

## ROMANIA AND THE BALKAN WARS – SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE BALKANS\*

DANIELA BUȘĂ  
(*Institutul de Istorie „Nicolae Iorga”*)

Balkans is often referred to as “the powder barrel of Europe”. A population of a great ethnical, religious and cultural diversity was living in this geographical area, which was still mostly under Ottoman rule, and which was disputed by its powerful neighbouring Empires. For a long time, nobody has thought at the “disintegration of Turkey for the sake of nationalities” and that because “all the nations were so badly known, so little fixed within their own borders, so little understood in their rights”<sup>1</sup>.

The borders of the new states from Balkans were established by treaties and agreements between European powers and, also here, the national question acquired new values and took the form of a nationalism rather combative or aggressive. A common history, disappointments and tragedies whose guilt can't be attributed only to the components of area, caused the doubt, distrust, intransigence. Not once, all these prevailed over dialogue, argument or logical explanation. Real or imaginary differences emerged into disputes, most often turned into open conflict, whether military, diplomatic or economic. All these became more visible after 1878, following the political and territorial changes resulting from the Russian-Romanian-Turkish war.

In the Balkans, not once, the history and myth merged. The ethnic groups or nations use these two as arguments in their claims, either alone or together, either on behalf of “historical rights” or of “natural law”. Each thought that justice and truth are only by one part. Religious differences led to intransigence, hate, intolerance, but without becoming authentic religious conflicts. The history is understood more as a national history rather than as one of the space, although the people who belong to this space, are also subject to external influences and, in turn, influence each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Ce înseamnă popoare balcanice*, Vălenii de Munte, Tipografia Neamul Românesc, 1916, p. 15.

The Balkan countries were frequently rivals in their disputes for different territories. Often these took the form of acute rivalry and, often the armed conflict was a solution. For the Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians and Albanians from the European possessions of the Ottoman Empire was practically impossible to overthrow the Ottoman rule peacefully and to live free. For the mutual recognition of freedom it was necessary to harmonize their ambitions, to realize which was the common goal, to make the concessions and especially, to cooperate. Otherwise, the European powers could use in their behalf the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire, as they previously did. This work became more obvious for the Balkans during the conflict of 1911, when Italy occupied the Ottoman possessions in North Africa (Cyrenaica and Tripolitania) and the eastern Mediterranean (the islands of Rhodes, Scarpanto, Stampolio, Dodecanese). Of course, for all the Balkan countries, any action against the Ottoman Empire was welcome. In the same time there was also a danger that the winner – in this case Italy – could impose its own control and dominance over parts of the Mediterranean, and even to make conquests in the Balkans, and thus to allow a direct interference for other interested European powers. At the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, the realities and perspectives brought the Balkan countries more closely. The Balkan wars, widely regarded as the prelude to World War I, put them even more into the spotlight.

From its early stages, the conflict in the Balkans has proven to be an accumulation of contradictions, from the structure of alliance its means of action, to the evolution, the factors involved and the outcome. The alliance against the Ottoman Empire was a first for the Balkans. It was accomplished despite disagreements, splits, ethnic and religious diversity and, particularly, despite the territorial disputes. For the first time, the hostilities were triggered without the intervention, the mediation and the support a great power, as do in the other occasions.

Thus, the First Balkan War expressed the desire of four of the Balkan countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro) to assert them against a fifth, the Ottoman Empire, identified as a common enemy. Romania declared itself neutral. In the Second Balkan War the composition of the two camps changed. Now, the belligerents were only the former allies, namely Bulgaria against the others. This reveals the conjectural character of the alliance<sup>2</sup>. In the short interval between the two conflicts, the combatants have tried to harmonize previous agreements with their new claims, which appeared after the cessation of hostilities. Bulgaria claimed also the centre of Macedonia, namely the territory between Stara Planina and Lake Ohrid, arguing that the financial and military effort far exceeded the original agreements. Serbia has insisted for compensation in Macedonia, while the Thessalonica was disputed by Bulgaria and Greece. The creation of the Albanian state has contributed to exacerbation claims.

<sup>2</sup> Ion Bulei, *Balkanii și relațiile româno-bulgare în preajma primului război mondial. Considerații incomode*, in vol. *Români și bulgari. Provocările unei vecinătăți*, București, Cartea Universitară, 2007, p. 133.

The attitude of the European powers towards the Balkan alliance and conflict was not unanimous. Russia contributed substantially to bring together the Balkan countries and, especially, to reduce the roughness between the slave states. Russia tried to maintain the alliance, while Austria-Hungary would have wanted it broken, as soon as possible. The different views of these two powers are also a proof of the disputes between the Entente and the Triple Alliance, both camps aiming to attract the Balkan states. Considering that, no one was surprised, that the treaty signed in May 1913 during the London Conference has proved to be incomplete, and insufficient to settle down the issues of Southeast Europe.

The second Balkan War marked a reconfiguration of the Balkan alliance, and also an increase into the number of states involved, due to the intervention of Romania. The reasons for Romania's involvement in the conflict were complex and related to the developments in the Balkans. Although geographically did not belong to the Balkan area, Romania was closely related historical, political, economic, cultural, religious to this space. For Bucharest, the *statu quo* established in 1878 by the Congress of Berlin was dependent upon the free navigation through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, vital to foreign trade, but also for the development of Dobrudja. The province of Dobrudja, which became part of the Romanian state in 1878, was the subject of more claims from Bulgaria after 1900. Romanian politicians knew the detailed content of the Russian-Bulgarian agreements of 1902 and 1909 on the fate of Dobrudja, in case of conflict in the area. Moreover, the ambiguous provisions of the Treaty of Berlin on the southern border of Dobrudja and, especially, the Arab Tabia point were still a sensitive issue in the Romanian-Bulgarian relations. The border route imposed by European Powers was considered unsatisfactory by both parties, because „it gave to Bulgaria the strong fortress which dominated the Dobrudja, and it gave to Romania valuable appurtenances of that place”<sup>3</sup>. However, Romania had no guarantee of a strategic defence. Finally, it cannot lose sight Romanians interest about Aromanians, the issue ever present in Romania relations with the Balkan countries and the Ottoman Empire.

The Allies victories have cast the doubt on maintaining the *statu quo* in Balkans and the misunderstandings between them warned of danger a new conflict. The perspective of „excessive increase of the Balkan states against one of its neighbors”, led Romania to fully abandon its previously announced neutrality and to ask for „new guarantees of security and territorial compensation”<sup>4</sup>. European powers have let to understand that they support Romania's claims and, also, the dialogue between the parties. Started in November 1912, talks between Romanians and Bulgarians were held intermittently in Bucharest, Sofia and London and highlighted the different position of the parties about the border of southern Dobrudja. Romania wanted concrete proposals and she expected compensations

<sup>3</sup> William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors 1801–1927*, Cambridge, 1927, p. 400.

<sup>4</sup> Mihai Macuc, *O privire comparativă asupra a două conferințe de pace balcanice (1886–1913)*, in *Omagiu profesorului Gheorghe Buzatu*, Focșani, Editura Empro, 1999, p. 210.

consisting in the modification of the southern border of Dobruđa on line Turtucaia-Balchik. Bulgaria made promises but offered uncovered guarantees. After its outright victory over the Ottoman Empire and, therefore, the validation of the new territorial acquisitions, Bulgaria seemed to increasingly lack the interest of solving the disputes with Romania.

The reopening of the hostilities in the Balkans in mid-January 1913 put an end to the Romanian-Bulgarian apathy. At 16/29 January a protocol was signed in London, which, without bringing anything new, seemed to avoid armed conflict. According to the protocol, Bulgaria accepted a Black Sea coast correction (about 5–6 km) to allow Romania to effectively use the port of Mangalia<sup>5</sup>. According to Russia, the correction was not likely to lead Romania to remain neutral. Russia thought that only a change on the route of Cap Kaliakra or on the line of Kavarna would satisfy Romania and extinct the tensions between Bucharest and Sofia. The Russian point of view was notified to the Bulgarian government. Moreover, Romania's positions regarding the conflict in the Balkans were a constant source of concern for Russia. In the spring of 1913, Russia made considerable efforts to defuse the dispute between the two neighbours and has repeatedly asked its allies, Great Britain and France, to intervene and convince Romania to remain neutral<sup>6</sup>. Under pressure from Russia, at 18/31 March to 26 April/May 9, a Conference of ambassadors of European Powers was held in St. Petersburg, but its end was hastened by the military operations in the second phase of the Balkan War. The Protocol offered Silistra to Romania and also an area with a radius of 3 kilometres around the town. The area had to be demarcated within three months. Bulgarian citizens, who did not want to remain there, were allowed to leave within six months.

By this diplomatic decision, the European powers considered the dispute closed. Their solution was a compromise needed to at least partially satisfy Romania, without upsetting Bulgaria. The justification was made clear by the Foreign Minister of France, Stéphen Pichon: "In Romania, we can see an increasingly movement toward the Entente and we have no interest to discourage it"<sup>7</sup>. The Entente and the Triple Alliance have sought to establish the belief that, if Romania and Bulgaria have each received as they hoped, this was due to adverse camp. European Powers have tried not to offend any part, hoping to keep and win sympathy in Bucharest and Sofia, as well.

<sup>5</sup> See the protocol in *Ministerul Afacerilor Străine. Documente diplomatice. Evenimentele din Peninsula Balcanică. Acțiunea României 20 septembrie 1912–1 august 1913*, București, 1913, doc. nr. 61 bis, p. 44–45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46–47; doc. 72, p. 51. See *British Documents on the Origine on the War 1898–1914*, ed. G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperly, vol. IX, part II, London, 1927, doc. 620, 625, 631, 658; *Documents Diplomatiques Françaises* (further quoted D.D.F.), 3<sup>ème</sup> série (1871–1914), t. V, Paris, 1955, doc. 387, 394, 400, 410, 427.

<sup>7</sup> D.D.F., t. VI, doc. 55.

However, the effect was not the desired one, and decisions were equally unsatisfactory for both Romania and Bulgaria. The government from Sofia, supported by Vienna, conditioned the implementation of the Protocol by a declaration of neutrality from the Romanian government in case of a new conflict, even though Romania did not sign an alliance treaty with Greece and Serbia, which both obviously appeared more clearly as the enemies of Bulgaria.

The Romanian Parliament ratified the Protocol of St. Petersburg. This decision was based on two reasons: Romania does not oppose to the Austria-Hungary and keeps intact its opportunities in case of a conflict. Romanian Prime Minister, Titu Maiorescu, declared in October 1912 that “if its produce territorial changes in the Balkans, Romania will have to say own word”. In the spring of 1913 he stated that “we can intervene only when a conflict will break out between them (formers Allies, note B.D.), because only then we will have the freedom to impose peace”<sup>8</sup>.

The mirage of building a big state to which many Bulgarians adhered, convinced by the truth of their cause, the claims of Serbs for Macedonia, the dispute between Greeks and Bulgarians for Thessaloniki as well as the interests of the European powers in Balkans, all these have accelerated the outbreak of the Second Balkan War<sup>9</sup>. In this context, Romania had the proof that the Balkan equilibrium was disturbed and, at 26 June/10 July, “came out of the reserve imposed in the interest of peace”<sup>10</sup> and declared the state of war against Bulgaria.

Romania’s military intervention had the agreement of the European powers and it was in a difficult moment, and after all attempts to stop the military confrontation has failed. According to the Romanian Prime Minister, this plan was designed “to ensure now a good border line for our Dobrudja, and namely Dobrich-Balchik-Turtucaia, with the required number of kilometres to the west and south, because for the Bulgarians, who attacked their allies, international conventions do not seem to have an importance”. The Romanian Premier added that Romania, by this intervention, is entitled to take part in “the treaty which will regulate the territories conquered from Turks”, also “to make possible a peaceful future for the two countries”, but also, and as „a duty to participate in the final settlement of a problem that disrupted and threatened the general peace for too long”<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> In May 1913, Romania was subject to strong external pressures generated by the insistence of Viennese diplomacy for a rapprochement of Bulgaria, and, also, by the offers of Serbs and Greeks to enter into a joint alliance against Sofia. For details see Constantin Iordan, *Venizelos și românii*, București, Editura Omonia, 2004, p. 99–103.

<sup>9</sup> The second Balkan War broke out as a result of the surprising decision of the Bulgarian Tsar Ferdinand Saxe Coburg, to carry out a surprise attack on Greek-Serbian troops at the border with Macedonia. The attack was ordered by General Mihail Savov, with the Prime Minister S. Danev. The action was seen as a “criminal folly” by Bulgarian politicians and historians. Iordan, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> See the Romania’s declaration of war in Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, fond Casa regală [National Central Historic Archives, Fund of the Royal House], dos. 37/1913, f.1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, doc. 206.

Serb and Greek victories over Bulgarians, the campaign of the Romanian army south of Danube and the occupation of the Turtucaia-Balchik line, forced Bulgaria to surrender at July 19, 1913. Initially, with the mediation of the Italian diplomacy, Bulgaria tried to sign a separate treaty with Romania. The offer was rejected by the Romanian government with the argument that the peace has to be signed by all belligerents, because "Romania does want not to separate its case from that of the Greeks and Serbs. Romania wants peace, gives advice to moderation for Belgrade and Athens, but, at the same time, declares that she intends to remain under army until will start the talks for a mutual agreement", noted at July 17, 1913, the Minister of France in Bucharest, J.C. Blondel<sup>12</sup>.

The Peace Conference opened in Bucharest on July 29, 1913, under the patronage of Titu Maiorescu. The Bucharest choice has met the consensus of the European powers and also of combatant parties, including Bulgaria, which hoped that here, more than elsewhere, Austria-Hungary will work in its favour. The decision was also recognition of the role played by Romania during the conflict and pointed out the unanimous confidence in the smooth running of the conference. The timing was very important for the small states, who tried to regulate matters as much as possible between them, avoiding the involvement of the European powers.

In order to find a lasting solution to the Balkan problem, the participants decided that Bulgaria must discuss in private with each winning country. The government from Sofia has agreed with this solution. It hoped for a separate peace with the other Balkan countries and even Romania. Titu Maiorescu wanted to clarify from the beginning, on behalf of the Romanian government, that it cannot be a separate peace and that the settlement of the Romanian-Bulgarian issue will be included in the Treaty. On August 10, 1913, the Peace Treaty was signed in Bucharest between Romania, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro on one side and Bulgaria, on the other. This formally ended the Second Balkan War. According to the Congress decisions Romania's southern border became the line Turtucaia-Ekrene (today Kranevo). Macedonia was divided between Serbia, which took the cities Usküb (today Skopje) and Monastir (today Bitolia), and Greece, which took the south-eastern part, with the cities of Thessaloniki, Serres, Kavala. Bulgaria held the region between the river Upper Struma and Mesta. Serbia and Montenegro shared the Sanjak of Novibazar.

The border line between Romania and Bulgaria was drawn by a commission composed of representatives of both parties. On December 5, 1913, the Protocol was signed at Giurgiu. Thus, the border line started from the Danube (near the village Turkşmil, 10 kilometres upstream of Turtucaia) and continued to the Black Sea, south of Ekrene. Romania incorporated two districts: Durostor and Kaliakra,

<sup>12</sup> *D.D.F.*, doc. 429.

which meant around 8 371 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 300 000 inhabitants. In September 1913, the diplomatic relations between Romania and Bulgaria were resumed, and, a month later, the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Vasil Radoslavov, visited Romania.

The Peace of Bucharest has generated different reactions among the European powers, according with their own interests and rivalries in the area. The most affected was Austria-Hungary, whose foreign policy has undergone a major failure in the Balkans. The double monarchy tried, through an intense diplomatic activity, to submit the Treaty of peace to a process of ratification by a European Conference. France, Russia and Great Britain opposed any revision. Italy and Germany, without categorically exclude this possibility, believed that the decisions taken in Bucharest needed to be followed. It is also true that, some decisions were in their advantage.

The Treaty of peace from Bucharest was highly valuable for the countries in South East Europe. This was the first treaty by which Balkan affairs were settled by those involved. Romania, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro were able to impose their own way of resolving problems. The borders drawn have survived, with some corrections, to both World Wars. The diplomacy in Athens, Belgrade and Bucharest has intuited the inner differences of the Triple Alliance and the Entente, and was able to take advantage of them. The role of mediator in the crisis of Balkan and, especially, the attitude toward the parties involved have contributed to the increase of Romania's prestige. Overall, the peace of Bucharest was a moment when the small states affirmed themselves in the European diplomacy.

The Treaty of Bucharest was not able to solve all problems of the Oriental crisis because some issues did not enter its jurisdiction: the treaties of peace of Balkan countries with the Ottoman Empire, the Albania's borders and the status of the Aegean islands. The game of interests of the great powers complicated the situation and contributed to development of many conflicts and misunderstandings among the Balkan countries, which, remaining unsolved by international acts could degenerate into armed conflict.

#### ROMANIA AND THE BALKAN WARS – SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE BALKANS

##### *Abstract*

Compared to the First Balkan War, in the second Balkan War the circle of belligerents extended due to the intervention of Romania. The perspective of "excessive enlargement" of one of Balkan state determined Romania to claim new guaranties of security. Romania was aware of the secret agreements between Russia and Bulgaria from 1902 and 1909 on the Dobrudja. Romania's military intervention in the second Balkan War was made with the consent of the great powers in a very difficult moment, when the possibility of the aggravation and internationalization of the conflict became imminent.

*Keywords:* Romania, second Balkan War, southern border of Dobrudja.