

THE THESSALONIKI FRONT: THE POSITION OF ROMANIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RUSSIAN PRESS OF AUTUMN 1915

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Abstract. *The article discusses the Russian press covering the events on the Thessaloniki (Macedonian) front during the First World War. It is noted that at the beginning of the twentieth century the press became a noticeable phenomenon in the political life of Russia. Massive press campaigns accompanied all major international conflicts of the pre-war period. During the First World War, the press played an extremely important role; it was not only the main source of information but also turned into a powerful means of ideological and political influence. For example, by analysing the perspective of the Russian press on the position of Romania during the First World War and taking into account both the domestic political situation and its relationship with Entente and the Central Powers, the authors demonstrate that the Russian press was an independent and multifaceted source, perfectly capable to accurately portray important events of the international life. For this article, the authors have made use of materials from famous and influential Russian newspapers, such as “Русское Слово” (Russian word), “Новое Время” (New Time), “Речь” (Speech) and the social-political journal “Вестник Европы” (Bulletin of Europe).*

Keywords: *First World War, Thessaloniki, Romania, Russian press, front, Balkans.*

Rezumat. Frontul din Salonic: poziția României în lumina presei ruse din toamna anului 1915. *Articolul pune în discuție materialele presei ruse care acoperă evenimentele de pe frontul de la Thessaloniki (Macedonia) în timpul Primului Război Mondial. Se notează că la începutul secolului al XX-lea, presa a devenit un fenomen remarcabil în viața politică a Rusiei. Toate conflictele internaționale majore ale perioadei dinaintea războiului au fost acompaniate de campanii masive de presă. În timpul Primului Război Mondial, presa a jucat un rol extrem de important, fiind nu numai principala sursă de informație, ci transformându-se și într-un mijloc de influență ideologică și politică. De exemplu, prin analiza publicațiilor cu privire la poziția României în timpul conflictului global*

și luând în considerare atât situația politică internă din țară, cât și relația sa cu blocurile aflate în război, autorii arată că materialele presei ruse sunt o sursă independentă și multifacetată, capabilă să reconstruiască evenimente importante din viața internațională a perioadei luate în considerare. În articol au fost folosite materialele unor ziare rusești celebre și influente, ca "Russkoe Slovo", "Novoye Vremya", "Rech" și jurnalul socio-politic "Vestnik Evropy".

Résumé : Le front de Thessalonique: la position de la Roumanie dans l'éclairage de la presse russe de l'automne 1915. L'article traite des documents de la presse russe couvrant les événements sur le front de Thessalonique (Macédonien) pendant la Première Guerre mondiale. Il est à noter qu'au début du XXe siècle, la presse est devenue un phénomène notable dans la vie politique de la Russie. Tous les grands conflits internationaux d'avant-guerre ont été accompagnés de campagnes de presse massives. Pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, la presse joua un rôle extrêmement important. Ce n'était pas seulement la principale source d'information, elle était également devenue un puissant moyen d'influence idéologique et politique. Par exemple, en analysant les publications concernant la position de la Roumanie pendant le conflit mondial et en tenant compte à la fois de la situation politique intérieure du pays et de ses relations avec les blocs en guerre, les auteurs montrent que le matériel de la presse russe est un document indépendant et multiforme, source capable de reconstruire des événements importants de la vie internationale de la période considérée. Dans cet article ont été utilisés des matériaux de journaux russes célèbres et influents, tels que "Russkoe Slovo", "Novoye Vremya", "Rech" et le journal socio-politique "Vestnik Evropy".

INTRODUCTION

Despite censorship and close attention from the authorities, the Russian press has played a significant role in the social and political life of its country. As domestic and foreign policy events were evolving, the Russian press was actively improving and entering political life. It developed not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively, providing readers with extensive information about important events of domestic and international life. Moreover, most importantly, it not only reflected but also actively shaped public opinion.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, especially after the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907, which provided the population with some civil rights and freedoms, the influence of the press over the political life of Russia becomes even more significant, addressing matters of foreign policy and international relations. It not only intensively developed within the country but also merged into the general global information flow and occupied a prominent place there. The tsarist government, which completely lost the propaganda rivalry game

during the Russian-Japanese war, finally realises the importance of the periodical press, the degree of its influence on public opinion at home and abroad, and begins to form its information policy. It was about time to do so because other small and big powers have long been using this new way of influencing public opinion.

The world entered a period of globalisation, when, thanks to new means of communication (telephone, telegraph, and then radio), any event of a social, political or economic nature worthy of attention, became in a very short time the property of almost the entire world community, especially when it came to a clash of interests between leading world powers. This phenomenon was not just simple information, but the influence of the press targeted over the public of their own and other foreign countries to prepare the way for the adoption and implementation of radical measures. Thus, all major international conflicts of the pre-war period – wars for the division of colonies of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, Bosnian and Moroccan crises, Balkan wars, etc. – were accompanied by massive campaigns in the press, sometimes acquiring the character of newspaper wars. During World War I, the press of the warring countries played an extremely important role. It was not only the main source of information but also turned into a powerful means of ideological and political influence.¹

The authors have analysed materials from the Russian press belonging to newspapers that influenced various social groups. Until the outbreak of World War I, the Russian newspapers published in Moscow, as well as some provincial newspapers (such as those from Kyiv or Odesa), have stimulated the public interest. Many of them were very respectable and produced at a high technical and consistent level. In our case, we turned to the analysis of materials from popular Russian periodicals - the newspapers “Russkoe Slovo”, “Novoye Vremya”, “Rech”, and one of the oldest socio-political journals “Vestnik Evropy”.

The influential liberal newspaper “Russian Word” was quite comparable with the largest European and American publications. I. D. Sytin, a well-known Russian entrepreneur and publisher, was its founder and publisher. The newspaper was well delivered, had substantial financial resources, had an advanced technical print base, an excellent selection of editors and journalists, and was distributed throughout Russia. The “Russkoe Slovo published famous writers”; it had a correspondent network in Russia and many foreign countries. The information printed in it was operational and reliable, which made the

¹ S. Badsey, *Propaganda: Media in War Politic*, in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/propaganda_media_in_war_politics (Accessed 10 September, 2019).

newspaper very popular.²

“Novoye Vremya” was one of the publications that sympathised with the government, but also spoke more critically than government officials speak about certain issues and even criticised some government decisions. In doing so, the newspaper could “throw” certain “test balls” into society, waiting for a reaction of public opinion or trying to formulate this reaction. The newspaper used the services of various news agencies, starting with the official St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency (SPA), as well as the most influential foreign ones, using materials from the foreign press. Nevertheless, its main advantage was the presence of its correspondents abroad in major world centres, high-class journalists and original publicists. Representatives of the liberal intelligentsia did not like the newspaper very much for being close to government circles but had to respect it for the speed and completeness of the published information.³

The newspaper “Rech” belonged to the so-called “party” print media. It was the central organ of the liberal party of constitutional democrats (the cadets). “Rech” was not as popular as “Russkoe Slovo” or “Novoye Vremya”, did not have a large journalist team, and paid much more attention to internal problems and party issues. Among the authors of the newspaper were representatives of liberal intelligence, especially teachers. One of the most published authors was the leader of the cadet party, a famous historian, professor and deputy of the State Duma P. N. Milyukov. He considered himself a connoisseur of international problems and repeatedly published his extensive articles on topical issues of Russian foreign policy, often critical of the official foreign policy. P. N. Milyukov led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for some time after the February 1917 bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia. However, having waited for his “finest hour”, he was not able to win recognition in his country either among the right or among the left political groups.⁴ As it turned out in practice, criticising was much easier than implementing real politics.

“Vestnik Evropy” is a popular monthly historical, political and literary journal of liberal orientation, published in St. Petersburg from 1866 to 1918. “Vestnik Evropy” was intended for certain circles of the professorial, bureaucratic, and other liberal intelligentsia who criticised the most odious manifestations of

² *Ibid.*

³ “Novoye Vremya” [New Time] (newspaper), ACADEMIC, in <https://enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/11357114> (Accessed 15 September, 2019).

⁴ M. K. Stockdale, *Politics, Morality and Violence: Kadet Liberals and the Question of Terror, 1902-1911*, in “Russian History”, Vol. 22, 1995, No. 4, p. 455-480.

autocracy. The journal rejects the revolutionary methods and advocates the implementation of a system of reforms that would turn Russia into a constitutional monarchical state. In the field of foreign policy, "Vestnik Evropy" adhered to a moderate critical position concerning the activities of tsarist diplomacy, believing that it was not always defending the interests of Russia. While covering the Balkan problems, the magazine spoke on the side of the Balkan peoples fighting against the Turkish yoke and was sharply critical of the foreign policy of the German Empire and its allies from the Balkans. It published serious analytical materials on pressing international issues.

The print media in question paid much attention to events on the fronts of the First World War. In particular, it is in these newspapers that one can often find materials characterising the position of the Romanian kingdom during the global conflict. An analysis of other Russian newspapers of different political directions shows that, for example, the Bolshevik press was not interested in specific events on the battlefields, focusing its critical attention on the failures of the Russian troops, unjustified losses, on unrest and protests in the rear and on the front.⁵

The Bolsheviks believed that the world war was unleashed due to irreconcilable contradictions of the interests of rival imperialist groups, seeking to redistribute the already divided world. Therefore, the attitude of the Bolsheviks and the working class of Russia towards the war, in their opinion, should have been negative. They called the war unfair, aggressive and imperialistic. Nevertheless, if the war began, then it had to be transformed from imperialist to civilian in order to overthrow the Russian autocracy. This line was carried out throughout the war. The leader of the Bolsheviks V. I. Lenin clearly identified the main culprits of the war – Germany, and England. In addition, Serbia was called the victim of imperialist politics.⁶

THE THESSALONIKI FRONT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The Thessaloniki (Macedonian) front was formed after the attack of Bulgarian troops in the fall of 1915 on Serbia. This attack placed the Serbian army in the face of imminent defeat. The Entente Allies decided to land British and French contingents in the port of the Greek city of Thessaloniki to come to

⁵ K. Rogatchevskaia, *Propaganda in the Russian Revolution*, British Library, in <https://www.bl.uk/russian-revolution/articles/propaganda-in-the-russian-revolution> (Accessed 15 September, 2019).

⁶ "Социал-демократ" [Social Democrat], Женева, № 56, ноябрь 6, 1916.

the aid of the Serbian forces. The Entente discussed the possibility of launching military operations in Macedonia at a time when troops were needed on the main fronts of the war. Therefore, the number of Allied troops was too small to have an effective impact and change the position of the Serbian army. Much depended on the position taken by three important Balkan states - Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece.

From the very beginning of the war, it was important for both warring coalitions to involve the neutral Balkan states of Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece on their side. As Russian military historians noted, these countries were a bridge between Europe and Asia, had large reserves of strategic raw materials (for example, Romania had large reserves of brown coal, iron ore, and most importantly oil), and could put up armies of up to 1,5 million fighters. This material and human potential was an important factor in the plans of the General staff on both sides.⁷ The diplomatic battle for Romania began even before the outbreak of the First World War. The two blocs preparing for the battle were very interested in getting Romania as an ally. Russia was aware of the disagreements between Bulgaria and Romania and tried to maintain good relations with both countries. The obvious inclination of Bulgaria's foreign policy towards Berlin and Vienna caused by Russia's support for the Balkan Union and the sympathy of Russian public opinion for Serbia, have led to important decisions. In June 1914, one of the main events of Russian-Romanian relations took place in Constanta - a meeting between the Russian emperor and the king of Romania, Carol I. As noted by the famous Soviet historian and *Balkan specialist* Yu. A. Pisarev, "The Constanta meeting contributed to the freezing of Russian-Bulgarian relations. Sofia was very nervous about the fact that the tsar and the Russian Foreign Minister travelled to Romania."⁸

During the meeting, Nicholas II awarded the Romanian king the honorary title of "Marshal of the Russian battlefield", and Carol I, in turn, awarded the Russian emperor the honorary title of "Chief of the Romanian regiment", the very one that entered the territory of Bulgaria in 1913. There were rumours about the allegedly possible engagement of the Romanian heir to the throne with the Russian Grand Duchess Tatyana. "The dynastic ties of the Hohenzollern-

⁷ *История Первой мировой войны 1914-1918* [History of the First World War 1914-1918], В 2-х томах. Том 2, Москва, Издательство "Наука", 1975, с. 6-7.

⁸ Ю. А. Писарев, *Великие державы и Балканы накануне Первой мировой войны* [The Great Powers and the Balkans on the eve of World War I], Москва, Издательство "Наука", 1985, с. 242.

Sigmaringen with the Romanovs, according to the ruling circles of Bulgaria, could lead to the strengthening of the position of Romania, which occupied anti-Bulgarian positions".⁹

Following these events, the King of Bulgaria went to Vienna, where he held talks with Chancellor Berchtold to gain the support of the Austro-Hungarian Empire against Romania. No precise information was recorded on the content of the negotiations, but it was suggested that their scope reached the subject of possible joint military operations against the Romanian kingdom and Russia in case of war. According to the Soviet historians F. I. Notovich and Yu. A. Pisarev, the negotiations were "about a preliminary agreement between Austro-Hungarian Empire and Bulgaria on an alliance, but Bulgaria was warned against a quarrel with Romania".¹⁰ The alliance between Bulgaria and the Central Powers began to take shape in the autumn of 1914 after the outbreak of World War I. German diplomacy worked hard to bring Bulgaria to the side of the Central Powers. Germany relied on Bulgarian resources (Bulgaria could mobilise an army of 500 thousand soldiers and, from an operational point of view, this meant an advantageous position in case of an attack on Serbia), and on the desire of the Bulgarian government to return the territory lost in the Second Balkan War.¹¹ During the Sofia negotiations of June to September 1915, the German representatives managed to mediate a reconciliation between Bulgaria and Turkey. On September 6, 1915, the Bulgarian government signed a military convention, a treaty of alliance and friendship and an agreement on financial and material assistance. Thus, German diplomacy defeated the Entente. Germany promised to convey Bulgaria for military assistance to the Serbian Macedonia, Romania and part of the border area of Turkey.¹²

Germany's attempts to win over Romania and Greece had failed. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the Russian envoy to Bucharest, Poklevsky, informed Petersburg through a telegram dated August 2, 1914, that the Romanian Prime Minister Brătianu had informed him of the start of the war and in the course of the conversation had asked, "Would we consider Romania's neutrality as a sign of friendship". To this, the envoy, relying on the opinion of the

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, cc. 242-243.

¹¹ R. C. Hall, *Bulgaria, International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*, in <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/bulgaria> (Accessed 21 September, 2019).

¹² *История Первой мировой войны 1914-1918*, Том 2, с. 7.

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, answered: "in the affirmative tone." He thanked Brătianu for his "friendly communication".¹³

In a telegram from August 3, 1914, the Russian envoy informed Minister Sazonov about the Great Council of Sinaia where the King of Romania, members of the government and party leaders "almost unanimously" decided to strengthen the military means to protect Romania's borders. The envoy notes that, in his opinion, "this is not an announcement of neutrality and, as has already been said, indicates Romania's willingness to wait for a proof of attitude".¹⁴

Greece and Romania declared their neutrality, although, after the fall of the Entente-friendly cabinet of Venizelos in Greece, the new Greek government ended the agreement with Serbia, saying that this agreement provided for assistance only in case of conflict with the Balkan countries. Having joined Germany, "Bulgaria is no longer a Balkan state".¹⁵ Of course, this was an excuse, but this way, the Greek government created a favourable situation for Germany and Austria in the Balkans. The Entente diplomacy "was late again".¹⁶ As the British historian, Liddle Hart has noted, Bulgaria's entry into the war will accelerate Serbia's defeat and then lead to the transfer of Central Powers troops to the western front.¹⁷

The presence of the Entente troops in Thessaloniki was intended to strengthen its authority in the eyes of the public and the politicians of the Balkan states. After the military and diplomatic failures, Entente "keeps an operational base from which Romania could be helped if expected to enter the war on the side of the allies".¹⁸ The expeditionary force on the Thessaloniki front was reinforced by new contingents of British and French troops, as well as troops arriving from Russia (2nd and 4th brigades of up to 18 thousand soldiers) and Italy. Russian brigades took an active part in the fighting of 1916 and 1917.¹⁹

The Russian Empire was responsible for the situation created in the Balkan region, as it knew Bulgaria's philosophical aspirations and failed to notice that the

¹³ *Международные отношения в эпоху империализма* [International Relations in the Age of Imperialism], Сокращенное издание. *Документы из архивов царского и временного правительств*, Серия III, 1914-1917 гг., Том 1, 1935, с. 539.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, с. 544.

¹⁵ "Русское Слово" [Russian Word], сентябрь 30 (октябрь 13), 1915.

¹⁶ Г. Б. Лиддел, *История Первой мировой войны* [History of the First World War], Москва, Издательство АСТ, 2017, с. 189.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, с. 183.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, с. 189.

¹⁹ C. Savich, *Succor for Serbia: The Russian Expeditionary Force to Salonika in 1916*, in <http://serbianna.com/analysis/archives/3474> (Accessed 01 October, 2019).

Bulgarian leadership was inclined towards an alliance with the German bloc. Perhaps this is the reason why Russia did not have adequate discussions with Romania about joining Entente. The idea of the presence of Russian troops in the Balkans became more and more persistent. It was also believed that Bulgarian soldiers would not open fire on Russian troops.²⁰

The autumn of 1915 was characterised by a difficult situation in the Balkans, complicated by numerous Balkan and international contradictions, intrigues of the warring parties, trying to win over the Balkan states that were not yet involved in the war.

THE REFLECTION OF THE BALKAN EVENTS IN THE RUSSIAN PRESS

The Russian press paid much more attention to the events after the start of full-scale hostilities in the Balkans. In the newspapers appeared a regular column called - "Balkan Front". In this section, we can find reports on military operations, troop movements, expediency and timeliness of the opening of the front in Macedonia. The military, political, and economic situation of the Entente Allies and the Central Powers led by the German Empire were also examined. The plans of Germany, Austria, Turkey, and Bulgaria to destroy the Serbian state were stated and criticised. The military actions and the role of Thessaloniki (Macedonia) front for the military position of France, Russia, Serbia, and their enemies, was constantly analysed. Particular attention was offered to the actions of Serbian and Montenegrin armies. The press also expressed its admiration for their steadfastness, sympathy, and solidarity with the fraternal Christian people. The military operations and the fate of the Russian troops, which were sent at the request of England and France to the Balkans, were also analysed.²¹

The Russian press unambiguously perceived the attack of the Bulgarian troops on Serbia as a "stab in the back", treachery, Russia's betrayal, the factual declaration of war against Russia, which appeared to be also a betrayal of the interests of all the Slavs and Christian peoples from the Balkans.²² The

²⁰ Р. Пуанкаре, *На службе Франции. Воспоминания. 1914 – 1918* [In the service of France. Memories. 1914 - 1918], Кн. 2., Москва, 1936, с. 85.

²¹ С. П. Костриков, *Русская пресса о событиях на Салоникском фронте. Россия в конце XIX – начале XX вв. Историко-культурные аспекты* [Russian press about the events on the Thessaloniki front. Russia in the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Historical and cultural aspects], Москва, Издательский дом ГУУ, 2016, сс. 52-59.

²² "Речь" [Speech], октябрь 3 (13), 1915; "Новое Время" [New Time], октябрь 7 (20), 1915.

newspaper "Rech" saw no reason for Bulgaria to intervene in the unresolved Macedonian question: "...And Russia was ready to give it Macedonia. But Russia wanted allied troops to guard Macedonia for Bulgaria, and Bulgaria wanted to send its soldiers to Macedonia." The newspaper summarised the policies of the Bulgarian government and noted: "The immorality of Bulgarian politics is at the level of its recklessness".²³

"Novoye Vremya" published an analytical article on Russian foreign policy in the Balkans, where it asked: "was everything conceivable done to provide real help to the heroic Slavic people, who entrusted their fate to the four allied great powers?"²⁴ The author accuses Italy of harming its interests and of not being in a hurry to help Serbia.

A columnist for the "Rech" newspaper noted the presence of huge German and allied military forces in the Balkans. In his opinion, this did not defeat Serbia, but threatened the entire Balkans, pointing to the far-reaching plans of Berlin to conquer the Middle East from Aleppo to Erzurum and from Jordan to Arabia and Yemen.²⁵

The Russian newspapers noted that, unlike Bulgaria, Romania was generally oriented towards the Entente, and its King Ferdinand I, ignoring his German family ties, was neutral from the very beginning of the world conflict. This attitude did not mean that his government was not subjected to serious pressure from German and Austrian relatives and diplomats. At the same time, the opposition and most of the country's public opinion stood firm for cooperation with the powers of the Tripartite Accord. The Romanian leadership, as noted in the Russian newspapers "did not make any sudden moves," as he was aware of all the consequences of entering a global conflict. "Russkoe Slovo" mentioned a clause from a published agreement between Bulgaria and the Austro-German bloc, which stipulated: "if Romania opposes Bulgaria, we are to attack Romania with the same army".²⁶ Given the complexity of the situation, the Romanian Prime Minister Brătianu, according to the Russian press sources, was in constant contact with both powers: Entente and the German bloc.

"Russkoe Slovo" noted that "Romania, not being connected with Serbia by a formal union agreement (unlike Greece), is trying to stay away from impending formidable events." A newspaper columnist stresses that this is a legal right of

²³ "Речь" [Speech], октябрь 3 (16), 1915.

²⁴ "Новое Время" [New Time], октябрь 10 (23), 1915.

²⁵ "Речь" [Speech], октябрь 7 (20), 1915.

²⁶ "Русское Слово" [Russian Word], сентябрь 30 (октябрь 13), 1915.

the Romanian state. However, he believes that “the most pressing interests of Romania dictate intervention in the war in order to put an end to Bulgarian predatory designs”.²⁷

The correspondent of “Novoye Vremya” from Paris wrote that after the start of the Bulgarian military operations against the Serbian forces, the Romanian government did not make any serious political statements, but, according to the French Prime Minister Viviani, “it behaved with dignity”.²⁸ “Russkoe Slovo” also mentioned the words of the French PM who stated that the Allies were satisfied with Romania’s attitude and “its watch over the Austrian and Bulgarian borders”.²⁹ This position was the reason why the Bulgarian General Staff, after sending large forces against the Serbian army, continued to maintain a significant number of military formations at the Romanian border.³⁰

Analysing the situation of the unfolding world conflict, in October 1914 “Vestnik Evropy” wrote that “Transylvania waits only for Romania's military intervention to join its possessions with the consent of the Allied powers. Thus, the proper elimination of the Austro-Hungarian inheritance requires the active participation of Italy and Romania, on which depends the fate of three million Transylvanian Romanians and the Italian population of Trentino and Istria”.³¹

This reasoning was caused not only by the desire of Entente to acquire new allies, but also by the fact that the German strategy of Blitzkrieg was failing, and it seemed that with combined efforts it would be possible to defeat the countries of the German bloc. A year later, the situation changed, especially after the entry of Bulgaria into the war.

“Vestnik Evropy” noted that “Romania has not taken a final decision, and its position has become really difficult” as Austrian forces were concentrated in the southern cities of Transylvania, with a hundred thousand soldiers’ army on the Bulgarian border. Romanian public opinion continued to be divided. Marghiloman recommended an alliance with the Central Powers. A new league was formed in favour of an energetic performance on the side of the quadruple accord. It is further indicated that Romania probably lost its chance for an active speech: “When the Russians were in the Carpathians and occupied Chernivtsi, the annexation of Romania could have become a decisive factor, if not for the fate of

²⁷ “Русское Слово” [Russian Word], октябрь 1 (14), 1915.

²⁸ “Новое Время” [New Time], ноябрь 1 (14), 1915.

²⁹ “Русское Слово” [Russian Word], октябрь 1 (14), 1915.

³⁰ “Новое Время” [New Time], октябрь 6 (19), 1915.

³¹ “Вестник Европы” [Bulletin of Europe], октябрь 1915.

the entire Austrian empire, then for the future of Germanized and Magyarized Romanian subjects of Austria".³²

"Vestnik Evropy" criticised the diplomacy of the Entente countries, and wrote that "the endless courtship ... for Bulgaria ended in complete failure ... The hopes of union diplomacy in Greece and Romania turned out to be deceiving; both countries considered to be more advantageous for them to maintain their neutrality and refrain from interference, despite the persistent persuasion of England, France, and Russia."³³

It was clear to everyone that Bulgaria could not withstand the war on two fronts if the Romanian army would actively attack. For foreign observers, this made the political situation of Romania more advantageous.

Discussing this possibility, "Rech" wrote that a blow from Romania would greatly damage the German and Bulgarian armies and complicate the situation of German troops on other fronts. The author even hinted at the important territorial acquisitions that Romania would have gained as a result of these actions: "Under such conditions, it is clear that Romania's opposition to Bulgaria could end with a brilliant victory for Romania and its occupation of Dobrudja and even the northern part of Bulgaria".³⁴

Analysing the situation in Romania, the observer of "Russkoe Slovo" noted that "under the late King Carol, Romania missed the most convenient moment to intervene in the world war, last fall," and now the Bucharest cabinet is "forced to be satisfied with protection from the pressure of Germany - in other words, maintaining its neutrality..."³⁵ Summing up the events of the Thessaloniki front after the first weeks of Bulgarian aggression against Serbia, the "Rech" observer noted that "Romania ... apparently shows a tendency to go over to our side. But here everything depends on the course of hostilities."³⁶ In a message from Bucharest, the correspondent of "Russkoe Slovo" wrote that there was a French delegation in the capital of the kingdom led by MP Gilbert Plianche "for a personal acquaintance with the moods of influential political groups and parties." From an exchange of views with Prime Minister Brătianu, political group leaders Filipescu, Take Ionescu and other public figures, the delegation "had a very good impression."³⁷

³² *Ibid.*

³³ "Вестник Европы" [Bulletin of Europe], ноябрь 1915.

³⁴ "Речь" [Speech], октябрь 24 (ноябрь 6), 1915.

³⁵ "Русское Слово" [Russian Word], октябрь 2 (15), 1915.

³⁶ "Речь" [Speech], ноябрь 2 (15), 1915.

³⁷ H. Gorun, *Relațiile româno-franceze în anii neutralității României (1914-1916)*, Craiova, Editura Universitaria, 2006, p. 222.

“Russkoe Slovo” writes that “Romania’s neutrality will continue as much as the Bucharest cabinet wants,” and emphasises those relations between Romania and Bulgaria “remain strained,” and Romanian neutrality continues to keep the Bulgarian General Staff in suspense.³⁸

The situation at this point was not very clear. On the one hand, the Serbian forces, despite the excess of enemy forces, provided by the Bulgarian aggression, resisted courageously. On the other hand, the countries of Entente decided to open the front of hostilities in Greece. “Novoye Vremya” published a statement of the French Prime Minister: “We need to act as energetically as possible to respond to the efforts of our enemies, who, being cramped on the western front and stopped on the eastern front, are trying to achieve success on the new front with the help of Bulgaria, which is now impossible for them in either France or Russia.” Viviani further explains the reasons for opening the front in Thessaloniki: “To come to the aid of the Serbs, we must go through Thessaloniki, and therefore from the very first days of the Bulgarian mobilization we held negotiations with the chairman of the Council of Ministers in Athens. These negotiations seemed all the more natural because the final treaty concluded between Serbia and Greece at the end of the second Balkan war takes into consideration an eventual attack from Bulgaria”³⁹ (As it turned out, the new Greek cabinet had its thoughts on this matter).

Viviani noted that the landing of the allied forces in Thessaloniki did violate the sovereignty of Greece and that this was not an act similar to the actions of Germany in Belgium when German troops neglected the sovereignty of Belgium and passed through its territory to the borders of France. The diplomatic conditions are completely different. Moreover, the Greek population gave the allied forces a warm welcome.⁴⁰ Romania had to closely watch the progress of hostilities and the success of the Entente forces to make calculated decisions and to act with confidence. The observer of “Russkoe Slovo” noted that “Romania ... can give up its neutrality if it is proven that the allies will send truly significant forces to help Serbia.”⁴¹

“Vestnik Evropy” emphasised that “Small states are afraid to take risks and their leaders will inevitably lean towards those powers that currently seem stronger to them; this shows that in relation with the Balkan governments they

³⁸ “Русское Слово” [Russian Word], октябрь 2 (15), 1915.

³⁹ “Новое Время” [New Time], октябрь 1 (14), 1915.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “Русское Слово” [Russian Word], октябрь 5 (18), 1915.

adhered to the same tactics, both in the period of external successes and in the period of failures. ⁴²

“Novoe Vremya” wrote on October 13 (26), 1915, about the “fantastic incorruptibility of the Tripartite Treaty diplomacy”, which had already “lost” Bulgaria and could miss Romania. We are talking about the inability of the Allied diplomacy to somehow interest Romania on firmly taking the side of the Entente and launch into military action against the Central Powers.

The Russian press has tried to influence the Romanian leadership, indicating that, together with Entente, Romania will manage to solve its national problems, and release its “people from Austria”, but under the conditions of “German hegemony, this dream becomes completely unattainable”.⁴³

“Vestnik Evropy” notes that the Allied powers did not cope with the situation and deliberately created new difficult circumstances, this indicated a difficult and risky situation for small countries: “The Anglo-French expeditionary body, has been detained near the main theatre of struggle; it had no time or could not connect with the Serbs from Uskub, or as expected, did not help the detachment of the besieged Serbs from the Monastery ... while the French and British limited themselves to defence, to operations against the attacks of the Bulgarian army, and were eventually forced to retreat to Thessaloniki.”⁴⁴ The consent powers failed to save the Serbian army, and the operation in the Dardanelles. At the same time, the observer noted that “The Germans still manage to succeed in everything that they conceived”.⁴⁵

The journal writes that Romania “would have willingly opposed excessive Bulgarian claims and would have taken the opportunity to occupy Transylvania if it had not been afraid to face Germany. Prime Minister Brătianu stubbornly stands for neutrality, in full agreement with King Ferdinand, and this policy has a majority in the parliament”.⁴⁶ The Romanian opposition was not happy with this, and from its point of view, excessive caution was intended to raise public opinion and push the government towards more active actions. “Vestnik Evropy” writes that the opposition “sharply attacks the government, demanding immediate action against the Austrians, and meets an apparently sympathetic response from a large part of society”.⁴⁷ On 11 October, Romania adopted a resolution for

⁴² “Вестник Европы” [Bulletin of Europe], ноябрь 1915.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, октябрь 1915.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, декабрь 1915.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

entering the war on the side of the Allies.⁴⁸

An author of "Vestnik Evropy" noted that the clash of opinions from the Romanian society "does not allow the government to take a definitive decision in one direction or another and makes neutrality inevitable for the time being." In his opinion, in the parliament "only the speeches of the opponents of the central empires are successful", while the speakers from the opposite side "hardly get to be heard". According to the author of "Vestnik Evropy", the chamber applauded MP Diamandi for a long time, after he finished his speech with the words: "It would be a crime to go near the Germans and Hungarians, who constantly threaten Romania and its foreign brothers, and no government will dare to lead the army to the wrong place for the interests of the nation."⁴⁹

"Vestnik Evropy" writes that, in its opinion, "noisy popular demonstrations against German supporters and in honour of the quadruple consent, arranged in the main centres of the country, show that the mass of the urban population does not approve of Romania's passive neutrality; and the ministers responsible for the country cannot be guided by feelings and desires alone, but must reckon with the real state of things: we need a major external success of the allies to encourage the Romanians to join them openly, but so far there has not been such success." The journal observer gloomily states: "Systematic military failures - at least only temporary ones - have nothing to do with an alliance with those who suffer them, and it is difficult to fight against this natural fact".⁵⁰ The Romanian government understood this. It continued to wait because the forces of the Austro-German bloc were very impressive and had not yet suffered serious defeats from the Entente forces. The plans of the Triple Accord to strengthen the Thessaloniki Front, and the post-war plans, were not completely clear.

In Russia, all military leaders (in particular the chief of the General Staff Alekseev) were convinced that Romania's entry into the war would ease the position of the allied forces on the Eastern Front. Indeed, Romania's neutrality played the role of a buffer zone between the Austrian and Russian troops, which was objectively beneficial for the Russians. A "Novoe Vremya" correspondent reported from Bucharest that "political circles" really hope for "Russian intervention" in the Balkans and, according to representatives of these circles, "the defeat of Germany in the Balkans will decide the fate of the war".⁵¹

⁴⁸ "Новое Время" [New Time], октябрь 15 (28), 1915.

⁴⁹ "Вестник Европы" [Bulletin of Europe], январь 1916.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, декабрь 1915.

⁵¹ "Новое Время" [New Time], октябрь 10(23), 1915.

At the turn of 1915-1916, the situation in Europe can be characterised as a “no change” situation. According to an author of “Vestnik Evropy”, “events are developing so far in the same direction, unfavourable for the Allies. In the Balkans, William II and Ferdinand maintain control”.⁵²

It is well known that Romania, encouraged by the success of the famous Brusilov breakthrough on the Eastern Front against the Austro-Hungarian forces, acted along with the Entente countries and, despite the difficult situation at the end of 1916, ended up among the winners of the First World War.

CONCLUSIONS

In this brief analysis, the authors try to reveal the discussions found in the Russian press, of different political directions, around the position of Romania during the events on the Thessaloniki front after the Bulgarian troops attacked Serbia, and that the Russian press is a serious independent source for the history of international relations of the First World War. It can be noted that the Russian press fulfils all the requirements to accurately and reliably reflect the historical reality, the military, and diplomatic side, to analyse the contradictions and positions of the countries participating in the global conflict, to highlight several socio-political issues and evaluations of different events, governments and political personalities, to reflect and form public opinion.

The Russian newspapers of that time are an important multifaceted historical source, which in combination with other sources can serve as solid support for historical research, recreating a vivid picture of what was happening, at that time. Thanks to the skills of the journalists and publicists, you can feel almost like a participant in the events.

⁵² “Вестник Европы” [Bulletin of Europe], февраль 1916.