

Aspects of the economic relations between Romania and Italy (1879-1914)

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Abstract: Aspects of the economic relations between Romania and Italy (1879-1914). By the end of the 19th century, Italy showed an increased interest in establishing more and more fruitful economic relations with Romania. The continually growing Italian population represented an important market for the Romanian agricultural products. The development of the car industry and the marine industry in Italy required a massive acquisition of Romanian oil products. On the other hand, Romania imported from Italy textile products, vegetal oil, rice etc. A large number of Italian workers were to be found in the industry of the forest exploitations in the southern and eastern Carpathians. The birth of the Society for the Romanian Forest Exploitations was the very initiative of an Italian bank.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Italy and Romania witness a real impetus in their economic relations, especially because of the presence of the Italian navy on the Danube and the Black Sea. The considerable inflow of foreign capital, until the First World War broke up, led to the internationalization of the Romanian oil, a fact highlighted as well by a statistics carried out by Nicolae Xenopol, which situated Italy on the fifth place among eight states concerning the capital investment in the Romanian oil industry.

Key words: Romanian-Italian economic relations; import-export; foreign capital; trade companies; forest industry.

The period comprised between the last two decennia of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century had a determining role in the social and economic development of Romania. The constitution of the modern Romanian state, the conquest of the Romanian state independence, the intensification of the fight for their rights of the Romanians from the provinces under foreign domination, created the necessary framework for the modernization of the Romanian society. Many of the features of an underdeveloped country persisted; yet, in many domains, Romania moved towards its modern form: the population grew and acquired a marked urban character, the industrialization gained impetus and the infrastructure of an advanced economy began to take shape.

The relations between Romania and Europe became more complex, because the modernization of the country depended extensively on its external

connections. The foreign markets for agricultural products, the foreign providers of manufactured goods both in industry and for the population, the foreign capital became indispensable for the health of the Romanian economy (K. Hitchins, 1996; Gh. Platon, 2003).

Holding the state power during the first decennium after the conquest of the independence, the liberals, in favor of protecting the Romanian industry by encouraging the local capital, had a significant contribution to the economic development of Romania. The protectionist legislation which encouraged the local industry had effects which were felt as well after 1888, as in various branches new enterprises appeared or old ones developed (P. Căncea, 1974).

P. S. Aurelian, one of the promoters of protectionism and one of the greatest Romanian economists during the second half of the 19th century

showed, in his studies, that all the industrial countries were at first protectionist, that Bismarck and Wilhelm II applied the policy of protectionism successfully, just as Italy did after 1859, that the United States, applying the most rigorous protectionist regime, beside the unprecedented development of its national industry, increased its custom tax revenues from 25 million dollars, in 1825, to 214 million dollars, in 1883, while England, the champion of the free exchange policy, taxed, in 1887, the manufactured goods with 12-20% (R. D. Vlad, 1994).

Because the modernization imposed, as we have mentioned, an adaptation to the requests and the rhythm of the developed Europe, the Romanian political elite saw itself forced to analyze the context of Romania's integration in the concert of the European states. These people, mostly graduates of the West European higher education, understood that the only way for the Romanians was the development "at the same pace as Europe" (L. Năstasă, 1998, p. 172-179).

This fact is confirmed by a declaration made by Ion C. Brătianu in the Assembly of Deputies, on January 10/22, 1861: „Gentlemen, I have been abroad and talked to the capitalists, I even negotiated with them, and they told me that unless we have institutions to guarantee their transactions, they will not come to discharge their capitals in here...” (Gh. Platon, 2003, p. 32).

In his turn, Ștefan Zeletin, the theoretician of the Romanian neoliberalism, mentioned that: “The invasion of capitalism in Romania increased the circulation of goods up to the level of modern life and modernization concerned the entire society” (I. Bulei, 2004, p. 43).

The foreign capital had a crucial role in the development of the Romanian economy. Penetrating in Romania in large quantities, mainly after the independence war, this capital was invested in industry, banks, commerce, insurances. In industry, the foreign capital had become predominant in gas and electricity (95.5%), oil (94%), sugar (94%), metallurgy (74%), chemical industry (71.3%) and wood industry (69%).

The foreign capital represented, at the same time, a massive presence in the banking system after 1880, when the national system of credit institutions became totally functional.

The adhesion of Romania to the Triple Alliance (N. Ciachir, 1996; N. Ciachir, Gh. Bercan, 1984; Gh. N. Căzan, Ș. R. Zöner, 1979), in 1883, in

the context of the situation of our country at the interference of the spheres of interest of some great expansionist powers, such as Austria-Hungary and Russia, got it closer to the block of the Central Powers, a fact which occasioned as well a collaboration with the signatory states of this treaty (R. Dinu, 2004).

Pursuing the increase of its own influence in the Balkans, Italy supported Romania's orientation towards the block of the Central Powers and this thing facilitated as well a good development of the relations between these two states, not only politically but also economically and culturally (Gh. N. Căzan, Ș. R. Zöner, 1979; A. Tambora, 1977).

Acknowledging the independence of Romania on December 6, 1879 and appointing count Tornielli as plenipotentiary minister to Bucharest, Italy proved that it preserved its good relations with our country, relations that wanted a more intense development in economy as well, in the context of Italy's unification and of the obtaining of Romania's independence.

Just like Romania, Italy went through a more marked industrialization process only during the last two decennia of the 19th century, when the state initiated a few measures meant to encourage the productive investments. The first protectionist customs tax, adopted in 1878, assured favorable development conditions for the textile and car industry. The heavy industry also went through a period of impetus thanks to the state subvention for the building of steel works and the development of the chemical industry and naval constructions industry (A. Tambora, 1977).

The extension of the protectionist tax to the branches of agriculture (in the context of the agricultural crisis initiated in 1880, when Italy imported large quantities of wheat from the United States and Russia, determining a decrease of the price of wheat), turned the Italian wool and cotton into the most wanted products on the international market (N. Păun, L. Bathory, C. Ivaneș, 1986; G. Procacci, 1975).

The signing of the Romanian – Austro-Hungarian convention (1875) determined a series of states, of which one was Italy, to become interested in “establishing the bases of a similar convention”. The French consul in Galați wrote at the time that the Italian government was going to obtain the modification, in favor of its export commerce, of the

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customs taxes adopted by Vienna and Bucharest (C. Bușe, 1976).

The secretary general of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlo Alberto Maffei sends, on December 25, 1879, a telegraph to Tornielli, the plenipotentiary minister of Italy to Bucharest, concerning the possibility of obtaining a special economic treatment for the Italians living in Romania: "Based on article 44 of the Treaty of Berlin, Austria-Hungary did so as to make accepted in Bucharest its interpretation concerning the conclusion of the conclusion of the commercial treaty with Romania, by means of which the "sudditos" of the Empire, regardless of their religion, were allowed to acquire stable goods in the Principalities... we have the firm conviction that the Romanian government will not exclude the Italian "sudditos" from the same benefit..." (R. Dinu, I. Bulei, 2001, p. 62-63).

The adoption by the liberal government of a protectionist customs tax in 1886, in order to encourage the local industry and not to allow the foreign industrial products coming from Austria-Hungary or Germany to slow down any attempt of creation of a Romanian industry, had for a main consequence a long customs war with Austria-Hungary, during the period 1886-1893 (Gh. N. Căzan, 1979; N. P. Arcadian, 1936; I. Stanciu, I. Oncescu, 2004).

The most important consequence of this customs war was the fact that the Romanian export shifted its focus from the Austrian-Hungarian market to the British, Belgian, French and Italian one (G. D. Cioriceanu, 1928; V. Jinga, 1975; Gh. N. Căzan, Ș.R. Zöner, 1979).

In a report on the external commerce of Romania, sent in June 1884, by count Tornielli Brusati di Vergano, the Italian plenipotentiary minister to Bucharest, to the count of Robilant, minister of foreign affairs of Italy, was mentioned that: "the system of conventional custom taxes introduced by Romania through the customs-related political agreements concluded with Austria-Hungary in 1875 was extended later on within the treaties concluded as well with other countries such as England, Belgium, Germany, Italy. According to an 1878 law, this conventional treatment was applied as well to other states, such as Turkey and France, which were not related through a special treaty with Romania. And according to the new Romanian customs tax, which entered into force on July 1/12, 1885 and which is part of the customs law of May

17/29, 1886, if one of the countries with which Romania concluded treaties were to accept customs tax variations before the expiry date of these ones, this treatment (these variations) would affect as well the agreements with Italy..." (*nr. 36, aug. 31/sept. 12, p. 328).

Of the above-mentioned countries, Romania had excedentary balances with England (in 1882 and 1892), Belgium (in 1892, 1902 and 1912), France (in 1882 and 1912) and throughout the years with Italy (V. Jinga, 1975; Gh. Platon, 2003).

So, Italy proved to be one of the main "clients" and providers of Romania. Its continually increasing population was to become one of the main beneficiaries of the Romanian agricultural products. The development of the Italian car industry and of the Italian marine, which assured the transport of merchandises, required the massive buying of Romanian oil products. In reply, the Italian textile articles, through their special quality and thanks to their convenient price, were more and more the first choice of the Romanian consumers (G. D. Cioriceanu, 1928).

Through its geographic setting, Italy was one of the most important clients of the Romanian cereals. For Romania, the Italian market for cereals was one of the most significant western consumer markets, especially as Italy's geographic and demographic conditions always obliged the Italian state to buy important quantities of cereals. The Romanian cereals meant for export were directed from the lordly houses to the ports situated on the Danube River and to Constanța or to the frontier points towards the Carpathians (V. Jinga, 1975).

In the development of this commerce, an important role was held by the ports situated on the western coast of the Black Sea: Sulina, Constanța, Mangalia, Varna and Burgas and on the border of the Danube: Galați and Brăila. So, in 1866 and 1867, the export of cereals to Italy, through Galați port, reached important values: respectively 2,655,738 lei and 3,501,148 lei; however, just a decennium later, Italy exported in Romania, through Galați, "especially rice and other general items, unevenly distributed" (C. Bușe, 1976; D. Bușă, 2002).

In 1900, through Constanța port as well were exported large quantities of cereals, but, beginning with 1906, when the foreign financiers focused their investments especially towards the extractive industry and the raw-materials processing industry, oil was to

acquire primacy, representing 90% of the port's export (D. Bușă, 1996).

The 1895 law of the mines gave freedom of exploitation to the international trusts in Romania. The weight of the foreign capital increased significantly during the period 1895-1903 and spectacularly during 1904-1915. Increasingly more companies based on shares appeared, and the exploited surface grew. Until the beginning of the 20th century, most of the capital invested in oil extraction and processing was English, beginning with 1905 the primacy went to the German capital (64.32%), followed by the Anglo-Hollandaise (8.75%), Italian (4.98%), Franco-Belgian (4.31%) and American capital (3.32%) (D. Bușă, 2004).

In 1900, out of 476 ships that entered the above-mentioned port, the majority bore the Romanian colors (134), being followed in number by the Austrian (130), the Italian (84), and the English ones (40). In point of displacement, the first place was held by Austria-Hungary (156,688 t), followed by Italy (135,387 t). In 1901, the number of ships increased to 488, but this time the supremacy was held by Italy, with 155,723 tons (D. Bușă, 1996).

The port of Sulina had a special importance for the import/export of foreign or Romanian goods. Here a series of foreign trading companies such as "Messageries Maritimes" of France, "Deutsche Levant Linie" of Germany, "Westcott" of Belgium, "Johston" of Great Britain and among many others "Florio-Rubattino" of Italy had their headquarters (G. Procacci, 1975; G. D. Cioriceanu, 1928; L. Taftă, 1999).

Consequently, the market that determined the prices of the Romanian cereals moved, successively, from Constantinople to Trieste and from there to London and other great occidental and transoceanic ports. The cereals from Romania were sold in Marseille, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Anvers, Copenhagen, Athens, Trieste or Genoa, according to the fluctuations of the respective prices in the largest port of those times, London (V. Jinga, 1975).

Along with the cereals were exported, though in a less significant quantity, oil products, animals, wood and salt.

According to a report sent by the consul of Switzerland in Bucharest, de Ștaub, to Tornielli Brusati di Vergano, plenipotentiary minister of Italy in Bucharest, the fluvial maritime way via Genoa, continued with the railroad via Gottard, was cheaper for the transport of the Romanian cereals. The

transport on ship between Galați and Genoa, in the direction Galați-Genoa-Brünner (Lagerhäuser) cost 17.65 francs, while the transport by railroad Genova-Pino cost 24.85 francs. This represented a concurrence for the transport on land through Austria-Hungary. At the same time, instead of Genoa, Venice could represent a stage (place of call). However, the facilities created by the railroad service could prejudice the Italian commerce by sea. That could represent a concurrence for the Italian lines through the organization of a transport via Triest- Arleberg-lake of Constanța in the traffic with Romanshorn towards Turnu-Severin (on the Danube). The union between the Austrian-Hungarian Lloyd on the Danube and the Austrian-Hungarian railroad would prejudice Italy.

"The Italian ports cannot hope to overcome the concurrence of their happiest rivals in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea, if the railroads and the national navigation refuse to bring together their interests. Today we need to win over the quantity of the traffic: we need to know to draw towards us the transit of the other countries. What it (the Romanian government) did with good result in order to activate the export of cattle by sea can be done with a sure arbitration for itself to reactivate cereal transport in the same way. The Italians, regaining in this traffic the share they used to held some time ago, will prove that in our country has not disappeared the conception of the trade policy conceived ever since the first crossing of the Alps was planned, meant to direct towards Genoa the trades of Switzerland and of Germany" (*nr. 38, sept. 14/26, p. 345).

During the period of the years 1880-1883, the Italian import in Romania amounted to 346,779 lei, among the imported products, along with the sunflower oil and other vegetal oils, one of the main places being occupied by the Italian rice, sold by the merchants of Genoa as "riso gemino"(true rice) (T. B. di Vergano, 1885).

According to the treaty concluded with Italy, and which expired on March 13, 1891, Romania also imported from the peninsula other products such as objects made of colored glass (false corals, black and colored beads) (T. B. di Vergano, 1885).

The chargé d'affaires to Bucharest, De Nitto, sends, on February 15, 1891, to Di Rudini, president of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs, a report concerning the Romanian-Italian trade treaty. However, the law was just in the stage of project,

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because a trade convention between these two states was to be signed only on December 23, 1892 (R. Dinu, I. Bulei, 2001).

On the other hand, the industrialization process led to the appearance of a natural phenomenon, that of the migration of the labor force from Western Europe to Romania. An especially important role in the determination of this migration process of the labor force from Italy to Romania was held by the Italian-Romanian Chamber of Commerce (J. Antohi, 1921). So, a series of new constructions were granted to foreign companies of German, Austrian, French or Italian origin. Among the Italian companies the most outstanding are: *The Italian-Romanian Oil Company* (“*Societatea petrolieră Italo-Română*”), *The Road-Building Company of Venice* (“*Societatea venețiană de construcție a șoselelor*”) and others.

The German company Stroussberg, to which the Romanian state granted the building of the main railroad of the country, Roman-Vârciorova, drew among its workers a significant number of Italians (E. Negruți, 1986).

During a decennium, beginning with 1869 until 1880, were achieved about 1,400 km of railroad in Romania, and the contribution of the Italian workers was very important. In October 1892, the minister of Italy to Bucharest, the marquis Francesco Curtopassi, wrote: “everywhere, where there is work to do, such as the construction of railroads, bridges, canals, and, in general, earthwork, we can be sure that we will find there a large number of Italian workers” (E. Negruți, 1986, p. 228).

A large number of Italian workers were employed as well in the forest exploitations from our country. Coming from the Italian Tirol, from the region of the Dolomite Alps, or from the NE of the Frioul province, territories that were still in the possession of Austria-Hungary, but also from the region of Venice, they were employed at the forest exploitations situated on the Southern and Eastern slope of the Carpathians. Among the great companies specialized in forest exploitation there was as well a mixed one, a Romanian-Italian one, with about 10,000 employees, of which 2000 were from Transylvania, 1.000 from Bucovina, 600 from Galicia and 1000 Italians from the region of Lombard-Venice (Udine, Treviso, Belluno, Venice) (E. Negruți, 1986).

The anonymous company “Oltul”, which exploited the forest from the Basin of Brezoi, Malaia,

Voineasa, in Vâlcea County, was authorized, in 1905, to introduce in Romania, through Căineni, 2000 workers from Italy and from Austria-Hungary. The company Göetz-Negoiu hired, for the forest exploitations of Buzău County, in 1908, 520 workers, of which 103 were Italians (E. Negruți, 1986).

One of the most important companies for the exploitation of the Romanian forests was created by the Commercial Bank of Milan, along with the banks: Louis Dreyfus et Co Paris, Allgemeine Verkehrsbank Vienna, the Italian Banking Company - Milan, which gave birth to the banking labor union Rumänische Forstindustrie A.G. with its headquarters in Geneva. This labor union bought the Romanian shares of “Union” from Bucharest and the shares of the firm “Union Forstindustrie A.G. Budapest”, which held forests in the Szecklers’ region (Secuime) from Transylvania and in Bucovina. In 1911, this labor union also concluded with the Romanian state a contract for the exploitation of state forests. In the forest exploitations from Transylvania was co-interested as well the Italian financial group Feltrinelli, share holder of the Credito Italiano Bank. In 1906, it created “*Società in Azioni Italo-Ungherese per Industria Forestale*”, with exploitations in Tâlmăciu, Sibiu County.

In order to coordinate the selling of this wood on the SE European market, all the companies situated under the control of the Italian, Austrian, German and Hungarian capital created a cartel of the softwood lumber exporters. Such was, in 1910, the cartel “Accordo”, which included the most important firms from Austria-Hungary and Romania, namely the companies: Göetz, Tarcău, Union, Siebenbürgische Waldindustrie, Lotru, Beszterce-Naszóder Holzindustrie, Bayersdorf & Biach, Alfalú Holzindustrie, Tâșita, Marnero, Carpații, Standard and whose purpose was to reunite the efforts of all the firms selling wood through the ports of Dalmatia, in the area of the Lower Danube and in the Black Sea area (N. Păun, L. Bathory, C. Ivaneș, 1986).

Concerning the number of the Italian workers in the Romanian agriculture, it was very low. The Italians preferred to buy lands for agriculture rather than work them for other landowners. Such is the case of 70 families of Italian emigrants, who settled near Iași, in Cornești and who managed, in 1890, by means of the Italian consulate, to get 1080 ha of land from the Romanian state, in Cataloi village, Tulcea County (E. Negruți, 1986).

Interesting is, from this point of view, the report sent, on August 14, 1888, by Pasquale Corte, the consul of Italy in Galați during the period 1888-1890, to Crispi, president of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs ad interim of Italy, by means of which was analyzed the very situation of the Italians of Cornești. So, he mentioned that “in order to prevent an invasion and a moral and economic absorption, (the Romanian government) adopted a series of measures, of which the one according to which foreigners cannot obtain public goods in Romania, and cannot exert the profession of stock brokers... king Carol, not forgetting his origin, favored especially the Germans... The measure that denies the foreigners the right to own rural goods, got the actual Italian owners in the position of either selling their goods or giving up their Italian citizenship. This thing is extremely prejudicial for the Italian colonies and the inhabitants of our agricultural colony from Cornești are not to be ignored, as the colony is all made up of Italians, to whom a quite significant quantity of land had been promised, in exchange (for the work) they have accomplished for more than ten years” (R. Dinu, I. Bulei, 2001, p. 237-239).

So, in a few decennia, Romania became the richest country of Europe in point of natural resources, and these resources were waiting for foreign investors in order to be well valorized.

Italy, which had turned from a predominantly agrarian country, as it still was towards the end of the 19th century, into an agrarian-industrial one (among the industries that contributed to the first Italian industrial boom being the siderurgy and the car industry, which acquired rapidly the dimensions of true trusts) (G. Procacci, 1975), knew how to be well represented, understanding that it does not need to take hold of the natural resources of the Romanian state, but rather, on the contrary, be a good collaborator of Romania. An example can be the creation of the Italian Commercial Bank, which in Romania bore the name of The Italian and Romanian Bank (Banca Italiană și Română), an institution that during a trimester of functioning carried out operations worth more than a billiard and 150 millions.

One of the main elements that contributed to this impetus of the Italian-Romanian economic relations was the continual presence of the Italian sea fleet in the waters of the Danube and of the Black Sea. The exports of Romanian goods in Italy reached

between 1900-1910 the value of 40,600,000 lei, that is 9.42% of the total of exported goods, and then between 1911-1914 they increased to 62,000,000, which represented a percentage of 10.30%. Only the wheat represented 34,000,000 lei of the total value of the first period, while during the second stage, this value rose to 58,500,000 lei. However, according to the Italian statistics, these values were clearly higher. So, during the period 1901-1910, the value was 59,000,000 lei, and between 1911 and 1914, it reached 113,500,000 lei (G. D. Cioriceanu, 1928).

The Romanian wood exported in Italy reached, between 1901 and 1910, the value of 3,000,000 lei, while oil and oil products found in Italy one of their best markets.

The Romanian imports from Italy grew rapidly as well: from 19,600,000 lei during the period 1901-1910 to 25,800,000 during 1911-1914. The Italian textile products, so appreciated on the Romanian market, represented a peak of the imports, worth 10.000.000 lei during 1901-1910, and their value increased between 1911 and 1914 to 19,600,000 lei. The Italian silks were a concurrent for similar products coming from other countries. The colonial goods, the wine and the fruit of the Mediterranean countries occupied a secondary place, with a value of 1,500,000 lei during 1901-1914 (G. D. Cioriceanu, 1928).

The law of the mines, voted by the conservative government since 1895, allowed the penetration of investments of foreign capital in the Romanian oil industry, during a period when the lack of local capital was badly felt, and the demand for oil products was beginning to grow (I. Stanciu, I. Oncescu, 2004).

So, after 1904, the great foreign capitals got involved without any hesitation in the exploitation of the oil fields of Romania, and the consequence was the birth of the first great industry of Romania before the First World War (I. Stanciu, I. Oncescu, 2004).

The massive influx of foreign capital until the beginning of the First World War led to the internationalization of the Romanian oil industry. So, in a classification of the capital investments regarding the Romanian oil industry, according to Nicolae Xenopol, Italy held the fifth place, of a number of eight states (Gh. Buzatu, 1998).

Though it wanted to alleviate the serious oil crisis it was going through, the Italian state did not do like Germany, France, the United States, England or Holland, who were fighting over the Romanian oil

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fields, but knew how to collaborate with Romania (J. Antohi, 1921).

George Cioriceanu estimates that the Italian capital investments in Romania situated this country on the eighth place in this top, with a value of 2,000,000 lei in 1900, witnessing a major increase in 1908, to 13,000,000 lei, and then decreasing in the year 1914 to 10,000,000 lei (G. D. Cioriceanu, 1928).

The relations with Italy became very good after Ion I. C. Brătianu had become the leader of the Liberal Party (1908), and in Rome, after the fall of Crispi's government, which had accepted a relation of dependence towards the Central Powers. Then, Giolitti's Italy concludes a series of agreements with the potential enemies of the Triple Alliance, such as France, England and Russia. The crisis of Tripolitania brings about a great interest of the Italian diplomacy in the Balkan area, and, in this context, Italy's most faithful ally proved to be Romania (I. Bulei, 1997; A. Tambora, 1977).

The Italian-Turkish war (1911-1912), which occurred in the above-mentioned context, also hit the economic interests of the Central Powers. Both Germany, which had serious economic interests in Turkey, and also Austria-Hungary, tried to mediate the conflict for the conquering of Tripolitania and Cirenaica by the Italian colonists, insisting concomitantly in Rome and in Constantinople to cease hostilities. In its turn, the Romanian government, constituting itself as a mediator in the discussions between the two belligerent parties, placed itself as well on the same position, though it was for the solution of the Tripolitan problem in favor of Italy (Gh. N. Căzan, Ș. R. Zöner, 1979).

When the Italian-Turkish war menaced to extend in the area of the Aegean Sea, king Carol I drew the attention of the Italian politicians to the serious consequences of some Italian naval operations near the Dardanelles.

Prince Fürstenberg wrote that "a closure of the straits by one of the belligerent parties would hit so powerfully Romania's vital interests that in order to prevent it the king would become ad-hoc even Russia's ally" (Gh. N. Căzan, Ș. R. Zöner, 1979, p. 323).

Bosporus and the Dardanelles had a special importance for Romania's foreign trade, especially as until 1914, 95% of the country's global export took place by water and only 5% by land. According to a telegram of the general secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, C. Cretzianu, to the minister of

Romania to Constantinople, the closure of the straits triggered unanimous protests from the Romanian merchants, especially from cereal exporters (Gh. N. Căzan, Ș. R. Zöner, 1979).

Around the beginning of the First World War, the Italian capital invested in the Romanian economy was situated on the seventh place with 7,500,000 lei (in the oil industry) and on the fifth place, with 50,000 lei (in the textile industry) (N. P. Arcadian, 1936).

On May 11, 1913, the minister of Italy to Bucharest, Fasciotti, sends to Di San Giuliano, the Italian foreign minister, a letter in which he mentions the visit of Nicolae Xenopol, minister of the Industry and Commerce, in Italy. Speaking about the relations between Romania and Italy and about the possibility to draw the Italian capital towards Romania, Nicolae Xenopol asked the Italian minister of Foreign Affairs, Di San Giuliano to send an Italian commission made up of a banker, a businessman and a provider, to study the Romanian market in order to determine the Italian interest concerning the capital investment in Romania (R. Dinu, I. Bulei, 2001).

The context of the beginning of the First World War approached the Romanians and the Italians more and more. If the Italian political circles manifested an expectative attitude towards Romania, until the crisis of Sarajevo, the Italian public opinion regarded the Romanians sympathetically. So, "Giornale d'Italia" expressed, in its pages, the hope that between Romania and Italy may appear closer relations, taking into account the common interests of the two countries following the new situation in the Balkans.

An approach between the government from Rome and the one from Bucharest occurred through Take Ionescu's visit, in September 1913, in Italy. Being invited by the Quirinal's minister in Romania, Carlo Fasciotti, the Romanian political leader met the marquis Di San Giuliano. Count Waldburg, chargé d'affaires of Germany to Bucharest, highlighted the fact that through Take Ionescu's visit in Rome, the Italian government pursued to strengthen the commercial relations between the two countries (Gh. N. Căzan, Ș. R. Zöner, 1979).

Take Ionescu's visit in Italy, as well as the meeting he had with marquis Di San Giuliano led the two states to become closer to each other and, later on, the future events continued to get them even closer together.

So, on December 1/14, 1914, in order to pay the different orders for war material in Italy, the Romanian State, by means of the National Bank, made a loan, guaranteeing with treasury bonds evaluated at a rate of 75% by Banca d'Italia, worth 10,012,000 Italian pounds for 6 months, with an interest of 6½% per year, renewable every six months. On December 15/28, 1914, the Romanian state received from the Bank of England as well the sum of 5,000,000 sterling pounds, which were the equivalent of about 126,110,000 lei at an exchange rate of 25.22. The Finance Minister of Romania communicated to the person in charge of the public debt (Gh. M. Dobrovici), strictly confidentially, that the use of this debt is only for the payment of the war material in France, England and Italy (Gh. M. Dobrovici, 1934).

In a French diplomatic report from January 10, 1914, it was stated around the beginning of the First World War that "Germany, Austria and Italy are trying using all the means they can use to influence Romania's views, offering their financial support, creating banks, being interested in the industrial and financial companies, briefly getting involved as much as they can in the Romanian life in order to keep Romania within their alliance" (Gh. N. Căzan, Ș. R. Zöner, 1979, p. 381).

When Romania was occupied by enemy troops, living in poverty and need, Italy was the first country to lend it a hand, anchoring its ships with goods answering the most urgent needs, in the ports of Brăila, Galați or Constanța. The economic collaboration between the two sisters nations led Romania to become, after the war, one of the most significant importers of Italian merchandises, while Italy was the only nation to obtain the exportation of crude Romanian oil, even holding the first place in the exports from Romania.

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