

# Romania

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**World War I afforded the first opportunity for modern Romania to participate in a war which had a larger than regional horizon (South East Europe). The most important reason for participation was interest in gaining territories belonging to Austria-Hungary in which Romanians, as well as others, lived. The attack on the Habsburg Empire however backfired and most of Romania was captured with the aid of the German Empire, and occupied until autumn 1918. Despite this defeat Romania succeeded in using the situation and its consequences to create a nation state of more than twice its original size.**

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## Introduction

The so-called Romanian Old Kingdom (a consolidation of the principalities of Moldova and Valachia) was not established in a political-territorial way until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it remained a small state at the edge of Europe in the subsequent decades. Hence, Romania could not play a role within Europe until it joined one of the political alliances. The country was part of the Triple Alliance between 1883 and 1914 (initially [Germany](#), [Austria-Hungary](#) and [Russia](#), later also [Italy](#) and Romania) under which the Central Powers operated during World War I (WWI), but it changed sides in 1916 and became a member of the Entente. The roots of the modern Romanian nation-state are based on many different influences from Western, Central and Eastern Europe, which affected the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Especially French and German factors were brought into play and complemented the local tradition which was closely associated with the Orthodox culture and the Ottoman civilisation. Romania declared its [neutrality](#) in 1914 and the following questions arose for the opposed alliances: Would Romania stay permanently neutral or change its policy depending on the course of the war? At what time and for which reason would a change happen? Which advantages and disadvantages would arise for all parties? Between 1914 and 1916 both rival groups made efforts to make Romania predictable and after that applicable for their own calculations. While the Romanian policy [Carol I, King](#)

of Romania (1839-1914) was pro-German until 1914, his successor [Ferdinand I, King of Romania \(1865-1927\)](#) adopted a Francophile course in order to promote the principle of unification of all Romanians. This aim was given priority over the insufficiently advanced modernisation within the kingdom (industrialisation, democratisation). Thus, the Romanian nation did not uniformly support entry into the war in 1916. While the national liberal powers and their supporters were in favour of war, the agrarian majority looked to the solution of social questions, which could not be answered until the end of World War I or even until the end of World War II.

## Romania before World War I

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, modern Romania was shaped by interactions between internal transformations and properly effected international connections. In only six decades the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia turned from vassal states under the sovereignty of the Turks into a sovereign Romanian state that played an important role in the [alliance system](#) worldwide and also succeeded at the end of World War I in making its claims heard over the Romanian inhabited territories that until 1918 had belonged to Russia, Austria-Hungary or Bulgaria.<sup>[1]</sup>

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romania was preoccupied with the 're-connection' to the Central and Western European world since Moldavia and Valachia, vassal states of the [Ottoman Empire](#), had been for four centuries severed from the cultural advances in Central Europe – Humanism, Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. An immense need to be in tune with this world is characteristic of Romanian society: a need that translates into its so-called 'synchronisation'.<sup>[2]</sup>

A special case was represented by the provinces which were inhabited mostly by Romanians, but embedded in other states: Banat (where Germans, Serbs and Hungarians coexisted) and which had been occupied by the Habsburgs since 1718; the Bihor and Maramureş regions (Romanians and Ukrainians); Transylvania (Romanians, Hungarians, Germans), which since 1690/91 had been under the Habsburgs as a Grand Duchy, and after 1867, by constitution was the Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy; Bukovina (Romanians, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews), which had been an Austrian province since 1774/76; and Bessarabia (Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews), which was ceded to Russia in 1812. These Romanians, living within other states, became important for the direction of Romanian foreign affairs.

With the deepening of the 'Oriental crisis' and the issue of how the inheritance of Europe's 'sick man' would fall to pieces, the 'Romanian question' gradually became an important issue for the European cabinet. Putting an end to the Crimean War, the Congress of Paris (1856) already allowed for the possibility of the principalities of Moldavia and Valachia merging in the future: this finally happened between 1859 and 1861. Bordered by the Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg Empires, the new state was born on the Lower Danube: it was a potential obstacle for Russia's advance through the Balkans. Whereas Prussia had endorsed the emergence of the new state, Austria felt it should react in a rather reserved manner despite the fact that it was among the first to have recognised the new state: a united Romanian state could have been a very powerful reference point for the Romanians of Transylvania as indeed, eventually happened. Austria and the Ottoman Empire were the chief opponents of the unification.

The principalities of Moldavia and Valachia, the United Principalities of Moldo-Valachia and finally Romania had to assert themselves in an international context in which Russia on the one hand and the Habsburg Empire on the other wanted to take over the Ottomans' role in the Balkan region. In this context, the Romanian political elites saw Russia as a much greater danger, which also led them to search for an alliance with the German Empire and implicitly Austria-Hungary.

Moldavia and Valachia were unified *de facto* in 1859 (the administrative and political union was achieved in 1861), and through the double election of [Alexandru Ioan Cuza \(1820-1873\)](#), Carol I, a ruler from the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen House, was to take over Romania's throne, so as to lead the country on the "long way towards the West." In 1866 a constitution fashioned after the Belgian model came into effect, enshrining a parliamentary system, the separation of powers and a constitutional monarchy.

The Balkan insurrections against the Ottoman Empire (1875) and the self-proclaimed role of Russia to protect the Orthodox Christians in the Balkans drew the Romanian government's attention to their relationship with their "great" Russian neighbour. Russia's war against Turkey, to whose successful denouement Romania's army had contributed significantly, taught the young Romanian state that relations with Great Powers are not always easy to build up: even though Romania's independence was recognised, Russia again seized the south of Bessarabia together with the northern branch of the Danube and its ships once more sailed in the Black Sea.

At the Congress of Berlin, Germany was an advocate of Romania's independence upon condition that the losses of the Stroubsberg and Bleichröder banking companies during the construction of the Romanian railway lines were reimbursed and the Jewish community granted citizenship. Only after the Romanian state complied with these conditions would the German Empire, [France](#) and [Great Britain](#) recognise its independence.<sup>[3]</sup>

In 1881, Prince Carol was proclaimed king, and Romania a kingdom. The previous experiences with Russia, the power loss that France suffered after 1871, the dominant position of the German-Austrian alliance and then the Triple Alliance made the king, together with a significant part of the Romanian political elite, search for an alliance with the German Empire. The German chancellor [Otto von Bismarck \(1815-1898\)](#) was not ready for the road to Berlin to pass through Vienna. On 30 October 1883 Romania joined the Triple Alliance by means of a defensive agreement with Austria-Hungary. The German Empire joined it on the same day. Romania had to disregard serious obstacles when signing the deal: the economic differences that would later lead to the 1886-1891/93 Tariff Customs War; the differences concerning the issues of navigation controls on the Lower Danube; and, even more burdensome, the question of the Romanians from Transylvania and Hungary, i.e. the status of the Romanians in the Hungarian side of the Dual Monarchy.<sup>[4]</sup>

The alliance was renewed in 1892, 1896, 1902, and, for the last time in 1913, with extended validity until 1920. It was brought to the knowledge of only the most significant political figures (the prime minister and foreign minister in office) as well as the king, and was not ratified by parliament, which was not, however, uncommon for that period.<sup>[5]</sup> Its guarantor was none other than King Carol I, supported nonetheless by an increasingly large group of Germanophiles.

Until the [Balkan Wars](#) (1912/13), Romania was a loyal partner in the alliance with the Central Powers. The question of the Romanians in Transylvania however soured this relationship, while the changes in the Balkan politics of Austria in the Second Balkan War (1913) sheared Romania off. The Bucharest Peace Treaty put an end to the Second Balkan War and gave Romania territorial expansion on the coast with [Bulgaria](#) against Austria's will, showing the signs of a new orientation of Romanian foreign policy. Since 1883, by means of the alliance with Austria-Hungary and, from the Romanian perspective, especially the alliance with Germany, Romania secured its borders, and gradually became a more significant partner for European Powers. All the Great Powers would favour an alliance with Romania, who was finally able to negotiate its interests on an international platform. It was a different Romania from that of 1859, 1877/1878, but also from that of 1908.

## Austria-Hungary's Romanian Question

From the onset of World War I more than 5 million inhabitants lived in the Habsburg Monarchy. Of these, 2,827,419 were Romanian (53.7 percent), 1,662,180 Hungarian (31.6 percent) and 564,359 Germans (Transylvanian Saxons, 10.7 percent).<sup>[6]</sup> In comparison with the year 1850, when the Romanian population represented 59.5 percent of the total in Transylvania, this figure had dropped by 5.8 percent, while the Hungarian population went up by 5.6 percent and the German one also recorded a rise of 1.4 percent.<sup>[7]</sup> Hungarian authors quote only slightly different figures.<sup>[8]</sup> It is significant that Transylvanian society at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century stemmed from the permanent constitution that the Habsburgs adopted when they appropriated the area. It was a state organisation based on three estates that guaranteed the rights of the Hungarians (the noblemen), the Szekler people and the Transylvanian Saxons, leaving the Romanians outside any political life. Romanians and Hungarians stepped on the road to national development almost simultaneously, the Hungarians after the language reforms of [Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor \(1741-1790\)](#) which raised a strong reaction among them. The establishment of the Greek Catholic Church and the expansion of the Austrian military borders facilitated the acceleration of Romanian national development, which in turn allowed for increased efforts in obtaining a similar political status to that of the other privileged nations in Transylvania. Shortly after the founding of the Romanian border regiments, during the 1784 Horea insurrection, and again in 1848 when the Romanians affirmed their rights in front of the [Hungarian government](#), the Transylvanian Romanians stood on the side of the House of Habsburg, from where they awaited their salvation.<sup>[9]</sup>

For this reason, the disappointment concerning the Neo-absolutist regime and especially the Austrian-Hungarian Compromise in 1867 was considerable. The Diploma of 20 October 1860 was an act which restored hope among Romanians as it recognised Transylvania's autonomy again and brought about the possibility for Romanians to participate in the governing bodies of Transylvania. Until 1867 Saxons and Romanians opposed the Union of Transylvania with Hungary that was envisioned by the

Hungarians.<sup>[10]</sup> In 1863 the newly convoked *Landtag* (parliament) would be "the first – and also the last – Transylvanian *Landtag* in which Romanians would be represented as a majority."<sup>[11]</sup> As a consequence, Romanians were formally treated as equals among the other nations on the political scene.

The 1867 Compromise, preceded by the *Landtag* of the Union from November 1865 which ratified the unification of Transylvania with Hungary with 166 votes, versus twenty-nine Romanian and twenty-six Saxon votes, opened a new chapter in the history of Transylvania, which would, in fact, confirm the annulment of the Transylvanian autonomy.<sup>[12]</sup> A period of economic boom followed, with real economic and social opportunities for every nationality. These were supported through state measures such as the Industry Promotion Laws from 1881, 1888, 1890, 1899 and 1907, and through liberal measures, which brought cultural advances for the three nations in Transylvania. The Nationalities Law (7 December 1868), which despite the fact that it reaffirmed the concept of the 'homogeneous Magyar nation', enshrined the equal status of different nationalities and granted several concessions for the use of different languages in Transylvania's public life. Moreover, this set of laws was preceded by another two that had granted the Orthodox Church 'complete church and teaching autonomy' (GA IX/1868/27 July 1868),<sup>[13]</sup> so that the Greek Catholic Church was on a par with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>[14]</sup> In reality, the Hungarian government soon abandoned good intentions and led an inflexible Magyarisation policy through a series of consecutive laws. This was achieved by the passing of the Laws of Trefort (XVIII/1879 and XXX/1883), the Schooling Law XXV in 1891, and the Apponyi Law XXVII in 2 June 1907, which provided for an increased role for the Hungarian language in the schools of the different Transylvanian nationalities.<sup>[15]</sup>

Reactions to this policy came from the Romanian representatives, not only spiritual leaders, but also lay persons. In May 1868, in Blaj the seat of the Greek Catholic Church of the Romanians from Transylvania), Romanians celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Assembly and through their representatives, compiled a document in which they demanded the restoration of political autonomy for Transylvania, the implementation of the *Landtag* Law of 1863/64 and the assembly of a new legislative institution based on democratic election principles.

In 1877/78 Romanians from Transylvania showed solidarity towards Romania that had obtained, through war, its independence from Turkey. In 1881 the political leaders of the Romanians from Transylvania, Banat and Hungary succeeded in merging their political parties into the National Romanian Party (PNR). In 1892 a delegation of 300 Romanian representatives, led by [Ion Rațiu \(1828-1902\)](#), handed over to [Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria \(1830–1916\)](#) a *Memorandum* of the Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary. The Emperor, acting as the Hungarian king, passed the Memorandum on to the Hungarian government, which returned it. The Emperor's approach to the matter, the condemnation and the ensuing arrest of the authors of the document led to a breach in the loyalty of Romanians from Transylvania towards the imperial house. In 1894 the PNR was outlawed.

Shortly before the outbreak of war, the situation in Transylvania between the Romanians and the Hungarian government circles was tense. The Romanian population of Transylvania had a long process of identity formation behind them, political maturity and a developed awareness of their own national rights. These had been promoted since the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the unification of a branch of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic, the expansion of the Austrian military border and the development of the Greek Catholic and Orthodox school systems.<sup>[16]</sup> Additionally, one must take into account the circumstances whereby Romanians in Transylvania lived in a state that was part of a great European Power. As such, they had economic prosperity that was far superior to that in the Romanian Kingdom, enjoyed the advantages of Law and Order and, most importantly, benefitted from a confessional school system that opened the doors of Universities such as those from Vienna, Graz and Budapest. Nonetheless, the price that they had to pay for the economic and social advances was the recognition of the political, unitary, single Magyar Nation.

Over the decades, the Romanians tried to gain support for their demands in Vienna. They had shown loyalty towards the imperial house in 1784, during the Napoleonic Wars, and in 1848 when the resistance by Romanians from Transylvania to the Hungarian revolutionary armed forces contributed significantly to the salvation of the monarchy. In return for such actions, they expected recognition as a political nation and an equal status such as benefitted the other nations in the country. They had been part of the discussions and decisions concerning the new organisation of the monarchy, both by means of personal projects, such as the one penned by [Aurel C. Popovici \(1863-1917\)](#) about the "United States of Greater Austria",<sup>[17]</sup> by means of participation of the representatives of the National Romanian Party in the political life. The many names include Ioan Rațiu,

[Alexandru Vaida-Voievod \(1872-1950\)](#) and [Iuliu Maniu \(1873-1953\)](#). A difficult time followed for the Romanians in Transylvania. Torn between loyalty towards the dynasty and the state on the one hand, and the perspective of a national future on the other, they saw no other course of action but to do military service in the Austrian-Hungarian army until the end of the War.

## Romania during the War (1914-1916)

After Romania had won its national independence on the battlefields of Bulgaria, the main concern of the rulers was to protect this status along with the country's territory.<sup>[18]</sup> The recurrent experiences the principalities had with Russia from 1812 on (successive occupations: 1848, 1853, marching-through 1877), made them cautious in relations with this neighbour. Russia's close relationship with Bulgaria enhanced after 1878, representing a confinement for Romania in between two not very friendly states, led Romania to join the German-Austrian Dual Alliance, which was another obstacle to overcome due to the large numbers of Romanians living in the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire. However, along with the dynastic change and the foreign policy in Serbia after 1903, when the country shifted from its pro-Habsburg attitude towards support of Russia, and after 1908 when Bulgaria increasingly sought the backing of Austria-Hungary, there was no longer a danger from a Russian-Bulgarian alliance,<sup>[19]</sup> but rather from an Austrian-Bulgarian one. This was the reason why Romania could not accept the territorial gains of Bulgaria after the First Balkan War and why it intervened in the Second Balkan War against its southern neighbour. With the ensuing Peace of Bucharest (10 August 1913), Romania achieved territorial gains against Bulgaria, despite the will of Austria-Hungary. From this perspective, Vienna became less confident in Romania's alliance pledge.

For Romania there was, however, a fundamental change in its international status: in 1856 and 1878 it was subject to external political decisions, but by 1913 the Romanian government hosted the peace conference where the redesign of the Balkans was decided. The former chief of the Russian Diplomacy, [Alexander Petrovich Iswolski \(1856-1919\)](#) gladly congratulated his successor [Sergei Dimitrievich Sazonov \(1860-1927\)](#) on achieving the disengagement of Romania from Austrian influence. In the meantime, the leading figures of the Monarchy were aware that due to the 'Romanians' despair caused by the chauvinist Hungarian politics applied in Transylvania, Romania could no longer remain in alliance with Austria-Hungary.

At the outbreak of World War I, the new Romanian Prime Minister, [Ion C. Brătianu \(1865-1927\)](#) was able to prevent King Carol I and the conservative Germanophile politician [Petre P. Carp \(1837-1919\)](#)<sup>[20]</sup> from engaging the country in war alongside the Triple Alliance. Neither the representatives of the Entente, nor those of the Triple Alliance succeeded in drawing Romania onto their side from the beginning. Romanian society was split in two – on one side the 'Germanophiles' led by Carp, who, based on the last century's experience feared an all mighty Russia and wanted to enter the war alongside the Triple Alliance, and on the other side, the Entente supporters, gathered around the figure of I. C. Brătianu, who wanted to pursue the war against Austria-Hungary for the liberation of Transylvania. One could have almost believed that everything boiled down either to the liberation of Bessarabia (in the case of the Germanophiles), or to the liberation of Transylvania (in the case of the Entente supporters). Both political factions would continue to argue their cause throughout the entire war.

Prime Minister Brătianu, who was also acting as Minister of Defense, exercised great precaution in the negotiations, as public opinion was hostile towards the Triple Alliance due to the Romanian question in Transylvania. However, he needed a political and military deal from the Entente Powers if Romania were to join the war on their side. On 3 August 1914, the Crown Council, against the will of the king and the conservative political figure P. P. Carp, decided on provisional neutrality for Romania.

In the next two years the Romanian government prepared the economy for war. Foreign trade developed almost entirely with the powers of the Triple Alliance, partly because of their location and because of the closure of the Bosphorus and Dardanelle straits, through which 97 percent of Romanian exports and 60 percent of imports passed. Besides reorganising the economy for war (e.g. increasing the budget percentage for military spending, banning certain products and munitions, adapting industry to war production, modernising and restructuring the war industry in eleven public industrial facilities and fifty-nine private factories and workshops<sup>[21]</sup>), Romania borrowed money from internal and foreign financial markets. Italian and British banks financed Romania for the purchase of [weapons](#), ammunition and other warfare materials.<sup>[22]</sup> The deliveries of weapons and ammunition were made from Entente countries. Until 1915, there was a similar situation in other states in the Triple Alliance, for example, delivery of German weapons was exchanged for the transportation of cereal to Turkey or Bulgaria (allies of the Central Powers).<sup>[23]</sup>

Starting in 1914 the army's war plans were restructured. Until then all military plans were based on scenarios where Russia



and/or Bulgaria were the enemies. None provided for a situation in which Romania was in conflict with Austria-Hungary or Germany. This changed in the autumn of 1914 when all war plans were redesigned with Austria-Hungary as the principal enemy.<sup>[24]</sup> At the same time, the Romanian government applied measures to renew and increase the number of its army officers.

The negotiations of the Romanian government with the Entente Powers were finalised with the Political and Military Convention from 17 August 1916 through which the Great Powers acknowledged Romania's right over the territories within the Austria-Hungary Empire where Romanians were in the majority. One of the most relevant reasons for Romania's position during the war is mentioned by [Nicolae Iorga \(1871-1940\)](#) in the second volume of his war chronicle, in which he depicts the permanent danger posed by Hungary for Romania, as long as Hungary was not reduced to its territory, in which the Hungarians lived alone or as the majority. This is the context in which Romania's declaration of war against Austria-Hungary 27 August 1916 should be understood. Romania joined the war in order to assert its claims over the territories in Austria-Hungary and Austria where Romanians were in the majority.<sup>[25]</sup> It was the end of a national project which successive Romanian governments had long worked for. Transylvania was, in this context, more important than Bessarabia.

## Romania's Attack on Austria-Hungary

After a cooperation treaty with the Entente was concluded the kingdom of Romania declared war on Austro-Hungary, 27 August 1916: a few days later, military operations against Transylvania started.<sup>[26]</sup> At that time the kingdom comprised three regions which were united partly in 1859 and partly in 1878: the former principality of Moldavia lay east of the Eastern Carpathian Mountains, the region of the former principality of Valachia (with the capital city Bucharest) was south of the Southern Carpathian Mountains, and the Dobruja lay east of Valachia between the Danube and the Black Sea coast.

The Romanian attack which could not be excluded by the Central Powers was not surprising, but the exact point in time could not be determined until August, 1916. Romania had been an ally of Germany and Austro-Hungary since 1883, so it declared neutrality on 3 August 1914 and news about arrangements with the Entente spread abroad. Furthermore, it was not possible to hide armament and mobilisation. On these grounds the governments in Vienna and Berlin had to envisage the opening of another frontline along the Eastern and Southern Carpathian Mountains. Since the other fronts (Russian, Balkan, Italian and French) were very high profile and took many resources, it was not possible until summer 1916 to make provisions for sufficient military activities within the Carpathian arc (Transylvania) in order to avoid a possible invasion by the Romanian army. The most important measure to improve the strategic situation of the Central Powers lay in the ambition to gain Bulgaria<sup>[27]</sup> and Turkey as allies. After long and tough negotiations these two neighbouring countries, previously (1912/13) enemies, came under the Central Powers in autumn 1916.

On 27 August, the First Romanian Army pushed forward across the Carpathian passes towards Southern Transylvania – not only to create a bridgehead on the enemy side, but more especially to clear the way via the Banat to Budapest (the main railway transport line was Bucharest-Braşov-Sibiu-Arad). In this respect it was important to maintain the element of surprise, to prevent the concentration of opposing powers and to involve the Romanian part of the domestic population as effectively as possible for the invading Romanian troops. The Second Army turned from the east to the Carpathian Mountains and passed mountain ranges in the southeastern areas of the country with the objective of breaking the Austro-Hungarian and German forces and to betray those who opposed the southern front. Due to the invasion of the Romanian army into Transylvania thousands of civilians fled to areas which were not threatened, or to other Crown lands of the Dual Monarchy. The First Romanian Army reached the area of Sibiu before German and Austro-Hungarian formations, hastily mustered up from other fronts, stopped them. The Second Romanian Army however could not rapidly reach deep into southeastern Transylvania because of the difficult terrain.

The fact that the Romanian army could be stopped within two months despite considerable quantitative superiority was based on various circumstances: Firstly, the coordination of both army corps posed a bigger challenge than initially supposed; secondly, the Romanian government did not expect Berlin and Vienna to rapidly agree on common defensive measures; thirdly, the fight in the mountains turned out to be generally more difficult and unpredictable than in lowlands; and lastly, Romania did not envisage a second front on the Bulgarian side of the country soon.

The military advantage on the Romanian side at the time of attack lay in the unstressed condition of the troops, the quantity of the armaments, the unrestricted food supply from their own country, and in the popularity within Romania of the war against

Austro-Hungary. The disadvantage at the time of attack resided in the fact that the Romanian soldiers did not have combat experience comparable to that of the soldiers of the Central Powers and did not attract sympathy among non-Romanians within Transylvania. The anti-Romanian mood among the Magyars and Saxons (Germans) was not only based on reservations from the past, but also on the condemnation of the 'defection' towards the former ally (compared with Italy as earlier treaty partner).

## The Counter-Attack of the Central Powers

The aim of the counter-attack of the Central Powers consisted first in expelling the enemy from Transylvania and next in eliminating Romania as a military factor for the rest of war and getting hold of its resources (especially food and mineral oil) which were classified as strategic.<sup>[28]</sup> They were seen as more important for supplying other fronts as well for German and Austro-Hungarian civilian territories.

The Central Powers proceeded against Romania in two directions: The First Army of confederates - a mixed union of German and Austro-Hungarian units under the command of [Erich von Falkenhayn \(1861-1922\)](#) - pushed the Romanian troops in Transylvania in tough battles at the end of October/early November, back across the southern Carpathian Mountains to Valachia and across the eastern Carpathian Mountains to the south-western side of Moldavia. The 9<sup>th</sup> Army of the confederates (a mixed union of German, Bulgarian and Turkish troops) under the command of Field Marshal [August von Mackensen \(1849-1945\)](#) crossed from Bulgaria over the Danube at Silistra and heckled the Romanian army from the west and southeast. The aim of the common operation was to confine the Romanian army in eastern Valachia.

Admittedly, the invasion of Bucharest on 9 December 1916 did not mark the formal end of the campaign against Romania, however, the situation was stabilised insofar as the Central Powers no longer had to fear immediate danger from the Romanian side. The hostilities were delayed until early 1917 in southern Moldavia and blazed again from July until August, but the situation did not change. Russia, as an important power in the war, dropped out in March 1917 due to the [revolutionary events](#) there.

That part of the Romanian army which could be defeated due to the capture of Valachia and Dobruja was disarmed and arrested. The rest fled to Moldavia, a region which remained free and to which the Romanian court and government also fled. Reorganisation was implemented there through French military aid – a fact which outlined the growing threat for the Central Powers in 1918. When the crumbled units of the Central Powers left Romania in October, 1918, the Romanian army again came into play in Moldavia. Not only did it invade the formerly occupied Valachia and Dobruja, but it pushed forward to Transylvania and, in the spring and summer of 1919, to Central Hungary in order to combat the emerged Soviet Republic of [Béla Kun \(1886-1938\)](#) there.

## The Occupied Part of Romania

The part of Romania which was conquered and occupied by the Central Powers was not only more important strategically (closeness to the Danube and to the Balkans), but it was also economically more interesting (resources). Immediately after the invasion of Bucharest on 9 December 1916 Field Marshal von Mackensen implemented the German military administration in Romania which was assigned to the command of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army. The military administration officially started work at the end of December and continued until early November 1918.<sup>[29]</sup>

The military administration consisted of three [occupation](#) zones – Valachia, Dobruja and Bucharest. While the German military administration reserved the Bucharest Region solely for itself, the other Central Powers participated in the two other occupation zones: a small part of Walachia was under control of the Austro-Hungarian administration, whereas in Dobruja, Bulgarians and Turks also took part in the administration.

As soon as the campaign against Romania had finished, the involved powers withdrew their troops because they were increasingly needed on other fronts. Thus, the number of occupants decreased gradually until 1918 when there was only a fraction of the original numbers. Those formations which stayed in the occupied part of Romania had various tasks: To ensure the own military and political position within the occupation area; to provide for their own troops and civilians throughout the country; to influence the economic production within the country; to ensure the supply of the Romanian civilian population and to export as many resources as possible; to rebuild a Romanian state administration which should increasingly be able to assume responsibilities to relieve the occupation regime.

The occupation regime appointed a centrally organised military administration to secure its own military and political position and it obtained both executive and legislative responsibility. It was situated in Bucharest and had military offices in all districts at its disposal; the latter were operatively and administratively under the control of headquarters, and had to report news about the situation within the country. In Valachia problems with coordination in respect of competence arose occasionally between German and Austro-Hungarian commands. Intelligence services played an important role in sounding out the Romanian civilian population and in reconnoitring the situation in the free part of Romania.

Since the supply situation in countries of the Central Powers was already rather bad in 1916, the occupation regime assumed that the supply of troops and accompanying civilians (administration, medical services, technical advisors etc.) could be easily be achieved through the occupied part of Romania. As there was no longer any combat in Romania and the supply situation was relatively better than in other countries, the foreign soldiers were keen to be stationed in Romania for as long as possible.

The major economic headquarters of the military administration periodically had to survey the supply of goods and to arrange the required redistribution: furthermore it had to take measures to increase economic production and ensure the politically reasonable and fair distribution of goods among natives and countries of the occupied powers. In order to facilitate transport a network of light railways was established to take goods to Bucharest or the Danubian ports. From there products went across either on the main railway transport line via the Carpathian Mountains to Austro-Hungary and Germany or upstream via the Danube. Furthermore, the professionals, together with the economic headquarters and in cooperation with the Romanian rump government, had the task of restructuring the finance system, which led to a number of sanctions.

Coincidentally with the occupation of Valachia the existing Romanian government fled in 1916 to Jassy (Moldavia); therefore initially no national authorities existed.<sup>[30]</sup> The German military administration consequently took measures so that the state-owned administrative bodies began to work starting in February/March 1917 and more and more responsibilities were gradually allowed. After the conclusion of the peace treaty in Bucharest on 7 May 1918<sup>[31]</sup> (which was not ratified by the Romanian parliament in the occupied part), the government in Bucharest was responsible for most of the administration, even though the occupying power stayed in the country for only a few months. The scope of this administration was kept under control of the occupation regime.

The relationship between the occupying partners was not the best from the beginning of the occupation, but all involved parties tried to suppress the many small conflicts in everyday life, and avoid bringing them to Romanian society's attention. Austria-Hungary in particular, which held a strong diplomatic as well as economic position in Bucharest before 1916, tried to reclaim an influential role. The installation of a consular representative alongside the Austro-Hungarian delegate at the German military administration in Romania was a success. As deputy of the imperial-royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs he had far more influence than officially admitted.<sup>[32]</sup>

Right from the beginning there was a big contrast between the theory and reality of occupation. Initially the Germans were held in high esteem which decreased however more and more with their harsh attitudes (scattered executions in 1918). In contrast the "little brother" Austria-Hungary appeared as the enemy in the country with whom it seemed to be easier to get along. At first Romanian politicians in the occupied part of Romania were forced to act carefully to ensure their influence on the circumstances. Gradually two sides emerged: those who were willing to arrange themselves with the Central Powers after the war and those unwilling to do so. Only in rare cases did the Romanian population openly resist; usually passive resistance was sufficient to signal their disagreement with the occupation regime. There were no major problems with Romanian [prisoners of war](#) until the end of 1917, but more and more people fled, trying to reach the unoccupied part, where the Romanian army consolidated. Discipline among the occupation troops decreased noticeably in 1918 because the unauthorised removal from the troops increased and goods found their way to private use.

## The Unoccupied Part of Romania

The (smaller) part of Romania that was not occupied by the Central Powers included the territory of the former principality of Moldavia west of the river Prut. This area belonged to the country's historical core and was surrounded by regions where, in spite of different proportions, a predominantly Romanian population lived. The surrounding regions were on the one hand the occupied part of Romania (Valachia, Dobruja), and on the other hand provinces which were parts of either Austro-Hungary (Transylvania, Bukovina, Banat) or Russia (Bessarabia).



The relationship between the free and occupied parts of Romania was special, because Moldavia was an integral component of the Romanian national state until the occupation and because unrestricted contact with the occupied part was not possible since the German military administration tried to block the relationships between the two parts of the country as far as possible. Freedom to travel was severely limited, and there was also no official economic substitute. A fortiori contacts to the underground played a role. Thus, intelligence services were highly active on both sides.

There was also no official contact between foreign countries and the Romanian population during war because these countries were either situated on enemy ground or – in the case of Bessarabia – the czarist authority had no interest in an intensification of relationships in spite of the cooperation between Russia and Romania within the Entente. Notably, Russia had annexed the eastern part of Moldavia (Bessarabia) in 1812 and had made it a Russian province. This problem changed after the central order collapsed and Russia began the February Revolution. In Bessarabia an initiative was established, ongoing in March 1918, which aimed to create a small independent state from the land between Prut and Dniester in spite of the fact the majority of the population was Romanian. The attacks by the [Red Army](#) in the first months of 1918 were aimed at an integration of Bessarabia into the new Soviet Russia: they forced political powers within Bessarabia to request help from the Romanian army in neighbouring free Romania; and help was granted. The consequence of this military intervention was the reincorporation of Bessarabia into Romania in April 1918.<sup>[33]</sup> This success raised the prestige of the exiled Romanian government. Similar opportunities for union between Bukovina, Banat, Transylvania, and Romania did not present themselves until November/December 1918, when the Habsburg Empire decayed and the National Councils which emerged in the regions brought about consolidation with the kingdom.

The relationship of occupied Romania with the allies of the Entente was ambivalent. Cooperation with France across the Macedonian Front flourished: but a French military mission under the command of General [Henri Berthelot \(1861-1931\)](#)<sup>[34]</sup> (which contributed essentially to the consolidation of the Romanian army on Moldavian ground in 1917/18), and the presence of the Russian troops until spring 1917, stressed the relationship not only to the Romanian army, but also to the Moldavian population.

The relationship of occupied Romania with the Central Powers was naturally tense. The Central Powers tried to appoint a government capable of acting in the occupied part of Romania and to negotiate a ceasefire and peace treaty with them, but the Romanian parliament and royal court fled to Jassy and tried to prevent such a compromise in order to keep influence in further developments. Due to German and Austro-Hungarian pressure and after months of negotiations, the Treaty of Buftea, near Bucharest was signed on 5 March 1918, and on 7 May the Treaty of Bucharest was concluded; in this process the Romanian forces in exile did not play a major role.<sup>[35]</sup> Although the Central Powers threatened to lead the fight against the rest of Romania if the Treaty of Bucharest was not ratified in the occupied part of Romania, this did not happen until the end of war. Thus, King Ferdinand and the government in exile gained increasing influence on the country's future without further combat.

## Romania at the End of the War (1918-1920)

After the summer of 1917 when, with the help of the French military mission the reorganised Romanian army managed to stop the German offensive (Mărăști, Mărășești),<sup>[36]</sup> and after the Russian troops abandoned the front because of the revolution on their home soil, the Romanian political figures knew that Romania could no longer sustain the war effort by itself. Although the Crown Council on 2 December 1917 had decided to continue with the resistance, in opposition to what the Powers of the Entente believed and contrary to internal resistance, Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu chose to sign the armistice with the Central Powers in Focșani<sup>[37]</sup> (7 December 1917, just two days after Russia and the Powers of the Triple Alliance had begun the peace negotiations in Brest-Litovsk). This was an infringement of the 17 August 1916 agreement signed with the Entente Allies.<sup>[38]</sup> After Russia signed the peace [treaty at Brest-Litovsk](#) on 3 March 1918, the king appointed the conservative and Germanophile politician [Alexandru Marghiloman \(1854-1925\)](#) as prime minister in Iași, hoping that he would be able to negotiate more efficiently with Germany and Austria-Hungary. The ensuing peace treaty was signed in Bucharest with the countries of the Triple Alliance. The provisions were disastrous for Romania – the country had no other option but to concede the Carpathian passes (a strip of two to ten kilometers with 23,000 inhabitants), and the entire economy became subordinated to the German-Austrian one, while Dobruja was occupied by Bulgaria. In exchange, Romania was able to keep Bessarabia, which had been annexed in April of the same year. King Ferdinand did not sign the Bucharest Peace Treaty.

The decision to sign the peace with the Triple Alliance countries spared the Romanian army, which had been left without Russian support and numerically and technically inferior to the military power of Germany and Austria-Hungary. It also gave way to an event on 10 November 1918, a day before the armistice from Compiègne (11 November 1918) was signed, in which Romania declared war on the Triple Alliance and as a result was able to be on the same side as the victorious Powers at the end of the war. This fact also gave Romania later the possibility of acting in favour of the Entente and contributing to the safeguarding of Europe against the Bolshevik advancement on the continent (1919).

Throughout 1918 Romania was able to annex the provinces promised in the 1916 agreement: Bessarabia (April 1918), Bukovina (November 1918), Banat, Crişana, Maramureş and Transylvania (December 1918). The Romanians represented the majority of the population in these territories, with the exception of Bukovina where they were only slightly outnumbered by the Ukrainians, who settled there in large numbers during the previous 150 years. The unification with Romania, decided by means of national assemblies, congresses or parliamentary decrees, was preceded in all three cases by Romanian troops entering Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia. These were meant to secure order in the face of Ukrainian or Hungarian anarchic attempts and marked these provinces as belonging to the Romanian Kingdom. Only in the case of Banat, which was claimed by Hungary, Serbia and Romania alike, did the Romanian troops enter as late as the summer of 1919, after the Serbian troops left the territory they had occupied since the autumn of 1918.

Once the unification was completed *de facto*, it needed to be recognised at international level. Through the agreement of August 1916 Romania was promised all the territory of Banat, parts of Bukovina, and Transylvania. The participation in the war, the great material losses and human sacrifice, and the will of the native Romanian population backed the historical and legal arguments that Romania brought forward during the Paris Peace Conference. The German Saxons from Transylvania and Banat were also favouring the unification with Romania – the former were quick to state this in January 1919, whereas, in the case of the Swabians of Banat, it took until the summer of 1919 to decide. Romania's status at the [Peace Conference in Paris](#) was of a country with 'limited interests'.<sup>[39]</sup> The Romanian Delegation was initially represented by Prime Minister Ionel I. C. Brătianu and, after his resignation, by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod - top-ranking politician of Romanians from Transylvania and confidant of [Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este \(1863-1914\)](#).

The [Peace Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye](#), 10 December 1919, signed by Vaida-Voevod brought the international recognition of Bukovina as part of Romania. The Allies and Hungary signed the [peace treaty in Trianon](#) on 4 June 1920. For the Romanian side, the agreement was signed by [Ion Cantacuzino \(1863-1934\)](#) and [Nicolae Titulescu \(1882-1941\)](#).<sup>[40]</sup> Transylvania, Banat, the Partium and Maramureş, a total of 102,200 square km and a population of 5,257,476 inhabitants (of these 1,704,851 being Hungarian and 559,824 Germans) became constitutionally integrated into the Romanian state.

For Romania, this was the climax of its entire history, while for Hungary it was a tragedy which would be repeatedly reflected in the [historiography](#) of both countries throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and would lead to numerous tensions between them. In reality, things were far more nuanced. While there were also voices among the Romanians of Transylvania imagining their future in a federal Austrian Monarchy, Hungarian representatives had to admit that their own national assertion would prompt the nationalism of the peoples they had occupied and that the politics of the Hungarian regimes after 1867 would eventually push minorities away from Hungary. The Transylvanian Saxons relied upon the promises made by Romanians in Alba Iulia (equality, right to education, administration, and justice in their own language, right to political representation) and decided quickly on 8 January 1919 in Mediaş to join Romania.<sup>[41]</sup> The Banat Swabians, who had previously been subjected to the intensive Magyarisation process, struggled more and, after taking various possibilities into consideration (for example, remaining at Hungary's side or becoming a separate 'Republic of Banat'), finally decided to join Romania in August 1919. The resolution was sent to the representatives of the Great Powers and to the newly created governing council of Transylvania, in charge of coordinating Transylvanian governmental affairs until 4 April 1920. For Hungarians it was difficult to accept and adapt to the status of an ethnic minority group. They had to accept the change in roles in light of the demographical figures of Transylvania that were not in their favour, and comply with them, albeit reluctantly.<sup>[42]</sup>

While the treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 10 December 1919, recognised Bukovina as part of Romania, Trianon had to recognise the unification of Transylvania, Crişana and Maramureş, and two thirds of Banat (the other third shared between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Hungary) with Romania. The Peace Treaty of Sèvres signed with Bulgaria recognised in 1913 the annexation of the regions south of Dobrudja to Romania. On 28 October 1920, the representatives of France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and Romania signed the treaty recognising the annexation of Bessarabia to Romania. Japan,

however, because of consequent pressure from Russia did not ratify the treaty.<sup>[43]</sup>

Before World War I, the kingdom of Romania extended to 138,000 square kilometers. After the annexation of all these provinces, Romania's land area more than doubled, to 295,049 square kilometers. Much the same happened with its population. In 1915, 7.5 million people lived in the entire kingdom, whereas in 1919 there were 15.5 million. By 1930, this figure increased to over 18 million making Romania the eighth largest country in Europe. Nevertheless, the national structure of the population changed substantially. The old Romania (the Old Kingdom) had a broadly unitary, ethnically homogeneous structure. In the new situation, a relatively large number of minorities ended up living in Greater Romania, representing approximately 30 percent of the total population. Minorities were dominant in certain regional or local areas. Ten percent were Hungarians, 4.4 percent Germans (Transylvanian Saxons, Banat Swabians, Satu-Mare Swabians, Bukovina Germans, Bessarabia Germans, Germans from Dobrudja, those from Bucharest, and from the industrial areas around Ploiești) and 3.2 percent Jews. The rest of the 30 percent comprised Roma, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Russians, Slovaks, Turks, Tatars, Gagaus, Greeks, Albanians and Armenians.<sup>[44]</sup>

Romania faced the great challenge of making the country viable by means of solid economic and cultural development, adapting the administration, and eliminating regional particularities. They also needed to synchronise the economic and social differences among the provinces, and especially to abolish great social injustices through the integration of different population groups. These were not necessarily only the national minorities, but also Romanians of the old and new provinces who had been familiar with different political, social and cultural systems they did not necessarily want to abandon.

P. P. Carp's vision would prove true – the great Eastern neighbour, Russia, would remain the main opponent of a modern and independent Romania that was in the process of developing according to Western models. Despite its participation in the war, numerous sacrifices and the post-war economic and demographic consolidation situation, Romania stood alone against Hungarian revisionism but also, as already stated, against a Russia (later the Soviet Union) that has never been ready to accept the unification of Bessarabia with Romania.

## Conclusion

The main cause of Romania's entry into war was because they sought a realignment of boundaries of the national state, since Austria-Hungary had captured provinces that included Romanian populations. In the final analysis this plan worked out, though not in the way the Romanian government planned. In contrast, the Treaty of Bucharest provided for slight concessions of territory along the Transylvanian border to Romania's cost. In addition, the association of the kingdom with Austro-Hungary existed as a project for the future. The disintegration of the Russian Empire, which was not one of Romania's war aims, preceded Bessarabia's affiliation to Romania.

The Romanian national state more than doubled in size, largely due to gains of territory with Romanian majority populations in 1918/20 (Banat, Transylvania, Bukovina, Bessarabia). This growth however also meant that about a third of the population who lived in Romania were not Romanians. The consequent problems of the minorities did not help the kingdom's external or internal stability. Additionally, the young Soviet Union did not want to accept the loss of Bessarabia and therefore implemented an Autonomous Socialist Moldavian Soviet Republic along the Dniestr as early as 1922. The associated Bessarabian question strained the Soviet-Romanian relationship in the interwar period and led to the annexation of the country between 1940 and 1944.

The positive outcome of war for Romania served as a foundation in the aftermath when the literature – memoirs and historiography – stressed Romania's victorious military role. Hence, the narrative to Romania's involvement in World War I is subject to pro-national aims: it does not yet benefit from widespread critical and value-neutral appraisal.

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