

**S**crisoriile Regelui Ferdinand al României,  
volumul I, stabilirea textului, note și studiu  
introdutiv de Sorin Cristescu, prefață de Sorin  
Liviu Damean [*King Ferdinand of Romania`'s  
letters, volume I, established text, notes and  
introduction by Sorin Cristescu, foreword by Sorin  
Liviu Damean*], Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de  
Scaun, 2015, 452 p.

**Mihai Ghițulescu, Ph.D.**

Faculty of Soial Sciences, University of Craiova - Romania  
ghitza\_roumanie@yahoo.com

“A strong and influential king is followed by a weak, very weak, sometimes unimaginably weak one” recently wrote Lucian Boia. It is not a singular case. Many historians noted that Ferdinand, the King of Great Union was very bright, but weak, timid, hesitant, manipulated by his friends and family. Other historians, more elegant, prefer the euphemistic *cliché* “constitutional monarch”, i.e. one who did not involve in the government affairs, like his uncle and his son, leaving politicians to do their job. Openly or covertly, all these historians take the words of a few influential memoir authors: I.G. Duca, Alexandru Marghiloman, Nicolae Iorga or... Queen Mary. Therefore, Ferdinand’s historical image is based solely on the testimonies of others. Until recently no one turned attention directly on what Ferdinand said.

As always in history, things have to be so simple. They require nuances that complicate but also clarify the picture. The letters from the recent volume bring, for who wants to see, plenty of nuances.

Professor Sorin Cristescu, who studied the age of Charles I, leaving behind a solid work, has now published, in a first volume,

237 letters of Ferdinand, to which he added some fragments and drafts. Most of the texts are translated from German. They are addressed to family members (Uncle Charles, brother Carlo, etc.), politicians, officers, etc. They were written between 1875, when he was not yet a Crown Prince, and 1924, when he already passed through tough situations in his personal and royal life; he had learned and understood the details of the Romanian politics. Until recently, Ferdinand's letters remained inaccessible to most historians because of the language and handwriting. Today, they are available to everyone and it would be a shame not to be read. The way the text looks is the result of one of the most complex work that a researcher can do.

The historical gossip hunters will find a lot of good stuff. It does not concern me here, but I cannot leave behind the 1891 exchange of letters between the Crown Prince and Elena Văcărescu (in their language, *Tagi Guangi* and *Moloch*). And, because we want Craiova to become European Capital of Culture, here's what he wrote Carlo in October 1890: "Wherever I looked, I found Craiova more European and western than other Romanian cities. One evening I was at the theatre, but I watched less the play and the acting and more the ladies, of course, and during the show, which was pretty long, I could do this with complete ease; they did not dislike either. There were some very beautiful among them".

King Ferdinand deserves attention in his capacity as head of Greater Romania, a country which, almost overnight, had doubled its population and area, the peasants had the land and political rights and the parties had increased incredibly. His concern about the new politics is seen from the letters sent to politicians, but especially those to relatives, where, in addition to personal matters, he spoke about the public affairs. In December 1919, he wrote to his daughter (do not say anything more!) Mignon about the elections and the cabinet changes, concluding that: "... Except for the Liberals, the Parliament is composed mostly of new and inexperienced people from all the regions of Greater Romania". He was in a dilemma: to become, like his uncle, "a constitutional monarch who knows what party to call in

government at the right time”, or to reduce his role, like a British king. It seems he would have preferred the second solution, but the reality pushed first. An undated letter (fall 1919 or spring 1920) with unknown addressee: “I would not like – although I could see me forced – to give to the Crown a more active feature than it would be appropriate in a normal constitutional life”. It confirms what I.G. Duca said: “The main feature of his personality was the sincere democracy. King Ferdinand was naturally democrat”.

But the young and fragile Romanian democracy risked falling into chaos. The political cleavages and the dangers of the early '20s (the secessionism and the communism) led him to seek a strong and stable cabinet. Then, dissolved, not unscrupulously, the first parliament elected by universal suffrage and returned to the old style of ruling. Iorga noted that “the King has always shown scruples when it came to touch the Parliament”. But the country also needed a strong government. “Determined to maintain the constitutional rule, in order to make this regime work, we must ensure that the cabinets have the unity of leadership, action, experience and spirit of authority” (September 1924). Could that someone other than Brătianu? Hard to believe and risky to try! So Brătianu it was. In April 1923 wrote to Nicolae Misu: “I want to keep the Brătianu cabinet as long as he thinks that he can dominate the situation”. He asked to communicate this to a Minister (Alexandru Constantinescu-Porcu) who was in conflict with his boss, adding: “I consider unnecessary that Brătianu be aware on this endeavor”. It does not sound like the speech of a weak man.

And because, in history as in politics, we judge too easily, by appearances, here is what he wrote to someone who wanted to become the Minister of the Court: “The execution with loyalty of all my instructions must be made with a very delicate tact, so that it does not question the king's person and you always show your action as determined by your own-initiative, except in certain cases, when I will consider that my direct intervention must be highlighted”. Discreet does not (always) mean weak!