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**NICOLAE TITULESCU'S POSITION ON THE INTERNATIONAL
REGIME OF WATERWAYS. THE INTERNATIONAL STRAITS
COMMISSION VERSUS THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION OF THE
DANUBE**

-Abstract-

The Black Sea came back into the attention of European diplomacy in the first half of the XIXth century, on the background of tsarist Russia's expansion politics towards the Straits, with domination of the Mouths of the Danube being a mandatory step in that direction. Simultaneously, the Black Sea had also become important to the West because of the grains market. The necessity of resettling a regional power balance and of securing a new access way to this market determined the Great western Powers in the Paris Peace Treaty (March 30th 1856) at the end of the Crimean War to innovate the juridical matters of navigational freedom on rivers that were considered to be international. The European Commission of the Danube was thusly created in 1856, and similar models were extended onto other navigational systems at the end of the First World War, including that over the Black Sea Straits. After 1918, newly emerged national states saw the internationalization of waterways found on their territory as infringements on their sovereignty and consequently demanded modifications in the regime. Nicolae Titulescu, the great Romanian diplomat, placed himself on such a position, supporting the disestablishment of the International Straits Commission (at the 1936 Montreux negotiations) and of the European Commission of the Danube. Still, such demands were potentially revisionist and added to the ruin of the Versailles system. Our study aims at analysing the causes and the historical and juridical contexts of imposing an international navigation regime on the Danube and the Straits, at regarding the legitimacy of Titulescu's actions in this matter, and the political and juridical consequences compelled by possible modifications in the status of the Mouths of the Danube and of the Straits.

Keywords: Black Sea, international relations, the statute of the Straits, the statute of the Danube, the Versailles system, the foreign policy of interwar Romania, the foreign policy of interwar Turkey.

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The history of the Romanian nation intertwines with that of the Danube. A great Romanian interwar geographer once stated: “the life of our people has had and has two coordinates: on one side the Mountain and the Forest [a reference to the Carpathian Mountains and the forests that stood as refuge for the indigenous population in times of war], on the other side the Mountain and the Sea. Whoever says *Danube* must also immediately say *the Black Sea*. But not only that: they must also add *the Bosphorus* – which is merely a prolongation of the Danube – and then *the Dardanelles* – a continuation of the Bosphorus”¹.

The economic and commercial significance of the Danube, at least for the last two centuries, has been determined by the route of the river, which has primarily linked the industrialized countries of Central and Western Europe to the agrarian and highly resource-rich regions in the East of the continent, and has secondly linked Europe to Asia and to the Mediterranean commerce through the Black Sea and the Straits. Within this Euro-Asian trade circuit there are two vulnerable spots: the Mouths of the Danube and the Black Sea Straits, each of them concurrently playing the role of a genuine political barometer.

In the first case, in the contact zone between the Danube and the Black Sea, similar hegemonic tendencies, coming from two directions, have been permanently intersecting: a Pontic one – Russia, whether tsarist up until 1918 or soviet after that, and a Danubian one – Austro-Hungary until 1918, namely Germany after that.

In the second case, control over the straits has determined to which extent the Black Sea’s contacts with the exterior could be blocked. Certainly, Russia held a direct interest towards the opening or closing of the Black Sea, starting in 1774 when the Kuciuk-Kainargi Treaty settled St. Petersburg firmly on its Coast. The Tsars’ obsession with conquering the Straits that guaranteed access to the Mediterranean was and still is reflected through the greatly controversial Testament of Peter the Great, most probably a historical forgery, but with real implications in the international geopolitics of the last two centuries. In fact, it was precisely this aggressiveness of Tsarist Russia in the Pontic region that determined the Great European Powers to directly engage in the restoration of a balance of force or of a regional *modus-vivendi* during the Crimean War (1853-1856)².

The Paris Peace Treaty (March 30th 1856), signed at the end of this war, held a series of clauses concerning the future of the Danube river and the Black Sea:

¹Simion Mehedinți, *Legăturile noastre cu Dunărea și Marea*, București, 1938, p. 7.

² See Peter Duckers, *The Crimean War at Sea. The Naval Campaigns Against Russia 1854-56*, Pen & Sword Maritime, 2011.

Russia and the Ottoman Empire were bound not to keep military flotilla or arsenals in the Black Sea, and Saint Petersburg returned Southern Bessarabia to Moldavia, which ultimately meant driving Russia away from the Mouths of the Danube. The great innovation in the Treaty's text came through the future management of the Danube "Straits". More precisely, all of the seven Great European Powers – France, England, Austria, Prussia, Sardinia, the Ottoman Empire and Russia – agreed to apply the principles of free navigation on international rivers in the case of the Danube, principles which had been historically introduced in the text of the 1815 Vienna Treaty which regulated navigation on the Rhine³. But unlike the Rhine, the route of the Danube was separated into two segments: a river section, for which a Permanent Commission of Riverines was to be established, and a maritime section corresponding to the confluence between the Danube and the Black Sea, which went under the authority of the European Commission of the Danube⁴.

The means of organisation and the attributions of the two Commissions were completely different, even if both of them were supposed to protect freedom of navigation. The Permanent Commission of Riverines was to be composed of delegates from Württemberg, Bavaria, Austria and Turkey, adding Serbia, Wallachia and Moldavia only after the official agreement of the Sultan as suzerain of the three countries. In its essence, the Commission made solely of riparians, including Turkey through its control over Dobrudja until 1878, had to establish a unitary navigation Statute for the entire river and to survey the territorial authorities' compliance. Unfortunately, all the initiatives of this Commission, and eventually even its existence, were blocked by Austrian/Austro-Hungarian politics. It advocated in favour of riparians for differences in cabotage – traffic between the Danube ports – which infringed the principles of freedom of navigation, deeply dissatisfying France and England, which had powerful flotillas on the Danube, and Greek ship-owners⁵.

³ Gordon E. Sherman, *The International Organization of the Danube Under the Peace Treaties*, in „The American Journal of International Law”, vol. 17, nr. 3, 1923, pp. 455-456. The Annex of the study includes the original French text of the Vienna Convention (1815), art. CVIII – CXVI [108-116]. Summarising their contents, the Vienna Convention stated that the authorities of the states crossed or separated by the same navigable river committed to jointly and bilaterally regulate all matters concerning navigation on that respective route. The waterway, if navigable all the way to its confluence with a bigger source, was free for commerce and for the transport of goods and people. Police and navigation regulations had to be as uniform as possible for the entire course and as favourable as possible to commerce. The same principles concerning uniformity between riverines in all matters concerning navigational rights, customs, transport of goods, etc, were the object of the respective Articles, all meant to encourage waterbound commerce.

⁴ Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomatie. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională*, Editura Muzeului de Istorie, Galați, 2014, pp. 49-65.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 80-84.

Even if Austrian initiatives seemed to be in the service of riparians, Vienna's politics were actually aimed towards imposing its own hegemony on the Danube.

On the other side, the European Commission of the Danube seemed to be an experiment of the seven European Powers, arisen from the West's great need for grains and from the demand to re-establish the balance of power in the Black Sea region. Initially receiving only a two-year mandate, subsequently prolonged until becoming permanent in 1883, the European Commission of the Danube was created to plan and execute downstream of Isaccea the technical structures necessary for cleaning a channel and neighbouring maritime portions in order to ensure good navigability. But unlike the Permanent Commission of Riverines, the European Commission of the Danube was primarily composed of non-riparian countries – all of the seven Great Powers, adding Romania after the attainment of Dobrudja and the Danube Delta as a consequence of the Berlin Treaty (July 1/13 1878). Secondly, the European Commission of the Danube was an executive international body with a fellowship-character and attributions that made it unique, bordering from fitting and maintaining the navigable channel on the Danube's maritime sector, to charging all ships that passed the Sulina bar (the point where the man-made channel met the Black Sea)⁶.

The Berlin Treaty (July 1/13 1878) gave Dobrudja, the Danube Delta and Snake Island back to Romania, but at the same time allowed Russia to regain its riparian position by retaking Southern Bessarabia; Austro-Hungary also obtained a strong position on the riverine sector owned by Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. Essentially, although it was declared an international river, the Danube did not receive a unitary regime at Berlin. The edge of discord between Romania and the European Commission, until the Sinaia Arrangement of August 18th 1938, primarily regarded Article 53 of the 1878 Treaty, in which *the international body enjoyed complete independence from the territorial authority in the exercise of attributions, rights and privileges conferred upon it by treaties, arrangements, acts and decisions* (our underline). The interpretation of this article will generate a permanent diplomatic dialogue between Romania and the other members of the Commission. In order to avoid the escalation of frictions, the Commission's Internal Order Statute

⁶ See Joseph L. Kunz, *Experience and Technique in International Administration*, in „Iowa Law Review, vol. 31, nr. 18, 1945, pp. 40-57. The European Commission of the Danube had legislative competences, juridical functions in civil or criminal cases, it could enforce and collect taxes, it had its own flag, it was not restricted by national bodies as opposed to other River Commissions, which only had a preparatory role and were supervised by national authorities.

set unanimity of votes in all matters and decisions, a principle that was later certified in the Definitive Statute of the Danube in 1921⁷.

The Mouths of the Danube's presence on Romanian territory after 1878 was simultaneously a great economic advantage and a risk for national sovereignty. It was this reality that led to the great dilemma of the Danube-matter connoisseurs: did Romania have the power to ensure its own complete sovereignty over its sector of the Danube, without any international help or control, in the face of Russian and Austro-Hungarian claims (until 1918) or Soviet and German ones (after 1918)?

Opinions were divided. Mihail Kogălniceanu, a great Romanian diplomat and political figure from the second half of the XIXth century, said in 1882 that "the Danube being European, it will also be able to remain Romanian as well"⁸, and this belief of Bucharest politicians was preserved at least at the debut of the Commission. But the role that this body had in regional geopolitical balance was not able to conceal the deceptions of the Romanian state, especially not after 1918⁹.

At the end of the First World War, the danger of exterior hegemonic pressure upon the Mouths of the Danube seemed to be remote. The incorporation of Bessarabia into Romania warded Soviet Russia off from the Mouths, Austro-Hungary had dissolved into multiple small states, and Germany, as the main defeated power, had been awarded extremely harsh conditions at Versailles momentarily dismissing it from exerting any political and economic influence in the River's basin. The moment seemed to be extremely favourable to Romania and to other riparian states, which pursued imposing their full sovereignty over the sectors that belonged to each of them. Furthermore, Romania had fought on the side of the Entente, and Bucharest's claims at the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and up until the signing of the Permanent Statute of the Danube (1921) went towards obtaining a favourable re-evaluation of the power balance between its own territorial authority and the pre-war prerogatives of the European Commission of the Danube as an international authority. Ultimately, Romanian diplomacy, which concentrated on the international recognition of Greater Romania, had to cede in the Danube matter. The navigable parts of the river remained divided into two sections:

⁷ We have in mind the provisions of Art. 4 and 7 from the Definitive Statute of the Danube (July 23rd 1921).

⁸ George Macovescu, Dinu C. Giurescu, Constantin I. Turcu, *Mihail Kogălniceanu. Documente diplomatice*, București, 1972, p. 411. A fragment from the discourse held by Mihail Kogălniceanu in the Chamber of Deputies on May 1st 1882.

⁹ See Arthur-Viorel Tuluș, *Dunărea maritimă între Aranjamentul de la Sinaia și Acordul de la Belgrad (1938-1948)*, Galați University Press, Galați, 2008, pp. 36-53; Idem, *Nemulțumiri și reacții românești față de Statutul Interbelic (Ante-Sinaia) al Comisiei Europene a Dunării*, in „Anuarul Muzeului Marinei Române”, tom XIII, Constanța, 2010, pp. 159-178.

1) The upriver sector, from Ulm to Brăila, was put under the jurisdiction of the newly established International Danube Commission, made up of two representatives for each of the German riparian states (Bavaria and Württemberg), one representative for each of the other states (Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Bulgaria, Romania) and one delegate for each of the non-riparian Great Powers (France, Great Britain and Italy).

2) The maritime sector, from Brăila to the confluence with the Black Sea (the Sulina bar), was made of delegates solely from Romania, France, Great Britain and Italy. Therefore, in the Mouths' region, the powers of the European Commission of the Danube remained the same; the only concession that the Romanian state obtained was the reduction of members from eight to four, which was supposed to ease the voting process concerning technical measures necessary to the administration of the navigable channel, in light of the need for unanimity in votes. Still, politically, the numerical limitation of the European Commission of the Danube was not a beneficial decision as the new, interwar format of this international body lost its representation (i.e. power) as an element for geopolitical equilibrium power-balance-wise, arousing discontent especially in Germany and the Soviet Union¹⁰.

Although the two had substantial differences – the European Commission of the Danube being an executive body, independent from state authority, whilst the International Danube Commission was a supervisory body, observing if the riparian states were keeping with their commitments concerning the maintenance of the navigable channel and with freedom of navigation – both institutions reflected the internationalisation of waterways.

The two Danubian Commissions' roles and attributions will otherwise become a motive for dispute amongst jurists, diplomats and politicians, depending on the geopolitical context that each side kept in mind. Two major juridical doctrines formed over time.

1) **The doctrine of the international character of waterways**, which said that the presence of a navigable channel on one state's territory does not give exclusive rights to that state. Optimization of freedom and equal treatment of all pavilions entailed the establishment of international collegial administrative bodies consisting of riparians and non-riparian powers, executive or only supervisory bodies, independent from territorial authorities. Obviously, the most advanced

¹⁰ Also see Idem, *Problema Dunării la Conferința de pace de la Paris (1919) și în perioada imediat următoare*, in „Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos” din Galați, Seria Istorie, tom VII, 2008, pp. 175-182.

model of such a body was the European Commission of the Danube, and we can find the invoked principles in the Paris Treaty of 1856.

2) **The doctrine of riverine rights**, which recognised full sovereignty over waterways for riverine countries. In this case, the respective state had complete authority over its own navigable sector, navigational uniformity being obtained through conventions between riverine states, whilst the surveillance of their compliance could equally be given only to riverine members. The origins of such a juridical interpretation can be found in the Vienna Treaty of 1815.

After the First World War, the internationalization that had been applied to the Danube since 1856 through executive or surveying bodies was extended onto other European rivers – the Rhine, Elba, Oder, Niemen, Vltava etc¹¹. Moreover, this regime was also applied to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. According to Lord George Curzon, which represented the allied winners' point of view – England, France, Italy – at the stormy parlays in Lausanne (November 1922 – July 1923), the Dardanelles, the Marmara Sea and the Bosphorus were an international route for world commerce, linking two international seas, therefore it was necessary to impose onto them the same regime as on other international paths (rivers, straits, channels) in order to ensure the liberties of peaceful commerce¹².

Turkey, as a defeated party in the War, could not oppose the internationalization of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits. As a start, according to the Treaty of Sèvres (August 20th 1920), the Straits were open to all types of ships, in peace and in wartime, thus renouncing the London Convention of 1841 which recognised the Sultan's right to block the access of warships belonging to other Powers. An international commission, with extended regulatory and police powers as well as freedom to act, had the right to control the Straits, in light of the destruction of existing fortifications and the reduction of the Ottoman army (the demilitarisation of shores)¹³. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's coming to power and his refusal to acknowledge the Treaty led to its nullity. Taking advantage of military successes over the Armenians and the Greeks, of the divergences within the Entente, and of the support coming from the Soviet Union, Turkish diplomacy succeeded in gaining important concessions at Lausanne as opposed to the Sèvres Treaty.

¹¹<http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/versailles321-386.htm>., Section II (Navigation) in Part XII (Ports, waterways and railways), has Art. 327-364 of the Treaty of Versailles.

¹²*Conférence de Lausanne sur les affaires du Proche-Orient, 1922-1923. Recueil des actes de la conférence. Première série, Tome I. Protocoles des séances Plénières et process-verbaux et rapports de la Première Commission*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1923, p. 124.

¹³ For the text of the Treaty of Sevres, see <http://www.hri.org/docs/sevres/>.

The text of the Treaty which was signed in the Swiss town on July 24th 1923¹⁴ kept: the principle of free passing through the Straits and freedom of commerce, with some wartime restrictions concerning the number and tonnage of military vessels belonging to non-riverine states that entered the Black Sea (they were not permitted to surpass the dimensions of the most powerful flotilla of riverine states, in this case the Soviet Union); the demilitarization of the Straits' shores, of the Marmara Sea islands and the Straits' entrance; the establishment of an International Straits Commission, consisting of delegates from France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, with the role to supervise freedom of passage and to ensure the correct implementation of conventional provisions¹⁵. As opposed to the Treaty of Sèvres, where the Straits Commission had more extended prerogatives such as those of the European Commission of the Danube (an executive body), at Lausanne its attributions were reduced to surveying navigation through the Straits (in the manner of the International Commission of the Danube).

Both Turkey and Romania viewed the prerogatives of these international bodies as infringements on national sovereignty. But the two countries stood on different juridical positions. Whilst Turkey was defeated in World War One and was not interested in the juridical revisionist consequences of its demands – moreover, the Treaty of Lausanne was the first revisal of the Versailles system – Romania had to be very careful with its claims. Romanian diplomacy tried to avoid the unilateral resolution of its own demands concerning the maritime sector of the river, also asking Turkey to not act with force in the matter of the Straits, especially not after the Balkan Pact (February 8th 1934) – a regional alliance with a defensive role, made of Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey¹⁶.

The Romanian demands over the internationalization of the Danube will be speculated by the true revisionists after 1918, becoming a fuel for increasingly stronger German attacks concerning the alteration of the entire statute of the river (for both the upriver sector – the International Commission, and the maritime sector

¹⁴ For the text of the Treaty of Lausanne, see https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne.

¹⁵ Paul Gogeanu, *Strămtorile Mării Negre de-a lungul istoriei*, Editura Politică, București, 1966, p. 131.

¹⁶ Nicolae Titulescu, the Foreign Affairs minister and the chief of the Romanian delegation at Montreux (June 22nd – July 20th 1936), will eulogize Turkey's attitude amidst the negotiations for the Straits, which manifested respect towards the Treaties. See *Ibidem*, pp. 142-143.

– the European Commission)¹⁷. In 1927 in Rome, during a meeting between the European Commission of the Danube's delegates, the non-riparian partners – Great Britain, France and Italy – drew the attention of the Romanian delegation that any initiative towards opening a discussion over the Mouths of the Danube's regime could constitute a request for the revisal of the Versailles treaties. Concerning this interpellation, the Romanian minister in Rome reported that the Italian government believes the debates on the European Commission of the Danube cause problems of major politics and endanger the principle for the inviolability of treaties¹⁸.

The most common argument used by the Romanian jurists that demanded the dismissal of the European Commission of the Danube indicated the inexistence of a similar body with such extended powers, which was indeed a fact, but Romanian diplomacy and media compared the Mouths of the Danube's status to that of the Straits up until Montreux (1936). Beyond possible resemblances, the interdependence between the Danube and the Black Sea Straits was far more important. I. G. Duca, a figure of Romanian interwar politics, stressed in a conference entitled *Romania's economic and political relations* [Raporturile economice și politice ale României] held on February 5th 1927 at the Commercial Academy in Bucharest that “the importance of commerce through the Mouths of the Danube was that much more obvious for Romania as, in lieu of a Black Sea almost shut-off at the Straits (an evident reference to the pre-war regime), we have an entirely open Black Sea because through the last regime for the Straits (from Lausanne) their freedom is completely secured and thus we can foresee the possibility of a great development towards Asia Minor and the Mediterranean basin”¹⁹.

By this point of view, we shouldn't be surprised at the interest of politicians or of the public in identifying, in most cases to full accord, the relations between the regime of the Straits and the Turkish State and those of the Mouths of the Danube and Romania. At least by a preliminary analysis, a Statute under the control of an international commission advantaged Bucharest in the case of the Straits and had the opposite effect in the case of the Mouths, the reverse of the medal being just as applicable.

¹⁷Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River in the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex from Antiquity to the Conference of Belgrade of 1948*, New York, 1987, p. 516.

¹⁸Iulian Cârțână, Ion Seftiuc, *Dunărea în istoria poporului român*, Editura Științifică, București, 1972, p. 242.

¹⁹ Apud Constantin Cheramidoglu, *Considerații privind comerțul de transit derulat prin porturile de la Dunărea de Jos în perioada interbelică*, in „Analele Dobrogei. Serie Nouă”, an VI, nr. 1, 2000, Constanța, p. 119.

In any case, at the Straits Conference in Montreux (June 22nd – July 20th 1936), Romanian diplomacy fronted by Nicolae Titulescu, relying on friendly relations with Turkey²⁰, supported its riverine right over its own territory and “there is no reason for not granting Romania the same satisfaction which was given to Turkey, both cases being similar (*The International Commission of the Straits and The European Commission of the Danube*): a Commission that implements over the territorial sovereignty of the State in which it finds itself”²¹.

The fiercest protester of the European Commission of the Danube’s interwar prerogatives was Nicolae Titulescu, Romania’s Foreign Affairs minister between October 20th 1932 and August 29th 1936²². Titulescu – a remarkable political figure, jurist and professor, one of the greatest diplomats in Romanian history, a sharp advocate for collective security and Romania’s permanent representative at the League of Nations from 1921 onwards (being elected as the president of this forum in two consecutive years, 1930 and 1931) – thought that Turkey’s intervention for regaining full control over the Straits was just as valid as that of Romania for the Mouths of the Danube. “[...] It seems to me – Titulescu said – that giving Romania back the territorial attributions inherent to any sovereign state is an act that serves peace. As Romanians, to accept restrictions on our sovereignty in what concerns the Danube [...] is an act so contraire to Romanian dignity that no one, absolutely no one in my country would accept it”²³.

The Montreux conference had been prepared by Turkish diplomacy fronted by TevfikRüstü Aras, Turkey’s Foreign minister between 1925 and 1938. Turkey’s wish to take on full control over the Straits had been previously stated at the meetings of the Balkan Pact²⁴, at the League of Nations’ sessions²⁵, in various meetings or discussions with other diplomats²⁶. Pleading its insecurity under the demilitarization of the Straits, a diplomatic note was addressed on April 10th 1936 to all signatory governments of the Lausanne Convention, which solicited the debut of

²⁰ Romania, Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia sealed the Balkan Pact on February 9th 1934, a regional defensive alliance.

²¹ The Archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (from now on, cited as AMAE), fond 71/România, for the years 1936-1939, vol. 3, f. 126. Emil Opreșanu’s report from September 6th 1936, a member of the Romanian delegation in Montreux, to Romania’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

²² Ion Mamina, Ioan Scurtu, *Guverne și guvernanți (1916-1938)*, Silex, București, 1996, pp. 148-149. Besides the indicated timeframe, Titulescu also held a short foreign ministry mandate between July 6th-30th 1928.

²³ Nicolae Titulescu, *Documente diplomatice*, Editura Politică, București, 1967, p. 808.

²⁴ In the minutes of the May 11th 1935 session of the Balkan Pact’s Permanent Council, “Turkey’s right to rearm the Dardanelles” was mentioned. See *Ibidem*, pp. 647-649.

²⁵ Turkey had adhered to the League of Nations in 1932.

²⁶ Robert Deutsch, *Conferința de la Montreux*, Editura Politică, București, 1975, pp. 21-37.

negotiations for the modification of the regime²⁷. The Montreux debates started on June 22nd 1936, on a European background in which revisionism was constantly developing. Up until that date, Germany had successively denounced the disarmament of March 16th 1935, imposed on it through the fifth section of the Versailles Treaty²⁸, and had remilitarised Rhenania on March 7th 1936, breaching the dispositions of Articles 42 and 43 of the same Treaty²⁹. Italy had attacked Ethiopia on October 3rd 1935, triggering a major crisis in the League of Nations, and on the eve of the Montreux conference it had developed powerful military bases on the Dodecanese islands, which were potential threats to Turkey and the Straits³⁰. Moreover, Italy was the single invited country that refused to participate in Montreux³¹.

Romania's delegation, led by Nicolae Titulescu and containing Constantin Coteșcu, Vespasian Pella, general Samsonovici, I. Roșca and C. Mihalopol, supported Turkey's demands in Montreux. Nicolae Titulescu's inaugural speech is evocative of the Romanian interest for the Straits and for the trust that Romania had in Turkey at that moment:

“At the verge of this conference I wish to make a statement: anything that touches Turkey's security also touches Romania's security and all that concerns the Black Sea interests my country to the highest degree, because it is through the Black Sea and the Straits where our only way to the free sea lies.

(...) The Honourable Foreign Affairs minister of Turkey was right to say in his speech that Turkey has its most vulnerable spot at the Straits, that it is its right to protect it and it is the duty of others to support it.

(...) I will say that the Straits are Turkey's heart itself. But they are also Romania's lungs. When a region is, through its own geographical position, the heart of a nation and the lungs of another, the most elementary wisdom commands the two nations to unite and to form a whole, a fact that Romania and Turkey have understood. By the Balkan Pact the two countries have tied their fates together and to those of Greece and Yugoslavia as well”³².

Two views confronted one another at Montreux, essentially expressing the two doctrines: the international character of waterways versus riparian rights. The

²⁷ AMAE, fond 8, Convenții, S.1, Vol. X, f.n. it includes the Turkish governments note.

²⁸ <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/versailles159-213.htm>., Part V (Military, naval and air force clauses), includes articles 159 to 213.

²⁹ <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/versailles31-117.htm>., Articles 42 and 43 are included in the “Political clauses for Europe” (art. 31 to 117). The stipulations were reconfirmed by the German State through the Locarno Agreement.

³⁰ Robert Deutsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

³¹ Ștefan Stanciu, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

³² Nicolae Titulescu, *Discursuri*, Editura Științifică, București, 1967, p. 330.

first point of view, Anglo-French, campaigned for the preservation of the International Straits Commission, arguing that its removal would be a negative example with troublesome consequences for similar international commissions. The Straits Commission did not inconvenience the Turkish government by not having executive powers, and the various representatives within the Commission could ensure more effective relations between their governments and the Turkish one. Turkey counter-positioned itself, with the support of Romania and the Soviet Union. Turkish diplomacy, in the name of regaining full sovereignty, stated that Turkey was ready to fulfil all of the Commission's functions and to respect all of the engagements concerning good navigation through the Straits³³. Ultimately this point of view prevailed and the International Straits Commission was disestablished³⁴.

Viewing the Montreux Convention (July 20th 1936) as a real success for Romanian diplomacy as well, and impossible not to also have effects on the regime of the "Danube Straits", Titulescu expressed his point of view in the interview he gave to the French newspaper *Le Temps* on July 29th 1936³⁵. The speech, which at the time contained Romania's official position on the matter, was extremely acidic towards the European Commission of the Danube. Condensing the arguments of the Commission's opponents, the Romanian minister said that "Romania sees as necessary the suppression of the second (the European Commission of the Danube), as it represents, as we will see, the most unbelievable anachronism, the most inadmissible foreign territorial control, the international body that responds in the least manner to the purposes for which it was created (...) The issue we wish to raise is not the revisal of the treaties (*the explanatory note comes in the context of international escalation of revisionism*, our underline). It is the issue of unifying the regime of the Danube, as no international river in the world is put under surveillance exercised by two Commissions". Furthermore, the Romanian diplomat brought economic, technical and moral arguments. "The purpose behind the Commission's creation was to look over the works being done at the Mouths of the Danube and in neighbouring parts", but "for many years now, the European Commission of the Danube has been struggling with insurmountable financial difficulties, having to cope with expenses that did not correspond to the incomes provided by navigation taxes" and "in these circumstances, the Romanian government could neither overlook nor fear to openly proclaim that it cannot allow its single most important riverine outlet to the Black Sea, the pivot of its economic existence, to collapse". Also invoking the multiple fiscal concessions obtained by the Commission's

³³ Juliette Abrevaya, *La Conférence de Montreux et le Régime des Detroits*, Paris, 1938, pp. 113-116.

³⁴ Robert Deutsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

³⁵ Nicolae Titulescu, *Discursuri*, pp. 546-549.

institutions or by its employees, which came down to “exemptions and again exemptions” and which ultimately were breaches of national sovereignty, the solution called for by the Romanian diplomat was the dissolution of the European Commission of the Danube and the extension of the International Commission’s competences so far as the Mouths of the Danube, because Romania did not contest the international character of the Danube but instead asked that attributions concerning territorial prerogatives be given to the Romanian State³⁶.

Therefore, Titulescu was not adjudicating the Montreux solution for the Mouths of the Danube; he was not contesting the international character of the Danube, but wanted to unify the river’s regime by dissolving the European Commission of the Danube (with an executive role) and by extending the attributions of the International Commission of the Danube (with a supervisory role) down to the river’s confluence with the sea. Such a solution, in his view, did not have a revisionist potential in a time when all of Europe was divided, in an atmosphere where revisionism prevailed and in which Italy was in conflict with any other Power, and Germany “was destroying a treaty each day”³⁷.

Even though, in all his speeches, Titulescu rejected the revision of the Versailles system on territorial matters, nonetheless the dismissal of the European Commission of the Danube could not be done without modifying Article 346 of the Treaty of Versailles, a treaty which also included territorial provisions. But the great Romanian diplomat was nonchalant in affirming that the modifications requested by the Romanian authorities over the maritime sector of the Danube cannot bring any other negative consequences in addition to those already caused by Germany through the denouncing of the Versailles Treaty’s clauses³⁸.

Titulescu’s stance, in our opinion, stood far from the truth, should we only consider the Romanian requests’ propaganda potential. Thusly, the states in the Danubian basin, Romania’s former adversaries in the First World War – Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and especially Germany – speculated and interpreted in their own interest the Romanian diplomatic activity that concentrated on the modification of the Danube’s international regime. By amplification and exaggerations, even the smallest Romanian demands ended up having the image of definitive territorial revisions of the Versailles System. As an example, we will merely indicate the reactions of those states’ media at Titulescu’s position at the Montreux Conference. The press in Budapest described the Romanian minister as “an avant-gardist of treaty revision”, the one in Vienna used the expression “the new adversary of the Versailles dictate”, and the German press wrote that “Titulescu is an advocate for

³⁶*Ibidem*.

³⁷Spiridon G. Focas, *op. cit.*, p. 516.

³⁸*Ibidem*, p. 517.

cold revision” or “Titulescu demands the abolition of control over the Mouths of the Danube”³⁹.

In the same day with the *Le Temps* interview (July 29th 1936), Titulescu informed Romanian king Charles IInd and prime-minister Nicolae Tătărescu through a confidential telegram about the interview he gave to the French newspaper, “in which I documentarily explained the Romanian thesis in the matters of the Danube as it was thought by our forerunners, showing the capitulations regime to which Romania is subjected, asking for the passing onto Romania of the territorial attributes and the unification of the Danube regime by means of one single Commission (...)”⁴⁰. In the diplomat’s point of view, supressing the European Commission of the Danube “is the only way to put an end, without insulting anyone, to new admission requests that were made by the U.S.S.R., Poland, Germany, Greece, and Turkey”⁴¹. At the end of the telegram, Titulescu asked for the prime-minister’s support for his thesis, “for foreigners to know that Romania is one single soul”⁴².

In reality the Romanian political class and public, although inclined by pride and national dignity to solicit the disestablishment of the European Commission of the Danube, were far from unitary in supporting Titulescu’s point of view. Politician Gheorghe Brătianu⁴³ and jurist Nicolae Dașcovici⁴⁴, through articles in the press, drew attention on the fact that “our situation at the Mouths of the Danube was not perfectly similar to that of Turkey at the Straits, and replacing the European Commission of the Danube with the International Commission would have been a mistake”, accentuated by suggestions coming from the Soviet Union⁴⁵.

Circling back to the *Le Temps* interview, Nicolae Titulescu said that “Romania will always keep a deep gratitude to this international body (The European Commission of the Danube), which gave her several decades of economic development *with shelter from the European political conflicts* (our underline)”.

³⁹ Apud Iulian Cârțână, Ion Seftiuc, *op. cit.*, p. 242. The articles were published in: “Pester Lloyd”, Budapest, August 6th 1936; “Neuigkeits-Welt-Blatt”, Vienna, August 7th 1936; “Kölnische Zeitung”, Köln, August 4th 1936; “Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung”, Berlin, August 5th 1936.

⁴⁰ Nicolae Titulescu, *Documente diplomatice*, doc. 474, p. 808.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ See Gheorghe Brătianu’s article in “Curentul”, issue of September 13th 1936.

⁴⁴ Nicolae Dașcovici, *Comisiunea Europeană a Dunării. Ce a fost de la început – datoria noastră de recunoștință*, in „Argus” issue of August 6th 1936; Idem, *Navigația la gurile Dunării și Comisiunea Europeană*, in „Argus” issue of August 10th 1936.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Regimul Dunării și al strâmtorilor în ultimele două decenii (cu o anexă documentară)*, Iași, 1943, pp. 53-54. An insinuation at Titulescu’s politics of drawing nearer Romania and the Soviet Union.

Starting off exactly from the false premise of apparent security, Titulescu's critics asked themselves if, in view of the intensifying revisionism, the Romanian State could afford to give this body up, which provided, even if indirectly, guarantees for security and regional stability.

Approximately one month after the Montreux success, Nicolae Titulescu was replaced on August 29th 1936 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after a governmental overhaul⁴⁶. His falling from grace had been caused by personal animosities with several influential political figures, who reproached his sometimes excessive support for collective security politics – see the embargo against Italy after the Abyssinian aggression, or the closeness towards the Soviet Union. The November 14th 1936 unilateral German denouncing of the international regime for rivers⁴⁷ changed the Romanian authorities' objectives in their claims for sovereignty at the Mouths of the Danube and determined Romanian diplomacy to distance itself from the previous Titulescu demands, although Romania now had the possibility to obtain its goals: either through the Montreux solution, that "peaceful revisionism, as it was called by the English political figure Anthony Eden in the house of Lords"⁴⁸; or through the aggressive type of revisionism promoted by Germany, left unsanctioned by the Great Powers defending the Versailles system. Furthermore, in its interventions Romania had the full support of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the two partners in the Little Entente⁴⁹. Bucharest's dilemma was obvious: it either accepted or rejected the European Commission of the Danube, in the last case Germany replacing the international body with a Berlin-dominated riverine agency⁵⁰.

Eventually, the solution proposed by Titulescu for the Mouths of the Danube came to be in the Sinaia Arrangement (August 18th 1938), which wasn't so much a result of Romania's demands as it was a consequence of the French-British conciliatory policy for Eastern Europe. The Arrangement and the following Bucharest Convention (March 1st 1939) were supposed to be a

⁴⁶ Ion Mamina, Ioan Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁴⁷ Dan Boțescu, *România și problema Dunării în preajma izbucnirii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, in „Danubius”, vol. V, Muzeul de Istorie din Galați, 1971, , p. 226.

⁴⁸ „Argus” issue of December 31st 1936. A fragment of Nicolae Dașcovici's speech, held on December 28th 1936 at a conference in Galați.

⁴⁹ Iulian Cârțână, Ion Seftiuc, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-312. The Yugoslavian government asked the authorities in Bucharest to jointly retire their representatives from the International Commission of the Danube so as to subsequently ask for the dismissal of the European Commission. Romania refused and asked Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia to collaborate in order to maintain the international regime of the Danube.

reconciliation on the Danube matter between the revisionist side (Germany and Italy) and the side defending the Versailles system (France and Great Britain). While the situation of the Straits remained unchanged until present times, the balance newly set at the Mouths of the Danube would not last for long, being affected by the Second World War and later by the post-war Soviet hegemony.

⁵⁰ Richard Frucht, *Combatting an Anachronism: Constantin Coșescu and the European Commission of the Danube*, in „Revue Roumaine d'Histoire”, tom XXVIII, nr. 1-2, 1989, București, p. 110.