

THE DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS REGARDING THE COIN OF THE FIRST MODERN ROMANIAN MONEY

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After the arrival of the Prince Carol of Hohenzollern on the 10 of May 1866, begun long diplomatic negotiations for establishing the confirmation visit's conditions, from Constantinopol, of the new Prince. Annoyed by the way in which the Romanians understood to put the Great Powers before an accomplished fact, Turkey was decided to take its revenge by trying to impose the most humiliating conditions possible. In this situation Romanian politicians started a real diplomatic offensive in the European capitals, especially in Paris and Constantinopol. They tried to explain the country's position, to gain support and, as for Turkey, an advantageous situation for the investiture firman.

The negotiations were evolving with great difficulty because they confronted the hostility of England and Austria – which supported Turkey – Russia's hidden opposition and France's retained sympathy. At the beginning this last country had underlined its benevolent attitude because of some misunderstandings with Prussia. The Romanian diplomats knew how to take advantage of the Cretan's revolt from July 1866, revolt which could again put into great difficulty the Ottoman Empire.

In order to be able to concentrate over the Cretan situation, Turkey wanted to solve the problem of the Principalities. It became more pliant and intensified the consultations with the Romanian politicians. At the beginning it didn't make any concessions especially because it didn't want to give up the terms which defined the Principalities subordination estate, as *integrating part* of the Empire, diminishing their suzerainty. The Turks were very concerned about the Constitution voted by the Romanian Parliament and promulgated by the new Prince immediately after his arrival, on the 13th of July 1866.

The Porte's firman project to recognize the Prince was considered, by the Minister's Council and by Carol I as "outrageous" and "insufferable". They reproached the Turks that they eluded the ancient treaties which clearly specified the Principalities position as Porte's *suzerain*, and not as *integrating part*. To clarify this situation, the Romanians elaborated a counterproject in which they suppressed the "outrageous" point with historical argumentation and moderated other stipulations. This situation amplified the Turkish External Minister and Aali – Pasha's irritation.

The Prince sent him a letter in which he explained that it was very difficult for him to master the Principalities agitated conditions, because the Greeks inside, gathering money to support Crete, were threatening with a riot.

For the Turks the situation became even more complicated because, encouraged by the Cretan revolt, Serbia also claimed withdrawal of the Turkish garrisons from the country and was ready for insurrection.

In these international conditions, all the European states were watching the “Great invalid”, its last struggles, some of them hoping to maintain a weak Turkey, others hoping for it to disappear without too many convulsions, but all of them wanting to achieve the most advantageous position in the future configuration of the continent.

The European context was favorable for the Romanian cause and our politicians knew how to take advantage of it. On the 7th and 8th of October 1866 Carol I and vizier Ruşdi – pasha changed letters in which they reached a compromise. The Porte recognized the Prince’s hereditary reign, in direct descendent, an army force increased from 15 000 to 30 000 soldiers and *the right to coin money*. On the currency was supposed to be present an Imperial sign (following to be established), stipulations which the Turks had rejected in the former firman projects¹.

In the same month, Carol I left for Constantinopol to receive the firman right from the Sultan’s hand. The Romanian politicians thought that for the moment it was all they could receive from the Turks, given that from the text had been taken out some ambiguous or humiliating stipulations.

The visit to Constantinopol was a success. Although the Turkish diplomacy, following the suggestions made by the Austrian agent at the Sublime Porte, had prepared some protocol traps mend to underline the country’s subordination condition, the young Prince knew how to avoid them with elegance, naturally using the royal right, as Prince of the Hohenzollern House. The Sultan and the high Turk dignitaries, who for the first time had to use for a Romanian Prince the title of Serenisimo Highness, understood that from now on the Romanian problems would be solved from this noble position. They were dealing with the nephew of the German and French Emperors, the cousin of the Queen of England, of the Tsar and of the Portugal King’s brother-in-law.

The Sultan’s goodwill increased during the visit, making new concessions for the Romanians. He gave the Prince the right to found an honorary distinction – a medal with several degrees – although at the beginning the right to found a national distinction has been repeatedly rejected². He also accorded several private invitations and for the first time he invited a Romanian Prince to a review of the Turkish troops.

At the first audience the Sultan gave to Carol I the long negotiated investiture firman, which had 9 conditioning – points and he advised him to make

¹ *Memoriile Regelui Caol I al României. De un martor ocular*, vol I, (1866-1869), Bucureşti, 1992, p. 125-127.

² ANIC, *Casa Regală, Carol I*, d.60/1866, f.15.

all the efforts to “[...] ensure a good administration of the United Principalities and to develop the welfare of their inhabitants [...]”³.

After the return to Bucharest Carol I decidedly begun the work to organize and modernize the country, along with the Romanians, considering that: “[...] Romania’s future will be ensured by order and stability, the only solid base for the country’s welfare [...]”⁴.

But to obtain the inhabitants prosperity, as the Sultan had advised, it was necessary to develop the economy and the commerce, sectors that were in unfunctional and stiffening estate. The economical progress was stopped by the difficult progress of the exchange, lacking a unique currency. In the Principalities circulated, altogether, Turkish, Russian, Austrian or French coins, made of gold, silver and copper. Their values were not established on real basis, but were imposed a flowering strata of usurers and agents who operated very advantageous speculations for them, but very damaging for a normal development of the changes. The thickening of this strata, encouraged by the wild circulation of the numerous currency, complicated and hardened the existence of the poor strata of the society.

Analysing this situation, Ion Ghika, the president of the Ministers Council, said: “[...] The usurer, the agent [...] the money dealers, [...] are provoking the price rising and dumping, using various, cunning and immoral means, so that they could take profit without working; they are not producers, they are lazybones living on other’s expense”⁵.

The Peace Congress from Paris, organized in 1856, regularized the Principalities situation, after the Crimean war and substituted the Russian Protectorate with the Guarantors Powers trusteeship: “[...] the Sublime Porte commits itself to respect the **Independent and National Administration** in the Principalities, the complete liberty of cult, legislation and navigation”⁶ (s.n.). Thus it was *the right to coin money*, privilege of an independent and national administration. After the Unification, the Convention from Paris strenghtened these stipulations that settled the attributions of the Central Commission from Focșani.

Although in the first firman project the Porte had denied the right to coin money and to found decorations⁷, these arguments had been used by the Romanians to obtain from the Turks the third article of Prince Carol’s investiture firman: “[...] *Being given to the United Principalities the right [...] to have a special currency, with our government’s sign that will afterwards be decided, you decide*

³ D.A.Sturdza, *Domnia regelui Carol I. Fapte-Cuvântări-Documente*, vol I, București, 1906, p. 358-360.

⁴ King Carol I of Romania, *Cuvântări și scrisori*, tom I (1866-1877), 1909, p. 236.

⁵ I. Ghika, *Convorbiri economice*, vol. III, București, 1884, p.67.

⁶ *Convenția încheiată la Paris la 19 august 1858 între Franția, Austria, Marea Britanie, Prusia, Rusia, Sardinia și Turcia, atingătoare de reorganizarea Principatelor Unite ale Moldaviei și a Valahiei*, București, 1859, p. 77-79, apud C.C. Kirițescu, *Sistemul bănesc al leului și precursorii lui*, vol. I, București, 1964, p. 153.

⁷ C. I. Băicoianu, *Istoria politicii monetare și a Băncii Naționale*, vol. I, București, 1932, p. 264.

to consider this authorization as without consequences, as long as this decision will not be taken”⁸. Turkey noted that in the Constitution promulgated in July 1866, on the article 93, paragraph, was proclaimed the right to coin money. This right was included in the constitutional rights of the state’s leader, according to “the independent and national administration”, as decided at the Parisian Congress.

The Porte had been urged to take this decision by the Guarantors Powers representatives, who reminded the previous agreements. Everybody was interested to have a fluid and normal money and wares circulation, everyone hopping to obtain advantages on this financial healed market.

Inside the country there was, from the times of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, an consensus of all the political forces to organize a modern monetary system. Several projects have been conceived back then, without being applied⁹. The Romanian politicians, many of them with economical studies at prestigious European universities, begun the elaboration of a law regarding the monetary system, the project being presented to the Parliament on the 22 March 1867. The law was voted on 29 March and adopted with overwhelming majority. On 1 January became valid *The law for the foundation of a new monetary system and to coin national money*¹⁰. There were to be coined gold money with values of 20, 10 and 5 lei, silver money of 2 lei, 1 leu and 50 bani and copper money of 10, 5 and 2 bani. The metal weight and purity were scrupulously regulated¹¹.

At the beginning, sensing the “immediate necessity”, it was decided to coin only coinage, because of the country’s difficult economical conditions which didn’t allow the acquisition and use of a large quantity of precious metals. Partly, the raison was real, but not entirely. The Sultan’s investiture firman deliberately specified that the gold and silver coins must bear the Ottoman “sign”, a fact that underlined the country’s dependence situation. This was the raison why the text of the Romanian law was pretty vague when it mentioned the issue date. They all hoped that in time diplomatic solutions would be find so that Turkey will agree to renounce at the “sign”.

During the parliamentary debates over the monetary law, some of the deputies asked a rapid issue of gold and silver money. Afterwards they just asked the government that, along with the 5 000 coinage from the first Romanian issue in 1868, to be included 100 gold coins of 20 lei. They were to demonstrate the country’s decision to entirely use a right confirmed by international rules and, in the same time, to make a first step towards sovereignty.

In the monetary law was stipulated that the country’s escutcheon be printed on the observe, and on the reverse the nominal, although this was only a stratagem

⁸ S.L. Damiean, *Carol I al României, 1866-1881*, București, 2000, p. 231.

⁹ V. Slăvescu, *Domnitorul Cuza și V. Place*, București, 1942.

¹⁰ *Monitorul. Jurnal oficial al României*, no. 89, 22 April / 7 May

¹¹ **Gold** 900‰: 20 L=6,452 g; 10 L= 3,226 g; 5 L= 1,613 g. **Silver** 835 ‰: 2 L= 10 g; 1 L= 5 g; 50 b= 0,5 g. **Copper**: 10 b= 10 g; 5 b= 5 g; 2 b=2 g; 1 b= 1 g.

to compose Turkey. The legislator's intention was to put on the observe Prince Carol's effigy and to impose the name of "caroli", after the French "napoleons" model¹². This was also a means to warn Europe over the Romanian's desire to impose their own will despite the country's further government and development and their decision to obtain the entire independence.

As we know, the 100 gold coins from 1868 provoked a real storm in the European Cabinets. Turkey protested demanding the Guarantor Powers to severely sanction this act, forbidding further emissions of this kind. The Turk diplomats complained that the Law stipulations that they had accepted and the Romanian Parliament adopted were not respected. But mostly they complained that the "sign" asked (but not established) in the Sultan's firman, had not been used.

To the Turkish protest added those of Austria, who complained about the coin's legend: CAROL I THE ROMANIAN'S SOVEREIGN. The Austrians considered that the legend incited to revolt the Romanian population from the Austrian – Hungarian Transylvania and that it had an irredentist character.

In these conditions the issue of coins stopped, but anyhow it was proposed only the production of 100 coins. In a way this was a test for the future monetary strategies, as we shall see further on. From this point of view the year 1869 mend the evaluation of the diplomatic and practical possibilities to issue the first Romanian silver coins. The main "arena" was the capital of France, a country which, generally, had supported all the Romanian initiatives after 1866. The Romanian authorities wanted to issue silver coins of 1 leu, at *Hôtel de la Monnaie* in Paris and for that, the Romanian agent in France, Ion Strat, discussed with the French politicians and especially diplomats. The documents that we will present further on refer to these diplomatic manoeuvres to ensure the support of the French State.

A diplomatic rapport made by Ion Strat, from 1 June 1869, addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dimitrie Ghica – President of the Ministry Council – presented the level at which the approaches were¹³. The Minister was informed that the demand to approve the issue of 25 millions coinage had been addressed to the French government from March. Despite the insistences to the Minister of Foreign Affairs – the marquess of la Valette, to the Minister's general secretary and to the Ministry division leader who coordinated these problems, the result was delaying. According to Strat the cause was the rigor of the subordinated functionaries, true masters of exceeding zeal when it came to formalities. To these added new "political considerations".

The first objection raised by the French government was to ask Turkey to *definitively* recognize Romania's right to coin money. The French Ambassador to

¹² *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 44, 26 February / 9 March 1870.

¹³ Romania's National Library, special Collections (further on, BNR, Col.Sp.), *I.C.Brătianu*, P. 607, ff. 241-249.

Constantinople ... answered only after five weeks to his government, saying that the recognize was definitive. Then followed the problem's economical difficulties, which hidden political connotations. Here is what Strat writes: "[...] *At the beginning we came up against a decree emitted by the Finances Ministry, which forbidden the issue of gold or silver money to any Govern who should make such a demand, if it was not ready to adhere to the Monetary Convention signed in 1867*¹⁴. *This fact wouldn't have created any difficulties especially since we totally adopted the French monetary system. But you surely understand that the main, and for now I would say insurmountable, obstacle, is to recognize in public the right to sign treaties and conventions, like the sovereign and independent countries.*"

After several stranded attempts, the Romanian diplomat managed to elude this stipulation, obtaining this "concession" from the French. But another one appeared, of strictly economical nature: "[...] *coining silver money is a considerable privilege for any government, so it is in the interest of every govern to issue them in a quantity as big as possible. Given that the volume of coins put into circulation is limited by the needs of the social transactions, it is obvious that the purpose is to eliminate, as much as possible, the foreign coins that might compete with the national currency. This competition is even more dangerous if it happens to have the same title and coinage as the national money. This inconvenient is considerably attenuated in the countries with national gold coin because in this case, once in a while, the silver coinage is put out of circulation and returned to the country it belongs. According to the monetary Convention from 1867, this country must accept it and change it with gold money, or this coercive cannot be used with us too, for we have no gold money. [...] I said I was ready to give [...] all the possible guarantees that no dime of the coin we are emitting at Paris won't circulate in France. [...] We have proved, showing the very situation of our commerce, that they shouldn't fear an invasion of our silver money in France, because our exports outruns by far the imports and the balance shows, fatally, a bigger or more considerable quantity of foreign money in our country.*"

The arguments of the famous Romanian diplomat, who proved to be an excellent economist, had success, because they were accepted by the French part. But other objections appeared, of political order. Before giving a new "reinforcement" of Romania's right to coin silver money, to which the rapport refers, the Turks hadn't asked assurances concerning the aspect of the observes, considering the problem definitively solved. This was after the protest in 1868 regarding the aspect of the gold coins.

From the rapport made by Ion Strat we understand that at Constantinopol was found out the Romanian's intention to coin the silver money with Prince Carol's effigy: "[...] *Maybe the Turkish government repent the gesture and, because it couldn't change a notified decision, invited the [French] Imperial*

¹⁴ It was the Latin Monetary Convention at which took part France, Belgium, Italy etc.

Government not to hurry to give the asked authorization. The intention was to paralyze, using this detour, the effects of the concession it made.” The Romanian agent found out about that, knowing that the French government advised the Turk officials to pass over this problem, because marquess of la Valette personally promised its approval. Still he had some doubts because, in that moment, France’s interests imposed an approaching to Turkey and it was necessary, at least in appearance, to spare the sensibilities (although in the future he wasn’t going to consider them).

Ion Strat also found out the France’s spokesman to Constantinopol, de Bourré, received precise indications to eliminate any Turkish opposition and informed our Ministry of Foreign Affairs that “[...] *in this problem there was also the vivid opposition from Viena, because [...] nobody wants a Romanian coin, with Prince Carol’s effigy to circulate among the Romanians from the Austrian – Hungarian Empire.*”

Ending his dispatch, Ion Strat mentioned to the Minister Dimitrie Ghika about the caution of taking all the technical information regarding the issue of money. They were to be transmitted to the Romanian Finances Minister, Al. D. Golescu.

Three days after Strat’s rapport, on 4 June 1869, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs addressed to our agent at Constantinopole, D. A. Sturza, a letter in which were again discussed the same preoccupations regarding the issue of money¹⁵. Dimitrie Ghika expressed his disappointment regarding Turkey’s oscillating politics, referring to a private letter send by the Turk Minister of Foreign Affairs Aali – Pasha, to Prince Ştirbey. From the letter resulted that the Porte gave us the right to coin money “*with no reserves or restrictions.*” Dimitrie Ghika was asking himself: “[...] *According to what right His Highnesses Govern sees that the 10 article from our Law¹⁶ will be observed or not? This is an **internal** problem, to be regulated between the Romanian Ministry and the country and, of course, **outside any foreign control**. If the Porte thinks it is authorized to retract its authentic and formal promise, for a purpose that we don’t know, the Romanian Government who observed, for its part, all the rules and conventions it must respect, will not have anything to do but study our national rights and to pass over it. Following the legal path which it strictly respected, the actual Cabinet can’t afford to be weaker than its predecessors, who followed the absolute and non-conformist path.*” (s. n.) Although the politic passions were speaking, as it was showing the reference to the former liberal govern, then the national interest was prior.

If Dimitrie Ghika complained about the indifferent attitude adopted by England’s representative to Constantinopol, he underlined Bourré’s activity, who

¹⁵ BNR, Col. Sp. I. Brătianu, P. 607, ff. 260-261.

¹⁶ It is the Law concerning the new monetary system where, at the 10 article, it was mentioned: “[...] *The coin will have on one side out country’s weapons and on the other side the indication of the nominal value and the year.*”

“had been of such a great help”. In the same time he urged D. A. Sturdza to popularize more his Govern¹⁷, considering it was not very well known by the Turk authorities.

The following document continues the diplomatic odyssey of our Romanian modern money situation. The powerful states were changing camp according to the momentary interests, passing over promises, over smaller states, despite the solemn declarations and commitments. If at the beginning France’s attitude had been favorable for the Romanians, towards the half of June, after a more thorough sounding of the European Cabinets, it “shaded” its views, becoming now the echo of the Austrian and Turkish protests.

In a new letter send to D. A. Sturdza, at 11 June 1868¹⁸, Dimitrie Ghika expressed his disappointment regarding the way the new govern was treated by the Turks, although it assumed all the imposed obligations: “[...] *after we became, so to speak, Turkey’s gendarmes, so it wouldn’t be worried any more about the invasion of the very well organized bands*¹⁹, *after we have gave a great help in its problem with Greece, what is Turkey doing to raise our internal prestige? What did it gave us in change? I should mention the money problem in which it gave with one hand and took all with the other because France liked to flirt with Austria in its demands. [...] With great regret I see that Turkey doesn’t know its own interests in this matter and how to treat this kind of problems in a more elevate manner. It is forcing us to take another conduct in order to defense our rights.*”

A new rapport from Paris, made by Ion Strat, confirmed on 18 June 1868 the fears of our Minister of Foreign Affairs²⁰. The Romanian diplomat said that he had been urgently called by marquees of la Valette who announced him that the Turk ambassador handed him an official protest in which the Ottoman govern contested Romania’s right to coin money with Prince Carol’s effigy. The marquees could not give him a copy of the protest, but Ion Strat reproduced him by heart: “[...] *The Porte recognized the right of the Danubian Principalities to coin money in the terms of the Law promulgated by the Romanian Govern, that introduces the decimal system. This law expressly mentions that the coins will have one side the country’s weapons and on the other the value of the coin, expressed in grams. The authorization we recently gave to the Principalities, by Imperial firman, intended only the strict application of the law we mentioned. The Empire found out that the Princely Govern wants to coin money with Prince Carol’s effigy, as Prince of*

¹⁷ S. Neagoe, I. Mamina, *Istoria guvernelor României de la începuturi – 1859, până în zilele noastre*, București, 1995, p. 44-45; the govern Dimitrie Ghika was installed at 16 November 1868 and leaded the country until 27 January 1870.

¹⁸ BNR, Col. Sp. *I. C. Brătianu*, P. 607, ff. 372-373.

¹⁹ He is talking about the Bulgarian bands that crossed Danube to prepare for a riot against the Turks. Because of them the Romanian authorities received permanently complaints from the Turk govern, accusing the Romanians of complicity and supporting the insurgents with weapons and nonintervention.

²⁰ BNR, Col. Sp., *I. C. Brătianu*, P. 607, ff. 350-355.

Romania. This project is totally contrary to the authorization gave by the Sublime Porte and to the law we mentioned. Prince Carol, when his election was recognized by His Highness the Sultan, formally committed himself, in a letter addressed to the Sultan, to respect the connections between the Principalities and the Sublime Porte. He also pledge not to use his royal rights, among which the right to coin money, outside the limits stretched by special authorities. The Ottoman Empire was informed that Romania's Govern, in order to develop its project, made several demands to the govern of His Highness the Emperor to obtain the authorization to coin money, in the conditions presented, at the Imperial Mint. Thus the undersigned ambassador considers that it is his duty to protest against this approach and to ask E. V. to eliminate such a demand."

There would be necessary some explanations regarding the legality of the acts reproached by the Turk Govern through its diplomat. In the international conventions signed by Turkey and France, the right to coin money was considered a problem of domestic politics, like any other modification of any law. Turkey, once it accorded the Romanians this right, it was a gained right and entered in the incidence of the problems of domestic politics. Thus it could be interpreted, on domestic plan, after the will of the Romanian authorities. On the other hand, Prince Carol's letter, invoked by the Turk ambassador, did not compelled in any way the Govern, because it hadn't been countersigned by any other member. According to the Constitution in 1866, recognized by Turkey, any official letter addressed by the Prince to another state leader should be countersigned by a representative of the Govern. Only in these conditions was the country committed, because "the King is reigning, but he is not governing". Or the letter to which the Turk diplomat was referring, because it didn't bore the countersignature of any other member of the Govern, became a private letter which didn't imply the state.

Despite these explanations, gave by Ion Strat to the authorities, France, through marquees of la Valette – the one who promised to the Romanian agent his personal aid - prevaricated: "[...] *he invited me to present the incident to my Govern, to see if we can find a means to extinguish it, coining money without our Prince's effigy. I answered that I founded very upsetting the protest of the Porte because it shown bad will or at least rigidity as far as we were concerned, and we didn't expect that. [...] Then I made the marquees understand why we thought legitimate the will to see on our coins the Prince's effigy.*

«I understand perfectly the feeling that leads you to that – he answered – and the "political dimension" of the deed, but it is impossible not to matter about the protest. If you care so much about your Prince's effigy, you can coin money some other place, where this coin in considered as emitting from the authority, like in our case. Thus the Govern wouldn't have the same responsibilities, neither the unpleasant consequences of a protest like the one I just read.» I promised to report to my Govern and, thanking for the kindness he had shown to help us in this situation, I retired."

Ion Strat had the prudence of being skeptic about France's aid and already informed about the possibility to coin money in Belgium or England. He even presented this hypothesis to the Romanian Finances Ministry, Al. G. Golescu, underlying the fact that the issuing costs were smaller in Belgium²¹.

With all the efforts made by the Govern and by the Romanian diplomat agents in France and Constantinopol, once again the promises made by the powerful state were not respected. The Romanian State had to wait until the appearance of the first silver leu, but it had the satisfaction to see it done into the country. On 24 February 1870 was inaugurated the State Mint where, in 1870 were issued 400 000 coins with value of 1 leu, which didn't had on the observe the Prince Carol's effigy, but the country's escutcheon.

DOCUMENTE DIPLOMATICE PRIVIND BATEREA PRIMELOR MONEDE MODERNE ROMÂNEȘTI

- Rezumat -

După venirea în țară a Principelui Carol de Hohenzollern la 10 mai 1866, principalul obiectiv politic urmărit de politicienii și diplomații români era pregătirea vizitei la Constantinopol, pentru confirmarea domniei. Tratatul se desfășurau anevoios din cauza condițiilor umilitoare pe care Turcia încerca să le impună, dorind să-și ia revanșa pentru politica „faptului împlinit” utilizată cu succes de români, la aducerea pe tron a prințului străin. Profitând de situația internațională – schimbare opticiei unor state europene, revolta populației din Creta – diplomația română a încercat, cu răbdare și tenacitate, să determine cabinetul condus de Aali-Pașa, la o atitudine mai conciliantă.

Primul proiect de firman a fost respins de români, fiind considerat ofensator și intolerabil, prin condițiile impuse. Principele Carol a scris ministrului de externe al Turciei, atrăgându-i atenția că situația din țară era tensionată, minoritatea grecească reușise să strângă fonduri însemnate pentru a-i ajuta pe cretani, amenințând cu revolta, iar la graniță, Serbia se pregătea să declanșeze insurecția, cerând retragerea din țară a garnizoanelor turcești.

În aceste condiții diplomația turcească a devenit mai maleabilă și, în urma schimbului de scrisori între Principele Carol și vizirul Rușdi-Pașa, s-a ajuns la un compromis. Principele a plecat în octombrie la Constantinopol pentru a primi investitura. În ciuda capcanelor de protocol întinse de diplomația turcă, Principele Carol a știut să le escamoteze cu eleganță și demnitate, folosindu-se și de prerogativele dreptului regalian, atrăgând simpatia Sultanului care l-a primit de mai

²¹ *Ibidem*, f. 354.

multe ori în audiență și i-a făcut mai multe concesii, unele refuzate anterior, înmânându-i firmanul de investitură.

Unul din punctele pentru care diplomația românească luptase cu îndârjire era dreptul de a bate monedă. În firman era înscris acest drept, la punctul 3, dar cu condiția ca monedele de aur și argint să poarte „un semn” care indica suzeranitatea turcească. Turcia luase notă că în Constituția promulgată în iulie 1866, art. 93, alin. 13 se proclama dreptul de a bate monedă, ca drept inclus între drepturile constituționale, în virtutea „administrației independente și naționale” decise de Congresul de la Paris.

Baterea monedei naționale era vital necesară pentru însănătoșirea situației economice și financiare a Principatelor, aflate într-o stare de anchirozare generală. Comerțul se desfășura greoi din cauza lipsei unei monede unice, în țară circulând monede turcești, rusești, austriece și franceze, de aur, argint și aramă, fără o valoare stabilă. Valoarea lor era impusă artificial, de o pătură prosperă de zarafi și speculanți care aducea un uriaș prejudiciu economiei și mai ales comerțului. În aceste condiții, progresul economic era stagnat și finanțele statului înregistrau deficite apreciabile.

Oamenii politici români, cu serioase studii economice și doctorate obținute la prestigioase instituții superioare din apusul Europei, au elaborat proiectul de lege pentru instituirea monedei naționale. Proiectul a fost votat la 29 martie 1867 și la 11 ianuarie 1868 intra în vigoare *Legea pentru înființarea unui nou sistem monetar și pentru fabricarea monedei naționale*. Urmau să se bată monede de aur – în valoare de 20, 10 și 5 lei, de argint – de 2 lei, 1 leu și 50 de bani, de aramă - de 10, 5 și 2 bani; greutatea și puritatea metalului fiind specificată și urmărită cu grijă, inspirându-se după sistemul monetar francez.

Inițial s-a hotărât baterea unor monede divizionare de aramă, motivând situația precară a economiei, care nu permitea aruncarea pe piață a unei cantități însemnate de metal prețios. În realitate intenția politicianilor români era aceea de a nu fi obligați să pună sigla turcească prevăzută în firman, semn al suzeranității turcești. Dar, alături de cele 5000 de monede divizionare s-a hotărât și baterea a 100 de monede de aur cu valoarea de 20 de lei. În Legea monetară se prevedea ca pe Av. să se imprime stema țării și pe Rv. valoarea nominală. Monedele de aur frapate în 1868 purtau însă pe Av. efigia Principelui Carol, intenția fiind aceea de a impune monedele cu denumirea de „caroli”, după modelul „napoleonilor” francezi, de același nominal.

Legenda aversului - CAROL I DOMNUL ROMÂNILORŪ – a stârnit protestele Turciei și Austriei. Turcia protesta pentru neaplicarea siglei turcești, iar Austria pentru că legenda aversului („domnul românilor”), ar fi incitat la revoltă populația românească din Transilvania.

Anul 1869 a însemnat pentru români, din punctul de vedere al politicii monetare, evaluarea posibilităților diplomatice și practice pentru emiterea primelor emisiuni românești de argint. Locul desfășurării acestei acțiuni era capitala

franceză și Constantinopolul. Datorită atitudinii binevoitoare a Franței s-a hotărât ca baterea acestor monede să se facă la *Hôtel de la Monnaie* din Paris. Studiul de față prezintă activitatea diplomaților români de la Paris și Constantinopol, reflectată în rapoartele diplomatice trimise în țară și cele ale miniștrilor din țară, cu instrucțiuni și sfaturi. Ceea ce impresionează pe studiosul de azi este competența autorilor acestor rapoarte, nu numai în sfera diplomației și politicii în general, ci și în cea a legislației europene, a economiei și a finanțelor. Din documente se poate urmări tenacitatea cu care s-a dus această luptă pentru baterea monedei de argint fără sigla turcească.

Franța ceruse garanții românilor, că dreptul de a bate monedă fusese obținut *definitiv*, drept dobândit prin firmanul de investitură. Apoi se ridicase o altă obiecție legată de legislația franceză, care interzicea baterea monedelor din metale prețioase cu nominal egal cu al celor franceze, de statele care nu făceau parte din Convenția Monetară Europeană. România dorise afilierea la acest for, dar fusese împiedicată din cauza suzeranității turcești, deși legea monetară românească se alinia perfect reglementărilor sale, după care se inspirase. Deși diplomatul român Ion Strat dăduse toate asigurările că guvernul nostru va observa toate reglementările cerute de Convenția Monetară Europeană, sprijinul francez începea să oscileze.

În iunie el a fost chemat de ministrul de externe francez, marchizul de la Valette, pentru a i se prezenta protestul ambasadorului turc, care ceruse ca solicitarea românească de a bate monedele în Franța să fie „îndepărtată”. Motivul fusese tot efigia de pe aversul monedei. Deși Ion Strat explicase că legea monetară intra sub incidența *politicii interne independente* a țării, care fusese consfințită prin semnăturile puse și de Franța și de Turcia la Congresul de la Paris, anterior Unirii, deci ea putea fi modificată (în acest caz, înlocuirea stemei cu efigia Principelui), Franța și-a retras sprijinul. Diplomatul român a fost sfătuit să solicite altei țări baterea monedelor, acolo unde „această monedă nu este considerată ca emanând de la autoritate” și deci nu angajează guvernul, țări ca Belgia sau Anglia.

Ion Strat nu se bazase pe promisiunile franceze și antamase deja tratative cu Belgia, așa cum reiese dintr-un raport trimis în țară ministrului de Finanțe Al. G. Golescu, avertizându-l că cheltuielile erau mai mici.

Cum protestului Turciei i se adăugase, din nou, cel al Austriei, Franța a cedat. La orizont se profila un conflict cu Prusia (țara de origine a Principelui Carol) și Franța avea nevoie de sprijinul Austriei.

Apariția primului leu de argint a trebuit să fie amânată, românii având însă satisfacția ca primele 400.000 de mii de monede de 1 leu să fie bătute, la 24 februarie 1870, chiar la inaugurarea Monetăriei Statului din București; ele purtau pe avers stema României.