 421-437

¹⁶ Kaplan, 119.

¹⁷ See H. J. Mackinder, *Democratic ideals and reality. A study in the politics of reconstruction* (Washington D. C.: National Defense University Press, 1942); Kaplan, 119.

¹⁸ Kaplan, 125.

The diplomatic representative in Petrograd, Constantin Diamandi suggested that the commercial neutrality of the Straits and of Constantinople should be declared. Moreover, all kinds of ships should gain the right of free passage during times of peace and war.¹⁹

The Straits' issue represented one of the elements which caused maintained the tensions between Romania and Tsarist Russia. Nicholas II's proclamation of 8 November 1914 led to an increase of the dissensions, generating concerns in Bucharest. This document expressed the hope that the Russo-Turkish war would finish accomplishing Peter the Great's hegemonic program. Great fears that Russia would exert domination over the Black Sea and the Straits spreaded.

Therefore, the French plenipotentiary minister in Romania, Jean-Camille Blondel asked the Russian government for an official explanation that would put an end to these suppositions, in order to remove all doubt concerning the principles of the freedom and internationalization of the Straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles.²⁰ The sentence of the imperial manifesto that caused a lot of agitation and emotion in Romania was the following: "Russia will fulfill the historical mission inherited from its ancestors regarding the shores of the Black Sea." Unlike the opinion previously expressed by Blondel, the ambassador in Petrograd, Maurice-Georges Paléologue shared the viewpoint of the leader of the Russian diplomacy, Serghei Sazonov. According to him, Russia did not have to offer any explanation regarding the way in which it understood to solve the Straits' problem together with its Allies.²¹ It was an impolite manner in which the Russian diplomats avoided a firm answer. Somewhat surprisingly, Paléologue stated, rather coldly: "Romania does not have the power to be a part of the concert of the three countries. It should not to pretend to take part in the discussions about the final decision."²² In fact, paraphrasing Martin Wight, the whole of the international politics is a power politics.²³ Thus, the international relations are perceived as a struggle for power between the most important international actors. In fact, although Martin Wight belongs to the English school of international relations, this is a point of view shared by realist theory. The great powers imposed the rules of the game, at least during the period of the First World War. However, the interests and the will of the small powers were often violated.

Nonetheless, the Bulgarian government headed by Vasil Radoslavov did not agree to the idea of Russia's control over Constantinople, considering the fact that Bulgaria would have been under serious threat. Russian authority over Constantinople would have meant the defeat of the *démarches* for the rebuilding of a Balkan block,²⁴ under the aegis of the Entente. The different national interests and foreign policy objectives of the actors represented the

¹⁹ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 27, f. 230.

²⁰ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 27, f. 68.

²¹ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 27, f. 72.

²² ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 29, f. 10.

²³ See Martin Wight, *Politica de putere*, transl. by Tudor Florin (Chişinău: Editura Arc, 1998).

²⁴ Marghiloman, 321.

main reason for the failure of the Entente's plan to revive the Balkan alliance²⁵ that had existed between 1912 and 1913.

The issue of the Dardanelles sparked a vivid interest within German diplomatic circles. On 11 November 1914, the baron Hilmar von dem Busche Haddenhausen, Germany's minister in Bucharest, told Virgil Arion about an article in the English newspaper *The Observer*. This article wrote about the recognition of Russia's rights over the city of Constantinople.²⁶ Great Britain's minister of Foreign Affairs, Edward Grey, estimated that Turkey's entry into the war alongside the Central Powers would reopen the issue of the Straits and Constantinople.. However, a complete solution would have been possible only after Germany's defeat in the world war.²⁷ On 16 February 1915, Alexandru Marghiloman also expressed his concerns regarding the Dardanelles, when talking to Marinkovici, Serbia's minister in Bucharest.²⁸

The highly important geopolitical and geostrategic role of the Straits determined the Entente to force the Dardanelles on 19 February 1915. The decision was meant to urge the entry of the neutral states from South-Eastern Europe into the war.²⁹ The Entente adopted the same attitude (in fact, from the very beginning of the Romanian neutrality), based on the *divide et impera* principle in the relations with Romania and Bulgaria. The definitive rupture in the relations of the two Eastern European states with the Central Powers would certainly have had a considerable psychological effect over the enemy camp. It would have also represented a significant diplomatic victory. In international relations, the application of the *divide et impera* principle is one of the most important methods used to balance the power of a rival. The Triple Entente's decision also complicated the problem of the ammunition transit from Germany to Turkey. According to the benevolent neutrality towards Russia, the Romanian Kingdom did not have to allow the transport of any ammunition to the former Ottoman Empire. Due to the shortage of munitions, it was very difficult for Turkey to stand its ground in the Dardanelles.³⁰ The attack on the Dardanelles launched by the Entente's forces impressed the Romanian public opinion and the authorities in Bucharest.³¹ Blondel informed Quai d'Orsay about the growing interest of the press regarding the Dardanelle issue and the mouth of the Danube. The French minister of Romania's capital was afraid that the press articles aimed to distract the attention of the public opinion from the possible armed intervention against the

²⁵ Gorun, 60.

²⁶ Marghiloman, 233.

²⁷ Paul Gogeanu, *Strămtorile Mării Negre de-a lungul istoriei* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966), 107.

²⁸ Marghiloman, 259.

²⁹ Keegan, 5. Vasile Vesa, *România și Franța la începutul secolului al XX-lea (1900-1916). Pagini de istorie diplomatică* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1975), 97. We fully share the point of view expressed by the historian from Cluj-Napoca.

³⁰ Constantin Kirițescu, *Preludiile diplomatice ale războiului de întregire* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrală, 1940), 12.

³¹ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 29, f. 18.

Dual Monarchy.³² Moreover, the French military attaché in Bucharest, captain Jules Pichon, informed the minister of war, Alexandre Millerand, that the Romanian military circles expressed a strong interest regarding the consequences of the attack on the Dardanelles.. He (Pichon) considered both the importance and the difficulty of this operation, expressing the hope that it would be successful.³³

On the same day on which the attack on the Dardanelles had been decided, the memorandum belonging to the minister of foreign affairs, Serghei Sazonov required the solution of the Straits' problem "in accordance with Russia's centuries-old tendencies." The memorandum explicitly requested the incorporation in the Russian Empire of the city of Constantinople, the Western shore of the Bosphorus and the Southern Thrace to the ligne Enos-Midia.³⁴ Less than one month later, on 8 March, the French government answered affirmatively to the official demands of the leader of the Russian diplomacy. The French authorities clearly added that "the definitive solution would be found in the peace treaties which, according to the declaration of 5 September 1914, should be elaborated and signed by the three Allied powers together."³⁵ Therefore, a final settlement was to take place at the peace conference, while also taking into account the protocol signed by the Entente's powers in London. In terms of that document, the powers committed to signing the peace treaty only together and at the same time. Almost immediately, Great Britain answered the Russian memorandum. The cabinet of London conditioned the achievement of the Russian aspirations to the victory of the Allies and particularly to the fulfilment of the British and French interests "concerning Ottoman Empire's territory and others."³⁶

Since November 1914, the issue of the Straits had fully contributed to the deterioration of the relations between Romania and Russia. The imprudent declarations of the Tsarist authorities decisively worsened the state of affairs. In the beginning of 1915, in order to promote its vital objectives, Romania considered that it needed oppose Russia's expansionist intentions towards the Straits. According to the correspondence of the Russian military attaché in Greece, Gudin Lefcovici, Romania even tended to the formation of an alliance made by the Balkan Peninsula's countries. That alliance's main goal was the containment of the Russian policy. Moreover, the news of a supposed secret agreement between England and Russia spreaded all across Athens. Thus, Russia was to receive the whole of the Bosphorus and the city of Constantinople. The Dardanelles was to become neutral. Later, it was learnt that Russia

³² Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères Françaises (thereinafter A MAEF), Série Guerre 1914-1918. Sous-Série Roumanie, d. 338, f. 63.

³³Service Historique de l'Armé de Terre, Vincennes, Série Attachés militaires en Roumanie, Carton 1455, d. 4, télégramme No. 12, Le Capitaine Pichon attaché à la Légation de France à Monsieur le Ministre de la guerre.

³⁴ Gogeanu, 108.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 108-109.

had only been promised the Northern part of the Bosphorus, while Constantinople would have become neutral. Therefore, the situation in Bucharest started to calm down.³⁷

In Blondel's opinion, in order to obtain the Romanian Kingdom's support, Russia would have had to intensely focus on the apprehensions of Ion I. C. Brătianu's government. In fact, Prince Serghei Trubețkoi's declarations and several ideas present in the speech delivered in the Duma by the minister of foreign affairs (referring to the Russian objectives in the issue of Constantinople) were perceived as a real threat in Bucharest. Blondel discussed with different interlocutors and did his best to eliminate the distrust that the Russian ambitions inspired to the Romanians.³⁸ In February 1915, the evolution of the military operations seemed quite discouraging, with respect to a future accession of Romania to the Entente. The retreat of the Russian army from Bukovina, in the north of the Pruth River and the successes of the Austro-Hungarians maintained Romania in the state of expectancy.³⁹ Russia continued to have expansionist intentions regarding the Straits and even concerning Romania, as proven by the telegram of the French ambassador in Petrograd, Paléologue, sent to Quai d'Orsay on 28 February 1915: "*One of the phrases I hear most often is the following: «Why do we need Romania [...] thus, we would have the hands freer in order to settle the issue of the Straits»*"⁴⁰ [translation mine]. On the same day, Blondel communicated to Quai d'Orsay that the destruction of the main fortifications of the Dardanelles had had a considerable effect in Bucharest.⁴¹

Théophile Delcassé, the French minister of Foreign Affairs expressed a rather similar opinion, emphasizing Romania's special interest in the operations from the Dardanelles and in the acts and declarations of the Russian officials on this topic in particular.⁴² The issue of the Straits and Constantinople involved a series of diplomatic difficulties for the Entente. If a major power conquered these key positions in the absence of an agreement and of prior consultations of the countries bordering the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea, the respective states would renounce their close relations with the Triple Entente. These were the cases of Romania and Greece in particular.

Raymond Poincaré, the president of the French Republic, estimated that this aspect would determine the irritation of the two nations whose sympathy was very precious for the Entente. Previously, France and England agreed for the Straits and the city of Constantinople to come under Russian domination.⁴³ In March 1915, Emanoil Porumbaru, the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs, asked the secretary of the Romanian legation in London, Vasile Boerescu, whether the news related to the Russo-Franco-English arrangement concerning the Black Sea and the Straits were veridical or whether the solution for this issue was to be postponed until

³⁷ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 29, f.11.

³⁸ AMAEF, Guerre, Roumanie, d. 338, f. 70.

³⁹ A MAEF, Guerre, Roumanie, d. 338, f. 82.

⁴⁰ AMA EF, Guerre, Roumanie, d. 338, f. 89.

⁴¹ AMAEF, Guerre, Roumanie, d. 338, f. 90.

⁴² AMA EF, Guerre, Roumanie, d. 338, f. 96.

⁴³ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 29, f. 21, 24; V. Vesa, 106-107.

after the conclusion of the peace treaty.⁴⁴ Ion I. C. Brătianu, the president of the Council of ministers, shared a concern similar to that of Blondel and Stanislas Poklevski-Koziell, his Russian colleague.⁴⁵ Quai d'Orsay ordered that this topic be kept secret. If the Romanian authorities obtained such information, they would not wish to join the Entente.⁴⁶

Knowing that, on 4 March 1915, Georges Maurice Paléologue, the ambassador in Petrograd, attempted to calm Delcassé by stating that, in fact, Sazonov was trying to avoid "any word, any allusion that could risk worrying the Bucharest cabinet."⁴⁷ In fact, the Romanian ruling circles showed a real interest even for the articles published in the newspapers from abroad on the topic of the Dardanelles.⁴⁸ Later, on 28 May/10 June 1915, the chargé d'affaires of Greece in Petrograd confirmed to Romanian plenipotentiary minister, Constantin Diamandi, that France and England had indeed made an agreement in order to recognize Russia's rights over Constantinople and the Straits.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, according to Alexandru Marghiloman, approximately two months before, on March 7, both Western powers would have provided even opposite guarantees to Brătianu's government.⁵⁰ Therefore the archival documents and the memorialistic works somehow proved the contradictory character of the information. Thus, on 9 March 1915, Henry Klepatsky from *The Russian Official Journal* confessed to Marghiloman, in the presence of the plenipotentiary minister Stanislas Poklevski-Koziell, that "in Russia it is hard to believe that the Allies would agree to abandon Constantinople to Russia."⁵¹ The authorities wanted the public opinion to know about this subject just for propagandistic and populist purposes: "[...] If it is told that they want it [Constantinople], this version is only for the people."⁵² It is certain that the declaration was made only for tactical reasons, in order to spare the susceptibility of the Romanians and to somewhat moderate their apprehensions.

There were even speculations according to which the slowness of the Allied operations in the Gallipoli peninsula was caused by France's and England's will to delay the achievement of the Russian goals. Paris and London would have liked to secure the Russian military aid for as long as possible,⁵³ in order to maintain a stake concerning the Russians. An ambition of the Russian Tsars was to complete many centuries of struggle against the Ottoman Empire by occupying the city of Constantinople. In this way, Russia aimed to symbolically regain the seat of the Orthodox Christianity from Islam.⁵⁴

⁴⁴ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 29, f. 24-25.

⁴⁵ ANIC, Fond Diamandi, d. 29, f. 25.

⁴⁶ Vesa, 107.

⁴⁷ AMAEF, Guerre, Roumanie, d. 338, f. 98.

⁴⁸ Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României, Fond 71/ 1914, vol. 38, f. 38-45.

⁴⁹ AN IC, Fond Diamandi, vol. I, d. 30, f. 97.

⁵⁰ A. Marghiloman, 269.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ AN IC, Fond Casa Regală, d. 30/ 1915, f. 5.

⁵⁴ Keegan, 233.

In March 1915, Russia's military situation became concerning. The Russian armies suffered defeat at the Masurian Lakes and started to be involved in inefficient battles in Galitia.⁵⁵ Forced by these inauspicious realities, the great duke Nicholas Nikolaevich made contact with the French authorities, stressing the absolute necessity of the cooperation between Romania and Italy in order to facilitate the Entente's tasks and to improve the general situation. The great duke calculated that in the absence of Romania's and Italy's immediate collaboration, the war would last many months, involving terrible risks.⁵⁶ Actually, in the spring of 1915, the representatives of the Entente were optimistic concerning the final outcome of the war, a fact also emphasized in the correspondence between the King George V of Great Britain and Queen Mary of Romania. Before that, the British sovereign had several discussions with General Paget, who had gone on the Russian front and had been able to express a pertinent point of view about the combative capacity of the Russian army. General Paget was well-informed about the situation of the French and English troops. Great Britain planned to stop the bombing of fortifications in the Dardanelles. Even if he were to consider the substantial ship losses, the optimism regarding the final triumph was undeniable.⁵⁷

In order to intervene in the war alongside the Entente, the president of the Council of Ministers, Ion I.C. Brătianu, asked Russia to provide guarantees regarding the Dardanelles.⁵⁸ The possibility for Russia to exert its domination over the Straits fed the Romanians' suspicions. They (the Romanians) rightly thought that the empire of the East could manifest hegemonic pretensions concerning Romania at any moment.⁵⁹ A compromise solution would have been the Straits' internationalization. In this case, Russia would not have been constrained to give up its naval pre-eminence in the Black Sea.⁶⁰ It was truly difficult and almost impossible for Russia to make any promises related to the Straits to the government of Bucharest, due to Petrograd's propension to exert a permanent control over these strategic points. Russia's objectives concerning the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and its duplicitous attitude increased the anxiety of the Romanian authorities. The natural consequence was the delay of the military intervention. In Bucharest, there was still a state of concern. Thus, In June 1915, Alexandru Marghiloman complained to King Ferdinand that Russia's influence was very dangerous for the Romanian young society. The perils would grow for Romania, if the Allies agreed for Russia to exert its authority on the former capital of the Byzantine Empire.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Kiriteşcu, 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ AN IC, Fond Regina Maria, d. 997, vol. V, f. 1.

⁵⁸ AMA EF, Guerre, Roumanie, d. 338, f. 111; V. Vesa, 108.

⁵⁹ René Moulin, *La Guerre et les neutres* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1915), 284.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁶¹ Marghiloman, 300.

In fact, the Russian Empire tried more than to merely impose its domination on the Straits. Russia attempted to perpetuate its influence over the entire Balkan and East-European region. After the First World War one can find the roots of the strategic glaxis that Soviet Union will clearly define at the end of World War II.