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## The Great Romanian Peasant Revolt of 1907 Reflected in the British Press

Ștefan-Cătălin Trofin<sup>a\*</sup>

\* Corresponding author: *Ștefan-Cătălin Trofin, trofincatalin@yahoo.com*

*“PhD. Candidate, „Al. I. Cuza” University, Iași, Romania, trofincatalin@yahoo.com*

### Abstract

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Erupted on the background of ample domestic unrest, The Great Romanian Peasant Revolt of 1907 had benefited increased attention from the European chancelleries and press, due to the destructions caused and the brutality that was stifled by the Romanian authorities. The British diplomacy and the British press have expressed a keen interest in its development especially due to the ample campaign orchestrated by the Jewish organizations in London, which identified the uprising, started in Moldova and then extended across the country, as a broad anti-Semitic movement. But detailed analysis of the situation, the government statements and the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Minister of Great Britain in Bucharest reports revealed that the background of the uprising was not anti-Semitism (even though there were many Jewish properties destroyed) but provided by the poor condition of Romanian peasant.

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**Keywords:** Romania; Great Britain; British press; international relations; Jewish organizations; discrimination.

## 1. Introduction

The Great Revolt of 1907 was one of the most publicized events in Romanian history. It became the subject of narratives, novels, movies, and, not least, a topic brought into question with predilection by the communist propaganda. But even today, there are things occulted to the historical knowledge and therefore any demarche that brings new information about this complex historical event it's very welcome. So, we decided to realize a radiography of the British press during the Great Peasants Revolt of 1907, to observe which was the impact of the rebellion on a Great Powers, geographically situated far from Romania and with limited interests in the area.

Not having great interests in Romanian, except economic and commercial (Ardeleanu, 2008, pp. 243-276), the British authorities and, implicitly, the British media, watched with detachment and analyzed selflessly the events in this country. Of course, not infrequently, there could be identified personal sympathies or antipathies on specific situations or people in Romania, but this was normal, being o part of the charm of press analysis.

We assume that the interest of the British press in the Romanian peasant revolt of 1907 came from its interest for the political situation of the South-eastern Europe, and of course, anything that could affect the security of the Great Powers in the region - Russia and Austria-Hungary. The British diplomacy still remained focused on the preservation of the Balkans *status-quo*, trying to prevent the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, desired by the neighboring empires and the Balkan nations (Bulz, 2003, pp. 5-7).

Romania had been shaken, in the recent years, by some violent outbursts (Platon, 2003, p. 99), and the *Foreign Office* was not at all insensitive about what happened in a country situated at the confluence of two great rival empires gnawed by internal problems, especially as, since the beginning of the uprising, there were rumors that the disorders could spread beyond the borders, in the neighboring states (*Manchester Courier*, 1907, April 3). At that time Austria-Hungary was a member of a politico-military alliance, hostile to Great Britain, and Russia was in advanced negotiations with the insular Power to conclude a political agreement.

Another aspect that kept the attention of the British press was the alleged anti-Semitic character of the revolt. *The Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA Annual Report, 1907, pp. 12-13)* and *The Board of Deputies of British Jews* were very active at that time in condemning the anti-Semitic politic promoted by the Romanian Government, accused of failing to comply the provisions of the Congress of Berlin in 1878, which stated the mass emancipation of the Jews (Iancu, 1998, p.43). *The Jewish Chronicle* was also very vocal on criticizing the Romanian authorities for their behavior regarding the Mosaic community (1907, March 22).

## 2. Method

As it emerged from the ranks above, the main goal of this research is to analyses the perception of the British press on the Great Peasant Revolt of 1907. For this purpose, we propose to cover a substantial number of articles in the British newspapers of that period and to observe which was the general opinion of the press about the causes of the uprising, the political, economic and social

development of the country, and the brutal intervention of the authorities to remedy the situation. We also intend to analyze the reports concerning anti-Semitic manifestations during the events and see if the character of the revolt was anti-Semitic, or if the anti-Semitic manifestations played only a secondary, occasional and isolated role during the events of 1907.

To achieve the proposed objectives, we will use the observation method, the narrative method, the historical method, the contextual analysis method and comparative critical method.

### **3. Review of Literature**

A singular but broad account on the Great Peasant Revolt of 1907 that appeared in British newspapers was made by Augustin Deac (1967, pp. 200-222). The collection of articles analyzed by the Romanian historian - many of them selected from *The Times* and *The Morning Post* - it allows us to decipher many of the causes of the revolt of 1907, but taking into account the political imperatives of those times, their approach it is highly politicized. The author assumed, in a socialist manner, that the opinions advocated by the British press were conditioned by the Britain's capitalist interest in the stability of the Romanian bourgeois society and the fear of a revolutionary action that could produce the collapse of the Romanian political system.

Besides the different approach, in this article we propose a much wider range of press reports from journals throughout the United Kingdom, that can reveal how there were perceived the events in Romania by the English, Welsh, Scots and Irish journalists.

### **4. The background of the events**

The revolt began on 8 / 21 February 1907 in the village of Flămânzi, Botoșani, on the huge estate of Prince Sturdza. The owner had leased his lands to the Austrian-Jewish family of Fischer after a competitive tender in summer 1906 between the Fischer Trust, the Juster Trust, and the Popular Bank of Romania (Matikainen, 2006, p. 137). The agreement between Sturdza and the Fischers played a critical role in the background of the revolt. To gain the peasants support the Fischers promised, in turn, easy terms for the leasing contracts. When Mochi Fischer did not keep his promise, the revolt broke out (Iorga, 1909, p.11).

First, the disturbances concentrated on Northern Moldavia, but later, in early March, spread to the whole of Moldavia. The peasants demanded more favorable agricultural contracts and the right to rent land through co-operative organizations. In February, the peasants were not very violent. The attacks were predominantly directed towards Jewish leaseholders (*arendași*) and their properties. But in mid-March, when the revolt was spreading across the country, the rebels also embarked on more violent, even deadly, actions. They attacked Jewish, foreign Christian, and Romanian leaseholders, as well as landowners. And when the troops arrived, they attacked the soldiers (Matikainen, 2006, p. 138).

Feeling helpless in front of the violent events in the country the weak Conservative government of Gh. Gr. Cantacuzino was forced to resign on 12 / 25 March. The new Liberal government of Dimitrie A. Sturdza suppressed the revolt in a violent manner, killing more than 10,000 peasants (Matikainen, 2006, p. 138).

## 5. British media perception of the uprising in Romania

The first mentions about the uprising of 1907 had appeared in the British press on 20<sup>th</sup> March, referring to the anti-Semitic character of the movement: „Two thousand peasants have entered the town of Botosani, and are plundering the large Jewish quarter” (1907, March 20, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, p.4). The next day, *Leeds Mercury* had dedicated a larger space for the uprising in Romania, also insisting on the anti-Semitic character of the movement: „The agrarian anti-Semitic riots in Northern Roumania have assumed alarming proportions. (...) Bands, sometimes 2.000 strong, led by students, pillage and burn all the Jewish houses, and arrange pogroms on the Russian model. Not even the children are spared. Their aim is to drive all the Jews out of the country. The number of Jewish fugitives in Bukovina exceeds 4000” (1907, March 21, p. 5).

The large number of peasants participating in the insurrection (40,000, according to information taken from *Allgemeine Zeitung*) had determined the reaction of King Charles I to supplement the troops. „All the Moldavian districts are in a state of anarchy, and as the troops are insufficient to quell the revolt, King Charles has ordered the mobilization of the Fourth Army Corps. (...) the peasants yesterday stormed the town of Pacurari, and that 30.000 people are prepared to storm Jassy” (1907, March 21, *Leeds Mercury*, p. 5).

On Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, two articles entitled „Riots in Romania”, were mentioning about the uprising in northern Moldavia, without adding new additional information (1907, March 22, *Luton Times and Advertiser*, p.2). *Gloucester Citizen* (1907, March 22, p. 6) and *Sheffield Independent* (1907, March 22, p. 4), also, did not brought new information about the events in Moldova.

Starting with March 23<sup>rd</sup> the newspapers accounts had become more consistent. It was already understood that the causes of the rebellion were much deeper, and that the peasants’ hatred was directed against a political system, deeply corrupt and unable to achieve an equitable agrarian reform, not against Jews: „The situation in Roumania is going from bad to worse. The peasant rioting, hitherto directed against the Jews, is becoming general in its character, and it has been found necessary to employ troops for the protection of the railway traffic. A crowd of peasants yesterday held up a train near Dangeni, and robbed the passengers indiscriminately” (1907, March 23, *Dundee Courier*, p.5). *Gloucestershire Echo* had published a statement of the Romanian Minister of Finance, given to the Viennese journal, *Neue Freie Presse*, asserting that "the present movement is not only anti-Semitic but agrarian and anarchist in character" (1907, March 23, p.4). Other publications had also insisted that the character of the rising was strictly agrarian: „The movement is wholly agrarian and is not Anti-Semitic” noted the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (1907, March 23, p. 7).

The majority of the British press alleged that the military repression was violent, but justified by the roughness of the insurgents: „At Blagesti, in the District of Bacau, a serious encounter has occurred. The troops, being, killed fourteen peasants. (...) Botosani is no longer the center of the agrarian movement, which has now spread all over Moldavia. The movement is wholly agrarian and not anti-Semitic, a large majority of the farmers and shopkeepers of Moldavia being Jews. The latter have naturally suffered more than other nationalities” (1907, March 23, *Dundee Courier*, p.4). Other newspapers also mentioned the large number of dead and wounded: „Fourteen peasants have been killed in a collision with the troops at Blagesti. The district of Focsani is in revolt, and the village of

Sulita has been destroyed" (1907, March 23, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, p.4). *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* noted that "the number of peasant killed in the district of Vaslui yesterday was twenty, and a great number were wounded" (1907, March 23, p. 7), and *Western Times* stated that „troops being attacked (...) they fired, killing fourteen peasants" (1907, March 23, p.4).

On 25<sup>th</sup> March the British press announced that the peasant revolt was spreading south: „The agrarian movement appears to be spreading to Wallachia. (...) The movement is now spreading southward. The peasants in the Braila and Razin districts, armed with cudgels, are threatening the landed proprietors, demanding an amelioration of the condition of work" (1907, March 25, *Aberdeen Journal*, p. 5).

Also with the spread of violence in the south of Romania, there were reiterated the accusations of anti-Semitism against the insurgent peasants: „A Bucharest message states that many Jews were maltreated in the anti-Semitic disturbances at Alexandria, Walachia, and the child of rabbi was maimed for life. The Jews' dwellings were sacked and demolished" (1907, March 25, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, p. 4). We quote that, like in the previous case, the information's regarding the anti-Semitic character of the peasant rising, came mostly from Austro-Hungarian sources, especially from Viennese journal *Neue Freie Presse*.

We notice, however, that in parallel with the journals that had mention, with predilection, the anti-Semitism as the main cause of the riot, there were realistic points of view, based on an in-depth analysis of the events and their causes, not just rumors, misinformation or surface analysis. Thereby, *Aberdeen Journal* alleged that the main cause of the revolt was the inequity of land distribution, and the insufficient land to peasants: „A serious peasant rising has broken out in Moldavia. (...) It is partly anti-Semitic, but is also very largely agrarian, and it now threatens to become anarchistic or purely destructive. The causes are complicated. In the first place, many peasant's families are without land, and subsist by working as agricultural laborers and by renting small plots, (...) but wages are low and the rents high, and their condition is described as poverty-stricken" (1907, March 25, p. 4).

Another cause identified by the author of the article comes from the involvement of intermediaries that were Jews in their vast majority, who also take an important commission from the peasant labor. „In the next place, the peasant families that have land now find themselves tenants of Jewish and other speculators, who have taken the land off hands of the Boyars or aristocratic proprietors; and the peasantry are beginning to find out that the change of landlord is not at all to their advantage. The speculative competition has put up the price of land, and consequently raised rents; and the speculators have combined and formed trusts, which it is needless to say are much more exacting than the old owners" (1907, March 25, p. 4).

So, the attacks were not directed against Jews but, against the intercessor (*arendas*), who could be a Jew, but also a Christian. „What began with a racial and commercial animosity and attacks on the Jews is now developing into a general rising against the landed proprietors, accompanied by a demand for division of the land among the peasants" (1907, March 25, p. 4).

Another press article that examines in its complexity the causes of the Romanian peasant revolt was published in *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* under the suggestive title, *The Causes of the Roumanian Peasant Revolt*. The article asserted that „the main causes of the revolt, contrary to current

belief outside Roumania, are the conditions under which the peasants are compelled to live. Just over 81 per cent of the inhabitants of Roumania are peasants who from the 17th century down to 40 years ago were serfs. Forty years ago various reforms were initiated, with the result that today there are now 900.000 peasant families owning each a small farm. On the other hand, there are 8.000 large landed proprietors who between them own one-fifth of the cultivated land" (1907, March 25, p. 8).

So, the current state of the Romanian peasant was heavier than 40 years ago, when he was in serfdom: „Owing to lack of intelligence (95 per cent. of the peasants are illiterate) and want of skill, the peasant farmer cannot make enough out of his little holding to support his family, and so he hires out to work for the large landowners or leases land from them at exorbitant rents, which he is soon unable to pay except in the labor of himself and family. He is, in fact, so entirely in the power of the large landowners that he has become a serf once more. The Government, well knowing what is the root of the trouble, is about to bring a bill in Parliament regulating the leasing of land to peasants" (1907, March 25, p. 8).

The injustice climate and heavy conditions that the Romanian peasants lived in, were also described in the pages of *London Daily News*: „The peasant is to all intents and purposes a serf. His landlord treats him as a beast of burden; the Government, as a beast to be shorn and fleeced. Primitive is no word for the condition of the peasant as regards education, food, lodging, or political status. He lives on clod *mamaliga* (a kind of maize cake), and occasionally a little rotten cheese made from sheep's milk. Work as hard as he will, he can only just manage to eke out an existence. He must work early and late for his landlord in return for the privilege of living in a wretched hovel and getting a little seed to plant in the allotment allowed him by the lords of the soil. His poverty is extreme. The hovel in which he lives is often underground. The sanitary and moral conditions are too shocking for description. Frequently whole families have not a change clothes between them all. In recent years their misery, in many instances, has been intensified by a terrible illness resembling sleeping sickness, generated by the bad corn given as payment in kind by some of the landowners" (1907, March 27, p. 6).

Further on, the author of the article insists on the inequity and generalized corruption in the Romanian politics: „Do you wonder that the peoples, driven by the pangs of hunger, have risen against those who batten on them? The townsman wields all the political power; the peasant has practically none. In many towns 30 or 40 voters return a member to the Upper and the Lower House. But it takes 8.000 peasants votes to return one member, and then only to the Lower House. Hence all the Government money is spent in beautifying the towns, while the country is neglected" (1907, March 27, p. 6).

On the alleged anti-Semitic character of the revolt, and on the alleged hatred directed against Jews from the Romanian peasants, the British journalist was expressing trenchant: „No Jew is allowed to live in the villages (...) and the peasant has no quarrel with him. He rather sympathizes with the Jew". The author believes that more alike, the Government was manifesting hostility about the Jewish population: „The position of the Jews is terrible in the extreme. The Government describes them as "aliens not subject to any alien power", but they are, of course, compelled to pay taxes and serve in the army. They have no votes; they cannot be chemists, lawyers, or contractors. They cannot sell matches, or tobacco, or be publicans. And when a short while back they tried to present a petition to the

Government, they were told that no petition could be received from foreigners. Many of the signatories were Roumanians by birth and had served in the army. They are not allowed to hold meetings to discuss their grievances, and their children are excluded from the schools of the State for which they pay” (1907, March 27, p. 6).

*Dundee Courier* had also denied the accusations of anti-Semitism hovering over the rebellion, considering that the peasants’ hatred was directed against the Trusts and the lessees: „The peasant’s movement in Northern Moldavia has again raised the agrarian question in Roumania. The question of the Trusts in Moldavia is not exactly a *Jewish question*, but an economic one. This Trust is forming, by the monopoly of land and the extraordinary increase of the rents, an economic danger to the country. Today the Trust possesses 69 properties, having an arable surface of 318.800 acres, and for which they are paying an annual rent of 3.441.343 francs. This property includes within its area 79 rural communes (villages). The Government has been induced to lease to the Trust a domain in the district of Ialomitza, 33.148 acres of arable land, for only 451 francs per annum. The School Board likewise leased to them 27.000 acres for 174,584 francs per annum, and some insurance companies holding land properties leased them 7972 acres of workable land for 92.233 francs per year” (1907, March 27, p. 5).

Therefore, as the author continues, the Trusts and the leaseholders power and influence was a threat not only for the peasants but also for the state security itself: „It will be seen from these figures that the Trust is renting an area of 3.188.000 acres today at the rate of 10 1/2 francs per acre, which they re-lease to the peasants at 20 and 30 francs an acre. Moreover, they re-lease 80 per cent. of the surface of land held by them, and only work 20 per cent. of it themselves. These facts show that the Trust exists, and that it is very dangerous to the economic development of the country. The peasant’s movement ought therefore not to be regarded as an anti-Jewish one, and the measures that the Government will be obliged to take ought not to be considered as directed against the Jews, their sole object being to secure the economic independence of the country” (1907, March 27, p. 5).

A similar reasoning was also presented on *Aberdeen Journal*, in the article „The Rising in Roumania. The Agrarian Question” (1907, March 26, p. 4).

The rumors about the anti-Semitic character of the revolt were consistently denied also by the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Bucharest, Sir William Conyngham Greene. „The peasant rising is not directed especially against the Jews, nor is in any way connected with religion; but there has certainly been great destruction of Jewish property. The movement is aimed at the whole class of land-owners, and is the outcome of the faulty land system of Roumania. It is particularly directed against the Land Trusts, by which large tracts of land have been acquired and rented to the peasants at exorbitant rents. The Jews hold the more important of these Trusts, and hence the present anti-Semitic agitation” asserted Green, in response to the instructions of his superior, Sir Edward Grey (F.O. 371/317/249, 1907, March 24). In the accounts that followed Conyngham Greene continued to deny the anti-Semitic character of the uprising: „This is evident, as the peasants in this province (Wallachia) are well-to-do, and there are no land trusts and very few Jews. This last fact goes to prove that the movement is not anti-Jewish in its origin, but rather Socialist and revolutionary” (F.O. 371/317/249, 1907, March 25).

The meeting he had with King Charles has removed even the last doubts about the character of the rebellion and convinced him that the accusations of anti-Semitism that had hovered over him and his Government were part of a press campaign orchestrated from abroad: „King Charles went on to say that the campaign which is now being waged against Roumania by the principal Jewish Associations in European capitals was particularly unfair and obnoxious at the present moment (...). The King spoke with very unusual warmth on this subject, and was evidently greatly nettled at the attitude of the Jewish organs, and especially of the *Neue Freie Presse*, which he named” (F.O. 371/317/249, 1907, March 29).

The alarming evolution of the events, the spreading of the insurrection in the South of Romania, the violence and the extent of the damages caused by the peasants, drew a violent response from the law enforcement, leading to troops firing cannons into the rebelled crowd. „The peasant rising in Roumania has attained the proportions of a civil war. Large portions of the disaffected district are quite without troops, and in these the peasants have brought about a state of anarchy similar to that during the French Revolution. Mansions have been wrecked, farms pillaged and burned, and the landowners are fleeing for their lives” (1907, March 29, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, p. 2). Similar statements were made in the pages of *London Daily News*: „The insurrection which began nearly a month ago in the extreme North of Moldavia has not only spread very widely, but has in some respects changed its character and methods. A state of siege is now proclaimed in the capital, and there have been encounters with the peasants at no great distance from Bucharest of so serious a character that the soldiers were obliged to bring their artillery into action” (1907, March 29, p. 4).

Using of field guns against the peasants caused numerous casualties: „The troops have everywhere acted with the greatest vigor, and a large number of peasants have been killed and wounded. Some roving bands in the district of Teleorman have been surrounded. In Vlascha the marauding peasants were yesterday also brought to bay. On being summoned to disperse they fired on the troops, who replied by three rounds from a field gun, killing seventy peasants and wounding some two hundred” (1907, March 29, *Dublin Daily Express*, p.5).

Grouped into large bands, the peasants courageously attacked the troops, but during the confrontation, the military training of the soldiers and the artillery had made the difference, the army decimating the insurgents: „An army of peasants numbering fully six thousand, (...) attacked a considerable body of troops under Major Orescheanu. (...) The troops were speedily reinforced by six companies of infantry, two squadron of cavalry, and a battery of artillery, and a fierce battle took place, lasting for some hours. The peasants fought with the utmost ferocity, but they were no match for the trained troops, and when the fighting ceased it was discovered that the peasant’s casualties numbered fully six hundred killed and four hundred wounded” (1907, March 30, *London Daily News*, p. 5).

The rapidity that the uprising spread throughout the country have fueled rumors asserting that the movement was the work of agitators from Russia, rumors that Conyngham Green also tend to believe (F.O. 371/317/249, 1907, March 24). „It is suspected that the societies and organizations which have carried out the pogroms across the Russian frontier have been at work in inflaming the passions for destruction among the Roumanian peasants. (...) The men who organize the massacres in Russia have great opportunity in Roumania where the Jewish question is always acute” (1907, March 29, *London*



*Daily News*, p. 4). *Western Daily Press* had also presented this theory, on 29<sup>th</sup> March edition: „The assertion now is that the revolt is very largely anarchical, and that a large number of political extremist have drifted over the Russian frontier into Roumania. The more violent members of the anarchical faction are prompted by motives which no reasonable critic can understand” (1907, March 29, p. 5).

Although they had not totally excluded the possible involvement of Russian anarchists, the Romanian authorities thought that the triggers of the revolt were internal, coming from the imperfect distribution of land. Therefore, they decided to propose a series of measures designed to improve the living conditions of peasants: „King Charles and his Government are not wholly disposed to attribute the rising to anarchical influence. They incline rather to the belief that the discontent is indigenous, and that it has been fomented by the imperfect land system which is operative in Roumania. (...) Acting on this assumption, the King and his advisers have lost no time in promising the enforcement of ameliorative measures. These promises embrace the amendment of the land laws, the remission of taxation on the peasantry, the creation of facilities for the borrowing of money, and many other things, all tending towards the same end. If these measures are made operative, and the condition of the country does not improve, then the anarchical theory will have to be much more closely examined, so that adequate action may be taken against it” (1907, March 29, p. 5).

Subsequently, the Romanian authorities had identified and arrested former sailors from the battleship *Potemkin*, who participated in the violent events: „The authorities here have discovered that several of the former crew of the Russian battleship *Potemkin*, who were so hospitably received in Roumania, have joined the Socialist clubs and have participated in the agitation. Several have been arrested” (1907, April 3, *Manchester Courier*, p. 7).

The overwhelming number of soldiers, their superior training and the heavy weapons used during confrontations with the insurgents led to the restrained of the rebellion. So, in the first days of April it could be said that the uprising was suppressed. There were only few localities where the peasants' bands still exhibited violent behavior, but this state of affairs was to end soon. „The disturbances in Roumania are now confined to a comparatively small section of the country, but the work of repressing the revolt, though rendered much easier by this circumstance, is being pursued with increased ferocity. The troops are not hesitating to use shrapnel; several villages have been destroyed by artillery fire, and the loss of life among the peasants is stated to be very large. The total number of troops now concentrated throughout the country is 120.000”, stated the *Lancashire Evening Post*, on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Encouraging news about the appeasement of the rebellion was also presented in the pages of *Gloucester Citizen*: „Monday's official report declares that intelligence received from all parts of Roumania indicates that general tranquility is being restored. Steps are being taken to deal with the bands of marauding peasants who, however, are now said to be abstaining from pillage and acts of incendiarism. The violent phase of the movement, the official statement adds, may be considered over” (1907, April 2, p. 5).

*Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* chooses a suggestive title for the first of April article – „Peace in Roumania”. In the manner of his colleagues from the British press, the author states that the vigorous intervention of the army had discouraged the peasants, and finally bringing the peace. „By ruthless repression, involving heavy loss of life, the Roumanian uprising has been

practically suppressed. (...) According to official reports issued yesterday in the capital, the revolt has been stamped out at all points, and troops are pursuing the bodies of rebels still in the field. (...) No fresh rioting has occurred anywhere. (...) The troops are now following up the bands of plunders, who it is declared will shortly be captured. Many of the ringleaders have already been arrested, and the others are being actively pursued. (...) The situation throughout Roumania has greatly improved” (1907, April 1, p. 5).

The repression of the Great Romanian Revolt did not fade the spark of the peasant agitations, which stood ready to burst beyond the western border of Romania, in Austria-Hungary. The natural reaction of governments in the neighboring countries was to increase the number of troops concentrated on the Romanian borders, to prevent insurgents’ penetration. „Austrian, Russian, Serbian, and Bulgarian troops are concentrated at different points on the Roumanian frontiers, and the Roumanian Government has been informed by the diplomatic representatives of the countries concerned that, as the regions bordering on Roumania are inhabited by large numbers of Roumanians, troops have been concentrated for the purpose of preventing the possible extension of the peasant disturbances across the frontier” (1907, April 3, p. 7).

Austro-Hungary, a country comprising over three million Romanians within its borders, was the most interested in a fast rebellion suppress, and it was willing to use all its influence and even to put great pressure on the authorities in Bucharest to eliminate the danger of agitations spreading. „It is rumored that Austria has given intimation to the Roumanian Government to the effect that it must repress the rebellion within five days, failing which Franz Joseph will deem it his duty to send an army corps into Moldavia. Some such threat of intervention has probably influenced the Government to employ cannon in an attempt to crush the rebels”, stated both *Dundee Courier* and *London Daily News* on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April editions.

However, not infrequently, the news coming from the neighboring country has proved to be false. Such is the case of one information from the previous evening, denied the next day: „The evening newspapers report that the Roumanian unrest has spread to Hungarian territory, and that at the request of the frontier authorities the gendarmerie has been reinforced and the Twelfth Army Corps mobilized. It is, however, semi-officially declared on good authority that the report is an invention” (1907, April 3, *Manchester Courier*, p. 7).

In the next days the British newspapers have reported isolated battles between soldiers and bands of armed peasants, and the pacification of new areas in the country (1907, April 5, *The Scotsman* p. 8). Also many articles were focused on rebellion aftermath, providing statistics on the dead, wounded and enormous damages (1907, April 3, *Penny Illustrated Paper*, p. 13). *Manchester Courier* and *Lancashire General Advertiser*, for example, presented an interview with Take Ionesco, Minister of Finance in the late Conservative Cabinet, which furnished interesting information regarding the damages done in the agrarian disturbances: „It was, he said, difficult to make an accurate estimate, but he thought that, roughly, damage to the amount of fifty millions of francs had been done by pillaging, while property to the value of twenty million francs had been destroyed by incendiaryism” (1907, April 5, p. 7). The Romanian Minister was „perfectly certain” that foreigners were concerned in the peasant movement, and that their „sole object” object was the destruction of property of every kind.

But, apart from the foreign agitators, it seems that during the revolt had acted a secret society that militated for the emancipation of the peasants, and one of her main figures was the son of former Prime Minister, Mihail Kogălniceanu. The news, published in *Aberdeen Journal*, on 20 of April, was taken from *The Times*: „Investigations carried out by the authorities here have resulted in the discovery of a secret society, which apparently possesses widespread ramifications throughout the country. The watchword of the society is *The emancipation of the peasants* and circulars embodying its program demand the distribution of land, universal suffrage, a reduction of the term of military service, a diminution of the land tax, and other reforms. Considerable sensation has been caused by the arrest of M. Kogalniceanu, the son of a former Minister. He is imprisoned on a charge of provoking sedition”.

Some British newspapers had mentioned the existence of another secret society, this one anti-Semitic in character: „The judicial authorities, in searching for the instigators of the recent disturbances, discovered the existence of a secret anti-Jewish Society, the members of which include a large number of well-known professionals and journalists. The objects of the society appear to be similar to those of the Peasants Association, and all members are sworn to secrecy” (1907, April 22, *Portsmouth Evening News*, p. 8).

An issue that has constantly preoccupied the British authorities and the *Fleet Street* was the safety of their fellow citizens in Romania and the protection of British property and capitals from the violent rebellion. The British concern in the safety of their economic and commercial interests had determined the praising assessments for the King and his Government, which intervened vigorously in repressing the revolt. King Charles I was considered a factor of equilibrium, stability and progress for his country, which becomes in the last years of his reign as a good example for the young Balkan states. „The King, then Prince Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (...) was elected Prince of Roumania in 1866. Everyone, including Bismarck, anticipated disaster. (...) But Prince Charles showed himself a man. He stayed, and modern Roumania in the result. (...) King Charles has built up a patriotic army of the first class, well-armed and equipped, and today he has at his command, ready to play a decisive part in history of Europe, some half a million men. He has inaugurated and carried out great national works, regenerated the inchoate finances of the country, inspired and supported an educational system, encouraged railway development, and cherished agriculture so effectively that Roumania is now one of the principal grain-exporting countries of the world. With all this progress it is perhaps, a little difficult to understand the present rising”, stated the *Derry Journal* on 03 April edition.

Other laudatory assessments occurred the same day, in *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser*: „Since the present King of Roumania was elected Hereditary Prince, in 1866 (he was proclaimed King in 1881) he and his family have never ceased to work for their people. King Charles has been a model ruler, and Queen Carmen Sylvas's sympathy for her subjects is proverbial. The causes of the revolt do not lie with the Royal Family, but with the aristocratic landholders of the country, who for some time past have been letting their properties to speculative tenants, chiefly Jews” (1907, April 3, p. 1).

It is possible that these laudatory articles on King Carol I, to have occurred as a reaction to the defamatory press campaign waged against him, by some publications from European capitals, particularly those in Vienna. „It is indeed most painful to His Majesty to see how the press in general, but more particularly that of Vienna, exaggerates and distorts the nature and extent of the disorders

which have taken place in Roumania. These have in no way partaken of the anti-Semitic character attributed to them”, stated the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, (1907, April 8, p. 4). In the same day *Dublin Daily Express* (p. 4) and *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* (p.6.) denied the rumors that the King's health was worsening following the events of last month: „The King of Roumania, despite rumors to the contrary, enjoys good health, and continues to take an active part in the conduct of affairs”. In the next days there were also disprove rumors of an anti-dynastic plot, also coming from the Austro-Hungarian press: „The news of a plot against the dynasty and the Government that some Vienna newspaper alleges to have been discovered are totally devoid of foundation” (1907, April 9, *The Scotsman*, p.7).

After the repression of the uprising, followed a very difficult period in which the government had to commit to implementation of reforms, for preventing the outbreak of a new rebellion, and to compensate those harmed and prejudiced by the uprising. But dealing with those two major goals was far more difficult than it seems: „Another difficulty is now arising with the large landowners. The Government's proclamation promised improvement of the condition of the ground lease without the landowners and farmers having been first consulted. The latter are now raising an agitation, and are considering the question of forming a powerful political party in order to impose their demands upon the Government” (1907, April 9, p.7).

## 6. Results

The study undertaken showed that the British Media was well informed about the political, social and economic situation in Romania. The press revealed the existence of corruption among the political class, the malfunction of the Romanian institutions and its impact on country's economy and the living conditions of the peasants. But despite the obvious vulnerability of the political system in Romania and the brutality that the government was forced to appeal for repressing the rebellion, King Charles perception by the British press had not suffered at all. On the contrary, the speed that resorted for the repression brought an important image capital for the Romanian sovereign in Britain, who was from now on perceived as a powerful and authoritative monarch and as a model for the other sovereigns in the Balkans.

Regarding the accusations of anti-Semitism, the press articles analyzed had revealed that the character of the rebellion was not anti-Semitic, even though, especially in the first part of the uprising, the violent acts have focused mainly on Jewish population, which suffered great material losses. However, as we were able to ascertain, none of the sources consulted (the British mainstream press, the Anglo Jewish press and the British minister in Romania) had mentioned the existence of casualties on the Semitic side, which lead us to believe that the only losses consisted in properties (shops, houses) destroyed.

## 7. Conclusions

As we observed, the first accounts in the British press have captured only some apparent causes of the rebellion, such as anti-Semitism and the influence of Russian agitators, but in the days that followed the newspapers accounts had become more consistent, identifying and analyzing the complex causes of one of the largest uprisings in Romanian history. Only a few days after the first accounts it

was already understood that the causes of the rebellion were much deeper such as: the inequity of land distribution and the insufficient land to peasants, the involvement of intermediaries (*arendăși*), the poverty and heavy conditions that the Romanian peasants lived in, the inequity and generalized corruption of the political class.

Regarding the consequences of the rebellion the British press had allocated a broad space for the casualties, damages and losses, but somewhat less space for the reforms and the improving in the situation of peasants. This is perhaps because the changes for the better were insignificant compared with the multitude of measures that needed to be adopted for a real improvement in the situation of the peasants. The real change for the peasants in Romania had not occurred till 1917, when King Ferdinand had addressed to the Romanian soldiers - peasants in their vast majority - with his famous words: „You, sons of peasants who have defended with your arm the land where you were born, where you grew up, I tell you, your king, that besides the great reward of victory, that will ensure to everyone the gratitude of our entire nation, you simultaneously won the right to master in a wider measure land for which you have fought. You will be given land. I, your king, I'll be the first to give example; and you shall also receive a broad participation in state affairs” (Mamina, 2000, p.36).

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