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The Interest of the British Admiralty in the Romanian Coast of the Black Sea

The First World War and the establishment of the unitary national state in 1918 “had changed Romania’s appearance and its status in Europe”.¹ After 1920, Romania was the sixth largest country in Europe (with an area of 295,049 km²) and the second most populated country in Central Europe (with a population of 15,541,424 inhabitants).² This reality gave Romania significant opportunities to perform in international life as an independent sovereign state, interested in maintaining peace and a climate of cooperation and concord between countries. Romania’s role in international relations and its very security depended mainly on the aims and tactics of the great powers; to that effect, successive Romanian governments aligned with Great Britain and France because they were the main guarantors for peace treaties after the First World War and, consequently, guarantors of Greater Romania.³ In the 1920s, Romanian diplomacy focused on three courses: strengthening relations with the Allied Powers, maintaining a good rapport with neighbours and developing relations with all countries, both neutral and enemy.⁴ In the same period, Great Britain’s main objectives were the following: maintaining good relations with the USA;

¹ Apud Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București 1997, p. 319.

² *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România Întregită (1918-1940)*, coordinator Ioan Scurtu, Editura Enciclopedică, București 2003, p. 31.

³ Marusia Cîrstea, *Din istoria relațiilor anglo-române (1936-1939)*, Editura Mica Valahie, București 2004, pp. 21-24.

⁴ *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, pp. 445-447.

ensuring appropriate defence for the country (this defence policy was directed towards four main goals: the security of the United Kingdom; the defence of the main commercial roads; the protection of the empire; and the decision to cooperate in the defence of the allies); simultaneously, most British politicians were hoping that a sensible policy of compromise and concession could prevent a conflict.⁵ Anglo-Romanian relations after 1920 mainly targeted economic, financial and military assistance. During this period, an important phase in the history of the relations between London and Bucharest was inaugurated in Nicolae Titulescu's accreditation to the capital of Great Britain – who presented his letters of credence to King George V (28th March 1922).⁶ For the duration of his mission, the Romanian diplomat managed to solve a number of financial, economic and military problems which concerned the two countries.

The great diplomat Nicolae Titulescu summed up Britain's interests in Romania in the following way: "Romania is not situated in an area where British interests are particularly at stake and is neither frontager to a sea which Great Britain is especially interested in. Consequently, if Romania maintains good relations with all its neighbours and is not peace-upsetting, if it avoids inflated ideologies of any type, if it pursues a politics of morality, if it is closely related to the states that interest Great Britain directly, such as France, and if it acts according to the great principles of the League of Nations, then Romania can obtain Great Britain's moral support".⁷

The military represented an important component of the connections between London and Bucharest, as Romania was interested in developing its military potential in order to be able to defend its national borders. Investigating the political and military

⁵ Alan Farmer, *Marea Britanie: politica externă și colonială, 1919-1939*, Editura ALL, București 2000, pp. 11-45.

⁶ Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *Relații româno-engleze (1914-1933)*, Editura Universității "Al.I. Cuza", Iași 1986, p. 89.

⁷ Nicolae Titulescu, *Politica externă a României (1937)*, G. Potra-C.I. Turcu-I.M. Oprea (eds.), Editura Enciclopedică, București 1994, p. 195.

situation in the area, the Romanian Army Great General Headquarters reached the following conclusion: "Reunited Romania faces a much more difficult situation than in the past, as its frontiers are amply threatened by neighbouring countries. These threats are due to either a desire for revenge on the part of Hungary and Bulgaria, who cannot accept being deposed of formerly possessed territories, or the propaganda tendency characterising the Bolshevik regime, who desires to extend its influence as far as possible to the west."⁸ In this context, the role played by the army became extremely important in defending the united Romania and fighting off possible aggressions. "The Romanian Country –was mentioned in a directive written by the Great General Headquarters– intends to respect the present configuration of Central Europe based on existing treaties. In other words, to maintain the integrity of its national territory and prevent its allies from being subdued".⁹ Under the circumstances, Romania sought on the one hand to enter a system of defensive political and military alliances from the beginning and, on the other hand, to update the military technology owned by the Romanian army.¹⁰ In order to endow the army with modern weapons, warships and fighter planes, Romania intensified its diplomatic-military, economical and technological-military cooperation with countries belonging both to the Little Entente and the Balkan Pact and also the democratic Great Powers – England and France.¹¹

In the interwar period, Romania's military cooperation with Great Britain consisted in: appointing military attachés specialised in aeronautics and maritime navigation; purchasing military technology for the endowment of the Romanian Army; ordering and purchasing British aircraft; supplementing the maritime naval fleet

⁸ *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, p. 432.

⁹ *Istoria militară a poporului român*, vol. VI, *Evoluția sistemului militar național în anii 1919-1944*, Editura Militară, București 1989, p. 111.

¹⁰ Constantin Olteanu, *Relațiile militare externe ale României în secolele XIX-XX*, Editura Fundației România de Măine, București 2008, pp. 117-149.

¹¹ Mitică Detot-Filip Anghel-Nicolae Ilie (ș.a.), *Diplomația română a apărării. Un secol și jumătate sub zodia Minervei. Scurt istoric*, Medro, București 2007, pp. 69-95.

with modern warship brought from England; joint projects to build naval bases on the Romanian Black Sea coast.¹²

In an attempt to ensure the defensive protection of the Romanian coast and along the Danube, the Romanian state spared no effort in creating a military fleet able to stop the landing of foreign troops on its territory. Up to 1938, Great Britain delivered significant amounts of cordite and ammunition to Romania and after 1938 it becomes an important supplier for the fleet, alongside France. The Armstrong company accepted a contract to build the protected cruiser “NMS Elisabeta” while the Thames Iron Works built the “Siret”, “Olt” and “Bistrița” gunboats.¹³

During the First World War, Navy Command sent memorandums to the Ministry of War, requesting the construction of new vessels. After 1920 a study entitled *Romania's Navy Programme* was conducted and was also analysed by the Navy Advisory Committee and it had the following motto: “Keeping seaways open for your own traffic and closing them to enemy traffic, that is the rationale of military fleets.”¹⁴ Referring to the role played by the navy in a *Report* to the President of the Council of Ministers, Radu R. Rosetti emphasised on 16th February 1920, that “our Navy’s main role in the future will be *to safeguard communications between the Bosphorus and the Danube mouths at all costs*. The other tasks of the Navy being: to ensure defence of the Black Sea coast between the mouth of the Dniester and the Bulgarian border; to ensure control of the Danube between Baziaș and its mouths; to cooperate in defending the Dniester; to guarantee water transports”.¹⁵ The purchase of warships from abroad was also employed with the

¹² See Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu–Lenuța Nicolescu–Gheorghe Nicolescu, *Relații militare româno-engleze (1918-1947)*, Cultura, Pitești 1998, pp. 7-34; Marusia Cîrstea, *Atașăți militari români în Marea Britanie (1919-1939)*, Editura Universitaria, Craiova 2009, pp. 77-110.

¹³ Ion Iliescu, *Politica navală a României între anii 1919 și 1941*, Editura Companiei Naționale Administrația Porturilor Maritime Constanța S.A., Constanța 2002, pp. 44-62.

¹⁴ Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁵ The Archives of the Romanian Foreign Ministry, Bucharest (hereafter AMAE), fond Londra, vol. 248, unpaged.

purpose of a more modern Navy fleet. In the 1920 Journal of the Council of Ministers no. 881 and no. 1526, it was approved that the Ministry of War purchase from the British government for the Romanian Navy a GORDON heavy monitor and 7 torpedo boat destroyers class M. for £600,000 to be paid from the war credit.¹⁶ The ships, the substitute parts, the maneuvering materials, the tools necessary for the shipyard in Constanța, as well as the costs of bringing the ships in the country were to be paid for out of the sum of £450,000, which would be discharged in three installments starting with 1st October 1921, and the other £150,000 was to be granted for the establishment of the naval base in Constanța.¹⁷ Negotiations were conducted to ensure payment for the ships and materials pertaining to them. As a result of these negotiations, commander I. Bălănescu reported on 17th December 1920 that the British government put forward a number of proposals for the negotiations regarding the purchase of British warships and, consequently, he requested the following: postponing the negotiations for the acquisition of the ships until Romania's financial situation was stable; sending Romanian Navy Command-endorsed officers to study in England; Romania accepting a commander captain on active service and two British Navy military officers as liaisons.¹⁸ The British government also requested through its representative, A. Leeper, that Romania didn't purchase other ships until negotiations regarding the acquisition of warships from Great Britain concluded.¹⁹

In 1921 negotiations were conducted with the aim of signing a "Navy agreement between England and Romania for the acquisition of maritime ships".²⁰ A significant event was the signing, on 25th July 1921, of the Paris Convention between Belgium, France, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Romania, the Kingdom of Serbs, Cro-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 306, unpagged.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ The Romanian Military Archives (hereafter AMR), fond Cabinetul Ministrului, dosar nr. 381, ff. 288-289.

ats and Slovene, Czechoslovakia, establishing the definitive status of the Danube, which stipulated that navigation on the Danube was free and open to all colours under conditions of complete equality on the entire navigable course of the river²¹ and, later, on 24th January 1923, the signing of the International Convention between Great Britain, France, Japan, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, the USSR, Yugoslavia and Turkey regarding the regime of the straits between the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, stipulating their demilitarisation and freedom of navigation for all commercial and war ships of all countries both in times of peace and in war.²²

The newly created situation –in the context of the latest international conventions– caused the Romanian government to adopt for the Romanian navy a more complex approach of the logistic system and also measures towards the modernisation and the update of its technology and stock. At the beginning of the third decade in the previous century, the defence of the Romanian maritime coast had relied on two destroyers “Mărăști” and “Mărășești”, three torpedo boats “Sborul”, “Smeul”, “Năluca”, four gunboats, along with several auxiliary ships.²³ Consequently, Romanian governments decided to modernise and increase the number of warships and, on 5th October 1926, the order was approved for two torpedo boat destroyers, a submarine and a store ship from Italy, then the contract with House of Pattison was drafted.²⁴ On 30th September 1931 the status of the ships belonging to the military navy was as follows: the defence of the maritime coast rested on four destroyers (“Mărăști”, “Mărășești”, “Ferdinand” and “Regina Maria”), three torpedo boats, four gunboats and other small size auxiliary ships; furthermore, on the Danube there were 7 monitors and as many E-boats, plus a number of auxiliary ships.²⁵ As far as hydroaviation is concerned, the situation was similar to the situation of the fleet; at

²¹ Ioan Scurtu–Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria Românilor în secolul XX*, Paideia, București 1999, p. 11.

²² *Op.cit.*

²³ Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

²⁴ *Op.cit.*, p. 71.

²⁵ *Istoria militară a poporului român*, vol. VI, p. 171.

the end of 1933, Romania possessed 16 airship²⁶. At the same time, various orders were initiated in this period, with a view to obtaining weapons and navy technology from reputable European companies, such as: Huzemayer's, totalling 6,500,000 lei; Telefunken for installing radio stations – 10,000,000 lei; the “Whitehead” company from England, for torpedo-tubes; for destroyers the “Silurificio” company and other companies such as: “Hotchkiss”, “Vickers”, “Bofors” etc., totalling 222,910,000 lei for orders.²⁷ In 1937, the Direction of Naval Constructions within the Ministry of the Air and Navy, requested the naval attaché in London, commander Dumitrescu Gheorghe, to contact the Vosper et C-nie dockyards in Portsmouth for an offer on the construction of four E-boats with the following characteristics: full-load displacement – approx. 31 tons; full-load maximum speed – approx. 42 knots; engine– Isotta Fraschini; number of torpedoes – 2 in tubes, one spare.²⁸

England showed special interest in the way the Romanian Royal Navy units were organised. To this effect, in the summer of 1938, the English navy attaché visited the Royal Navy units in Galați and Constanța. He visited the Navy Dockyard in Galați, showing interest in the Dockyard's capacity of repairing military ships loaded on dock, and in Constanța he visited the Destroyer Squadron. The aim of these visits was “to form a general idea about the work capacity of the Dockyard and the Navy”.²⁹ In November 1939, Romania requested that Great Britain provide five anti-aircraft command units and four destroyers. On 6th November, the British Admiralty agreed with the manufacturing of the four destroyers, but on 20th November 1939 the Romanian government was informed in a letter that manufacturing them was possible “only for countries allied with Great Britain”.³⁰

²⁶ Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁷ *Op.cit.*, p. 136.

²⁸ AMAE, fond Londra, vol. 308, unpagged.

²⁹ AMR, fond Ministerul Aerului și Marinei, dosar nr. 1 303, ff. 36-38.

³⁰ Ion Pătroiu–Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *România și Anglia în anii '30*, Scrisul Românesc, Craiova 1997, pp. 258, 259.

Taking into consideration Romania's geo-strategic location as well as its economic power, a proposal was put forward in early 1930 to build a naval base on the Black Sea.³¹ Romania needed a war fleet as well as a naval base to "guarantee safety against invasions or merely against a diversionary enemy force landing [...] and to offer reasonable safety to the commercial navy."³² Therefore, R. Goodden –London's military representative in Bucharest– advised, on 13th February 1930, that he had discussed this topic with Admiral Vasile Scodrea³³ to build a modern harbour in Taşaul, designed to serve as a military naval base, too. This proposal was in agreement with *The Objective of Modern Naval Policy*: "Wherever there's water to float a ship, the English flag should not miss".³⁴ In connection with the interest shown by Great Britain in the Black Sea, the Romanian naval attaché to London reported on 20th July 1930 that "in accordance with His Excellency Minister N. Titulescu's instruction and directions, I had talks at the Admiralty [...] who are willing to make all accommodations for us and lend their full support in finding a solution to our problems (in building a naval base)".³⁵ The talks at the British Admiralty were held with Admiral R.G. Henderson –assisted by Commander G.P. Hayes, the Admiralty's liaison officer for Romania– who specified that "during the summer and autumn campaign a technical committee should check estimates and geological difficulties so that in the auction the Romanian government will possess the complete information regarding even the last cent that was spent and the capability of covering expenses from the resulting revenue when the entire system becomes operational". Admiral Henderson also suggested that the Romanian state order two destroyers "to be built ac-

³¹ David Britton Funderburk, *Politica Marii Britanii față de România 1938-1940. Studiu asupra strategiei economice și politice*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București 1983, pp. 43-45.

³² AMR, fond Secretariatul General, dosar nr. 1433, ff. 89, 90.

³³ Marian Moșneagu, *Dicționarul marinarilor români*, Editura Militară, București 2008, p. 429.

³⁴ AMR, fond Secretariatul General, dosar nr. 1433, f. 120.

³⁵ AMAE, fond Londra, vol. 259, unpaget.

ording to the latest plans of the Admiralty” – their purchase, the Report specified, will attract the British Admiralty’s amiability, which is extremely important because “England’s politics are entirely guided by the politics of the Admiralty and Bank of England, who are the two regulators of world politics”.³⁶ Following these negotiations, a British mission made up of Admiral Henderson and Engineer Hayes came to Romania on 3rd April 1930. In late June, after several investigations of the Black Sea coast, Henderson filed a documented report, accompanied by plans for the construction of a naval port.³⁷ Concurrently, within the framework of the interest in building a port in Taşaul –with the support of British specialists– it was proposed that a canal be constructed on the route Cernavodă-Constanța-Taşaul.³⁸ Thus, on 2nd April 1931, British officials approached Gh. Marinescu, the president of the Minister Council, in a letter –accompanied by an Aide-Mémoire and a memorandum by Gibb and Partners– which emphasized that Admiral Henderson (upon his return to London, having completed the requested surveys in Romania) “had approached Gibb for the construction of a canal and a port on Lake Taşaul”.³⁹ The implementation expertise for the Henderson plan, which stipulated, apart from “the naval base, a commercial harbour, connected to the construction of a canal from Cernavodă to Constanța”, would have cost between 4 and 10,000 pounds.⁴⁰ It should be mentioned that the Romanian officials and especially Navy Command greatly favoured the projected Cernavodă-Constanța canal. In Navy Command’s opinion, “the canal would be advantageous in saving part of the Romanian traffic the unreasonable fees required by the European Commission of the Danube and also in shortening by a few hundred kilometres the journey of agricultural, industrial and oil produce from Muntenia,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ AMAE, fond Problema 71, vol. 135/3, f. 163.

³⁸ Valentin Ciorbea, *Evoluția Dobrogei între 1918-1944*, Ex Ponto, Constanța 2005, p. 139.

³⁹ AMAE, fond Problema 71, vol. 135/3, f. 164.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Oltenia and Banat”.⁴¹ As far as costs were concerned, according to Admiral Henderson’s expertise, the entire canal and naval base system would require a capital investment of £7-10 million which could be recovered in 15-20 years.⁴² Referring to Admiral Henderson’s expertise, the Army Minister, General Condeescu, concluded that “Things are being treated with utmost competence and constitute a valuable contribution to the solution of the Naval Base problem. The suggested solutions correspond with the country’s higher interests in the Black Sea and are shared by leading figures in the Navy”.⁴³ Further on, General Condeescu recommended approaching the British government, through diplomatic agents, so that the issue of the offer that was received could “enter an official stage and be solved as a State-to-State issue”.⁴⁴ After these talks –with Admiral Henderson– the Romanian naval attaché to London concluded: “On these lines and given England’s friendship over the Straits and the Black Sea, one could foresee a great future for the development of a maritime, commercial, naval and naval-aerial programme centered in Constanța-Tașaul –with important triage and storehouse areas– between the Mediterranean Basin and the rest of Europe”.⁴⁵

Following these explorations and proposals, the High Council for National Defence approved the plans put forward by Admiral Henderson, from the British Admiralty, in June 1930, at the Ministry of the Army – and under “the High Presidency of H.M. the King”.⁴⁶ The justification for this endeavour was that “This contract –commercial in appearance– is underlaid by a naval connection with England – still the Great Master of the Seas. Along with other advantages, it gives us the most urgently needed protection today of taking our country out of the campaign and plan for Treaty revision – from which Europe cannot not escape, no matter what it

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, f. 169.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ AMAE, fond Problema 71, vol. 135/3, f. 163.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 164.

⁴⁵ AMAE, fond Londra, vol. 259, unpagued.

⁴⁶ AMAE, fond Problema 71, vol. 135/3, f. 118.

does”.⁴⁷ Another proposal to build a modern port in Taşaul was made in 1934. To that effect, Commander Eugeniu Roşca remarked that “Romania needs a war fleet, as well as a naval base”.⁴⁸ In selecting the location for a new naval base, a number of factors had to be taken into account: the position of the harbour has to be chosen so that it can cover any area of the coast that comes under attack, as well as the main communication ways; the safety of the harbour in case of an attack on land; the construction and maintenance costs should not be too high; communications with the rest of the country should be safe and fast.⁴⁹ In fact, the General Inspectorate of the Royal Navy’s *Report* detailed why Lake Taşaul was chosen as a future naval port: “This lake is situated 18 km north of Constanţa and thus in an excellent strategic position not only for a Naval Force that can dominate the Russian ports in the north of the Black Sea and the Bosphorus, but its position is such that it can protect it against attacks from land; it is also the only one that could permit a counter attack, in case of an enemy air force approach either from the north or the south”.⁵⁰ A *Report* about the financial negotiations between England and Romania for the construction of the naval base also emphasised that “the interest and good disposition of the most authorised English government officials, as well as their support in accomplishing the projects in Taşaul”,⁵¹ which, “due to a fortunate geographical situation, characterised by a central, entering position, doubled by Baia Midia which can shelter tens of ships at anchor, suddenly embrace all the military, technical, meteorologic and sea-going problems [...] What is more, through the connection with the Cernavodă-Constanţa-Taşaul canal, it also solves the serious problem of an exit to the Black Sea”.⁵² Speaking about

⁴⁷ Ibid., f. 128.

⁴⁸ Ibid., f. 93.

⁴⁹ Ibid., ff. 94-100.

⁵⁰ Marusia Cîrstea, “Un proiect anglo-român privind construcţia portului de la Taşaul”, in *Analele Universităţii din Craiova. Seria Istorie*, XIV 1/15 (2009), 220-221.

⁵¹ AMR, fond Secretariatul General, dosar nr. 1 433, f. 256.

⁵² Ibid., f. 259.

the strategic importance of Lake Taşaul, Commander Gh. Niculescu, naval attaché to London, reported that “Regarding the decisions of the High Council for National Defence and the fact of the government appropriating the Taşaul project” he could do no more than emphasise that “The geographic position and topographic configuration of Lake Taşaul, the shore and the sea coast, the surrounding area, its central position in the heart of Dobrogea, closely connected to Constanţa, all make Taşaul’s position a focus for all solutions that satisfy military, naval, sea-going, aerial, technical and meteorologic interests. The Cernavodă-Constanţa-Taşaul canal will solve all problems in the Delta and in particular the one regarding the guarantee of a permanent, central gateway, independent of all fluctuations [...]. By extending the project to Galaţi –by a bridge across the Danube– the Prut Valley towards the Vistula, Galaţi and Brăila will attract all triage and storing activity of the Polish traffic and the regions between the Baltic and the Black Sea”.⁵³

In the meantime, the project stagnated mainly because of lack of funds. Therefore, in 1933, on Navy Day (15th August), in the royal message, Carol II turned the government’s attention to the necessity of solving “that famous matter that has been stagnating for a few years” –the construction of the naval base– “in the absence of which our navy cannot survive”.⁵⁴ As a result of this prompting, negotiations with England are resumed. The British Admiralty confirms in an address on 16th March 1934 that Lake Taşaul is the perfect location for the construction of a military naval harbour. The address emphasised that: “The Taşaul project answers problems of high interest for European safety [...] and the moment (of the construction) is appropriate –that is, now– because money can be found easily and cheaply now, that the budget excess has been announced this year”.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., ff. 272-273.

⁵⁴ I. Ciupercă, “Construcţia bazei navale Taşaul – un proiect abandonat”, in *Arhivele Moldovei*, I-II (1994-1995), Editura Fundaţiei Axis Universitaria, Iaşi 1996, p. 121.

⁵⁵ AMR, fond Secretariatul General, dosar nr. 1433, f. 182.

Under these circumstances, the Romanian Supreme Council of National Defence recommended that the government endorse the plans and proposals of the English Admiral R.G. Henderson, of the British Admiralty, “lest the fast progress of international events cause a change in London’s good mood today as far as financing is concerned”.⁵⁶ At the same time, numerous solicitations were made to the British Admiralty to recommend companies specialised in the construction of military and civil ports. The naval military attaché to London, Commander Gheorghe Dumitrescu, informed the General Staff in address no. 321 of 25th November 1936, that “British Admiralty recommended Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners Consulting Engineers company [...] which includes, among others, Sir Alexander Gibb, C.B.E. C.B., who is the president of the British Association of Civil Engineers and Sir Leopold Savile, K.C.B., a member of the council of that Association [...], both having been responsible for the maintainability and improvement (enlargement) of all Admiralty Dockyards and Establishments. Sir Alexander Gibb managed the construction of the British Navy Dockyard in Rosyth, and Sir Leopold Savile designed the plans for the Navy Base in Singapore”.⁵⁷

Unfortunately for Romania, this project was postponed yet again because the Romanian state was opposed to “permitting their exploitation (Port Taşaul and the Cernavodă-Taşaul canal) by a foreign enterprise, who could impose such conditions and fees to prejudice the national economy”.⁵⁸ The implementation of this project was further postponed because of the unclear status of the Straits and the opposition manifested by France.⁵⁹ A report by Costiescu Ghika on the naval base in Taşaul, drafted ever since 28th June 1930, emphasised that “Henderson’s mission in Romania produced

⁵⁶ Ibid., f. 167.

⁵⁷ AMAE, fond Londra, vol. 308, unpaget.

⁵⁸ Cîrstea, “Un proiect anglo-român”, p. 215.

⁵⁹ Marian Moşneagu, *Politica navală postbelică a României (1944-1958)*, Mica Valahie, Bucureşti 2006², p. 19; idem, *Dicţionarul marinarilor români*, p. 48.

certain nervousness among the circles of the French Legation in Bucharest”⁶⁰ and the said “nervousness didn’t originate in Paris (in the Quai d’Orsay or the Ministry of the Navy), but inside the very Legation of France in Bucharest, coming mainly from the Naval Attaché who managed to convince the French minister that prestige was at stake and that the French government must not allow a prevalence of English Admiralty in Romanian naval issues”.⁶¹ However, in January 1937, Lieutenant-Commander Matilda Costiescu Ghika addressed two memoranda to King Carol II showing that the British Admiralty continued to be interested in the execution of the Taşaul project. At the same time he specified that the execution of the Henderson Plan was not possible without the assistance of Stewart, a member of the House of Commons, a person with whom the Romanian state had a dispute triggered by the cancellation of the contract for road construction; and that Sir L. Savile, Gibb’s main expert, suggested that the technical expertise for Lake Taşaul be made concomitantly with the one for Lake Tăbăcărie, where the Royal Navy intends to build a submarine base”.⁶² Lake Tăbăcărie was situated north of Constanţa. The Royal Navy Commander, viceadmiral Ion Bălănescu, also provided evidence that in anticipation of the construction of the Taşaul base, which was difficult because of the country’s financial situation, a less expensive solution would be to convert lake Tăbăcărie into a military port. The costs involved would not exceed the sum of 450,000,000 lei, and its construction would take three years and it should commence immediately.⁶³

As a result of the new diplomatic arrangements, in March 1937 a British delegation led by Sir Leopold Savile and A. Maunsell went to Bucharest to visit Constanţa and the area of Lake Tăbăcărie – suggested as alternative potential naval base. The Romanian participants in the talks were: Radu Irimescu, Minister of Aviation and the Navy; vice-admiral Bălănescu, commander and General In-

⁶⁰ AMAE, fond Problema 71, vol. 135/3, f. 167.

⁶¹ Ibid., f. 168.

⁶² Ciupercă, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

⁶³ *Op.cit.*

spector of the Navy; Koslinski, Chief of the Navy General Staff; captain commander Stoianovici, Chief of the Navy Hydrographic Office.⁶⁴ Following talks in Bucharest, the British delegation went to Constanța, where “they visited the area of the quarry and its installations where good stone could be obtained for the works in question [...] and received valuable information about the cost of such works in the area, at the same time being shown the results of drilling operations done in the lake area under their supervision”. Subsequent to their visit of the Romanian seaside, the British delegation gained a hearing by H.M. King Carol II, who “showed his interest in the manifest plan”⁶⁵ and then requested the Minister of the Air and Navy to carry out this project. For this reason, vice-admiral Ioan Bălănescu (commander of the Romanian Royal Navy between 1934-1937) visited England in July 1937.⁶⁶ Works on the new port started in May 1938 and the execution was projected in three stages: building the foothold, by developing the north and south piers; cutting the isthmus and gaining entrance into the lake through a navigable canal; building the quay and ensuring practicality on the entire lake surface. The new port was designed to be a component of a system of developments which was going to “bring about the engaging of European and Far Eastern commercial currents towards Romania”.⁶⁷

Between 15th and 18th November 1938 King Carol II visited Great Britain. King Carol’s talks with Prime Minister Chamberlain and Lord Halifax undoubtedly contributed to a better awareness of the two parties’ positions on the approached topics, revealing that, because of its Munich policy, the British government refrained, under different pretexts, from proceeding towards an extension of Great Britain’s collaboration with Romania. Referring to these talks, Matilda Costiescu Ghika, minister plenipotentiary to London (appointed on 15th November 1936), showed that “after His Maj-

⁶⁴ AMAE, fond Londra, vol. 308, unpagued.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Moșneagu, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

⁶⁷ *Op.cit.*, p. 20.

esty the King's departure both Mr. Bianu, our commercial attaché and Commander Dumitrescu, naval and military attaché, kept in touch with the English departments which are responsible for the economic, naval and military affairs –brought up during His Majesty's stay– and for which the atmosphere seems quite favourable at present, due to the international state of affairs. They involve:

1. The Taşaul commercial port (possibly including the Danube-Black Sea Canal); this is the Henderson plan whose execution has already been initiated (as far as the port itself is concerned) with our own means.

2. Military and commercial ships: Commander Dumitrescu is managing these two affairs (namely with the Admiralty – House of Vickers and House of Runciman) within the boundaries of the instructions he has been given.

3. The granary affair; it has been arranged by Lord Lloyd and for now it is being analysed by the Legation independently. If a concrete outcome is reached the affair will probably enter the area of those funded under the English government guarantee (Export & Credits Guarantee Department).⁶⁸

The outbreak of the Second World War and the fall of Carol's regime caused the suspension of works on the Taşaul-Gargalâc-Tăbăcărie system, in 1939.

⁶⁸ AMAE, fond Problema 71, vol. 135/3, ff. 220-223.