

Romania As Reflected in the Acts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire From the Outbreak of World War I Until the Conclusion of the Sazonov–Diamandy Agreement

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Taking into account its geographical position, its natural resources, and its active role on the international arena, Romania was of special interest to the Russian Empire.

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ROMANIAN-RUSSIAN relations have always had a contradictory nature or at least they have been treated this way in a number of historiographical papers. To comprehend their evolution is an even greater task, especially when particular tense situations or confrontations are tackled.

The outbreak of the War of Nations is precisely the case of such a situation and, moreover, the Russian historiography treated the then relationships between Romania and the Russian Empire in the most tendentious way. This fact made us revisit this subject, and we started by analyzing the documents issued by the Russian structures in charge of the relations between the Empire and an ally of the Entente.

In this regard, we will approach the series of events that started on 11 July 1914, when the diary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Em-

pire mentioned that the French Ambassador invited S. D. Sazonov, the British ambassador, and the representative of Romania to his residence, for breakfast and an exchange of opinions. Furthermore, the French ambassador urged the guests to immediately request their governments to develop a common action plan. This message was obviously passed on to the Romanian representative, the author of the diary stating that “it led to Romania’s involvement in a joint action, and for us it was convenient to draw Romania on our side and it is clear that, for Romania, it was an honor to equally participate in diplomatic actions alongside big nations.”²¹

The position of the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire towards Romania seems a little erroneous, as he stated that “it was an honor.” In our opinion, by using this qualifying phrase, he decreased the importance this country could have had. Actually, this fact was also confirmed by S. D. Sazonov, the minister of Foreign Affairs of Tsar Nicholas I, who, in his speech to the State Duma on 27 January 1915, showed that “the German influence in Romania has been rendering ignorant the people who have a faith and conscience similar to ours, decreasing our interests, both economic, due to our neighborhood, and political, considering that a large part of our fellow citizens are under Austro-Hungarian oppression. In relation to Bulgaria, for instance, although connected to us by special historic ties, Germany takes efforts to subdue it to its interests.”²²

Therefore, we don’t think that Romania’s position could have been overlooked, a thing proven by the abovementioned words of the Russian foreign minister, who clearly stated this position in his memoirs: “The issue about Romania’s involvement into the war divided the opinions of the Entente members. In the opinion of the Petrograd Soviet, the goal of the Alliance’s policy was to break the ties between Romania and the Central Powers, and that would have guaranteed its neutrality, rather than its active participation in the war. Because of its natural resources, Romania was a strong economic power in Southeast Europe. It became a key actor during the war as a cereals and oil supplier—assets that Germany and Austria acutely needed. To deprive our enemy of the Romanian products became my major concern, and for this service the imperial government was ready to pay Romania a big price.”²³

It is precisely for these reasons that Romania was instantly involved into the diplomatic actions of the Russian imperial court, and on 14 July 1914 the diary of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs related: “The Romanian Minister Plenipotentiary informed Baron Schilling that in the reply to a telegram he had sent to Bucharest after being asked by S. D. Sazonov to invite Romania to join the states making an appeal to Vienna to extend the deadline of the ultimatum imposed to Serbia, Brătianu stated that on such short notice the request could

not be fulfilled. Brătianu also informed Diamandy of the statement made by the Austrian representative in Bucharest, according to whom Austria-Hungary was not looking for a territorial expansion towards Serbia, and even if it had to occupy the Serbian territory with military support, it would be only temporary.⁴

The secretary of the chancellery objected to that answer, claiming that those statements were not quite trustworthy, especially with regard to Austria, which, given the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had showed the entire world what it understood by the temporary occupation of a territory. Therefore, Baron Schilling reminded Mr. Diamandy of his own words during his journey to the Hungarian territories, namely, that Serbia and Romania's interests were identical and forced Romania to be on Serbia's side should the latter be attacked by Austria-Hungary—thus pressuring the Romanian diplomat in an attempt to bring Romania closer to Russia and the Entente.⁵ The Romanian plenipotentiary did not disavow his words; on the contrary, he declared that he would defend his position and, moreover, he wished that the Serbian-Austrian conflict would not turn into a war, since Romania could find itself in a difficult situation.⁶

From 12 July to 16 July, there was an intense correspondence between the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, Stanislas Poklevsky-Koziell, and the head of the Russian diplomacy. They sought to make the leadership of the Romanian state, namely, I. I. C. Brătianu, aware of a potential conflict, and of the benefits to be received if Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary.

At long last, on 16 July, S. D. Sazonov requested the Russian minister plenipotentiary in Bucharest to demand in a categorical and imperative manner that Brătianu define Romania's position, suggesting that if it went against Austria, certain benefits would come forward. It was specified, on the following day, that should it fight against Austria-Hungary, the unification of Romanian and Transylvania would take place (under the auspices of the Russian Empire, which also promised the Allies' support).⁷

For the Russian diplomatic bodies, the situation was still uncertain, although the Russian representative Poklevsky stated on 18 July that voices in Bucharest and in the press claimed Romania would join the Triple Alliance, should a conflict emerge. The Russian diplomat did indicate, however, that he was not yet ready to draw a conclusion or to formulate a hypothesis, but nevertheless, he did not believe that Romania "could act treacherously."⁸

Romania's uncertainty was also aggravated by a series of pressures on the Russian ministry of Foreign Affairs and other states. Thus, on 19 July, the Russian ambassador in Paris, Mr. Izvolsky, declared that Raymond Poincaré had requested the disclosure to Romania of the possibility of uniting with Transylvania, in exchange of not siding with Austria-Hungary.⁹ The same concerns came from Belgrade, where the Russian diplomacy, relying on the information

submitted by M. G. Ristić, the Serbian plenipotentiary in Bucharest, stated that the issue of Romania joining the Central Powers was almost solved, the main role having been played by King Carol.¹⁰

In the meantime, Germany declared war on the Russian Empire and Romania was then facing another issue: the position of Bulgaria and being its potential target. The Russian minister of Foreign Affairs issued a pessimistic note with regard to Romania, informing the Russian diplomacy in Paris that lately there had been doubts concerning Romania's safety and that even the proposal referring to Transylvania did not lead to any agreements with Romania.¹¹

Nevertheless, the intercessions of the Russian diplomacy with the Romanian president of the Council of Ministers continued. He was informed that Transylvania's return to Romania was not only a desire expressed by the Russian Empire, but also by France.

When, on 21 July, Poklevsky stated that Austrian and German diplomats had demanded Romania's involvement into the war on their side, guaranteeing security on Bulgaria's side and the cession of Bessarabia, where there were no military units, and had indicated that a declaration of neutrality could be interpreted as hostile towards the Central Powers,¹² S. D. Sazonov contacted the Russian ambassadors in Paris and London, requesting that the representatives of France and the United Kingdom state that: they agreed with the concessions proposed by Russia should Romania actively cooperate with Russia against Austria; for as long as Romania actively sided with Russia against Austria-Hungary, the United Kingdom and France would treat as an enemy any state that might attack Romania.¹³

Nevertheless, the concern about Romania joining the Central Powers was still present and the Russian ambassador in Rome informed the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Antonio di San Giuliano was certain that Romania would join Austria against the Entente, since that was the king's will. This information was supported by the information sent by the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, via a secret telegram, on 2 August, showing that the Italian ambassador explicitly confirmed that Romania had concluded a written agreement with Austria, which would expire in two years.¹⁴

Finally, on 20 August, Poklevsky reported that while discussing with I. I. C. Brătianu, he had found out that the latter was ready to guarantee Romania's neutrality throughout the entire conflict in exchange of an assurance (agreement) that after the end of the war, Romania would receive all the territories inhabited by a Romanian majority that were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nobody was to find out about that proposal issued by the president of the Council of Ministers, not even the king or anyone from among the Allies, at least not until the conclusion of such an agreement. A few days later, on 26

August, the same source stated that Brătianu had reiterated his proposal, adding that under certain circumstances, Romania could even enter the war against the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy.¹⁵

On 1 September, Poklevsky requested the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to put forward a proposal to Romania to occupy that part of Bukovina that was inhabited by Romanians as an indication of the Russian Empire's favorable position towards Romania.¹⁶ Subsequently, on 3 September, S. D. Sazonov sent the Russian representative in Bucharest a telegram:

By occupying a part of Bukovina, Russia took the first step to free those territories from under Austrian occupation, a freedom much desired by both Russians and Romanians. In light of this fact, the Imperial Government again addressed the Royal Government, making an appeal to join it in the fulfilment of the same goal and proposed to occupy with no delay Southern Bukovina and Transylvania.

The distribution of the Russian and Romanian armies in Bukovina had to be made subsequent to the agreement reached by the Chiefs of Staff, ensuing specifically from military interests. This would not hamper the upcoming partition by the Governments, based on the ethnic composition of the population.¹⁷

It is a known fact that those proposals were rejected, Romania maintaining its neutrality. Therefore, on 9 September, Sazonov declared that, for its neutrality, until the war ended the most they could guarantee to Romania was the promise made by the three major powers to recognize the union of Transylvania with Romania, if that did not demand any special military actions from their side in order to occupy that territory. In the meantime, Poklevsky had sent some information from Bucharest, claiming that the Central Powers had promised Romania a special status for Transylvania, some adjustments to the borders with Bukovina, as well as the entire Bessarabia, and its borders defended by a state that was to be a vassal to Germany and Austria—the Grand Ukrainian Principality. He also mentioned that the Kaiser William had promised King Carol during his last visit to Germany that in 20 years Transylvania would be Romanian.¹⁸

Forced by the circumstances, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to act fast. Thus, on 13 September, the head of the Russian diplomacy proposed the text of the agreement between the Russian Empire and Romania and, on 15 September, Poklevsky announced that Brătianu had accepted to sign the agreement. The procedure for the signing of the agreement is described in minute detail in the diary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which related on 20 September:

On 16 September, the Romanian Minister Plenipotentiary, Mr. Diamandy, visited the Minister and declared he was empowered to sign the note in the format proposed [see Annex 1 (in Russian)]. The Minister said that during the discussion he had had on the eve with his Majesty the King, the latter had approved the signature of the notes, suggesting that those should contain the obligations of both parties. In addition to that, some words that didn't have great importance were slightly changed. Diamandy declared he could sign the note with the changes that had been introduced. After his departure, an accompanying note [see Annex 2 (in Russian)] was prepared to be signed by the Romanian Government, together with the first note. Consequently, the Minister asked the Romanian Plenipotentiary on the phone to come back and handed him the accompanying note. Probably, Diamandy was discontented with the addition and, claiming he had no instructions on signing an accompanying note, suggested telegraphing Brătianu, in order to request further instructions. In the opinion of Sazonov, Diamandy was extremely bothered by the restrictions ensuing from the accompanying note.¹⁹

The opposition and refusal of Constantin Diamandy made both the Russian diplomatic apparatus and Sazonov review their positions and drop the accompanying note. For these reasons, the Romanian minister plenipotentiary received a call asking him to return to the MFA, but that happened on the following day, on 17 September. After a discussion with the Romanian diplomat, Schilling related:

Diamandy started speaking and it turned out he was indeed very upset about yesterday's conversation with the Minister. He expressed his doubts that our new proposal would be accepted by Bucharest, pointing to the fact that our proposal to sign the accompanying note proved our mistrust towards Romania and that the additional note demanded from Romania the promise to allow the smuggling of weapons. Probably Diamandy first became upset when Sazonov told him about the accompanying note—I assume this does not come from you—Sazonov replying in a tough manner: "Mister Plenipotentiary, beware, you are walking on thin ice." And then, when Diamandy started to complain about the accompanying note, he was again shaken when Sazonov told him that he did not care about his opinion, but about Brătianu's, to whom he had to send the text. As a result, Diamandy stated that "I am not a message-bearer to the Imperial Government, but only to mine. Your message-bearer in Bucharest is Poklevsky." Diamandy thought that adding an annex to the main note would stir an unpleasant response in Bucharest and could even make Brătianu renounce his intention to sign the agreement . . . that response could have a huge impact on Brătianu, and all the agreements signed in

*Constanța might be annulled; Diamandy explained to us that we had taken a step back compared to the agreements reached in Constanța, and that even if Brătianu delegated him to sign the accompanying note, he would hand in his resignation rather than sign such a paper.*²⁰

The opposition of the Romanian minister plenipotentiary made the Russian diplomacy review the signing and the accompanying note. Thus, during the discussions with Constantin Diamandy, the secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire indicated that there was no intention to sign both documents simultaneously, but only the key one. Although the Romanian representative disagreed, stating that there were new circumstances, nevertheless, after a three-hour discussion, he was convinced that the final answer would come the following day. S. D. Sazonov was informed of the same thing. He agreed to that position and subsequently the Romanian representative received the same information by phone. Constantin Diamandy went to the MFA of the Russian Empire on the following day, where the notes (the agreement) were exchanged, having the date of the previous day.²¹ The Russian side decided that Poklevsky would inform Brătianu about the remark concerning the word “to oppose” at point 1, as well as about the explanation of the word “favorable” used in connection to Romania’s neutrality.

Accordingly, the diary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs related:

On 1 October, at 6 PM, the representative of Romania paid me a visit and informed me that he had recently received a telegram from Bucharest, in which Brătianu communicated to him that on the eve Poklevsky had passed on the package from Petrograd and had also enclosed a letter, or rather a note in which he explained his wrong wording of the term “to oppose” and our explanation concerning Romania’s “favorable neutrality.” According to Diamandy, that note, especially its last part that referred to neutrality, had had a negative impact on Brătianu, to such extent that Brătianu was wondering if an agreement had indeed been reached. He considered that he could not accept the note of Stanislas Poklevsky-Koziell, telling Diamandy to inform Sazonov about that, suggesting that if we do insist on it being accepted, then the agreement should be deemed as void . . .

To the question whether Poklevsky acted in line with the directions from Petrograd, I replied that indeed, he had the task to issue a written intercession concerning our interpretation of the term “to oppose,” since we don’t want in any way to give you illusions, even if those illusions would be helpful for us; especially, bearing in mind the year 1877, we would not want potential misunderstandings to arise again.

Concerning our interpretation of the Romanian “favorable neutrality,” Poklevsky was not told in which form he should have sent Brătianu our interpretation. Probably, Poklevsky thought that the written form would be appropriate, but I am convinced that our side would not insist on this very format. Therefore, I suggested Diamandy to telegram Brătianu, telling him that Poklevsky had been ordered to notify on the following: that we understand the phrase “favorable neutrality” as expecting Romania to facilitate the supply of Serbia and, at the same time, to forbid the states who were suspected of supporting the enemies of the Entente from using Romania’s warehouses and roads.²²

At last, after the discussion between Constantin Diamandy and Baron Schilling, it was decided that I. I. C. Brătianu’s response should not be communicated to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S. D. Sazonov. The Romanian minister plenipotentiary had to telegram Bucharest to explain what the Russian side understood by “willing neutrality,” while the chancellor of the MFA had to “propose S. D. Sazonov to telegram Poklevsky to confirm the need to issue a written explanation of the word ‘to oppose,’ and to prepare a verbal explanation related to the second part of the message, in order to get a verbal answer from Brătianu, as formulated by me. Therefore, an end was put to that new incident, and after the discussion Sazonov agreed to telegram Poklevsky.”²³

Thus, indeed, the incident was solved, and the Sazonov–Diamandy agreement remained in force, establishing the relations between Romania and the Russian Empire.

THE MEMOIRS and the documentary data analyzed here show that Soviet and, later on, Russian qualifying statements were totally groundless, since one of the goals of the Imperial Russian diplomacy was to preserve at least Romania’s neutrality status. Taking into account its geographical position, its natural resources, and its active role on the international arena, Romania was of special interest to the Russian Empire. As for the diplomatic efforts of the two states, overall they would eventually reach their goals, given that the Russian Empire obtained Romania’s neutrality guarantee, while Romania, should the Entente win, would have obtained the recognition of the incorporated territories inhabited by Romanians, which were part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

Annex 1

Нота министра иностранных дел румынскому посланнику в Петрограде Диаманди.

1 октября/18 сентября 1914 г.

Mr. le ministre,

A la suite des pourparlers qui ont eu lieu entre nous, j'ai l'honneur de vous faire la déclaration suivante :

La Russie s'engage à s'opposer à toute atteinte au statu quo territorial de la Roumanie dans l'étendue de ses frontières actuelles.

Elle s'engage également à reconnaître à la Roumanie le droit d'annexer les régions de la monarchie Austro-Hongroise habitées par des Roumains. Pour ce qui a trait spécialement à la Bukovine, le principe de la majorité de la population servira de base à la délimitation des territoires à annexer soit par la Russie, soit par la Roumanie. Cette délimitation sera effectuée à la suite d'études spéciales sur les lieux. Une commission mixte sera nommée à cet effet, munie d'instructions qui s'inspireront de l'esprit de conciliation qui anime les deux gouvernements.

La Roumanie pourra occuper les territoires susindiqués au moment qu'elle jugera opportun.

La Russie s'emploiera à faire ratifier les engagements ci-dessus par les Cabinets de Londres et de Paris.

En échange de ce qui précède la Roumanie de son côté s'engagera à observer, jusqu'au jour où elle occupera les régions de la monarchie Austro-Hongroise habitées par des Roumains, une neutralité bienveillante à l'égard de la Russie.

Il est entendu que la présente déclaration sera tenue secrète jusqu'au moment de l'annexion par la Roumanie des territoires dont il est question.

Veillez etc.

S a z o n o w.

Перевод.

Г. посланник,

Ссылаясь на происходившие между нами переговоры, имею честь сделать вам следующую декларацию:

Россия обязуется противодействовать всякой попытке нарушить территориальный status quo Румынии в пределах ее настоящих границ.

Она равным образом принимает на себя обязательство признать за Румынией право присоединить населенные румынами области Австро-Венгерской монархии. Что касается специально Буковины, то принцип большинства населения будет служить основанием для разграничения территорий, которые должны быть присоединены или к России, или к Румынии. Это разграничение будет проведено после специального изучения вопроса на месте. С этой целью будет назначена смешанная комиссия, которая будет снабжена инструкциями, составленными в примирительном духе, одушевляющем оба правительства.

Румыния может занять означенные выше территории в момент, который она сочтет удобным.

Россия возьмет на себя получение от лондонского и парижского кабинетов ратификации указанных выше обязательств.

Взамен за вышеизложенное Румыния, со своей стороны, обязуется соблюдать до того дня, когда она займет населенные румынами области Австро-Венгерской монархии, доброжелательный нейтралитет в отношении России.

Условлено, что настоящая декларация останется секретной до момента присоединения Румынией территорий, о которых идет речь.

Примите и пр.

Сазонов.

Annex 2

Проект добавления к ноте Сазонова.

Pour éviter tout malentendu le soussigné Mr. Sazonow, ministre des affaires étrangères, croit devoir préciser que l'engagement contenu dans sa note du... de s'opposer à toute atteinte au statu quo territorial actuel de la Roumanie implique pour la Russie une action diplomatique et non pas une action militaire.

En outre Mr. Sazonow croit devoir ajouter que la neutralité bienveillante que la Roumanie s'engage à observer aux conditions spécifiées dans la note précitée, implique :

1) Le concours amical du gouvernement roumain à la Russie en tout ce qui concerne la guerre actuelle et tant que ce concours n'exige pas une action militaire que la Roumanie reste libre de n'entreprendre que si elle le juge opportun.

2) La prohibition par le gouvernement roumain de tout passage par son territoire de combattants ou de personnel affecté à des services techniques militaires ainsi que toute exportation ou transit d'articles considérés comme contrebande, de guerre à destination des pays en guerre avec la Russie et ses alliés ou des pays dont l'attitude dans le présent conflit est encore incertaine.

3) La concession de toutes facilités pour le transit de matériel de guerre et d'approvisionnement venant de Russie et destiné à la Serbie.

Перевод.

Во избежание всякого недоразумения нижеподписавшийся г. Сазонов, министр иностранных дел, считает долгом разъяснить, что заключающееся в его ноте от... обязательство противодействовать всякой попытке нарушения нынешнего территориального status quo Румынии влечет для России принятие мер дипломатического воздействия, а не военное выступление.

Помимо того, г. Сазонов считает нужным добавить, что доброжелательный нейтралитет, который Румыния обязуется соблюдать на условиях, изложенных в указанной выше ноте, включает:

1) Дружественное содействие румынского правительства России во всем, что касается нынешней войны, поскольку это содействие не вызывает военных действий,

которые Румыния сохраняет право начать лишь в случае, если она сочтет это целесообразным.

2) Запрещение румынским правительством всякого транзита через свою территорию комбатантов или персонала, входящего в состав военно-технической службы, а равно вывоз и транзит предметов, признаваемых за военную контрабанду, если они предназначаются для стран, находящихся в войне с Россией и ее союзниками, или для стран, отношение которых к настоящему конфликту еще не выяснилось.

3) Предоставление всякого рода льгот для транзита предметов военного снаряжения и снабжения, идущих из России и предназначенных для Сербии.

Международные отношения в эпоху империализма. Документы из архивов царского и временного правительства 1878-1917. Серия 3. 1914–917. Том 6, часть 1: 341–344.



Notes

1. С. В. Лавров, В. Г. Титов, and А. И. Кузнецов, eds., *Министерство иностранных дел России в годы Первой мировой войны: Сборник документов* (Тула, Изд.: Акварис, 2014), 26.
2. *Ibid.*, 206.
3. С. Д. Сазонов, *Воспоминания* (Москва: Издательство Международные Отношения, 1991), 162.
4. М. Е. Schilling (1872–1934), senator and secretary of the Chancellery of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire.
5. Лавров, Титов, and Кузнецов, 28.
6. *Ibid.*
7. М. Н. Покровский and Я. А. Березин, eds., *Международные отношения в эпоху империализма. Документы из архивов царского и временного правительства 1878-1917, Серия 3. 1914–917, Том 3, Государственное социально-экономическое издательство* (Москва/Ленинград, 1934), 206–207.
8. *Ibid.*, 304–306.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 346.
11. *Царская Россия в мировой войне. Сборник материалов и документов, Том 1* (Ленинград: Издательство Центархив, 1925), 150.
12. *Ibid.*, 152. This very telegram of the Russian plenipotentiary shows the pessimism of the Romanian politicians and illustrates the words of Take Ionescu, who stated that “Romania is dead anyway, since, regardless of its decisions, it would be either wiped off the map or turned into something like a Russian or Hungarian governorate.”
13. Покровский and Березин, Том 6, часть 1: 34.

14. *Царская Россия в мировой войне*, 154.
15. Ibid., 156–159.
16. Ibid., 160.
17. Ibid., 161.
18. Ibid., 164.
19. Лавров, Титов, and Кузнецов, 35.
20. Покровский and Березин, 343–344.
21. Лавров, Титов, and Кузнецов, 36.
22. Ibid., 37–38.
23. Ibid., 38–39.

Abstract

Romania As Reflected in the Acts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire: From the Outbreak of World War I Until the Conclusion of the Sazonov–Diamandy Agreement

The topic proposed for analysis stems from a number of erroneous statements of the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian historiography referring to Romania's neutrality in the early years of the First World War. Therefore, we have brought to light some information originating from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire, in an attempt to identify the true interests and the backstage diplomatic games that took place during this period, as well as the position of various officials, concerning one issue or another, emerging as a result of the position taken by Romania. The data comes from documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and mainly from the daily journal of this institution.

Keywords

World War I, Romania, Russian Empire, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Transylvania