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Through the Diplomats' Eyes:
Romanian Social Life
in the Late 19th and
Early 20th Century

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The Land of Contrasts and Contradiction. Perceptions of Romania Among the Austro-Hungarian Diplomats on the Eve of the Great War

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Almost all Austro-Hungarian diplomats who were in service in Romania before the outbreak of the Great War described this southeast European country in a similar way: “Romania is the land of contrasts: scenically, socially, and climatically”¹. Many added that that was also true culturally, politically and economically. They shared the experience of being attracted to, fascinated and, at the same time, irritated by all these contrasts and contradictions. As a rule, they stayed there for two or three years, as it was considered the best legation in the Balkans and a “stepping stone to a higher position”². While their predecessors enjoyed a relatively calm, normal day-to-day posting, the last two Austro-Hungarian envoys to Bucharest, Prince Karl Emil Fürstenberg and Count Ottokar Czernin, had to cope with several political conflicts and diverging interests between Romania and the Danube Monarchy. Undoubtedly, Romania had played a pivotal role in the Viennese Balkan policy since 1913 onwards (at the latest), as all official documents on foreign policy along

¹ Ottokar Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg* (Berlin und Wien: Ullstein, 1919), p. 112. Compare also Erwin Matsch (ed.), *November 1918 auf dem Ballhausplatz. Erinnerungen Ludwigs Freiherrn von Flotow des letzten Chefs des österreichisch-ungarischen Auswärtigen Dienstes 1895-1920* (Vienna, Cologne, Graz, 1982), p. 14; Josef Stürgkh, *Politische und militärische Erinnerungen* (Leipzig: 1922), pp. 94-95; [Alexander] Freiherr von Musulin, *Das Haus am Ballplatz. Erinnerungen eines österreichisch-ungarischen Diplomaten* (Munich: 1924), pp. 53-56.

² Solomon Wank, *In the Twilight of Empire. Count Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal (1854-1912). Imperial Habsburg Patriot and Statesman*, volume 1: *The Making of an Imperial Habsburg Statesman* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2009), p. 152.

with the diplomats private correspondence from 1913-14 prove³. The question of loyalty and reliability in the case of a war against Serbia and Russia dominated this late period of their relations.

This study will give a short sketch of the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic mission in Bucharest and introduce its most important actors. An analysis of the private and official documents provides an insight into the diplomats' perceptions of Romania. How did they perceive King Carol I, the Romanian government and the political parties? What image did they have of the heir to the throne and his wife? How did the diplomats see the future cooperation between Austria-Hungary and Romania? What else did they report and what did they deal with? How did they assess Romanian society and culture? There is, of course, a difference between the views presented in their private correspondence and their official reports as well as between their diaries and their memoirs. All these sources were consulted and compared in order to draw a comprehensive and differentiated picture of perceptions of the Romanian kingdom. For the period under examination, 1912 to 1914, the political topics, Austro-Hungarian-Romanian rivalries, and their international context were central to all considerations and records. The paper will conclude with a short description of the Romanian entry into the Great War on the side of the Entente in 1916.

The Austro-Hungarian Legation in Romania

The diplomatic mission in Bucharest was considered to be one of the most important diplomatic posts for the Habsburg Monarchy, or, as Ludwig von Flotow, an Austro-Hungarian diplomat, declared, it was "the embassy among the legations"⁴. This means that the political importance

³ Two classic accounts on Austro-Hungarian foreign policy: *From Sadowa to Sarajevo. The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungaria 1866-1914*. By F. R. Bridge [Foreign Policies of the Great Powers. Edited by C. J. Lowe] (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Samuel R. Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991).

⁴ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 113.

of this mission was much higher than that of all other legations in the Balkans. Bucharest was quite attractive to the diplomats for various reasons: having at least one assignment on the Balkan Peninsula was thought to be an essential step towards a great career. Alexander von Musulin, one of the leading Austro-Hungarian diplomats before 1914, stated that “an Austrian diplomat who did not know Petersburg and the Balkans was like a soldier who only knows shooting from hearsay”⁵. Bucharest was known as a steppingstone for the highest diplomatic careers. When Aloys von Aehrenthal became an envoy there, his mentor and former Foreign Minister Kálnoky confirmed the usefulness of spending time in the Balkans, “even if there are more pleasant places and people than you will find there. However, you will be able to derive diverse benefits from this for your future”⁶. Another reason for the attractiveness of this post was the opinion of most Austro-Hungarian diplomats with regard to social and political life, their legation was the leading one in Romania⁷. Bucharest was also “the most desirable assignment”⁸ in the Balkans, not only because it had a real upper class that spoke French and had been educated abroad, but also because of the proximity to the monarch and of the intimate relations with other foreign diplomats. On the other hand, many complained about a lack of variety in social life and leisure. The wife of one of the diplomats lamented about her actual nightmare – being “in Bucharest again”⁹ after her husband was stationed there for a second time.

There exists a “Who’s who” of the most prominent diplomats and politicians from Vienna on the list of Austro-Hungarian ambassadors in Bucharest. Three of them – Count Agenor Goluchowski, Aloys Lexa von Aehrenthal and Count Ottokar Czernin – later became Foreign Ministers.

⁵ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 80.

⁶ Kálnoky to Aehrenthal, 27.10.1895. *Apud* [cited after] Solomon Wank, *In the Twilight of Empire*, p. 151.

⁷ Josef Stürgkh, *Erinnerungen...*, p. 96; Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 68-69.

⁸ William D. Godsey, *Aristocratic Redoubt. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office on the Eve of the First World War* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, 1999), p. 177.

⁹ *Apud* [cited after] William D. Godsey, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, p. 178.

Two other prominent and appreciated diplomats, Count Johann Pallavicini and Prince Johann Schönburg-Hartenstein, worked as envoys there too. Emperor Franz Joseph, his foreign minister, and frequently the heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand decided which envoy might represent Austro-Hungarian interests best. They considered not only the professional skills of the potential candidates, but also their nationality, though it was not clear whether an Austrian or a Hungarian would be more successful in Bucharest. An Austrian would easily obtain sympathies in Romania, but a Hungarian would obtain a hearing in Budapest and could contribute to an improvement of the Hungarian-Romanian relations¹⁰.

From March 1911 through October 1913, Prince Karl Emil von Fürstenberg (1867-1945) was the representative of the Habsburg Monarchy in Bucharest. His highly promising career began in Rome and St. Petersburg, and before his appointment in Romania, he was an envoy in Dresden from 1909 to 1911. At the Ballhausplatz, the seat of the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, his work was appreciated and the heir apparent Franz Ferdinand made plans for Fürstenberg's future career. The fact that both Prince Karl Emil Fürstenberg and his wife were related to the Romanian royal family was mentioned at the Ballhausplatz with regard to ceremonial issues, but were not an obstacle to his appointment in 1911¹¹. Perhaps it even facilitated the access and interaction with King Carol I. Prince Fürstenberg enjoyed the King's confidence and benefited from Aehrenthal's communication policy¹². However, his work during the Balkan Wars was considered a failure as Romania drifted away from her allies Austria-Hungary and Germany and cooperated with Serbia and Russia¹³.

¹⁰ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 73. Pallavicini was an exception as he was a Hungarian and still obtained sympathies there.

¹¹ Schönburg to Aehrenthal, 1.03.1911, in: Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien (HHStA), Administrative Registratur, F4, 101 Personalia.

¹² Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 28.02.1912, in: Private Papers Berchtold, Státní oblastní archiv Brno (SOA), G 138 (PPB), Inv. 464, K. 134.

¹³ Ernest U. Cormons, *Schicksale und Schatten. Eine österreichische Autobiographie* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag 1951), p. 143.

Fürstenberg asked for his dismissal from Bucharest because he feared negative consequences for his career if he stayed longer in Romania. When he indicated that he might leave the service entirely, Foreign Minister Berchtold offered him the post of envoy to Madrid, which was viewed only as a stopover until he felt ready to take over one of the major embassies¹⁴.

Fürstenberg was succeeded by Count Ottokar Czernin (1872-1932), one of the most influential intimates and consultants of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Among his colleagues and foreign diplomats, he was considered as a talented, perhaps even an ingenious master of diplomacy. He was a major Bohemian landowner who never passed his exams and worked only for a short time as a diplomat, the last time in 1902. But for many years, he advised Franz Ferdinand in foreign affairs matters and was supposed to become foreign minister after the Archduke's accession to the throne. On 25 October 1913, at the request of the heir and under the protest of the Hungarian parliament, Czernin was appointed the new envoy to Bucharest where he stayed until 27 July 1916¹⁵. The fact that his brother Otto was a former diplomat in Romania from March 1910 to October 1912 and that he was transferred to the Austro-Hungarian embassy in St. Petersburg facilitated Ottokar's access to the new office. Otto instructed him about the state of things in Romania and privately sent him information about Russia¹⁶. Czernin's contemporaries described Ottokar as charming, witty, humorous, though sometimes offensive and nervous¹⁷. They all praised his persuasive power and his oratorical and writing talent¹⁸. By the end of 1916, after Franz Joseph's death, Ottokar Czernin became Foreign Minister under the young Emperor Karl I.

¹⁴ Berchtold Diary, 27.09.1913, in: HHStA, Berchtold Private Papers, E 79.3.

¹⁵ William D. Godsey, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, p. 142.

¹⁶ Flotow described both of them as egocentric, but held Otto for the better diplomat. Erwin Matsch, (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 321.

¹⁷ Ladislaus Singer, *Ottokar Graf Czernin. Staatsmanneiner Zeitenwende* (Graz: Styria, 1965), p. 18.

¹⁸ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, pp. 317-318.

When he was appointed to represent the Habsburg Monarchy in Bucharest, Count Czernin was not sure if this was a sign of an unlimited confidence in his diplomatic abilities, as the Austro-Hungarian-Romanian relations were at their lowest point. The alternative was that it marked the beginning of the end of his career, and a signal that Franz Ferdinand had given up the idea of appointing him foreign minister after his accession to the throne¹⁹. In private letters to Foreign Minister Berchtold, Czernin expressed his antipathy against his future position, which he called a “Sau-Anstellung” (swinish position)²⁰. He hoped to stay there only for one year. As Berchtold stated, Bucharest was less attractive for somebody like Czernin who was not eager for “patient detailed work” and “feared he would not stand the test and would be worn out”²¹.

Czernin’s activity in Bucharest was characterized by an oscillation between extreme optimism and depressive pessimism regarding his chances of improving and stabilizing the alliance between Romania and Austria-Hungary. He was caught between a rock and a hard place: on the one hand, he had to cooperate with the Hungarian prime minister István Tisza if he wished to improve Hungarian-Romanian relations, on the other, he was aware that this might lead to a complete loss of confidence on the part of Magyarophobic Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who even refused to receive Tisza in audience. Czernin was not able to escape from this dilemma during the heir’s lifetime and he wished to keep his personal relationship with the Hungarian prime minister secret²².

Another sign for Romania’s high significance for Vienna was the early establishment of a military attaché in 1884, a direct diplomatic connection between the courts in Vienna and Bucharest, as well as their military.

¹⁹ Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, pp. 103-105. Compare Robert A. Kann, *Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand Studien* (Oldenbourg: Munich, 1976), pp. 157-205, here pp. 159, 197-98.

²⁰ Czernin to Berchtold, 16.10.1913, in: PPB. Inv. 464, K. 134.

²¹ Hugo Hantsch, *Leopold Graf Berchtold. Grandseigneur und Staatsmann* (Graz: Styria Verlag, 1963), here volume 2, pp. 495-496.

²² Czernin to Berchtold, 16.10.1913, in: PPB. Inv. 464, K. 134. Compare Singer, *Czernin*, p. 26; Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 319.

For the period under examination, Colonel Oskar von Hranilović de Czoetassin (1867-1933) was the Austro-Hungarian military attaché in Bucharest. He was regarded as one of the most talented military diplomats, he spoke eight languages and was a good rider, marksman and athlete. He was very sociable and popular with his comrades and in every host country. From 1907 to 1911, he was military attaché in Bulgaria. The prevailing opinion was that he successfully mastered the demanding tasks in the Balkans²³. His cooperation with the Austro-Hungarian head of legation in Bucharest was excellent. Their views and reporting on the political situation were almost identical and they exchanged information about all the political developments. For example, when Czernin realized the enormous difficulties between Austria-Hungary and Romania as well as between himself and Berchtold, he sent Hranilović to the Ballhausplatz and asked the Foreign Minister to “listen to him carefully” as the colonel would tell him the “whole truth” about the situation in Romania²⁴. He stressed that both the Emperor and the heir appreciated Hranilović’s “clear judgement” and that he himself trusted the colonel. During the Second Balkan War, Hranilović was allowed to visit the Romanian-Bulgarian battleground twice. He reported on the equipment and transportation, board and lodging, as well as on the military hospitals of the Romanian army²⁵. In May 1914, Hranilović was transferred to the General Staff in Vienna.

Perceptions of Romania

Romania was often described as a mix of the Orient and Occident, characterized by contrasts in all respects. Diplomats praised its “wonderful nature”, mountains, colourfulness, and hunting areas²⁶. Bucharest’s

²³ Hans Meisl, *Der Russisch-japanische Krieg 1904/05 und die Balkankriege 1912/13 in den Berichten der österreichisch-ungarischen Kriegs-, Militär- und Marineattachés*, Ph.D. Innsbruck 1964, p. 303.

²⁴ Czernin to Berchtold, 2.04.1914, in: PPB. Inv. 464, K. 134.

²⁵ Meisl, *Der Russisch-japanische Krieg*, pp. 303, 415-423.

²⁶ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, pp. 124-25. Compare Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 53; Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 112.

contrasts included impressive public buildings, beautiful villas as well as dirty farmyards with pigs and poultry²⁷. The rivers were filthy, the risk of typhus high and according to some reports, the people drank for that reason large quantities of wine and *schnapps*²⁸. The Romanian capital lacked the typical “graceful beauty” and “elegant appearance,” to which the diplomats were accustomed in other capitals. Josef Stürgkh underlined Bucharest’s “glaring contrast” between Western European influences and the Asian “lack of culture” devoid of charm²⁹. The only diplomat who later admitted to be fond of Bucharest in spite of its “extremely bad press”³⁰ and wished to come back as the head of the legation was Alexander von Musulin, who served in Romania under Aloys von Aehrenthal.

Of all European countries, France influenced the Romanian cultural and intellectual life the most. Wealthy Romanians were educated in Paris, only a few went to Germany. According to Musulin, who was considered the finest linguistic genius at the Ballhausplatz, the Romanians spoke the best French as “the noble Romanian spent a lot of time in Paris, only temporarily in Sinaia and sometimes in Bucharest”³¹. However, the discrepancy between social classes was huge: on the one side the wealthy, well-educated, cosmopolitan upper class and on the other, the poor, modest, calm, backward, uneducated, and hardworking peasantry³². Women from the upper classes dressed according to the latest French fashion while rural women wore sheepskin clothes. Some diplomats complained about the low moral reputation of Romanian society³³. According to Czernin, almost every woman had been divorced and married again, which resulted in complicated family relationships³⁴. Again, only Musulin

²⁷ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 98.

²⁸ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 54.

²⁹ Stürgkh, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 94-95.

³⁰ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 54-55, 75.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³² Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, p. 112.

³³ Stürgkh, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 94-95.

³⁴ Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, p. 113.

appreciated the beauty and elegance of the Romanian women as well as the Romanian people's knowledge, humour, conviviality, and sense of family³⁵. The Romanian army was shaped by huge differences in education and manners, conscientiousness and seriousness too³⁶. Ludwig von Flotow described everyday diplomatic life in Bucharest as "miserable" with hardly any variety and entertainment: the diplomats always met the same people at the same salons, horse races, charity events or balls; the theatres and vaudevilles were of low quality³⁷. Due to a lack of broader elites and cultural opportunities, most of the diplomats described cafés, restaurants and hotels as the hub of social life, where they met and spent most of their time. The positive consequence was the warm atmosphere and the unusual intimacy among the international diplomatic corps³⁸.

After his first private audience with the Romanian king, Count Ottokar Czernin described Carol I as "charming, extremely friendly and amiable"³⁹. This opinion was shared by probably every Austro-Hungarian diplomat, especially in their retrospective records. Interestingly enough, they all described Carol as a typical German, respectively a Prussian officer, "earnest and wise, a bit stiff and dry"⁴⁰, with a high sense of morals and honour⁴¹. In their opinion, he was prudent, tough, patient, cautious, tenacious and goal-oriented⁴². Foreign Minister Count Berchtold underlined the king's strict devotion to parliamentarianism and his typical alternation between the liberals and conservatives⁴³. But Carol's subjects perceived

³⁵ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 64-66.

³⁶ Stürgkh, *Erinnerungen*, p. 103.

³⁷ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 109-10.

³⁹ Czernin to Berchtold, 1. 12. 1913, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

⁴⁰ Hantsch, *Berchtold*, vol. 1, p. 291.

⁴¹ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 92.

⁴² Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 106; Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 93.

⁴³ Hantsch, *Berchtold*, vol. 1, p. 292; Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 58-62. Romania was governed alternately by conservative and liberal cabinets. According to Czernin, the opposition had usually threatened the governmental party and the King with a revolution, so the government resigned. This repeated every few years. Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 108.

him as a prince from the German royal family of Hohenzollern, an unapproachable and reserved official who spoke Romanian with a noticeable accent and preferred having conversations with foreign diplomats. King Carol was unpopular, unloved, and feared by the Romanians and remained a stranger in the country he had governed for many years. However, the people knew how useful their king was, as he contributed significantly to the higher reputation of the Romanian state compared to the other Balkan states⁴⁴. This lack of popularity and identification made him appear less reliable to his allies, as Carol always feared a negative public reaction to his alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany.

Karl Emil von Fürstenberg admitted that he was generally afraid to mention his real opinion of the royal family in his official documents, however one can read between the lines⁴⁵. The official reports were submitted to Emperor Franz Joseph and Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The Archduke did not tolerate any criticism of Carol I, as he had great sympathy for the Romanian king since his visit to Romania in 1909⁴⁶. This obstructed his view of the actual developments as he “mistook Carol I for Romania”⁴⁷. However, in his private letters, Fürstenberg characterized King Carol as “old, weak and inconstant”⁴⁸ as well as timid and impressionable. He explained that the King’s “skilful manipulation” of the political parties turned into weakness, which he considered the most dangerous with respect to the republican forces in Romania⁴⁹. The Austro-Hungarian

⁴⁴ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 67-68; Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, pp. 92-93, 100.

⁴⁵ Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 28.2.1912, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

⁴⁶ Most contemporaries believed that this sympathy was based on the warm reception of Franz Ferdinand’s wife Sophie. See, Wladimir Aichelburg, *Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand von Österreich-Este 1863-1864. Notizen zu einem ungewöhnlichen Tagebuch eines aussergewöhnlichen Lebens*, vol. 2 (Berger, 2014), pp. 549-552; Georg Franz-Willing, *Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand und die Pläne zur Reform der Habsburger Monarchie*, Issue 35 [Südosteuropäische Arbeiten] (Callwey: Indiana University, 1943).

⁴⁷ Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 105.

⁴⁸ Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 3.03.1913, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 28.02.1912. Compare also 18.04.1912. Interestingly, Fürstenberg initially interpreted Carol’s handling of the political parties as “skilful

envoy attested that Carol had a “huge weakness of character” and was senile; he warned about the consequences for the alliance, as the King probably would not be able to conduct foreign policy alone in the future⁵⁰. During his first meeting with Carol I in July 1912, Foreign Minister Berchtold noticed his “exhaustion” and “mental concern”⁵¹. According to Fürstenberg, Carol was “weary of his office” and thought about resignation. Fürstenberg’s successor, Czernin, who called the Romanian monarch a “predestined mediator and avoider of difficulties” also found King Carol lacking in “power, energy, and daring”⁵².

All foreign diplomats were associated with the royal family as well as with several Romanian politicians and the Romanian upper classes and were welcomed at the royal court in Bucharest as well as in Sinaia every summer. The Austro-Hungarian diplomats who belonged to the higher and highest aristocracy praised Carol’s “gentle simplicity”⁵³ on the one hand, and on the other they wondered about this unusual social mix of royalty, politicians, foreign diplomats, and the Romanian (economic) upper class. Allegedly, Archduke Franz Ferdinand quickly became accustomed to this unusual social mix during his visit to Sinaia and remarked that his and Sophies trip to Romania ranked among the most beautiful memories of his life⁵⁴.

In contrast to Carol, who was always seen as a member of the Hohenzollern house whose head was Emperor Wilhelm II, his wife Queen Elisabeth came from the German princely family of Wied, and was very popular⁵⁵. She wrote under the penname Carmen Sylva, she was admired and mythologized for her artistic, musical and poetic talents. The

manipulation”, while Czernin considered it as a sign of weakness on Carol’s side. Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 19.03.1913, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

⁵¹ Hantsch, *Berchtold*, vol. 1, p. 292.

⁵² Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 124.

⁵³ Hantsch, *Berchtold*, p. 292.

⁵⁴ Aichelburg, *Franz Ferdinand*, p. 551.

⁵⁵ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 101.

diplomats were fascinated by her appearance and performance as well as by her passion for nature and people⁵⁶. Count Berchtold glorified her “altruistic kind-heartedness”, “noble femininity and true Christian love,” but he also underlined her sense of duty and self-discipline⁵⁷. Her political involvement was limited to the general support of her husband’s politics and of Albania⁵⁸.

Crown prince Ferdinand and his wife Marie, a granddaughter of the British queen Victoria, were always a topic of conversation, which was reflected in private correspondence and memoirs. Most of the remarks dealt with their adventure-fraught marriage. Marie was considered one of the most beautiful women of her time and her husband was one of the most notorious philanderers⁵⁹. There were rumours of love affairs on either side. In 1913, the Romanian royal family planned to visit Vienna; Ferdinand and Marie wished to introduce their children to Emperor Franz Joseph. The visit was repeatedly postponed because of Marie’s illness. Prince Fürstenberg, who recommended an invitation for hunting, called the crown prince “too stupid” to plan the visit⁶⁰. In October 1913, Archduke Franz Ferdinand declared this visit to be “desirable and necessary”⁶¹. However, it never took place. Later, during and after the war, most diplomats mentioned Marie’s anti-Austro-Hungarian and pro-Entente attitude⁶².

Another semi-private visit of Ferdinand and Marie’s preoccupied the Austro-Hungarian diplomacy even more: they were supposed to visit the Russian Tsar together with their son Carol in order to explore the chances for a marriage between the young Prince Carol and one of the Tsar’s daughters. Fürstenberg believed that the Romanian King and

⁵⁶ Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, pp. 120-22.

⁵⁷ Hantsch, *Berchtold*, vol. 1, pp. 292-293.

⁵⁸ Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, p. 122.

⁵⁹ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 103.

⁶⁰ Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 30.01.1913 and 3.03.1913, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

⁶¹ Franz Ferdinand to Berchtold, 12.10.1913, in: PPB, Inv. 457, K. 133.

⁶² Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, pp. 129-130.

the heir would refuse for political reasons, but that the crown princess Marie and her son Carol might favour this relationship. He warned Vienna of the possible consequences of this marriage, although he underlined that stronger political support by Austria-Hungary of Romania's territorial demands after the First Balkan War could compensate even for such an occurrence⁶³.

Romanian politics and the Triple Alliance on the eve of the Great War

One of the recurring issues in the diplomatic documents was the question whether Romania was a Balkan state. Because of the negative connotation of the Balkans in general, the Romanian politicians and the king refused to be compared to Bulgaria or Serbia, on which they looked down with disdain⁶⁴. According to Ludwig von Flotow, the King's main effort was to make his country "appear as a European state, and to rid it of the bad after-taste of a Balkan country"⁶⁵. The Austro-Hungarian envoys advised their government in Vienna not to call Romania a "Balkan state". When the First Balkan War began, and Romania exercised a policy of "wait and see," Fürstenberg reported to Vienna after several conversations with King Carol and his ministers that they believed that their peace policy would prove that Romania was not a Balkan state.

The Romanian government harboured even higher ambitions of becoming a Southern European Great Power and a member of the European concert of the Great Powers. For that reason, Bucharest started a public debate on Romania's participation in a Great Powers' conference to end the First Balkan War. Prince Fürstenberg suggested supporting Romanian participation and using this favourable "psychological moment" as a perfect "bait" and a good basis for further cooperation. The undertone

⁶³ Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 21.02.1913 and 3.03.1913, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134. Compare also Czernin to Berchtold, 16.02.1914, in HHStA, Berchtold Private Papers, Box 15.

⁶⁴ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 67.

⁶⁵ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 92.

of the report implies that neither Fürstenberg nor any other diplomat at the Ballhausplatz considered Romania as a future Great Power, and that the Habsburg Monarchy would not take any risks in supporting these high-flying Romanian plans. The typical Austro-Hungarian attitude was to support Romania officially and to hope that their promises would not have to be kept in the future.

The relations between Romania and Austria-Hungary proved to be difficult for several reasons, among which the Transylvanian question was the “most deeply anchored area of conflict”⁶⁶ since the second half of the 19th century. The conflict was rooted in the Hungarian nationalization policy (Magyarization) that suppressed all cultural and political development of the other nationalities in Hungary. The slight majority of Romanian people in Transylvania was completely dominated by the Magyars. The Romanian national elites there desired autonomy while in Romania, various political circles demanded an annexation of Transylvania⁶⁷. Despite strong pressure from Vienna and Berlin, all Hungarian-Romanian negotiations failed, and the anti-Hungarian disposition turned into an anti-Austro-Hungarian attitude on the part of the Romanian public. In March 1914 in particular, when the last negotiation failed, Bucharest’s newspapers blamed the Hungarian government for its lack of willingness to compromise. The Transylvanian question affected the evaluation of Romanian reliability and loyalty to Austria-Hungary to a great extent. Finally, despite a decades-old secret alliance, the Romanian Kingdom entered the war in 1916 on the Entente side against the Central Powers,

⁶⁶ Gerald Volkmer, *Die siebenbürgische Frage, 1878-1900. Der Einfluss der rumänischen Nationalbewegung auf die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen Österreich-Ungarn und Rumänien* (Böhlau: Köln u.a., 2004, volume 31 *Studia Transylvanica*), p. 350. See also Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁷ Keith Hitchins, *Afirmarea națiunii: mișcarea națională românească din Transilvania 1860-1914* [A Nation Affirmed. The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania 1860-1914] (Bucharest: The Encyclopedic Publishing House), 1999; Harald Roth, *Kleine Geschichte Siebenbürgens* (Böhlau: Köln u.a., 2003), pp. 87-112.

as Bucharest aspired to obtain Transylvania and Bukovina from the Habsburg Monarchy instead of Bessarabia from Russia⁶⁸.

The Romanian King refused to make public the secret alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany, as he feared Russia's reaction and national unrest in Romania. Only the king and a few Romanian politicians and army officers knew about it⁶⁹. The general sentiment of the population towards Austria-Hungary did not correspond to the alliance. The Romanian sentiment started to change in the first decade of the twentieth century due to Bulgaria's independence and the Habsburg annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina⁷⁰. Of course, the Transylvanian question also played an important role for anti-Hungarian attitudes in Romania. During and after the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913, the negative perception of Austria-Hungary intensified⁷¹. The public blamed Vienna for Romania's lack of success at the conference table. According to the Romanian press, the Habsburg Monarchy supported Romania's aspirations for territorial compensation insufficiently and caused King Carol's unsteady attitude. The Austro-Hungarian envoy Fürstenberg reported on the "permanent, deep resentment"⁷² against Austria-Hungary on the part of both the Romanian government and public. He blamed Russia and France and their propaganda and urged Berchtold to influence the public in Vienna while he tried to influence the public opinion in Bucharest⁷³. Throughout many years, most heads of the Austro-Hungarian legation complained about

⁶⁸ Volkmer, *Die siebenbürgische Frage*, pp. 349, 360-61.

⁶⁹ The best studies on the relations between Romania and Central Powers are Udo Haupt, *Die Rumänienpolitik Deutschlands und Österreich-Ungarns vom Rücktritt Bismarcks zum Ausbruch des ersten Balkankrieges (1890-1912)* [Ph.D. Würzburg], 1976; Ernst Ebel, *Rumänien und die Mittelmächte von der russisch-türkischen Krise 1877/78 bis zum Bukarester Frieden vom 10. August 1913* (Berlin: 1939).

⁷⁰ Volkmer, *Die siebenbürgische Frage*, p. 344.

⁷¹ For the Balkan Wars see Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913. Prelude to the First World War* (London; New York: Routledge), 2000.

⁷² Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 21.02.1913, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

⁷³ Ibid. Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 30.01.1913.

the increasing influence of the Russians, French, and even the Germans, which did not work in favour of Austria's advantage⁷⁴.

Fürstenberg and Berchtold proposed two strategies to counterbalance this development: pro-Habsburg and anti-Entente press campaigns, as well as official support for Romania's territorial aspirations at Bulgaria's expense. Prince Fürstenberg believed in a controlled press campaign and pleaded at the same time for Austro-Hungarian support of Romania's claims for compensation in order to maintain "truly friendly, intimate" relations with their neighbour⁷⁵. To prevent Austria-Hungary from being blamed by Romania for "treason or extreme egoism," Fürstenberg required territorial compensations: "Silistra must become Romania, otherwise I can pack up here!"⁷⁶. In this case, Bucharest would remain neutral in a potential war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia or Russia. Eventually, Romania might change alliance partners after Carol's abdication or death⁷⁷. Count Czernin, who completely despised the free press, was convinced that he could influence the Romanian press if he only received enough money⁷⁸. When *Adevărul*, the newspaper with the highest circulation in the country, refused to take money and continued its campaign against Austria-Hungary, he asked the Romanian King and Prime Minister Brătianu for help⁷⁹. Finally, nothing was done to change the negative image of the Habsburg Monarchy and to make the alliance popular.

In the last months before the war, a rather drastic solution was discussed: Romania should be forced to make the alliance public, or, even more radically, Vienna would publish it indirectly in the foreign

⁷⁴ Ibid. Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 28.02.1912; Wank, *Aehrenthal*, p. 157; Hoyos to Szápáry, 21.11.1912, in: HHStA, Private Papers Szápáry, Box 1. Compare also Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 61, 190, 262.

⁷⁵ Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 21.02.1913, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 3.03.1913.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Fürstenberg to Berchtold, 19.03.1913.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Czernin to Berchtold, 30.12.1913, 20.02.1914, 17.01.1914 and 18.01.1914. See also Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, pp. 112, 145-46.

⁷⁹ Czernin to Berchtold, 17.02.1914, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

newspapers⁸⁰. This was a part of the new political plan of the Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza and of the Hungarian parliament. After Romania's cooperation with Serbia during the Second Balkan War, and due to the failure of the Hungarian-Romanian negotiations, the Hungarian government argued that Romania should be dropped in favour of Bulgaria as the monarchy's principal Balkan ally⁸¹. However, Emperor Franz Joseph, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and to a certain extent Foreign Minister Berchtold, hoped to improve Austro-Hungarian-Romanian relations and rejected putting any pressure on Romania. Perhaps the Ballhausplatz did not believe Fürstenberg's reports on the Austrophobic and Magyarophobic atmosphere and the possible loss of the Romanian partner. Fürstenberg warned about the difficult position of the loyal, old King Carol I and disparagingly compared Bucharest with Rome, concluding that both were only concerned with their own benefits⁸². Berchtold and Franz Ferdinand decided to send Czernin, a close friend of the archduke, to Bucharest, in order to ascertain whether "the alliance still had any practical value, and if not, to suggest means and ways to return it to viability"⁸³. They expected Czernin to restore the confidence of Romania's leading circles towards Austria-Hungary. The Romanians were frustrated and irritated by the lack of support from Vienna after the First Balkan War regarding territorial compensations, as well as by Austria-Hungary's refusal to accept the Bucharest Peace Treaty by requesting a revision in Bulgaria's favour. In Tisza's opinion, Romania's annoyance was "downright ridiculous," as even Russia had to accept the revision of a treaty in 1878 to its own disadvantage⁸⁴.

Austria-Hungary's politics caused distrust and suspicion in Bucharest for several reasons: firstly, because of huge disagreements between Berlin and Vienna as well as among the decision-makers in the Habsburg

⁸⁰ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, p. 96.

⁸¹ Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, pp. 103, 110.

⁸² Hantsch, *Berchtold*, vol. 1, p. 288.

⁸³ Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 103.

⁸⁴ Tisza to Berchtold, 11.08.1913, in: HHStA, Berchtold Private Papers, Box 15.

Monarchy regarding future Balkan policy. Their conflicting views mutually blockaded and contradicted each other in public and caused a feeling of uncertainty and unpredictability⁸⁵. Secondly, this effect was reinforced by Vienna's changing position towards Bulgaria. For many years, the Austro-Hungarian diplomats attempted to maintain the rivalry between Romania and Bulgaria⁸⁶. At the beginning of the First Balkan War, this was still Berchtold's guiding principle, which he later changed by trying to arbitrate between the two Balkan states and broker an agreement⁸⁷. This seemed incredible, implausible and suspicious to the Romanian politicians. Berchtold's attempt to manoeuvre between Sofia and Bucharest during the Second Balkan War failed, and in the end both sides were upset for not receiving more support from the Danube Monarchy⁸⁸. Franz Ferdinand was the only one among the Austrian ruling elites who condemned Vienna's political course, as he strictly refused to cooperate with Bulgaria and trusted the loyalty and authority of the Romanian King, while reassuring Carol of his own loyalty⁸⁹. Meanwhile, the Chief of the General Staff Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf had serious doubts about Romania's reliability and demanded the fortification of the Hungarian-Romanian frontiers in Transylvania⁹⁰.

However, despite their conflicting views, the Austro-Hungarian leading circles needed clarity about the reliability of their Romanian

⁸⁵ Erwin Matsch (ed.), *Flotow*, pp. 145-46. See also Alma Hannig, "Austria-Hungary, Germany and the Balkan Wars. A Diplomatic Struggle for Peace, Influence and Supremacy", in: Katrin Boeckh/Sabine Rutar (eds.), *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913* (in press).

⁸⁶ Volkmer, *Die siebenbürgische Frage*, p. 343.

⁸⁷ Hoyos to Szápáry, 21.11.1912, in: Szápáry Private Papers.

⁸⁸ Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914. Diplomatische Aktenstücke des österreichisch-ungarischen Ministeriums des Äussern (ÖUA), vol. 6, Vienna 1930, n° 6903, 7152, 7399, pp. 358-59, 521, 664f. Compare also Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 186.

⁸⁹ Franz Ferdinand to Berchtold, 16.01.1913, 6.07.1913, 8.08.1913, 12.10.1913, 10.04.1914, in: PPB, K. 133.

⁹⁰ Conrad von Hötzendorf, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906-1918*, vol. 3 (Vienna, 1922), pp. 647, 757.

partner. Under the new liberal Romanian government of Ion Brătianu, the rapprochement towards the Entente, especially Russia, obviously intensified⁹¹. Count Czernin was supposed to improve and clarify their relations and to explain to the Romanian nationalist politicians that maintaining the Romanian-Serbian alliance was not “compatible” with the Romanian-Austrian alliance. Vienna considered Serbia its “deadly enemy”⁹² and warned Bucharest about a “clash of interests and duties”⁹³ in the case of a war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

Czernin’s reports from November 1913 to June 1914 consisted chiefly of his pessimistic views on the present and future relations between Vienna and Bucharest. The head of legation described the nationalistic agitation of the press as well as the widespread anti-Habsburg sentiments in all social and political circles in Romania⁹⁴. In his conversations in Bucharest as well as in his official communications to Vienna, Czernin demanded with his increasingly “aggressive style,”⁹⁵ the publication and ratification of the alliance treaty by the parliaments in Vienna, Bucharest and Budapest. Otherwise, the alliance would be only a “meaningless scrap of paper”⁹⁶. Czernin acted loyally when he wrote this, for – in opposition to the heir to the throne – Foreign Minister Berchtold had instructed him to pressurize Romania into making the alliance with Vienna public⁹⁷. Uncertain whether Bucharest would change alliances at least after King Carol’s death, Berchtold demanded a clarification of relations.

The demonstrative strengthening of the Russo-Romanian relations through the visit of the Tsar and his Foreign Minister Sazonov in June 1914 frustrated Czernin. In his official report of 22 June 1914, Czernin proposed to test Romania’s loyalty by supporting her publicly and even

⁹¹ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 60.

⁹² ÖUA 7, n° 8708, p. 355. Compare n° 9032, pp. 588-594.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, n° 9032, p. 592. See also Musulin, *Ballplatz*, pp. 188-190.

⁹⁴ Hantsch, *Berchtold*, vol. 2, pp. 529-534. Compare ÖUA 7, n° 8495, 8496, 9511.

⁹⁵ Godsey, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, p. 198.

⁹⁶ Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, p. 107.

⁹⁷ ÖUA 7, n° 9032, pp. 593f.

suggesting an alliance with Serbia. In the case of a negative reply, which almost everyone in Vienna expected, an alliance with Bulgaria should compensate for the loss of Bucharest⁹⁸. This plan was mentioned in the so-called Matscheko Memorandum, the last Austro-Hungarian programme for future Balkan policy before the outbreak of the war⁹⁹. In a private letter to the foreign minister sent on the same day, Czernin complained about Berchtold's passivity regardless of the dangerous "encirclement of the monarchy" and threatened to resign, as he feared being accused of blindness or inertia¹⁰⁰.

The Matscheko Memorandum from 24 June 1914, whose addressee was Germany, questioned Romania's reliability towards Austria-Hungary as a result of Russo-French agitation. As Berlin constantly refused Bulgaria as an alternative partner, the memorandum tried to shake up Berlin by underlining the dangers of Russian and French aggressiveness and their activity in the Balkans, not only for the Habsburg Monarchy, but also for the Triple Alliance¹⁰¹. It stated that Romania had already deviated from her traditional foreign policy and that the situation had become risky since the beginning of the Romanian-Serbian cooperation. The memorandum ended with a request to Berlin to adopt the Austro-Hungarian plans: should Bucharest refuse the aforementioned proposal, the Central Powers must form an alliance with Bulgaria and take military measures to fortify the frontiers¹⁰².

The assassination of the Austro-Hungarian heir and his wife in Sarajevo completely changed the situation. Vienna blamed Belgrade

⁹⁸ ÖUA 8, n° 9902, pp. 173-176, here p. 176. Compare also ÖUA 7, n° 9463, pp. 951-957.

Czernin made similar suggestions in his correspondence with the Archduke, but Franz Ferdinand strictly rejected putting any pressure on Romania. Czernin to Franz Ferdinand, 2.04.1914, 20.04.1914, 16.05.1914, in: HHStA, Franz Ferdinand Papers, K 9. Compare also Czernin, *Im Weltkriege*, p. 117.

⁹⁹ ÖUA 8, n° 9918, pp. 186-195, here p. 193.

¹⁰⁰ Czernin to Berchtold, 22.06.1914, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

¹⁰¹ ÖUA 8, n° 9918, p. 189, 195.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

and decided to go to war. After consultations with Berlin and the Serbian rejection of an ultimatum, Austria-Hungary declared war on 28 July 1914. When he heard of the assassination, the Romanian monarch was in a “very mild mood,” he cried repeatedly and talked about reminiscences of the “precious dead”¹⁰³ archduke, as Czernin reported. The Romanian people expressed their “deepest and most sincere sympathy and genuine consternation,” mourning the lost hopes for a peaceful change of the situation in Transylvania¹⁰⁴. Ottokar Czernin planned to use King Carol’s sorrow after Franz Ferdinands death and put more pressure on Romania. In order to get more information on what was happening at the Ballhausplatz during the July crisis, the Austro-Hungarian envoy decided to use the opportunity of a medical check-up for his kidney disease as a pretext for a visit to Vienna¹⁰⁵. As Berchtold wished to keep all war plans for Romania and Italy secret, he immediately requested Czernin to join his family.

The situation in Romania changed after the ultimatum. When he returned to Bucharest, Czernin experienced hatred against Vienna, based on a “combination of outrage and awakening greed”¹⁰⁶ for Austro-Hungarian territories, above all Transylvania and Bukovina. King Carol advised Belgrade and St Petersburg to accept the ultimatum in order to prevent a war. After the outbreak of the war, he declared neutrality and successfully prevented a mobilization of the Romanian masses against the Danube Monarchy. According to Czernin, who was supposed to “remind” the king of the Triple Alliance, the old monarch finally died of these “blows with a cudgel”¹⁰⁷ on 10 October 1914. The Austro-Hungarian envoy was disappointed with the conduct of the Romanian

¹⁰³ Czernin to Berchtold, undated [July 1914, A.H.], in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

¹⁰⁴ Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 114. There is no evidence that Franz Ferdinand advocated the cession of Transylvania. See Kann, *Erzherzog*, p. 174.

¹⁰⁵ Czernin to Berchtold, 8.07.1914, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134. One of his colleagues, János Forgách, claimed that Czernin’s curiosity was the only reason why Czernin came to Vienna, Forgách to Mérey, 16. July 1914, in: HHStA, Private Papers Mérey, Box 10.

¹⁰⁶ Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

ally and he declared the Romanian government and Romanian politicians to be “bastards and swine” and Romania a place of “perfidy, treason and meanness”¹⁰⁸. Two years later, on 27 August 1916, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary.

Conclusion

The Austro-Hungarian legation in Bucharest was one of the most important diplomatic missions and a steppingstone for the highest careers of the Habsburg diplomats. In the last decade before the outbreak of the First World War, its influence in Romania diminished in comparison with that of the Russian, French and German legations. The Austro-Hungarian diplomats perceived their host country as an exotic mix of East- and West European culture, full of contrasts and contradictions in all respects. Their private notes and memoirs contained general reflections on the land and people, its landscapes and socio-economic situation, while the official documents dealt with the daily political developments¹⁰⁹. They avoided openly criticising Carol I in their official reports, which were presented to Emperor Franz Joseph and Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and often blamed the political structures and developments inside and outside Romania for the deterioration of the Austro-Hungarian-Romanian relations. In their private letters, they complained about the King’s weakness and susceptibility to blackmail by the Romanian public and politicians.

Prince Karl Emil Fürstenberg and Count Ottokar Czernin, who represented the Habsburg Monarchy in Bucharest from 1911 to 1916, received similar impressions of Romanian policy and its consequences for the Triple Alliance, as well as for the security and integrity of the Danube Monarchy. They were faced with serious problems, which affected and questioned Romania’s reliability: the anti-Habsburg atmosphere and irredentist movement in Romania, Hungary’s policy of Magyarization

¹⁰⁸ Czernin to Berchtold, 22.11.1914, in: PPB, Inv. 464, K. 134.

¹⁰⁹ Some diplomats memories written down later might have “changed” due to their experiences with Romania during the First World War.

toward the minorities in Transylvania, the rapprochement between Russia and Romania, and above all, Bucharest's alliance with Serbia during the Second Balkan War. Russia's expanding influence and Serbia's enlargement as well as the differences in Balkan policy between Berlin and Vienna and, respectively, among the leading circles in the Habsburg Monarchy, deteriorated the position of Austria-Hungary in Southeast Europe. In 1912 and 1913, the Danube Monarchy pretended to support Romania's demands for territorial compensations and the status of a Great Power, but in fact, it pursued its own interests, trying to fuel the rivalries between Bulgaria and Romania and treating Bucharest as an unequal partner. According to Alexander von Musulin, the relations between Vienna and Bucharest were "colder" after the First Balkan War and "considerably cold" after the Second Balkan War¹¹⁰. However, the crucial factor that poisoned their relations was the Transylvanian question. The Austro-Hungarian diplomacy did not succeed in implementing Aehrenthal's principle of preventing the "artificially nourished Magyarophobia from becoming stronger than the well-founded fear of Russia"¹¹¹. Apparently, the Romanian public as well as politicians perceived the Russian and Bulgarian "peril" after the Balkan Wars as less dangerous, and at the same time, they yearned for Transylvania and Bukovina more than for Bessarabia. To Romania, the secret alliance with Austria-Hungary proved unnecessary and unfavourable. For the Habsburg Monarchy, it turned into a "deep tragedy," as Alexander von Musulin stated, because the treaty seemed not to be negotiated with "sincere friends, but appeased enemies"¹¹².

¹¹⁰ Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 261.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57. Compare Wank, *Aehrenthal*, p. 156; Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, p. 107.

¹¹² Musulin, *Ballplatz*, p. 59.