

IN MEMORIAM CAROL I. 1866-2006

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When, in 1866, a prince from a great European ruling family was called to rule the new Romanian state endeavoring to have affirmed, recognized and consolidated the Union of 1859 - its first step towards political union, it was not only the fulfillment of an urgent political necessity, but it was also the fulfillment of the national intent. It was explicitly expressed in the Ad-hoc assemblies, preceding the achievement of the political act of January 1859, which, convened in Bucharest and Iassy, in October 1857 voted for the union of the two principalities in a single state under the name of *România*, such new state to be ruled by a „A foreign prince, an heir to a throne, chosen from a reigning family of Europe, the heirs of whom to be educated in the country's religion”¹. The role of the prince was perceived as a firm and propitious factor of equilibrium and political stability while for the country's foreign affairs, his envisaged role was to facilitate and accelerate, by his blood relations, Romania's access to the community of the European states, and provide it with aid against unwanted interference, principally by the three great neighboring empires: the Russian, the Ottoman and the Hapsburg empires.

Alexandru Ioan Cuza himself, being aware of the limited role he was to play and fully convinced that “only a foreign prince can, [...] warrant Romania's future”², made his position as clear as possible in his address to the Parliament of 5/ 17 December, 1865: „Be everyone knowing that never is my person to become an impediment to any event which would give strength to the political edifice to the establishment of which I was happy to minister to”³. All the more heinous appears to us, under such circumstances, the way in which he was forced to abdicate on 11/ 23 February, 1866, of which even one of the most fervent admirers and supporters of Carol I, Titu Maiorescu, said that “is hardly defensible. Freely elected by the nation in the two Principalities, Cuza deserved a better fate”⁴.

Taking over the political power, the The Prince Three Lieutenants (A regency), comprised of Nicolae Golescu, Lascăr Catargiu and Nicolae Haralambie immediately called the Deputies' Assembly and the Senate to inform them regarding Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza's abdication and, on the same day, 11/ 23 February, 1866, the Prime-Minister of the newly formed Government, Ion Ghica, submitted to the representatives of the nation the recommendation that the brother of King Leopold II of Belgium, the Count of Flanders be invited to the throne of

¹ Constantin C. Giurescu, *Viața și opera lui Cuza Vodă*, București, 1966, p. 40.

² *Domnia Regelui Carol I. Fapte. Cuvântări. Documente*. Annotate de Dimitrie A. Sturdza, Tomul I, 1866-1876, București, 1906, p. 1-2.

³ Constantin C. Giurescu, *op.cit.*, p. 351-352.

⁴ Titu Maiorescu, *Istoria politică a României sub domnia lui Carol I*, București, 1994, p. 11.

Romania. Although hailed and approved by acclamation by the two Chambers in joint session, the proposal was received with hostility by met an inimical Napoleon the III, the Emperor of France, and was, diplomatically, rejected by the same three days later. The same Napoleon the III, supported, with the common consent of Great Britain and, later on, with Italy, another candidate to the throne of Romania, the young 27 years old German prince Carol de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, an officer in the Prussian army, the second born son of the Governor of Rhenania, Prince Carol Anton de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen and the princess Josefina of Baden. A descendent of the Swabian branch of the old reigning family of the Zollern, settled in Southern Germany, Carol Ludovic of Hohenzollern was born on 8/ 20 April, 1839, in Sigmaringen, Germany. Following the path of the family tradition, Carol prepared himself for the military career first graduating the military school in Munster (1856) and one year later, in 1857 the artillery school in Berlin, also hearing the lectures of French literature at the University of Bonn (1863). After having made his way through the entire military hierarchy – second lieutenant (1857), lieutenant, a rank in which he took part in Prussia’s war against Denmark and is awarded the highest Prussian military distinction, the Order “Pour le Mérite” (1864) and captain (1866).

To avert the carrying out threat to undo the unification achieved in 1859 of the Great Powers reluctant - Austria and Prussia or even hostile - the Ottoman Empire and Russia to the idea of bringing a foreign prince, the Romanian politicians tried to hasten things. As soon as they received, care of Ion C. Brătianu, Prince Carol of Hohenzollern’s acceptance, the The Three Prince Lieutenants published, on 30 March/ 11 April a proclamation to the people recommending the election, by plebiscite, of the Prince Carol Ludovic of Hohenzollern as ruler of Romania, under the name of Carol I. The public opinion, disunited in this matter, had to be prepared as much more so as a great part of the population kept vivid the memory of the dazzling reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the one who implemented land reform, and feared that the recently received rights were to be lost. The Government had to call on its entire apparatus – prefects, deputy prefects, mayors, notaries. – also using to the full the priests’ and school teachers’ moral ascendancy over the population, especially over the population of the villages, to explain the necessity of the referendum. The result of the referendum was more than satisfying: 685,969 votes in favor, 124,837 abstentions and 224 against the proposal. According to Radu Rosetti, the votes against the proposal amounted, in fact, to “several tens of thousands”⁵, which, however, could not have changed under any circumstances the count. The Parliament’s votes did nothing but confirm the popular vote, 109 deputies approving Carol’s coming to the throne while only six of the deputies abstained. Voicing the general resolution, the Constituency Assembly adopted the well-known statement emphasizing “that the resolute

⁵ Radu Rosetti, *Amintiri din prima tinerețe*, București, 1927, p. 6.

determination of the Unified Principalities is to remain for all time what they are, a one and united Romania, under the ruling of a foreign prince, descendant of a one of the Western royal families, and that the prince of Romania, one and undivided, is prince Carol Ludovic de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, whom the Assembly, in its turn, proclaims under the name of Carol I”⁶. All preparations being made, it was for such “resolute determination” to gain substantiality.

Although he has received the approval, encouragement and “blessing” of the Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and of King Wilhelm I of Prussia, Prince Carol had to escape the vigilance of the Austrian authorities during his passage through the Empire, due to the imminence of a war between Austria and Prussia, running the risk of death penalty, as officer in the Prussian army, in case he had been caught. Therefore, disguised and using a forged passport issued in Switzerland to a person named Karl Hettingen who was traveling to Odessa „for business purposes”, he journeyed, hardly without anxiety, the pre-established itinerary: Augsburg-München-Salzburg-Viena-Pesta-Timișoara-Bazia^o. Here, met by Lieutenant Sergiu Len^o, he embarked - after having waited for two days and accompanied incognito by Ion C. Bratianu - on the boat which took him to the Romanian land at Turnu Severin. On its journey to the capital city, in Craiova and Pitesti, as well as in Bucharest where he arrived on 10/ 22 May 10/ 22, after having spent the night at the manor of the Golescu boyars, the state officials and the population enthusiastically welcomed him. On entering Bucharest, the city mayor, Dimitrie Bratianu handed him the keys to the town uttering chosen words of welcome, then Prince Carol continued to Dealul Mitropoliei in the same open eight horses-driven carriage made available to him upon his entering the country and accompanied by the President of the Ministers’ Council, Ion Ghica, and by Nicolae Golescu, the prince’s lieutenant who welcomed him in Pitesti. The singing of a Te Deum by the head of the Orthodox Church, Nifon was followed by the oath taking in the Chamber of Deputies: the Prince’s Lieutenant, Nicolae Haralambie reads the constitutional read the constitutional solemn oath: “I swear to protect Romania’s laws; to safeguard its rights and the indivisibility of its territory”⁷, and Prince Carol uttered in Romanian: “I swear!”. In his public address Prince Carol at the ceremony he wanted to assure the deputies, and through them the entire Romanian people that “By stepping on this sacred land, I became a Romanian. Accepting the referendum imposes on me, I know, heavy duties; I hope I’ll live to carry them out. I bring you an honest heart, pure intentions, a firm will to do justice, an endless commitment to my new homeland and the unbending respect for law which I have taken from my ancestors”⁸. Prince Carol was to prove to be truthful to this allegiance trying, by the multiple journeys undertaking ever since the first years of his reign to several places in Muntenia, Oltenia, and in Moldova, meant to help him know his people and its claims, and not less to try to resolve them by the steps

⁶ *Domnia Regelui Carol I.*, p. 219.

⁷ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I al României. De un martor ocular*, vol. I, București, 1995, p. 57.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

taken subsequently. Moreover, in order to get closer to the Romanians and to better understand them, he started taking lessons of Romanian from August Treboniu Laurian, for his wife, the princess Elisabeth of Wied, whom he married on 3/ 15 November 1869, in Neuwied, to do the same.

The first issues to be addressed urgently by the Romanian political class with the help of the young ruler who was born and raised in obeying to the laws, was the elaboration of a modern and liberal constitution and the recognition of the new standing of Romania and of its ruler by the European Great Powers and, principally, by the Ottoman Empire which was, still, the nominal suzerain of our country.

The constitution bill, discussed in the plenum of the Chambers starting with 29 June/ 11 July 1866 and unanimously voted by the Parliament and on which, the next day, Prince Carol was taken his oath: "I swear to protect Romania's laws; to safeguard its national rights and the indivisibility of its territory"⁹, was inspired by the Belgium Constitution of 1831, although Romanian realities, not comparable with the Belgium ones, did not allow the enforcement of some of the provisions of the Constitution. Considered by the ruler "the most solemn act of my life", and the "final pact for ever binding me to the destiny of my new homeland, Romania". The Constitution of 1866 has, at its basis, the principle of state sovereignty and the principle of separation of powers of the state. Article 82 provided that "The Ruler's constitutional powers shall be hereditary in direct and legitimate descending line of His Highness, Prince Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, from male to male by primogenital order and by perpetual exclusion of females and their descendants. The descendants of His Highness shall be raised in the Eastern Orthodox religion"¹⁰; while Article 93 provided for the ruler's prerogatives, whereof that of conferring "the Romanian medal according to certain laws", the coinage rights, and the right to close, with other nations, commercial, navigational and other treaties. Such prerogatives were, in fact, the prerogatives of a ruler of an independent country, one more evidence to the Romanian's hope that the foreign prince was to fulfill this dream, too. The ruler's power was, however, scant as "no ruler's act shall have force unless countersigned by a minister, who thereby becomes liable for such act"¹¹ (Article 92). Naturally, the Constitution of 1866 also provided for the Romanian's rights, whereof freedom of conscience, freedom of communication and publication of their ideas, freedom of education and association, the freedom to elect and be elected in the parliament, and in county and local councils; the Constitution guaranteed inviolability of person and domicile and confidentiality of correspondence, while property of any kind was proclaimed "sacred and inviolable". Among the most controversial articles and which, eventually, led to the amendment of the constitution was Article 7, which, referring to citizenship and to the persons entitled to be granted Romanian citizenship

⁹ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I al României. De un martor ocular*, vol. I, București, 1995, p. 57.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

provided that they were only “foreigners of Christian rites” thus excluding, principally, the Jewish people. But, notwithstanding any of the imperfections of such labor of love which transformed Romania in one of the first constitutional state in the South-Eastern Europe, the Constitution of 1866, as amended in 1879, 1884 and 1916 remains the intrinsic legislation of the constitutional monarchy in our country.

Related to the recognition, by the Great Powers of the actual condition of Romania, the Tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire were very intent not to validate the bringing of the foreign prince, threatening even to occupy the Principalities, a solution which France, Italy and England considered inadequate. The beginning of the war between Austria and Prussia diverted the interest of the Great Powers and gradually modified their standpoint regarding the situation in Romania, however thanks to the diligences of the Romanian diplomacy, the mediation by Napoleon III and, last but not least, due to the diplomacy that characterized Carol I's acts. Immediately after his arrival in the country, he had sent a telegram to the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire expressing his commitment to the Sultan and showing his determination to respect the rights of the Sublime Porte, while in a letter to Tsar Alexander II of Russia, of the same time, he assured the Tsar of his wish to re-establish, on a solid and stable foundation, the agreement with Russia and the strengthening of the relationships between the two countries “until the time, of God's will, when the Orient's and the Christianity are disenthralled”¹². The conditions imposed by the Ottoman Porte, initially unacceptable, regarding the country's name, the limitation, in number, of the army, denial of the country's right to maintain official relationships with foreign Powers and so on were later on adjusted in favor of Romania, so that, based on Carol's assurances that the suzerainty of the Porte would be held in respect, Carol receives an invitation from the Grand Vizier to travel to Constantinople, the Sultan having a good mind to him hereditary princely rank and prerogatives, and to sign over to him the ordination of investiture. The visit paid to the Sultan, which began on 12/ 24 October, 1866 came to pass according to a protocol less common under such circumstances, Romania's ruler conducting himself according to the privileges of a purebred prince, descendant of a great ruling family of Europe. Welcomed with military honors and invited by Sultan Abdul-Aziz to the Dolmabahce Palace, Prince Carol I remained in Constantinople for a whole week, during which he had talks with the representatives of the diplomatic corps, was offered by the Sultan the Order „Osmanie” and, upon departure, a Damascus sword and five Arab stallions.

The frequent journeys around the country showed the ruler a not so flattering reality – the scarcity of streets as well as asphalt roads, the scarcity of rail roads, undeveloped ports, bridges over rivers roughly constructed of lumber, industry almost inexistent, while agriculture – the occupation of the greatest part of

¹² *Din viața Regelui Carol I. Mărturii contemporane și documente inedite*, Culese de Tzigara Samurçaș, București, 1939, p. 100.

the Romanian population, done with roughcast tools. The very image of Bucharest was also different from the one a country's capital, even if a country at the boundaries of the Orient, was supposed to have – downtown streets paved “with wood” and the skirting streets unpaved, full of dust and mud, agreeing with the season, no remarkable buildings, even the ruler's residence being in a modest enough house which had belonged to the boyar Dinicu Golescu, the majority of the buildings being small, insalubrious, chaotically built without a plan whatsoever.

One of the first steps taken by Prince Carol I and meant to economically, politically, socially and culturally modernize the Romanian state was to promulgate, in 1867, the first monetary law of Romania, the law regarding the establishment of a new coinage system and coins, under which the leu, divided into 100 bani [centimes, t.n.] became the national currency. The first coins were the gold 20 lei coins, circulated in 1868 but withdrawn in 1870 following the protest of the Ottoman Porte, as, besides the ruler's effigy, they also had the inscription “Carol I the ruler of Romanians”. În 1870, concomitantly with the establishment of the State Mint, 5,000 gold 20 lei coins and 400,000 silver coins were stamped with the prince's effigy. Starting 1872-1873, silver 50 bani, 1 leu and 2 lei coins were stamped, the Porte having stopped objecting, although the number of such coins exceeded 23 million¹³.

Another concern of the ruler was the construction of a rail roads network based upon the franchising of this operation to the Prussian consortium managed by the contractor Bethel Henry Strousberg, in 1868, to construct the rail road Roman-Galați, with a branching Tecuci-Bârlad, then Galați-Bucharest, via Brăila, Buzău and Ploiești and București-Vârciorova, via Pitești-Slatina-Craiova-Turnu Severin; another consortium, the English – Austrian Offenheim, was to be franchised the construction of the rail road Suceava-Roman, with a branching to Botoșani and another one to Iassy. Unfortunately, the bankruptcy of the Strousberg consortium in 1871 and the annulment of the franchise granted to the same caused plenty of trouble to the Government of the time, headed by Ion Ghica, but, more importantly, it suggested the public opinion that the person who insisted on the franchise to be granted to the Prussian concern – Prince Carol - would have been aider and abettor of the bankrupt in defrauding the Romanian state¹⁴, which was not true.

Among other steps taken during his first years as a ruler, and which, as the those mentioned above, were preparing propitious conditions for the independency of the Romanian state to be acquired, were the postal conventions with Austria-Hungary and Prussia (July 1868) and the telegraph convention with Russia (August 1868), but mostly the establishment, as of 1868, of diplomatic missions to Vienna, Berlin and Petersburg, the signing, in Bucharest, of the Romanian-Serbian treaty of mutual aid and assistance, in January 1868, as well as the steps taken for the

¹³ Dan Berindei, *Societatea românească în vremea lui Carol I (1866-1876)*, București, 1992, p. 135.

¹⁴ Anastasie Iordache, *Sub zodia Strousberg. Viața politică în România între 1871-1878*, București, 1991.

organization and modernization of the army. Romania's participation in the World Exhibition, in Paris, in 1867, under a pavilion separate from that of the Ottoman Empire, is just another one of the steps mentioned above.

Political life during Prince Carol's first years of governance was not really untroubled, its characteristics being political turmoil and agitation (ten governments took turns in leading the country between 11 May 1866 and 12 March 1871) not stopped by the prince's prudent, tactful and wise attempts to calm the ebullient spirits flushed by political disputes between the different political trends and persons and determination to be a factor of equilibrium and a moderator and to wither all political gang warfare. Against the background of the French-Prussian war which broke out in 1870, and considering the explainable sympathy of Carol I for the Prussians as opposed to the quasi-general sympathy of the Romanians for France, all demonstrations in support of the latter turned to actions against the dynasty. That was the case in Ploiești, when a member of the anti-monarchist conspiracy lead by Eugeniu Carada of the radical liberal group, Major Alexandru Candiano-Popescu impelled, by not observing the plan¹⁵, the anti-dynastic movement on the night of 7/ 19 August – 8/ 20 August 1870, seizing, together with a group of supporters, the prefecture, and the lasted but a day, being quickly suppressed. A crucial point of the young Romanian monarchy as well as for Carol I himself occurred in 1871 when, for "fear of not being able to restrain the monomania of the political parties that rule in Romania", the prince found himself one step away from abdication¹⁶. Prussia having defeated France and Wilhelm I having been crowned Emperor of Germany at Versailles, in the Gallery of Mirrors, the German community in Bucharest ostentatiously celebrated, on 10/ 22 March, 1871, at Sala Slătineanu (Slatineanu hall, t.n.) (later on, Casa Cap'a in Bucharest), his birthday, which caused an ample manifestation of hostility of the people in Bucharest, against the dynasty and against Carol I, the furious mob heading towards the Palace. As nothing seemed to be able to defuse the situation, the Prince requested the resignation of the Prime Minister and, the next day, asked Dimitrie A. Sturdza to call the members of the Three Prince Lieutenants of 1866, whom he apprised of his decision to abdicate and to hand over the leadership of the state. This was a moment when, pinning his hopes on a single card¹⁷, Carol I won, both the politicians as well as the population having appreciated his courage and resolution. The appointment as Prime Minister of Lascăr Catargiu who was a very good organizer and enjoyed important political prestige, the dissolution of the parliament and the organization of elections in May 1871, won with a great majority by the conservatories, were the steps that managed to reestablish order.

¹⁵ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I*, vol.II, București, 1995, p. 121-122.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

¹⁷ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi*, vol. I, *Carol I*, București, 2001, p. 71.

The period following the dynastic crisis was one in which spirits calmed down in politics, the representatives of the two emerging parties – the National Liberal Party, established in 1875 and the Conservative Party established around five years later, in 1880, had understood the intrinsic truth of the ruler's urge: "it's high time, gentlemen, for so many unproductive attempts, for us to answer the most arduous wish of the country - stability; on an insubstantial land always in turmoil nothing durable can be erected"¹⁸. The Government headed by Lascăr Catargiu, essentially a Conservative one, stayed at the helm of the country after the elections of 1874, being replaced, in 1876, by the Government constituted by the National Liberal Party and presided by Manolache Costache Epureanu, just to be replaced, after two months, by the Government presided by the leader of the party, Ion C. Brătianu, which opened the period of the great liberal governance - 1876-1888. This was the moment when the system of governmental rotation came into being, the artisan of it being no other than Prince Carol I, who managed to impose and cause to persist political stability based on which important economic and cultural achievements were scored by the Romanian state which had become, during this interval, an independent state.

If on a political level things started to fall into place, and Prince Carol could feel, mostly, satisfied, the same cannot be stated regarding his personal life, much burdened in this period, the hardest blow being the death, in 1874, of his sole descendant, Princess Marioara¹⁹, who, at the age of only three years and a half, had fallen ill with measles, a contagious disease characterized by a very high mortality at that time. The trauma of her very short and unhappy maternity made Princess Elisabeth to become, after the death of her child, more preoccupied with literature – the best known literary pseudonym being that of Carmen Sylva, as well as arts, music, charitable work, social work, not rarely playing the role of Maecenas, and much less with political life. As regards the nature and complexity of the relationships between the two spouses, the most suggestive appreciation was that of Princess Maria, who later on said that: "Her personality (Elisabeth's - n.n.) was as powerful as that of King Carol, but they were diametrical opposite one to the other: ice and fire. But their behavior one to the other was impeccable, and they went along with each other as two great companions [acting together] for one and the same cause"²⁰. Unfortunately, Carol and Elisabeth did not have any other children, so that, instead of the much desired son, Prince Ferdinand, one of the ruler's nephews, the second son of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern and Princess Antoinette, Infanta of Portugal, was elected to inherit the throne. Ferdinand came to Romania, in his capacity as prince heir at the beginning of May 1889.

¹⁸ *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I*, vol. I, București, 1939, p. 123.

¹⁹ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I*, vol. II, București, 1995, p. 308-310.

²⁰ Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele*, vol. II, București, [1936], p. 84.

True to his promises made immediately after his arrival in Romania, Prince Carol devoted his entire energy and power to fulfill one of the Romanian's most precious ideals, being aware that the suzerainty relationships with the Ottoman Porte became more and more unbearable and that the only solution was the "declaration of independence of the Romanian state". As there was no way such thing be possible without the approval and the support of the European powers, a *détente*, principally of an economic nature, was attempted, principally with Germany and Austria-Hungary, however not least to Tsarist Russia. The improvement of the relationships with Germany by the convention of 5/ 17 February 1872, the conclusion, on 10/ 22 June of the Commercial and Customs Convention with Austria-Hungary, as well as the conclusion, in 1876 of the economic conventions with Russia, Great Britain, France, and Italy are all circumscribed to this trend. Notwithstanding the fact that by these conventions Romania acquired the capacity as an equal partner and that as a state quasi-independent of the Ottoman Porte, neither Austria-Hungary, nor Germany, Russia or Great Britain had manifested clearly their intention to aid Carol I in his efforts to acquire the independence as a state. Although employed in the midst of an aggravation of the Ottoman Porte's crisis in the Balkans, both the diplomatic efforts of Mihail Kogălniceanu, at the time the Minister of Foreign Affairs: the memorial sent out to the Porte and the Guarantor Powers by the prominent politician and eloquent orator whereby he requested the said Powers to recognize the independence of the Romanian state, as well as the memorandum sent to Romania's diplomatic agents on 20 July/1 August 1876, representing a "protest before the contemporary public opinion and before the history" to the manner in which certain European peoples and countries were treated met the same failure. Both documents were received defiantly and unsolicitously by the Great Powers. The new Ottoman Constitution, adopted on 11/ 23 December 1876 eventually mentioned Romania as a "privileged province of the Ottoman Empire", a fact that triggered the powerful protect of the Bucharest authorities and their determination to conquer, considering that a Russian-Ottoman war was looming, the country's independence. The Romanian Government, presided by Ion C. Brătianu decided general call-up on 31 March/ 12 April 1877, while on 4/16 April, the Romanian-Russian convention allowing the Russian troops' crossing the territory of Romania in their way to the war theater, provided that the Russian Government observed the political rights of the Romanian state and defended "the current integrity of Romania".

The mobilization of the army was finalized on 15/ 27 April, and rallied approximately 100,000 people, thereof 58,700 belonging to the "operational forces" modernized and equipped at the urge and under the supervision of Carol I, who had become, meanwhile, its Commander-in-Chief. The first military operations in which it was involved were those for the defense of the Danube line when the Ottomans bombarded the Romanian localities Calafat, Giurgiu, Islaz, Bechet and the Romanians retorted by bombarding the localities Vidin and Turtucaia located on the Bulgarian shore. Virtually, Romania was at war with the Ottoman Empire a fact that

had to be officially brought to the attention of the public opinion in Romania, while the Government had to establish its priorities and the manner of standing up to the difficulties of the war, both on the battle field as well as in the country. Consequently, on 9/ 21 May 1877, both Chambers of the Parliament convened in an exceptional meeting. In a room brimful with an enthusiast public that had occupied the stalls and expanded by the large crowd packed on Dealul Mitropoliei [the hill of the Metropolitan Church in Bucharest where the Parliament building was - t.n.] Mihail Kogălniceanu uttered his memorable declaration of independence: “At war, with the ties torn, what are we? We are independent; we are a self-ruling nation [...] So, gentlemen, I have no doubt and I am not afraid to state, before the National Assembly of Representatives, that we are a free and independent nation”²¹. The next day, 10/22 May, which became, besides the now common anniversary of Carol’s arrival, the day of consecration, by its sanctioning by the ruler, of the proclamation of independence the Government, the Presidents of the two Chambers and other officials arrived at the Palace to congratulate Carol and thank him for having respected his promises made to the country. The Prince appeared to be satisfied that “România has regained his former independence, as a free country, as a self-ruling state”, and convinced that “the independent Romania is to be beneficial not only to itself, but rather to the entire Europe”. On the occasion and as an expression of the full sovereignty of the Romanian state, the first national Romanian battle honors „Steaua României”, was instituted, meant for the soldiers as well as the civilians who deserved well of the homeland. In his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, and determined to use not only his military education but also his own person on the battle field, Prince Carol in an address to the army on the same day of 10/ 22 May 1877, heartened the army: “In this very difficult times our country is traversing, the entire Romania watches you, it has all its hopes and belief placed in you. Keep in mind, when time for battle comes, the deeds of the former Romanian soldiers; remember that you are the heirs of the heroes of Racova and Călugăreni. The colors under which you are to fight are the image of the Homeland, itself. Follow it, therefore, bravely and when the laurels of peace blossom again in the fields and on the mountains of Romania, the Homeland will gratefully write the names of its brave defenders on the frontispiece of the Romanian independence”²².

Wishing to have independence, once proclaimed, confirmed on the battle field, both the Government as well as the ruler had made repeated attempts to earn Russia’s military cooperation. They were, however, firmly refused as the Russians considered the Romanian army too small to be of any help, although its had been equipped with 35,000 new rifles, and by the bill adopted on 11/ 23 May the 914,000 lei amount, owed as a tribute to the Porte, was allocated to the maintenance of the army. But fate decided differently. The Ottomans’ powerful resistance at Plevna,

²¹ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Texte social-politice alese*, București, 1967, p. 315-316.

²² *Independența României. Documente*, vol. I, București, 1977, p. 91.

and the Russians failure to conquer this very important strategic point determined the Grand Duke Nicolae, the Tsar's brother, and Commander-in-Chief of the Russian troops located South of Danube, to request emergency aid from the Romanians. To this effect, he addressed Carol I a telegram on July 19/ 31, 1877, followed by other two telegrams on July 30/ August 11, and August 6/ 18, having a similar contents, requesting help as "The Turks, who amassed the greatest number of people in Plevna, are crushing us. Please join us, proceed to demonstrations and is possible cross the Danube, whatever you want. Between Jiu [a Romanian river] and Corabia [a locality on the banks of Danube], such demonstration is indispensable to ease our movements"²³. The participation of the Romanian army in the war – having become a necessity for Tsarist Russia, was nonetheless desired both by Prince Carol I as well as by the Government and all Romanians; however it was subject to a series of summit talks. Eventually, both Tsar Alexander II as well as the Russian Government had to accept the Romanian's conditions according to which the Romanians were to fight under the command of their ruler, Carol I being offered supreme command of all the Russian troops at Plevna. It was a great honor but nonetheless a great responsibility for the Prince of Romania who, by a day order issued as the Romanian troops were crossing the Danube at Corabia, on 20 August/ 1 September 1877 urged the Romanian troops: "Make, then, the Romanian flutter on the battle field where our ancestors were, for centuries, defenders of law and liberties"²⁴. From his headquarters at Poradim, Carol I, showing his education as well as military skills, organized the troops under his command and appointed General Alexandru Cernat commander of the Romanian operational army, while the Russian general, P. D. Zotov became the general chief of staff of the Russian and Romanian joint armies, commanded by Carol I. And, even if in the battles of 27 August and 30 August for the conquering of two strongholds in front of Plevna 10,000 Romanian soldiers died and the battles were not exactly victories, for the Romanian army and its commander they represented a military success, proving to those who still doubted, the worth of an army that hadn't been in a battle before and that seized a flag and three Ottoman cannons. The Plevna fortress and its commander, Osman-Pasha, surrendered on 28 November/ 10 December 1877, the Romanian army also being distinguished in the battles of Rahova, Smârdan, Opanez and Vidin. But Romania, in spite of the repeated requests of the Prince Carol I, was not accepted to participate in the peace talks, the San Stefano Treaty of 19 February/ 3 March 1878 only recording the territorial swap desired by Russia, which took three counties in the South of Bessarabia, Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail and offered Romania Dobrogea. Consequently, the moment of glory – the confirmation of the independence on the battle field – turned to disappointment, but the population's and officials' reaction of dismay and revolt was countervailed

²³ *Pașini din lupta poporului român pentru independență națională. Documente și texte social-politice*, București, 1967, p. 175.

²⁴ *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I*, p. 257-258.

by Russia's threat to occupy Romania and disarm its army, which made Carol I exclaim: "An army that fought at Plevna before the Emperor Alexander II may fight until it is destroyed, but shall never allow to be dishonored"²⁵. Being aware, though, that the Romanian's emotional response cannot change the decision of the Great Powers, and that Bessarabia had been lost, Carol I took all due steps for the Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihail Kogălniceanu to be received and heard at the Peace Congress of Berlin of 1/ 13 June 1878, in order to present Romania's grievances. The Peace Treaty of Berlin, signed on 1/13 July 1878 recognized Romania's independence, and its receiving, Dobrogea and Insula Șerpilor (Serpents' Island) in exchange for the Southern Bessarabia; by Article 44 of the Treaty, our country was imposed the amendment of Art. 7 of the Constitution (to be made in October 1879, n.n.), to provide equality between the Romanians and the inhabitants belonging to other rites (envisaged being the Jewish traders living in great number, mostly in Moldova areas n.n.).

The welcome organized to receive the Prince returning from the battle field was enthusiastic and, on 8/ 20 October 1878 the Government organized the receipt, with honors, of the Romanian army in Bucharest, an ad-hoc triumph arch being constructed for this occasion. But the decisions of the Berlin Congress brought a great amount of bitterness in the hearts of the Romanians, Carol and the Prime Minister having the same feelings and regretting that they had not seized the turning point when the request for military aid by the Russian army in the summer of 1877, and close an official written deal in which to specify its position and requests. The Independence of Romania as a state was recognized, first by Austria-Hungary, Russia and Ottoman Empire in September, October and November 1878, while Germany, Great Britain and France delayed such recognition until February 1880.

The independence war undeniable incremented Carol I's prestige, changing the people's perception of him as a foreign ruler, to one as a ruler belonging to the Romanian people and profoundly committed to the country he ruled. The change of the attitude towards the ruler was surely due to the fact that confronting the perils and hostile conditions of warfare life, he was on the battle field, beside his soldiers, leading them in battle. Along with that, the change that had occurred in Romania's position due to its having acquired independence also required a change of Carol's position that was to be referred to, according to the resolution of the Ministers' Council, as "His Royal Highness". It was the first step towards proclamation of the Romanian Kingdom, which the Brătianu Government, as it informed the monarch, wanted to cause to become actual on the very occasion of the monarch's birthday, 8/ 20 April 1881, but, being accused of delay, submitted the respective bill sooner. The law regarding the proclamation of the Kingdom, promulgated by Carol I on 14/ 26 March 1881, comprised two articles: "*Article I.* Romania shall assume the title of Kingdom. Its monarch, Carol I, shall assume, for himself and his heirs, the title of

²⁵ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I*, vol. IV, București, 1994, p. 89.

King of Romania. *Article II*. The heir to the throne shall be referred to as Royal Prince”²⁶. Due to the mourning imposed by the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, the festivities related to the proclamation of the Kingdom had to be postponed, the best day for it being considered 10/22 May 1881, the 15th anniversary of Carol’s coming to Romania.

The coronation festivities started on 10/ 22 May 1881. The crown of Carol I, meant to be also worn by the future kings of Romania was made, upon the monarch’s explicit wish, of the steel of one of the cannons captured by the Romanians from the Turks at Plevna, to symbolize the country’s independence; Elisabeth’s crown was made of gold, having the same design as the steel crown, but having, however, reduced dimensions. The two crowns were brought to the Palace in the sound of military music on 9/ 21 May. The festivities opened the next day by 21 cannon salvos announcing the event; thereafter, at 10:15, the monarchs went from Cotroceni [royal palace] to Gara de Nord [railway station] wherefrom they were supposed to leave in an 8 horses-driven carriage, vanward of the coronation cortege comprised of civil and military officials. Arriving at the Metropolitan Church, the cortege stopped to attend the blessing of the crowns, a moment marked by 101 cannon salvos and by the king’s and queen’s signing of the law regarding the proclamation of the Kingdom, a document to be safeguarded in the State Archives. After this important moment, the cortege returned to the palace where the crowns were handed to King Carol and Queen Elisabeth by the two presidents of the legislative Chambers, Dimitrie Ghica (Senate) and Constantin A. Rosetti (Deputy Chamber). In his address, considering this moment a glorious crowning of the 15 years that passed since his arrival to the throne, the King, wanted to emphasize: “I proudly accept this crown made of the metal of a cannon that the blood of our heroes had sparged and the church had blessed. I accept it as a symbol of Romania’s independence and strength! [...] Long live our beloved Romania, crowned today by its civic and military virtues”²⁷. The coronation festivities continued for other two days, when the monarchs greeted troops’ parade and the parade of the allegoric pageants of the different guilds, thousands of people celebrating the event by banquets, festive dinners, and fire works. On the occasion of the proclamation of the kingdom, Carol I instituted the second Romanian national order “Coroana României” [Romania’s Crown]. As of 1881, the 10th of May received, besides the significance related to Carol’s arrival to Romania, received a new significance, that of the King’s day, Romania’s national holiday until the takeover of power by the Communists in 1948.

After securing national independence, and proclaiming the Kingdom, Romania experienced a period of actual development and prosperity, a fact mostly due to the policy of the Monarch whose powerful personality found a dependable

²⁶ „Monitorul Oficial”, nr.60 din 15/ 27 martie 1881.

²⁷ *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I*, vol. I, București, 1939, p. 365.

ally, i.e. the so-called “vizier”. Ion C. Brătianu, whose government extended until 1888, had in mind, beside others, a series of reforms meant to create and develop a national industry as well as a modern financial and credit system, the same being the equivalent of economic and political consolidation of the country. As early as in April, 1880, Carol I had promulgated the law establishing the National Bank of Romania, to be headed by a reputable finance expert, Eugeniu Carada, a large network of banks being created in the entire country. As regards industry, several industrial undertakings had been established during this period, as for instance the Buhuși cloth mill, and the paper mill „Letea” of Bacău, which, in 1885 had started producing, to be followed by the bear factory of Azuga, the sugar factory of Roman and many others. Wood industry also developed, the lumber mills in Moldova, for example, but mostly mineral resources exploitation, Romania occupying first place in Europe in petroleum and derivatives extraction. King Carol I himself, in order to support the country’s economic development, became a shareholder of several factories – beer, canned food, cheese, cloth and cement, nonetheless a shareholder of refineries „Astra Română”, „Steaua Română”, „Concordia” a.s.o. Moreover, in May 1887, the law regarding the encouraging of national industry had been voted and promulgated, to be supplemented in 1906 and replaced by a more ample law in 1912.

From a political standpoint, considering the changing of Romania’s position as a consequence of the proclamation of the kingdom, as well as due to the changes that occurred by the restitution of Dobrogea and due to the necessity to resolve certain matters related to election law, a new amendment of the Constitution became impending. After one year of negotiations and discussions in the Parliament, the amendment of 25 articles of the Constitution regarding the new name as Kingdom of Romania, the incorporation of Dobrogea, the suppression of the national guard, the instituting of a standing legislative committee, the liberty of press (forbidding committal for sentence in relation to press transgressions and reintroducing censorship meant to protect the King and the members of the Royal Family of the sometimes quite harsh attacks of the press) was decided in June 1884. This provision appears to have never been enforced considering the abundant anti-monarchic and republican press and literature in the epoch.

The bill regarding the establishment of Royal Estates was also approved in the Parliament on 5 June 1884. The Royal Estates consisted of 12 properties having a total area of 132,110 hectares²⁸, located in Dolj, Ilfov, Prahova, Brăila, Rm. Sărat, Vaslui, Neamț and Suceava counties, the same to remain the property of the state and the Royal Family to benefit only as usufructuaries of the same. Well managed and making the most of them, first by Ion Kalinderu, and, as of 1913, by Barbu ʰtirbey, the Royal Estates had brought important profit to the King and his family, but also to the inhabitants of the respective estates, who were better paid than in

²⁸ Apud Ioan Scurtu, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

any other place. Some years later, and for the purpose of improving the condition of the peasants and the avoidance of peasant revolts²⁹, similar to the one back in 1888, Carol I was to support and promulgate, on 7/ 19 April 1889 the law regarding the sale to the peasants of the state-owned estates, totaling 546,593 hectares, 106, families benefiting of the respective law. The peasant issues had remained, however unsolved thereafter.

Ion C. Brătianu resignation from the position as a Prime Minister due to the peasant revolts around the capital city, as well as due to the more virulent attacks of the conservatory opposition, who meanwhile had rallied in a party lead by the same well-reputed great, Lascăr Catargiu, a moment which marked the beginning of the governmental cycles rotation³⁰, a system created artfully by the King in order to provide the Romanian political life with a greater stability without, however, contributing too much to the political education of the electors and the development of their civic convictions.

As regards Romania's foreign policy, in which King Carol was directly involved, a more tangible relationship with Germany and Austria-Hungary was sought, to eventually have a five years' extendable alliance treaty signed, on 18/ 30 October 1883, with Austria-Hungary, to which Germany and later Italy also adhered. The above mentioned treaty provided for Romania's intervention only in the event of an attack against Austria-Hungary. For understandable reasons, related to the prospects of the Romanian population living within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the 1883 treaty remained secret, not to mention the fact that the alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany was not very helpful to King Carol when, under the circumstances of the Memorandist movement in Transylvania, he tried, unsuccessfully, to intercede and have the leaders of the movement released from prison where they had been thrown following the lawsuit of Cluj in May 1894. The King was to make another attempt to this effect in September 1896, when Emperor Franz Joseph paid a visit to Romania to inaugurate the works for the construction of the Portile de Fier channel, and meant, also, to strengthen the relationships between the two countries. After one year, in September 1897, Carol I returned the visit to Frantz Joseph, being welcome, with full honors, in Vienna. In the interest of maintaining neighborly relationships and avoiding conflictual situations – Carol I tried, during his very long reign, (48 years, one year more than ătefan cel Mare – n.n.) to keep Romania far from the hotbeds of potential wars – Carol also paid a visit, accompanied by Prince Ferdinand, to Tsar Nicolae II of Russia, in Sankt Petersburg and Þarskoe-Selo.

King Carol I was, also, a fervent supporter of Romanian culture, of the modernization of transport, of the Romanian cities, and, principally, of the capital

²⁹ Ion Mamina, *Monarhia constituțională în România. Enciclopedie politică.1866-1938*, București, 2000, p. 227.

³⁰ Ion Mamina, Ion Bulei, *Guverne și guvernanți. 1866-1916*, București, 1994, p. 63-156.

city, Bucharest. As soon as the year 1880 the works for the channeling of the river Dâmbovița were started as the river, in rainy seasons, produced much trouble to the people in Bucharest, repeatedly flooding their houses. The river bed was deepened and a layer of oak tree boards was placed on it, the two lateral embankments were opened, trees were planted and the wooden bridges over the river were replaced by stone bridges (7) and by metal bridges (5). The first artificial granite sidewalks were constructed in Bucharest in 1888. The process of street planning and constructions planning was also initiated, with a view to changing, in as much as possible, the untidy, chaotic and distressing appearance of the town. The monarch encouraged talented foreign architects to come to Romania, but he also supported the Romanian architecture school and the construction of buildings in the new architectural style, the neo-Romanian style. Among the buildings which enriched and smartened Bucharest, and which became true landmark buildings of the town, mention should be made of the National Bank Palace (1883-1885, French architects Albert Galleron and Casien Bernard), The Romanian Athenaeum (1885-1888, French architect Albert Galleron), The Palace of Justice (1890-1895, built according to the designs of the French architect A. Ballu), the building of the Carol I University Foundation (1890-1914, French architect Paul Gottereau), the Post Palace (1894-1900, Romanian architect, Alexandru Săvulescu), the C.E.C. (Savings and Consignment Bank) Palace (1896-1900, French architect Paul Gottereau), The building of the Ministry of Agriculture (1895, Swiss architect Louis Pierre Blanc) a.s.o. During that time other very shapely, official or private buildings were erected in the capital city, by skilled Romanian architects, especially due to Ion Mincu, the initiator and promoter of the neo-Romanian style. He designed in Bucharest ^acoala Centrală de Fete (the Central Young Ladies' School) (1890-1892), the restaurant at the second flower bed from the ^aosea (1892), Vernescu and Monteoru houses (1887-1889) and the Institute of Architecture Palace, (1912-1917), to name only a few of his works of art. Important and very numerous were the works meant to modernize the communication means in the country. During Carol's reign, the territory of Romania was covered with a rich network of rail roads, principle and secondary, modernization works of Constanța harbor started in 1895, while in September 1895 the Cernavoda Bridge, designed and built by the engineer Anghel Saligny, was inaugurated, as at that date the longest bridge in continental Europe, being designed to connect Romania to its new province, Dobrogea. Actually, it was Anghel Saligny who also conducted the modernization works of Constanța harbor, after he had built, between 1888 and 1889, the silos of Brăila and Galați. Military constructions had not been forgotten either, the reinforcement works of the line Focșani-Nămoloasa-Brăila, meant to protect the country in case of a Russian intervention, having started in 1884, while the works on the fortresses meant to protect the capital started a little later. To end the chapter regarding Carol's construction of the modern Romania, we should not forget his most dear "child", the Peleş Castle in Sinaia, started in 1875 and finalized in the fall of the year 1883, and being a mirrored image of the monarch, straightforward, temperate,

incorruptible, correct and proud, built of the King's funds who declared upon its inauguration: "I built this castle as a lasting evidence that the dynasty freely elected by the nation has been given deep roots in this country and that we reward the love of our people with the unlimited faith we have in the future of our beloved homeland"³¹. Among the technical "premieres" which Romania had experienced at the end of the 19th century were the appearance of electrical trams (1894), telephone and electric lighting, (1890) and even the first private automobile (engineer Gh. Assan), which was seen on the streets in Bucharest (1900). Thanks to one of the most diligent mayors of the city of Bucharest, Pache Em. Protopopescu, the "great" boulevard connecting the Obor Station with Cotroceni which was the residence of Prince Ferdinand and Princess Maria, who married in 1893 and the marriage of whom was blessed, to Carol's full satisfaction, by the first heir to the throne, born in Romania and baptized in the Orthodox religion, Carol.

Romanian education of all levels received a new modern structure, due to the contribution of two prestigious cultural personalities – Petru Poni, the initiator of the primary education and primary teacher's training law of 1896, and Spiru Haret, who elaborated, in 1898, the secondary and upper education law. On 30 March/ 12 April 1879 the Romanian Academy was established by the transformation of the Academic Society (1867), organized in three sections – literary, history and scientific. King Carol I received, on 27 May/ 8 June, 1879 the title of president of honor of the Romanian Academy, and in this capacity he supported, in 1884, the elaboration of a monumental work, *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae [the grand etymological dictionary of Romanian language]* to comprise all the words in the Romanian language, the Academy being awarded 6,000 lei for completing this task. The work is entrusted to Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu who, between 1886 and through to 1898 would try to finalize it.

All these achievements of which the monarch was, rightfully, satisfied and proud, had to be brought to the attention of all the Romanians as well as the foreign countries, the General Romanian Exhibition of 1906, having an anniversary nature, being the event that brightly materialized it. Organized on the occasion of Carol's 40th anniversary as a monarch, the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of the kingdom and the anniversary of 1800 years as of the Roman colonization of our territory, after conquering Dacia, the exhibition was hosted in Parcul Carol in Bucharest, inaugurated on this occasion comprising both Romanian and foreign pavilions and representing a "costume rehearsal" of the Great Unification of 1918, due to the participation of Transylvanians and of people from the Bucovina province of Austria-Hungary (the people of Bessarabia could not participate as they did not have Russia's approval – n.n.). On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of glorious reign, Carol I instituted, on 10 May 1906, the third national Romanian

³¹ *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I*, p. 405.

order, the Order “Carol I” in four degrees: commander, high officers, great crosses and sashes.

During the first fifteen years of the 20th Century the politicians and the monarchy, the Romanian society in its entirety were confronted with three major crises, one social having an adverse effect upon the political life, the other two affecting the foreign policy and the military policy of Romania.

Although attempts were made several times to alleviate the peasant issue, the problem of their want of land had not been resolved, it even became more acute, their discontent being kept up and aggravated by the propaganda of the socialist agitators in the villages. Against this background and doubled by the more and more violent rejection of the tenants (lessees) and acting as brokers between the peasants and the landlords, the peasants revolt of 1907 broke out unusually violently. Unable to handle the situation, the conservatory Government, lead by Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino resigned and a liberal Government, headed by Dimitrie A. Sturdza replaced it. Eventually, the army had to intervene to curb the revolt, a lot of victims raising as many speculations, being registered (the socialist press mentioned 11 thousand deaths – n.n.). An eyewitness, participant in these events, the general Alexandru Averescu, charged with the task of reestablishing order in the country, specified that during the event of the spring of 1907 only 2,500 deaths were registered³², the soldiers killed by the peasants, included. The monarch and the monarchy were the target of an abundant disparaging literature and press campaign. What’s certain is that the 1907 uprising clearly pointed out that the peasant issue needs full attention and that an agrarian reform is necessary, an idea accepted and supported by the King.

During the scrutinized period, Romania, under the inspired leadership of Carol I continued to close relationships of friendship with the Great Powers, among which especially with Germany – a powerful military force – and Austria-Hungary, countries to which the country was tied under the still secret but renewed treaty of 1883, as well as with Russia, a neighbor whose amity, rather than inimicality, was befitting. It was the most satisfactory policy in a Europe torn by continuous latent conflicts, always ready to burst out. King Carol I was even recompensed for, so to say, his performance in foreign policy, receiving in 1909, the title and wand of Field Marshal of the German army while in 1912 the title as Marshal of the Russian army. Due to its monarch’s moderation, Romania represented an actual stability factor in the permanent “gunpowder barrel” from the Balkans, applying, under the circumstances of aggravated contradictions between the Balkan states, a policy of clarification of the disputes and maintenance of the statu-quo. Thus, as at the moment of outburst of the first Balkan war, on 18/ 31 October 1912, between Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro, on the one hand and the Ottoman Empire on the other hand, Carol I, in his address to the Parliament announced that Romania

³² Apud Ioan Scurtu, *op.cit.*, p. 190.

was to maintain its neutrality to the belligerent Balkan countries, in order to stop the conflict from spreading. The situation was however different upon the outburst of the second Balkan war, this time between the former allies, Bulgaria, on the one hand and Greece, Montenegro and Serbia on the other hand. Faithful to his previously announced decision that, in case of such a conflict Romania to mobilize the army and occupy the Turtucaia – Balcic line, Carol I authorizes the Government, headed by Titu Maiorescu of Junimea (a Romanian literary gazette, t.n.) to declare war to Bulgaria on 27 June/ 10 July 1913. Hindered by age and illness to personally command the military operations, the Monarch entrusted the command of the troops to Prince Ferdinand, the heir to the throne. The war was a very unusual one, as Bulgaria, hearing that Romania has entered the conflict as ally of the other belligerent party, sought peace so that no arms were fired and the soldiers who had died were victims of cholera. The peace signed in Bucharest on 28 July/ 10 August 1913 changed the configuration of the Balkan Peninsula, the Cadrilater (the Southern part of Dobrogea) with its two counties: Durostorum and Caliacra became part of Romania. For the first time in the European history such important decisions, affecting the entire continent, were taken by small countries in the South-Eastern part of the continent, without consultations or involvement of the Great Powers. For Romania the moment was even more important, as it was marking the beginning of its separation from Austria-Hungary.

The last year of Carol as a monarch, also being the last year of his life, was hardly peaceful, bringing a lot of sorrow to the old monarch. Warfare was in the air in 1914 in the entire Europe, therefore Germany and Austria-Hungary imperatively required Carol I to have the 1883 secret treaty ratified by the Parliament, for them to be able to turn to their partner in case of necessity. Europe was already divided into two opposing factions, the Entente and the Triple Alliance, therefore the visit paid by Tsar Nicolae II to Constanta in June 1914 raised the suspicion of the adverse faction, and increased the pressure upon Romania which was considered rightful part of the countries loyal to the Triple Alliance. The outburst of the First World War following the assassination in Sarajevo of 15/ 28 June 1914 forced Carol I to respond, as clearly as possible, to Germany and Austria-Hungary, taking however into consideration the firm position of the majority of the politicians and the public opinion who wanted an alliance with the Entente, the only power capable, in their opinion, to help Romania and the Romanians to achieve their dream of full unification. Under such circumstances, Carol I called a Crown Council's meeting at Peleș Castle on 21 July/ 3 August 1914³³, during which, all those present, except P. Carp, voted for neutrality and against a collaboration with the Triple Alliance, so much desired by the monarch. His position as a constitutional monarch as well as his conscience, in spite of his convictions, sympathies and blood relationships, made the monarch assume the majority

³³ Ion Mamina, *Consilii de Coroană*, București, 1997, p.32-51.

opinion, and accept Romania's neutrality. It was a very difficult moment for him, when, as he confessed to Constantin Stere later on, after 48 years of ruling, he found himself isolated and almost alone³⁴. His grief increased when contrary to his conceptions and expectations, the French and English armies defeated the Germans at Marne River. With his soul turned upside down, and shaken by a reality which he did not wish to believe, King Carol I confessed to Take Ionescu: "If I regret something is that I had not died before this war started"³⁵. Realizing that the public opinion and the greatest part of the politicians could hardly wait Romania's entering the war beside the Entente, and wishing not to be an obstacle for this desire to become true, King Carol I declared that he was ready to abdicate, his last act as king being the approval, upon pressure by the Prime Minister, Ion. I. C. Brătianu, of the secret convention with Russia which promised to recognize Romania's title to the provinces under Austria-Hungary rule. The fate absolved him, however, of the pain and humiliation of an abdication as Carol I died on 27 September/ 10 October 1914. His role in Romania's history of almost half a century was best described in the anthological portrait made to him by I. Gh. Duca: "In a country which did not possess the notion of time King Carol brought the sense of mathematical exactness [...]. In a country where relativity applied to everything, he brought earnest and persistent application made extremely careful and precise by the German meticulousness. In a country of jumpstart, violent enthusiasm and rash dismay, or, at least, rapid boredom, he brought inextricable assiduity, calm and regular as the beat of the numerous clocks filling his apartments. In an impatient and fervent country he brought patience that can prepare and the endurance that can maintain serenity [...], in a country of oriental mentality he brought Western spirit at a time when the country was just attempting to dash into the swirl of the Occident [...], in a country which, due to its past ordeals, was not used to plans made ahead and well finalized, he came having a precise purpose in mind, made a plan and achieved it accordingly"³⁶.

IN MEMORIAM CAROL I. 1866-2006

- Rezumat -

Anul 2006 marchează aniversarea unui număr mai mult sau mai puțin rotund de ani de la evenimente importante din istoria modernă a României, toate legate de persoana întemeietorului monarhiei române, Carol I: 140 de ani de la venirea sa pe tronul țării, 125 de ani de la proclamarea Regatului Român și 100 de ani de când, aniversându-și 40 de ani de domnie, Suveranul și-a dat acordul pentru

³⁴ Constantin Stere, *Marele război și politica României*, București, 1918, p. 36.

³⁵ Constantin Bacalbașa, *Bucureștii de altădată*, vol. IV, București, 1933, p. 151.

³⁶ Apud Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, București, 1997, p. 238.

organizarea Expoziției Generale Române din Parcul Carol menită să arate românilor, dar și străinătății, progresele înregistrate, în varii domenii, de țara ale cărei destine îi fuseseră încredințate și care devenise noua sa patrie.

Având în vedere toate aceste aniversări, autoarea studiului de față a intenționat și a și reușit, folosind argumentația faptelor ce definesc esența domniei primului Rege al românilor, să contureze, atât personalitatea lui Carol I, cât și rolul și locul pe care l-a ocupat în istoria României și care i-a fost nu doar minimalizat, dar chiar contestat, după instaurarea regimului comunist, fiind eliminat, total sau parțial, din manualele și tratatele de istorie și, oricum, denaturat prezentat.

În debutul studiului sunt precizate condițiile și împrejurările în care Prințul Carol Ludovic de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, rudă cu Regele Prusiei Wilhelm I, dar și cu Împăratul Franței Napoleon al III-lea, este chemat pe tronul României, împlinindu-se astfel o mai veche dorință a românilor, exprimată explicit de adunările ad-hoc premergătoare realizării actului din ianuarie 1859, întrunite la Iași și București în octombrie 1857 și anume „Prinț străin, cu moștenirea tronului (ereditar – n.n.), ales dintr-o familie domnitoare ale Europei și ai cărui moștenitori să fie crescuți în religia țării”. Pentru a îndepărta pericolul defăcerii unirii din 1859 cu care amenințau Marile Puteri reticente (Austria și Prusia) sau chiar ostile (Imperiul Otoman și Rusia) față de ideea aducerii unui principe străin, oamenii politici români au căutat să grăbească lucrurile. Odată primit răspunsul afirmativ al Principelui Carol de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, Locotenența Domnească adresează poporului o proclamație prin care era recomandată alegerea acestuia, prin plebiscit, ca domnitor al României, sub numele de Carol I. Atât rezultatul votului popular, cât și cel al votului Parlamentului au confirmat voința majoritară de aducere pe tronul țării a tânărului prinț, pregătit, în tradiția familiei, pentru cariera militară și având deja gradul de căpitan în armata prusacă, dar și cu o solidă pregătire în domeniul literaturii franceze, al artelor plastice, al esteticii ș.a.

Primii ani de domnie nu i-au fost tocmai liniștiți, iar cele dintâi probleme a căror rezolvare era imperios necesară, nu s-au dovedit a fi deloc ușoare: elaborarea unei constituții pe principii moderne și cât mai liberală și recunoașterea noului statut al României și al conducătorului său de către Marile Puteri europene și mai ales de către Imperiul Otoman, încă puterea suzerană a țării noastre. Rezultatele însă, s-au dovedit a fi pe măsura eforturilor depuse. Proiectul de constituție, votat în unanimitate de Parlament la 29 iunie/ 11 iulie 1866, inspirat după constituția belgiană din 1831, a fost socotit de domnitor actul „cel mai solemn al vieții mele” și „pactul definitiv, care mă leagă pentru totdeauna cu destinele noii mele patrii, România” care, astfel, era transformată în primul stat constituțional din sud-estul Europei. Totodată, Constituția din 1866, cu modificările din 1879, 1884 și 1916 reprezintă baza juridică a monarhiei constituționale în țara noastră. În ceea ce privește recunoașterea, mai ales de către Imperiul Otoman, a noului statut al României și statutului Domnitorului Carol I, ea s-a materializat, datorită și diplomației acestuia, încă în octombrie 1866 cu ocazia vizitei făcute de el la

Istanbul, când Sultanul i-a acordat rangul și prerogativele princiare cu titlu ereditar și i-a înmănat firmanul de investitură.

Destul de curând însă, conștient fiind că legăturile de suzeranitate cu Poarta devin din ce în ce mai insuportabile și că unica soluție era „declaraarea independenței statului român”, Principele Carol I, sprijinit cu înțelepciune și pricepere de doi dintre sfetnicii săi cei mai apropiați, Ion C. Brătianu și Mihail Kogălniceanu, va purcede la transpunerea în fapt a acestui ideal atât de scump românilor. Inițial s-a încercat obținerea acordului și sprijinului puterilor europene, pe cale diplomatică și prin încheierea unor tratate economice, pe picior de egalitate, cu Germania, Austro-Ungaria, Rusia, Anglia, Franța și Italia, dar încercările au fost sortite eșecului. Așa încât, singura cale rămasă a fost cea a câștigării independenței naționale pe calea armelor, conjunctura fiind favorabilă prin adâncirea crizei Imperiului Otoman în Balcani și izbucnirea războiului ruso-turc desfășurat pe câmpul de luptă din Bulgaria. Mobilizarea generală a armatei române s-a încheiat la 15/27 aprilie 1877, aducând sub arme aproximativ 100.000 de oameni, dintre care 58.700 făceau parte din „armata de operațiuni”, a cărei modernizare și dotare fusese făcută, timp de câțiva ani, la îndemnul și sub personala supraveghere a lui Carol I, devenit comandantul ei suprem. La 9/ 21 mai 1877, ambele camere ale Parlamentului, întrunite în ședință extraordinară au aprobat declarația de independență rostită de Ministrul de Externe, Mihail Kogălniceanu, iar a doua zi, Carol I a sancționat hotărârea Parlamentului, 10/22 mai 1877 devenind și ziua consacării proclamării independenței. Deși atât guvernul, cât și domnitorul au făcut repetate încercări de a obține cooperarea militară cu Rusia, aceasta a refuzat cu duritate oferta românească. Dar soarta a hotărât altfel, iar rezistența puternică a turcilor la Plevna și pierderile însemnate pe care le-a înregistrat armata rusă, l-au determinat pe Marele Duce Nicolae, fratele Tarului Alexandru al II-lea și comandat suprem al trupelor ruse de la sud de Dunăre, să ceară intervenția urgentă a românilor, acceptând și condițiile puse de aceștia, Carol I fiind nu numai comandatul armatei române, dar primind și comanda supremă asupra tuturor trupelor rusești din fața Plevnei. Indiscutabil, războiul pentru cucerirea independenței naționale a sporit prestigiul Domnitorului Carol I, el nemaifiind perceput ca un principe străin, ci ca unul aparținând poporului român, profund atașat țării pe care o conducea. Schimbarea de atitudine față de domnitor se datora, cu siguranță, mai ales faptului că, înfruntând pericolele și condițiile vitrege ale vieții de campanie, se aflase pe câmpul de bătaie, alături de soldații săi, conducându-i în luptă. În același timp, modificarea statutului României prin câștigarea independenței impunea și o schimbare a statutului domnitorului său care, prin hotărârea Consiliului de Miniștri din 9/21 septembrie 1878 urma să poarte titlul de „Alteță Regală”. Era primul pas către proclamarea Regatului României care se va face prin legea propusă de guvernul condus de Ion C. Brătianu și promulgată de Carol I la 14/26 martie 1881, urmată fiind de serbările încoronării desfășurate la București începând cu 10/22 mai 1881.

O destul de întinsă parte a studiului de față este dedicată rolului pe care l-a avut Carol I în modernizarea societății românești pe toate planurile – economic, politic, cultural. Desele călătorii pe care le-a întreprins, încă de la începutul domniei sale, în toate regiunile țării, i-au dezvăluit domnitorului o realitate nu tocmai măgulitoare – lipsa străzilor, ca și a drumurilor pavate, lipsa căilor ferate, porturile nu erau amenajate, podurile peste râuri erau rudimentar construite, din bârne, industria era aproape inexistentă, iar agricultura, ocupația celei mai mari părți a populației României, se practica cu mijloace rudimentare. Și imaginea Bucureștilor diferea mult de aceea pe care ar fi trebuit să o aibă capitala unei țări, fie ea chiar de la porțile Orientului – străzile centrale „pavate cu bârne”, iar cele laterale nepavate, pline de praf sau de noroi, după anotimp, nu existau construcții mai răsărite, până și reședința domnitorului fiind într-o casă destul de modestă, ce aparținuse boierului Dinicu Golescu, iar majoritatea clădirilor erau mici, insalubre și construite haotic, fără un plan anume. La plecarea Regelui Carol I de pe scena politică românească, odată cu dispariția sa de pe scena vieții, România avea o întreagă rețea de căi ferate formată din linii principale și destule linii secundare, avea străzi pietruite și șosele, avea Bancă Națională și alte instituții bancare și de credit, avea un sistem monetar propriu, se produsese un promițător început în industrie prin apariția a numeroase fabrici ce exploatau imensele bogății ale solului și subsolului românesc. În planul politicii interne, unde Suveranul își impusese să fie un arbitru imparțial inițiind și încurajând sistemul rotativei guvernamentale, încercând să țină dreaptă balanța între cele două partide ce animau scena politică românească, Partidul Național Liberal și Partidul Conservator, reușise să asigure stabilitatea politică pe fondul căreia țara va obține importante succese economice și culturale. În politica externă, dovedindu-și calitățile de bun și înțelept diplomat, a reușit să transforme România într-un real factor de echilibru în Balcani, lucru dovedit cu prisosință în timpul războaielor balcanice din 1912-1913. Regele Carol I s-a preocupat de dezvoltarea și modernizarea învățământului românesc de toate gradele, a susținut înființarea Academiei Române și i-a încurajat activitatea, de multe ori cu fonduri provenind din caseta personală, așa cum, din aceeași sursă au provenit banii cu care s-a ridicat Fundația Universitară Carol I. Bucureștii au devenit cu adevărat capitală europeană fiind supranumită, pe bună dreptate, „Micul Paris” și fiind înfrumusețată cu clădiri ce au devenit emblematice pentru oraș, datorate talentului unor arhitecți francezi, germani, elvețieni, dar și unor arhitecți români de renume, provenind din școala stilului neoromânesc a lui Ion Mincu.

Din păcate, ultimul an de domnie, dar și de viață al Regelui Carol I, nu a fost unul liniștit, aducându-i multă amărăciune bătrânului suveran. În condițiile în care, majoritatea oamenilor politici și populația doreau alianța cu Antanta, statutul său de monarh constituțional și conștiința sa, l-au făcut, în ciuda convingerilor, simpatiiilor și legăturilor sale de sânge, să se plece în fața majorității, acceptând situația de neutralitate a României. Această dureroasă hotărâre care s-a adăugat

necruțătoarei sale boli, i-au grăbit însă sfârșitul survenit la 27 septembrie/ 10 octombrie 1914.