

AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN-ROMANIAN DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGES DURING THE NEUTRALITY PERIOD. THE CASE OF A “ROMANIAN AGITATOR”

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At the time the First World War broke out, Mircea Russu Șirianu, a young man from the Romanian Kingdom, found himself in the capital of France, working hard in order to finish his doctoral thesis. This diligent student was the son of Ioan Russu Șirianu, a consecrated Transylvanian journalist and an influential member of the Romanian National Party of Transylvania¹, and of Constanța (later known to the public under the name of Hodoș), a representative of the feminine literature of the beginning of the 20th century².

Born in Bucharest on May 10, 1889, the young Șirianu attended the classes of the Faculty of Law and was involved already during his student years in many journalistic and cultural projects. At the age of only 20, in 1909, Mircea Russu Șirianu was already under the spotlight of the Royal Security Service, given the fact that he was close to Nicolae Iorga, whom he was helping to recruit Transylvanian students of the “Petru Maior Association” in Budapest for the nationalist summer courses at Vălenii de Munte³. At the age of 23 he was working as editor at “Universul” and he was a competent political analyst of the situation in Hungary. The correspondence between him and the strategists of the Romanian National Party (R.N.P.) in Transylvania reveals a young man, who is well-oriented in interpretation matters of the political fact and more than that: Mircea Russu Șirianu represented a spreading factor of the R.N.P – politics in the press of the Old Kingdom; his column in the “Universul” was always endorsed by Transylvanian leaders⁴.

In 1912, when Mircea Russu Șirianu decided to take doctoral courses in Paris, he was rapidly hired by the Editorial Board of “Românul” in Arad, the

¹ For a more generous portrait of this journalist and politician, see the study of Nicolae Roșuț, *Contribuția lui Ioan Russu Șirianu la reluarea activismului politic*, in “Ziridava”, VIII, Muzeul Județean Arad, 1977, pp. 273–281.

² Constanța Hodoș (born Tălășescu), (1860–1934), prose writer and publicist, who settled in Romania in 1886 (although originating from Arad) and was close from a thematic point of view to the cultural group of “Sămănătorul”. *Dicționarul Scriitorilor Români*, vol. II, coord. by Mircea Zăciu; Marian Papahagi; Aurel Sasu, Bucharest, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1998, pp. 512–513.

³ Cornelia Bodea, Radu Ștefan Vergatti, *Nicolae Iorga în arhivele vieneze și ale siguranței regale (1903–1904)*, Bucharest, Mica Valahie, 2013, p. 180.

⁴ George Bariț County Library in Brașov, Special Collections, Ms. 3856, Ms. 3859, Ms. 3862, Ms. 3863, Ms. 3864.

official newspaper of the R.N.P.; as external collaborator, the journalist promised to internationalize the issue of Transylvania by means of the Parisian press.

While trying to intensify the Romanian-French relations, in February 1914, a group of Romanian students in Paris founded the “Vasile Alecsandri” Association and the periodical “La Tribune Roumaine”, whose purpose was going to be “the awareness of Romanianhood in France” with a focus on the fate of Romanians in Hungary⁵. Meanwhile, in the city on the banks of the Seine, the Romanian Bureau of Political Information was founded, his appointed director being Mircea Russu Șirianu, a character who proved to be an actor with increasing importance for the rapprochement between the Romanian Kingdom and France. Functioning as a genuine propaganda machine, the Bureau’s purpose was to work “in order to accurately inform the main European newspapers as well as foreign affair departments of different states about Romanian political business”⁶.

Especially after the resolution of the Balkan Wars, taking advantage of a public opinion that was manifesting itself with growing intensity against the treatment applied to Transylvanian Romanians, the French diplomacy tried to capture this hostile current against Austro-Hungary and to guide it in accordance with the purposes followed by foreign politics⁷, thus encouraging any initiatives that resembled this Romanian Bureau of Political Information and trying to ensure sufficient public scenes for Romanian intellectuals living in the capital of France, in accordance with its geostrategic aims.

After the beginning of the war, Mircea Russu Șirianu regarded the neutrality solution of Romania with non-dissimulated disappointment, continuing to write pro-Entente articles that were published in the Romanian press as well as in the French one. His orientation was obviously part of the atmosphere of the place in which he was developing, but also part of a national commitment made by the journalist long before his arrival in Paris: “The unification of all Romanian patriots in order to accomplish the great ideal of our national unity is necessary”⁸. From this perspective, Șirianu represents a typology of the European journalist, whose propensity for war should be understood by referring to a horizon of expectations already created by some national traditions, a school curriculum, a political and cultural speech that have shaped the public’s attitudes in a patriotic sense along time⁹.

⁵ *La Tribune Roumaine*, in “Românul”, III, no. 22, Arad, 11 February 1914, p. 6.

⁶ *Bureau roumain d’informations politiques*, in “Românul”, III, no. 36, Arad, 27 February 1914, p. 3.

⁷ Vasile Vesa, *Relațiile politice româno-franceze în perioada 1910–1914 în lumina corespondenței diplomatice franceze*, in “Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai”, Series Historia, XV, Fasc. 2, 1970, pp. 118–119; Hadrian Gorun, *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare ale României cu Franța în Primul Război Mondial*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2009, pp. 23–24.

⁸ Romanian Academy Library, Department of Manuscripts, S 54 (1) \ DCLXXXII, Bucharest, 4 October 1914. Mircea Russu Șirianu to C. I. Istrati.

⁹ James Joll, Gordon Martel, *The Origins of the First World War*, III, London, New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 254.

According to Şirianu, the confrontation that was prefiguring itself represented the chance for continental regeneration, whose end would be the instauration of a new, better and juster world. Already during the years before the war, this type of argumentation was widely discussed by European powers interested to use the written works of intellectuals and their cultural motivations in order to ensure a mobilization that would be as easy as possible in case of an eventual conflict¹⁰.

Beside his constant appearances in public space, Mircea Russu Şirianu was also working on his doctoral thesis, elaborating on a subject with sensitive content as well: *The issue of Transylvania and the political unity of the Romanian space*. The coordinator of the thesis was professor Ferdinand Larnaude, an expert in legal sciences and Dean of the Paris Faculty of Law, who was close to the French political circles of the beginning of the 20th century¹¹. As revealed by many of the notes of his doctoral student¹², we are entitled to believe that regarding the relationship of the above-mentioned professor to Mircea Rusu Şirianu, the former surpassed the status of an innocent scientific mentor, in fact representing a transmitter of the political analyses of his Romanian doctoral student to French official circles. Through Larnaude, the analyses signed by Mircea Russu Şirianu reached Aristide Briand, at that time the President of the Council of Ministers and France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, or René Berthelot, Chief of the Bureau of Diplomatic Information: "Afternoon: At 4 o'clock I went to Neuilly-sur-Seine, to Larnaude's place. This is an important visit. I presented him the manuscript of the thesis, and then we talked about politics. He told me that he had sent the letter I had written to him to Mr. Aristide Briand, Head of the French Government. Briand has my letter. We have talked extensively about general politics and especially about the Romanian one."¹³

Before publicly defending his thesis, professor Larnaude granted the young Romanian journalist permission to publish it immediately at a publishing house in

¹⁰ In extended form, the chapter *Civilizație, barbarie și pasiuni de război*, in Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *Războiul descoperit 1914–1918*, Bucharest, Corint, 2014, pp. 153–203. Wolfgang Mommsen, *German artists, writers and intellectuals and the meaning of war 1914–1918*, in John Horne, *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 40.

¹¹ Vincent Laniol, *Ferdinand Larnaude, un «délégué technique» à la conférence de la Paix de 1919 entre expertise et «culture de guerre»*, in "Relations Internationales", 1, no. 149, Presses Universitaires de France, 2012, pp. 43–55.

¹² The Sibiu County Direction of the National Archives keeps a part of Şirianu's notes in form of a manuscript with the title "Însemnări și amintiri din primăvara anului 1916". Further research work has led us to another manuscript belonging to the same person; it can be found at the Sibiu ASTRA Library, Special Collections, under the title *Mon journal*, written in French. Thus, the two parts recompose a diary from the beginning of 1916 until August of the same year; this diary is being currently edited for publication.

¹³ Après-midi: je suis allé à 4 h., à Neuilly-sur-Seine, chez Larnaude. C'est une visite importante. Je lui ai présenté le manuscrit de la thèse et nous allons causé ensuite politique. Il me dit qu'il a communiqué la lettre que je lui ai écrit à M. Aristide Briand, chef du gouvernement français. Briand a ma lettre. Nous avons longuement causé sur la politique générale et surtout sur celle de la Roumanie". Sibiu ASTRA Library, Special Collections, Mircea Russu Şirianu, *Mon journal*, without page numbers.

France. The expediency of this process suggests external political motives. In fact, after submitting his manuscript and making the first payments to his editor, Mircea Russu Șirianu revealed his propaganda agent vocation in a few lines of his testimonial: “[...] I have also finished my thesis, it will be ready next week. I have worked to prepare my propaganda for the political work [...]”¹⁴.

In 1916, the conclusions of the thesis that he had defended in the meantime in Paris appeared under the title *La Question de Transylvanie et l'unité politique roumaine. Histoire. Situation actuelle. La Roumanie et la guerre européenne. Les revendications roumaines*. The summarized assessments of Mircea Russu Șirianu impressed with the trenchant and categorical manner, in which they were formulated: Austro-Hungary is “another sick man of Europe”, and as for the Transylvanian issue, from a legal point of view, there is only one satisfying solution for Romania, that is annexation¹⁵.

Thus, the work of Mircea Russu Șirianu becomes one of the firmest publicly assumed and argument-based solutions regarding Transylvania during the years of the Great War. In fact, the few details of the development journey of the young Mircea Russu Șirianu reconstitute a frequent typology of that epoch, with strong traits borrowed from the Transylvanian environment, specific to the active intellectual who easily converts his cultural expertise into acts of political militancy.

The publishing of this book on an important matter for the balance of war alliances offers the young Romanian journalist the opportunity of starting an impressive campaign of self-promotion. The volume was sent immediately to the members of the French government, politicians, professors, journalists and academicians. After receiving thank you letters from his famous recipients (“Yesterday evening, after dinner, I received a letter from the Presidency of the Republic: M.R. Poincaré is thanking me for sending him my book”¹⁶), and sometimes even invitations to meet them, Mircea Russu Șirianu wrote with contentment: “In a second, I have made a bunch of connections”¹⁷.

Thus, his volume of political and legal analyses focusing on the Transylvanian issue became, with the undeniable approval of its author, a politically instrumentalized object. Mircea Russu Șirianu was aware of the relationship capital his work was able to provide, and he therefore invested enormously in popularization campaigns and strategies for captivating the interest of the French side: “I am really lucky to have had the chance of launching my book at a moment in which the whole world is interested in Romania and in Transylvania”¹⁸.

¹⁴ „[...] j’ai fini ainsi avec ma thèse, elle sera prête la semaine prochaine. J’ai travaillé pour préparer ma propagande pour le travail politique [...]” *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Mircea Russu Șirianu, *La Question de Transylvanie et l’unité politique roumaine*, Paris, Jouve, 1916, pp. 22–23.

¹⁶ J’ai reçu ce soir, après le dîner, une lettre de la Présidence de la République: M.R. Poincaré me remercie pour l’envoi de mon livre”. Sibiu ASTRA Library, Special Collections, Mircea Russu Șirianu, *Mon journal*.

¹⁷ „Je me suis fait d’un coup un tas de relations”. *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ J’ai vraiment de la chance d’avoir lancé mon ouvrage à un moment où tout le monde s’intéresse à la Roumanie et à la Transylvanie”. *Ibidem*.

Taking into account that in France the ties between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the press were profoundly consolidated, and there was even a tradition of professional development along the journalist to diplomat axis¹⁹, the attempt to conquer the French publicistic space started by Șirianu can be understood also from the perspective of obtaining a high visibility that allowed him to further approach the zone of Parisian politics.

Only the letters from home were able to awaken him from his euphoria caused by the reception of his volume, announcing him that he might have to go to court due to the fact that he did not respond to the conscription order sent already at the beginning of the year²⁰.

While Mircea Russu Șirianu was collaborating with the entire French political spectrum, it is interesting to observe what kind of Romanian political affiliations he was attracted to. We are learning from his notes that the first copies of his new book were sent to his mother in Bucharest, to colonel Verzea, Postal Director, a man who was benefiting from strong ties with Transylvanian political leaders, and to Leonte Moldovan, a Transylvanian from Șinca Veche (Brașov), who is mentioned as his stipendiary. The volume was sent to Romania through diplomatic courier, from the headquarters of the Romanian Legation in Paris, after meetings with Alexandru Em. Lahovari. Colonel Rudeanu, sent by Ionel Brătianu to the capital of France for matters related to the endowment of the army, also appears in the notes as someone who is close to the recent doctoral graduate, as does I.G. Duca. With few exceptions, the persons who were close to the politics around the Romanian journalist were recruited from the liberal group, an option that was obvious in fact already from the time of his collaboration at “Universul”, a newspaper that, in the opinion of the historian Ion Bulei, “was covertly supported by the Brătianu family” during the neutrality period²¹.

This connection network provided Mircea Russu Șirianu with the ability of an information gatherer for the Romanian world as well as for the French political and cultural upper class that he intensely visited during this period (he participated in many meetings and official receptions, where were discussed a series of journalistic projects that were going to be accomplished after his arrival at home and he was promised the help of the French government for a French-Romanian magazine in Bucharest²²).

On February 24, 1916 a note in his diary reveals a character directly involved in matters of diplomatic appointments in Romania: “Before noon, I have seen Larnaude at the Faculty, we talked about politics. He told me that, as a result of my letters that he had sent to Quai d’Orsay, the Minister of France to Bucharest will be

¹⁹ M.B. Hayne, *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War 1898–1914*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 43–44.

²⁰ Sibiu ASTRA Library, Special Collections, Mircea Russu Șirianu, *Mon journal*.

²¹ Ion Bulei, *Arcul așteptării 1914–1915–1916*, Bucharest, Editura Eminescu, 1981, p. 132.

²² Sibiu ASTRA Library, Special Collections, Mircea Russu Șirianu, *Mon journal*.

changed, that imbecile Blondel. Here is a positive result of my activity...²³. Indeed, Camille Blondel, who was leading the French Legation in Bucharest, was replaced by Charles de Saint-Aulaire, a probably desirable change for someone of Şirianu's kind, an extremely hasty pro-Entente supporter who interpreted Blondel's mandate to attract Romania into the area of French foreign policy in terms of a fiasco.

On March 2, 1916 Mircea Russu Şirianu defended his doctoral thesis in Paris. Forced by the increasingly insistent calls for conscription, he decided in March 1916 to return home to Bucharest after his long Parisian sojourn. While he was passing through Switzerland and at the moment when he was crossing the border to Austria, he was arrested on spot by the authorities and sent after a short investigation to the civilian prisoner camp in Katzenau²⁴, near Linz, with instructions to be kept there until the end of the war.

Even if the propagandistic activity for the Entente, conducted until that moment, seemed to him as a sufficient accusation ("I have spent an agitated evening especially because I know what I will be accused of and what fate I shall have"²⁵), after an interrogatory in front of a lieutenant, Mircea Russu Şirianu wrote: "I am not charged with espionage, which is a weight off my shoulders, but I still don't know what I have been arrested for. The respective lieutenant told me to write a memoir, in which I should describe my whole life and especially my activity during the war. I am not relieved yet, but it seems to me like I have made some progress. I was fearing more"²⁶.

Immediately after the beginning of the war, a circle of suspects consisting of civilians considered capable of irredentism or acts of espionage appeared in the Austro-Hungarian military structures that were increasingly interested in counteracting the propaganda of the Entente²⁷. During the period of war, these individuals considered dangerous will be taken care of by the General Staff of the K.u.K. Army through a subsection founded by imperial decree at the end of July

²³ „Avant midi j'ai vu Larnaude à la Faculté, nous avons causé politique. Il m'a dit que, comme suite à mes lettres qu'il a communiqué au Quai d'Orsay on va changer le ministre de France à Bucarest, cet imbécile de Blondel. Voilà un beau résultat de mon activité...". *Ibidem*.

²⁴ The camp was imagined by Austro-Hungarian authorities for imprisoning Italians from Tirol, who exhibited irredentist views. Alessandro Ferioli, *Il lager di Katzenau*, in www.storiaXXIsecolo.it, G. Chini, *Da Katzenau a Eferding. Memorie d'esilio* in "Alba trentina", n. 1, January 1921), in www.itcleopardi.scuolaer.it consulted on 20.02.2015, Claudio Ambrosi, *Vite internate: Katzenau 1915–1917*, Trento, Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, 2008. More information about this camp and Mircea Russu Şirianu's adaptation to his prisoner status together with an analysis of the detention journal can be consulted in our study, *Destinies in a Time of War: Mircea Russu Şirianu*, in "Brukenthalia", no. 5, Sibiu, Editura Muzeului Național Brukenthal, 2015, pp. 765–772.

²⁵ Sibiu County Direction of the National Archives, Mss. var. I. 350.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary. The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, pp. 18–19.

1914, the War Security Office, a department responsible for supervising censorship and political surveillance measures²⁸.

The arrest of Şirianu should be seen in the context of a spy hunt psychosis that had started inside the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy already on the first days of the conflict²⁹. Although subject of a still neutral country, the restraint of Mircea Russu Şirianu was based on his ties with the movement of Transylvanian intellectuals and especially his frequent pro-Entente articles signed in the Romanian and French press. All these could have easily created him a profile of an influential agent of France, who could have been sent to Bucharest on a mission to destabilize Romania's traditional political line. These suppositions were enough in order to draw the attention of the Austrian Security Service to this uncomfortable journalist.

Immediately after his imprisonment in Katzenau, Mircea Russu Şirianu wrote to his mother through the Red Cross in Bucharest, explaining her the situation and asking for her help: "I was arrested nine days ago, when I entered Austria, and I was detained here as a civilian prisoner of war. The reason: Because I wrote articles for France and against Austria. I am not charged with anything and I am not sent to trial, but they want to keep me here until the end of the war"³⁰.

On March 30, 1916 the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs received from Constanța Hodoș the details of her son's arrest together with the plea for a diplomatic intervention for his liberation "because I believe it is not legal for a citizen and soldier of a neutral country to be kept prisoner"³¹. Immediately after this notification, Emanoil Porumbaru contacted the Romanian Minister to Vienna by means of an encoded telegram, asking him to activate all his competent connections in order to liberate the prisoner Russu Şirianu³². Shortly after, a new letter sent by the Minister in Bucharest to Minister Edgar Mavrocordat in Vienna warned that if the only charge brought to the Romanian journalist consisted in the interventionist articles against Austro-Hungary he had signed, the Viennese authorities would become responsible for an abuse because "as subject of a neutral country, in which freedom of press is guaranteed to all inhabitants of the country, the political opinion that some persons may have cannot be invoked in order for them to be prosecuted and detained in another state, even in a currently belligerent one, and if this is the case, it would be a completely unjustified persecution"³³.

²⁸ Wolfram Dornik, *Conrad von Hötendorf and the "Smoking Gun": A Biographical Examination of Responsibility and Traditions of Violence against Civilians in the Habsburg Army, in 1914: Austria-Hungary: The Origins and the First Year of World War I*, Günter Bischof, Ferdinand Karhofer (ed.), Innsbruck University Press, 2014, p. 70.

²⁹ József Galántai, *Hungary in the First World War*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989, p. 95.

³⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Romanian: Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (further abbreviated as A.M.A.E.), Fond 71–1914 E1, Diverse 1914–1924, vol. 149, telegram without page numbers, attached to the file.

³¹ *Ibidem*, f. 59.

³² *Ibidem*, f. 100. *Ibidem*, f. 75.

³³ *Ibidem*, f. 100.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had sent the birth certificate of Mircea Russu Șirianu to Vienna, proving the fact that he was a Romanian citizen, together with a document of the Ministry of War attesting his quality as reserve sub-lieutenant in the Romanian Army³⁴. These documents were considered necessary under the given circumstances, in which a confusion starting from the birthplace of Șirianu's parents might have existed, which would have made him a Romanian from Transylvania; in this case, his liberation would have been compromised and the intervention of the Romanian government would have become tenuous.

The reactions and arguments produced by the two ministries of foreign affairs involved in the resolution of this incident have the value of a barometer revealing the increasingly tensioned atmosphere in the relations between the two governments. The Romanian side, through Minister Porumbaru, would consider the situation as paradoxical, given the fact that the restraint of Șirianu did not have any legal basis. The diplomat expressed the belief that even political opinions of subjects of a neutral country should be considered as literary, and they should not base any charge formulated by a belligerent state³⁵.

On the other side, the Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was summoned by the Romanian Legation in Vienna to formulate a point of view, requested the whole motivation of the Șirianu case from the General Staff after he had tried to avoid a clear response to his Romanian counterparts, hiding behind the war context that required enhanced safety and caution measures at the Empire's borders³⁶. Even if the passenger of a neutral country benefits from a valid passport, this does not automatically also mean "the absolute right to cross the borders of the Monarchy", on the contrary, this task was reserved to some officials who were able to estimate whether free trespassing could be granted to each individual³⁷.

In Austro-Hungarian documents, the most frequently claimed reason for arresting Șirianu is the suspicion of espionage. The representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the imperial military structures believed that Șirianu was not only one of the frequent suspects of espionage restrained since the beginning of the war, but "one of the most dangerous agitators against the Central Powers"³⁸. The situation became increasingly delicate for the Austro-Hungarian side after the case Șirianu became international on April 29, 1916, in "Journal des Balkans", where an extensive article on his imprisonment appeared under the title "A New Austro-Hungarian Infamy"³⁹.

Thus, for Austro-Hungarian officials, the necessity of an urgent motivation for the detention of Șirianu, based on conclusive evidence, became more and more

³⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 101–102.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 109.

³⁶ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Ministerium des Äußern, AR, F52, Staaten R 96.

³⁷ A.M.A.E., Fond 71–1914 E1, Diverse 1914–1924, vol. 149, f. 119.

³⁸ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Ministerium des Äußern, AR, F52, Staaten R 96, 30.05.1916.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

pressing. While trying to find arguments that could justify his imprisonment in Katzenau, military experts looked for precedents that had been handled identically, or interpreted certain articles of war legislation and the neutrality agreement in order to sustain the preventive detention of spies from neutral countries.

However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest continued to reject the charges of espionage brought against Şirianu. Emanoil Porumbaru responded to his counterpart that these suspicions could not be sustained under the circumstances, in which the Romanian journalist had chosen as his way back home the most guarded path. This would be the least appropriate route, if the fears of the Austrian authorities were well-founded⁴⁰.

But the development of these Romanian-Austro-Hungarian negotiations became even more complicated when prisoner Şirianu managed to escape from the concentration camp, planning to take refuge on the premises of the Romanian Legation in Vienna in order to request protection from there. After a few days, he was caught on the road between Linz and Vienna by the military authorities, who found a new reason for justifying his restraint in front of the Romanian diplomats: during his breakout, Mircea Russu Şirianu was wandering through several places, from which he learned information of military nature, whose exploitation could bring prejudice to Austro-Hungary⁴¹. Even after learning about the new situation, the position of the Bucharest Cabinet remained an uncompromising one, insisting on the liberation of its citizen.

As a result of this intense diplomatic pressure, Mircea Russu Şirianu was liberated, and on July 30, 1916, after more than four months of Austrian detention, he arrived in Romania. He was urgently invited to the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he talked with Minister Porumbaru, who assigned him a new editorial project (a volume that would elaborate on the issue of Banat in the same way, in which he had done for Transylvania) and to the Ministry of War, where generals Christescu and Iliescu asked him to provide many reports⁴². In fact, between his return to Romania and Romania's entry into war, Mircea Russu Şirianu attended daily meetings with influential persons from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of War, or the General Staff of the Army.

When Romania joined the war, Mircea Russu Şirianu was mobilized immediately. Like a gloomy premonition, on February 20, 1914 he wrote in an article: "Let us not linger within the perilous illusion that the Bulgarians have given up the part of land that we have annexed based on the peace imposed by us to these enemies. So far, no blood has been spilled for the new Dobruja. And no conquest has ever been made without blood!"⁴³. The epilogue was going to follow after only

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 63281, 12.06.1916.

⁴¹ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Ministerium des Äußern, AR, F52 Staaten R 96, 6845\ 28.06.1916.

⁴² Sibiu ASTRA Library, Special Collections, Mircea Russu Şirianu, *Mon journal*.

⁴³ Mircea Russu Şirianu, *O nouă alianță*, in "Românul", III, no. 30, Arad, 7/20 February 1914, p. 1.

two years and a half, when Mircea Russu Șirianu died during the confrontation with the Bulgarian troops in Turtucaia.

At the end of the presentation of the Șirianu case, there are some observations that need to be made. The Great War, the “total war” meant also instituting a “total propaganda”, in which the part reserved to the press became essential in the strategic field. In this national mobilization caused by the military conflict, journalists represented some of the most powerful intermediaries between the political institutions and the people. Not by chance, in a state that declared its neutrality, this sector became highly important to the belligerent blocks that were directly interested to put pressure on political decision makers by means of the press.

The reports issued during the neutrality period by the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Bucharest, Count Czernin, were constantly warning about a new factor inserted into the Romanian-Austro-Hungarian relations: a public opinion that was hostile towards Vienna, but especially towards Budapest⁴⁴. For the Dual Monarchy, war meant also the challenge of controlling the public space by all possible means. The way in which the Austro-Hungarian information structures reacted in the Șirianu case should be placed in the larger context of some vulnerabilities that had appeared inside these departments⁴⁵; the fear regarding the spreading of the enemy nationalist propagandas forced them to react in a precipitated way, especially towards journalists, who were the representatives of a strategic segment for the fate of the war. Political and military structures realized already in the summer of 1914 that the developing war was fought not only on the battle field, but represented also a competition for imposing a dominant vision concerning the conflict, which could decisively turn the balance⁴⁶.

Public intellectuals like Șirianu, those who formulate projects with an impact on their societies, who produce “maps of collective identity”⁴⁷ become disturbing for the belligerent block that is directly attacked in the lines of their articles. Mircea Russu Șirianu represented a threat to the security structures at the top of the Monarchy because he managed to render a European dimension to the Romanian national cause. Through his many connections, he became a nationalist agitator who internationalized his cause, his visibility being highly enhanced compared to that of the old propagandists, for whom the public represented just the mass of subscribers to “Universul”.

⁴⁴ Ioan Ardeleanu et al. (ed.), *1918 la români. Desăvârșirea unității național-statale a poporului român*, vol. I, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983, pp. 373–383; 390–391.

⁴⁵ Mark Cornwall, *Disintegration and Defeat. The Austro-Hungarian Revolution*, in *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary: A Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth-Century Europe*, Mark Cornwall (ed.), II, 2002, Exeter, Exeter University Press, p. 169.

⁴⁶ Matthias Karmasin, Gabriele Melischek, Josef Seethaler, *Preface*, in *Seeling War. The Role of the Mass Media in Hostile Conflicts from World War I to the “War on Terror”*, M. Karmasin, G. Melischek, J. Seethaler (ed.), Chicago, Bristol, 2013, p. XI.

⁴⁷ John Hutchinson, *Ethnicity and Modern Nations*, in “Ethnic and Racial Studies”, vol. 23, no. 4, Routledge, 2000, p. 655.

In the context in which the whole diplomatic correspondence of Prime Minister Tisza István regarding the negotiations with Romania during the neutrality period was focusing on separating “the Romanian issue” from “the Transylvanian issue”⁴⁸, one can sense the impact of a book like that signed by Mircea Russu Șirianu, published in the Parisian milieu. The action he initiated in France can be included into the scenario of the “cold war”, of the ideological war prepared by Italy and Romania against Austro-Hungary already during the neutrality period⁴⁹.

Mircea Russu Șirianu is a character gravitating around several power centers (R.N.P., N.L.P., i.e. the National Liberal Party, the French cultural and political media) that can raise some suspicions regarding the personal motivations of his endeavors during war years. There is no doubt about the fact that he was a journalist with propagandistic vocation, benefiting from a powerful paternal heritage in this regard. Nevertheless, the protection provided to him by the above-mentioned political areas cannot be ignored. Although the diary is constructed in a sufficiently encoded manner so that it does not allow for clear associations, reading between the lines of his notes and some archive documents still reveals a few hints about his missions. A letter he sent to the Romanian Legation in Vienna during his detention reveals the network of political endorsers of the recent doctoral graduate: “You know me well, and I can be also recommended by Mister I.G. Duca, Minister of Public Instruction, Mister Victor Verzea, Mr. C. Coșescu from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Em. Antonescu, university professor, who was my professor, and many other persons who know me in Bucharest, or His Excellency, Minister Lahovary, Romania’s Minister to Paris”⁵⁰.

His incursions into the zone of French politics, the familiarity with Romanian decision makers and their frequent meetings with the former prisoner may suggest that his actions are situated in the region of “soft diplomacy”, representing a more or less discreet message extension of some political and diplomatic instances. On the other hand, we have to outline the persistence of Mircea Russu Șirianu’s ideational project, whose political options remain between the same coordinates along the entire duration of his journalistic activity. For all these reasons, Mircea Russu Șirianu represents a case that is relevant for the way in which in a war context the category of the intellectual with multiple agendas chooses to act. At a macro level, “the Șirianu incident” represents another litmus test for the Romanian-Austro-Hungarian diplomatic relations, whose increasing deterioration seems impossible to avoid at the horizon of 1916.

⁴⁸ István Tisza, *Count Stephen Tisza, Prime Minister of Hungary: Letters (1914–1916)*, Peter Lang Publishing, 1991.

⁴⁹ Hannes Leidinger, *The Case of Alfred Redl and the Situation of Austro-Hungarian Military Intelligence on the Eve of World War I*, in *1914: Austria-Hungary: The Origins and the First Year of World War I*, Günter Bischof, Ferdinand Karhofer (ed.), Innsbruck University Press, 2014, p. 37.

⁵⁰ A.M.A.E., Fond 71–1914 E1, Diverse 1914–1924, vol. 149, f. 110.