

Romanian-Bulgarian Political-Diplomatic Relations during Bulgarian Agrarian Government (1921-1923)

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Abstract:

The study investigates the Bulgarian-Romanian relations based primarily on the Bulgarian works and analyses, especially on the theses of the Bulgarian historiography. The territorial modifications after the Bucharest Treaty of 1913, the lack of confidence and the diplomatic tensions framed the beginning of interwar Bulgaria's relations with Romania. Prime Minister Stamboliyski took actions to enhance Bulgarians' relations with the neighbouring and Western countries. Stamboliyski's visits to Romania were part and parcel of the efforts the Agrarian government undertook to improve the international standing of the country after the defeat suffered during the First World War. On the other hand, the Agrarian leader pursued two other objectives: to have a closer relationship with the Peasant Party of Romania in order to establish a Green International and a project of dynastic inter-marriage binding the Royal House of Romania and that of Bulgaria.

Key words: Romanian-Bulgarian relations, Agrarian government, Aleksandăr Stamboliyski, Southern Dobrogea, minorities.

Romania's main goal during the interwar period was the consolidation of its national state by maintaining the territorial and political terms as established in the 1919-1923 peace treaties. To achieve this, Romania has created a network of politico-diplomatic and military alliances. Diplomatic relations with Bulgaria were resumed in December 1920, one year after the signing of the Treaty of Neuilly, but they were dominated, when veiled, when openly, by the revisionist claims of Bulgaria on Quadrilateral/Cadrilater (Southern Dobrogea) or even the entire Dobrogea. „Romania was in no hurry to re-establish diplomatic relations with Bulgaria” as Antonina Kuzmanova concludes. The Romanian envoy Constantin Langa Răşcanu presented his credentials to Tsar Boris only on September 17, 1920. For most of this period, the Romanian foreign policy leaders have organized and conducted extensive media and diplomatic campaign concerning the attacks allegedly staged by Bulgaria against Romania.

The Romanian diplomacy officially announced the simultaneous concentration of bands and military training at the borders of Romania by Bulgaria and Hungary and the prospect of a Bulgarian-Hungarian invasion. In reality, there has been no such risk then or later.”¹ The Bulgarian researcher undertakes a brief parallel between the revisionist policy of the two states dissatisfied with the provisions of the peace treaty, both harbouring territorial claims against Romania. But there were also key differences.

The Hungarian policy in the `20s and `30's of the last century was characterized by dynamism, which lacked in Bulgaria, a country surrounded only by enemies. Between Bulgaria and Hungary common interests existed, but the two governments never completed

¹ Antonina Kuzmanova, *Ot Nioi do Craiova. Văprosăt na Iujna Dobrogea v mejdunarodni otnoşenia* (Sofia, 1989), 67.

an actual political and military alliance.² It was not Bulgaria the one that was plotting with Hungary to attack Romania, Kuzmanova underlines with a reproachful tone, but Romania had joined the anti-Bulgarian campaign in Greece, a country which was seeking a pretext for war with Bulgaria in order to shift the Bulgarian-Greek border in North Thrace.³ The simultaneous action of Romania and Greece against Bulgaria, to which Yugoslavia also joined shortly, offered not particularly encouraging prospects to Bulgarian foreign policy.

Regarding Bulgaria's pre-World War II diplomacy, the priority was „to revise the Treaty of Neuilly through peaceful means, in accordance with Article 19 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, calling for the review of a peace treaty.”⁴

In the first chapter entitled „Bulgaria in European politics after World War” of his work „Bulgaria in the Balkans and Europe”, academician Ilcio Dimitrov outlines the main features of Bulgarian revisionism in the interwar period. It encompassed the reducing and removing of financial and other obligations, which was an unbearable burden on the weakened Bulgarian economy, full restoration of national sovereignty by liquidating foreign control and freeing from the military terms interdictions; avoidance of any complications that might lead to armed conflict (after the two national catastrophes of 1913 and 1918, the Bulgarian military euphoria had evaporated, and the majority of Bulgarians were against stepping in another conflagration, which may have relegated their country back to the camp of defeated), avoidance of political commitments which would have hampered the freedom of action

²This issue was highlighted by historian K. Gärdev in his work entitled *Bulgaria and Hungary 1923-1941* (Sofia, 1988), which was initially presented as a Ph.D. dissertation. The author, a Hungarian speaker, uses archives, published documents and works from Hungary for the documentation of his work.

³Apud. Kuzmanova, 68; *Cehoslovaški izvori za bałgarskata istoria*, Sofia, 1985, Vol. I, no. 21, 50.

⁴Kuzmanova, 63.

and recognition of the Bulgarian legitimate rights to a climate of understanding in the Balkans.⁵

Despite these above-mentioned peaceful traits of Bulgarian revisionism, others were also coming out which sowed the seeds of potential aggression: a lenient attitude of Bulgarian officials and ties with the Komitadji gangs, the obviously revisionist doctrine of the Bulgarian Army, the share of military expenditure in the country budget, allocation of disproportionately large amounts of money to the army, despite the restrictions imposed on the country at Neuilly and the modernization of roads and railways. Although these actions were known to decision-makers in Bucharest, Nicolae Titulescu opined in 1934 that Bulgarian revisionism cannot get as far as undertaking armed aggression.⁶

Dissatisfied with the terms of the Treaty of Neuilly, the Bulgarians were expecting a favourable context for an ample and lasting revisionist approach. Until then they relied on the Bulgarian minorities from the territories lost to neighbours but unclaimed publicly as yet. In order to achieve this goal, Blagovest Niagulov⁷ explains, well acquainted with Romanian language and history, a devoted researcher of Dobrogea and this province's ethnic issues, it was necessary that the Bulgarian population from neighbouring states maintain its ethno-demographic and socio-economic weight, its cultural-linguistic identity and primarily its Bulgarian national consciousness.⁸

⁵Ilcio Dimitrov, *Bălgaria na Balcanite i v Evropa* (Sofia, 1983), 5-21.

⁶Apud. Kuzmanova, 63

⁷Atanasov Blagovest Niagulov. Born in 1957 in Sofia. Graduate of the Faculty of History at the University of Sofia. (1983). PhD in History (1988). Specializations in Geneva and Bucharest. Researcher at the Institute of History, Bulgarian Academy. Scientific secretary of the magazine „Istoriceski pregled“ since 1995. Author of studies, volumes of documents, monographs devoted to Bulgarian-Romanian bilateral relations, the issue of the Bulgarian minority in Romania's Dobrogea and Banat (Romanian and Serbian) and Bessarabia.

⁸Blagovest Niagulov, *Văprosăt na Dobrogea v konteksta na ciujdestranata politica preamo Bălgaria 1926-1931*, BHR, 1990, № 1, 3 - 20.

Throughout the interwar period, feebler, and sometimes more substantial efforts were made both from Bulgaria and Romania, as to improve relations by developing economic, cultural, parliamentary and governmental level visits.

The outcome of First World War surprised the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha Bulgarian dynasty in an extremely awkward situation both due to the alliance with Germany and the reaction of the public opinion, strained after the failed attempt to recover the lost territories. The damages caused by war, hunger, poverty, inflation generated tension in Bulgaria. Tsar Ferdinand, assuming the responsibility of the country's disaster, abdicated on October 3, 1918 in favour of his son Boris III. The young tsar aged 24, inexperienced, was forced to deal with much roughness. The Neuilly Peace Treaty was signed by Prime Minister Todor Todorov whose cabinet was also joined by Agrarian Aleksandŭr Stamboliyski.⁹ From May 1920 Stamboliyski

⁹Aleksandŭr Stamboliyski (1879-1923). Born in the village of Slavov, Pazargic County. Studies at the School of Agriculture at Sadovo, Graduate of the School of viticulture and viniculture in Pleven (1897), where he was introduced to agrarian movement ideologue I. Zabunov. He participated at the founding congress of the BZNS (Bulgarian Agrarian National League) in late December 1899, in Pleven. He studied philosophy at Hale and agronomic studies at Munich, but is forced to discontinue in 1902 due to advanced stages of tuberculosis. After returning to Bulgaria, he is actively involved in BZNS, and since 1904 is the editor of the Agrarian mouthpiece „Zemedelsko Znamea”. He polished the class ideology of the League, drew up the first program of agrarians in 1905 and became their undisputed leader. Several times MP, he rejected the pro-monarchical changes in the Constitution. He was against the participation of Bulgaria in the Balkan Wars and the First World War. Because of its antiwar activity he was sentenced to life imprisonment, but remained the BZNS leader. He was granted amnesty after the breaking of the Dobro Pole front in September 1918, and assigned the mission to negotiate with rebel soldiers to return to the front. He was proclaimed President of the Republic of Radomir by Raiko Daskalov, an agrarian MP, on 27 September 1918, but refused to participate in the uprising. From January 1919 he became a member of T. Teodorov coalition cabinet and of the delegation dispatched to Paris Peace Conference. In June 1919, he was elected officially BZNS leader and develop a new program of the League. Under his leadership, BZNS won the elections in August 1919 and he formed a coalition cabinet with the People's Party and the Progressive Party. He was the one who signed the Treaty of Neuilly and started applying its provisions. Stamboliyski suppressed en force the large strike of transport workers. BZNS decided to dissolve the coalition, the government dissolved the parliament and held new elections. On May 21, 1921, the new government was composed solely of BZNS. As Foreign Minister (1920-1923),

authoritatively ruled the country and blackmailed Boris III with the proclamation of the republic. In the elections of April 1923, the Agrarians achieved considerable success, with 212 MPs, the opposition totalling only 33 seats.

After strengthening his power internally, Stamboliyski channelled his efforts towards removing Bulgaria's insulation. The Bulgarian Prime Minister, who also held the portfolio of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led an active policy aimed at improving and developing the bonds with neighbouring countries, seeking to distract public attention from the Bulgarian defeat. The diplomatic tour of 100 days in European capitals, which Stamboliyski conducted in late 1920 and early 1921, was part and parcel of this effort. Everywhere, but especially in Paris and London, the man who broke the pen with which had signed the Treaty of Neuilly stated firmly „I accepted the terms of peace, convinced that they will be reviewed in maximum three years”, gave assurances that Bulgarian politics had entered a new path of faithful fulfilment of the provisions of the Treaty, despite all difficulties. Stamboliyski tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain the consent of England and France for Bulgaria's access to the Aegean Sea.¹⁰ The issue of Dobrogea and the situation of the population in Dobrogea, an essential theme in the agrarian government's policy, were addressed on several occasions during the 100-day tour.

During talks in Prague (December 12 1920), Stamboliyski thanked Romanian Prime Minister General Averescu for the opening of

Stamboliyski headed the Bulgarian delegation at Genoa and Lausanne conferences. He pursued a policy aimed at overcoming Bulgaria's international isolation and improving relations with Turkey and Yugoslavia and wanted to obtain access to the Aegean Sea. This led to denial of Macedonian aspirations of nationalists and conflicts with VMRO. Stamboliyski was the originator of all reforms of agrarians. On June 9, 1923 a coup occurred, Stamboliyski's government is overthrown by the military and National Understanding. Stamboliyski led an insurrection against the coup in the Pazargic region. But the uprisings were suppressed, his followers killed or arrested. Stamboliyski is captured, tortured and killed near his home village!

¹⁰VI. Topalov, *Poseštenieto na Aleksandăr Stamboliyski vāv Velikobritania*. In: *Vāšnata politica na Bālgaria 1878-1944* (Sofia, 1978). See also Aleksandăr Stamboliyski, *Jivot, delo, zaveti* (Sofia, 1980).

several Bulgarian schools in southern Dobrogea.¹¹ In Warsaw, the agrarian leader explored the possibility of solving the problem Dobrogea in favour of Bulgaria. Stamboliyski tried to win over the favour of Polish diplomacy, assuring Foreign Minister Prince Sapieha that he can count on Bulgaria in case of Bolshevik danger, on the condition that Polish diplomat intervened with the Romanian government for the return of South Dobrogea to Bulgaria. Sapieha declined Stamboliyski's proposal, answering that „Poland has enough conflicts at its own borders to meddle in other countries’.¹²

From Warsaw, Stamboliyski headed to Bucharest. In his first official visit to Romania, from 9 to 13 January 1921, the agenda of the Bulgarian Prime Minister consisted of several topics. In an effort to improve Bulgaria's image, Stamboliyski, immediately after his arrival in Bucharest, gave an interview to Romanian journalists at Athénée Palace, where he was accommodated, highlighting the Romanian hospitality, a host country of Bulgarian emigration during Bulgarian National Revival: „Without the help and hospitality of Romania on the land of which the first Bulgarian organizations were set up, and the Bulgarian propaganda books were printed, we would have lost the memory of our history.”¹³ In the same spirit, Stamboliyski divulged the aims of the agrarian reforms which his government had initiated: „social equality, material satiety and moral satisfaction of the masses to form a bulwark against the invading Bolshevism”.¹⁴ He called for discernment, arguing that „the past should be forgotten, I never alluded to the Cadrilater, but I enjoyed the Romanian government's decision to open Bulgarian schools, which dissipated the atmosphere of hatred. I hope the bridge over the Danube will be built.”¹⁵

¹¹Stefan Ancev, *Dobrogeanskiat vāpros v politiceskia jivot na Bālgaria (1818-1923)* (Veliko Tārnovo, 1994), 113.

¹²Apud. Kuzmanova, 70

¹³„Țara nouă”, 15 January 1921.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Apud Dimităr Sazdov, *Dunāv most – 100 godini politika I diplomația* (Sofia, 2006), 92.

During a meeting on 10 January 1921 with General Averescu, the President of the Council of Ministers and Take Ionescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the following topics were addressed. We will list them according to the importance the Bulgarian historiography confers them. If for the Bulgarian side, the primary issue was the condition of the Bulgarian population in Dobrogea, and the return of refugees, for the Romanian foreign policy, the most neuralgic issue was the relations with Soviet Russia. In Bucharest, where the fear of Soviet actions in order to recover Bessarabia was particularly high, any rumour about a Bulgarian-Soviet rapprochement evoked concern. Stamboliyski brought calmness, saying that if the Bolsheviks would attack Bessarabia, and even if they „would give Dobrogea to Bulgaria on the platter, Bulgaria would refuse it without delay.”¹⁶

The second issue Romanian government raised was that of the Komitadji gangs. Bulgarian Prime Minister firmly committed his government to take steps to guard the border so that the gangs would not infiltrate into Dobrogea. Moreover, Bulgaria’s proposal to establish a joint commission of inquiry of the Romanian-Bulgarian border line incidents was accepted.¹⁷ The works of the committee were held during the spring of 1921, and completed on April 26. The report of 9 May of vice-chairman, Colonel Pecigargov, emphasized “that all protocols (55 in total) clearly show that the Romanian criticism is unfounded”. The committee also documented incidents that clearly unmasked a Romanian commander of a company of guards, guilty “of lies and provocative actions”. According to the report of Colonel Pecigargov “people with aggressive behaviour from which both countries’ border guards suffer, smugglers and thieves are unavoidable present in any border areas. But in most cases offenders are poor refugees from Romania to Bulgaria, Romanian Army defectors and refugees settled in Bulgaria, who for one reason or another cannot return voluntarily in Dobrogea, struggling to

¹⁶Apud Kuzmanova, 71.

¹⁷Ibid.

assuage the alertness of the border guards and sneaking in to see their families.”¹⁸

Analyzing the causes of the Komitadji phenomenon, the Bulgarian envoy accredited to Bucharest, Todor Nedkov, reveals that the roots of this phenomenon are “internal, not external.” “A large number of Dobrogea people, Bulgarian refugees, had been condemned to suffering, misery and despair, which turned them into dangerous elements for the order and civic peace. But they, and this is the final conclusion of the Bulgarian diplomat, are citizens of Romania, whom the unjust fate drove away, and for their deeds Bulgaria cannot be held liable, not in the least.”¹⁹

Shortly before the Bulgarian-Romanian commission had completed its work, on April 11, 1921, the Romanian, Yugoslav and Greek governments dispatched a collective note to Bulgaria which demanded it „to prevent the passing of Bulgarian gangs onto the territory of neighbouring states and also to end the Bulgarian propaganda which was directed openly against the order and safety and caused unrest in the border areas.”²⁰ Bulgaria, fearing that the collective action of the three neighbouring countries might lead to military intervention denied the accusations. Compared with Yugoslavia, which displayed a pugnacious attitude, the one of Romania was reasonable.

Stamboliyski's promises were not in vain, and in September 1921, the “*Law to condemn the acts against public order and safety of goods and people in foreign countries*” was enacted, which contained nine articles and provided the imprisonment of 8 to 15 years for gang bosses and 3 to 5 years for police inaction.²¹ Despite the law enacted, the agrarian leader did not seek to fully dissolve the Komitadjis. Versed politician with duplicitous conduct and authoritarian governing style,

¹⁸Ghencev, „Văzvrăștane na Iujna Dobrogea kăm Bălgaria prez 1940,” In *Istoriceski pregled*, kn.6, 1969, 61

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

Stamboliyski juggle with skill both the „scarecrow” of Bolshevik threat, and the terror gangs maintained by Komitadjis.

In June 1922, considering that the Komitadji gang question had not been resolved satisfactorily, the three states issued a second note addressed to the Bulgarian government. From the rostrum of the League of Nations, the Romanian diplomat Titulescu accused Bulgaria of the Komitadji attacks, amalgamating these attacks in the definition of aggression.²²

The priority of Stamboliyski’s first official visit to Bucharest was the condition of the Bulgarian population of southern Dobrogea and the replevin. The Bulgarian Prime Minister wanted to know to what extent he can count on Romania’s contributions as a mediator in order to bring forth a Bulgarian-Yugoslav rapprochement. During discussions, he highlighted the importance of leaving an access to Aegean Sea to Bulgaria and the construction of a railway to the sea under the control of the Great Powers. Take Ionescu declined Bulgaria’s first proposal of intermediating between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, but promised to write personally to Nikola Pašić, reassure of Stamboliyski’s honesty and his desire to do everything in its power to improve the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. In terms of Bulgaria’s access to the Aegean Sea, the Romanian Foreign Minister gave no concrete answer.²³

It was also decided to form a joint commission to investigate the Romanian-Bulgarian differences, the ostensible „outstanding problems” arising after the annexation of southern Dobrogea.²⁴

The Bulgarian historiography considers that the formation of the two committees was an undoubted success of Bulgarian diplomacy. The commission of border issues helped clarify the real causes of banditry in southern Dobrogea. And so it would prove false the allegations against the Bulgarian population in the area, the Dobrogea migrants and their organizations in Bulgaria, and the

²²Ancev, 230.

²³Apud Kuzmanova, 72.

²⁴Ghencev, 61

Bulgarian government as well as the accusations of complicity in order to support the rout in Dobrogea. The advantage of the second committee for „outstanding issues” was that the Bulgarian population’s situation and problems of southern Dobrogea were decided on the international arena, even if only within the confines of the Romanian-Bulgarian relations.

Following the meeting in Bucharest, King Ferdinand and Queen Maria invited Stamboliyski to Sinaia. The Bulgarian guest’s image appears in the daily notes of Queen Mary and the evocations of the outstanding memorialist never lacking in sarcasm, Constantin Argetoianu.²⁵ In a note dated January 11, 1921, the Queen described the Bulgarian official as follows: “Stamboliyski is an ardent patriot and so sincere in his desire to restore his country as to make an impression wherever he goes. A man of tremendous energy, of peasant origin, who has only the minimum manners needed to be accepted into a salon. Bulky, solid and broad-shouldered, one immediately feels his strength, though he has a pleasant face. He does not speak any language apart from his mother tongue.”²⁶

In the grotesque portrait which the Interior Minister Argetoianu makes to Bulgarian Prime Minister on an official visit to Sinaia, Stamboliyski appears “as a bouncer man, greasy, with dishevelled hair with orangutan paws, black nails, dressed in rotten clothing / ... / a bestial appearance”²⁷ “with manners that stir disgust”, he eats with his fingers, put the knife in his mouth, grab his fork with his fist clenched as a fist. He only spoke Bulgarian and did not understand a word of any other language.”²⁸

Unfortunately, Argetoianu did not recount anything about the content of political and diplomatic discussions, only incidentally is mentioned the project of possible dynastic marriage between Tsar of

²⁵Constantin Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*. vol.VI, 1919-1922 (București, 1996).

²⁶Maria, *Regina României, Însemnări zilnice*, vol.III (Bucharest: Historia Publishing House, 2006), 23

²⁷Constantin Argetoianu, *op.cit.*, p.192.

²⁸*Ibid.*

Bulgaria and one of the daughters of King Ferdinand and Queen Maria. The Romanian-Bulgarian dynastic marriage would not materialize, and Tsar Boris III found his bride in the revisionist camp, marrying Princess Giovanna di Savoia, daughter of King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy on October 25, 1930. This politico-dynastic marriage represented a triumph for Sofia diplomacy considering the rise of Italy in an international context while Italy gained strategic influence in the Balkan Peninsula.

In contrast to the impressions of boyar Argetoianu those of the Bulgarian envoy to Bucharest, Hristofor Hesapciev stress Romanians' arrogance towards the Bulgarian complexes so as to outline why the Bulgarian and Romanian interests failed to intersect for an effective resolution of "outstanding issues". "In early 1905 I was appointed as envoy in Bucharest - Hesapciev confesses. This appointment - promoting did not make me happy at all. In Bucharest - unknown leaders with very different mentality, grandstanding political leanings out of touch with their state and a full self-conceit about Romania's cultural supremacy over the neighbouring Bulgaria."²⁹

The Bulgarian historians look for elements that helped create a negative image of Romania and Bucharest's supercilious officials also in the westerners' records of that period. A case in point is the diary of English lords Noel and Charles Buckstone discovered and edited by Bulgarian historian Ivan Ilchev³⁰.

During his first visit to Bucharest, besides the attempt to create a favourable image and the exposed concrete objectives, Stamboliyski also met the leaders of the Peasant Party, Ion Mihalache and Virgil Madgearu, seeking to establish links between BZNS and the Peasants' Party of Romania in order to found the Green International.

Analyzing the results of Stamboliyski's visit to Romania, the Parisian newspaper *Le Temps* (January 30, 1921) reached the following gloomy conclusion: "Neither Romania has forgiven nor Bulgaria has

²⁹Hristofor Hesapciev, *Slujba na Bălgaria v ciujbina. Voennodiplomaticeski spomeni/1899-1914* (Sofia, 1993).

³⁰Misia na Balcanite (Sofia, 1987).

ceased to dream of Southern Dobrogea.”³¹ However, *Le Temps* continues, “the Romanian-Bulgarian relations improvement is real and substantial”. Among the causes that have influenced this improvement it was noted that “Romania itself, facing the Bolshevik threat, is more interested than any other Balkan country in keeping the balance in the area.”³²

And, indeed, the Romanian-Bulgarian relations have witnessed an upward trend. In March 1921, the Romanian government agreed with the principle of return of refugees. Excluded from this category were those inhabitants who had fought in the Bulgarian army and were considered guilty of war crimes.³³ More difficult to solve turned out to be the issue of seized assets. In August 1921, the Romanian government gave the option to those concerned to sale and liquidate their assets to the Romanian state within three months. Then, in October, Take Ionescu proposed to General Ficev, the Bulgarian envoy recently accredited to Bucharest (July 7, 1921), the principle of liquidation by substitution. In the absence of a firm position of Sofia, Ficev did not respond promptly, and the new government led by Ion I.C. Brătianu, through the Romanian Interior Minister jurist-consult, informed Ficev of the obsolescence of the former government’s proposals.³⁴

Stamboliyski did not seem satisfied with the remedies of the condition of Bulgarian residents in Dobrogea. The agrarian newspaper *Zemedelsko Znamea*, whose editor was Stamboliyski himself, published on July 7, 1921 a speech of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, according to whom two were the fundamental conditions for a stable Balkan Peninsula: first, the right of the inhabitants of the disputed territories to decide their own fate, and as an example the Kominternist principle of the right to self-determination was quoted;

³¹Apud. Kuzmanova, 71.

³²Ibid.

³³Ancev, 138.

³⁴Ibid., 190-191.

the second, the guaranteeing of minority rights under international control.³⁵

In November 1922, Stamboliyski undertook the second diplomatic tour. During the visit to Bucharest (4 to 8 November 1922), he declared that Bulgarians did not seek territorial expansion, their only desire being to live in peace and tranquillity. He also addressed the Bulgarian community in Bucharest, accusing the former Bulgarian leaders of the lack of political vision and deploring the fact that the Balkan peoples are a stranger to each other. The Romanian-Bulgarian talks on the Thrace problem formed the core of conversations. The settlement of the Thrace dispute, proposed by the Romanian side, the autonomy of a Bulgarian corridor to Aegean Sea was rejected by the Bulgarians.³⁶ At Stamboliyski's meeting with Ion I.C. Brătianu and I.G. Duca, the situation of minorities, the issue of seized assets, the land confiscation of Romanians in Bulgaria, and the Romanian-Soviet relations were approached.³⁷ The only satisfactory achievement of the second visit of senior Bulgarian officials was the establishment of a joint commission to settle the Romanian-Bulgarian „outstanding issues”. Before the overthrow of Stamboliyski (June 9, 1923) there were three rounds of negotiations of the commission in January, April and May 1923. In the first round, the Bulgarian side asked: the replevin of all Bulgarian possessions, the granting of Romanian citizenship to all Bulgarians residing in Romania and the return of refugees to their homes. The Romanian side claimed for the replevin 250 million lei while the Bulgarians were prepared to settle for as little as 19 million lei.

As far as the work of the commission is concerned, the Bulgarian envoy in Bucharest, General Ficev reported to Stamboliyski on December 13, 1922, at Lausanne: “The Romanian-Bulgarian commission works out for two weeks, but the results are poor. The Romanians have a bunch of new claims raised in connection with the

³⁵Kuzmanova, 151.

³⁶Ancev, 257.

³⁷Ibid. 257-258; see also Kuzmanova, 83-84.

Treaty of Bucharest... Business is difficult because the Romanian representatives ask many things that we cannot meet."³⁸ In order to lift sequester from Bulgarian properties, Romania demanded a sum of 500 million. In addition, Romania claimed additional amounts as compensation for damages caused to Romanian citizens by Bulgarian military administration during the war.³⁹

The Paris Conference on the Statute of the Danube of July 1921 created the atmosphere of a rapprochement in the bilateral Romanian-Bulgarian relations, and the new regime of Danube with all its limitations meant a breakthrough for the riparian states. Thus, the Convention signed on July 23, 1921 proclaimed the freedom of navigation and the equality of all flags on the navigable river, the right to perform technical work, levy taxes, prepare regulations and their enforcement, police territorial waters, administer the Iron Gates which were returned to Romania and Yugoslavia, etc.⁴⁰

A milestone in international relations, but not in the Romanian-Bulgarian rapprochement, was the European Economic Conference summoned in Genoa (April 10-May 19, 1922). Romania was represented by a delegation led by Prime Minister Ioan I.C. Brătianu, and the head of the Bulgarian delegation was Premier Stamboliyski. Driven by the interest to improve relations with Soviet Russia and to earn the recognition of the union of Bessarabia with Romania, Brătianu took steps in this respect, but the Soviet delegation rejected all proposals. Romania did not get positive answers at Genoa from the Bulgarians either, when Brătianu asked Stamboliyski if Bulgaria would adopt a neutral position in case of „military complications” at the Bessarabian Romanian border. The Bulgarian Prime Minister simply departed from the subject. He obviously realized the trump card he possessed in this regard and wanted to play the card of

³⁸Apud. Kuzmanova, 83

³⁹Penakov, *Sekvestărăt v Rumânia vărhu bălgarskite podaniți*, Sofia, 1931, 23.

⁴⁰*Politica externă a României*. Dictionar cronologic, coord. Ion Calafeteanu, Cristian Popișteanu, Bucharest, 1986, 178., see more in Iulian Cîrțină, Ilie Seftiuc, *Dunărea în istoria poporului roman* (Bucharest, 1972).

neutrality in a difficult time for his country, exactly as Romania used the Komitadji issue to constrain Bulgaria.⁴¹

On April 18, 1922, the Bulgarian delegation submitted a memo to the President of the Conference, in which it exposed in all details the Bulgarian refugees' issue, the link to the Komitadji issue and its impact on relations with neighbours. As the only means of resolving the Komitadji gangs issue, the following measures were proposed: 1. A general amnesty by all the Balkan countries be proclaimed so as the refugees would return to their homes; 2. Goods to be returned to refugees; 3. The clauses of the peace treaty on the rights of minorities be applied as soon as possible.⁴²

Stefan Ancev complements the presentation of Antonina Kuzmanovic about the Bulgarian attempts to achieve positive results in Genoa with the moment when Stamboliyski raised the issue of minorities. The Romanian, Polish and Czechoslovak representatives informed Lloyd George of their willingness to consider the wishes of the Bulgarians, but also the decision to leave the room if the Hungarians would raise similar issues. Momčilo Ninčić said he would raise the question of the issue of minorities in Italy.⁴³

It is noteworthy that in Genoa, Stamboliyski met, on several occasions, with Dr. Krăstiu Stancev Rakovsky, a known precursor of socialism in Europe, party activist, politician and diplomat, eventually a tireless fighter against Stalin and his totalitarian socialism. In this regard, it is to be mentioned the recent monograph of Mihail Stancev, Dr. Krăstiu Rakovsky – “statesman, politician and diplomat”⁴⁴, which is based on unpublished documents discovered in archives in Russia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania, Switzerland, Germany, France and England.

In his *Recollections* Aleksandŭr Stamboliyski record Krăstiu Rakovsky's outstanding qualities: “The most competent of the

⁴¹Kuzmanova, 79.

⁴²Ibid., 80

⁴³Ancev, 201.

⁴⁴Mihail Stancev, Dr. KrăstiuRakovski – dărvjvnik, politik, diplomat (Sofia, 2004).

Russian delegation – the Bulgarian Rakovsky. / ... / Chicherin, Rakovsky, Lenin, Trotsky - they are the leading diplomats of modern Russia". The contacts that Rakovsky maintained in Genoa with the Bulgarian delegation gave rise to several Western media fabrications. After returning to Kharkov from Genoa, Rakovsky recalled, the Romanian press published a telegram allegedly received from London, stating that he had signed a treaty with the Bulgarian government and, later, incognito, left with Stamboliyski for Sofia.⁴⁵

Summing up, the conference in Genoa ended in failure. The European powers were not able to find a common denominator to their conflicting interests, the Romanian-Soviet relations remained strained, Bulgaria categorically rejected the solution of an outlet to the Aegean Sea through Greek territory, while Romania and Bulgaria continued, unremittingly alternating the roles, to play the cat and mouse game.

The Lausanne Conference took place between 22 November 1922 and 24 July 1923 with the participation of 12 countries, including Romania and Bulgaria. The Bulgarian delegation led by Stamboliyski again and again tried unsuccessfully to secure a territorial connection of Bulgaria to west Thrace area. Both the European powers as well as the Balkan states refused to support the ambitions of Bulgaria. Before leaving for Lausanne, Aleksandŭr Stamboliyski made a stop in Bucharest to get the support of Romania at the incoming conference for access to the Aegean Sea and Thrace's autonomy. The Bulgarian diplomacy had worked hard to create a favourable atmosphere for the visit of the high Bulgarian official. At that time, cultural attaché in Bucharest was a great Bulgarian writer, Jordan Iovkov, the minstrel of Dobrogea. Stamboliyski himself confessed to Langa Rășcanu: "We do not give up our claims at Thrace and our Aegean Sea outlet. I will not hide from you that our only goal and all our efforts are directed towards the south."⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid., 85.

⁴⁶Kuzmanova, 83

Stamboliyski's foreign policy was always criticized by political enemies of the agrarian cabinet, the invoked populist reason being that Bulgaria's efforts ended in failure everywhere. Considering the situation of Bulgaria, brought to its knees following the two national disasters, the main policy goals could not be other than the revision of the Treaty of Neuilly through peaceful means. Neutrality and non-partisanship were key features of the policy of Stamboliyski as outlined by the Bulgarian historiography. During the time of BZNS governing, the foundation of the Bulgarian foreign policy was laid, which all Bulgarian government would follow in footsteps until the beginning of World War II. However, the subsequent governments have failed to pursue agrarian political line with the same foresight and in the same rhythm as Stamboliyski so brightly initiated. On June 9, 1923, the coup led by General Rusev commenced. The grand bourgeoisie, fascist squads, and the army with the consent of Tsar Boris III toppled the agrarian government. The agrarian ministers were arrested, Stamboliyski's followers are imprisoned and killed, uprisings repressed all over the country, and the Prime Minister, who was when the rebellion broke out at his villa at Slavovitsa, his native village, despite the staunch opposition he showed when captured, was terribly tortured and killed. Prime Minister becomes the extremist Alexandar Tsankov. On hearing the news of Stamboliyski's overthrow the king of Romania exclaimed "Stamboliyski was the person whom, at least, we could rely on."⁴⁷

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⁴⁷Apud.IlcioDimitrov, *Bālgariavevlopeiskata*, 45.

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