

A ROYAL VISIT: KING CAROL I TO PLEVNA (1902)

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 20th century, royal visits were events that aroused the curiosity of journalists and diplomats, fuelling the imagination of those seeking to gain a glimpse behind the scenes of power. A well-informed monarch, Carol I of Romania prided himself on being a role model for the kings and princes of the Balkans. Although his royal palace was open to princely, royal or even imperial figures, his visits south of the Danube were a rarity. His reluctance to return the visits of monarchs from the Balkan states who had visited him in Sinaia or Bucharest would give rise to diplomatic comments and royal displeasure. A notable exception was his sole visit to Bulgaria in October 1902, which took place in a special context linked to the 25th anniversary of Romania's independence, on the battlefields of Grivitsa and Plevna. It was a visit that took many people by surprise, given the strained relations between Romania and Bulgaria.

Keywords: Carol I; Ferdinand of Bulgaria; Plevna; Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878)

In January 1903 a book by one of the most respected Romanian journalists, Alexandre Rubin, was published in Bucharest. The name of the book, printed in French, speaks for itself: *Une année jubilaire*. The volume was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of Romanian independence and the surrender of Plevna. A special chapter was devoted to the two-day visit of King Carol I to Bulgaria in the last days of October 1902. A visit that Rubin considered to be a real apotheosis for the king and for Romania. It is alleged that the presence of Carol in Grivitsa and Plevna had a profound impact on the Romanian Kingdom¹.

The Romanian sovereign himself would publicly declare that the memory of the military victories of 1877 had taken on “special significance” thanks to the warm welcome he had received during his brief visit to Bulgaria². Why did the mention of the name of a Bulgarian town, Plevna, stir up such strong emotions in Romanian society? In response to this question, the

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¹ Alexandre Rubin, *Un année jubilaire*, (Bucarest, 1903), 286-287.

² *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I. 1866-1914*, II, 1887-1914, ed. Constantin C. Giurescu, (București: Fundația pentru literatură și artă Regele Carol II, 1939), 285.

President of the Council of Ministers, Dimitrie A. Sturdza, attempted to provide an explanation from the parliamentary rostrum: Plevna was not merely a victory, but a victory won shoulder to shoulder with the army of a great empire. For the first time in our national history, “the glory of the Romanian soldiers was on a par with that of the army of a great empire”. For the first time, through a victory won by our soldiers, “we became an important factor in resolving issues concerning the situation in Europe”. In this way, Sturdza argued, a great change had taken place in the Near East “with our knowledge and our effective and significant contribution”³. Some journalists viewed this royal visit as “a precious sign of peace in the East”. They justified their view by stating that “kings are the true representatives of their peoples, whose interests they defend, alongside those of general peace, with far greater authority than the cumbersome machinery of diplomacy”⁴.

This visit, the only one King Carol I has made to Bulgaria, surprised many people. It took place at a time when relations between Bucharest and Sofia were not friendly, with tensions between the two neighbouring states causing concern amongst European chancelleries. However, the visit had been planned well in advance, and the Romanian sovereign hoped that it would bear fruit⁵. In Sofia, it was hoped that this royal visit would succeed in dispelling the “traces of coldness and hostility” that the Romanians had shown towards the Bulgarians⁶.

Two years had passed since a series of political assassinations committed on Romanian soil in 1900 had triggered a major crisis in relations between Bucharest and Sofia. A high-profile trial takes place in the autumn of 1900 in Bucharest against Bulgarian citizens accused of plotting to assassinate King Carol I. The two countries' differing policies on the Macedonian question and a series of incidents on the river border trigger a virulent press campaign on both sides of the Danube. There is even talk of the danger of war breaking out between the two countries. Negotiations are taking place, without success, for enhanced security guarantees. In Bucharest, the feeling is that there has been no real support from its allies, Berlin and Vienna, and that only the government in St Petersburg has been seriously involved in the diplomatic settlement of the Bulgarian-Romanian conflict⁷. Rumours of a military agreement between Romania and Austro-Hungary prompt the Bulgarian government to sign a secret military agreement with Russia in the summer of 1902, a defensive military agreement. It was of a defensive nature, strictly confidential, and

³ *Desbaterile Adunării Deputaţilor*, Nr 11, sesiunea ordinară 1902-1903, şedinţa din 30 noiembrie 1902, p. 61

⁴ *L'Indépendance Roumaine*, No. 7972, 6(19) Novembre 1902

⁵ Sorin Cristescu, *Carol I. Corespondenţă Privată*, (Bucureşti: Tritonic, 2005), 413.

⁶ Arhivele ale Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (AMAE), Problema 21, vol 103, f 129 bis.

⁷ Rudolf Dinu, *Diplomaţia Vechiului Regat. Studii*, Ed. a II-a, (Chişinău: Cartier, 2024), 134-135.

provided for a neutral stance favourable to Russia in the event of a Bulgarian-Romanian military conflict⁸. Diplomats accredited in Bucharest have noted the Romanian authorities' fear of Bulgarian military strength and are keeping a close eye on any official statements regarding the Romanian army's equipment⁹.

The nature of the personal relationship between the two sovereigns, King Carol I and Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria, also plays an important role in the evolution of Romanian-Bulgarian relations. They are two very different characters, best described by Queen Marie: "Both Uncle Carol and Uncle Ferdinand were considered clever politicians and diplomats, which they undeniably were, but their schools were very different. There was not much love lost between these two sovereigns, but their politeness towards each other was irreproachable and admirable; a grand display of perfect manners. For the looker-on it was as good as a play to see them together, because greater contrasts it would have been difficult to find. *Der Onkel* was earnest, somewhat pompous, took himself and his work tremendously seriously, and certainly his methods were as up-right and devoid of double dealing as is compatible with the professions of reigning and diplomacy; but Uncle was entirely devoid of a sense of humour, nor did he understand the art of small talk and elegant conversation. Uncle was in fact somewhat of a pedant. Imagine as contrast Ferdinand of Coburg, world-renowned for his intelligence and love of intrigue, which he professed like a fine art. The French blood running in his veins made of him an incomparable *causeur*, his repartees were sparkling, his irony light, intangible, and always to the point. Sharp-witted, all-observing, with a superfine sense of humour, he often indulged in the delicate luxury of laughing at himself, of making fun of his looks, his idiosyncrasies, his tastes, his likes and dislikes. All this furnished subjects for endless witty conversation and allowed him to use his sarcasm to his heart's content. (...) To anyone with a sense of humour, to see the two kings together was really exceedingly entertaining. Uncle always took himself seriously at all hours of the day, at all seasons of the year and in every company. Life was to him a long chain of important events, nor did he ever ease this attitude of heavy earnestness, whilst Bulgaria's monarch was a great actor."¹⁰ Carol I criticises Ferdinand of Bulgaria for his vanity and fickle

⁸ See Vasili Borisovici Kaşirin, "Circumstanţele pregătirii Convenţiei militare ruso-bulgare, din 1902, în contextul planificării strategice a Rusiei", in *In memoriam acad. Florin Constantiniu. Smerenie. Pasiune. Credinţă*, ed. Laurenţiu Constantiniu (Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică, 2013), 340-370; Daniel Cain, "România şi convenţia militară ruso-bulgară din 1902", in *In memoriam acad. Florin Constantiniu. Smerenie. Pasiune. Credinţă*, ed. Laurenţiu Constantiniu (Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică, 2013), 133-151.

⁹ Flavius Solomon (ed. coord.), Andrei Cuşco, Grigorii Şkundin, Alexandr Stâkalin, *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse din România (1899-1905)*, (Bucureşti-Brăila: Editura Academiei Române – Editura Istros a Muzeului Brăilei Carol I, 2020), 352.

¹⁰ Marie, Queen of Roumania, *The Story of My Life*, (New York, 1934), 499-500.

nature, regarding him as someone you cannot rely on¹¹. The favourable impression Ferdinand had made during his first visit to Sinaia in the summer of 1897 quickly faded, as the King was disappointed that the Bulgarian prince had not informed him of the trip he was due to make to Constantinople a few days later¹². Carol I was so outraged by his guest's behaviour that, in November 1897, the Bulgarian prince's insistent wish to present two decorations to the Romanian sovereign in Bucharest was politely but firmly declined, and the visit was postponed¹³. This did not take place until the summer of 1898 and was regarded by the Romanian and European press as "a mere courtesy visit"¹⁴. In his interactions with Ferdinand of Bulgaria, the Romanian sovereign must always take care to ensure that Ferdinand does not feel in any way offended¹⁵. The main reason for the Bulgarian prince's dissatisfaction was Carol I's reluctance to reciprocate the gesture. Some Bulgarian ministers even intervened with the Romanian diplomatic agent in Sofia to press for such a visit: if King Carol, whilst in Giurgiu, could cross the Danube for a few hours to visit Rustchuk, the Bulgarian people would be grateful to the Romanian sovereign, as he would be making this gesture for Bulgaria's sake and not for Prince Ferdinand's¹⁶. Foreign diplomats in Bucharest also raise this issue: Ferdinand of Bulgaria was troubled by this lack of consideration on the part of the Romanian sovereign, convinced that a Coburg was worth just as much as a Hohenzollern. Consequently, Prince Ferdinand could not accept that his visits to Sinaia should go unrewarded¹⁷. The explanation given by the head of Romanian diplomacy, Dimitrie A. Sturdza, is that, before paying a visit to Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria, Carol I should visit King Alexander of Serbia. Furthermore, if he were to travel to Sofia, Sultan Abdul Hamid II would, in turn, expect to be visited by the Romanian sovereign¹⁸. The French Minister Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, Henry, even speaks of an arrogant attitude on the part of King Carol I, who

¹¹ Sorin Cristescu, *Scrisorile Regelui Carol I din arhiva de la Sigmaringen. 1878-1905*, (Bucureşti: Paideia, 2012), 397, 445, 448.

¹² Carol I al României, *Jurnal*, Vol. III, 1893-1897, (ed.) Vasile Docea, (Iaşi: Polirom, 2020), 395-396.

¹³ Петър Стоянович, *Между Дунав и Нева. Княз Фердинанд I Български в очите на австро-унгарската дипломация (1894 - 1898)*, (София: ЛИК, 1999), 161 – 162.

¹⁴ Beatrice Marinescu, "Romania and South-East Europe at the end of the 19th century", *Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes*, XXI, 4, (1983): 333.

¹⁵ Sorin Cristescu (ed.), *Regele Carol I în rapoartele diplomatice austro-ungare (1877-1914)*, Vol. 2, 1896-1908, (Bucureşti: Paideia, 2014), 299.

¹⁶ Daniel Cain, *Diplomaţi şi diplomaţie în sud-estul european. Relaţiile româno-bulgare la 1900*, (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române, 2012), 194.

¹⁷ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Commission de Publication des Documents relatifs aux Origines de la Guerre de 1914, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871-1914*, Série 2 (1901-1911), tome II, 1er Janvier-31 Décembre, 1902, (Paris: 1931), 500-501.

¹⁸ *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse din România (1899-1905)*, 299-300.

“never reciprocated the visits paid to him by the heads of the Balkan states since his accession to the throne”¹⁹.

It was against this background that, in diplomatic milieu in Bucharest, information emerged as early as July about King Carol's intention to visit the battlefields of Bulgaria. There were the first signs of a thaw in bilateral relations. Crown Prince Boris's illness prompted an exchange of telegrams between Ferdinand and Carol²⁰. At the same time, negotiations were under way between Sofia and Bucharest with a view to signing a convention on fishing in the Danube; Sturdza regarded these negotiations as a first step towards establishing bilateral relations that would be beneficial to both countries²¹. Signed in Sofia on 29 November 1901, the convention was to come into force a year later, on the eve of the royal visit to Bulgaria²². Steps are being taken to reach an agreement on the delimitation of the Danube border, and the idea of building a bridge across the Danube to link the two countries' rail networks is being raised²³.

Time and place are carefully chosen. The visit was to take place after the ceremonies at Shipka Pass, organised between 12 and 18 September 1902 by the Bulgarian authorities to mark a crucial moment in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. In addition, Carol I chose to visit Rustchuk rather than Sofia so as not to be obliged by diplomatic custom to visit Constantinople or Belgrade²⁴.

Romanian society is offended by the fact that no invitation has been extended to Romanian officials to attend the celebrations at Shipka. Although low-key, Prince Ferdinand's involvement in these celebrations is beyond doubt, as he insisted on combining the two events – the commemoration of the battles at the Shipka Pass and the consecration of a Russian church. At the insistence of the Russian side, which did not wish to politicise the ceremony, no foreign guests were invited, and the celebrations retained a Bulgarian-Russian character²⁵. The assurances given by the Bulgarian government – namely that these festivities are simply Russian celebrations and that they concern nothing more than the inauguration of a Russian memorial church – have failed to calm tensions²⁶. In Bucharest, the move is seen as an act of defiance on the part of

¹⁹ *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871–1914, Série 2 (1901–1911), tome II*, 501.

²⁰ Sorin Cristescu, *Carol I. Corespondență Privată*, 395.

²¹ *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse din România (1899–1905)*, 299.

²² F.C. Nano, *Condica tratatelor și a altor legăminte ale României. 1354-1937*, I, (București: 1938), 118.

²³ Стоян Данев, *Мемоари*, (София: Университетско издателство „Св. Климент Охридски“ - Военноиздателски комплекс „Св. Георги Победоносец“, 1992), 107.

²⁴ *Regele Carol I în rapoartele diplomatice austro-ungare. 1877-1914*, vol 2, 1896-1908, 272.

²⁵ See Тина Георгиева, “Възход на юбилейната дипломация: Шипченските тържества през 1902 година“, *История*, Год. XXXII, 1 (2024), 38-52.

²⁶ AMAE, Problema 21, vol 103, f. 113.

the Bulgarian authorities. It was hoped, right up until the last moment, that the important role Romania played in the events to be commemorated at Shipka would be taken into account. Some opposition newspapers argued that “the Bulgarians are being disrespectful towards us”, given that “there is not a single spot on the plains of Bulgaria that has not been soaked with the blood of brave Romanians”²⁷. Warlike voices, such as the influential journalist Constantin Mille, criticised the “lack of patriotism and prudence” displayed during the diplomatic conflict of 1900, “when we failed to seize the opportunity to crush the neighbours who are causing us so much trouble today”²⁸. The celebrations at Shipka were also the subject of satire in the Bucharest satirical press, which highlighted the Bulgarians’ ingratitude towards the Romanians²⁹. Some foreign diplomats in Bucharest saw the celebrations at Shipka as an opportunity for Ferdinand of Bulgaria to express his dissatisfaction with Carol I clearly and publicly, “deliberately overlooking the important role played by the Romanian army in the events of 1877”.

They noted that King Carol’s coldness towards the Bulgarians had suddenly melted away after the celebrations at Shipka. Moreover, the Romanian monarch was now seeking opportunities to curry favour with his neighbours, ‘with the same zeal with which he had previously avoided them’. Aware of the risks that a new episode of tension in Romanian-Bulgarian relations would entail, the king decided to intervene personally and turn things round for the better. Thus, the Bulgarian officers who took part in the Romanian army’s autumn manoeuvres were overwhelmed by Carol I’s attention, whilst the Bulgarian diplomatic agent was invited to Peleş Castle to have lunch in the intimate company of the royal family³⁰. In short, Carol I went to great lengths to appear as amiable as possible, thereby paving the way for his visit to Bulgaria. Russian diplomats in Bucharest also offer an explanation for Carol I’s decision: “The King felt personally offended by the Bulgarians’ failure to invite representatives of the Romanian army to Shipka and, in particular, by the omission from these celebrations of his heroic deeds at Plevna, to which he attaches great importance”. For this reason, whilst extending courtesies to the Bulgarians, Carol I was at the same time considering “the organisation of a Romanian-Bulgarian celebration, at which he would be the central figure, and Romania would assume the role of liberator of Bulgaria”³¹.

The announcement of this visit took Romanian society by surprise. The press published the full itinerary of the royal visit to Bulgaria (29–30 October 1902). Reactions were mixed. Even some members of the opposition were

²⁷ *Adevărul*, XV, no. 4708, 7 September 1902.

²⁸ *Adevărul*, XV, no. 4703, 2 September 1902.

²⁹ *Veselia*, XI, no. 38, 22 September 1902.

³⁰ *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871–1914, Série 2 (1901–1911), tome II*, 605.

³¹ *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse din România (1899–1905)*, 352.

angered by this move on the part of the Romanian sovereign. Some newspapers took a favourable view of the king's forthcoming visit, regarding it as a guarantee of peace in the region³². Special correspondents have been sent to Rustchuk to report on the preparations for this royal visit, which is expected to ease the strained relations between the two neighbouring countries³³. Some Romanian journalists, however, will regard it as a national humiliation: "Today, however, we find ourselves humiliated before a people who are our own creation, whom we have raised to where they are today." Constantin Mille asks: If Alexandru Ioan Cuza had been on the throne of Romania, rather than Carol I, would he have pursued the same shameful policy?³⁴ The King is also criticised for having agreed to pay a visit to Bulgaria before the Bulgarian authorities had made a gesture of moral satisfaction towards Romania for what happened in the summer of 1900.

There are many who speak of the embarrassing impression made by this scheduled visit, which is regarded as a humiliating failure of Romanian foreign policy. Concerns have even been raised regarding the personal safety of the Romanian monarch during this visit, with fears of a political assassination³⁵. On the other hand, Russian diplomats were dissatisfied that, in their eagerness to prepare for the king's triumphant arrival in Plevna, the government press in Bucharest was promoting the idea that the Bulgarians owed their freedom exclusively to Romania, whilst Russia's participation in the 1877–1878 campaign was being overlooked³⁶. Some journalists in St. Petersburg will regard this visit as a pale imitation of the celebrations at Shipka. The very significance of the Romanian army's participation in the 1877–1878 war is called into question: "What does Russia's colossal struggle for the Slavs have in common with the actions of a Romanian army corps that advanced too late onto the battlefields?"³⁷ In contrast, the people of Sofia recall with gratitude that King Carol, "at the head of his valiant army, shoulder to shoulder with our liberators, the Russians, fought for our liberation". That is why – as the newspaper 'Bulgarija' wrote — we are delighted that, immediately following the celebrations at Shipka, where we expressed our boundless gratitude to our Russian liberators, we are being given the opportunity, "through the visit that His Majesty King Carol will pay to our Prince, to express our gratitude also to the Romanian people, in the person of their worthy leader"³⁸. Subsequently, in the Parliament in Bucharest, the President of the Council of Ministers, D.A.

³² *Voința Națională*, XIX, no. 5283, 29 October 1902.

³³ *Universul*, XX, no. 294, 26 October 1902.

³⁴ *Adevărul*, XV, no. 4755, 24 October 1902.

³⁵ *Adevărul*, XV, no. 4756, 25 October 1902.

³⁶ *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse din România (1899–1905)*, 353.

³⁷ AMAE, Problema 21, vol 79, f 129.

³⁸ AMAE, Problema 21, vol 103, f. 127.

Sturdza, would argue that this visit was a natural course of events, and that the proposal to visit the battlefield at Plevna was nothing other than “a celebration of King Carol and the Romanian Kingdom, which was itself forged in those very places where the Principality of Bulgaria was born”³⁹.

The absence of Russian officers at Grivitsa and Plevna would have been regarded as a diplomatic affront. Consequently, King Carol decided that, in addition to D. A. Sturdza and the Foreign Minister, Ion I.C. Brătianu, the Russian military attaché in Bucharest should also be included in his suite. It was a decision that made a good impression in Russia⁴⁰, serving as a reminder that the victory at Plevna had been achieved by the Russian-Romanian allied forces. Even though Colonel Leontieff's presence alongside Carol I might have been interpreted by some as an indication of a shift in Romania's foreign policy, this was preferable to a reaction that would have placed Russia in a delicate position⁴¹.

The Bulgarian authorities will make every effort to live up to expectations. The head of protocol at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrived in Rustchuk with “a battalion of secretaries, quartermasters and valets”. The Chief of Police in Sofia has arranged for heightened security measures during this royal visit, whilst the Bulgarian Minister of the Interior has overseen the restoration of the monuments on the battlefield at Plevna⁴². Robert, Count of Bourboulon, Lord Chamberlain to the Prince of Bulgaria, describes his busy schedule during those days to his wife: “I arrived in Rustchuk on Sunday evening. Monday – a day of exhausting preparations. Tuesday – the king's reception with an entourage of eight people, some of whom were acquaintances of mine. Representatives of the government, ministers, clergy, the army – they were all standing. (...) A gruelling day – planning for the meal, visits, etc. In the evening – a banquet for 80 people, speeches. I went to bed at half past three; on Wednesday I woke up at five. At half past six I set off for Plevna. I spent the whole day on the battlefields of the Russo-Turkish War, visiting the war graves of Russian and Romanian soldiers. Requiem; at five o'clock I arrived in Plevna, had a meal, listened to patriotic speeches, returned by train to Samovit (on the Danube), attended a banquet on board the ship, and accompanied the king to the brightly lit Romanian shore.”⁴³

Analysing Carol I's correspondence, we understand the emotion of this visit, made 25 years later, to the battlefield where Romania won its independence. The King was delighted not only by the fact that Ferdinand of Bulgaria had given him such a warm welcome, but also by the enthusiasm with

³⁹ *Voința Națională*, XIX, no. 5320, 14 December 1902.

⁴⁰ *Scrisorile Regelui Carol I din arhiva de la Sigmaringen. 1878-1905*, 480.

⁴¹ *35 anni di relazioni italo-romene, 1879-1914. Documenti diplomatici italiani*, A cura di Rudolf Dinu, Ion Bulei, (București: Univers enciclopedic, 2001), 436-437.

⁴² AMAE, Problema 21, vol 79, f 129.

⁴³ Граф Робер дьо Бурбулон, *Български дневници*, (София: ИК Колибри, 2007), 406.

which he was received by the Bulgarians – an enthusiasm he had not expected. “Ferdinand of Bulgaria was overjoyed by my visit. He arranged a welcome that was as splendid as it was affectionate, to which he also invited his brother Philipp, my former friend. At Rustchuk, he had his house renovated and arranged for carriages, horses, silverware – in short, the entire court from Sofia – to be brought there. Everything was impeccable and very elegant. (...) Ferdinand took an interest in my preferences and set his mind on fulfilling all my wishes, which were, in fact, modest: first and foremost, Plevna, a visit to which was my political objective – the response to Shipka.”⁴⁴

The reception in Rustchuk was very warm, the reception in Plevna was enthusiastic. Captain Alexandru Sturdza (son of the head of the Romanian government), who was part of King Carol’s suite, recalled the atmosphere of those two days spent in Bulgaria: “I do not wish to appear ungrateful for the hospitality and the truly splendid receptions the Bulgarians had given our king; nevertheless, I must say that we had already become somewhat accustomed to arriving and departing to cheers, shouts of joy and streets adorned with garlands and carpets. But at Plevna we were surprised by something new: a shower of flowers.”⁴⁵ Prince Ferdinand was accompanied by Prime Minister Stoian Danev and four other ministers, with whom King Carol held extensive discussions, which served to reassure him regarding Bulgaria’s foreign policy. The Romanian monarch told his Bulgarian counterparts that “maintaining peace in the Balkans must be the primary objective of our common policy and that we must resist the temptation to impose solutions, leaving the initiative to the Great Powers”⁴⁶. The six-hour journey on the same train provided the Romanian and Bulgarian officials with a good opportunity to exchange explanations. D.A. Sturdza would later tell the Russian diplomatic representative in Bucharest that “a great many issues on which we had been unable to reach agreement in the past, and which had given rise to a climate of mistrust between us, had finally been discussed”⁴⁷. During the audience he granted to the Bulgarian head of government, Stoian Danev (who also held the Foreign Affairs portfolio), King Carol sought to find out more about Bulgarian policy on the Macedonian question. The Romanian monarch advised the Bulgarian ministers not to arouse suspicion regarding the sincerity of their intentions, as in such a case they would not only lose the sympathy of the outside world, but could also provoke complications capable of igniting a conflagration in the Balkans. Danev maintains that King Carol I advised them not to abandon our national aspirations, provided they remained cautious and took the overall situation into

⁴⁴ *Scrisorile Regelui Carol I din arhiva de la Sigmaringen. 1878-1905*, 480-481.

⁴⁵ Căpitan Sturdza Alexandru, *Călătoria Majestății Sale Regelui în Bulgaria*, (București, 1903), 31.

⁴⁶ *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871-1914, Série 2 (1901-1911)*, tome II, 664.

⁴⁷ *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse din România (1899-1905)*, 360.

account⁴⁸. The Romanian monarch would later tell foreign diplomats in Bucharest that he had warned Ferdinand of Bulgaria regarding his policy on the Macedonian question: if it seeks territorial expansion in Macedonia, it will find itself isolated and the Great Powers will speak out against it⁴⁹.

For King Carol, the visit to the battlefield of Plevna was the highlight of his trip to Bulgaria. "It's been an uplifting day, but also very tiring, 15 hours busy to the max. At seven in the morning we left by train from Rustchuk after going to bed at one in the morning on the day of arrival. It was bitter cold and foggy. Sixty people - ministers, generals and suites - were seated in a very nice special train." After first stopping at his former headquarters at Poradim, Carol arrived at Grivitsa to go to the Romanian chapel on the site from where he led the battle of 30 August 1877. He was expected there by a guard of honour and a metropolitan. He gave a moving speech, "and as he spoke and pointed to the blood-spattered fields the sun came out and the whole battlefield stretched before me. One cannot describe what I felt in those solemn moments," wrote Carol to his brother Leopold. After Grivița came a visit to Plevna, where the enthusiasm with which he was received by the Bulgarian people exceeded his expectations: "The welcome I received there was indescribably beautiful and magnificent. In the very place where, 25 years ago, I had ridden in triumph, a huge triumphal arch now stood in honour of 'the Victor, the Liberator and the Friend of Bulgaria'. I was showered with flowers and wreaths, and was presented with telegrams and poems. In a solemn address, the city council announced that the street through which I had entered the city back then would bear my name. The crowds and the ceaseless cheers were so overwhelming that the carriage could barely move forward; flowers and fir branches were constantly being thrown at us." The same evening he would return home to return to Peles Castle 'very tired but delighted with everything I saw'⁵⁰.

In his address delivered at the opening of the new parliamentary session, shortly after his return from Bulgaria, King Carol would say he was moved to see that the Bulgarians' feelings of gratitude towards Romania remained as strong as ever and that the many ties of neighbourliness from the past had not been forgotten⁵¹. Pragmatism characterised the thaw in Romanian-Bulgarian relations that followed King Carol I's visit to Bulgaria. Several bilateral agreements were signed in the years that followed, including the one demarcating the border along the Danube. Russian diplomats in Bucharest will note the positive impact of King Carol's visit to the former battlefield in Bulgaria: articles and recollections have appeared in local newspapers "about those times when the Russians and Romanians were allies and fought side by

⁴⁸ Стоян Данев, *Мемоари*, 108.

⁴⁹ *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871–1914, Série 2 (1901–1911), tome II*, 664.

⁵⁰ *Scrisorile Regelui Carol I din arhiva de la Sigmaringen. 1878-1905*, 481-483.

⁵¹ *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I. 1866-1914, II, 1887-1914*, 285.

side. Those who had taken part in the previous war have started speaking out again, and they have begun to speak without hatred towards the Russians. The newspapers have even made a discovery, namely that, had the Russians not started the war, perhaps there would have been no independent Romania at all.”⁵² Although the improved cordiality between Romania and Bulgaria was a positive development, there were few illusions in government corridors in Bucharest regarding the gestures of friendship shown to Romania by the unpredictable Ferdinand of Bulgaria⁵³. For the Danev cabinet, which took a particular interest in the Macedonian question, Romania’s friendly attitude was invaluable in many respects⁵⁴. It was the Macedonian issue which, a decade after King Carol’s visit to Bulgaria, led to the severing of diplomatic relations between the two neighbouring states.

⁵² *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse din România (1899–1905)*, 357.

⁵³ *35 anni di relazioni italo-romene, 1879-1914. Documenti diplomatici italiani*, 437.

⁵⁴ Стоян Данев, *Мемоари*, 108.