

CAROL I OF RUMANIA (III*)

BY

ZSOMBOR DE SZASZ

In 1880 Rumania's independence was recognised by the Great Powers, and in the following year the country became a kingdom. Both events were the result of Prince, now King, Carol's assiduous endeavours and admirably restrained policy.

But the international situation of the new State was far from enviable. It stood alone, without friends or supporters, both at the Congress of Berlin and after its conclusion. France, Rumania's old patron, had not yet recovered her influence after the shock of the lost war. Italy, the other Latin sister, was absorbed in her internal affairs. England was far away and nourished little sympathy for Rumania. Lord Derby said of her that she had "made war as a matter of speculation and had only her own government to thank." Russia's ingratitude as evinced in the annexation of Bessarabia, had revealed her once again as Rumania's eternal and inveterate enemy; it brought home to Rumanian statesmen the full meaning of Panslav expansion. Germany might have lent her support to a small nation ruled over by a Hohenzollern; but Bismarck was annoyed by Rumania's handling of the Jewish question, as well as by her launching a railway enterprise which threatened German shareholders with financial loss. He charged the Rumanians with "dishonesty and arrogance", and regretted that "they were not within reach of his arm, so that he might administer to them the whipping they deserved."

There remained Austria—Hungary, Rumania's powerful neighbour; and as long as Count Julius Andrassy was Minister for Foreign Affairs, he honestly endeavoured to

* See previous articles under the same title in the January and February 1942 issues of this review.

maintain friendly relations with the small and unruly neighbouring State. In a letter addressed to King Carol by Andrassy immediately after his resignation, and dated May 4, 1880, he outlined concisely Rumania's political situation and the direction which her future policy should take.

He stressed the point that the interests of Austria—Hungary and Rumania were identical. "It is the mission of both States", he wrote, "to form an effective barrier against the Slavisation of Eastern Europe; it is their common task to hinder the union of the northern and southern Slav elements. Any deviation from this course would involve great dangers for Austria—Hungary and the certain destruction of Rumania . . . The good relations obtaining between Germany and Austria-Hungary," he continued, "are not of an ephemeral nature; they are not based on personal predilections, but on a healthy *Real-politik* . . . The alliance is confined to a natural defence against a natural danger. It means that an attack on Russia's part against either of these two Powers would find them united. As far as Rumania is concerned, it will suffice for her to express her willingness to be a third partner in the alliance; she has only to declare that she is resolved, in case of being attacked, to seek the assistance of the two empires."

However, in the years that followed the resignation of Count Andrassy, the role of Germany and Austria underwent a notable change. The Jewish question as well as that of the railway were satisfactorily settled, whereupon Bismarck altered his attitude and became all at once friendly instead of hostile towards Rumania. Ever since 1880 he had toyed with the idea that the efficacy of the dual alliance between Austria—Hungary and Germany would be much enhanced if the Balkan States, and first and foremost Rumania, could be drawn within its orbit.

On the other hand, Baron Haymerle, Andrassy's successor, was decidedly averse to the Rumanian collaboration, and Bismarck's conciliatory policy could make no headway while he was at the head of affairs.

In 1882 relations between Rumania and Austria—Hungary became so strained in consequence of the unyielding



attitude of both States in the Danube question, the Rumanian Government deemed it advisable to try and find a way out of the difficulty. In December of that year Peter Carp was appointed Rumanian Minister in Vienna, with the task of paving the way towards a better understanding. The following details of Carp's mission form part of the as yet unpublished memoirs of Lupu Kostaki, an intimate friend of Carp's, and have appeared in the two-volume Life of Carp written by C. Gane. Carp was an admirer of German culture, a friend of the Central Powers, and a decided enemy of Russia. It is said that, having met Prince Lwow one day, the latter said to him: "*On dit, Monsieur, que vous êtes Germanophile.*" "*On se trompe,*" answered Carp, — "*je suis Russophobe.*"

Count Kálnoky, Haymerle's successor, proved unsympathetic, however, wherefore Carp decided to enlist the help of Germany. Prince Reuss, the German Ambassador in Vienna, lent a ready ear to his representations concerning the need of a strong and satisfied Rumania, and tried to convince Kálnoky, the next time he met him, that it was against the interests of the Austro—Hungarian Monarchy to drive that country, weakened and humiliated, into the arms of Russia.

Carp drew far-reaching conclusions and sanguine plans from the goodwill manifested by the German Ambassador. He rushed to Bucharest and told the Prime Minister, Ion Brătianu, that the Danube question was no longer of paramount importance, since the idea of Rumania's joining the Triple Alliance was viewed with sympathy by the German Ambassador and had thus become a possibility. He explained to Brătianu the immense advantage it would mean for Rumania to be accepted as an equal partner in the *bloc* of the three Great Powers: Austria—Hungary's hostility towards her would cease automatically, and she would enjoy a long term of peace, so essential to her development, and be able to prove to Europe that she was an important factor in the service of order and civilisation.

Brătianu was convinced, and Carp returned to his post. Not long afterwards — the date is not mentioned by

Kostaki — he was asked, through the medium of Prince Reuss, to present himself at Friedrichsruh for an audience with Prince Bismarck.

The Iron Chancellor received him with cordiality and — if credit can be lent to Kostaki's statement — started the conversation by referring reproachfully to the unfriendly attitude taken up by both King Carol and his government in regard to Germany. Rumania, he said, would fulfil her European mission (Kostaki does not make it clear what that mission was supposed to be), not by assuming an aggressive political attitude, but by settling down to honest work, by raising the cultural standard of her people, and by exploiting her rich soil to better advantage.

Rumania, he went on, should not covet Transylvania, which for a thousand years had been dominated by Magyars, Saxons, Swabians and Serbs;* even if she could annex it, she would not thereby become a European factor. A people wishing to be received into the concert of European States must have economic and civilisatory aims. The Rumanians of the Dual Monarchy were far more civilised and industrious than their kinsmen of the kingdom, so that, were they to be annexed by the latter, a prolonged struggle for domination would ensue. For the rest, the annexation of Transylvania would have to be preceded by the dissolution of the Monarchy, which would be a disaster from the point of view of the European equilibrium.

"In 1866", said Bismarck, "we could have destroyed Austria, but we refrained even from weakening her unduly: the Dual Monarchy is of importance as a stabilising influence in Europe and consequently has to be preserved. . . . It is to Rumania's interest," he continued, "to become a powerful State on the Black Sea, possessing such important ports as Odessa, and a preponderant voice in Constantinople. Don't forget the Black Sea, which is the key to the Dardanelles.

* It is unlikely that Bismarck made so erroneous a statement. It was the Magyars alone who dominated Transylvania for a thousand years, ever since the end of the ninth century. The Saxons settled in the country in the twelfth century and the Serbs and Swabians as late as the eighteenth century, and that not in Transylvania proper but in the Banat. Nor were they ever a dominating element there.

You have your independence; you have your links with the West, but you must have a door open towards the East. If you become a productive, orderly, civilizing element, you will be able to rule the Balkans. What you need is greater seriousness, honest work, and a firmer character."

To this homily Carp, according to Kostaki, made a long and incoherent reply.

Rumania, he said, had settled down to work in earnest, but she needed peace and stable conditions in order to continue the task of organization. For this reason it was a necessity for her to participate in a defensive alliance against Russia. Unfortunately Magyar chauvinism was apt to manifest itself in the persecution of the Rumanians living on Hungarian soil, a fact which could not but affect the Rumanians of the Regat. The Magyars would have to change their policy before the relations between the two countries could become such as to form a real dam against the Slav menace.

Carp affirmed (not quite accurately) that feeling in Rumania was throughout hostile to Russia, in consequence of the sufferings which the Russian occupation had entailed on the people. Notwithstanding that Rumania had rendered Russia every possible assistance in 1877, the latter had humiliated her by refusing to let her take part in the San Stefano Peace Conference and by annexing the three Bessarabian counties. The deep wound caused by the rape of Bessarabia would never be healed. Apart from this, Russia's denationalisation policy was much more pernicious than that of Hungary; the Russification of Bessarabia was going on apace, countless numbers of Rumanians being transported to the Don regions, to be replaced by Russian colonists, while the Transylvanian Rumanians had not been denationalised in a thousand years. From an economic point of view Rumania had nothing to gain from Russia, for they produced and exported the same things. Both political and economic interests bound Rumania to western Europe, so that if the European equilibrium were to be endangered, this would be as much Rumania's concern as that of the western States.

As a result of Carp's luminous exposition — so at

least thinks Kostaki — it was decided that Rumania should join the Triple Alliance. Bismarck categorically declared that he had no intention of interfering in the Austro—Hungarian Monarchy's domestic affairs, least of all in favour of the Rumanians of Transylvania, but he offered his mediation through other channels, and declared himself willing to receive the Rumanian Prime Minister.

With these results Carp rushed back to Bucharest, where Brătianu received him with tears in his eyes: "You have made Rumania", he said to him; "from now on we may say that her future is secure."

So far Kostaki. The rest is told by more reliable witnesses, and may be found in more authentic records, the official documents of the German Foreign Office. In these the importance of Rumania, so dwelt upon by Carp, is somewhat less in evidence.

In August 1883, when King Carol's visit to Vienna and Berlin was pending, Bismarck intimated to Prince Reuss, the German Ambassador in Vienna, that the time had come to consider whether "it would not be natural and possible to extend our League of Peace also to the East and to guide thereby the policy of Rumania and perhaps also of Serbia into a firmer track? . . . In any case", he continued, "it would be worth examining whether such a situation would carry with it a promise of permanence?" He directed the Ambassador to discuss the matter with the Austro—Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Ambassador saw Count Kálnoky and afterwards sent an exhaustive report to the Chancellor.

Kálnoky told him that he had never abandoned the idea of a closer political connection with Rumania. He was sometimes forced to use strong language in dealing with the Rumanian Government, but he had always expressed his willingness for a more intimate collaboration. They, the Rumanians, had never made a step towards a *rapprochement*; nevertheless he was ready to enter into negotiations with them. "It is, however, a question", said Count Kálnoky, "whether such a situation admits of any guarantees. In this case guarantee means reliability, and that is a quality in which the Rumanians are conspicuously lacking."

(Bismarck's marginal note at this point was: "only too true!") "The king", continued Kálnoky, "has every intention of honourably keeping his word, but he is weak." In Kálnoky's opinion the Foreign Minister, D. Sturdza, had no influence whatever on public opinion; the only influential person was Ion Brătianu, the Prime Minister. He it was who must be won over.

Two weeks later, in September, Bismarck received Brătianu in Gastein.

From the Chancellor's dispatch to his Vienna Ambassador we know that the impression made on him by Brătianu was none too favourable. He was "rhetorical instead of business-like", protested too vehemently that Rumania wished to side with Germany and collaborate with Austria-Hungary, stressed his aversion to Russia "more emphatically than was credible", especially in view of his recent Russophile tendencies, and talked of the necessity of recovering the Dnjester frontier. He also complained that Russian agents disguised as Rumanians fomented trouble among the Austrian Rumanians and caused Austria to look on Rumania with suspicion.

Bismarck interposed to remind him of the Gradişteanu affair, which had not been the work of Russian agents but a characteristic manifestation of Rumanian irredentism. The true story of this incident was as follows:

In June 1883 the statue of a Rumanian Prince, Stephen the Great, was unveiled in Iassy, and at a public banquet given in honour of the occasion, King Carol being present, a well-known politician, Peter Gradişteanu, made a speech in which he said that "two pearls were missing" from the crown of Stephen, — manifestly meaning thereby Austrian Bukovina and Hungarian Transylvania. The Vienna Foreign Office protested against this open and tactless irredentism, but the Rumanian Government was in no hurry to make amends. The French journalist who had published the incident in the paper *L'Indépendance Roumaine* was expelled from the country, and King Charles offered personal apologies when, a few weeks later, he arrived in Vienna. But on the whole the incident had revealed the real feelings of the Rumanians.

It was to this affair that Bismarck had alluded.

Brătianu, on being taxed with it, stammered and prevaricated. He protested that he regretted Gradişteanu's speech, but asserted that it had been aimed, not against Austria and Hungary, but against Russia. Stephen the Great had not ruled over Transylvania, but over Bessarabia, — and also, —he had to admit it, — over Bukovina. Yet, while Austria-Hungary had protested forcibly, Russia had taken no notice whatever of the matter.

On the whole, Bismarck gained the impression that Brătianu was bent more on a "defensive and offensive alliance with a due share of the spoils", than on a "defensive preservation of the peace".

"I told him", wrote Bismarck, "that a Russian war, even if victorious, was for both Germany and Austria an eventuality which neither State had any wish to conjure up".

On the Chancellor's intimation of a possible agreement between the two Empires and Russia, Brătianu expressed his misgivings lest Rumania should be sacrificed. Bismarck endeavoured to dissipate his anxiety by assuring him that the preservation of the non-Slavonic Rumanian elements was an Austrian interest, while Germany could not but have the maintenance of the Hohenzollern kingdom at heart. He finally advised Brătianu to conclude an agreement with Austria-Hungary, to which Germany would accede.

Such — wrote Bismarck — was the practical result of these conversations, in the course of which Brătianu repeatedly expressed his conviction that Rumania could only preserve her independence, which was threatened solely by Russia, by relying on the support of Austria-Hungary and Germany.

"I do not believe", Bismarck summed up the matter, "that we should act rightly if we refused to conclude an agreement with Rumania, provided that it can be done in a suitable form. So long as King Carol rules we are safe; but we do not know whether in the long run the destructive, Francophile elements in the land will not be stronger than the king." "The best policy, — concluded Bismarck — "would be to accept Rumania as an ally, without prejudice to a possible understanding with Russia."

A week later, on September 15, he reverted once again, in a letter to Prince Reuss, to his conversation with Brătianu. The latter's unmistakable, if vaguely expressed, desire to conclude a treaty which would secure territorial aggrandisement to Rumania, seems to have made an unfavourable impression on the Chancellor. He warned Prince Reuss and through his medium the Austrian Foreign Office of the "cupidity" of the Rumanians, which would undoubtedly manifest itself in the course of the Viennese negotiations. It will be necessary, — he wrote — "to emphasise very strongly the peaceful and defensive character of the alliance and to embody in the Convention the pledge of the contracting Powers to refrain from every provocative act against other Powers which might endanger peace; in fact to make the alliance an instrument, not for the gaining of advantages, but for the preservation of peace."

The difference in the attitude of the Great Empire and of the insignificant but ambitious small State was manifest: Germany wanted the collaboration of Rumania in order to safeguard peace, while Rumania offered her collaboration with a view to imperialistic aggrandisement.

The negotiations between Austria-Hungary and Rumania were started forthwith and concluded without a hitch, both Parties, and especially the Austrian Foreign Office, being in a conciliatory mood. The latter's draft was accepted with a few alterations by Brătianu, and sent to Berlin for approval, whence it was returned with one modification, but that an important one.

Clause 2 of the original draft, under which both Powers undertook to tolerate no political propaganda directed from their territories against the other Power, was omitted at the request of Brătianu, who saw in it a sign of mutual distrust which had better not be so openly expressed.

In two clauses which mentioned the "aggression" or "attack" of Russia against the contracting Powers, the name of Russia was struck out at the direct request of the German Emperor, so that in the definitive text the term „aggression" was used in a general way as applying to any Power.

For the rest, the Treaty followed the lines usually laid down in defensive alliances. The contracting Parties under-

took to maintain mutual "peace and amity," to abstain from entering into any alliance against one other, and to render each other mutual assistance within the limits imposed by their own interests. In case of an unprovoked attack on Rumania, Austria-Hungary bound herself to assist her against the aggressor; in the same way a *casus foederis* would arise for Rumania if any part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy adjacent to Rumania, were to be attacked. In case of war no separate peace would be concluded. The treaty, which was to be kept secret by the contracting Parties, was to be valid at first for five years, and afterwards to be automatically renewed for successive terms of three years unless denounced.

The Convention was signed by the representatives of Austria-Hungary and Rumania on October 30, 1883. Germany's adhesion followed the same day, and Italy's five years later, in 1888.

It might be thought that with Rumania's adhesion to the Dual Alliance her foreign policy would gain a firm basis and a decisive direction. It was not so. Alliance with the Central Powers, and especially with Hungary, was so unpopular that it could not be made to serve as the foundation for a new orientation. Nor can the attitude of the Dual Monarchy be said to have been helpful.

Thus the second half of King Carol's reign saw a continuation of Rumania's former foreign policy, which was characterised by the endeavour to play a preponderant role in the Balkans and by irreconcilable hostility towards Hungary. These tendencies led her, in the course of the first world war, into the arms of the Entente Powers.

The account of this phase will form the subject of the last of our articles on King Carol of Rumania.