

IOSUD – “DUNAREA DE JOS” UNIVERSITY OF GALATI
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DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

**SHIPPING COMPANIES AT THE MOUTHS
OF THE DANUBE (1830–1939)**

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Abstract

1. The Danube as an international mobility route

Along the 2.850 km between the springs of the Black Forest and the Black Sea, the Danube passes through or borders the territory of 10 European states: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The second largest river in Europe (after the Volga), the most internationally known river in the world (after the Nile), the Danube is navigable on a length of 2.415 km and it is part of the vital infrastructure for the prosperity of tens of millions of inhabitants.

From a historical point of view, the river was rather a border and a barrier between regional political entities than a transport route that facilitated the connections between different riparian communities. There are two reasons for this: on one hand, the political situation of the Danube's course has always been a border area between rival empires for the last two millennia. On the other hand, the natural obstacles on the river's course, narrow paths, rocks, and sandbanks endangered the navigation in certain sectors. The most known examples, with regards to the Romanian space, are the Iron Gates and the Sulina branch. Therefore, the Danube has been separated in multiple fragments, important to the riparian communities' economy, but without having a major role in securing international trade.

A technological discovery – steamship navigation – would revolutionize the Danube's role as a continental communication route. After several attempts of some other investors, two British entrepreneurs, John Andrews and Joseph Prichard established in Vienna, in 1829, *Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft (DDSG)*, better known as the *First-Danube-Steamboat-Shipping Company*. In September 1830, the “Francisc I” pyroscaphe successfully navigated between Vienna and Budapest and back and demonstrated both the functionality of the route and its profitability. In the next years, DDSG invested in the construction of new pyroscaphes and extended the navigation services until the entrance of the *Defileul Dunării (Danube Gorge)*. In 1834, when the Danube's level was low and the rocks in the riverbed were visible, a ship passed the Iron Gates and DDSG succeeded in extending the navigation on the Lower Danube line up to Galați. Then in 1836, the “Ferdinand I” passenger ship started to operate on the Black Sea line, between Galați and Istanbul. This filled in the missing link that allowed travelling, by the standards of that time, safely, quickly, and comfortably, between two of the most important

capitals of the world. Therefore, thanks to the DDSG services, the Danube started to play a more important role for international economic exchanges, being for several decades, until the construction of railways in the region, the main route of mobility for people and goods between Central Europe and the Levant. But it also acted as a connecting route between the West and the East.

Political factors also contributed to this important geopolitical change. The Final Act of the Congress of Vienna (1815) marked the beginning of modern regulations for navigation on international rivers. The provisions regarding the Rhine river and other navigable routes of the German space were gradually extended to the other navigable routes inside Europe. The status of the Danube remained somewhat uncertain, mainly due to rivalries between riparian empires. The political and economic consequences of the Treaty of Adrianople (1829) increased the Danube's geopolitical relevance. The annexation of the Danube's mouths, seen in terms of power balance in Europe, transformed the region in a new space for symbolic confrontation between Russia and the Western powers. At the same time, establishing freedom of navigation in the Black Sea and the Danube, especially eliminating the restrictive provisions on foreign trade of Moldova and Wallachia, made the principalities an important grain supplier for the Mediterranean and Western Europe markets. Therefore, the economy of the two states began to be integrated in the world capitalism system. Galați and Brăila transformed in outlets of a more thriving region. In 1845, the DDSG pyroscaphes of the Österreichischer Lloyd (Austrian Lloyd) company and in 1846, those of the Russian shipping company (with courses between Odessa and Galați) fully contributed to the economic integration of the two principalities. They secured the mobility of merchants, samples, mail, and information towards the world's greatest markets.

At the end of the Crimean War, the Congress of Paris (1856) brought important changes in the Danube's role as an international mobility route. The Final Act's Principles of the Congress of Vienna extended to the Danube, whose status was still fragmented, mainly, as the result of the rivalries between inland western powers and riparian empires in connection to the different understanding of the liberalization of cabotage between inland ports. The rivalry is directly linked to the shipping companies' case that, regardless if they were private or state-owned, were more and more important as an economic and political expansion tool.

The hydraulic and regulatory activity of the European Commission of the Danube (ECD) contributed to the visible improvement of navigation conditions on the Maritime Danube, connecting the ports of Brăila and Galați with major maritime centers of the Mediterranean Sea and Northern Europe. The technological changes facilitated the construction of bigger ships, equipped with powerful engines. With concealed or direct government support, other shipping companies also took advantage of the internationalization of the Danube and organized shipping courses to Romanian ports. It is worthy to mention the French shipping companies, Messageries Maritimes and Fraissinet, extremely active in the entire Black Sea pool. At the same time, DDSG massively invested in its naval park, becoming the world's biggest shipping company. Its significant contribution to its business was in freight transport along the entire navigable sector of the river. The transition from sailing ships to steamships is clearly visible since the 1860s when more and more regular shipping companies began to include in their routes the ports of Brăila and Galați, the point of convergence of maritime and river companies.

After Romania achieved state independence, important transformations regarding the Danube as an international mobility route followed and the connection axis of the Romanian space with the world. Three aspects should be mentioned: the integration of Dobrogea in the Romanian state and the massive investments in arranging the port infrastructure from Constanța, which gradually became the main port of Romania; building a dense network of railways that spanned throughout the entire country and competition from rail to river transport; the decision of the Romanian state to set up its own river shipping companies in 1890 (*Navigația Fluvială Română - NFR - Romanian River Navigation*) and maritime in 1895 (*Serviciul Maritim Român - SMR - Romanian Maritime Service*). All these measures made the Romanian state an important actor in defending its national interests eager to reduce the Romanian economy's dependence on the transport services of foreign companies. And at the same time to use these national companies to ensure the development of the Romanian industry by securing reduced transport costs towards certain strategic markets. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a decisive role in this matter, for supporting the Romanian interests.

These were the main elements that marked the history of the presence and activity of shipping companies in the big Danube ports at the end of the 19th century and until the outbreak of the Second World War. The realignment of the Danube's political geography after the First World

War radically changed the routes of regional mobility and made new actors appear on the scene with existing state-owned or private shipping companies established in all riparian states. The conflict also changed the structure of the commercial fleet, as well as the states' determination to reserve their monopoly on domestic cabotage. The Danube's international status, with the navigation regulated by two international commissions, as well as the economic and geopolitical interests of the western powers made the "clash" between riparians and inlands to be exhibited through the shipping companies that they owned on the Danube. In all these matters, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a vital role in the relation with foreign companies that operated in Romanian ports, but also to support Romanian interests regarding navigation and trade in foreign ports in which NFR and SMR shipping companies operated.

2. The objectives of the paper

The present paper is set to analyse the Danube's role as a main economic and geopolitical axis of the connections between Romania and the world, connections made through the shipping companies that operated in Romanian waters. It takes into consideration the actions carried out by the Romanian state to defend its sovereign rights and its national interests with regards to foreign companies, the way in which these navigation companies were used by various European actors as leverage of geopolitical and economic influence over the Romanian state, as well as the way in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the interests of the Romanian navigation companies in states in which NFR and SMR operated.

The specific objective of the paper is to identify and follow, in its topic and chronological approach, the emergence, organization, and evolution of the activities of the river and maritime shipping companies in the Lower Danube and the Black Sea and to analyse their crucial role in the development of Romanian ports. Additionally, the supporting actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Romanian economy will be presented in their competition with the commercial entities and the way the Romanian state managed the relation with these foreign companies after the national companies *Navigația Fluvială Română* (*Romanian River Navigation*) and *Serviciul Maritim Român* (*Romanian Maritime Service*) were established. Therefore the subject of the paper views the frame by which Romania connected to the international transport of goods, passengers, or mail. It must be also mentioned, from the very beginning, that shipping companies

that provided regular services, at regular intervals, for the transport of passengers, mail, or goods will be considered.

This perspective gives the paper its originality and novelty in Romanian research. As will be shown below, there are studies dedicated to some of the biggest foreign shipping companies or volumes dedicated to national companies. However, there is no paper in which these companies are synthetically and comparatively analysed, including also Romanian companies. The project starts with the identification of the main shipping companies, the presentation of the context in which they started operating in the Romanian ports, qualitative and quantitative references regarding the companies' activities, and their relation with the Romanian authorities.

Moreover, the main initiatives, actions, and measures with judicial character assumed by the Romanian state as their partner in some economic operations will be presented, as well as the state entity that acts as a regulating element in order to keep free competition in the Romanian ports. Through these actions, the Romanian state, which was in the process of strengthening its institutions, was motivated to eliminate some commercial privileges and some judicial effects that encumbered the exercise of its sovereign rights over the navigation on the Danube.

This paper presents and exemplifies those actions assumed by the Romanian state for identifying and implementing some solutions that eliminate or reduce the privileges that some companies of the European greater powers had. This resulted in a rich experience and jurisprudence likely to "harden" Romania in its international disputes in the field, but also an active state policy for the development of ports and the infrastructure of national ports. A less known role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be brought to light in connection to defending the national economic interests in Romanian ports, but also the support of these interests in foreign ports. Therefore, the diplomacy – navigation link prevails throughout the paper, being revealed by various signals regarding the appointment in diplomatic/consular positions of former economics agents of these companies, as exponents of the category of good connoisseurs of political-administrative realities in Romanian ports.

3. Sources and historiography

The base of this research exploits a consistent corpus of published and unpublished documents, the latter ones identified during research at the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, as well as in various archival offices in the National Archives of Romania.

The identification, analysis, and critical interpretation of these main sources allowed to emphasize less known aspects in which foreign shipping companies started to operate on the Romanian part of the Danube and in the Black Sea, and also economic, political, and military factors involved in these operation and their relation with the Romanian authorities.

At the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the so called *Problema 68. Societăți de navigație fluvială, maritimă și aeriene, române și străine (Problem 68. Romanian and foreign river, maritime, and air shipping companies)*, was identified. This is the archive that connects the Ministry of Foreign Affairs clerks to the navigation problem through Romanian ports in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. *Problem 68* has a number of 65 volumes of documents, chronologically structured on topics about the types of activities, organized both on spaces of interest (e.g. Austria-Hungary, England, Russia, Germany, etc.), as well as on technical problems connected to the navigation in Romanian ports: port organization, ports activity, the ports situation, the ports regime, petitions and complaints, etc.

Out of the 65 volumes of documents, a number of 42 volumes were selected for this topic, from which approximately 3.000 pages have been identified, extracted, analysed, and capitalized in this paper. This entire portfolio contains data and information relevant for understanding the issue of the presence of river and maritime shipping companies on the Romanian Danube, their judicial and commercial advantages, the way the agencies of these foreign companies were used as geopolitical and economic leverage by their home states and, obviously, the actions conducted by the Romanian state to end these situations and assert its sovereign right in the field.

Briefly, the selected documentary portfolio contains the following types of documents:

- information regarding the current activities of the offices of foreign shipping companies in the Romanian ports;
- their correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the institution responsible for regulating navigation problems, including the river and maritime police;
- information notes of the Romanian legations from different capitals with direct reference to navigation problems and the legislation from the accreditation state accompanied by proposals for the benefit of national navigation;

- notifications regarding the appointment of agencies of foreign shipping companies in the ports of the Romanian Danube;
- litigious matters of shipping companies with the Romanian state;
- administrative documents signed with the local authorities (land lease agreements for landing places and other facilities, requests for facilities, etc.);
- correspondence between the state's institutions responsible for conducting the navigation in Romanian territorial waters, etc;
- notes on incidents, accidents, or other things that happened in the Romanian ports;
- notes of ministries responsible for supervising foreigners present in our country addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- situations regarding the movement of foreign ships on the Romanian Danube and proof of the passenger ships' timetable.

Besides this corpus of big historical interest, the necessity of completing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attributions in coordinating and managing the national and foreign navigation in Romanian waters led to the archive entitled *Problema 82. Legi de Organizare ale Ministerului Afacerilor Străine* (*Problem 82. Organizing Laws of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*) from the same archive. With direct reference to the topic of this paper, *Volume 2* from *Problem 82* was used that covers 1880-1884, from which 30 unpublished documents have been selected and capitalized in this doctoral thesis.

Moreover, the research of the two problems from the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was completed by studying other sources. These were identified in *Local Branches of the National Archives of Romania*, especially in Galați: *European Commission of the Danube – General Secretariat, General Inspectorate of Navigation and Ports of Galați, Harbourmaster of Galați*, etc. Besides, the content of the present research is completed by a rich documentary appendix that contains unique sources selected from the previously mentioned archives.

From the published sources, collections of laws, statistical reports, volumes of local documents have been used. Moreover, comparative statistics are presented on the evolution stages of different shipping companies, the volume and nature of trade, the number of ships, their use, the program of the Romanian state for modernising the naval and maritime infrastructure, construction and evolution of the national fleet (numerical, quantitative, and qualitative), the establishment of national institutions to

oversee the regulation of navigation and exercise sovereign controls of the Romanian state in the field, etc.

The historiography of the problem is relatively poor and most often touches only tangentially the topic of this paper.

Therefore, the first category of papers that mention, in a larger international context, these shipping companies is the one that studies the Danube problem. These are older volumes of Constantin I. Băicoianu or the newer ones of Ștefan Stanciu, Constantin Ardeleanu or Arthur Tuluș. All of them mainly study the ECD and the shipping companies. The authors concerned with the history of the biggest Romanian ports have touched on the topic of shipping companies. These are Moise N. Pacu, Constantin Bușe, Emil Octavian Mocanu for Brăila, Valentin Ciorbea, Carmen Atanasiu or Mariana Cojoc for Constanța.

Also, authors more broadly interested in the history of transportation have touched on the navigation problem. Among them is Al. Cebuc or Sergiu Columbeanu. A special mention is for the experts in the field of transport. A special interest was given to the history of the topic by the engineer Thoma Gâlcă, director of Regiei Autonome a Porturilor și Căilor de Comunicație pe Apă (*Autonomous Directorate of Water Ports and Routes*) under which the Romanian shipping companies also operated. He was an active supporter of the development of the Romanian companies and also the author of many historical studies. Grigore Vasilescu had similar interests related to the Danube's role in the development of the national transport and economy.

With exact reference to the topic of shipping companies, some papers dedicated to French companies, part of the interest in the history of French-Romanian relations in the second half of the 19th century, were published by Lucia Taftă, a historian at “Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History. A recent volume and with interest in the field (with published information and separated in different articles) from which a lot of information was summarized, is that of Cristian Constantin, *O istorie a companiilor de navigație străine de la Dunărea de Jos (A history of foreign shipping companies on the Lower Danube)*. For this researcher, I have made available most of the documents that served to his study. All these papers are part of the bibliography of this research and will be cited where appropriate.

4. The structure of the paper

This paper is structured on three distinct periods that correspond to some major events in the history of Romanians. For each period, the presence and activity of shipping companies in the Romanian ports will be detailed and their relation with the Romanian authorities.

In chapter I, the period between the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople (1829) that opened the international navigation on the Danube and obtaining the state independence of Romania, as a result of the Russo-Romanian-Turkish War (1877-1878), is analysed. It is a period that corresponds to a new phase of the “industrial revolution” in which the use of steamships has been generalized, a phenomenon visible on the Danube beginning with the 1860s. After presenting a short history of the importance of the Danube river in the economic development of the Romanian nation, the chapter is set to explain the problem represented by the “Danube Matter” compared to the interests of the greater powers. This is done by highlighting the way in which river navigation was included in different international treaties with reference to various legal and institutional aspects generated by the establishment of the ECD (1856) as an international body meant to regulate and manage the problem of international navigation on the Danube. In a consistent part of the chapter, the evolution of the shipping companies’ activity in the Romanian ports is the central element and their relation with the Romanian state and its interests in the field.

Chapter II covers the period between obtaining the state independence and the end of the First World War (1918). This period is marked by the appearance of Romania as an independent state and a subject on the international scene. This perspective made the Romanian government lead a supported policy in order to impose its sovereign authority on its entire territory, including upon navigation on the Danube and the Black Sea. In this regard, based on the research of the specialised literature and the archived documents, many unpublished, the main moments of strengthening the authority of the Romanian state in its relations with foreign shipping companies is highlighted. The identified solutions and applied by the authorities in order to limit or eliminate the privileges held by these companies, depicting the legal framework in which they operated, are presented, with numerous and suggestive references to the activities and problems specific to navigation, and also issues related to the effort of the Romanian state in the development of port infrastructure on the Danube.

A major role in this part of the paper was given to the institutionalization process of the Romanian navigation, under the appearance of the NFR and SMR companies. Moreover, the attributions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in coordinating and managing the activities in the Romanian ports were studied. The elements included in the paper highlight the state's vision on the Danube's strategic importance, defined by our authorities as the backbone of the national economy, as well as the importance of Dobrogea (and especially of the port of Constanța), a new province incorporated in Romania.

Furthermore in this chapter, the foreign shipping companies are mentioned, who made their presence relevant in the Romanian ports at the end of the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century, and with their political-economic influence that the great powers did not shy away from exerting on the Romanian state through these companies. In this context, by appealing to the primary documents of the time, the various shipping companies from Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Russia, Greece, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire will be presented, with details about the organization, evolution, arguments with the local authorities, etc.

As an element of novelty for the historiography of the field, aspects related to the relations between the representatives of the foreign shipping companies with the Romanian state institutions are presented (port authorities, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, town halls, etc.). Also, various details regarding the agencies of these societies, i.e. the appointment procedure and their duties in the specific activity are presented - all this from the perspective of Romania's independent status in international relations. Both categories of representations, diplomatic and economic, of the European actors in the Romanian ports were also an expression of leverage used by them in the control of the spheres of influence.

In chapter III, the economic role of the activities of foreign shipping companies is analysed from the perspective of the appearance of Greater Romania. It was the time of a new geopolitical configuration in Europe with another relevance of the Danube matter in international relations. Complementary to the aspects analysed in previous chapters reported to the new national and regional politic and economic realities, the new European legal framework related to Romanian navigation, institutions, and shipping companies is being researched. This is done through various analysed and comparisons related to the activities and problems specific to the navigation field, to elements of national port

infrastructure, including legislative, institutional, and internal commercial aspects that regulated the navigation and ports on the Romanian Danube and on the Black Sea.

In order to comply with the main objective of the paper, the core of this chapter is, by direct approach to the archive documents, the attestation of the presence of Romanian and foreign shipping companies in the Romanian river and maritime ports. Their role in the national economy with references to companies from Austria, Hungary, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and even Brazil, as well as the action developed by the Romanian state in asserting its sovereign right over the control of their activity in Romanian waters, in order to serve the Romanian national interests.

5. Conclusions

This paper is set to analyse the Danube's role as the main economic and geopolitical ax of the connections between Romania and the world, connections developed through the river and maritime shipping companies that operated in Romanian waters. At the same time, its purpose was also to systemically present the actions that the Romanian state took in order to defend its sovereign rights and its national interests in relation with foreign companies, the ways in which these shipping companies used different European actors as leverages of geopolitical and economic influence upon the Romanian state, but also the way in which the interests of the Romanian shipping companies were supported in other countries where they had river and maritime transport operations.

The specific objective of this paper is to identify and follow in its topic and chronological approach the organization and evolution of the activities of the river and maritime shipping companies on the Lower Danube and in the Black Sea, as well as to analyse their crucial role in the development of Romanian ports. Additionally, the diplomatic actions carried out by the relevant ministry to promote Romania's economic interests were highlighted in their competition with the related shipping entities and the way in which the Romanian state managed its relations with these foreign companies after NFR and SMR national companies were established.

In the first part, the paper followed the deep transformations in the relation between the Romanian principalities and the foreign shipping companies. Therefore, in the period when the principalities and Romania were under the Ottoman suzerainty regime, the governors' position towards

international navigation on the Maritime Danube was adapted depending on the firm attitude adopted in the matter by the great powers. The characteristics of that period were the international treaties and regulations through which the interested great powers imposed their will on the international status and navigation regulation on the Danube. The intense activity of foreign shipping companies on the Lower Danube and the increasing presence of diplomatic and consular representations of European powers in Romanian port towns are indicators of the growing economic potential of the Romanian internal market and also of the powers' geopolitical and military interest towards the Romanian space. After the union of the principalities, modern Romania began introducing some national regulations in naval transport and in its ports meant to defend its own political and economic interests and at the same time to consolidate the legislation applicable to the Romanian space with the one existing in the other European countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also played a decisive institutional role in this context. It got itself directly involved in coordinating the navigation and also in the actions of supporting the national interest in this field. Briefly, the research of this period (1830-1878) leads to the conclusion that the international regime of the Danube and the liberalization of trade on the Lower Danube, after 1829, generated a real boom in the European trade circuits and implicitly in the navigation on the Danube and the Black Sea.

Starting with the 1830s, the Romanian ports are the subject of increasing interest from Austrians, French, and Russians, especially in the passenger transport segment. Until the 1870s, the interest of shipping companies gradually extends towards freight transport with the discovery of the economic potential of the Danube region and the need to integrate it into the global economic routes. Between 1830-1870, the largest presence in the Danube navigation was by the Austrian companies DDSG and Lloyd, followed by the French Messageries Maritimes, and by the Russian Shipping Society. Also, the presence of British and Greek companies cannot be ignored for that time period, and also a French-Serbian initiative. At the same time, it could be determined that navigation in this period created means of building new bridges of knowledge and exploration of European realities in the context of organizing trips and cruises (tourist navigation).

This research emphasized the fact that all the shipping companies which contested their supremacy on the Danube and in the Black Sea after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829) benefited from sustained support from the

countries of origin. They repeatedly provided them with massive subsidies, especially in the field of postal transport or of certain categories of goods which are absolutely necessary for the markets in those countries.

The second period of interest followed the way in which the independent Romanian state acted after 1878 to eliminate the privileges owned by foreign shipping companies that affected the national economy and the sovereign will of the state to exercise its rights within its national territory. Gaining state independence had to be necessarily followed by gaining economic independence and the means by which this strategic goal could be achieved was navigation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the main institutional leverages that contributed to supporting Romania's economic interests regarding navigation and maintained a close relation with representatives of foreign shipping companies that operated in Romanian ports, as well as with state authorities where Romania had diplomatic and consular representation. In the mentioned period there are strong efforts from the authorities in Bucharest for implementing some legal and administrative measures regarding the establishment of institutions meant to improve navigation activities. Therefore, on March 24th, 1879, "*Regulamentul poliției porturilor și malurilor dunărene ale României*" (*Regulation of the police of the Danube ports and banks of Romania*) was published; in 1887, "*Legea de organizare a porturilor românești*" (*The law on the organization of Romanian ports*) and "*Codul Comercial și Maritim*" (*Commercial and Maritime Code*) appear; in 1906, "*Regulamentul serviciului de bord*" (*Onboard service regulation*) is adopted; in 1907, "*Legea pentru organizarea Marinei Comerciale*" (*Law for the organization of the Merchant Navy*) is issued and the next year, "*Legea privind înființarea Direcției Generale a Porturilor și Căilor de Comunicație pe Apă - PCA*" (*Law on the establishment of the General Directorate of Ports and Waterways*) institution meant to coordinate under one administration all the services of interest for ports and navigation.

At the same time, the Romanian state also acted to impose its territorial rights in Danube ports which, with the development of navigation activities, it got overcrowded (especially the ports of Galați and Brăila). The multiplication of navigation activities in the Danube ports implicitly led to an increase in the number of foreign shipping companies and agents in Romania. The agencies of the foreign shipping companies operated as real diplomatic representations, their only attribute that was missing, was diplomatic immunity. In terms of the procedure, the Romanian authorities were informed about the agents of shipping companies, requiring prior

approval from them. This is similar to the notification of newly arrived diplomats in the state that accredits them. With similarities regarding the activity of diplomats, it can be noted that the agents of the shipping companies could relate with any institution of the Romania state in matters related to the activity of the company that they represented. The correspondence that they had with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a special character and the links with the diplomatic mission of the countries of origin from which the companies came, was a normal practice.

The fast development of the navigation activities until the start of the First World War was favored by two important factors: granting benefits and facilities to foreign shipping companies both by the member states and by the ECD (especially to those which declared themselves as “postal company”) and initiating supported measures for the development of port infrastructure. Regarding the shipping companies that operated in the Danube ports, compared to the previous period, it has obviously diversified. Therefore, besides Austrian, French, and Russian actors who had a large volume of profile activities, British, German, Italian, Hungarian, Turkish, and Greek companies appeared.

The profile market regarding navigation became more and more dynamic and competitive. From this perspective, the interesting part of the Romanian navigation was the fact that NFR and SMR became important pioneers of this market and contributed significantly to support Romania’s economic interests. Under institutional aspect, it can be noticed that for this period, the Romanian state protected, sometimes “vehemently”, the national rights and interests regarding navigation, especially for “cabotage”. The national picture of navigation services should also include the efforts of private entities to start projects in this field and to complete the institutional parts of NFR and SMR (see the establishment of the “Dunărea” company in 1910 and SRD in 1914). And the neighbouring states like Bulgaria and Serbia tried in the years leading up to the First World War to define their own national interests regarding navigation.

The general conclusion of the period 1878-1918 indicated the fact that the presence of foreign and Romanian shipping companies on the Lower Danube and on the river maritime sector was marked by a spectacular momentum favored by several factors. Among these are: the technological development of steam navigation and its increase in the river and maritime transports; land developments at Sulina disposed by the ECD and by the Romanian state on the navigable channel of the river, especially those in the area of the Iron Gates; modernising the main Danube ports and

Constanța port, and also increasing the volume of trading activities with various goods, especially grains.

The interwar period brought new valences for the Danube navigation, given primarily by the new political realities, namely the emergence of nation-states and the disappearance of empires. The first consequence of the appearance of national states was the multiplying number of actors in the field of navigation. Similar to the previous period, there are new measures to improve navigation at national level from a legal, administrative, and also institutional point of view. The first years of the interwar period were marked by both the post-war efforts to restore the economy and the disputes over the claim of means of navigation arisen from the negotiations of “victorious states – defeated states”. After 1919, the leaders of shipping companies were the Austrians and Hungarians who benefited from a substantial contribution of British capital. These were followed by societies that operated under German, Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, Romanian, Greek, French, and Dutch flags. The interwar period highlights the efforts of many riparian states to consolidate their interest regarding navigation (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, etc.).

In the entire interwar period, Serviciul Maritim Român competed successfully against foreign shipping companies. At one point, SMR ships were in third place in the top of ships that docked in Istanbul, after the Italian and French ones, passing the British ones. For the number of passengers transported by Serviciul Maritim Român, this was in second place in the top of foreign companies, being overtaken only by the shipping company Lloyd Triestino.

In the interwar period, although navigation was no longer subordinated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, SMR kept an “organic” connection with the diplomatic and consular representations of Romania in specific matters related to special assistance, supporting navigation activities with an impact on trade dynamics or providing support in clarifying financial and administrative issues.

This research demonstrates abundantly that the development of the Romanian economy and its connection to the global economy was strongly influenced by the presence of foreign and also national shipping companies in the Danube and Pontic ports of Romania.

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