

THE LAST VISIT OF A BULGARIAN SOVEREIGN TO ROMANIA. TSAR BORIS III, TO BUCHAREST AND SINAIA (JANUARY 1934), IN ROMANIAN PUBLIC PERCEPTION

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Abstract: The official visit of the Bulgarian Tsar to Bucharest and Sinaia has been addressed superficially by Romanian diplomatic history research. Given the fact that the Balkan Entente would be signed just two weeks after these meetings (February 9, 1934), the talks between Carol II and Boris III have been placed in the context of the Bulgarian reluctance towards the project and of the efforts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Titulescu, to promote his objective.

The public image of Tsar Boris III in the Romanian public's opinion was one of evident sympathy.

All public indications converge towards the idea that there was no personal connection between King Carol II and Tsar Boris III, despite their belonging to the same generation. In terms of their human structures, they were very different, as were the institutional practices through which they ruled in their countries. This happened despite the fact that neither of the sovereigns managed to rule during constitutional and democratic regimes, sooner or later consenting to authoritarian and dictatorial solutions. This fact is clear: despite the fact that bilateral relations did not thaw until the end of World War II, the two sovereigns never met again, on any occasion provided or not.

Even though devoid of any tangible results, the visits and meetings between King Carol II and Tsar Boris III (on October 30, 1933 and January 25-28, 1934) temporarily stopped the accelerated degradation of bilateral relations and postponed the outcome of the administration of Southern Dobrudja by several years, until September 7, 1940.

Keywords: Carol II; Boris III; Romania; Bulgaria; 1934

"A kind of Harun al-Rashid of our times, and also a Tsar whose gospel is the Constitution"¹ was the headline on the front page of an editorial in one of the most popular left-wing daily newspapers from Bucharest when, on the foggy and cold morning of Thursday, January 25, 1934, Tsar Boris III of

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¹ Liviu P. Nasta, „Un rege iubit de poporul său”, *Dimineața*, January 26, 1934: 1.

Bulgaria was stepping onto the freshly cleared of snow pavement of the Ramadan port, off the coast of Giurgiu. In Bucharest, the hope of a miracle was still lingering, political leaders were still waiting for the future projects, related to the Balkan Entente, to be fulfilled through an agreement also with the government in Sofia.

It was the first visit to Romania of a Bulgarian sovereign in a quarter of a century, followed by the meeting which took place on October 30, 1933, on the "Ștefan cel Mare" yacht, during a six-hour trip on the Danube, between the localities Giurgiu and Zimnicea.

The official visit of the Bulgarian Tsar to Bucharest and Sinaia has been addressed superficially by Romanian diplomatic history research.² Given the fact that the Balkan Entente would be signed just two weeks after these meetings (February 9, 1934), the talks between Carol II and Boris III have been placed in the context of the Bulgarian reluctance towards the project and of the efforts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Titulescu, to promote his objective.

Regional and continental developments suggested a general reassessment of the defining principles that underpinned the organization of Europe after World War I. The pact between Germany and Poland was to be signed on January 26, 1934³, during the presence of Boris III in Romania, and the formulas of collective security, under the guidance of France, were beginning to show their limits. The Balkan Entente was an attempt to save the regulations of 1919-1920 and to settle, by maintaining the *status quo*, the relations with the defeated states, which had already become rising powers, mainly Germany and Italy. In the discussions which took place in Sinaia and Bucharest, two distinct opinions emerged: the Romanian side continued to support the system of alliances and international regulations which emerged in 1919-1920, without any changes, whereas the Bulgarian side, invoking provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations, mentioned that it wanted to sign non-aggression pacts with its neighbors, expecting changes in the

² A presentation of the visits taking place in October 1933 and January 1934: Florin Anghel, „Întorcând spatele haosului de ieri”. Vizitele țarului Boris al III-lea al Bulgariei în România (30 octombrie 1933 și 25–28 ianuarie 1934), *Analele Dobrogei*, Constanța VI (2024): 71–99.

³ On the 5th of February 1934, before the foreign policy committee of the Polish Senate, Foreign Minister Józef Beck claimed that, contrary to the “general European opinion” according to which the coming to power of the Nazi regime in Berlin would lead to “the aggravation of Polish-German relations”, Poland “did not share” this sentiment. On the contrary, Beck assured that the non-aggression pact from 1934 had “created the foundations for the establishment of good-neighborly relations within a secure framework”. Y. Bizardel, „La politique extérieure de la Pologne”, *Politique étrangère* 2, no. 5 (1937): 430.

territorial provisions of the peace treaties, as a result of negotiations and full-fledged agreements.

That is why the intention of this text is to reveal how unrealistic Romanian expectations were before the royal visits and what the course of the meetings which took place in October 1933 and January 1934 was. The coldness between the two capitals, visibly installed also between the two royal families, remained a common fact until the signing of the Treaty of Craiova, on September 7, 1940, which ceded Southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria. Despite the promises, emotions and effusions publicly stated, after January 28, 1934, King Carol II and Tsar Boris III never saw each other again.

We have exclusively relied on the public perception, which was inserted into a few of the most important Romanian publications, in order to outline the perceived images in relation to the profiles of the two sovereigns, the level of the bilateral relations and the expectations regarding the regulation of the main shortcomings. The image of Tsar Boris III in Romanian 1930s public opinion is similar to what Aneta Mihaylova explained in her argued research about historiographies after 1989 in Romania and Bulgaria, referring to Ion Antonescu and the monarch. Particularly, the book by Stefan Groueff, wrote Mihaylova, which was written with great sympathy for the king, enjoyed great popularity and in many articles in the press and memoirs of people close to the monarch, his personality was almost mythologized⁴.

Obviously, these perceptions can be supplemented with the diplomatic and administrative reasoning of the time. As there is still no presentation of these episodes at the level of Romanian historiography, we consider this to be the beginning of such an endeavor.

1. How did the meetings between King Carol II and Tsar Boris III come about?

The first steps of the Bulgarian sovereign on Romanian soil were taken after a quarter of a century since the last Romanian-Bulgarian high-level meeting. After the year 1900, Daniel Cain wrote, generations changed at the level of Bulgarian politics and the former politicians, familiarized with Romanian society, began to be replaced by a new generation, which was not sentimentally connected to Romania. This happened in addition to the divergence in terms of their projects, Greater Bulgaria versus Greater Romania, Cain continued.⁵

⁴ Aneta Mihaylova, „World War II Revisited: New Approaches and Interpretations in the National Historiographies of Bulgaria and Romania After 1989”, *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, LVIII, no. 1-4 (2020): 324.

⁵ Vladimir Mitev, „Daniel Cain: Dintre toate popoarele din regiune, românii și bulgarii sunt cei mai apropiați”, *Friendship Bridge/ Podul Prieteniei*, June 2, 2020, accessed January 5, 2024, <https://www.friendshipbridge.eu/ro/2020/06/02/cain-interview-ro/>.

Only King Carol I, and that happened only once, at the end of October 1902, had been on the territory of the neighboring country as the sovereign of Romania, on an official visit. Then, accompanied by Prime Minister Dimitrie A. Sturdza and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion I.C. Brătianu, he spent three days in Ruse, Poradim/Pordim, Plevna/Pleven, Grivița/Grivitsa and several other places where, 25 years earlier, the Russo-Romanian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 had taken place.⁶ Kings Ferdinand I, Carol II and Mihai did not visit Bulgaria (as heads of state), the strongest impediment being the political and diplomatic one, more precisely the result of the Balkan War of 1913, as a result of which Southern Dobrudja became a part of Romania. This obstacle was later joined by the disadvantageous geopolitical and diplomatic situation in which Bulgaria found itself after the First World War and following the provisions of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine signed in 1919.

None of the Romanian sovereigns has ever arrived in Sofia. The Carol I- Elisabeta couple also recorded the most meetings with the Bulgarian head of state, Prince (then, from 1908, Tsar) Ferdinand I. In 1908 and 1909, Queen Eleonore's private visits to Romania are also recorded, and in May 1911, that of Queen Elisabeth's to Evksinograd, on the Black Sea coast⁷.

The official visit of Tsar Boris III and Tsarina Ioanna (Giovanna) to Bucharest and Sinaia, between 25 and 28 January 1934, was the only one in the period between the two World Wars and the last visit to Romania that a Bulgarian head of state paid until the establishment of the communist regimes. It was a continuation of the custom of Tsar Ferdinand I of visiting King Carol I, before the Balkan Wars.⁸ It would also be the last in history between two sovereigns, Romanian and Bulgarian.

In turn, the Bulgarian sovereign came to Bucharest just a few days before the official signing, on February 9, 1934, in Athens, of the Balkan Entente treaty. Boris III was involved in a regional *tour de force*. On October 1, 1933, he had met with King Alexander of Yugoslavia in the palace of

⁶ Daniel Cain, *Diplomați și diplomație în Sud-Estul european: relațiile româno-bulgare la 1900* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2012): 194-195. About the visit, in the accounts of the time, see: „România și Bulgaria”, *Universul*, October 31, 1902: 1; *Universul*, November 1, 1902: 3. At Somovit (Samovit), near Plevna, Carol I also delivered a short speech, reproduced in the press: "25 years ago I left Bulgaria as a conqueror; today I return to this land as the best and most sincere friend of Bulgaria and of the Bulgarian army". „Vizita regelui în Bulgaria”, *Adevărul*, November 1, 1902: 2.

⁷ Florin Anghel, „A Black Sea Belle Epoque Tale. Queen Elisabeta at Evksinograd: The Last Journey to Bulgaria of a Sovereign of Romania (13-16 May 1911)”, *Studia Maritima*, Szczecin 37 (2024): 45-62, DOI:10.18276/sm2024.37-03.

⁸ Hristofor Hesapciev, *Amintirile unui diplomat bulgar în România (1905-1910)*, translation from Bulgarian, notes and afterword by Daniel Cain, foreword by Elena Statelova, (București: Editura Fundației Pro, 2003): 161- 201.

Evksinograd, near Varna, and the sovereign from Belgrade had come from Istanbul, where he had seen Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.⁹

It was a time for the public unveiling of the profiles of the Balkan sovereigns, all within the same generation: Boris III (born in 1894), Carol II (born in 1893), Alexander I (born in 1888), George II of Greece (born in 1890) and Zog I of Albania (born in 1895). Their efforts to promote the policies of the states they represented were accompanied by great expectations regarding the pacification of the region, by freeing the Balkans from the threats of military conflicts and direct influences. Most hopes were connected to the family relations established between the Royal Courts in Bucharest, Belgrade and Athens, under the care of Queen Maria.¹⁰

The public image of Tsar Boris III in the Romanian public's opinion was one of evident sympathy. An extensive article by the writer, publicist and, at that moment, National Peasants' Party deputy Ion Vinea, published during the royal visit in January 1934 in the left-wing daily newspaper "Facla"¹¹, about a meeting with the Bulgarian sovereign in an ordinary train compartment, in September 1931, had an impact and was still alive at the level of public opinion. The taste of the ordinary Romanian for a domesticity as close as possible to that of a family with an ordinary income was well known, and that was precisely why the Bulgarian Tsar quickly became a very popular figure. "He displays relaxed movements, his gestures are a bit large and off-centered, and his hands are bony, energetic, and precise - Vinea describes the interlocutor on the night train to Paris, where the Tsar was going in order to meet Giovanna of Savoy. His lean, slightly crooked stature, his face from everywhere betrays not a specific nationality, but rather a strictly separated class, a self-confident nobility, and moreover, a natural aristocracy, defined by birth, cultivated for centuries, up to the extreme limit of rarefaction, from which going further is not allowed."¹² "The king" -Vinea continued -"was traveling in a simple compartment, situated between Colonel Draganov's and his valet's. The valet had a place at the king's

⁹ „Vizita M.S. Regelui Alexandru la Varna”, *Universul*, October 4, 1933; 9. Dilek Barlas, „Turkish Diplomacy in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Opportunities and Limits for Middle-Power Activism in the 1930s”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (2005): 441-464; Yonca Köksal, Dilek Barlas, „Diplomacy, State Policies and Muslim Minorities. Turkey's Relations with Bulgaria and Romania (1923-1936)”, *European History Quarterly*, 53, no. 3 (2022): 520-543.

¹⁰ Daniel Citirigă, *Europa Centrală și tentația federalismului. Istorie și diplomatie în perioada interbelică* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2015), 298-321.

¹¹ Ion Vinea, „În tren cu Regele Boris. Un interview înăbușit. Despre podul de peste Dunăre. Despre parlamentarism și constituție. Despre minorități. Două popoare cari ar putea face fapte mari împreună”, *Facla*, January 27, 1934. Reprinted in Ion Vinea, *Opere*, Vol. IX (Publicistica, 1932-1934), edition by Elena Zaharia-Filipaș and Magdalena Răduță, (București: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2012): 392-399.

¹² *Ibid.*, 393.

table. The entire life of King Boris is reflected in this detail of human simplicity and understanding solicitude".¹³ "A king" - Boris III told him then - "can exercise his benevolent action, can determine, strictly adhering to the constitutional regime, which, while appearing to be limiting, gives him, on the contrary, a wider power of judgment and reign".¹⁴

Given the fact that he accurately perceived the competition for notoriety, Carol II introduced Queen Maria into the ceremonial of the official visit of the Bulgarian royal couple. The Queen had left Yugoslavia on January 23, where she had been hosted by King Alexander and Queen Maria/Mărioara, in order to await the Bulgarian guests at Cotroceni Palace.¹⁵ Through the presence of his mother, Carol II had also found a protocol solution for a major impediment, related to the absence of his ex-wife, Elena, already sent into exile, but also of his son, the former King Mihai, a minor, (1927-1930), at that moment Grand Voivode of Alba Iulia. The latter, on vacation with his mother in Florence, returned to Romania on January 29, 1934¹⁶, a few hours after the Tsar and Tsarina of Bulgaria were already in Sofia.

Tsar Boris III and Tsarina Ioanna would be the last sovereigns to visit Romania for a period that would cover the next 30 years. It was not until the last days of September 1964¹⁷, at the invitation of communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, that the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, officially arrived in Bucharest. The Negus received all the official honors, including from Patriarch Justinian¹⁸ and a *Doctor Honoris Causa* title from the University of Bucharest.¹⁹

2. "The Craftsmen of Peace/Peacemakers". Four days with King Carol II and Tsar Boris III (January 25-28, 1934)

It was the first official visit of a Bulgarian Tsar to Romania in over 15 years since the end of World War I, and it had been scheduled just a few days before the signing of the Balkan Entente treaty in Athens. Bulgaria gave no official signal that the Tsar had come to Bucharest in order to provide alternatives to the French-inspired construction, rather than that he had scheduled the visit in order to contribute decisively to preventing a regional

¹³ Ibid., 396.

¹⁴ Ibid., 398.

¹⁵ „M.S. Regina Maria se înapoiază în țară”, *Universul*, January 26, 1934: 1.

¹⁶ „Marele Voevod Mihai se înapoiază în țară”, *Universul*, January 30, 1934: 1.

¹⁷ *Scînteia*, September 26, 1964: 1; *Scînteia*, September 27, 1964:1 and 3; *Scînteia*, September 28, 1964: 1; *Scînteia*, September 29, 1964: 1 and 3; *Scînteia*, September 30, 1964: 1.

¹⁸ „La Patriarhia Bisericii Ortodoxe Romîne”, *Scînteia*, September 29, 1964: 3.

¹⁹ „Solemnitatea conferirii titlului de doctor honoris causa al Universității din București”, *Scînteia*, September 29, 1964: 3.

conflagration that his country did not want. The Bulgarian royal visit to Bucharest may be perceived as a personal effort to build a relationship with the Royal Court in Bucharest, which was now far from the austere standards of Sofia²⁰, and an official action to quell Romanian suspicions and grievances regarding the regional issue of maintaining the territorial *status quo*.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikola Mushanov had not left much room for expectations from this visit. Rather, it was about symbolic meanings, intended to suggest the resumption of a historical tradition, from the time of Carol I and Ferdinand I of Bulgaria, that of seeing each other and of talking frequently. In a rudimentary manner, just a few hours before leaving for Bucharest, the Bulgarian Prime Minister announced, in an interview with the Romanian news agency Rador, that the entire format of the talks between the sovereigns would have been intended to "solve issues of direct interest to Bulgaria and Romania". Bilateral relations, the head of the Bulgarian government also mentioned, had the chance to be restored to the foundations of a "traditional friendship" with "historical foundations", a friendship which had had its "trials" in "recent years"²¹. In Sofia, the official/officially sanctioned newspaper in French "La Bulgarie" believed that the visit to Romania of the Bulgarian sovereigns was most certainly related to a type of diplomacy practiced in good faith and to the friendly relations between the heads of state. In a nutshell, better less than nothing, as it had been since 1913 until that moment. "Turning our backs on yesterday's chaos" - the aforementioned text, dated January 25, 1934, read -, "Romania and Bulgaria are addressing at this moment not only their two peoples, but also the spirits of good faith and people of goodwill, to ask for their cooperation towards a pacifying action which will be able to capitalize on the rapprochement policy now inaugurated"²². A few days later, Mushanov also listed some of the political and diplomatic reasons that were the basis of the agenda of the royal visit to Bucharest: the strong memory of the bilateral historical ties, which "the trials of the recent years could not destroy," certain "contentious issues" which through "goodwill" can be "easily solved", and the Bulgarian community in Romania, which constituted, in Sofia's opinion, "an element of loyalty and peaceful work".²³

The Bulgarian Prime Minister also wanted to clarify that the most important reason for the discussions between Carol II and Boris III was related to "the pacification of the Balkans and the consolidation of peace between the

²⁰ Tsar Simeon II writes about his mother, Tsarina Ioanna, that she was a very religious woman. Simeon II of Bulgaria (with Stéphane de Courtois), 59.

²¹ „D. Muşanoff despre raporturile româno-bulgare”, *Universul*, January 27, 1934: 1.

²² „Presa din Sofia despre vizita suveranilor bulgari în România”, *Dimineaţa*, January 28, 1934: 3.

²³ „D. Muşanoff vorbeşte presei române. Declaraţiile făcute de preşedintele consiliului de miniştri bulgar”, *Dimineaţa*, January 31, 1934:1.

peoples of the Peninsula".²⁴ All this in a context in which, in Bucharest, Nikola Mushanov explained the refusal to sign the accession to the Balkan Entente by "the differences compared to the Romanian statesmen on the character of the conventions". "Bulgaria" - the head of the government in Sofia insisted - "pursues a policy of peace and understanding with all peoples and first of all with its neighbors. It has no aggressive intentions towards anyone and is ready to turn this declaration into the respective diplomatic form. However, the Bulgarian people cannot give up those rights that are guaranteed to Bulgaria by its participation in the League of Nations."²⁵

In other words: non-aggression pact, yes; Balkan Entente, no.

Tsar Boris III and Tsarina Ioanna arrived at the Ruse railway station early on a Thursday morning, January 25, 1934. After a simple and short reception ceremony, organized by the city hall and the Bulgarian 5th Infantry Regiment, the sovereigns boarded the "Vit" ship of the Hydraulic Service and began crossing the Danube towards Giurgiu.²⁶ Welcomed here by an official delegation led by Richard Franasovici, Minister of Public Works and Communications, the guests immediately left for Bucharest by train. In the Royal Salon of the North Railway Station, King Carol II was accompanied by Queen Maria and also by his sister and brother, Queen Elisabeta of Greece and Prince Nicolae.²⁷

Three royal carriages *à la Daumont*, escorted by two squadrons on horseback, traveled along Calea Griviței and Calea Victoriei up to the Royal Palace.²⁸ In the first official carriage, assisted by valets dressed in golden embroidery and four black trotters, Carol II and Boris III were seated, in the second - Queen Maria and Tsarina Ioanna, and in the third, the last one, as a concession from the elder brother, Queen Elisabeta and Prince Nicolae.²⁹ The route was short, the weather quite cold and at the Royal Palace on Calea Victoriei, a frugal but official lunch was organized, which lasted barely half an hour.³⁰

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ „Sosirea în țară a Suveranilor Bulgariei. Primirea la Ramadan. Sosirea în Capitală. Primirea în Gara de Nord. Cortegiul regal. Dejunul de la palatul regal. Festivalul de la Teatrul Național”, *Universul*, January 27, 1934:11; *Dimineața*, January 27, 1934: 1, *Adevărul*, January 26, 1934: 5; *Curentul*, January 28, 1934: 5; *Viitorul*, January 27, 1934: 1; *Dreptatea*, January 27, 1934: 1.

²⁷ *Universul*, January 27, 1934: 11.

²⁸ „Programul oficial al vizitei”, *Adevărul*, January 26, 1934: 5.

²⁹ „Primirea în Gara de Nord”, *Universul*, January 27, 1934: 11.

³⁰ „Vizita Suveranilor Bulgariei. Dejunul dela palatul regal. Concertul dela teatrul Național. Primirea la Sinaia”, *Universul*, January 28, 1934:1.

In a hurry, the Royal Families left in order to handle their outfits at Queen Maria's Cotroceni Palace and the officials who were part of the entourage went nearby, to the National Theater, so as to wait for them. It was here, from 3 p.m., that the Philharmonic organized a gala concert³¹, with the orchestra conducted by George Georgescu and with three musical performances in the program: the overture from "The Master-Singers of Nuremberg/Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg", by Richard Wagner, "Romanian Rhapsody", by George Enescu and "Till Eulenspiegel", by Richard Strauss.³² The mandatory codes regarding the spectators' attire had been sent out several days before and announced in the press, with the obligation of wearing blue uniforms, with decorations, for the officers, jackets for the civil officials and afternoon dresses for the ladies.³³ The concert did not last too long either because, at 5 pm, from Cotroceni railway station (currently known as Băneasa), a royal train left for Sinaia, carrying as passengers in the railroad cars the members of the Royal Families and the Romanian and Bulgarian officials. Arriving in the evening, around 8:15 pm, the sovereigns ended a tiring day with an intimate dinner at Peleş Castle.³⁴

For the second day, i.e., January 26, 1934, the official program was full, the main part comprising official talks, meetings and receptions. There was public information according to which, during that day, from the Royal Palace in Belgrade, King Alexander of Yugoslavia telephoned Peleş Castle and spoke with the two sovereigns³⁵ in what we could designate as the first international teleconference in the history of the Romanian Royal Family. The interlocutors undoubtedly also learned about the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between Poland, a key ally of Romania after 1919³⁶, and Germany. During the discussions between the two sovereigns, probably also in the one with the participation on the telephone of the Yugoslav guest, the diametrically opposed positions on the Balkan Entente project were explained, as well as the prospects of eliminating as many of the remnants of the memory of the military conflicts of 1913 and 1916-1918 as possible.

Early in the morning, Queen Maria, accompanied by young Tsarina Ioanna and Prince Nicolae, left for the Royal Sheepfold, where the Romanian

³¹ „Primirea în Gara de Nord”, *Universul*, January 27, 1934: 11.

³² „Vizita Suveranilor Bulgariei. Dejunul dela palatul regal. Concertul dela Teatrul Național. Primirea la Sinaia”, 1.

³³ „Programul oficial al vizitei”, *Adevărul*, January 26, 1934: 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ „Textul pactului balcanic comunicat regelui Iugoslaviei”, *Universul*, January 26, 1934: 1.

³⁶ Florin Anghel, *Construirea sistemului cordon sanitaire. Relații româno-polone, 1919-1926* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2008).

Winter Sports Federation was organizing the national sledding championship³⁷. Later, Carol II also made his presence known, coming especially to mingle with the crowd and to hand out the prizes to the winners. After the competition, the Romanian and Bulgarian journalists accredited to the delegations were the official guests of the Sinaia City Hall, at the elegant "Palace" hotel, for breakfast³⁸. In turn, the Royal Families gathered at Peleş Castle for lunch, alongside the ministers of the Tătărescu government, the dignitaries of the Court, the former regents, the marshals and officials of the Bulgarian Legation and of the municipality of Sinaia.³⁹

In the evening, from 6 p.m., the two sovereigns received in mutual consultations the heads of government, Gheorghe Tătărescu and Nikola Mushanov, and, an hour later, Boris III would also have a meeting with Savel Rădulescu, undersecretary of state in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the absence of Nicolae Titulescu, who remained in Bucharest, sick with the flu. A subsequent solemn ceremony, held in Peleş Castle, consisted of bestowing the highest orders and distinctions of the two states, King Carol II receiving the Grand Cordon of the Order of "Cyril and Methodius" and Tsarina Ioanna the Grand Cordon of the Order of "Crown of Romania".⁴⁰ The Tsar awarded the Grand Cordon of the Order of "Alexander I" to Queens Marie and Elisabeth, Prince Nicholas, Patriarch Miron Cristea, Prime Minister Gh. Tătărescu, and Ministers Constantin Angelescu and General Paul Angelescu, while Richard Franasovici and the Prefect of the Capital Police, Gabriel Marinescu, were decorated with the Grand Cordon of the Order of "Civil Merit".⁴¹ The royal speeches and the official reception on the night of January 26, 1934 were attended, alongside the members of the government, by the diplomats accredited to Bucharest, led by the papal nuncio Valerio Valeri, as dean of the diplomatic corps. Close to midnight, Dinu Lipatti was invited to play Johann Sebastian Bach's "Toccata" and Frédéric Chopin's "Scherzo" on the piano, after which George Folescu⁴², from the Romanian Opera in Bucharest, accompanied by Theodor Rogalski, sang four old folk songs ("Jos pe Mureş/Down on the Mureş River", "Unde aud cucul cântând/Where I hear the cuckoo sing", "Duce-m-aş şi m-aş tot duce/I would go and I would keep going" and "Cântec

³⁷ „Festivităţile dela Sinaia în onoarea Suveranilor Bulgariei”, *Universul*, January 29, 1934: 1.

³⁸ Ibid. „Suveranii bulgari oaspeţii regelui Carol, la Sinaia. Primarul Sinaiei întâmpină pe regele Boris cu o urare de bun venit în limba bulgară”, *Adevărul*, January 28, 1934: 8; „Festivităţile de la Sinaia în cinstea Suveranilor bulgari”, *Curentul*, January 28, 1934: 5.

³⁹ *Adevărul*, January 26, 1934: 5.

⁴⁰ „Distincţii acordate de Suverani”, *Universul*, January 29, 1934: 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Corneliu Buescu, *Gheorghe Folescu* (Bucureşti: Editura Muzicală, 1966).

haiducesc/Outlaw song").⁴³ Finally, N. Iorga offered the Tsar an album with the images of the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia, and the Tsarina a rare edition, with color boards, representing old Romanian church art (and with a dedication in Italian).⁴⁴

The gala reception at Peleş Castle, which began at 10 p.m. and lasted half an hour after midnight, also marked one of the key moments, awaited by most decision-makers in Balkan regional politics. In all the capitals of these countries, Bulgaria's public and official reaction to the last high-level discussion before the coagulation of the Balkan Entente was expected. In other words: friends or enemies?

In similarly structured speeches, Carol II and Boris III avoided uttering the word "failure" for those who were still hoping for Bulgaria's accession to the Balkan security structure. Both sovereigns agreed to bring to light the historical memory of the old bilateral ties⁴⁵, with Carol II being keen to mention the most important landmarks: Pleven and Grivitsa. "The relations between Romania and Bulgaria have existed for a long time", the Romanian sovereign recalled⁴⁶, "I am happy - Boris III replied - to notice that the memory of the hospitality which Your country granted so generously to the creators of Bulgarian freedom, as well as the glorious part taken by Romania in the war of 1877 is always alive within Us and constitutes a precious element for all the initiatives which aim at an ever closer rapprochement between Our countries".⁴⁷

However, the consensus publicly conveyed by the two sovereigns stopped at the very inviting point of the places of memory.

Whereas King Carol II spoke in his speech of a "consolidation of the existing order"⁴⁸ (in the Balkans and in Europe), Tsar Boris III wanted to be as explicit as possible, invoking "peace and understanding", but also "trust", along with "serving the vital interests of Our peoples"⁴⁹ by supporting and promoting them. Arriving home, in Sofia, Prime Minister Nikola Mushanov explained it better, in a press conference held on January 29, 1934, what the sovereigns had only suggested at the reception at Peleş Castle, in Sinaia. "We explained ourselves with complete sincerity – Mushanov declared – and in an atmosphere of trust. We communicated to the Romanian government the reasons which prevent Bulgaria from joining a pact which deals with territorial guarantees.

⁴³ *Universul*, January 29, 1934: 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Constantin Velichi, *România și Renașterea bulgară* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980).

⁴⁶ „Discursul M.S. Regelui Carol II”, *Universul*, January 29, 1934: 1.

⁴⁷ „Răspunsul Majestății Sale Regelui Boris III”, *Universul*, January 29, 1934: 1.

⁴⁸ *Universul*, January 29, 1934: 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Reiterating at the same time the strong will of the Bulgarian people to continue a policy of understanding and friendship with all its neighbors and its desire to take part in the common efforts to consolidate peace, we declared that Bulgaria is ready to sign non-aggression pacts with the Balkan states.⁵⁰ A confirmation of the differences of opinion and also of the consistent efforts to reopen the dialogue also came from Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu, who felt the need for a public explanation regarding the various inconsistent opinions within the bilateral discussions. Tătărescu characterized those who discussed in Bucharest and Sinaia as "peacemakers" and continued: "I will reveal my entire thought: we did good work for the good cause."⁵¹

The next day, quite early, given the time at which the reception at Peleş Castle had ended, the Bulgarian royal couple left with Queen Maria and King Carol II for the queen's residence in Bran. After a few hours spent there, the two Royal Families went out for a short visit to Braşov, stopping at the Black Church and the "St. Nicholas" Church in Şcher⁵², before returning to Sinaia. It was the right time, since Boris was leaving that evening, by train to Periş for a hunting party alongside King Carol II and Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu.

3. The last day in Romania: the royal hunt in Periş and a visit to a national museum without electricity (January 28, 1934)

A photograph published by the daily newspaper "Dimineaţa", on the front page, in the bottom right corner⁵³, on the last day of January, shows a sled with two passengers wearing fur hats, well wrapped in thick clothes, with blankets next to them. Carol II is smiling happily and in a relaxed manner. His clothes seem more appropriate for a trip through the snow, in any case they seem more elegant and more expensive. Boris III, in a thick, dark military coat, with a fur soldierly collar, is looking absent, expressionless. One might say that he is tired, if not downright bored. If one looks carefully, one may even get a general impression about the personal relationship between the two. Probably, outside of the official dialogue, there would be very few topics of personal conversation between the two still young men. Even though the two men were very close in age, they had almost nothing in common.

Since the evening, the royal train had left Sinaia with the august passengers Carol II and Boris III, in order to take them to Periş, not far from Snagov and the royal residence at Scrovişte. The forest, located on the banks of the Neajlov River, was known by those with a passion for hunting, and visits by

⁵⁰ „D. Muşanoff despre vizita la Bucureşti”, *Dimineaţa*, February 1, 1934: 1.

⁵¹ „Primul ministru despre conversaţiunile bulgaro-române. Declaraţiile făcute de D. G. Tătărescu ziariştilor bulgari veniţi la Bucureşti”, *Dimineaţa*, February 1, 1934: 1.

⁵² „Suveranii la Braşov”, *Universul*, January 30, 1934: 1.

⁵³ *Dimineaţa*, January 31, 1934: 1.

sovereigns there were not rare at all. The moment proposed a strictly male reunion for the better part of the last official day in a rather embarrassing protocol situation, i.e., the lack of a queen on the throne of Romania, given that the former wife, Helen, had been in forced exile in Florence since 1932, after obtaining a divorce in 1928.⁵⁴ The heir to the throne, the former king Mihai, now Grand Voivode of Alba Iulia, was not in the country either, being excluded from the ceremonial at the Court.

On Sunday morning, at 9 o'clock, on the platform of the small railway station, the two sovereigns were greeted by Prince Nicholas, Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu, the Minister of the Interior, Ion Inculeț, Generals Constantin Ilasievici and Ernest Baliff, and by the Prefect of Ilfov County, Ion Ghiață.⁵⁵ Half an hour later, the queens also got off at Cotroceni station. Queen Maria, Tsarina Ioanna and Queen Elisabeta of Greece were welcomed by the Minister of Public Works and Communications, Richard Franasovici, and by two other members of the government, both undersecretaries of state at the Ministry of the Interior: Victor Iamandi and Sergiu Dimitriu. After a frugal breakfast at Cotroceni Palace, Queen Maria offered to be Tsarina Ioanna's guide throughout her visits to Pitar Moș Church, located between Magheru Boulevard and the Icon Garden/Grădina Icoanei, a ktetory from 1795 by Prince Alexandru Moruzi⁵⁶, and to the French Sanatorium "St. Vincent de

⁵⁴ Arthur Gould Lee, *Regina Mamă Elena a României, prințesă de Grecia și Danemarca: o biografie autorizată* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2019). About Queen Elena, historian Dorin Dobrinu claimed, in a press release, that "she is a fairly little-known character even in the world of historians, apart from a few general issues related to her marriage to Carol II and this unhappy personal history related to King Mihai, her childhood and the period 1940-1947". Andreea Ofițeru, „Secolul Regelui Mihai. Mama care a oprit Holocaustul în România. Regina Elena sau cum să rămâi om când lumea înnebunește”, *Radio Free Europe Romania/Radio Europa Liberă România*, October 21, 2021, <https://www.romania.europalibera.org/a/regina-elena/31527838.html>.

⁵⁵ „Plecarea Suveranilor bulgari. Vânătoarea regală de la Periș. Regele Boris la mormântul eroului necunoscut. Recepția dela legația Bulgariei. Plecarea din gara Cotroceni”, *Universul*, January 31, 1934:1; „Suveranii bulgari au părăsit țara. Vânătoarea regală dela Periș. Ultimele vizite în Capitală. Plecarea spre Giurgiu”, *Curentul*, January 30, 1934:1.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Culture, National Institute of Heritage, Archive of the Historical Monuments Commission, file 0615, Pitar Moș Church, Dionisie Lupu Street 45, Bucharest, accessed January 6, 2024, <https://www.arhivacomisiuniimonumentelor.ro/?p=87020>. The church was located in the immediate vicinity of the residence of Minister Richard Franasovici, *aide-de-camp* to the Bulgarian Royal Family on behalf of King Carol II and of the Romanian government, during the visit. Villa Merope, on Pitar Moș Street 20, is the work of architect Alexandru Zaharia (Alexandru Zachary). Antoaneta Dohotariu, „Palatul mediteranean în care a fost instalat „Tov. Sadoveanu”, opera arhitectului pe care Bucureștiul interbelic iubea să-l urască. Interviu cu arhitectul Mădălin Ghigeanu”, *b365*, November 23, 2022, accessed January 6, 2024, <https://www.palatul-mediteranean-in-care-a-fost-instalat-tov-sadoveanu->

Paul"⁵⁷, on the Road. At noon, the Queens returned to Cotroceni Palace for an intimate lunch⁵⁸.

The sovereigns, in turn, had lunch at the palace in Scroviște, after the team had hunted 36 pheasants and three wild boars, two of which were trophies assumed by Gheorghe Tătărescu, a success "with two consecutive shots"⁵⁹, as the most important daily newspaper in the country commended. Towards the end of the winter afternoon, with little light and no sun, the royal car entered Bucharest, and the Tsar began to diligently complete the last part of the official program.

Boris III became the first (and only) head of state from the coalition of the former Central Powers of World War I to pay homage at the Tomb of the Unknown Hero inside Carol Park. This official gesture contained, in itself, an exceptional political and diplomatic meaning, especially given the fact that Bulgaria had not given up on the idea of repairing the territorial clauses of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, including regarding Dobrudja.

Early in the evening, the Tsar arrived at the Military Museum, which he had been keen to see; however, the event was filled with embarrassment, even if it was treated discreetly by the press. The institution had been founded in 1923 by King Ferdinand and the former Palace of Arts (built in 1905-1906), located inside Carol Park, had been allocated to it.⁶⁰ The building lacked electrical networks, being unsuitable for a museal and cultural establishment, and Boris III admired the artifacts and the pieces exhibited in semi-darkness.⁶¹ Also in the dark, by candlelight, he signed the institution's visitor's book, after which he headed towards the Bulgarian Church, where he was awaited by Queen Maria and Tsarina Ioanna, for half an hour in the Bulgarian Legation building (at 34 Vasile Lascăr Street), then to Cotroceni Palace.⁶² From here, they arrived at Cotroceni Royal Railway Station at 8 p.m., in three official cars - the first one, with the two sovereigns, the second, with Queen Marie and Tsarina Ioanna, and the last one, with Queen Elisabeta and Prince Nicolae - being awaited by most

[opera-arhitectului-pe-care-bucurestiul-interbelic-iubea-sa-l-urasca-interviu-cu-arhitectul-madalin-ghigeanu-487634/](https://www.adevarul.ro/blogurile-adevarul/sanatoriul-st-vincent-de-paul-de-la-sosca-1910129.html).

⁵⁷ The Saint Vincent de Paul Sanatorium (today known as "C.I. Parhon" Endocrinology Hospital/Spitalul de Endocrinologie „C.I. Parhon”) was built on Jianu Road (today known as Aviatorilor) starting in 1912. See Oana Marinache, „Sanatoriul St. Vincent de Paul de la Șosea”, *Adevărul*, December 9, 2018, <https://www.adevarul.ro/blogurile-adevarul/sanatoriul-st-vincent-de-paul-de-la-sosca-1910129.html>.

⁵⁸ *Curentul*, January 30, 1934: 1.

⁵⁹ *Universul*, January 31, 1934: 1.

⁶⁰ Carla Duța, „Muzeul Militar Național - 100 de ani de la înființare”, *Historia*, accessed January 6, 2024, <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/muzeul-militar-national-100-de-ani-de-la-2251739.html>.

⁶¹ *Curentul*, January 30, 1934: 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*

of the members of the government, led by Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu.⁶³ Dinner was served on the train for the Bulgarian royal couple, on the way to Giurgiu, alongside the Romanian companions sent by Carol II: Minister Richard Franasovici, Eugen Bianu, the General Director of Security, General Florea Țenescu, and the Bulgarian minister in Bucharest, Vladimir Robev.⁶⁴

Arriving at 10 p.m. at Giurgiu railway station, the Bulgarian sovereigns boarded the "Vit" ship and, before the scheduled departure half an hour later, Boris III transmitted, through Minister Richard Franasovici, a message of hope for the future of the bilateral relations: "I am happy to note that the weather has changed completely, the fog has dissipated, the ice has begun to melt and in the sky I see the star of all hope shining."⁶⁵

"I have wanted this meeting with the King of Bulgaria for a long time," declared Carol II, in Romanian, to journalist Stoian Tanev from "Utro". Between both peoples, lasting, sincere, friendly ties must be created. The contact between Me and King Boris cannot fail to bring results. You can be sure that such results will have a favorable impact on both peoples.⁶⁶ "When asked by the journalist whether one could count on the fact that this meeting would be followed by others, Carol II replied categorically: "It certainly will not be the last."⁶⁷ The King confirmed a lot of rumors, some more optimistic than others, quickly taken up by the press in Bucharest and Sofia immediately after the departure of the Bulgarian sovereigns, according to which in March 1934, successively, Carol II and Alexander of Yugoslavia were to arrive on official visits in Bulgaria. The newspapers also promoted the idea that, in May 1934, a reunion of the three sovereigns would have been scheduled in Sofia.⁶⁸ Only Prime Minister Nikola Mushanov, a skilled and realistic politician, the main actor in the discussions from Romania, proved to be much more reserved, asking the press to stop publishing such news which, in his opinion, would have been "premature".⁶⁹

King Carol II was no prophet and the meeting between the two sovereigns would be the last.

⁶³ *Universul*, January 31, 1934: 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. „Regele și regina Bulgariei au părăsit România. Vizitele și solemnitățile de duminică”, *Dimineața*, January 30, 1934: 5; „Suveranii bulgari au părăsit țara. Vânatoarea regală dela Periș. Ultimele vizite în Capitală. Plecarea prin Giurgiu”, *Curentul*, January 30, 1934: 1.

⁶⁶ „Suveranul Bulgariei despre vizita perechei regale bulgare”, *Curentul*, January 30, 1934: 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ „Regii Carol, Boris și Alexandru se vor întâlni la Sofia”, *Universul*, February 2, 1934: 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

4. Conclusions

Carol II and Boris III were meeting for the first time, as heads of state, after the bilateral relations had been frozen since 1913, when Southern Dobrudja had become part of the Romanian state. The efforts on the part of Bucharest to normalize its relations with its hostile neighbors (USSR, Bulgaria, Hungary) were more visible since the Foreign Affairs portfolio had been entrusted to Nicolae Titulescu. A few days after the talks in Bucharest and Sinaia between the two sovereigns, the Balkan Entente treaty was signed, after which, in June 1934, Romania and the USSR established diplomatic relations, however, without regulating the Kremlin's recognition of Bessarabia's status.

The results of the meetings in Sinaia and Bucharest (in January 1934) can be quantified into a modest score in terms of diplomatic and political value. Romania insisted on the recognition of the territorial *status quo* established in 1919-1920, whereas the partners in Sofia invoked the solutions offered by the Covenant of the League of Nations, which left open the regulation of the provisions in the peace treaties through agreements between the negotiators.

All public indications converge towards the idea that there was no personal connection between King Carol II and Tsar Boris III, despite their belonging to the same generation. In terms of their human structures, they were very different, as were the institutional practices through which they ruled in their countries. This happened despite the fact that neither of the sovereigns managed to rule during constitutional and democratic regimes, sooner or later consenting to authoritarian and dictatorial solutions. This fact is clear: despite the fact that bilateral relations did not thaw until the end of World War II, the two sovereigns never met again, on any occasion provided or not.

Even though devoid of any tangible results, the visits and meetings between King Carol II and Tsar Boris III (on October 30, 1933, and January 25-28, 1934) temporarily stopped the accelerated degradation of bilateral relations and postponed the outcome of the administration of Southern Dobrudja by several years, until September 7, 1940.