

# KING FERDINAD OF RUMANIA (IV.)

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## IV. THE ROAD TO PEACE<sup>1</sup>

In the beginning of November 1917 the Bolsheviks — as has been told in a previous article — assumed the power in Russia and addressed a peace offer "to all concerned", urging that an end should be put to further bloodshed and, all thoughts of conquest abandoned, peace to be made on the basis of the self-determination of the peoples.. On November 20 the Central Powers declared their willingness to enter into negotiations with a view to the conclusion of an armistice. By this time the Russian army was completely disintegrated, the troops refused to fight. Rumania, cut off from all her friends, was left to shift for herself, with no access either to military or diplomatic assistance. She could choose between a heroic self-immolation and a separate peace with her enemies. The first alternative would have been difficult, for the Rumanian soldier is no hero, except in the capacity of Unknown Warrior; the second would be an act of despair and would entail the consequence of invalidating the extorted secret treaty of August 1916, with all its incalculable advantages. Both alternatives had their partisans.

Finally Brătianu appointed a delegation to start negotiations; in doing this he relied on an intimation received in December 1917 from the Ministers of the Allied Powers, Great Britain, France, Italy and Russia, to the effect that even though Rumania had ceased fighting and the Court and the Government had fled from the capital, she had fulfilled the obligations contained in the secret treaty and had not forfeited the advantages it secured for her, which was as much as to say that the conclusion of a separate

<sup>1</sup> See previous articles under the same title in the August, October and November issues of this review.

peace would not upset the provisions of the secret treaty. I shall return to this later on. Brătianu showed Take Ionescu, the leader of the Conservatives in his Cabinet, a telegram from the Rumanian Minister in Rome. "I spoke —" this telegram ran — "with Sonnino concerning the necessity of a separate peace and the need of obtaining for it the previous consent of the Allied Powers. Sonnino said: 'Do not ask for such a thing; it is impossible to grant it. Remember that the Christian Church pardons crimes that have been committed, but cannot give anticipatory absolution for crimes about to be committed.'" Brătianu hoped for subsequent pardon of the crime of having concluded a separate peace.

It must be noted, however, that the Conservative members of his Cabinet were not convinced. Take Ionescu, for one, was intransigent. He and his followers submitted to the king a memorandum voicing their disapproval; they feared that Rumania would be excluded from the peace negotiations if she signed a separate peace. "It is Rumania's primary interest," — they wrote — "in the present as for the future, for the sake of her own citizens and for the Rumanians living outside her borders, that the Rumanian Government should be present at the peace negotiations, in order to discuss the questions of her national unity and to demand the fulfilment of the promises made to her by the Allies."

A moderate section of conservative opinion proposed that Moldavia should be evacuated likewise and that the Court, the Parliament and the Government should withdraw to Russia, to Odessa or even further, to the Ural Mountains, there to await the end of the war. The objection to this was, that the occupying force would probably set up a rival government, perhaps even a new dynasty, with which they could negotiate with greater ease.

To the peace party belonged, naturally, the Germanophiles, who had from the first been hostile to the Entente alliance and now, in the hour of defeat, regarded themselves as justified. Foremost among them was the aged Peter Carp, who at the historic Crown Council had so passionately pleaded for war against the Allied and Associated Powers. But there were also more sober and less vehement politicians, like Maiorescu and A. Marghiloman, who saw the salvation

of the country in an early and honest peace with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Bucharest was still unoccupied when Marghiloman tried to convince the Queen that peace would be more beneficial for the country than the continuation of the war.

The final decision was precipitated by the fact that on December 3 negotiations for an armistice were started between the Russians and the Central Powers at Brest-Litowsk. Two days later, on December 5, Sherbatchev, the commander of the Russian forces in Rumania, applied to Fieldmarshal Mackensen for an armistice, and his example was followed by the Rumanian commander.

The request was granted, and on December 7, — the German General Kurt von Morgen narrates — negotiations were started in Focşani. The Russian delegates were General Keltchewsky, commander of the ninth Russian army, and Colonel Baumgarten, his Chief of Staff, with fourteen other officers and men, mostly Bolshevick and social-revolutionaries. The Rumanians sent General Lupescu with eleven officers; Austria-Hungary was represented by General Hranilovitch with two staff officers, and Turkey and Bulgaria with one officer each. "I was the chairman," writes General von Morgen, "supported by Colonel Hentsch and several other officers. The Russian delegation came to Focşani by car. I received them on the steps. The Russians were cold as ice, the Rumanians at first refused; later, however, they consented to take their seats at the table. I greeted the two delegations and expressed the hope that the negotiations would be carried on in a spirit of comradeship and that they would be crowned with success. General Keltchewsky thanked me and drank to democratic comradeship, which he regarded as the only justifiable attitude. He stressed this because of the presence of the revolutionary Russians. He himself was an officer of the Artillery Guards, while Baumgarten was a Colonel of the Dragoon Guards. General Lupescu also spoke, emphasising the independence of the Rumanian delegation."

The Russians demanded that no fixed term should be assigned for the duration of the armistice, but that three days' notice should be given of its expiration in order to give the Bolshevick legislature in Moscow time to decide over



war and peace. They took no account of the armistice concluded at Brest-Litovsk, which extended over the whole Russian as well as Rumanian front. A speedy agreement was reached, writes General von Morgen, in regard to all but the last three clauses: the neutrality of the Lower Danube, that of the Black Sea, and the transfer of the German and Austro-Hungarian forces to other battle-grounds. They were willing to consent to the transfer of two divisions, but with that von Morgen could not be satisfied. The discussions were broken off, and the Russians left for Maraşesti. The Rumanians remained. Next day, however, the Russians reappeared, which showed that the conclusion of an armistice was an important matter for them. This facilitated matters, and after a discussion lasting ten hours, at 10.30 p. m. an agreement was reached which allowed the Germans to transfer five divisions to other battle-grounds.

"While the text of the armistice terms was being drawn up," General von Morgen concludes his narrative, "I had time to talk with the members of the various delegations. General Keltchewsky was very reserved, but I entered into a spirited conversation with Colonel Baumgarten, whom I found most intelligent. He told me openly that the Tsar was responsible for the situation in Russia, because he had turned a deaf ear to all liberal proposals. He also condemned the Empress, who, under Rasputin's influence, had supported the Tsar in his opposition to every reform. When we parted, the Colonel pressed my hand with deep feeling and said earnestly: 'I trust Your Excellency's country and army may never know conditions such as are now prevailing in ours.' Twelve months later, "adds von Morgen," we had soldiers' councils, insubordination, the collapse of the nation and of the army — an exact replica of the Russian upheaval down to the minutest detail."

The armistice having been concluded, the next step was the peace treaty. But the Rumanians were in no hurry to proceed to anything so definite. It was their interest to evade it if they could, or at least to put it off as long as possible; at any moment the war might bring unexpected changes.

The diplomats of the Central Powers had their hands full with the Russian treaty; it was no easy matter to treat

with Bolshevik leaders such as Trotsky and Yoffe. The negotiations in Brest-Litovsk dragged on through the whole of December and January without any agreement being reached, until the Ukrainians declared their independence and made a separate peace with the Central Powers on February 9, 1918. This materially improved Rumania's situation, for Ukrainian detachments in Moldavia helped to disarm the unmanageable Russians and to restore some order on Rumanian soil; as a result, the Rumanians were able to invade and annex Bessarabia, an adventure we hope to describe in a future article.

The obstacles in the way of an early peace were not due solely to the divergent views of the Rumanian politicians. The victors also had aims and claims which were not always easy to reconcile.

The Hungarian attitude was summed up in a Pro Memoria written by Stephen Tisza for the use of King Charles.

"It is a regrettable fact," — wrote Count Tisza — "that Rumania will not emerge from this war as weakened as both justice and the interests of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy would demand. The loss of the Dobrudja is fully compensated for by the acquisition of Bessarabia, while the Hungarian demand for frontier rectification is no wise in proportion with Rumania's crime or her military situation. Our peace conditions are so mild that they should be offered as a magnanimous gift to a vanquished foe and not be made the subject of negotiations. In particular these negotiations should not be allowed to assume the character of bargaining or chaffering. If Rumania refuses to make peace on the terms we offer, we can only answer by a renewal of hostilities . . . the rectification of the frontiers is a *conditio sine qua non*, a defensive measure for the Monarchy, demanded with insistence by Hungarian public opinion . . . It was right not to exploit Rumania's desperate situation and to offer acceptable peace terms, but if we do not stand firm on this moderate platform we shall strengthen the Western Powers in their belief that it is unnecessary to conclude peace with us on the basis of our sovereignty and territorial integrity." In point of fact, Hungary's territorial demands in respect of frontier rectification were all but nominal.

Bulgaria claimed the cession of the whole of the Dobrudja, with the Black Sea ports, not only the territories taken from her in the second Balkan war.

Germany not being a limitrophe State, her demands were not territorial but economic. She wished, among other things, to lease the Rumanian oil-fields, the Danube and other Black Sea ports, and the exploitation of the forests.

There was one German demand which, so long as it was upheld, bred a certain amount of friction and disaccord between Germany and Austria-Hungary.

The Germans demanded that King Ferdinand, a Hohenzollern but one who, as the Kaiser said, "failed to maintain the noble traditions of fidelity", should be punished for his treachery. He must be made to resign, for it was out of the question for the Central Powers to treat with him. But it was no easy matter to replace him. One candidate after another was suggested: the Hungarian Archduke Joseph; King Charles' younger brother Max; King Ferdinand's younger son Nicholas (the elder, Crown Prince Carol, was excluded as one of the most rabid war-mongers); the king's brother Prince William of Hohenzollern, or any other Prussian or German Prince.

Count Czernin was strongly opposed to the removal of the dynasty.

"For one thing," he wrote in his Memoirs, — "I held that it was not our task to exercise divine justice and mete out punishment, but to end the war as quickly as possible . . . The widely accepted idea that the Rumanians were at the end of their tether and compelled to accept any conditions offered them was completely erroneous. They were in a very advantageous position, the *morale* of their army was excellent, and at the last big attack at Marasesti Mackensen's troops had decidedly had the worst of it. This success had gone to the Rumanians' heads, and there were many among them who wanted to go on fighting to the bitter end." Not that they could hope for a genuine victory; what they counted on was that if they could hold out long enough, their Western allies would obtain the victory for them. "My second reason for insisting that we should treat with the king was that from a dynastic standpoint I held it to be unwise to dethrone a



foreign ruler. At that time there was already a certain decline in the value of kings on the European market, and I feared that we might occasion a panic if we deprived some more kings of their thrones." His third reason was that no real peace could be concluded except with a fully acquiescent Rumania. "If we had deposed the king, we should have split Rumania into two camps and at best could only have concluded an illegitimate peace with the side which had accepted the dethronement. There was no legal peace to be made except with the legitimate sovereign of Rumania."

It must be remembered that Rumania's conduct in attacking Austria-Hungary was judged more severely by her former allies than that of Italy. Rumania had not been menaced from any quarter, she had gone into the war solely for her own imperialistic purposes. Unlike Italy, whose long sea-front lay exposed and defenceless in case of attack by Great Britain or France, she was perfectly safe, and all her neighbours would have been satisfied with her neutrality. Notwithstanding these objections to her conduct, she was treated with the utmost leniency. What the victorious Powers took with one hand they returned with the other. "We want a strong Rumania," said Field-Marshal Mackensen to Marghiloman, "with her territorial integrity preserved." This policy was dictated by the fear of Russian expansion; although a strong and contented Bulgaria would have done equally good service in this respect.

The armistice concluded, it was legitimate to expect peace to follow soon after. But so far there was no serious sign of it. The German, Austrian and Hungarian statesmen were busy with the Russian peace in Brest-Litowsk, and the Rumanians were in no hurry. The Rumanian Government now residing at Yassy, commissioned a certain Major Mitilineu, who in peace-time had been Chief Constable of Bucharest, to get in touch with General von Morgen and in the course of repeated conversations to sound him as to the peace terms and the chances of the Central Powers entering into negotiations with them. But tentatives were not serious.

More to the purpose were the steps taken by Count Czernin and Field-Marshal Mackensen.

Count Czernin, from Brest-Litowsk, advised King Charles

to have King Ferdinand secretly informed that if Rumania asked for peace she would receive decent treatment. Colonel Randa, formerly Military Attaché of the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Bucharest, was entrusted with this mission. Negotiations were carried on in the first days of February, but it is unknown whether they led to any more tangible results than the reassurance of the Rumanians that they would meet with a comparatively amiable reception at the hands of the Austrian statesmen. Marghiloman heard what Count Czernin had said in Vienna: "We are not so mad as to let our soldiers be killed for the sake of Moldavia; and it is not so easy as people think to drive away a king and his family — to drive away a dynasty, and a Hohenzollern dynasty at that!"

The endeavour of the Central Powers to bring the Rumanian adventure to a conclusion by means of a definite peace was met on the part of the Yassy Government by open sabotage, and on the part of military circles by a simple non-observance of the armistice.

Under these circumstances Field-Marshal Mackensen took a decisive step. He invited the peace delegation to return to Focşani on February 4. There he rebuked the Rumanians in no measured terms, blaming them for the transfer of army contingents, the occupation of Bessarabia, etc. He demanded plain dealing, — precise information as to the intentions of the Government and of the Army Command.

The Rumanian delegation fenced and prevaricated, in their turn accused the Central Powers of not keeping the terms of the armistice, and finally broke off the discussions. On February 9 General Lupescu intimated that, the Brătianu Government having resigned, it would be necessary to appoint a new armistice delegation. Mackensen's answer was an ultimatum to the effect that he expected the delegation on February 12; he added that he hoped "the members of the outgoing Government and such leading politicians as were hostile to the Central Powers would not be included in the new Government."

In Yassy two Cabinet Councils were held on the 6th and 7th respectively, followed on the 8th by a Crown Council.



The Government was in a quandary. The two heads of the Coalition Government, John Brătianu, Prime Minister and leader of the Liberals, and Take Ionescu, leader of the Conservative fraction, were both rabidly hostile to Germany and still more to Austria, and opposed the conclusion of a separate peace, but they differed in their views of the best course to be followed.

Take Ionescu wanted war; his opinion was that the armistice should be denounced at once, that the Court, the Legislation and the Government should withdraw to southern Russia, and that the army should remain and continue the fighting.

Brătianu opined that if the fighting was to be renewed, Ionescu should form a new government and shoulder the responsibility. The Liberals would put no difficulties in his way. But his recommendation was to procrastinate, begin negotiations with the approval of the Allied Powers, conceal their real intentions in order to gain time, in the hope that the situation would take a turn for the better. Three questions, he held, must on no account be discussed: the person of the King, the situation of the dynasty, and the territorial integrity of the country.

Ionescu was intractable. He was afraid that negotiations would automatically lead to a separate peace. There was a deadlock in the discussions.

Next day a Crown Council was held. The King declared that the existing political parties were unsuitable either to continue the war or to make peace. It was his intention to form a non-party Administration.

Thus ended the Brătianu-Ionescu Coalition Government.

The King chose as his new Prime Minister General Averescu, the most popular of all the army leaders, somewhat of a demagogue, completely devoid of political experience. In 1907, on the occasion of an agrarian revolt, twelve thousand peasants had been shot at his command. Now he represented peace and social reform.

The pro-Germans in Bucharest received his appointment with aversion.

The aged Peter Carp sent him the following note: "Mr. Peter Carp begs you to inform the King that if he takes it

upon himself to conclude peace with the Central Powers, his presence on the throne will cause such convulsions as will make the dynasty impossible, and will render it difficult to heal the wounds caused by such a policy." He and his followers refused their collaboration.

Averescu and Mackensen met on February 18 at Buftea, the country place of Prince Stirbey. They were old acquaintances, having known one another in the days when Averescu was Military Attaché in Berlin.

As it proved, their good understanding made no difference as regarded the final result. In view of the difficulties of the Russian peace, the Central Powers desired to wind up the Rumanian business as quickly as possible, and that was the affair of the diplomatists. The negotiations in Brest-Litowsk were once again broken off, hostilities were resumed, and Kowno and Kiew were occupied. The peace delegations of the Central Powers left Brest-Litowsk, and in the second half of February Kühlmann and Count Czernin arrived in Bucharest. This time the peace negotiations were started in earnest.

(To be continued.)

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