GHEORGHE I. BRĂTIANU: "THE BLACK SEA ISSUE IS ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF HISTORY" (FOUR LECTURES AND AN ARTICLE FROM THE YEARS 1943–1944)

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Abstract: *The author of the remarkable synthesis, written in French, Marea Neagră (published posthumously, in Munich in 1969, and translated into Romanian in 1988), the great Romanian historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu (1898-1953) referred to the history of the Black Sea in various guises in the 1930s-1940s – conferences, articles, speeches. In the present material, the Black Sea issue is presented at four conferences and one article, from 1943 and 1944*.

Keywords: Gheorghe I. Brătianu, The Black Sea Issue, Russia, Romanian History.

Gheorghe I. Brătianu (1898-1953) occupies a prominent place in our historiography, as shown in an early scientific reassessment of the scholar who died in detention (without having been judged). He contributed to raising our historiography to a higher, modern level, comparable to other European historiographical schools[i]**.** In the most recent (2021/2022) academic synthesis of the "representatives of Romanian historical writing," it is stated that he "is undoubtedly one of the most well-known and gifted Romanian historians, with lasting prestige both nationally and internationally. This is due to his meticulous education, intellectual endowment, wide cultural horizon, versatile erudition, lucidity, interpretative flexibility, and the meticulousness with which he elaborated his works.[ii]"

A learned historian and politician[iii] (including the founder of a political formation[iv]) – whose "relevance as a scientific and human model" is recognized as such – his life[v] and scientific work[vi] have attracted increasing interest over the past four and a half decades from Romanian scholars of Clio.

In this context, the editorial recovery of his major historical works in the 1980s – ***The Historical Tradition Regarding the Foundation of the Romanian States*** (published in 1980, edited by the diligent cultural figure Valeriu Râpeanu[vii]), ***The Black Sea: From Origins to the Ottoman Conquest*** (1988: edited by the versatile historian and editor Victor Spinei[viii]), and ***Une énigme soignée / A Historical Enigma and Miracle: The Romanian People*** (in French and separately in Romanian, editions edited by the renowned medievalist/Byzantinologist Stelian Brezeanu) – became remarkable milestones in the recovery of the fundamental values of our culture[ix].

The Romanian historian was also a prolific lecturer, delivering various public lectures – at the Athenaeums and on the radio (in addition to his university lectures) – some of which were included in a standalone volume published at the beginning of 1942[x].

In the present article are made available to today's interested readership four lectures and one article dating from 1943–1944[xi], all addressing the question of the Black Sea (including the Straits) in its historical context[xii]—examining in particular the interests of the Great Powers, most notably those of the Russian Empire and the U.S.S.R. (without becoming entangled in unscientific polemics)—and emphasizing the role of the Romanian space within the Pontic basin ("starting from the observation that our history has developed and continues to develop between two permanent factors: the Mountain and the Sea"), including the issue of Bessarabia[xiii].

The Black Sea Issue

Lecture by Mr. Gh. I. Brătianu

On Tuesday afternoon, at the Romanian Athenaeum, within the framework of the "Free University" lecture series, Professor **Gheorghe I. Brătianu** delivered a talk on *"The Black Sea Question"*, considered in the light of Romanian political history, world history, and the political and military events of the day.

From the outset, the lecturer stressed the importance of the topic, recalling the subjects that, prior to the last war, had been the focus of the famous lectures of "his unforgettable predecessor, Professor Nicolae

Iorga," at the Chair of History of the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest: *"The Rhine Question," "The Danube Question,"* and *"The Ocean Question."*[xiv]

Professor Gheorghe Brătianu then developed his lecture with erudition and eloquence, grounding it in facts and documents, and starting from the observation that our history has developed and continues to develop between two permanent factors: the Mountain and the Sea.

One of our earliest voivodes styled himself "Ruler of the land from the mountains to the sea," and whenever the enemies from our immediate neighborhood sought our destruction, it was in the direction of the mountains and the sea that they first struck.

Examples:

When the voivode of Wallachia was invaded by the Ottomans, our access to the Danube and to the Sea was the first to be cut off. Stephen the Great had to fight the enemies of Moldavia both in the mountains of Suceava and at Chilia and Cetatea Albă.

Yet the Black Sea Question is not merely a chapter of Romanian history; it is also one of world history.

Within this history, the Black Sea has always appeared as a primary goal and principal instrument of Russia's enduring aspirations for expansion into Europe.

And in the path of these expansions, we have always been the first to stand exposed.

The salvation of our national existence lay in the fact that each of these Russian attempts at expansion invariably collided with the contrary stance of the Great European Powers, which—acting for their own security—have always had an interest that we should remain here, at the eastern frontier of Europe, sometimes whole, sometimes dismembered, but always a barrier and a guard.

Beginning especially with the seventeenth century, the Russians—under two of their most prominent rulers, Tsarina Sophia and Tsar Peter I—undertook three serious attempts at expansion, along three distinct directions: first toward the Sea of Azov, then toward the mouths of the Danube, and a third time toward the Caucasian littoral. Since their main adversary was the Ottoman Empire—then still powerful—these attempts succeeded only in part, and all were ultimately equivalent to genuine failures.

Each time, St. Petersburg naturally sought to win over at least one European power in favor of its ventures. And from these ventures, several lessons may be drawn—lessons of lasting relevance.

Thus, for example, shortly before the Peace of Klausewitz, while the Russians were scheming to secure against the Ottomans the alliance of Leopold of Austria, they did not succeed, for the emperor was warned by one of his imperial counsellors—an instance of prophetic foresight on the part of a diplomat of three centuries ago—who informed him that the security of Austria and of Europe depended on Russia's *not* possessing Crimea and Bessarabia (the Budjak), and that such security could only be complete if supported by an unthreatened Transylvania.

The lecturer further quoted the chronicler Neculce, who recorded one of the "clauses" of the international treaty between his Prince and the Tsar of St. Petersburg, by which a Moldavia whole and entire was recognized, with Bessarabia and the Budjak as rightful parts of it, and with its natural frontier, the Dniester. A precious lesson, for even the history of Russia thus vindicates Romania!

This stands in contrast with Molotov's ultimatum of 1940, which justified its claims by alleging that Bessarabia had a Ukrainian population. This brazen falsehood—emphasized the speaker—is refuted by Russia's own history.

Another lesson to be retained is never to underestimate—whether in diplomatic or in military struggle—one's adversary, in this case, the Russian.

For instance, much has been said of Peter the Great as the creator of modern Russia and its civilizer—by cutting the peasants' long hair, abolishing their caftans, and introducing other reforms, comparable to Kemal's reforms in present-day Turkey. But less attention has been given to another aspect, one whose reality we see most clearly today: that Peter the Great, the creator of the modern Russian state, was also the founder of Russian militarism, which—with few interruptions in history—reappears today in all its aggressive clarity.

Likewise, both Peter the Great and Stalin prepared militarily in secret, without the knowledge or cooperation of the outside world. From Peter the Great's time onward, the Ural region was transformed into a vast industrial zone. Throughout the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, Russia waged war exclusively with Russian iron from the Urals,

converted into enormous mines and factories served by millions of serf peasants.

Today, Russian expansionism seeks to reassert itself in identical fashion. (This second part of the subject, *The Black Sea Question*, is to be developed by Professor Gheorghe Brătianu in his lecture announced for next Tuesday.)

Under these conditions, the famous *Testament of Peter the Great*— although historically apocryphal and produced in its time by interested parties for what might even then be called "propaganda purposes"— remains nonetheless valid as an eloquent expression of Russia's permanent imperial ambitions, all the more threatening in its categorical injunctions, which appear to have been faithfully obeyed by Peter's successors, regardless of "ideological" color:

- A Russian people permanently and powerfully armed;
- Constant interference in all European affairs;
- Aiming successively at Europe's discord and subjugation;
- And seeking free access to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea— thence to all the seas of the world[xv].

The Expansion of Russia into the Black Sea. The Question of Bessarabia

Second Lecture by Mr. Gh. I. Brătianu at the Athenaeum University

At the Athenaeum University, Prof. Gh. I. Brătianu continued, before a large and distinguished audience, his exposition on the question of the Black Sea.

After recalling the stages of Russian expansion into the Black Sea during the eighteenth century — through the three wars against Turkey, which in 1739, 1774, and 1792 pushed ever farther south the frontiers of the Orthodox Empire — the lecturer turned to the fourth war, that of 1806–1812, during which, for the first time, the question of Bessarabia arose as part of the territorial claims of the Russian Empire. It is worth noting that it was only twenty years before the annexation of Bessarabia that Russia became master of present-day Transnistria, whose southern half it took from the Turks and Tatars in 1792, and whose northern half it acquired in the second partition of Poland in 1793. If, therefore, we cannot in this regard claim historical rights in the true sense of the word — our national aspirations lying elsewhere —

neither can Russia assert between the Bug and the Dniester any older rights or traditions. With regard to Bessarabia, he stated that he does not share the view upheld by certain Romanian historians, from Xenopol to the present — with the notable exception of Nicolae Iorga — who attribute the loss of this province to the treachery of the Moruzi dragomans, allegedly bribed by Russian diplomacy.

On the basis of documents published even by the Russians themselves, a very different conclusion emerges: that Russia had set out to annex the Romanian Principalities in their entirety. Checked by Napoleon's victories, it was obliged at Tilsit to evacuate them; but, an agreement having been reached between the two emperors, Napoleon and Alexander, Russia continued to occupy them, since the French did not evacuate Prussia either. A letter from Napoleon I to Caulaincourt, his ambassador in St. Petersburg in 1808, clarifies this understanding: the Emperor Alexander was not to hurry to evacuate Moldavia and Wallachia, just as Napoleon was in no hurry to leave Prussia. He even urged Alexander to occupy Sweden as well; and indeed, in 1809, Russia annexed the Grand Duchy of Finland. Such agreements between empires constitute a lesson of history — one that our political leaders in 1940 disregarded. One may ask whether the cession of Bessarabia could have been avoided, and again whether resistance would have been possible; but in any case, a minimal sense of foresight and even a cursory knowledge of historical circumstances would have prevented the evacuation under the conditions in which it took place three years ago — circumstances that proved fatal to the entire political situation of our country and to the preservation of its borders.

In these negotiations, in which our countries were merely a bargaining chip in the compensation system of the two emperors, there appeared for the first time the question of "a narrow strip of land, which, not forming a province, is called Bessarabia." This referred to what is today Budjak, then under the possession of Tatars subject to the Sultan, whereas the northern and central parts of Bessarabia were an integral part of ancient Moldavia. Russian diplomats argued that this undefined region was not mentioned in the Treaty of Tilsit and therefore could remain occupied.

Meanwhile, the war between Russians and Turks resumed. After Tilsit, the latter had lost all confidence in Napoleon; the Franco-Russian treaty had produced the same effect in Persia. Nevertheless, the Turkish fortresses on the Danube resisted, and the Russians made no significant progress. "Everything will end," wrote Joseph de Maistre in 1810, "with a

dismemberment of Moldavia, either to save its honour or to ruin a province." On the other hand, Russia was anticipating a new war with Napoleon and had an interest in settling the conflict on the Danube. The Turks, exhausted, also sought peace, as they no longer expected any real support from the French emperor. At one point, the Russians demanded the Siret River as a frontier, but the Phanariot dragomans opposed this vigorously in order to preserve a princely throne. The Turks then tried to secure southern Bessarabia for themselves, in order to keep Russia away from the Danube — a solution that would be adopted more than half a century later by the Congress of Paris in 1856. Finally, they agreed upon the Prut line: "I give you the Prut, nothing more; the Prut or war," declared the Grand Vizier to General Kutuzov.

He had, moreover, received instructions from the Tsar to grant the Turks this "grave concession," on the condition that a treaty of alliance also be concluded. This treaty was never finalized, yet peace was achieved, and Russia's frontier extended to the Prut, through an unforeseen conjunction of circumstances and as the result of a chance negotiation.

What would have happened had peace not been concluded? The Turks did not trust Napoleon and feared that, in one way or another, they would fall victim to Russian expansion. Leaving the issue unresolved risked the Russians returning at some point to seize more than just Bessarabia. Yet the prestige of the Sultan had to be maintained, and it was easy to place the blame on those who negotiated the peace: the Turkish negotiators were exiled, while the Moruzi "ghiaurs," victims of intrigues by other Greeks, were executed. One may say of them, when a descendant in Russian service considered them the instigators of the annexation of Bessarabia by Russia, that they did not merit "ni cet excès d'honneur, ni cette indignité." Evidence of bribery and treachery does not withstand scrutiny — in fact, the treaty was ratified by the Sultan after war had already broken out between France and Russia.

It thus becomes clear what "national and historical" rights Russia can invoke regarding Bessarabia: "a narrow strip of land," without a defined name or borders, brought under its control by the accident of war, and which it was ready to return to the Turks in exchange for an alliance that they refused.

From 1812 onward, the protest of the Moldavian boyars shows that this was "the heart of the country, more than half the country." Contemporary sources describe how deeply the people felt the cursed river as their frontier. In the light of these circumstances, the justice of history is

to be pronounced regarding the Romanian land of Bessarabia. Indeed, the Russian point of view is summarized most clearly at the end of his book by the Bessarabian Leon Casso, university professor and Minister of Education in Tsarist Russia:

> *"A Russian military writer (General Kuropatkin), calculating the Russian wars in the Balkan Peninsula, found that Russia had reached its natural southwestern frontier as early as 1792, after the Peace of Iași, by which it received the left bank of the Dniester, when all the last outpourings of blood from the campaigns against Turkey (three wars in the eighteenth century) added only 'a strip of land,' as he calls the territory between the Prut and the Dniester… Would it not be better," asks Casso, "to value this 'strip,' which reminds us to this day of the great deeds of the Russian army? Would it not be better to cherish this image as all that remains of the Eastern dreams and unfulfilled designs?"*

This is the true significance of Bessarabia for Russian policy and history: a mark remaining within its borders, of its desires for conquest that periodically spill over beyond Constantinople, across the Black Sea and the Straits, onto Europe and the world. Bolshevik historiography once defined the "occupation of Bessarabia" as "the first anti-Soviet intervention by foreign imperialists." We can reverse the definition with far greater justification: the occupation of Bessarabia by Russia is the first intervention against the Romanian nation, by Moscow's imperialism, aimed at subjugating the entire continent under its destructive rule. In light of these circumstances, the objectives of European policy regarding Bessarabia are made clear: a gateway for Russian incursions, a defensive wall for Romania.

Professor Gh. I. Brătianu's lecture enjoyed remarkable success[xvi].

The Black Sea Question in the First World War

Lecture by Mr. Gh. I. Brătianu in the "Free University" series, held last evening at "Dalles"

Recalling the phases through which the Black Sea question passed in the modern era, Mr. Gh. Brătianu distinguishes three stages: the period of Turkish dominion over all its shores; the struggle between Russia and Turkey, culminating in 1833 with the Treaty of Unkiar Iskelesi, a true Russian protectorate over the Ottoman Empire; and the intervention of Europe, which for a century — from the Convention of London (1841) to

Montreux (1936) — sought to assert its right of control over a region in which economic and political interests were so deeply intertwined.

From this perspective, the tendency of the Western powers, particularly England, to position Romania as a barrier against Russian expansion toward the Danube and the Balkans becomes apparent. Romania in fact constituted the advanced position protecting the Straits system.

The regime of the Straits remained during this period that established by the Treaties of Paris (1856), London (1871), and Berlin (1878). The Black Sea was closed through the Straits to warships, except for those considered by Turkey to belong to “friendly and allied powers.” In reality, it was a situation of equilibrium and status quo, which lasted until the threshold of our century.

However, after Russia’s expansionist efforts in the Far East were frustrated by the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, it turned its attention to southeastern Europe: the question of a new regime for the Straits became the ambition of the Tsar’s new Foreign Minister, [Alexander] Iswolsky.

Following the Reval meeting between Edward VII and Nicholas II, he deemed the moment favorable to raise the issue with the Central Powers. In the Buchlau meeting with the Austro-Hungarian Chancellor Aerenthal (1908), he categorically presented a question of mutual advantage: Austria would annex Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Russia would obtain the right of passage for its warships through the Bosporus and Dardanelles. Austria generously conceded, exceeding its authority, as the issue could only be resolved with the assent of all powers. England’s opposition, however, thwarted the plan, and Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, also prompting the proclamation of Bulgarian independence, without any compensation to Russia.

This “trick” aroused in Iswolsky a deep resentment toward Austria and Germany, forming one of the preparatory factors of the world war. Meanwhile, conflicts intensified. The Berlin-Baghdad transversal line cut across Russian expansion toward the Aegean and the Mediterranean. The influence of geopolitical forces came into play.

When war broke out in August 1914, the first concern of the belligerents was the position and neutrality of Turkey. Enver Pasha initially considered approaching Russia, which refused, as it conflicted with its claims on the Straits. The Turkish-German alliance and the opening of

hostilities in the Black Sea by the former German ships *Goeben* and *Breslau* relieved Russia of this concern. Tsar Nicholas was greeted upon his return from Crimea with the cry: “Constantinople, a Russian city. The Black Sea, a Russian lake!”

The preparation of the Allied expedition to the Dardanelles — an initiative of Minister Winston Churchill — clarified Russia’s position. The issue was officially opened by the memorandum of 17 March 1915, in which Russia demanded the annexation of Constantinople, the Straits, and a covering territory in Thrace and Asia Minor. The threat of resignation by [Sergei] Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, which hinted at the possibility of a separate peace, compelled France and England to concede. The latter, however, secured advantages in the Aegean and Persia in its response. The concern of the French ambassador [Maurice] Paléologue is notable, as it opens perspectives on the future development of Russian imperialist ambitions.

The war, however, continued on its course. The attack on the Dardanelles was repulsed; operations in the Caucasus brought the Russians in the winter of 1915–16 to the line Trabzon–Erzurum; Romania’s resistance in 1917 maintained the Danube front. Only after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution did Austro-German troops enter Ukraine. By the summer of 1918, the Black Sea had effectively become a German-Turkish lake. Yet the course of the war was determined capriciously. A few months later, the Allies became the masters of the Black Sea.

At the moment of victory, however, they appeared exhausted and no longer capable of resolving the problems of Eastern Europe. In these turbulent years, Romania’s resistance and Turkey’s national revival were the only factors maintaining balance and security in the Black Sea region, as confirmed by the Lausanne Conference (1923) with the adjustments made at Montreux (1936).

The Black Sea question is one of the essential dimensions of Romanian history, which has unfolded from the earliest times between mountain and sea. At times, fate placed both challenges before us in a tragic alternative, only to resolve both itself, as occurred in 1918.

Even today, they continue to share our concerns and aspirations. Yet with regard to the mountain, we may be more confident. The obstacle encountered along the way is only a single people, fewer in number, raised now in our path merely by a transient circumstance, which they have exploited.

The maritime question, with its neighboring regions, and the vast continent of Eurasia, remains a permanent preoccupation of our history. The mobilization of all our resources will be necessary to defend, within its natural borders, the existence of our country and the destiny of our nation, precisely where fate has placed it and where the will and interests of Europe have established it[xvii].

Russia's Policy and the Fatality of the Straits

by Gheorghe I. Brătianu

Recently, the director of *Curentul* reproduced the interesting article from the English magazine *Nineteenth Century* concerning the "constants of Russian policy[xviii].

One of these constants — and here it becomes particularly clear to anyone who studies these issues even minimally — is the need for expansion toward a free sea, an access to the broad spaces of the planet, which would allow the full economic and political exploitation of the enormous resources accumulated across the continental expanse of Northern Eurasia, over which the tsars' dominion has flowed through the centuries, and now that of the Soviet Union. Today's war is fought, among other things, under the banner of the same old slogan: *"the sixth part of the world"* that the USSR claims as its own — in terms of area, if not population — asserting the right to send its products into the open seas and oceans from its own ports, which are not frozen shut for most of the year or patrolled by foreign fortresses and warships. Hundreds of thousands of lives are lost in some of the fiercest battles in history, in which countless military and civilian materials are destroyed daily, all in order to reopen Peter the Great's former "window" onto the Baltic Sea, or that through which Empress Catherine gazed from the rocky shores of Crimea toward the distant Bosporus.

Until recently, at the entrance to the city, in the port of Sevastopol, stood a colossal bronze statue of Lenin; at its feet, Soviet soldiers and sailors directed their gaze toward the same southern and western horizons, driven by the age-old aspiration.

Yet in times of profound transformation, experienced by our generation, even the most traditional constants must adapt their methods if they wish to achieve their objectives. In the era of sailing ships and slow

seventeenth-century navigation, with limited-range firearms and sluggish communications, access to the Baltic or Black Sea could pose challenges — by the standards of the time — for the Russian Empire's policy. These challenges served the needs of its commercial expansion and its political prestige. But these naturally enclosed seas, hemmed in by opposing shores, already posed the most formidable obstacles to reaching the open sea. Consider only the present geographical aspect of the issue, which is more than sufficient to clarify the situation.

To reach the Baltic, the front line today nearly coincides with Peter the Great's boundary; Russian forces barely reached the eastern end of the Gulf of Bothnia. Let us suppose, however, that Russian troops expanded again over Finland and the Baltic states, reaching the borders of the tsarist empire of 1914 or the USSR of 1940. Russian economic and maritime power would still be constrained to the margins of waters enclosed by the territorial outline of the Scandinavian peninsulas, where, in past centuries, it had to share dominion with Sweden or, more recently, with Germany. And access to the northern open sea and ocean is guarded by the Danish Skagerrak and Kattegat straits; the cannon at Copenhagen can close the gate just as effectively as a minefield; the "exit" is, in reality, a dead end, a bottleneck, and the northern straits are linked to so many complex global economic and strategic interests that Germany found it preferable to bypass them, creating its Kiel Canal.

The Black Sea, a lake closed to the Ottoman Empire, does not offer better prospects for Russian expansion. Its navigation key has, from the earliest times, been the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits — the centuries-old goal of Russia's route to the world's major trade arteries. Yet this key is not in Russian hands, and these straits have long been tied to the most vital interests of other states, which consider it wiser for the balance of the world that no continental or global expansionist power hold such a commanding position.

Suppose, however, that by a coincidence of circumstances, resuming the thread of the Russo-French-English negotiations of 1915, Russia were to take control of the Bosporus and Dardanelles, swallowing even the "langue de chat" of the Gallipoli peninsula, which had once blocked the division of Europe between Napoleon and Alexander I. Beyond the straits lies only the Aegean, a sea with a limited horizon, dotted with islands, among which Imbros and Tenedos nearly close the coveted route to the South by their very geographic positions.

Let us again imagine that the Slavic flood poured over Central Europe, encompassing the regions now under Marshal Tito's command, and reached the Adriatic shores; even this sea, the map shows, is easily closed at the Strait of Otranto. But even if, impossibly, all these obstacles were removed, only the narrow space of the Eastern Mediterranean would open to Slavic power, locked and guarded by the fortresses of Malta, Pantelleria, Sicily, Crete, Cyprus, and Suez. Moreover, this part of the Mediterranean is the hub of maritime communications to India, vital to the British Empire. Here too, Russia does not find a free path to the boundless horizons that contemporary economic and strategic development demands of a great power.

Instinctively, imperial Russian policy, during the age which history marks as one of colonial imperialism, sought from the end of the nineteenth century other solutions to the old problem, pushing eastward — to the symbolic "power of the East," Vladivostok — along the Trans-Siberian route, seeking access to the boundless spaces of the Pacific, the ocean of the future. But the fatality of the straits pursued it there as well, with the same implacable persistence. Since Emperor Alexander II lightly ceded, for a trifling price, the enormous riches of Alaska to the United States, the frozen shores of the Bering Sea offer little navigational prospects east of Kamchatka. Further south, the Sea of Okhotsk is blocked by the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin, whose southern half belongs to Japan, while the Japanese Sea itself is enclosed by the Japanese archipelago and the Korean peninsula; in the Tsushima Strait, Admiral Rozhestvensky's proud fleet met its grave in 1905. The geographical fatality of the straits again places obstacles to Russia's age-old ambitions, in Asia as in Europe.

Russia, however, attempted another route to the open sea, one it had not been able to reach either to the West or to the East. At one point, its influence became evident in Iran, and the entire northern part of Persia fell within its sphere of protectorate. Here, however, it had to choose between the old directions of its historical expansion and the new prospects of its policy in Central Asia: the 1915 agreement, which confirmed the old mirage of the Straits — over which, like a golden vision, shone the dome of Hagia Sophia — sacrificed to the foresighted British policy the economic and strategic realities of the Persian spheres of influence, so close to the borders of India. Yet even here, the fatal lock of the straits reappeared: even if Russian forces reached the Persian Gulf, the path of expansion would have been blocked by the narrow passage between the coast of Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, which, by chance, was again in British hands.

Viewed in the light of these planetary-scale perspectives, the geopolitical problem of Russian expansion, the current struggle of the Soviet Union, seems to grind its immense powers more for the deceptive realization of past ambitions than for truly carving new paths into the future. These observations are not solely ours; they have, at other times, been expressed in the writings of Russia's own political and military leaders. A century ago, during the preparation of the Organic Regulation, General Kisseleff still saw the occupation of the Romanian Principalities as a significant step in the policy of the Orthodox Empire. "If it is objected to me," he wrote in 1832, "that the goal of Russian policy is not territorial expansion, I will respond that events are stronger than any forecast, and that Russia has not moved in more than a century from the banks of the Dnieper merely to stop at those of the Prut." Yet three-quarters of a century later, General Kuropatkin concluded in his book on *the problems of the Russian army* that Russia had already reached, as early as 1792, through the Peace of Iași, its natural southwestern border at the Dniester, and that all the bloody wars of the nineteenth century had added only the "strip of land" of Bessarabia — a gain that justified neither so many sacrifices nor so much enmity.

Does not the epilogue of the first half of our century bring Kuropatkin's judgment into full light of actuality?

We no longer live in the age of wooden ships, whose construction the tsarist apprentice Peter the Great learned at Saardam. Radio waves carry news instantly from one end of the globe to the other; fast vessels traverse the seas in a matter of days, airplanes cross the skies in a few hours. Access to a sea, closed by the fatality of the straits, does not solve the problem of Russian economic and strategic power, no matter how many millions of people fall in battle, or how many billions are spent on arms and ammunition.

If we examine the Eurasian margins once more, the traditional routes to the Baltic and Black Seas yield no positive results in the spirit of the modern century: these are routes guarded by the interests of others, constrained by the multiple borders of various nations, each zealously defending its existence, forming an entire system of in-depth barriers to Russian expansion, which cannot achieve here the great objective dictated by the changed conditions of modern technology.

Thus, for its access to the vast spaces of the open seas, only two possibilities remain — aside from the still unlikely case in which it would integrate all European countries within its borders to the Atlantic Ocean. One would be to open a route along Finland's northern coast, toward the

mountainous far north of Norway, thereby reaching the warm waters of the Gulf Stream — i.e., the free sea, without straits, with an outlet to the Atlantic. The claim to the port of Petsamo (awarded in 1944 — ed.), which the USSR did not acquire in 1940 and where, coincidentally, significant nickel deposits are exploited by Canadian interests, is certainly a step along this line of expansion, dictated by geographic realities. It is one of the "corridors" Russia could claim to realize its longstanding policy aspiration.

There is, however, another. From northern Iran, where Russian interests currently predominate in Tehran, another "corridor" could extend southward to reach the shores of the Gulf of Oman, beyond the Strait of Hormuz between Persia and Arabia, where, at the border of British Baluchistan, the route to the distant Indian Ocean opens. It is roughly in this same region that Alexander the Great once reached the Ocean, whose waves nearly shattered his ships, and which he faced from the deck of his flagship Nearchus to mark his dominion to the ends of the inhabited world. Here lies the prospect of penetrating the warm seas of the globe and establishing a vast transcontinental axis "from the Arctic lands to the tropics," as the Soviet geography would doubtless like to define it.

But history teaches us that any "corridor" of a continental power toward the sea encounters obstacles. It is significant, however, that in its expansion from the North toward the Atlantic, Russia clashes with the inevitable opposition of the Anglo-Saxon powers, who occupy Spitsbergen and Iceland and consider the entire Norwegian coast to be within their exclusive sphere of influence. Likewise, in any potential attempt to reach the open waters of the Indian Ocean, it would meet the circle of possessions of the British Empire and its dominions, which guard everywhere—from Madagascar, taken from the French, to Singapore, seized by the Japanese—the entire expanse of the free waters of the South.

We pause here for observations, the conclusion of which readers will undoubtedly draw for themselves. Should Russian policy ever succeed in circumventing the geographic fatality of the straits, which limits its maritime prospects at every latitude, it will still not be able to avoid the equally evident fatality of conflict with British power, if not with the entire political system of the Anglo-Saxon states. No constant is more solid than that inscribed in history by the very design of the map[xix].

Gh.I. Brătianu

The Black Sea Issue after the First World War

Lecture by Prof. Gh.I. Brătianu at the University of the Athenaeum

Two events dominate the Black Sea question in the period following the First World War: the Russian Revolution and the Turkish Revolution.

In the summer of 1918, after the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest, the Black Sea had effectively become a German-Turkish lake.

The circumstances on the Western Front and the armistice of 11 November 1918 at Compiègne brought Allied control to these parts of Europe as well.

The Allies could have chosen between two solutions: either reaching an understanding with the Soviets, with whom their relations had been severed, or waging war against them by supporting with arms the new national states born of the Russian Revolution, as well as the counter-revolutionary movements that had spread across significant parts of southern, northern, and eastern Russia. However, they did neither. The peoples, exhausted by war and stirred by communist propaganda emphasizing social issues in all countries, allowed the Red Army to eliminate its internal opponents one by one and to reconstitute the old imperialism on new and even stronger bases.

In this attitude, the question of oil also played a significant role, influencing the 1919 Peace Conference and all subsequent international gatherings. From the rivalry between the two major corporations, the American Standard Oil and the British Royal Dutch Shell, Soviet policy benefited, having discovered in oil one of the most important factors to support its expansion.

South of the Black Sea, the victorious powers of 1918 had decided to carve up the territory of the Ottoman Empire until its elimination. For some time, the Sultan’s advisors, left in Constantinople under English occupation, entertained the illusion that with certain concessions and a humble attitude, they could gain the goodwill of the peace conference. However, the conditions presented to them quickly dispelled these calculations.

Anyway, the reaction of indignation within the army brought General Mustafa Kemal to power. Under the most difficult conditions, he gathered nationalist elements within Asia Minor and began, with the most limited and primitive means, the struggle for liberation and for the restoration of a national Turkey. The victory of 1922 vindicated him, and the Treaty of Lausanne recognized the rebirth of Turkey under its great leader and first president, Kemal Atatürk.

Together with Romania at the mouths of the Danube, Turkey at the Straits constituted, in the turbulent interwar years, a guarantee of peace and security along the shores of the Black Sea.

This example of Kemal's Turkey must always be kept before us in difficult moments, such as the one we are experiencing today. Even during the last war, a verse of Virgil haunted me in moments of crisis: *Una salus victis, nullam sperare salutem* — there is only one salvation for the defeated: to hope for no salvation.

In the hour of danger, let us be steadfast, resolute, and determined in defending our land and our rights. Let the responsible leaders of the country choose the path. But one thing we must not allow to be diminished: the moral capital of bravery represented today by the Romanian people and its army.

I am confident that God will not abandon us, but God helps those who are worthy[xx].

NOTES

[i] [Ștefan Ștefănescu], *V o c e – BRĂTIANU, Gheorghe I.* (semnată Șt.Șt.), in *Enciclopedia istoriografiei românești (Encyclopaedia of Romanian Historiography)*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1978, pp. 72-73.

[ii] Victor Spinei, Gheorghe I. Brătianu: Between the Vocation of History and the Temptation of Political Life, in Victor Spinei (ed.), *Romanian and European Historiographical Confluences: 90 Years Since the Birth of Historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu*, "Al. I. Cuza" University, Iași, 1988 [x+550 pp.], pp. 91-267 (also included in – Idem, *Prominent Figures of Romanian and World Historiography and Philology*, Istros Publishing House of the Brăila Museum, Brăila, 1996 [414 pp.], pp. 235-267; Șerban Papacostea, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu: The Historian and the Politician*, in *Revista Istorică*, vol. IV, no. 1-2, 1993, pp. 19-32; Gheorghe Onișoru, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu: Political Life (1944-1947)*, in *Xenopoliana. Bulletin of the A.D. Xenopol Academic Foundation of Iași*, VII, no. 1-2, 1999, pp. 37-44; Petre Otu, Aurel Pentelescu, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu: History and Politics*, Corint, Bucharest, 2003 [200 pp.]; Ioan Scurtu, *Gheorghe Brătianu, Political Activity*, *Revista Istorică*, New Series, XIV, no. 5-6, 2003, pp. 31-50.

[iii] Victor Spinei, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu: Between the Vocation of History and the Temptation of Political Life*, in Victor Spinei (ed.), *Romanian and European Historiographical Confluences: 90 Years Since the Birth of Historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu*, "Al. I. Cuza" University, Iași, 1988 [x+550 pp.], pp. 91-267 (also included in – Idem, *Prominent Figures of Romanian and World Historiography and Philology*, Istros Publishing House of the Brăila Museum, Brăila, 1996 [414 pp.], pp. 235-267; Șerban Papacostea, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu: The Historian and the Politician*, in *Revista Istorică*,

vol. IV, no. 1-2, 1993, pp. 19-32; Gheorghe Onișoru, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu: Political Life (1944-1947)*, in *Xenopoliana. Bulletin of the A.D. Xenopol Academic Foundation of Iași*, VII, no. 1-2, 1999, pp. 37-44; Petre Otu, Aurel Pentelescu, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu: History and Politics*, Corint, Bucharest, 2003 [200 pp.]; Ioan Scurtu, *Gheorghe Brătianu, Political Activity*, *Revista Istorică*, New Series, XIV, no. 5-6, 2003, pp. 31-50; Gabriela Gruber, *The National Liberal Party – Gheorghe I. Brătianu* [Preface by Vasile Ciobanu], European Institute (Academica Collection), Iași, 2013 [302 pp.].

[iv] Aurel Pentelescu, *In the Face of History: Gheorghe I. Brătianu (1898-1953). Fifty Years After His Death*, Dacia Publishing House (Social Sciences. Politics Collection, 16), Cluj-Napoca, 2003 [212 pp.]. Nicolae Enciu, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Historian and Man of the Citadel (1-2)*, available at https://www.art-emis.ro/personalitati/gheorghe-i-bratianu-istoric-si-om-al-cetatii-1 (February 12, 2023);https://www.art-emis.ro/personalitati/gheorghe-i-bratianu-istoric-si-om-al-cetatii-2 (February 13, 2023).

[v] Gabriela Gruber, *The National Liberal Party – Gheorghe I. Brătianu* [Preface by Vasile Ciobanu], European Institute (Academica Collection), Iași, 2013 [302 pp.].

[vi] Pompiliu Teodor, Radu Mârza (eds.), *Incursions into the Work of Gheorghe Brătianu: Studies and Historical Interpretations*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 1999 [132 pp.]; Victor Spinei, *A Plurivalent Florilegium*, in *Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Studies and Articles on History*. Edited by Victor Spinei and Alexandru-Florin Platon, *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* University Press, Iași, 2010 [424 pp.], pp. 9-21.

[vii] See the documentary volume, with the accompanying explanations and comments (including the inclusion of articles and reviews related to Gheorghe I. Brătianu and the reissued volumes) – *Gheorghe I. Brătianu 1980-1980*. Compiled and edited by Valeriu Râpeanu and Sanda Râpeanu, n.p., n.d. [Bucharest], 2019 [424 pp.]; I had the honor – as a young museum curator – to be the author of a modest article, published in a journal from Constanța (December 1980): *Gheorghe I. Brătianu and the Reinterpretation of Historical Tradition*, anthologized on pp. 160-163.

[viii] Victor Spinei, *The Genesis of Gheorghe I. Brătianu's Synthesis on the Black Sea Area*, in *Gheorghe I. Brătianu, The Black Sea: From Origins to the Ottoman Conquest* (Vol. I-II). Translated by Michaela Spinei. Edited edition, introductory study, notes, and bibliography by Victor Spinei, Meridiane Publishing House (Art Library Series. Arts and Civilizations 464), Bucharest, 1988 [352 pp.], Vol. I, Bucharest, 1988, pp. 5-63 (Reprinted in the 2nd Revised Edition, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 1999, pp. 13-49).

[ix] Petre Otu, *Gheorghe I. Brătianu and the Issue of the Black Sea Straits (1933-1944) – "The Fatality of the Straits"*, in *Romanian Military Thinking*. New Series, XXXV, no. 1, 2024, pp. 216-227.

[x] Gheorghe I. Brătianu, ***Words to the Romanians: Ten Lectures and Speeches***, n.p., Bucharest, 1942. The volume (210 pp.) is dedicated to the Romanian officers and soldiers, comrades from two wars, in memory of those who fell in the hope of the future, and includes the following lectures: ***The National Idea among Hungarians and Romanians***, ***Hungary's Historical Mission***, ***The Evolution of the National Idea***, ***Mihai Viteazul's Entry into Alba Iulia***, ***Geopolitics, an Educational and National Factor***, ***May 10***, ***Three Faces of Founders***, ***Moldavia***, ***Romania under Ferdinand I***. The final part of the ***Foreword*** (pp. 7-11): ***May these words to the Romanians, seeds carried by opposing winds in times of great trial and sorrow, bear fruit in the Romanian consciousness and in the complete fulfillment of all***

its hopes and aspirations. December 1941 G.I.B. (p. 11). In 1996 and 2018, the volume was republished, under the editorial care of Professor Ion Toderașcu from Iași – ***Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Words to the Romanians: Ten Lectures and Speeches***. Edition, introductory study, notes, and index by Ion Toderașcu, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Press, Iași, 1996 [LXVI + 180 pp.]; ***Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Words to the Romanians***. Third revised and expanded edition, edition, introductory study, notes, comments, and index by Ion Toderașcu. ***Historica Series***, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Press, Iași, 2018 [220 pp.].

[xi] Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Words to the Romanians. Ten Lectures and Talks*, n.p., Bucharest, 1942. The volume (210 pp.) is dedicated "to the Romanian officers and soldiers, comrades in two wars, in memory of those who fell, in hope of the future," and includes the lectures: *The National Idea among the Hungarians and the Romanians*, *Hungary's Historical Mission*, *The Evolution of the National Idea*, *Michael the Brave's Entry into Alba Iulia*, *Geopolitics as an Educational and National Factor*, *May the 10th*, *Three Portraits of Founders*, *Moldavia*, and *Ferdinand I's Romania*. The closing lines of the Preface (pp. 7–11) read:

"May these words to the Romanians, seeds carried by adverse winds in times of great trial and sorrow, bear fruit in the Romanian conscience and in the full fulfillment of all its hopes and aspirations. December 1941, G.I.B." (p. 11) In 1996 and again in 2018, the volume was republished under the care of the Iași scholar Ion Toderașcu: *Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Words to the Romanians. Ten Lectures and Talks. Edition, Introductory Study, Notes, and Index by Ion Toderașcu*, "Al.I. Cuza" University Press, Iași, 1996 (LXVI + 180 pp.); and *Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Words to the Romanians. Edition, Introductory Study, Notes, Commentary, and Index by Ion Toderașcu. Third Revised and Enlarged Edition*, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Press (Series "Historica"), Iași, 2018 (220 pp.).

[xii] See, in detail, Victor Spinei, *The Genesis of Gheorghe I. Brătianu's Synthesis on the Pontic Space*... See also: Sergiu Iosipescu, *Gheorghe Brătianu's Pontic Studies*, in Victor Spinei (ed.), *Romanian and Universal Historiographical Confluences. Ninety Years since the Birth of the Historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu*, "Al.I. Cuza" University, Iași, 1988, pp. 85–120;
M.M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, *G.I. Brătianu, Historian of Genoese Expansion in the Black Sea*, pp. 121–140; Aurel Pentelescu, *The Black Sea Area in Gheorghe I. Brătianu's Vision*, "Revista de Istorie Militară," no. 5–6, 1997, pp. 51–55; Michel Balard, *Georges I. Bratianu, Historian of the Black Sea*, in "Revista istorică," New Series, X, no. 1–2, January–April 1999, pp. 5–12; Claudia Tănăsescu, *The Importance of the Black Sea in Gheorghe I. Brătianu's Vision*, in Olimpiu Glodarenco (ed.), *The Black Sea in the Context of the Rise of the Great European Powers (19th–20th Centuries)*, Romanian Naval Museum Press (Series "Studia"), Constanța, 2012, pp. 199–203 [364 pp.].

[xiii] See, in this regard, the more recent introductory study to the well-known (reissued) volume of the great Romanian historian: Nicolae Enciu, *Introductory Study*, in Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Bessarabia: National and Historical Rights. Edition and Introductory Study by Nicolae Enciu*, Știința Publishing House, Chișinău, 2023, pp. 5–48 (also reproduced in "Revista de istorie a Moldovei" [Chișinău], no. 1–2 (133–134), 2023, pp. 134–153; no. 3–4 (135–136), 2023, pp. 131–149).

[xiv] See, in this context: Stoica Lascu, *Nicolae Iorga – Historian of the Black Sea in a Regional Geopolitical Context*, in *Black Sea Region at the Crossroads of Civilizations* (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Niko Berdzenishvili Institute),

vol. I, *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, July 5–6, 2022, Batumi*, Batumi, 2023, pp. 258–281.
(Romanian version: *N. Iorga – The First Romanian Geopolitician. On the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of the Titan of Romanian Historiography and Culture*, in *History, Geopolitics, and Romanian Spirituality at the Black Sea. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference* [Holy Monastery of Dervent, August 12–14, 2021]. Afterword by Dorin Popescu. Volume edited by Marian Zidaru, Andrei Tudor, Stoica Lascu [Black Sea House Association], Etnologică Publishing House [History Series], Bucharest, 2024, pp. 46–67).

[xv] xxx *The Black Sea Question. Lecture by Mr. Gh. I. Brătianu*, in *Curentul*, vol. XVI, no. 5,440, April 9, 1943, p. 3.

[xvi] xxx *The Expansion of Russia into the Black Sea. The Question of Bessarabia. Second Lecture by Mr. Gh. I. Brătianu at the Athenaeum University*, in *Ibidem*, vol. XVI, no. 5,446, Aprilie 15, 1943, p. 3.

[xvii] [Gheorghe I. Brătianu], *The Black Sea Question in the First World War. Lecture by Mr. Gh. I. Brătianu in the "Free University" series, held last evening at "Dalles"*, in *Universul / Capitala*, vol. 60, no. 345, December 17,1943, p. 3.

[xviii] In the introduction to the Romanian translation of this stimulating article, written on the banks of the Thames, the director of the hosting publication, the well-known and influential journalist Pamfil Șeicaru, concludes at the end of a detailed piece: *"In this atmosphere (among the Allies, at the end of 1943, conditioned by the issues of delimiting their postwar spheres of influence — ed. note) of oscillation, of hesitation in the face of threatening realities, the English magazine* ***The Nineteenth Century and After*** *has the courage to present Russian reality. It is a journal that has been published since 1877 and represents British political thought, thought that receives direct inspiration from the British Foreign Office. In its November and December 1943 issues, it published two articles entitled* ***'Constants in Russian Foreign Policy'****, both signed by the editor of the magazine, which means they establish the magazine's stance. We reproduce them in full: today the article published in November, and tomorrow the article published in December. Readers will verify the English point of view and will be surprised at how different it is from what is propagated in Romanian or in French on Radio London. The campaign they conduct (so many have whispered insinuations of intent) finds complete confirmation, so that without hesitation I shout — Yes! England is right, but only the England represented by the magazine The Nineteenth Century and After, the England that senses and even has a clear vision of the great Russian threat. The constants of Soviet Russia's foreign policy?… The conquest of all continents, Moscow as the center of the planet. A bold dream? Yes, but the shortsightedness of the great democracies makes it possible."*— Pamfil Șeicaru, *Yes! The English Are Right!*, in *Curentul*, vol. XVII, no. 5,752, 21 February 1944, p. 1. The Romanian version of the article *Constants in Russian Foreign Policy* (signed *By the Editor*) was published in the issues of 21 and 22 February 1943.

[xix] Gh.I. Brătianu, *Politica Rusiei şi fatalitatea Strâmtorilor*, Ibidem, XVII, nr. 5.777, March 17, 1944, pp. 1, 5.

[xx] [Gh.I. Brătianu], *The Black Sea Question after the First World War.* Lecture by Prof. Gh.I. Brătianu at the Ateneum University, in *Timpul*, VIII, no. 2,477, April 2, 1944, p. 3.