

NATIONAL MEMORY: HISTORY, DIPLOMACY AND POLITICS

KING CAROL II OF ROMANIA IN A DIPLOMATIC TOUR. ECHOES IN THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS (1938)

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Abstract: The article entitled *King Carol II of Romania in a diplomatic tour. Echoes in the international press (1938)* comes under the very complex subject of international relations at the end of the interwar period. In this context – of a serious decline in the international situation – King Carol II made several official visits to western states, including Great Britain. This visit took place between 15 and 18 November 1938 and its aims were: a better understanding of the two parties' positioning, following the Munich Agreement; Great Britain's involvement in South-eastern Europe; England's possible economic and financial support to the countries of the Danube basin; Romanian–British commercial exchanges; the naval base in Taşaul, et al. All these events were commented upon both in the national and the international press, emphasis being laid upon the fact that the objective pursued by our country was to safeguard peace and that “*Romania has nothing to ask of anyone, but neither has she anything to give to anyone: she is the friend of all those who let her be and is no one's enemy. Romania feels strong enough to pursue only the policy that best corresponds to her interests*”.

Keywords: Romania, Great Britain, King Carol II, King George VI, the international press.

INTRODUCTION. THE OBJECTIVES OF ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY 1936–1938

During 1936–1939, Romania remained loyal to her alliances (with the western democratic states, with the member states of the Little Entente and those of the Balkan Entente, etc.), as well as to the values and plans upheld by the League of Nations¹. However, the international situation worsened gradually, as the provisions of the peace treaties that had constituted the “*Versailles system*” were

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¹ Ioan Scurtu, *O sută de ani de politică externă și diplomație românească (1918–2018)*, in vol. *Politica externă și diplomația României pe parcursul unui secol de la înfăptuirea României Mari*, I, *Momente cruciale*, coord. Ion M. Anghel, Bucharest, Academia Română Publishing, 2018, pp. 2–4; *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România Întregită (1918–1940)*, coord. Ioan Scurtu, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing, 2003, pp. 507–537.

broken by most of the states that had been defeated in the war – Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria – and also by others – the Soviet Union and Italy – who unleashed a revanchist and revisionist policy, facilitated by the discord and competition between Great Britain and France for domination over the continent, by their appeasement in the face of Germany’s revanchist policy, as well as the German-Soviet relations materialised in economic, political and military agreements². In this context, Romania – under Carol II – has to take into consideration a number of threats and pursue a national policy directed at accomplishing the following permanent objectives: defending the borders and safeguarding peace, but also strengthening ties with traditional allies in the Little Entente, the Balkan Entente, with England and France, as well as establishing friendly relations with all states and a more intense cooperation, on multiple levels, within the League of Nations³. Towards the end of the fourth decade of the last century, Romania’s foreign policy – as decreed by King Carol II (1930–1940)⁴, Prime Ministers Gheorghe Tătărescu (1934–1937; 1939–1940), Patriarch Miron Cristea (1938–1939), Armand Călinescu (1939), as well as Foreign Ministers Victor Antonescu (1936–1937), Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen (1938) and Grigore Gafencu (1938–1940) – was marked by sustained efforts towards improving national defence against mounting German pressure. In reference to Romania’s foreign policy at the time, diplomat Alexandru Cretzianu highlighted, in a fascinating analysis concerning “*The Synthesis of the Evolution of the Anglo-Romanian relations from 1919 until 1940*”, that: “*The numerous Foreign Ministers who alternated in Romania between September 1936 and June 1940 did not enjoy [as Mr. Titulescu did] personal relations with British statesmen. Nevertheless – upon the advice of King Carol II, who assumed governance of the foreign policy after the exclusion of Mr. Titulescu, they all pursued a policy of rapprochement to England. Indeed, they depended on England wielding a predominant influence, either in the event of war, or in the event of peace [...], it was estimated that, in case of an Anglo-German agreement meant to solve all the problems arising from the Treaty of Versailles, we were fully interested in sparing our friendship with the British, in order to be protected from any peaceful territorial revision (the idea of territorial revision through negotiations found many supporters in England)*”⁵.

² Marusia Cîrstea, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Europa în balanța forțelor*, vol. I (1919–1939), Bucharest, Mica Valahie Publishing, 2007, pp. 13–70.

³ Viorica Moisuc, *Momente din istoria relațiilor politico-diplomatice dintre Franța și România*, in vol. *Politica externă și diplomația României pe parcursul unui secol de la înfăptuirea României Mari*, II, *România, factor activ în viața internațională*, coord. Ion M. Anghel, Bucharest, Academia Română Publishing, 2018, pp. 115–133.

⁴ “Romania’s foreign policy (under Carol II) was characterised by dynamism, by the continental effort to safeguard peace; in the end, the position of the great powers proved decisive and it led to the second world-wide conflagration, our country falling victim to the policy of strength and dictate, pursued by the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy”. (Apud Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866–1947)*, vol. III, *Carol al II-lea*, Bucharest, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing, 2001, p. 321).

⁵ Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României, București (The Archives of the Romanian Foreign Ministry, Bucharest, hereinafter: AMAE), fond 71 Anglia, vol. 39, ff. 5–26; Marusia Cîrstea, *Din istoria relațiilor anglo-române (1936–1939)*, Bucharest, Mica Valahie Publishing, 2004, pp. 341–362.

During the Sudeten crisis of 1938⁶, politicians in Bucharest, convinced that Germany had assumed the initiative in international relations, continued to hope that France would quit her “*lethargy*” and, at the same time, they turned progressively towards Great Britain. King Carol II still hoped that Great Britain would somehow become a counterweight to Germany in South-eastern Europe, certain that Great Britain’s economic power would allow her to prevail in any war.⁷ Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu shared his convictions and he emphasised in a report broadcast by Radio-Bucureşti (1938) that: “*Romania views with interest and friendship any attempt at agreement or rapprochement between the Great Powers of Western and Central Europe, upon whose shoulders lays, especially after the meeting in Munich, the heavy burden of defending and saving the European civilisation*”⁸. Interested in resuming political relations with the great western powers was not only the Romanian side – Great Britain also proceeded to offer the countries in Central and South-eastern Europe some bearing through cooperation at numerous levels – diplomatic, economic, financial, – with the purpose of counteracting the German influence.

1. VISITS MADE BY ROMANIA’S KING CAROL II IN THE WEST. 1936–1938

In January 1936, together with Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu, army corps Adjutant General Paul Angelescu, the Minister of the Army, and Alexandru Lepădatu, the Minister of Cults and Arts, King Carol II travelled to London to attend the funerals of the former King George V. It is worth mentioning – emphasized Savel Rădulescu, Under Secretary of State with the Foreign Ministry – that “*His Majesty’s retinue [...] also included: General Balif, prime-dignitary of the Court, General Ilasievici, Marshal of the Court, Mr. Ernest Urdăreanu, Minister of the Court, Colonel Zwiedenk, frigate captain Fundăţeanu and Major Mihăilescu, all three His Majesty the King’s aides-de-camp*”⁹.

Within the talks King Carol II and his retinue had with British high officials (Edward VIII, the King of Great Britain, Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Robert Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary, et al.) they examined “*three matters of foreign policy: 1) the Austrian matter and the central European problems; 2) the Mediterranean matter;*

⁶ Viorica Moisuc, *România și criza cehoslovacă. Documente (septembrie 1938)*, Bucharest, Historia Publishing, 2010.

⁷ Keith Hitchins, *România: 1866–1947*, Translated by George G. Potra, Delia Răzdolescu, 4th edition, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 2013, pp. 510–511.

⁸ AMAE, fond 71 România, vol. 5, f. 501.

⁹ Idem, fond 71 Anglia, vol. 9, f. 22; see also Marusia Cîrstea, *Romania and Great Britain (1919–1939). Interests. Projects. Achievements*, Saarbrücken, Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017, pp. 166–175.

3) *the German threat*¹⁰. As regards the matter of the Habsburgs returning to the throne of Austria, Nicolae Titulescu – in keeping with the Bled Agreement (29–30 August 1935) of the Permanent Council of the Little Entente that “*it should remain counter to the Habsburgs*”¹¹ – explained to the king of Great Britain the reasons why the three states (Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) opposed the return of the Habsburgs, obtaining a promise that the British officials should intimate to Prince Starhemberg (Austria’s vice-chancellor), who was also in London at the time, that they also opposed such an event¹². Consequently, during the talks Eden had with Prince Starhemberg, the British minister “*did his utmost to discourage his ambitions of a Habsburg restoration, advising a rapprochement to the Little Entente, which could only be obtained at the cost of relinquishing any design of Restoration*”¹³. To summarise the talks which Romania’s representatives had in London, a suggestive article was published in the Norwegian newspaper “*Morgenbladet*” (mentioned by the Romanian minister in Oslo, Dimitrie Juraşcu), reporting the following: “*The fact that King Carol and Mr. Titulescu, as well as Prince Starhemberg, had talks with British and French politicians is of paramount importance, because everything urges us to believe that the matter of the Habsburgs is an acute one. It is certain that Austria must be free to give herself a dynasty or not, but it is equally certain that the countries of the Little Entente did not want to see that dynasty either in Wien or Budapest*”¹⁴.

In 1936–1937, relations between Great Britain and Romania were relatively close. During the meeting in Geneva (26 September 1936), Victor Antonescu, Nicolae Titulescu’s successor at the head of Romanian diplomacy, assured Sir Anthony Eden, secretary of state with the *Foreign Office*, that he would continue the policy pursued by Nicolae Titulescu, but “*neither as brilliantly, nor as fervently*”, although, as V. Antonescu emphasised, “*his country’s foreign policy will rely on the friendship with France and England as well*”¹⁵. 1937 distinguished itself through the fact that the Romanian officials expressed Bucharest’s desire to create a new framework for the relations with Great Britain; in his talks with Eden, in January in Geneva and April in London, Victor Antonescu confirmed this aim. In his turn, Carol II highlighted on several occasions his desire that relations between Romania and Great Britain be strengthened. In the same year, 1937, Crown Prince Mihai would visit Great Britain as a representative of the Royal House of Romania, the reason being to attend the Coronation of King George VI (12 May).

¹⁰ *Documente Diplomatice Române*, Series II, vol. 18, Part 1, 1 January 1 – June 30, 1936. Volume compiled by Laurențiu Constantiniu, Alin-Victor Matei, Bucharest, Academia Române Publishing, 2008, doc. 108, p. 143.

¹¹ Ion Calafeteanu, coord., *Istoria politicii externe românești în date*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing, 2003, p. 288.

¹² Nicolae Titulescu, *Documente diplomatice*, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing, 1967, pp. 718, 719.

¹³ *Documente Diplomatice Române*, Series II, vol. 18, Part 1, 1 January 1 – June 30, 1936, doc. 108, p. 144.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, doc. 113, f. 161.

¹⁵ Ion Pătroi, Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *România, Anglia și Europa anilor '30*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc Publishing, 1996, p. 45.

The summer of 1937 continued to have a distinctive significance in the configuration of King Carol's political and diplomatic options. Between July and August 1937, he made an (unofficial) visit to Paris and London. Later, referring to the talks he had, he would record the following in his "Annotations": "*I called their attention to the threat posed by the German commercial intrusion and appealed that, with the support of Great Britain, this gap should be filled before it was too late. Despite being lent a benevolent ear, the evasive answers I was given do not enable me to believe this appeal shall be taken too seriously. There is growing dissatisfaction towards France, a dull, but adamant opposition to any military alliance, be it even of a defensive nature, with that country, all the more so as the governments of the Popular Front have sown great scepticism. Certainly, these do not represent official or governmental points of view, but come from very influential circles*"¹⁶.

Against the background of a serious decline in the international situation, in November 1938, King Carol II made official visits to Great Britain (15–18) and France (19–21). The death of Queen Marie (18 July 1938) prompted King George VI to write to Carol II the following words: "*My dear Carol, I was pleased to be represented by George (the Duke of Kent) at the burial of our cousin Missy, whose grace to me, when I was in Romania for your father's coronation in Alba Iulia, I remember so well. I am happy to learn that nothing can prevent Your postponed official visit to my country when the Court morning ends, in October; I have the pleasure of inviting you and your son Mihai, to stay at Buckingham Palace from Tuesday, 15 November, until Friday, 18 November. Elisabeth and I hope you will agree with these dates and we take pleasure in the thought of seeing you then*"¹⁷. Referring to this invitation, the newspaper "Gazeta Polska" emphasised in an article entitled "*On the Eve of King Carol II's Visit to London*" the following: "*London knows that King Carol II is the grandson of Queen Victoria, that Queen Marie died recently, a queen who connected her name so heroically to the Romanian Union and who had English blood. At the same time, the English public opinion, which in February this year had looked coldly on the constitutional overthrow in Romania, has become fully convinced of the royal dictatorship of King Carol II and today harbours fervent and sincere feelings for Romania's young Monarch. Therefore everything enables us to hope that King Carol II's visit to London will represent a solid stage in the evolution of the rapports between the two countries and the expression not only of cordial ties between the two cognate courts, but also of a political agreement. For it is clear that during his visit to*

¹⁶ Apud Georgiana-Margareta Scurtu, *Din istoria diplomației europene. Relațiile României cu Franța (1935–1938)*, Bucharest, Cartea Universitară Publishing, 2006, pp. 107, 108; see also Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *Însemnări zilnice*, vol. I, Bucharest, Scripta Publishing, 1995, pp. 87, 88.

¹⁷ Apud Paul al României, *Carol al II-lea Rege al României*, Romanian version by Ileana Vulpescu, Bucharest, Holding Reporter Publishing, 1991, p. 194.

*London, King Carol II will also attend a series of political interviews. Their aim will undoubtedly be discussing matters of English policy in South-eastern Europe. For Romania, it will be of main interest whether Great Britain intends to proceed in a more active way than she has done so far in the Danube River basin or she will consider it a territory for German expansion as a matter of course*¹⁸.

Public opinion in Romania also considered that *“the visit King Carol II and the Heir to the Throne, Mihai, are due to make to London will bring about good outcomes for the country*”¹⁹ and in the official circles in London it was emphasised that *“relations between London and Bucharest have been friendly for a long time and this concord will be further strengthened by the Romanian King’s visit to London [...] and when King Carol comes to London, England’s Sovereigns will greet in Him not only an important European chief of state, but also their closest relative*”²⁰. This view was shared by the Warsaw newspaper “Kurjer Polski”, who highlighted that: *“King Carol’s visit to London is undeniably an important event from the perspective of the South-eastern European matters. It comes at a moment when Romania’s attention is mainly focused on foreign issues. The revision of Czechoslovakia’s borders could not have remained without an influence upon the policies of the neighbouring countries – the same way as Hungary’s territorial expansion and the increased Hungarian ambition could not have left her unaffected. Of course Romania is also interested, in the most direct manner, in the animation of Bulgaria’s revanchist claims, of which there is already open talk today. It is not and it should not be considered a coincidence that is it exactly in this period that King Carol is going to London – he, who is undeniably a politician who realizes perfectly the seriousness of the situation*”²¹.

Therefore, Carol II, accompanied by Crown Prince Mihai and a retinue made up of Ernest Urdăreanu, Minister of the Court, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, Foreign Minister, Baron Ioan V. Stîrcea, Baron Constantin Flondor, Marshal of the Palace, General Gheorghe Mihail, Chief of the Royal Military House, Colonel Constantin Filitti, royal adjutant-general, Lieutenant-Colonel Mihail Mihăilescu, royal adjutant, Major Ilie Radu, officer d’ordonnance, Constantin Cesianu made a new visit to Great Britain²², being *“received extremely cordially both by H.M. King George VI, H.M. Queen Elisabeth, the entire royal family and also the English crowds*”²³.

During this visit, King Carol II had several meetings and interviews with British diplomats and politicians such as Arthur Neville Chamberlain, Prime

¹⁸ AMAE, fond 71 Anglia, vol. 16, f. 311.

¹⁹ Idem, fond 71 România, vol. 5, f. 448.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 449.

²¹ Idem, fond 71 Dosare Speciale, vol. 380, f. 259.

²² Sorin Arhire, *Vizita oficială a Regelui Carol al II-lea în Marea Britanie (15–18 noiembrie 1938)*, in “Apulum”, XLVII, 2010, p. 385; N. Georgescu, *O călătorie epocală. Regele României la Londra. Impresii – documente – vederi – recapitulări*, Bucharest, Librăriei SOCEC & Co. Publishing, S.A., f.a., p. 40.

²³ AMAE, fond 71 Dosare Speciale, vol. 380, f. 276.

Minister (1937–1940) and Lord Edward Halifax, Foreign Minister (1938–1940) and others. In these talks, King Carol wanted “*to clarify to what extent and in what practical way England took an interest in the problems afflicting Central and South-eastern Europe*”²⁴, at the same time emphasizing that “*economic matters had a great importance*”²⁵.

2. THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS ON THE VISIT OF KING CAROL II TO LONDON

The Romanian King’s visit to London sparked “*remarkable interest throughout the British Empire and especially within the political and economic circles. However, the interest England takes in Romania and in the Balkan countries in general does not commence with this visit [...] Following Germany’s advance towards the Balkan countries, England become closer to Romania both politically and economically [...] Similar to her proceeding in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea, England is trying hard to establish and continue military, political and economic relations both in the Black Sea and the Balkan countries. Romania, who is beware of associating herself completely to Germany and has rejected Poland’s proposal relative to the establishment of a <<neutral block>> of Eastern European States to avoid remaining completely isolated, wants to take advantage of the interest shown to these regions by Britain, hence the meetings in London are of great importance*”²⁶.

The negotiations for the economic and financial support which England was to give Romania were followed attentively not only by the English press, emphasising that “*Romania will receive financial support from England, which will allow her to oppose the growing German expansion*”²⁷, but also by the press in the distant Land of the Rising Sun (Japan), as the “Osaka Asaki” newspaper of 15 November 1938 mentioned: “*Romania, who was caught between the two powers, the English and the German, will be forced to determine her position and for this reason King Carol himself will make a visit to London where he will ask for economic and military assistance from England [...] for the purchase of planes and ships, while for the overall increase in armaments he will request financial assistance from Great Britain*”²⁸.

In relation to the Romanian-British economic agreements and the possible consequences for the other Balkan states, the German newspaper “Koelnische

²⁴ Idem, fond 71 Anglia, vol. 16, f. 319.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Idem, fond 71 Dosare Speciale, vol. 381, ff. 299–302.

²⁷ Idem, fond 71 Anglia, vol. 16, f. 318.

²⁸ Idem, fond 71 Dosare Speciale, vol. 381, ff. 458, 459.

Zeitung” of November 1938 published an article signed by Fr. Gruber, its correspondent in Belgrade, showing that: *“The governmental circles in the Balkans – according to the author – consider the visit of King Carol to London a courtesy call. The Romanian circles consider it has a pronounced economic nature, as it can be inferred from an article published in the Timpul. A matter that will be discussed in London is that of the market for Romanian grains, but especially that of the market for oil. There is no doubt that the economic concerns progress along the line of the economic tendencies that England has lately manifested towards the countries in the European southeast. As far as I can see, Romania serves as a practical experience. Circles in Belgrade avoid any predictions pending the results of King Carol’s visit to London. The economic agreement recently concluded by Yugoslavia with Germany has further enlarged the framework of goods exchange between the two countries. This means that, although England’s economic influence may strengthen in Romania for the time being, neighbouring Yugoslavia will not neglect the important role the German market plays in the South-eastern European economy. Circles in Sofia also adopted an expectant policy towards the experiment being made with Romania. At any rate – the author concludes – King Carol’s visit to London will not lead to the weakening of the economic axis in the Balkans, closely tied – especially after Minister Funk’s visit – to the German market”*²⁹. The German newspaper “Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung” also concluded: *“A clarification of the present situation and the past relations will first be attempted on the occasion of this visit and the problem of the British capital’s participation in the stimulation of the Romanian economic life will also be attacked”*. However, this participation will not take the shape of a loan that will only create instalments and interest – but will be framed into the production process itself. Past experiences show clearly that this approach is the only useful one³⁰.

During the same talks, King Carol II tried, unsuccessfully however, to obtain a commitment (an official position of the British government) that Romania’s independent attitude towards Germany will be supported. On these lines, the Bulgarian press commented as well; thus, the newspaper “Mir” emphasised the following: *“The king will try to assess the intentions of the English government in the event of a change in the status-quo established by treaties. If England proves responsive to the Romanian cause, the future will undoubtedly be regarded with equanimity in Bucharest. But if England proves unfeeling to the issues concerning the Near East or lends her moral support to other Great Powers to intensify pressure on Romania, the concerns of the Romanian Government will only enhance”*³¹. The “Dnevnic” newspaper believed that *“The principle mission of H.M. the King will be to solve the minority problem, because England will search for a quick solution to this matter in order to maintain her prestige in the East”*, all

²⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 380, ff. 183–184.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 185.

³¹ *Ibidem*, f. 231.

the more so as “it is certain that Germany and Italy will support the Hungarians’ requests for the freedom of minorities in Transylvania. King Carol shall be offered a number of solutions for the liquidation of the minority conflict. At the same time, Romania will receive from England huge credits for the consolidation of the army, especially the navy and air forces. One of the most important proposals to be made will be to hold a referendum without the participation of any foreign or neighbouring powers, which will permit the Romanian authorities to return only some of the territories”³². The “Slovo” newspaper also highlighted that “The visit of our August Sovereign, who, ever since 10 February has been a monarch-dictator formally, and not only effectively, obtains a complete political colouring. The king will try to assess first and foremost the extent to which England intends to engage in the Balkans politically and economically. Following the events in Czechoslovakia, Germany has the chance to become if not the exclusive, at least the most powerful import and export factor. Romania is far from being excited about the perspective of an economic Mitteleuropa. On the other hand, however, it must not be admitted that Romania shall move away from the economic cooperation with the Reich. Analysing the Anglo-Romanian relations, we must admit they have improved considerably, especially since the foreign policy of France – therefore its attraction, too – became weaker in the Balkans. Repeated visits to Bucharest, numerous lessons and reports, the development of the Anglo-Romanian institute all demonstrate Great Britain’s growing interest in the Balkans”³³.

Practically, King Carol II suggested an extension of the commercial relations, especially by means of increasing Romanian exports, granting loans for the endowment of the Romanian army, increasing armament deliveries, building a naval base. To that effect, an article signed by Muharrem Feyzi Togay and entitled “England and Romania” emphasised that “England considers Romania important merely strategically speaking, because the Black Sea coast which belongs to Romania and the Danube Delta are the route to the Straits and therefore Romania may be considered of special importance from a strategic point of view. However, in the absence of any large harbour able to receive a big fleet, the strategic advantages are basically impracticable. This is why England has been encouraging Romania constantly for the last ten years to build a large port here, to serve as a naval base. Having lately become convinced of the need to accomplish this plan, Romania established the location of the proposed port, and work has begun under the direction of a great British admiral [...]. As a result of Germany moving towards the Balkan countries, England has become closer to Romania both politically and economically. England is preparing to open a 20-million pounds line of credit to Romania, for this country’s armament. [...]. Similar to the way she proceeded in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, England is currently

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*, ff. 231, 232.

*struggling to establish and maintain military, political and economic relations both in the Black Sea and the Balkans*³⁴. Investigating the attitude of the British towards Romania, the “Politika” newspaper (Belgrade) of November 1938 highlighted the following: *“It is clear that everything England has done for the economic strengthening of Romania has not been done out of goodwill, but primarily because Great Britain’s own interests requested it. We understood that we had to intervene quickly so that Romania could remain free and open to the international economy. For these reasons we allowed the English tradition of slow and cautious development to be overruled, because we bore in mind that Romania is on the Black Sea and not on the Danube”*³⁵.

On the same lines, of an economic proximity to Germany, the “Gazeta Polska” of November 1938 reported that *“As far as can be seen, England has not ceased concerning herself with this region; however, the English common sense opposes granting new credit to undertakings of questionable results. It seems that the economic English circles have come to the conviction that the natural opening of the Balkan countries is and will continue to be the Reich, connected to this territory structurally, economically and geographically, so that any attempt to drive the Germans out of the economic positions they have conquered in the Balkans would not only be very expensive, but also – in the long run – meant to fail. Therefore, the City is more willing to assume a defensive, rather than an offensive attitude, in other words, more willing to defend the positions she owns, rather than fight to achieve new positions”*³⁶.

Other magazines and newspapers of the time also highlighted the main topics of discussion between Great Britain and Romania. Thus, the Polish newspaper “Goniec Warszawski” wrote that *“King Carol II’s visit to London will undoubtedly play an essential role in clarifying the situation in the Danube River basin. After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, the decline of the French influence and the disappearance of the Little Entente, the growth of Hungary and the increase in the German, Italian and Polish influence, the situation of the Danube basin has not clarified yet. So far nobody knows what political factors will prevail and what direction the Danube states will take. To this, add the unresolved issue of Carpathian Ruthenia, which interests not only Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but also Romania. All these problems will evidently constitute the object of the Anglo-Romanian talks. In fact, the English have invested large capitals in Romania and can only be interested in the Romanian matters”*³⁷; while “Gazeta Polska” emphasised that *“This journey of King Carol II to London will occasion political talks whose purpose, from the Romanian point of view, will indubitably be to assess if and to what extent Great Britain intended to engage actively in the*

³⁴ *Ibidem*, vol. 381, ff. 299–302.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. 380, f. 341.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. 381, ff. 310–311.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 316.

*Balkans in the near future. If London does not exhibit a more lively eagerness in this direction, there will be a spontaneous surge in the rapprochement to Germany, especially at the economic level*³⁸.

On this occasion, King George VI awarded Carol II the Order of the Garter (which had also been awarded to King Carol I in 1892, by Queen Victoria and to King Ferdinand I in 1924, by King George V), while Grand Voievod Mihai was awarded the great ribbon of the Victorian Order. Other decorations were also awarded to members of the London Legation, such as: Minister Plenipotentiary Vasile Grigorcea, Commander Gheorghe Dumitrescu, Lieutenant-Commander Nicolau, press secretary Dimitrie Dimăncescu were awarded the Commander Victorian Order and Captain Gheorghe Iliescu – the Officer Victorian Order. The Romanian sovereign proclaimed his decision to donate land to the Anglo-Romanian society in Bucharest so that a building for the future British institute could be erected there³⁹.

The Romanian Foreign Minister N. Petrescu-Comnen and his counterpart, Lord Halifax, also carried out ample talks regarding the current European situation. The talks centred mainly on the consequences of the Munich Agreement and, more precisely, on the serious decline in the international relations and the consolidation of revisionist countries. On this occasion, N. Petrescu-Comnen remarked: “*Let me take advantage of this opportunity and draw Your attention to some of the effects of the Munich Agreement: in Bulgaria and Hungary both these decisions created the illusion of a possible overthrow of the status-quo in Central and Eastern Europe and of a complete revision of the borders of the countries that were founded or enlarged after the war*”⁴⁰. Lord Halifax was evasive in his answer, content to say simply that “*it determined me to recommend caution*”⁴¹ to the states in the area. The British Foreign Secretary’s laconic answer was in accordance with the political analysis made by the Romanian diplomat Radu Florescu, who emphasised that “*No British head of government and no Parliament would be able to engage the whole Empire in defending local interests, knowing that by so doing, much bigger interests would be put at risk*”⁴².

Referring to King Carol II’s visit to Great Britain, the international press featured at great length both its preparations and its progress, revealing the importance of the talks between the two delegations. Thus, the French newspapers emphasised the “*grandeur of the reception given in honour of the Romanian sovereign in London and the concern Great Britain has put in doing everything in*

³⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 314.

³⁹ Sorin Arhire, *Marea Britanie și România (1936–1941). Relații politice, economice și culturale*, Cluj-Napoca, Mega Publishing, 2015, p. 106.

⁴⁰ AMAE, fond 71 Anglia, vol. 40, f. 119.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, f. 120.

⁴² *Idem*, fond 71 România, vol. 262, ff. 196–219.

her power to strengthen Romania's political and economic independence;" the Czechoslovakian press underlined "the importance of the Romanian sovereign's visit in London," while the Yugoslavian press published extensive "correspondences from London and Bucharest on the visit of H.M. King Carol, which is assigned exceptional importance"⁴³ Thus, under the heading "Important Preparations in Bucharest for the Reception of King Carol, following His Visit to London, Paris, Brussels and Berchtesgaden" the "Politika" newspaper of Belgrade emphasised: "Romania wants to maintain the old and proven friendships, but will not miss the opportunity for cooperation that may serve the consolidation of peace in Europe. Bucharest is convinced that peace cannot be safeguarded in any other way than through the cooperation of all countries. Antagonism between the great powers or the division of Europe into enemy groups of countries will never bring, in the Romanian point of view, any lasting peace [...] In London, Paris and Berchtesgaden, the same words were heard in the name of Romania and that is: cooperation with all those who, similar to the Romanian people, want peace, on condition each state's integrity and each people's political and economic independence are respected. In this way, King Carol only underlined the fundamental principles of the traditional Romanian politics. The bonds with France and England are, as King Carol emphasised in his speeches in London, old and were sealed at decisive moments in the history of the Romanian people. They will now be consolidated by Romania's economic connections with both powers"⁴⁴. Commander Gheorghe Dumitrescu (naval military attaché in London during 1935 and 1941) also concluded that "the visit of the Romanian sovereign to London was a « wonderful and complete success »"⁴⁵.

The Romanian press dedicated full pages to this visit, too, underlining "the greatness of the reception at Victoria Station," as well as "the expression of enthusiasm with which the population of London greeted Romania's Sovereign"⁴⁶ and published all the "words said by the two Sovereigns at Buckingham Palace, the welcoming wishes of the mayor of Dover, the president of the London County Council and the mayor of Westminster, as well as H.M. the King's replies to these wishes"⁴⁷.

However, beyond these eulogies, the two governments, the English and the French, have assumed no commitment, which means, in effect, that Romania could not count on the support of Great Britain and France. Thus, analysing the purpose of Carol II's visit, the "New Statesman and Nation" highlighted the following: "It would be too cynical to say that the king is auctioning Romania, but he is indubitably trying to discover whether Great Britain is ready to make an offer.

⁴³ Idem, fond Londra, vol. 76, unpagé.

⁴⁴ Idem, fond 71 Dosare Speciale, vol. 381, ff. 276, 277.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. 266, unpagé.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. 76, unpagé.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

Because the sovereign proposed oil, wheat and other agricultural produce in exchange for support, but Albion opted for the Mexican oil and wheat and, through their absence, the British pushed the country into Hitler's hands. There was no war fought over « Romania's soul » [the oil] and Carol leaves England with his tail between his legs»⁴⁸, while the "Scotsman" reported: "perhaps King Carol returns to Romania with a good opinion of the British goodwill, but also a moderate appreciation of the British good sense"⁴⁹. However, Constantin Cesianu, Romania's minister in France, referring to the importance of King Carol II's visit to England, emphasised: "The official point of view here (Paris, A/N) is that Romania, who remained the only real base in trying to withhold Germany's descent towards the mouths of the Danube and the Bosphorus, and now H.M. King Carol II, whose loyal and unambiguous policy constitute evidence which caused a great impression, the King must be supported in the direction that his Royal impetus charted for Romania, thus demonstrating a precise vision of what Europe needs and what can never be. Therefore great store is laid on our August Sovereign's visit to Paris, as it occasions a contact with the President of the Republic and certain members of the Government"⁵⁰.

Consequently, the foreign policy led by governments in the interwar period, substantiated on the idea that the two great western states – Great Britain and France – will protect and support Romania was dealt a hard blow. Despite it, the Romanian diplomacy continued to militate and act in favour of "*Central Europe's accomplishing first and foremost an appeasement of passions and an establishment of peace of mind in all nations*"⁵¹. Thus, the Romanian state remained faithful to all its commitments and always sought to put forward the observance of the status-quo and the safeguarding of peace, mention being made that "*Romania has nothing to ask of anyone, but neither has she anything to give to anyone: she is the friend of all those who let her be and is no one's enemy. Romania feels strong enough to pursue only the policy that best corresponds to her interests*"⁵².

⁴⁸ Apud Ioan Dănilă, *Regele Carol al II-lea și cedările teritoriale*, in "Columna", no. 1, 2012, p. 144.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*; see also Paul al României, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

⁵⁰ AMAE, fond 71 Dosare Speciale, vol. 380, f. 311.

⁵¹ *Idem*, fond 71 România, vol. 5, f. 448.

⁵² *Ibidem*.