

Bucharest, 19 February/3 March 1886:

“...anyone understands how shaky and little durable this peace will be”*

Mircea-Cristian GHENGHEA

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iași

E-mail: mcghenghea2010@yahoo.com

Article history: Received 8.10.2021; Revised 22.11.2021;

Accepted 15.12.2021; Available online 13.04.2022.

©2021 Studia UBB Historia. Published by Babeș-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Abstract: Only several years after the war of 1877-1878 between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, in which Romania had also been involved and had had an important role, succeeding in gaining its state independence, the situation in the Balkan Peninsula experienced new tense moments. Against the background of the so-called *Bulgarian crisis* in the late '80s of the 19th century, in which Russian interests played again an important part, along with the involvement of other Great Powers, an armed conflict between Serbia and Bulgaria took place in November 1885, causing a general concern at the continental level. Situated in the immediate vicinity of the conflict, Romania tried to contribute to its resolution, wanting to avoid a new Russian invasion and a tension of the relations with its powerful eastern neighbour.

The choice of Bucharest as a venue for peace negotiations and the signing of the treaty between Serbia and Bulgaria was also a sign of the appreciation and prestige enjoyed by the Romanian state and King Carol I, primarily due to the balanced and prudent approach shown in the foreign policy and international relations. However, at the level of the Romanian historiography, the erroneous perception of an important role that Romania would have played in the completion of the conflict and the signing of the peace in Bucharest was established for some time, a perception contradicted by the historical realities and the testimonies from that period.

Keywords: Bulgarian crisis, Serbian-Bulgarian war, Romanian Kingdom, Carol I, the Bucharest peace.

* București, 19 februarie / 3 martie 1886: “...pricepe oricine cât de șubredă și puțin durabilă va fi pacea aceasta”.

Rezumat: București, 19 februarie / 3 martie 1886: "...pricepe oricine cât de șubredă și puțin durabilă va fi pacea aceasta". La doar câțiva ani după războiul din 1877-1878 dintre Imperiu rus și Imperiul otoman, în care fusese implicată și România și care avusese un rol important, izbutind să-și câștige independența de stat, situația din Peninsula Balcanică a cunoscut noi momente tensionate. Pe fondul așa-zisei *crize bulgare* de la sfârșitul anilor '80 ai secolului al XIX-lea, în care interesele rusești au jucat, din nou, un rol important, alături de implicarea altor Mari Puteri, a avut loc, în noiembrie 1885, un conflict armat între Serbia și Bulgaria, provocând o îngrijorare generală la nivel continental. Aflată în imediata vecinătate a conflictului, România a încercat să contribuie la soluționarea acestuia, dorind să evite o nouă invazie rusească și o tensionare a relațiilor cu puternicul vecin de la răsărit.

Alegerea Bucureștiului drept loc de desfășurare a negocierilor păcii și de semnare a tratatului dintre Serbia și Bulgaria a reprezentat inclusiv un semn al aprecierii și al prestigiului de care se bucurau statul român și regele Carol I, în primul rând datorită abordării echilibrate și prudente manifestate în privința politicii externe și a relațiilor internaționale. Cu toate acestea, la nivelul istoriografiei românești s-a încetățenit, de mai multă vreme, percepția eronată a unui rol important pe care România l-ar fi avut în finalizarea conflictului și în semnarea păcii de la București, percepție contrazisă de realitățile istorice și de mărturiile din epocă.

Cuvinte cheie: criza bulgară, războiul sârbo-bulgar, Regatul României, Carol I, pacea de la București.

In 1885-1886, only a few years after the Russo-Turkish war which had caused important changes on the political map of South-Eastern Europe, a new episode of the so complicated Eastern Question unfolded. This time, the coordinates were noticeably changed compared to the years 1877-1878, the main difference being the absence of the Ottoman Empire from the forefront of the events. Until then, almost every time when the Eastern Question was discussed, the Porte was automatically taken into account, as the Turkish state was usually regarded as the main responsible for the general instability and disorder within the area. Nevertheless, for a better understanding and underlining of this aspect, in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th one must permanently consider both the specific interests of the Great European Powers and the gradual development and affirmation of the national movements in the territories under Ottoman rule in this part of the continent.

The situation to which we refer through our text falls into the second phase of the so-called *Bulgarian crisis* of 1885-1887.¹ At the level of nowadays historiography it is considered that this crisis comprises three phases. The first concerns the union of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria, proclaimed by the unifying act of Philippopolis (Plovdiv) of 6/18 September 1885. The second phase consists of the Serbian-Bulgarian war and the peace of Bucharest. Finally, the third phase is represented by the removal of Alexander of Battenberg and the installation of Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha as prince of new Bulgaria. For reasons as objective and understandable as possible we will not consider the actual development of the Bulgarian crisis nor the military operations during the conflict with Serbia. As it can be easily deduced from the title of our text, we are primarily interested in the role of Romania within this crisis and the meanings that can be attributed to the peace in Bucharest at the beginning of 1886.²

The Bulgarian crisis also occurred on the background of the increasing tensions between the Bulgarian Principality under Ottoman suzerainty, led by Prince Alexander of Battenberg, and the Russian Empire which had not given up its great Balkan confederate project in which Bulgaria had been reserved a leading role. The acceptance of the act of unification of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria by Alexander of Battenberg was the last straw of those which contributed to the complete degradation of the relations between Tsar Alexander III and his former friend and ally in the Balkans. As an immediate consequence, all Russian officers who were in Bulgaria were called back to Russia,³ and Alexander III ordered the Prince to be removed from the ranks of the Russian army (he had the rank of Lieutenant General).⁴ As Gheorghe Vârnav-Liteanu, the Romanian

¹ Gheorghe Cliveti, *România modernă și "Apogeul Europei" 1815-1914* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2018), 984.

² Ibid.

³ R.J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 123; Charles Jelavich, Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan national states 1804-1920* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 165; Frederick B. Chary, *The History of Bulgaria* (Santa Barbara - Denver - Oxford: ABC-CLIO Greenwood Press), 2011, 39.

⁴ *Documents diplomatiques français (1871-1914)*, 1^{re} série (1871-1900), tome VI (8 avril 1885 - 30 décembre 1887) (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1934), 137 (Le général Appert, Ambassadeur de France à Saint-Petersbourg, à M. de Freycinet, Ministre des Affaires étrangères. Saint-Petersbourg, 5 novembre 1885); Rudolf Dinu (coord.), Alin Ciupală, Antal Lukács (eds.), Anca-Graziella, Nicolae Nicolescu (associated ed.), *Documente Diplomatice Române* (hereinafter: *DDR 12*). Series I, Vol. 12 - 1884-1885, (Râmnicu Vâlcea: Editura Conphys, 2010), p. 754 (the diplomatic agent of Romania in Sofia, Alexandru Beldiman, to the President of the Council of Ministers, Minister *ad interim* of Foreign Affairs, Ion C. Brătianu. Sofia, 9 November (new style) 1885, w.h. [without hour - our note]); Daniel Crețu, "România și reînnoirea Triplei Alianțe," *Transilvania*. 11 (2015): 83.

Minister in Berlin, pointed out in a telegram addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion Cămpineanu, the measures in question proved that the Russians regarded Bulgaria as a Russian province and its sovereign as a mere official or employee of the Tsar.⁵

However, the situation provoked by the unifying act of Philippopolis led to a new aggravation of the Eastern Question, worrying both the Great Powers and the small states in the area. Among the Great Powers there was also the fear, expressed especially by the French diplomacy, that the three kingdoms in the south-east of the continent – Romania, Greece, and Serbia – might raise, together or separately, the issue of certain compensations following the territorial changes in the Balkans. Indeed, two of them, namely Serbia and Greece, were dissatisfied with the changes and demanded territorial compensations. Unavoidably, there were various discussions between the diplomats of the Great Powers in the attempt to solve the crisis caused by the outcome of the uprising in Eastern Rumelia. Eventually, also through the manoeuvres of British diplomacy which had considered it appropriate to propose the Porte the acceptance of a “personal union” of Bulgaria and Rumelia under the rule of Alexander of Battenberg, it was decided to convene in Constantinople the representatives of the signatory powers of the Treaty of Berlin on 13 July 1878 for a conference to regulate this new disorder. Nonetheless, the most important role in summoning that conference belonged to the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck; although he preferred “direct arrangements between the most interested parties”,⁶ understanding the danger that Russia would again take advantage of the possibility of an armed intervention South of the Danube as it had done back in 1877, he insisted with the Ottoman officials for the organization of such a meeting.

The conference in Constantinople opened its proceedings on 25 October / 6 November 1878. Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary wanted a return to the *status quo ante*, while Great Britain sustained the plan of a personal union of the two Bulgarias under the leadership of Alexander of Battenberg and categorically opposed the idea of an intervention of the Ottoman army against the Bulgarians. All these were taking place against the background of a growing agitation and discontent in Serbia and Greece, which were demanding territorial compensations if the new extent of Bulgaria was to be maintained. However, being also

⁵ DDR 12, p. 744 (Minister of Romania in Berlin, Gheorghe Vârnav-Liteanu, to the Minister of the Foreign Affairs, Ion Cămpineanu. Berlin, 6 November (new style) 1878): “Mesure prise par la Russie contre le Prince de Battenberg [a produit l’] impression d’un acte de tension à montrer que la Bulgarie [doit être] considérée province russe et son souverain comme un employé du Czar”.

⁶ Cliveti, *România modernă*, 993.

instigated by Austria-Hungary,⁷ the Serbs did not wait for the conclusions of the Constantinople talks and took action attacking the Bulgarians. Having their army mobilized even since September,⁸ they declared war and crossed the border with Bulgaria on 2/14 November 1885. A few days later they were defeated in Slivnitsa, a locality 22 kilometres away from Sofia, forced to retreat, and after 24 November the Bulgarian army entered Serbia. The determined warnings of the Great Powers, expressed including under the form of an ultimatum issued by Austria-Hungary joined by Germany and Russia,⁹ led to the cessation of hostilities and the signing of an armistice. The unfolding of the military events, as well as the complication of the diplomatic situation, demonstrated that a return to the so desired *status ante quo* became increasingly distant. Even Tsar Alexander III had to reluctantly accept this aspect. The situation was regulated and resolved at the official level through the peace treaty signed in Bucharest, on 19 February / 3 March 1886.¹⁰

Briefly presented, this was the situation which found its temporary resolution following the peace treaty signed in Bucharest. As already mentioned, we are interested to see what was the role played by the Romanian state and what were the meanings attributed to this act carried out in the capital of the Romanian Kingdom. Thus, as pointed out in the field literature, the attitude of the decision makers in Bucharest was, "at least in the first phase, one of timorous expectation",¹¹ Romania being situated between "the two Russias" and potentially exposed to an invasion both on the two land fronts and at sea.¹² It was also intended to avoid a possible new crossing over the national territory of the Russian armies in the event of another intervention in the Balkans or, even more seriously, the turning of the country into a war theatre. This is why Romania's primary interest was to settle the Serbian-Bulgarian dispute as quickly as possible, the leaders in Bucharest adopting an absolute reserve attitude towards the ongoing events in order not to fuel the conflict in any way.¹³

⁷ Chary, *The History of Bulgaria*, 39.

⁸ Cliveti, *România modernă*, 993.

⁹ Frank Maloy Anderson, Amos Shartle Hershley [with the Assistance of 50 Contributors], *Handbook for the Diplomatic History of Europe, Asia, and Africa 1870-1914* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 125.

¹⁰ "Treaty of Peace between Bulgaria and Servia. Signed at Bucharest, 3rd March, 1886," in Edward Hertslet (ed.), *The Map of Europe by Treaty; showing the various political and territorial changes which have taken place since the general peace of 1814. With numerous maps and notes*. Vol. IV. 1875 to 1891 (London: Butterworths, 1891), 3151; Anderson, Hershley, *Handbook*, 125.

¹¹ Dinu, "Introduction," in *DDR* 12, X.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, X-XI.

At the same time, the direct relations with the south-Danubian neighbours – Serbia and Bulgaria – presented certain nuances. Both Sofia and Belgrade would have liked Romania to speak out in favour of their interests in this crisis. It is true, in the case of Bulgaria the hopes were somewhat lower if we consider the problem related to the border in the South of Dobruja which dated back to 1878. Therefore, the news that Romania had declared its neutrality towards the situation caused by the act Philippopoli was received with some satisfaction in Sofia, although certain moments of concern appeared even in October 1885, when the Romanian royal government had shown its discontent regarding the arms trafficking and the brigandage acts practised by the Bulgarians within the border area, a fact which was possible, according to Bucharest's opinion, including because of the imprecision in the delimitation of the Dobruja southern border.¹⁴

For their part, the Serbs hoped that following the visit of King Carol I to Belgrade in August 1884, Romania might even have shown itself open to a military action against Bulgaria. Moreover, on 13/25 September 1885, a special envoy of King Milan I came up with a concrete offer of cooperation regarding the idea of a joint operation against the Bulgarians as the Romanians were invited to occupy the entire territory up to the Rusciuk – Varna alignment.¹⁵ That is why the announcement of neutrality by the Romanian side caused some discontent in Belgrade.

It should also be reminded here that, in the context of the Bulgarian crisis, Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu considered possible territorial compensations for Romania, even more so as there was the old problem related to the delimitation of the Dobruja border and the city of Silistra. His vision differed from that of King Carol I, but also from that of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion Cămpineanu, who regarded the Bulgarian or Rumelian crisis only as a new source of problems. In addition to that, Brătianu thought of it as possible opportunity which Romania had to try to capitalize on for the national interest. That is why after testing Bulgaria's attitude he went to Vienna and to Berlin in order to see if he could rely on the support of the new allies¹⁶ in the event that Romania had formally raised claims regarding territorial compensations. However, as King Carol

¹⁴ Ibid., 737-738 (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion Cămpineanu, to the person in charge of the diplomatic Agency of Romania in Sofia, Spiro-Paul. [Bucharest], 19/31 October 1885).

¹⁵ Ibid., 622-623 (*Propunerile făcute Ministrului Afacerilor Externe al României, Ion Cămpineanu, de către Generalul Gheorghe Catargi, trimisul regelui Serbiei, Milan Obrenović / The proposals made to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Ion Cămpineanu, by General Gheorghe Catargi, envoy of the King of Serbia, Milan Obrenović.* [Bucharest], 13/25 September 1885).

¹⁶ Romania had secretly joined the triple Alliance, on 18/30 October, through a secret treaty signed with Austria-Hungary, to which Germany subscribed the same day, and Italy after almost five years, on 3/15 May 1888.

I recorded in his memoirs, the answer received by the Romanian Prime Minister was that the Triple Alliance was an association of peace and not a purchasing company, being obvious that Otto von Bismarck wanted “absolute peace” as the Bulgarian union was to be recognized without any compensation for Romania.¹⁷ After all, any decision in this regard had to necessarily take into account the interests and the attitudes of Romania’s secret allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary. By the treaty of alliance signed in 1883 the Romanian state had also assumed the obligation to align its foreign policy with the strategy unfolded in Berlin and Vienna.

Following the conclusion of the Serbian-Bulgarian armistice, the question of where the peace talks would take place arose. Victorious on the battlefield, the Bulgarians wanted these to be held in Sofia. The suzerain power – the Ottoman Empire – proposed Constantinople, considering also a possible resumption of the conference of ambassadors’ works. The Serbs, supported by Austria-Hungary, preferred Belgrade, of course. Finally, Otto von Bismarck intervened and proposed for the peace negotiations to be held in Bucharest,¹⁸ a proposal finally accepted by all the Great Powers, as well as the belligerents. It is true, there was also the idea of designating the city of Craiova as the place of these negotiations, but everything remained at the level of pure discussions.¹⁹

¹⁷ Carol I al României, *Jurnal*, Vol. I, 1881-1887. Text established, translation from German, introductory study and notes by Vasile Docea (Iași: Polirom, 2007), 397: “3 o’clock in Buzău, welcoming, Brătianu there, he returned without result from his trip. Bismarck wants peace absolutely, the Bulgarian union will be recognized, without compensations for us”. The aspect in question is also pointed out by Guasco di Bissio, chargé d’affaires of the Kingdom of Italy in Bucharest, in a report sent to Carlo Felice Nicolis di Robilant, the Italian Foreign Minister, written after a conversation with Ion Câmpineanu – see R. Dinu, Ion Bulei (eds.), *35 de ani de relații italo-române, 1879-1914. Documente diplomatice italiene / 35 anni di relazioni italo-romene, 1879-1914. Documenti diplomatici italiani* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 2001), 176 (Chargé d’affaires in Bucharest, Guasco di Bissio, to the Minister of Foreign Affaires, di Robilant. Bucharest, 11 October 1885): “Non mi fu dato di vedere lo stesso signor Bratiano ma ebbi stamane la sorte di conversare a lungo con questo Ministro degli Affari Esteri [Ion Câmpineanu – our note] ed ho l’onore di riassumere all’Eccellenza Vostra quello che mi pare più importante a conoscersi. Il signor Bratiano si è formato la convinzione che Bismarck vuole la pace a qualunque costo. La questione prettamente bulgara non lo preoccupa in modo eccessivo, e non crede potra’essere causa di conflagrazione”.

¹⁸ A. Ciupală, A. Lukács, L. Trăușan-Matu (eds.), *Documente Diplomatice Române. Series I, Vol. 13 – 1886*, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2014), 21 (hereinafter *DDR 13*) (Minister of Romania in Berlin, Liteanu, to the Minister of Foreign Affaires, Pherekyde. Berlin, 9 January 1886): “Le Comte de Bismarck m’a communiqué que la Serbie et la Bulgarie ne peuvent s’entendre au sujet du lieu à choisir pour les négociations de la paix. Bismarck a ordonné à ses représentants de Belgrade et de Sofia de proposer aux deux parties de se réunir à cet effet à Bucarest”.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7 (Minister of Romania in Sankt Petersburg, Kretzulescu, to the Minister of Foreign Affaires, Pherekyde. Sankt Petersburg, 31 December 1885 / 12 January 1886).

The diplomatic relations between the Great Powers and the lack of willingness to discuss issues that would go beyond the local or regional plan clearly indicated that the peace negotiations in Bucharest were to be assigned a very limited role, namely of officially closing the Serbian-Bulgarian conflict, without involving issues related to the “exclusive competence of the European diplomacy”.²⁰ That is why the negotiating parties were practically put in the position of fulfilling a mandate previously established by the European areopagus.²¹

The meetings of the Bucharest reunion began on 23 January / 4 February 1886; it was also the moment when the news of an arrangement between the Ottomans and the Bulgarians which ensured Alexander of Battenberg the rule of Eastern Rumelia for an unlimited period reached the Romanian capital; in return he agreed to the maintenance of the Ottoman suzerainty for that province. The Ottoman Empire had to accept *de facto* the situation which occurred. Under these circumstances, when the Great Powers also gradually expressed their adherence to this arrangement, it became even more obvious that the works in Bucharest had to target an epilogue that was supposed to simply aim to the conclusion of peace. The treaty signed on 19 February / 3 March 1886 contains a single article which states: “Peace is re-established between the Kingdom of Servia [*sic* - our note] and the Principality of Bulgaria, dating from the date of the signature of the present Treaty”.²²

The moment 1886 is very important from the point of view of the regional geopolitics of that time. In current terms one might even say that the Kingdom of Romania was considered by the Great Powers, and first of all by Germany, as the only regional provider of stability and security and a reliable partner for the restoration and guarantee of peace in the case of the Serbian-Bulgarian conflict. This attitude was also the result of the caution shown by the decision makers in Bucharest. In addition to the fact of being, since 1883, a part of an alliance which demanded compliance with the guidelines of the Berlin Treaty of 1878, the heads of the Romanian foreign policy had the wisdom not to follow in any way the proposal that came from Serbia in September 1885. The aspects are interrelated as the alliance with the Central Powers proved to be, for Romania, a real source of security and stability. As noted by Rudolf Dinu, one of the editors of the collection *Documente Diplomatice Române* [*Romanian Diplomatic Documents*], “in most regional crisis situations after 1883, from the Rumelian issue to the Balkan Wars, the Triple Alliance shaped, constrained, and moderated the

²⁰ Cliveti, *România modernă*, 1007.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1008.

²² “Treaty of Peace between Bulgaria and Servia,” 3151.

Romanian foreign policy, transforming the small North-Danubian kingdom into a factor of stability in the South-East of Europe".²³

Choosing Bucharest as a venue for peace negotiations also demonstrated that the prudence and balance shown by the Romanian head of state engaged the appreciation and respect of the leaders of the European continent. As an additional proof of the prestige enjoyed by King Carol I one can mention the fact that, in 1886, following the abdication of Prince Alexander of Battenberg, the Bulgarian Prime Minister Stefan Stambulov proposed to Carol to secure the Bulgarian crown in order to accomplish a personal Romania-Bulgarian union, a proposal which the Romanian monarch declined.²⁴

In addition to all these issues which deal, first of all, with the overall existing situation, other aspects proved a certain relevance and contributed, to some extent, to the shaping of the positive image which Romania gained during and after the Serbian-Bulgarian war – we refer here not only to the neutrality that was strictly observed by the leading factors in Bucharest, but also to the involvement in helping the wounded of the two sides and the war refugees. The ambulances of the Romanian Red Cross were sent to both states, with Romanian physicians and nurses caring for several hundreds wounded in the hospitals of Sofia and Belgrade; hundreds of refugees who had crossed the Danube because of the war were received and housed in the Calafat area.²⁵ Both the public opinion in Serbia and Bulgaria as well as various representatives of the Great Powers appreciated the attitude shown by the Romanian state;²⁶ also

²³ Dinu, "Introduction," XIII.

²⁴ Alexandru Em. Lahovary, *Amintiri diplomatice. Constantinopol (1902-1906). Viena (1906-1908)*, Adrian Stătescu and Laurențiu Vlad (eds.) (Iași: Institutul European, 2009), 95. As shown by the Romanian historiography, Carol's refusal was formulated in agreement with the opinions expressed by the Romanian politicians, but also taking into account the fact that neither Russia, nor Austria-Hungary would have accepted a Hohenzollern to rule both Romania and Bulgaria – Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)*. 2nd ed., Vol. I – *Carol I* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică), 2004, 138.

²⁵ Bogdan Catana, "România și războiul sârbo-bulgar din 1885," *Analele Universității din Craiova. Seria Istorie XI* (2006): 133–135.

²⁶ *Ibid.* A sign of appreciation from the highest level was sent from the Italian capital – thus, Alexandru Plagino, extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary in Rome, informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihail Pherekyde, that the designation of the Kingdom of Romania's capital as a place of negotiations between the Serbs and the Bulgarians was very well received by King Umberto I – *DDR 13*, 79–80 (Ministrul României la Roma, Plagino, către Ministrul Afacerilor Externe, Pherekyde. Roma, 4 February 1886):

"Minister,

I had the honour of receiving yesterday evening the telegram of Your Excellency of the same day relating to the meeting of the negotiators for Thursday 5 current; two

thanks to this fact Bucharest's nomination was finally accepted without much opposition by the belligerent parties.

In spite of these aspects which essentially contain favourable nuances for the Romanian Kingdom and the attitude adopted during the Bulgarian crisis, we consider that it is exaggerated to talk about a special role which our country would have had within this crisis in South-Eastern Europe or about the presentation of the peace of Bucharest as "a prestigious success of the Romanian diplomacy", as it could be understood from all kind of works and studies in our historiography.²⁷ The fact as such can be easily noticed and understood if we consider the manner in which the entire Bulgarian crisis is presented and analyzed within the foreign historiography – the peace treaty signed in Bucharest at the beginning of 1886 is barely mentioned and sometimes even omitted from the overall picture of the respective crisis.²⁸ For reasons we have already mentioned,

hours later I was at the ball of the German Ambassador which was also attended by TM [Their Majesties – our note] The King and Queen, they stayed until 2 o'clock after midnight as they had come at 11 o'clock.

Asked by HM [His Majesty – our note] if I knew anything about the negotiations in Bucharest, I was able to report him the telegram of YE [Your Excellency – our note].

He added that he finds the meeting place to be right from all points of view, that he would like only Romanians to exert some influence on them, as it will be disinterested since the representatives and diplomats of the great powers are more concerned with their own interests".

²⁷ See, for instance, Nicolae Ciachir, "Oraşul Bucureşti – locul tratativelor şi al păcii care a pus capăt conflictului balcanic din anii 1885-1886," *Bucureşti. Materiale de istorie şi muzeografie*, VII (1969): 279–284 (here 284) it is even shown that: "Proving lucidity, calm, much tact, the Romanian diplomacy managed to establish peace relations in the balkans [lowercase in the text – our note]". After 2000, see Gheorghe Platon (coord.), *Istoria Românilor*, Vol. VII, Tome II – *De la Independenţă la Marea Unire (1878-1918)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 251: "During these events, the Romanian government maintained an attitude whose correctness was appreciated by the other powers. It maintained a strict neutrality and was concerned with the localization of the conflict. The correct attitude and the prestige enjoyed by Romania south of the Danube caused the place of the peace talks to be designated the city of Bucharest. The proposal in this way was made by Bismarck. The participants in the talks which would restore the status quo praised Romania's correct attitude. The peace of Bucharest can be considered as a prestigious success of the Romanian diplomacy". See also Liviu Brătescu, "Chestiunea "Dunării" – o problemă pe agenda clasei politice româneşti (1878-1888)," *Acta Moldaviae Septentrionalis*, V-VI (2006-2007): 209: "Without falling on the slope of exaggerations, the years 1884-1888 show us a Romanian state regarded either as an arbiter and mediator in the Serbian-Bulgarian conflict, or the central pillar of certain political constructions of the type of the much invoked in this period Balkan confederations".

²⁸ See, for instance, the presentation from a book published in 1915, authored, among others, by the great British historian Arnold Toynbee – Nevill Forbes, Arnold J. Toynbee, D. Mitrany, D.G. Hogarth, *The Balkans. A History of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Rumania, Turkey* (Oxford: s.n., 1915), 58-59 –, in which the entire Serbian-Bulgarian conflict of 1885 is

one must acknowledge that Romania's role was a relatively limited one, very well circumscribed to the European order of the time. This aspect was clearly reiterated in a relatively recent analysis by Gheorghe Cliveti: "Romania was not directly acting in any of the three «phases» nor involved deliberately on the «monitoring and diplomatic solutions of the crisis». It only «hosted» in its capital, at the headquarters of the Ministry of Finance, for almost a month (23 January / 4 February – 19 February / 3 March 1886) the Peace Conference (...)."²⁹

Although one can speak about the existence of intentions or ideas to see the Kingdom of Romania directly involved in the management and resolution of crisis from South of the Danube it is obvious that such a matter could not materialize without the consent of the majority of the Great Powers.³⁰ Despite the fact that it was bordering the conflict zone, having certain interests that might have concerned possible border changes in Dobruja,³¹ but also the ethnic realities of Timoc area,³² the Romanian

summarized in a single paragraph, and the issue of the Bucharest peace is presented in a few words: "On November 13 King Milan declared war, and began to march on Sofia, which is not far from the Serbo-Bulgarian frontier. Prince Alexander, the bulk of whose army was on the Turkish frontier, boldly took up the challenge. On November 18 took place the battle of Slivnitsa, a small town about twenty miles north-west of Sofia, in which the Bulgarians were completely victorious. Prince Alexander, after hard fighting, took Pirot in Serbia on November 27, having refused King Milan's request for an armistice, and was marching on Nish, when Austria intervened, and threatened to send troops into Serbia unless fighting ceased. Bulgaria had to obey, and on March 3, 1886, a barren treaty of peace [our emphasis] was imposed on the belligerents at Bucarest".

²⁹ Cliveti, *România modernă*, 984.

³⁰ The fact as such was also publicly stated by King Carol I in the autumn of 1885, on the occasion of the opening of the work of the Parliament, through the message of the throne, reproduced by several periodicals of the time – see for instance "Mesagiul de deschidere a Corpurilor legiuitoare," *Românul*, XXIX (1885), 16 November, 1021: "Having a strong and well-defined position, being in the most friendly relations with all the states, we watched with silence, but with great attention, the events taking place beyond the Danube. Our non-interference in a conflict in which the signatory powers of the Berlin treaty had to pronounce themselves first of all was self-indicated. However, we could not help feeling a vivid regret, when concerns that the general peace could be disturbed aroused, that peace so necessary for the development of all peoples and especially for us who still have so much work to do to reach the degree development and progress to which we all aspire." See also "Mesagiul Tronului pentru deschiderea sesiunii ordinare a Corpurilor legiuitoare," *Epoca*, I/1 (1885), 16 November: 3; "Bucuresci, vineri 15 Noembrie 1885," *Telegraful*, XVI /4034 (1885), 16 November, morning edition: 1; "Mesagiul Tronului pentru deschiderea sesiunii ordinare a Corpurilor legiuitoare," *Voința națională*, II/394 (1885), 16 November, edition B: 1; "Mesagiul Tronului," *România liberă*, IX/2494 (1885), 17/29 November: 1–2.

³¹ Cliveti, *România modernă*, 989–990. Besides, shortly after the onset of the crisis south of the Danube, various ideas began to circulate within the Romanian press regarding the expediency of Romania's intervention in order to rectify the Dobrogea's border, with

state could not overcome its condition and could not replace the Great Powers in the context of the time.

Integrated in a broader framework, the conflict of 1885 can also be regarded as a preamble of a premise for later tensions and grievances like the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. The fact as such was correctly appreciated and understood during the discussions in Bucharest, an aspect which is easy to recognize, for instance, at the level of some of the analysis elaborated and published within the Romanian press of the time³³ which also inspired us in establishing the title of our text. If until then the main efforts of the nations in the Balkans were aimed at building an adequate anti-Ottoman resistance which would allow their political and national affirmation, starting with this Serbian-Bulgarian conflict the local animosities specific to the Balkan Peninsula came to light with intensity being overlapped with the interests of the Great Powers.

direct reference to the situation in the Silistra area – see “Bucuresci 19/1 Brumărel 1885,” *Românul*, XXIX (1885), 20 September, edition B: 837; “Din Bulgaria. Corespondință particulară a Românului,” 1885, 13 November, edition B: 1009; “Bucuresci, 21 Septembrie,” *România liberă*, IX/2449 (1885), 22 September: 1.

³² Catana, “România și războiul sârbo-bulgar,” 134. It is about the large number of the Romanians from Timok who were enlisted in both armies, Serbian and Bulgarian, a fact mentioned inclusively by the two medical missions sent by Romania south of the Danube.

³³ Eloquent in this regard is the presentation of the current situation that can be found in the newspaper *Epoca* in 19 February 1886. Taking also information from German sources, the editorial board of that newspaper, in view of the disputes which had led to the outbreak of the war, showed: “Therefore, even if today or tomorrow the plenipotentiaries were to reach a peaceable solution and put their signatures on the peace treaty, anyone understands how shaky and little durable this peace will be” – “Conferența,” *Epoca*, I/75 (1886), 19 February, 2nd ed.: 1. See also the analysis published in the same newspaper on 22 February 1886 at the end of which it was stated: “The peace of Bucharest is nothing more than a suspension of war which resolves none of the issues pending before it, and which is as short as the no fixed duration” – S.H., “Pacea în Orient,” *Epoca*, I/78 (1886), 22 February, 1st ed.: 1.