

The Entry of Romania into the War of National Unification As Reflected in *Le Figaro*, August 1916

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Le Figaro, 29 August 1916

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THE FIRST World War represented a turning point in the history of Europe and that of the world. Romania became involved in it after two years of neutrality, joining the Entente in order to free its territories still under foreign domination. On 4/17 August 1916, the documents based on which Romania would adhere to the Entente were signed “in the deepest secrecy . . . in the house of Vintilă Brătianu,” and then, on 14/27 August 1916, Romania decided to declare war on Austria-Hungary.¹

In this paper we analyze the way in which *Le Figaro* perceived and presented the entry of Romania into the World War, in 1916.

After a delay caused by the state of the mass media at that time—not a long one, if one considers the fact that the declaration of war was made public on the evening of 27 August—the newspaper *Le Figaro* announced, in its issue of 29 August 1916, the entry of Romania into the World War. The front page of the newspaper was fully reserved to this event.

The first article of the newspaper was entitled “The Romanian Intervention: The Declaration of War on Austria-Hungary” and it began by stating that, more important than the military consequences, this declaration of war contained a moral message, namely, the achievement of the national interests “of a noble country” in opposition to the German decay. It was increasingly clear that Germany would lose the war, which, according to the author of the article, Alfred Capus, a member of the French Academy, had already entered its final stage. The Romanian intervention came to strengthen the belief that Germany would be eventually defeated. It was the responsibility of the French leaders to take the most appropriate military decisions in order to put an end to the war as soon as possible.²

The second article, entitled “The Declaration of War,” signed by A. Fitz-Maurice, highlighted the fact that this document had been adopted by the Crown Council chaired by King Ferdinand himself on Sunday, 27 August 1916. Furthermore, several significant details were provided. The meeting had been attended by other members of the government, former prime ministers and several heads of the political parties, including the Germanophile Alexandru Marghiloman, as well as the Entente supporters, Take Ionescu and Nicolae Filipescu. The declaration of war had been immediately telegraphed to the Romanian minister in Vienna, who further notified it to the Austro-Hungarian government. Baron Burián, minister of Foreign Affairs, made the event public in the following terms: “In a note submitted this evening by the minister of Romania, the Romanian government considers itself to be in a state of war with the Monarchy, starting today, Sunday, 27 August, in the evening.”³

The author stated that the event, which was fervently desired by everyone and had become predictable for several days, and which was considered inevitable and necessary by some people, had become a *fait accompli*. “Mr. Brătianu proved that he was fully aware of the interests and of the legitimate aspirations of his country. King Ferdinand kept the promise made on the occasion of his enthronement, namely, to always be a loyal and constitutional sovereign, as well as a Romanian.”⁴

The author considered the moment to be of utmost importance, second only to Italy’s entry into the war on 21 May 1915. The same importance was given to this declaration of war in Berlin, where the Federal Council was immediately summoned. The information came from German sources, i.e. Wolff Telegraphic Bureau and the *North-German Gazette*. The latter publication had been warning its readers for over three weeks that the Romanian government would act realistically and that they would decide whether to take part in the conflict or not only after having seriously considered the military situation. The Romanian intervention was to be interpreted as an indicator of the certain future victory of the Entente. The same idea was transmitted by the *Frankfurt Gazette*, a jour-

nal published in Paris, which noted among other things that: “It is clear that Brătianu has joined the Entente, and that he could do this without being in fatal danger, so that it may be beneficial to Romania.”²⁵

The author noticed the similarities between the entry of Romania into the war and that of Italy. Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary, just like Italy, Romania had previously been part of the Austro-Hungarian camp, similarly to Italy, and entered the war in order to free several of its territories occupied by the dual monarchy, just like Italy. The publication showed the fact that Romania’s alliance with the Central Powers had been kept secret until it became public knowledge following the declaration of war. Only prime ministers had been informed of it by King Charles, upon taking office, but they considered it primarily a personal connection of the old king and not a firm commitment of the Romanian state. As a matter of fact, as the same newspaper highlighted, when the war broke out back in 1914, the Crown Council refused any Romanian involvement in the conflict.

Under the new conditions, the Treaty between Romania and the Triple Alliance became null and void. In fact, it had represented a simple declaration of support by Romania. A note submitted to Vienna by the Romanian minister indicated that, when attacking Serbia in 1914, the Central Powers had violated the defensive nature of the informal alliance, which released Romania from any agreement. This argument had been also used by Italy in their declaration of war in the previous year.

The French newspaper further stated that the Romanian declaration of war enumerated “the persecutions and violent acts suffered by its nationals under the dual monarchy, showing that it could not remain indifferent to these calls of the oppressed. Austria proved unable to improve their condition and, as a result, Romania’s only option was to stand alongside *the powers that could help it in its mission of emancipation.*” The article concluded that it was not only a declaration of war, but it also represented the adhesion of Romania to the Entente. Therefore, “it was merely a matter of time before one heard the news that the Romanian armies had crossed the Carpathians and entered Transylvania.”²⁶

On this occasion, *Le Figaro* presented the congratulatory telegrams sent by the President of the French Republic, Raymond Poincaré, and by Aristide Briand, president of the Council of Ministers of France, addressed simultaneously to Italy and to Romania, respectively, after their declarations of war on Germany. In the telegram addressed “À Sa Majesté le roi de Roumanie, Bucharest,” Poincaré made direct reference to the national interests of Romania when entering the war by writing: “In this moment, when the Romanian people, by answering the call of the oppressed brethren, have entered the glorious path that leads to the fulfillment of their national aspirations, I am sending my warm

wishes to His Majesty and to His noble country, on behalf of France.”⁷ In his turn, A. Briand sent the following telegram to Ion I. C. Brătianu:

The whole French nation applauded the declaration whereby Romania courageously took its place among the defenders of law and civilization.

I am happy to be their spokesperson and that of the Government of the Republic in conveying to you my warmest congratulations.

*In this moment, when your noble country has committed this great liberating act, I have no doubt that our joint efforts for the triumph of law and civilization will ensure not only the victory of the Allies, but will also allow Romania to achieve its national aspirations.*⁸

Polybe (probably a penname) published a very consistent article entitled “From the Tiber to the Danube.” In his analysis, he started from the recent events, noting that through the action of the two countries “The Latin Union asserts itself. The Holy Entente of the peoples is expanding.”⁹ The author made a parallel between the situation of Italy and that of Romania, highlighting the similarities between the reasons that had led to the entry of the two countries into the conflict. There followed a brief historical analysis of the Romanian-French relations, which underlined the contribution of Napoleon III to the establishment of the Hohenzollern dynasty on the throne in Bucharest. The author did not omit to mention the friendship between Mrs. Cornu and the French king, the Sigmaringen family, and Brătianu. Furthermore, reference was made to the strong connections between Romania and the German environment, considering especially the fact that “the king of Prussia has always been like ‘the head of the household’ to King Charles.”¹⁰

It was particularly these reasons and others, of political and economic nature, be them “good or bad,” which had led to the signing of the secret treaty with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1883, and five years later with Italy. The author appreciated that, although this treaty had been renewed every ten years, it was legally null and void because it had not been formally submitted to parliamentary ratification. However, the politicians took into account the document, since it had a defensive character. When, at the beginning of the war, King Charles had convened the Crown Council and proposed to end any cooperation with Russia, just one participant approved. The king threatened with abdication, but Lahovary replied: “We have confidence in the Crown Prince.” The king understood the hint; yet, he passed away soon after.

In the French newspaper it was highlighted that the war started by the Germanic empires would instantly raise the issue of the alienated territories of Romania, namely, Transylvania and Bukovina, cruelly oppressed by Austria-

Hungary. These provinces were paying a heavy price for a war they detested. The geo-strategic situation of Romania was not an enviable one. If Italy was defended by two seas and high mountains, Romania, due to the Danube River, “was practically the perfect prey offered to the armies of the Germanic empires and those of Bulgarians.” Therefore, the timing of the entry into the war was as important as the beauty of the cause and represented the main element likely to bring victory, as Romania had calculated so well.

In the author’s opinion, Brătianu had made the right calculations, just as Cardinal Richelieu, who, in an important moment in French history, had skillfully waited for the right moment that would bring victory against the great European powers of his time. “Thus, one can state that Mr. Brătianu has kept Romania ‘in storage’ for more than two years for the Entente, instead of taking a premature initiative that might have led to the Germans not only destroying a beautiful army, but also to their taking over one of the richest granaries of the world, and one of the largest suppliers of oil.”¹¹

The actions of Nicolae Filipescu, of Take Ionescu and of other Entente supporters, which had already gained the gratitude of the French, were followed by the involvement of the taciturn Brătianu. If a German had claimed, just one day before, that “Romania has joined the winning side,” the French publication appreciated that the decision of Romania to enter the war was a response to the emotional cry for help of the territories “inhabited by more than four million Romanians to whom the Romanian nation responded, at a moment when fate expected victory.”¹²

The article ended with the conclusion that the Romanian case resembled the general European situation of the peoples longing for peace and national liberation against the order that the Germans wanted to establish on the continent. The newspaper article was also accompanied by a map of the Kingdom of Romania and of the Romanian territories which at the time belonged to the neighboring empires.

ANOTHER ARTICLE, entitled “Recollections from Romania,” was devoted to Queen Mary and represented a fragment of the portrait the actress Suzanne Desprès had made during her visit to Romania in May 1915. She noted that “Queen Mary will certainly play an indisputable role in her country’s participation in the war on the Allied side.”¹³ She noted that “there was a rumor” in Bucharest according to which, from the beginning of the war, the queen had loved France and wanted the victory of humanity. It was no secret to anyone that the queen had inspired important decisions, given her dedication, responsibility, and beauty. The Romanians were proud of her beauty and would wait for her to ride her horse “down the road.” The author herself could

witness the charm of Her Majesty at a meeting of the most beautiful women in Bucharest. “Beauty and reason lead the ship,” declared Mrs. Antonescu, the wife of the Minister of Justice. It was clear to everyone that the “Queen is watching!”

She watched over her people with constant care, she went to hospitals in the suburbs, tending to contagious patients, and was close to the peasants’ problems. The queen also loved art, inviting foreign artists to Cotroceni Palace and asking them to recite lines from the Belgian poets, her favorites. The author could not forget the farewell party organized in a salon where the queen “brought together the diplomatic and military representatives in Bucharest” and shone through her erudition. When referring to the World War and to Germany, Her Majesty concluded: “This king was cruel and overlooked three sensitive aspects: the pressure of the Russian vodka, the unity of England with Ireland and its colonies, as well as this extraordinary, beautiful and vivacious rebirth of the French soul which saves the world.”¹⁴ The queen did not need to say more. The author of the article was not going to repeat those words until the right moment, and the right moment had arrived.

The last article was entitled “Before and After the Declaration of War” and it began by describing the last day of peace in Romania. “Although not unexpected, the official news of the summoning of the Crown Council at Cotroceni Palace in Bucharest, on Sunday, at 10 a.m., produced enormous excitement. The Germanophiles were bewildered. The Crown Council included 19 people; as expected, no more than four or six of these members were to speak against entering the war and were in favor of maintaining neutrality. The decision of the Council was not known until the evening.”¹⁵ The article also comprised a fragment from the newspaper *Adevărul* that commented on the event.¹⁶

The declaration of war on Austria-Hungary was considered an unavoidable fact in Bucharest. An example of this belief was considered to be the neutral newspaper *Minerva*, which had foreseen the forthcoming military intervention in one of its articles: “We do not dare to hope that the war will spare Romania. Everybody expects that our moment will soon come.”

Under the subtitle “Supreme German Efforts,” the French publication described the last attempts of the German minister in Bucharest to seek a reconciliation with King Ferdinand. During his audience with the king, the diplomat from Berlin highlighted the good relations between the two countries and handed to the Romanian monarch a handwritten letter from Kaiser Wilhelm II. Nevertheless, this intervention could not change anything in the resolution of the Crown Council. The German Legation had predicted this failure and had even suggested to the German residents in Romania to quickly settle their affairs so that they may be ready to leave the country on the first signal.

The hostility of the Romanian public against the Central Power had steadily risen and became extreme after they learned that the German minister had created a spy network in Romania, in order to decipher Russian telegrams. Three officials that were broadcasting diplomatic correspondence were arrested.

The cited publication also indicated that the German authorities had requested another delivery of grain from Romania and were expecting an answer on 28 August. The Romanian answer came indirectly through its declaration of war on 27 August.

Another subtitle of the article, “Romanian Aspirations in Transylvania and Bukovina,” referred to the aspirations of the Romanians living in Transylvania and Bukovina. It was estimated that Romania had at that moment a population of 7.9 million and that the number would rise to eight million people, due to Romanian refugees from Transylvania. The Transylvanian Romanians were united with the country “on the basis of a common language and of numerous historical and moral traditions, and represented large groups outside the borders of the kingdom, groups that were either heterogeneous or mixed with non-Romanian populations.”¹⁷ The newspaper indicated that most of the Romanians living outside the country’s borders were to be found in territories controlled by Austria, such as Bukovina, or incorporated into Hungary, such as Transylvania, Banat and Maramureş. Thus, the total number of Romanians exceeded 13 million.

Furthermore, the publication provided a brief but extremely accurate historical overview of the Romanian people. Romanian traditions found their roots in the conquest of Dacia by Trajan and in the later developments. Banat and Timișoara represented “precisely the old Dacia.” The “Romanized Geto-Dacians started to call themselves Romanians.” In the late thirteenth century, the Romanians founded small independent states that were to fight against the Hungarians. The Hungarians had begun to migrate into these areas since the ninth century. After that, the Romanians were forced to fight with the Turks. “Between 1320 and 1349, Basarab I founded the principality of Wallachia, and in 1360, Bogdan, the ruler of Maramureş (northern Transylvania), founded Moldavia. The union of these principalities in 1859 formed the core of current Romania, which comprised, among others, Dobruja and the mouths of the Danube, added to Romania after the Treaty of Berlin.”¹⁸

Regarding the two largest Romanian ethnic groups in Austria-Hungary, situated on both sides of the Carpathians and still not integrated in Romania, they had suffered a lot throughout their history: “The Romanians in Banat and Transylvania resisted the constant attempts at Hungarian assimilation, and those from Bukovina, at assimilation by Poles and Ruthenians.” The Romanians in these provinces had maintained their identity in terms of language and religion,

a fact clearly recorded and proven by official statistics. “Due to their Neo-Latin language, the Romanians have always stood apart from the neighboring peoples who spoke Slavic languages, such as Serbian, Slovak and Ruthenian, or from the Hungarians whose language is a Finno-Ugrian one from the same family as Turkish.” Furthermore, one could not overlook the fact that the Romanians were Orthodox (like the Greeks and the Russians), while the Hungarians were Roman Catholics, whereas the Ruthenians were mostly Uniate (a mixture between Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, according to the newspaper).

The ‘radiography’ performed in the article continued with a chapter dedicated to “The Romanian Army.” The Romanian army amounted to a total of 900,000 people, whose level of training was not a negligible one. According to the Romanian law of 1913, the term of military service was 25 years, for all Romanian citizens between 21 and 46 years of age, a period divided as follows: 7 years in the active service (of which at least 2 years in the infantry and three years in other branches of the service), 12 years in reserve and 6 years in the militia.

The structure of the Romanian army during peacetime was also presented in detail.¹⁹ Since the outbreak of the conflict, the number of the Romanian troops had fluctuated considerably, from 100,000 in July 1914, to 400,000 in September 1914, and to 150,000, in the winter between 1914 and 1915. In recent months there had been a noticeable increase in the number of reservists and of soldiers called ‘călărași.’ The publication estimated that nearly 900,000 people had been conscripted since the beginning of the war.²⁰

On the second page, under the title “In Paris,” the newspaper presented the reaction of the Parisians to Romania’s entry into the war. The article revealed extremely warm and favorable opinions: “The Parisians, who for more than eight days had been waiting each morning to find the news in their newspaper, received with great satisfaction the news of Romania’s entry into the war on the side of the Entente Powers. They kept their calm. There was no demonstration, but smiling faces everywhere were expressing a joy that should be emphasized.” The stock market reacted positively and, as a result, there was a rapid growth of the ruble. “On the avenues or terraces, newspapers were practically devoured and in all conversations everybody was speaking of nothing else than the new allies.”²¹ Romanian flags were even displayed on balconies, but not many, as they could not be immediately found. However, the publication estimated that they were to be soon manufactured.

The deep satisfaction of the Parisians was well illustrated in the evening papers. *Journal des Débats* wrote about the event of the day as follows: “Romania’s entering the war is an important piece of news and a certain guarantee of victory.” Romania joined the cause of the Allies and included on their list of reasons “the need to completely crush the Hungarians who will not accept,

even dead, the dismemberment of the kingdom where they had reigned over subjected peoples . . . The Central Empires had to take into account the 500,000 Romanian bayonets massed on the slopes of the Western Carpathians.” Romania’s entry into the war had shifted the balance of powers, both on the military and the moral level, in favor of the Allies.

Le Temps spoke about a clearer promise of victory for the Allies due to new tactical moves made by Romania and Italy or to the victories in Greece. In turn, *La Liberté* wrote that

Romania has decided to follow the Sacred Way, alongside her mother. A superb evocation of the times when, during Trajan’s Dacia, the Roman “eagles” would watch the barricades raised against the Goths, Heruli, Gepids, Vandals and other Germanic tribes.

The Balkan Romance people knew very well that their claims could only be satisfied alongside the Allies.

According to the German “Weltpolitik,” victory involved the gigantic plan of a railroad from Berlin to the Ganges, passing first through Bucharest before reaching Constantinople. The Danube was thus to become the second German “gem,” after the Rhine. According to the strategy of the Allies, alongside Serbia, a great, unified Romania was essential to ensure the equilibrium of Eastern Europe.

This was exactly what Romania understood and what it wanted. National aspirations triumphed over the family pact. The young king was led by the national goals and he prepared a beautiful destiny for his country, already outlined by the agreements reached with our Russian friends...²²

Additional information about Romania came in a piece entitled “Romania’s Entry into the War,” on the third page of the publication, in the section “The Press This Morning.” The newspaper *Le Gaulois* highlighted the fact that Romania had declared war only on Austria-Hungary, which meant “that Romania undertook, above all, a war of liberation.” The permission granted to the Russians to enter Dobruja was, in the opinion of this publication, a further indication of the intentions of the Romanian state. “Therefore, we should be patient and trust King Ferdinand and Mr. Brătianu, who have given us such a brilliant proof of loyalty.”²³ The Romanian intervention was interpreted in the terms in which it had been conducted, as being of considerable moral and military significance.

Le Petit Parisien made assumptions about the imminent Romanian-Russian military cooperation.²⁴ *L’Événement* considered that Germany still did not realize the “seriousness of the Romanian decision” and believed that Bucharest was guided by transient military considerations. In reality, Bucharest appreciated “that the empire of conquests and pride has been defeated. Its promises and

threats have been in vain. They have neither misguided nor intimidated anyone.”²⁵ *L’Action française* considered the Romanian initiative a “great event” and referred to the German newspapers that had previously warned about this possible attitude of Romania. Maximilian Harden’s assessments were repeated, namely that “Mr. Brătianu will join the Entente powers, since they will be able to ensure the final victory. The Romanians will be alongside the victors.”²⁶

After analyzing other reactions in France, *Le Figaro* concluded that there was unanimous satisfaction. The information provided came from the Bordeaux area. *Petite Gironde* seemed more optimistic about the final victory, due to “Romania’s adhesion, [coming] as a bright lightning.” *La France de Bordeaux et du Sud-Ouest* highlighted the European solidarity in the common struggle. *La Liberté du Sud-Ouest* mentioned that “Romania has joined the defenders of civilization. Honor to it.” *Le Nouvelliste* “was rejoicing in the long-awaited intervention of Romania.”²⁷

BY MEANS of a mirror presentation, *Le Figaro* also presented the external reactions. First came the German ones. According to the French newspaper, after Britain’s declaration of war on Germany, “no other event has produced so much consternation to the German public, who did not expect to see Romania entering the war. Such an event was considered unlikely by most knowledgeable political leaders, whereas the Minister of Foreign Affairs thought it was impossible. . . . The police set up security measures, particularly in the vicinity of the Romanian legation.”²⁸

Putting together the information provided in the successive issues of the newspaper, one can notice the different reactions occurred in several layers of the German society. The issue of 30 August pinpointed that, in Germany, the news of Romania’s declaration of war “fell like a true thunderbolt among the population of Berlin . . . Everywhere, on the streets, in trams, in omnibuses, indescribable consternation was on all faces.”²⁹

The section “Echoes” of the newspaper, dated 29 August 1916, presented the latest impressions of the *Berliner Tageblatt* correspondent in Bucharest. He reported the “great sadness of the seventy thousand Austro-Bochs that resided in Bucharest. They have not abandoned the joys of such a delightful city.” They all hoped for an aggressive offensive of Hindenburg on the Russian front, which was to save them. “The inhabitants of Bucharest precipitously withdrew to the countryside, whereas banks and savings banks were besieged” and, as a consequence, the Austro-Bochs finally “took the train.”³⁰

On the third page of the 29 August issue, the “Newsflash” column began by announcing that Germany had declared war on Romania. It was the thirtieth declaration of war since the start of the conflict, and it occurred on the 757th

day of war. The Romanian minister in Berlin was summoned in order to be notified of this fact. The gesture of Germany was motivated by the fact that Romania had broken the treaty with Austria-Hungary and, therefore, Germany was forced to be loyal to its ally. The Romanian minister was asked to end his diplomatic mission in the capital of Germany and to communicate to his government that Germany considered itself at war with Romania.³¹

In order to better describe Romanian-German relations, on the one hand, and because of the initial lack of German ‘hot’ reactions to the declaration of war by Romania, on the other hand, *Le Figaro* resumed, in its issue of 29 August, some of the initial assertions of the German media. Thus, on 24 July 1916, *Frankfurt Gazette* had considered that Romania’s attitude would be influenced by the military situation. It was clear that Brătianu would choose the side that was to emerge victorious. The Eastern Front was a veritable barometer that allowed analysts to decipher what position was going to be adopted by Romania. *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* had reached the same conclusion, as reflected in its issue of 26 July, stating that the outcome of the battles would decide the position of Romania. *Berliner Tageblatt* was discordant with the general opinion when claiming, on 26 July, that Romania’s attitude did not seem to suffer a major change “since the official Romanian circles were convinced that the war would last for a long time.” *Norddeutsche allgemeine Zeitung* wrote on 17 July that “Romania is waiting to see who is stronger, in order to make a decision.” The same position was shared by *Badische Landes-Zeitung*, in its 15 August issue: “We know that Romania will decide its position based only on military events, and it will act only when certain of the success of its interests.” The newspaper *Germania*, on 21 August, appreciated in a manner that was meant to be ironic that “we can be sure that Mr. Brătianu will gladly join the Entente Powers, if they could guarantee the final victory.” *Zukunft* repeated Bismarck’s assessments according to which Romania was in good relations with one power or another, “but in the last minute, in case everything collapses, it will have to become the ally of those powers whose victory seems more certain.” The legitimate question as to “Who will Romania ally with?” was answered “With the victor, for he alone is right.”³²

After the German media, *Le Figaro* surveyed the reactions of other European states. In the article “In Vienna: The Rupture,” the public was informed that the Romanian minister in Vienna had made his last diplomatic visit to Ballplatz, and on that occasion all diplomatic documents were withdrawn. The minister left the Austrian capital the next day, on a special train.³³

In Switzerland, the news of Romania’s entry into the war, as well as the Italian declaration, produced an enormous impression. The crowds would devour special editions and comment on the news. “Everyone considers the interven-

tion of Romania as a way to hasten the Allied victory.” *Gazette de Lausanne* stated that “due to the intervention of Romania, a new army of 400,000 people has just joined the battle,” in a move that had been expected for weeks. It was estimated that “the Romanian Army would undoubtedly be directed towards the border with Austria-Hungary.” *Journal de Genève* wrote that “the Romanian declaration of war had military consequences of utmost importance” and reiterated that “Romania will join the conflict only when the Allies are confident of their victory.” In Berne, the newspaper *Bund* insisted on the national considerations that had led to this decision of Romania and mentioned an observation, overlooked for strategic reasons by other publications, including *Le Figaro*, namely, that the Romanian state had “fellow nationals fighting in both camps.” It wondered whether the Romanians had made diplomatic attempts on the eastern front as well and concluded that “time will tell.” Welcoming the gesture of Romania, the publication hoped for higher quantities of Romanian oil delivered to Switzerland.³⁴

The news of Romania’s entry into the war produced “a tremendous feeling” in Spain as well, even if recent events had been announcing it. The supporters of Germany “still refused to believe it.” What impressed the most was “the idea that Romania had waited for so long, and that its statement in favor of the Allies meant that it was absolutely certain of their victory.” The Romanian intervention affected the balance of hope in the final victory, especially since it had been made simultaneously with the Italian declaration of war on Germany. The role of the French government and of Aristide Briand was considered essential in coordinating these two actions. A connection was also made with the actions of the Allies in Thessaloniki, the Spanish media stating that if the Allies had not occupied Thessaloniki, “the Romanian intervention would not have happened.”³⁵

In Greece, the reactions to the Romanian decision were also impressive. The news was announced in the evening of 28 August. It “was an indescribable feeling,” as there was a possibility of opening the borders for the Russian army stationed in Bessarabia. “People were running and shouting the news in the street, and Venizel groups were expressing their enthusiasm by shouting ‘Long live France! Long live the Allies! Long live Romania!’”³⁶ All media commented the decision of the Romanian government and unanimously considered it “a terrible blow to the German cause.” They also appreciated the wisdom of Brătianu, with the exception of one to two Germanophile journals that could not hide their consternation. They had hoped until the last moment for a turn-around, due to “the effect of German threats on Mr. Brătianu and on King Ferdinand.”³⁷

The Russian public reactions were also noticeable. Romania’s entry into the war triggered enthusiasm in the Russian capital, where a procession was organized. The people went to the Romanian legation shouting “Long live Romania!”³⁸

The section dedicated to the Austrian-Romanian front comprised information about the forthcoming Romanian-Russian military cooperation. The information was dated Bucharest, 27 August. The Russians had already moved closer to the Romanian borders and Russian troops were concentrated in Bukovina. In southern Bessarabia preparations were being made to set up mobile bridges over the Danube, in order to link it with Tulcea. The publication stated that “these were intended to prepare the future junction of the Russian armies with the Romanian one.”³⁹

The public was also informed that following their declaration of war on Austria-Hungary “the Romanians have entered the Transylvanian territory.” The source of the information was the *Petit Parisien*, which, in its turn, quoted the Austrian media. Austria communicated that “the new enemies” had already attacked the border, at Turnu Roșu and along the track leading to Brașov. The battles were to continue.⁴⁰ It was anticipated that the Romanian troops concentrated in Moldavia would cross the Carpathians from that direction. They also counted on the contact with the Russian forces in Bukovina. Even if the Carpathians were high, it was estimated that “Romanians would be able to advance through the valleys leading to the Hungarian plain.”⁴¹

The 30 August issue of *Le Figaro* provided further space to Romania’s entry into the war. They continued to write about external reactions, the Romanian military involvement, the military situation on the new front, new historical and ethnic details about the Romanian territories outside the national borders, and they also published the full text of the declaration of war. In the article “On Hungarian Tyranny and on the Romanians” it was stated that “the Romanians have gone to war in order to liberate their brethren in Transylvania.”⁴² Writing about the general mobilization in Romania, the newspaper reported “the great enthusiasm in the city [Bucharest], as well as in the rest of the country. Rallies have been organized in Constanța, Iași, Turnu-Severin, Giurgiu.”⁴³ News on Romania continued to be published in the following issue, although in a much smaller number. On 31 August, *Le Figaro* informed on the congratulatory telegrams of the British king and government, as well as on that of the Italian prime minister addressed to Ion I. C. Brătianu,⁴⁴ the actions of the Romanian troops in Transylvania,⁴⁵ the appointment of Vintilă I. Brătianu as Minister for War⁴⁶ and so forth.

OUR ANALYSIS highlights the way in which *Le Figaro* reflected the decision of Romania to enter the First World War. The impact was particularly strong. This newspaper, along with other publications of that time, considered the gesture of Romania as being a necessary and expected act that would shorten the war and would lead to the victory of the Allies. It also

highlighted the fact that Romania had entered the war in order to liberate its territories and fellow nationals under foreign rule.

The publication presented news that was familiar to Romanians, generally known facts which were assumed or expected, but what was interesting was the external point of view, the reports being made from the vantage point of foreigners. The texts of the articles were so favorable to Romania that they may create the impression that they had been written by a Romanian. A possible explanation for this feeling may reside in the correct manner of presenting reality and the historical truth. The authors of the cited articles benefited from high quality information sources, any historical or documentary inaccuracies being insignificant, a fact which demonstrates their professionalism.

In order to highlight the impact of the event on *Le Figaro* journalists and on the French media, it is sufficient to mention that the front page of the issue of 29 August 1916, the day when Romania's declaration of war became public in France, was exclusively reserved to our country. Of the six articles published on the front page, only one contained partial references to the declaration of war which Italy had addressed to Germany. On the second page of the newspaper, information and comments about the events in Romania amounted to approximately 60%, and nearly 40% of the contents of the third page was dedicated to the same event. In the above-mentioned issue of the publication, the topic of Romania's entry into the war was discussed in 13 articles and, as the newspaper had only four pages, one can consider that the 29 August 1916 edition was devoted to Romania.

The same situation was to be found in the following days, even if in smaller proportions. Thus, in the issue of 30 August 1916, we find nine important articles and several other references that account for about 40% of the content of the first page, and 50% of the content of the second page.

We consider the way *Le Figaro* journalists presented this event as being particularly significant in several respects. The articles highlighted the strategic importance of Romania's entry into the war, the value of its human, military and economic potential, the cultural and linguistic affinities that linked the two peoples, as well as the manner in which all these aspects were being perceived abroad.

It should be noted that *Le Figaro* also presented the views of other newspapers in France and in Europe. Thus, in the issues of 29 August and of 30 August 1916, they quoted information and comments from twelve other French newspapers, ten newspapers from Germany, four from Italy and Switzerland, three from Austria, two from Hungary and one from Spain and Denmark, respectively. We can therefore consider that *Le Figaro* provided a comprehensive view of the international media reactions to Romania's entry into the First World War.

Although the Romanian intervention was a predictable one, the Germans were the most surprised. The German press followed the general trend, with some exceptions coming from the top political echelons in Berlin and from one or two publications which either failed to decipher the intricacies of the political situation in Bucharest, or simply refused to accept it.

Immediately after the event, *Le Figaro* presented a huge amount of information about Romania. There was a deluge of news, in successive waves: the declaration of war, the opinion of the evening newspapers, *Breaking News*, *This Morning's Information*, the press in Paris, the press in France, foreign media etc.

Following our analysis, we consider that, 100 years after Romania's decision to enter World War I, we could better piece together the way in which this outstanding moment in our national history was perceived in one of the most important European capitals and in a country which has been a great friend of Romania.



Notes

1. Gheorghe Platon, ed., *Istoria românilor*, vol. 7, tome 2, *De la Independență la Marea Unire (1878–1918)* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2003), 419–421.
2. Alfred Capus, “L’intervention roumaine: Déclaration de guerre à l’Autriche-Hongrie,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
3. A. Fitz-Maurice, “La déclaration de guerre,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. “Aux Rois d’Italie et de Roumanie,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
8. Ibid.
9. Polybe, “Du Tibre au Danube,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. “Souvenirs de Roumanie: La Reine,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
14. Ibid.
15. “Avant et après la déclaration de guerre,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
16. *Adevărul* newspaper wrote: “Finally, the time has come. The events have compelled the government to act so that they may achieve the Romanian national claims. The King, confronted with the new situation, reacted as the late King Carol, and summoned the Crown Council. All politicians, upon leaving the Council, had to accept the decision, and all parties were to unite in order to serve the grand cause.” For

further information on the declaration of war and on the atmosphere in Bucharest, see also the notes of Aurelian Moșoiu, an eyewitness to the event. See Gheorghe Calcan and Cantemir Moșoiu, *Profesorul și senatorul Aurelian Moșoiu, o personalitate a lumii prahovene* (Ploiești: Printeuro, 2003), 76–77, 93–97.

17. “Avant et après la déclaration de guerre,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
18. Ibid.
19. According to the French publication, the Romanian army consisted of five corps with two divisions: Corps 1, in Craiova; Corps 2, in Bucharest; Corps 3, in Galați; Corps 4, in Iași; Corps 5, in Constanța. The infantry had 40 active regiments with 3 active battalions each, for a total of 120 battalions; 40 regiments of 3 battalions for the reserve infantry—120 battalions; 10 battalions of mountain troops and 10 reserve battalions of mountain hunters, which amounted to a total of 20 battalions; one brigade of guards with 6 battalions. There resulted a total of 266 infantry battalions. The cavalry comprised 10 regiments of ‘roșiori,’ with 4 squadrons, which meant a total of 40 squadrons; 10 regiments of horsemen, with 4 squadrons, a total of 40 squadrons. These last regiments were composed of non-permanent horsemen. The program of this last type of military service took 130 days in the first year, 40 days in the second year and 30 days in the third year. The young people enlisted in this branch of the service were to train and to take care of their horses at home and to report to the army whenever summoned. The Romanian cavalry was considered strong enough by *Le Figaro*. The reason behind this fact was of historical and traditional nature. The artillery comprised 20 field regiments with 6 batteries, each featuring 4 Krupp 75 mm guns, for a total of 480 pieces; 5 reserve artillery regiments, with 160 pieces, and an indefinite number of 105 rapid fire howitzer batteries and other heavy batteries. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. “À Paris,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
22. Ibid.
23. “La presse de ce matin: L’entrée en guerre de la Roumanie,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. “La presse de ce matin: L’entrée en guerre de la Roumanie. L’Action française,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
27. Ibid.
28. “Opinions étrangères,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
29. “Les impressions à Berlin,” *Le Figaro*, 30 Aug. 1916.
30. Le Masque de Fer, “Échos,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
31. “Dernière heure: L’Allemagne déclare la guerre à la Roumanie,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
32. “La presse allemande,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
33. “À Vienne, La rupture, La Haye, 28 août,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
34. “En Suisse, Genève, 28 août,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
35. “En Espagne, Saint-Sébastien, 28 août,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
36. “En Grèce: La décision roumaine et l’opinion greque,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.

37. Ibid.
38. “L’enthousiasme en Russie,” *Le Figaro*, 30 Aug. 1916.
39. “Le Front Austro-Roumain: Jonction des Russes et des Roumains,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
40. The presentation of the events of 27 August 1916 would be resumed by *Le Figaro* on 27 August 1919, after the end of the war, when Romania was facing difficult moments at the Peace Conference, as it was fighting for the recognition of its national rights. *Le Figaro* once more displayed a correct and favorable attitude to Romania. They recalled the circumstances in which the declaration of war had been adopted, the atmosphere in Bucharest, the Romanian-French solidarity, the Romanian army crossing the Carpathians, and so forth. See Gheorghe Calcan, *România în relațiile internaționale ale Conferinței de pace de la Paris-Versailles, 1919–1920: Recunoașterea internațională a Marii Uniri* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2013), 41–42.
41. “Le Front Austro-Roumain: Les Roumains en Transylvanie,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Aug. 1916.
42. Polybe, “De la tyrannie magyare et des Roumains,” *Le Figaro*, 30 Aug. 1916.
43. “La Roumanie en guerre,” *Le Figaro*, 30 Aug. 1916.
44. “Entre Alliés,” *Le Figaro*, 31 Aug. 1916.
45. “Sur le front roumain,” *Le Figaro*, 31 Aug. 1916.
46. “Dans les Balkans, Le ministère de la guerre roumaine,” *Le Figaro*, 31 Aug. 1916.

Abstract

The Entry of Romania into the War of National Unification
As Reflected in *Le Figaro*, August 1916

Our analysis highlights the way in which articles from *Le Figaro* newspaper reflected the entry of Romania into World War I, after the declaration of war was presented to Austria-Hungary. *Le Figaro*, as well as other publications, acknowledged Romania’s entry into WWI as a necessary and expected step, likely to shorten the war and bring victory to the Allies. Romania entered the war in order to liberate its territories that were, at that time, part of other countries. The information provided by *Le Figaro* was accurate and well documented. The 29 August 1916 issue made Romania’s declaration of war public in France and contained 13 articles dedicated to Romania. Furthermore, the front page of the newspaper was reserved exclusively to Romania. The issue of the following day dedicated eight longer articles and several smaller pieces to the same event. As *Le Figaro* also presented the points of view of other French and European publications, one can state that, based on the articles published in this newspaper, we may acquire a rather broad and detailed image of how the international media perceived the entry of Romania into World War I.

Keywords

Romania, World War I, French media