

THE DELIMITATION OF THE NEW ROMANIAN-BULGARIAN LAND BORDER (1913–1914)

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In the summer of 1913, a new land border was established between Romania and Bulgaria. It would take more than three decades of negotiations between the members of the joint Romanian-Bulgarian commission responsible for the technical work to definitively establish the route of the Romanian-Bulgarian land border before a final protocol was signed.

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In July 1913, 22 plenipotentiaries met in Bucharest to negotiate the new borders of the Balkan Peninsula, as a result of the Second Balkan War. Article 2 of the Bucharest Peace Treaty rectified the old Romanian-Bulgarian border between the Danube and the Black Sea. Tutrakan (Romanian *Turtucaia*) and Ekrene (today Kranevo) were the farthest points of the new land border between the two states¹. The starting point of the negotiations on the new border was the map drawn by the Romanian military topographers when the Romanian troops were marching towards Sofia. They have been ordered to find out as soon as possible, with the means available, the most convenient borderline for Romania to request at the Peace Conference². The route of the new Romanian-Bulgarian border, established in Bucharest in the summer of 1913, took into account both the particularities of the terrain and landmarks such as church steeples and village mosques³. The same Article 2 of the Bucharest Peace Treaty stipulated the set-up of a joint commission to determine, on the ground, the route of the new land borderline in Dobrudja. The same commission was also to decide on the status of real estate and capital in the territory ceded by Bulgaria to Romania. The joint commission had to be set up in no more than two weeks after the signing of the Bucharest Peace Treaty. If both parties could not reach an agreement international arbitration was the way out⁴.

A few weeks had passed since the set-up of a similar commission whose purpose was the same. The territorial dispute between Romania and Bulgaria had

¹ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Le Traité de Paix de Bucarest du 28 juillet (10 août) 1913 précédé des Protocoles de la Conférence*, Bucarest, 1913, p. 68–69.

² Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (hereafter AMAE), fonds 71/1900–1919, dossier 31, fol. 185.

³ *Le Traité de Paix de Bucarest du 28 juillet (10 août) 1913*, p. 73–75.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

long been in place, being a result of the victories won by the Bulgarian Army in the First Balkan War. In exchange for its favorable neutrality, the Bucharest government invoked security interests, calling on Bulgaria to rectify its land border. Unable to reach an unmediated agreement, both governments decided to be mediated by the Great Powers, as stipulated by international law provisions. Hoping to gain sympathy in Bucharest and Sofia, the representatives of the Great Powers in St. Petersburg, unwilling to upset either of the parties that made recourse to mediation, signed a protocol on April 26, 1913, whereby the old Romanian-Bulgarian border remained the same, excepting the 3-kilometer-wide area around Silistra that was to be accrued by Romania. According to the St Petersburg Protocol provisions, three Romanian-Bulgarian joint commissions were established. One was in charge of delimiting the new land border between the two countries. The second one dealt with the assessment of damages the Romanian government was to grant to the inhabitants of the new territory who wanted to migrate to Bulgaria. The third commission had to establish the measures that would be taken by the Bulgarian authorities so as to demilitarize the land border with Romania. All the meetings of these joint commissions were to be held in Silistra. In the absence of any appropriate building, the meetings were finally held on two ships (one Romanian, the other Bulgarian) anchored in the Port of Silistra. During the two weeks of meetings, the Bulgarian delegates complained of their Romanian counterparts, who were empowered to negotiate, rather than sign any document. This is why the Romanian delegates were quite cautious and, in the event of further clarifications, they often went to Bucharest⁵. Anyway, the negotiations came rapidly to a standstill. The apple of discord was the starting point of the 3-km line that had to be ceded to Romania⁶. The works of these joint commissions stopped the moment when the Second Balkan War broke out⁷.

A week after the signing of the Bucharest Peace Treaty, Simeon Radev, the Bulgarian delegate stationed in the capital of the Romanian Kingdom, was given urgent instructions from Sofia: find out and report immediately if the Romanian government appointed the members of the commission in charge of delimiting the new land border between the two countries. The chief of the Bulgarian diplomatic service, Nikola Genadiev, wanted to know not only the number of Romanian delegates, but also who they were in order to be able to know who to appoint in the joint commission. A few days later, Genadiev made a new request. He wanted Radev to provide him new details about the Romanian delegates: how they had been appointed and if they were plenipotentiaries or not. The quick answer was that the Romanian members of the commission in charge of delimiting the new border were delegates appointed by royal decree, at the proposal of the foreign minister.

⁵ Централен Държавен Архив [Central State Archive] (hereafter ЦДА), фонд 233к, опис 1, а.е. 351, л. 3–9.

⁶ General G.A. Dabija, *Amintirile unui atașat militar român în Bulgaria*, București, 1936, p. 303.

⁷ Ion T. Ghica, *Luarea Silistrei*, București, 1915, p. 50–51.

Consequently, the Bulgarian part did the same thing, appointing the members of the joint commission in charge of delimiting the land border with Romania. The delegates appointed to be part of this commission were ready to face all sorts of challenges related to economic and social issues concerning the status of the population of the new Romanian territory. This exchange of territory implied the settlement of some pressing matters, such as pension payment, tax collection, the granting of general amnesty, the citizenship status regulation⁸.

Things happened very fast. On August 8th, King Carol I signed the decree which appointed the members of the Romanian part to become part of the joint commission. There were five delegates altogether: two MP's and three officers. Among them we find Dimitrie Nenițescu (former minister), Nicolae Titulescu (who was at the start of his prestigious political career) and General Gheorghe Iannescu, head of the Geographic Service of the Romanian Army⁹. They were accompanied by two employees of the Foreign Ministry, who were in charge of the secretarial activity of this joint commission. They benefited from a special budget, which amounted to nearly 30.000 lei a month¹⁰. The Bulgarian delegates were appointed on August 11th: a former minister, a MP and three officers, among them being the former head of the Cartographic Institute¹¹. They were accompanied by a diplomat, a jurist and a topographer. It is worth mentioning that the diplomat in question was Ivan Ikonov, who, in his capacity as first secretary of the Bulgarian Legation in Bucharest, also took part in the works of the joint commission that met in June 1913. Initially, this commission had to include General Petur Tantilov too. It is unclear why Tantilov was replaced by his deputy, Colonel Naidenov, who took over the leadership of the Bulgarian delegation. For the commission's works to unfold well, Naidenov requested the Bulgarian Chief of Staff to provide eight horses, ten soldiers, a non-commissioned officer and a young officer¹². The instructions received by the Bulgarian delegates were not related only to the delimitation of the new land borderline. The Bulgarian delegation had to require the Romanian authorities to acknowledge the right of the Bulgarian subservient people who lived in the territory ceded to Romania to move to Bulgaria. This right was not to be conditioned by the fulfillment of military duties by these Bulgarian ethnics towards their new country. In other words, they could not be mobilized in the Romanian Army until December 31st, 1913. Another topic on the joint commission's agenda was the fate of the institutional archives found in the territory annexed by Romania¹³.

⁸ ЦДА, фонд 176к, опис 2, а.е. 1444, л. 1, 5, 16–25.

⁹ *Monitorul Oficial*, Nr. 104, 9 (22) august 1913, p. 4209.

¹⁰ АМАЕ, fonds 71/1900–1919, dossier 31, fol. 29, 240.

¹¹ ЦДА, фонд 176к, опис 2, а.е. 1444, л. 19–20.

¹² Държавен военнoисторически архив [State Military Historical Archive] (hereafter ДВИА), фонд 22, опис 3, а.е. 192, л. 147.

¹³ ЦДА, фонд 176к, опис 2, а.е. 1444, л. 30–31.

The works of the joint commission began on August 17th in Tutrakan¹⁴. Comic situations were soon to occur. General Iannescu was ordered to urgently send to Bucharest the two original maps of the new border established by the Peace Treaty. They were to be printed in a state of emergency in over 3,000 copies¹⁵. Nenițescu, the chief of the Romanian delegation, complained that two of the three cars available for the works of the commission could not cope with the rough terrain. Consequently, Nenițescu asked the War Ministry to provide two powerful cars. Otherwise, threatens the Romanian delegate, the works could not begin. He was informed that an expert would be sent immediately to check the cars. Nenițescu was told that “we believe that the information you provided is wrong, since the cars are powerful and in good condition.” The Romanian delegate’s answer is tragic-comic: “May the expert travel safe and protected by God; the carriages are bad with our without his help.” As a result, Nenițescu was to urgently receive two powerful cars and 2,600 liters of fuel¹⁶.

After a few days of works and after the first 25 km of the new border had been established, the same Nenițescu was dismayed by the fact that the Bulgarian delegates did not enjoy the same powers as their Romanian counterparts. More precisely, in the absence of a plenipotentiary powers also signed by the Bulgarian sovereign (not only by the chief of the Bulgarian diplomatic service), the chief of the Romanian delegation was concerned with the fact that the Bulgarian delegates would not be able to sign the final documents. Consequently, Nenițescu asked Premier Titu Maiorescu if the Bulgarian delegation had to grant the same powers as the Romanian one. The answer given by Maiorescu, who was also foreign minister in office, was a comforting one: “I think we can be satisfied with the Bulgarian delegation’s plenipotentiary powers as it is. Our safety lies in our strength, not in form.”¹⁷ In his turn, Nenițescu invoked the lack of plenipotentiary powers when the Bulgarian delegates tried to discuss legal matters concerning the status of the population living in the territory annexed by Romania¹⁸.

In early September the joint commission wrote in a report that they accomplished their mission. In three weeks, the delegates managed to establish through tumuli the new Romanian-Bulgarian land borderline. A thorough description of the border was to be made only after a topographic map had been drawn up¹⁹. Supervised by a Romanian officer and a Bulgarian one, the Romanian topographers took measurements of the borderline in order to pinpoint on the map details which could not be seen with the naked eye. This topographic map had to be ready by 20 October, when the joint committee was to meet to conclude the final

¹⁴ ДВИА, фонд 22, опис 1, а.е. 22, л. 1–2.

¹⁵ АМАЕ, fonds 71/1900–1919, dossier 31, fol. 71–72.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, fol. 246–248.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, fol. 73.

¹⁸ ДВИА, фонд 22, опис 1, а.е. 22, л. 3–4.

¹⁹ АМАЕ, fonds 71/1900–1919, dossier 31, fol. 85–89.

protocol of its work²⁰. Their mission was not deprived of incidents, the Bulgarian soldiers shooting at them for a few times²¹.

A few weeks later, the protocol recognizing the new Romanian-Bulgarian land border was signed in Giurgiu on November 22nd, 1913. According to Article 5 of this protocol, the border between Romania and Bulgaria was to be marked by stone pillars. Mounds of earth or stone were to be erected between the pillars, where the natural borderline could not be seen. They had to be 2 meters in diameter and 1 meter high. When the border passed through forests, these were to be cleared to a width of 10 meters to make it clear where the borderline was. The costs of demarcating the new land border were to be shared equally by the two countries. After April 1st, 1914, a joint delegation had to check on site the final location of the mounds which marked the borderline²². In addition to the technical commissions, the Romanian government decided, just a few weeks before the outbreak of World War I, to appoint a special three-person commission whose role was to resolve any misunderstandings that may have arisen during the drawing of the new land border between Romania and Bulgaria²³.

The authorities in Bucharest quickly took steps to print the map of the new Romanian-Bulgarian land border at a scale of 1:50,000. In the first days of 1914, the commander of the Romanian troops of the border guards asked for more copies of this map in order to determine the location of the guard posts at the new border with Bulgaria²⁴.

In March 1914, General Iannescu, the head of the Cartographic Service of the Romanian Army, warned his superiors that the enforcement of the protocol signed in Giurgiu would take many months of work in the field. At the same time, Iannescu expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of coordination between the authorities concerning the schedule of the completion of the last works for the delimitation of the new Romanian-Bulgarian border. In this sense, the Romanian general warned that the approval of the Bulgarian government was needed in order to allow Romanian specialists to cross the border area and to receive, if needed, free pass permits in order to arrive in Bulgaria. Iannescu drew attention to a state of affairs that would soon become a source of tension in Romanian-Bulgarian relations. Due to lack of time and instruments, the work of the Romanian-Bulgarian Joint Commission in autumn 1913 was rather preliminary. There remained some areas of the land border that required some tacheometry work to establish the exact route of the state border between the two countries²⁵.

²⁰ ДВИА, фонд 22, опис 3, а.е. 214, л. 36.

²¹ АМАЕ, fonds 71/1900–1919, dossier 31, fol. 103–105.

²² Ministerul Afacerilor Străine, *Delimitarea fruntariei dintre România și Bulgaria/Délimitation de la frontiere entre la Roumanie et la Bulgarie*, București, 1914, p. 3–14.

²³ АМАЕ, fonds 71/1900–1919, dossier 31, fol. 226.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, fol. 390.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, fol. 185.

Under these circumstances, it was a matter of weeks until incidents occurred at the border. Between June and July 1914, a few people were killed in clashes between the Romanian and Bulgarian border officers²⁶. Sofia and Bucharest were engaged in an intense diplomatic correspondence. Both countries discussed about the formation of a joint commission or even an international one meant to investigate the causes and circumstances in which those incidents took place. Finally, the two governments decided to fulfill the requirements: punishing the culprits and granting damages to the victims' families. The creation of a 100-meter neutral area in the vicinity of the Romanian-Bulgarian border was the solution found to put an end to these incidents²⁷. The solution was only partly viable. Although they seldom happened, the border incidents occurred until the diplomatic relations between the two countries went sour in the summer of 1916. At that time, stone pillars had only been erected along a small part of the Romanian-Bulgarian land border. The rest of the border was marked only by earth mounds²⁸.

For the next three years, the history of this province between the Danube and the Black Sea is characterised by a spiral of violence. At the end of the Great War, when the Romanian authorities returned to Southern Dobrudja, they discovered that most of the stone pillars and earth mounds erected in 1914 no longer existed.

This made it extremely difficult to identify the old border, which led to many incidents. In order to put an end to this situation, the commander of the Romanian troops of border guards requested, in December 1918, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that, immediately after the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Bulgaria, a joint commission be appointed to fix stone pillars on the route of the land border between the two countries²⁹. The Peace Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, signed on November 27, 1919, stipulated that the new border between Romania and Bulgaria was the old border existing on 1 August 1914³⁰. In other words, the summer 1913 border, established by the Bucharest Peace Treaty, was restored. By re-establishing diplomatic relations, the way was opened for negotiations to establish the Romanian-Bulgarian land border. In June 1921, a joint Romanian-Bulgarian commission found that the work begun in 1913 had not been completed. Moreover, mistakes were made on both sides during 1918-1919 and the demarcation line of the land border between the two countries did not fully respect the provisions of the protocol signed in Giurgiu³¹. Shortly afterwards, a tender was organised for the purchase of stone pillars to be fixed along the entire length of the Danube-Black Sea border. At the end of 1924, this operation was complete. Geodesy, topography and tachymetry work was to be carried out in order to

²⁶ See AMAE, fonds Problema 52, dossier 12.

²⁷ AMAE, fonds 71/1914, E2, dossier 22, fol.152–163.

²⁸ AMAE, fonds Convenții, dossier 13D1, fol. 1.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Traité de paix entre les puissances alliées et associées et la Bulgarie et protocole. Signés à Neuilly-Sur-Seine le 27 Novembre 1919*, Bucarest, 1920, p. 10.

³¹ AMAE, fonds Convenții, dossier 13D1, fol. 94.

establish with mathematical precision the location of the boundary pillars on the ground. Due to budgetary constraints, this work will be delayed for several years, during which time a third of the bollards installed in 1924 were destroyed, damaged or displaced³². Finally, on January 29, 1937, in Varna, the Final Protocol of the Romanian-Bulgarian Joint Commission for the Delimitation of the Border was signed. A new difference of opinion arises: whether all these official documents must be transmitted to the Powers that signed the Neuilly-Sur-Seine Peace Treaty, as provided for in Article 35³³. The position of the government in Sofia was that, since the border between Romania and Bulgaria was the one established by the Treaty of Bucharest (1913), it was not interested in the procedure established by Article 35 of the Treaty of Neuilly.

The outbreak of the Second World War causes a new change in the territorial border between Romania and Bulgaria. Thus, after the signing of the Treaty of Craiova (September 7, 1940), a new Romanian-Bulgarian Joint Commission established the old border in force at the beginning of the Balkan wars³⁴.

³² AMAE, fonds Convenții, dossier 13D1, unfolded, report written by Alexandru Iacovaky, Director of the Foreign Ministry's Frontier Department, Bucharest, December 1930.

³³ « Les procès-verbaux définitifs de délimitation, les cartes et documents annexés seront établis en triple original, dont deux seront transmis aux Gouvernements des États limitrophes, et le troisième sera transmis au Gouvernement de la République française, qui en délivra des expéditions authentiques aux Puissances signataires du présent Traité. »

³⁴ See AMAE, fonds Convenții, dossier 13D 4bis; AMAE, fonds Tratatul de la Craiova, dossier 3, fol. 20–23.

