

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL PETROLEUM CONGRESS IN BUCHAREST, 1907

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Abstract: *The history of this congress began in 1900, when in Paris there was organized the first International Petroleum Congress. Due to the success registered by the Romanian delegation there, it was decided that the second congress to be held in Romania. The idea was welcome in the oil field, but politicians were rather reserved. In 1903, the political circles refused organizing the congress. As a result, the second International Petroleum Congress was held in 1905 in Belgium. The performance of the Romanian delegation was also excellent, so it was decided that the next congress to be held in Romania. If in 1906 the preparations went rather slowly, at the beginning of 1907 they accelerated.*

The Programme of the Congress (August 22 - September 2 1907) was complex and included both scientific papers and documentary visits, as the ones to the city of Constanța, to Constanța port and to oil facilities in the area. The Romanian Maritime Service also provided the opportunity for the participants to visit Constantinople. It was an exceptional event at which 30 nations were represented.

Keywords: congress, petroleum, Bucharest, 1907

Introduction

Although oil has been known and used since ancient times, in the Romanian territory included [1], petroleum extraction and processing started to flourish especially in the second half of the 19th century. Thus, if in 1857 Romania officially registered the first oil national production in the world, with a total of 275 tons [2], in 1900 production reached 250,000 tons, increasing by over 900 times. The pace of this growth continued, in 1913 there being produced 1,885,619 tons of oil, which represented an increase of more than seven times compared to 1900. With this production, Romania ranked fourth in the world after the USA, Russia and Mexico [1]. Romania's oil production continued to grow reaching its maximum in the interwar period, in 1936, with a production of 8.784 million tons, which maintained it in the global hierarchy [3].

In this context, the interest of foreign investors in the Romanian oil was fully justified. By reciprocity, the Romanians saw the opportunity of inserting national material and spiritual values in the international circuit. A special proof in this respect was the deployment of the 3rd International Petroleum Congress in Bucharest in 1907.

Our work aims to analyze the organization of this scientific event and the efforts such an action implied. We shall proceed from the context of the 1st International Congress, continue with the debates on the 2nd edition being held in Romania and analyze the reasons why Romania was unable to organize it, as initially decided. Our analysis will highlight the involvement of not only

the representatives of oil industry and scientific research but also that of political factors, which demonstrates that this event was not only a scientific and economic one, but it also had a political nature, connecting various fields of Romanian political and social life.

Congress History

The history of Petroleum Congress began in 1900, when in Paris there was organized its first edition. A Romanian delegation was present there and it was remarked due to the quality of the exposures made by C. Alimăneșteanu, L. Edeleanu, engineer Petreanu and especially due to the exhibition on the Romanian oil industry. The success registered by the Romanian delegation prompted the Congress to decide that the 2nd Congress should be held in Romania, decision that produced real enthusiasm among specialists. The highest decision-making bodies were notified and the adhesion of King Charles I [4] was also obtained.

In the autumn of 1900, there was chosen the organizing committee of the congress and it was even sketched a programme, suggesting September 1902 as the period for the congress to be held. *Oil Gazette* [5] and the industrial factors worked hard in order to organize the event, but starting with the second half of 1901, things did not advance any more, as the attitude of the political factors was rather reserved. In the spring of the following year, Prime Minister Dimitrie A. Strurdza was cautious "because in this congress there were to participate scientists worldwide" and it was advisable that "things should not to be

hasty" [6]. The Congress was therefore delayed by another year, in September 1903, but in the spring of 1903, the Minister of Estates bluntly declared: "the Congress will not take place". Besides financial constraints, he invoked the imperative of a better organization, as: "We are not one of those countries where economic and scientific congresses were held" [7].

The decision was communicated to the International Commission from Paris which decided that the second congress to be held in 1905 in Liège, Belgium. With this occasion, the Romanian delegation impressed again due to the quality of the materials presented by Mrazec, Edeleanu, Alimăneşteanu and to the only oil exhibition in the Congress. Therefore, it was decided again that the next congress to be held in our country. In Romania it was advanced the possibility to organize the 3rd edition in 1906, year that marked the Royal Jubilee celebration. Insufficient time to organize such an event imposed the 3rd edition of the congress to be scheduled in the second half of 1907. In 1906, preparations did not advanced very much, but in 1907, things have changed dramatically [4].

The Organization of the Third International Petroleum Congress in Bucharest, 1907

In the very first issue from 1907, *Oil Gazette* informed their readers about the state of preparation for the next oil congress. It was to take place in autumn, under the patronage of the Crown Prince Ferdinand. The exhibition dedicated to the oil industry was ready and it contained tools, equipment used in oil extraction and processing and data on the evolution of this industry. The 3rd edition of the Congress would comprise three sections: 1. Geology, Exploration and Exploitation, 2. Chemistry and Technology of Oil, 3. Legislation and Trade. The persons interested were invited to contact the Laboratory of Mineralogy within the University of Bucharest [8].

Abroad, there was a great interest in this event. In March 1907, *Oil Gazette* published a list of over 40 renowned personalities from 14 countries who wanted to participate in the congress [9]. In some countries, there were even constituted National Committees and, where they already existed, there were meetings to discuss the participation in the congress. Persons designated to participate in this event were industrialists, experts, academics or senior officials in the related ministries [10, 11, 12, 13]. The Italian Committee, for example, highlighted in their call for papers that "the purpose of the meeting is not limited only to oil, but it lies especially on the industry of asphalt and other matters". Therefore, the meeting in Bucharest was to bring into prominence "the huge

interest that the discussions and decisions of the Congress would have for all those who through their field of study, professional occupations, commercial or industrial interest were involved in the hydrocarbons industry" [14].

In order to organize and to hold the 3rd edition of the Congress, there was designated a national committee which was really impressive. If in April the members were still selected and decided upon, in May it was advertised the first formula of the Romanian General Committee which included a list of over 130 persons and institutions [15]. A circular written in Romanian, German, French and English was addressed to all internal and external producers from the oil industry, asking them to participate in enriching the exhibition of the Congress. There were targeted: publications, samples of crude and processed oil, survey systems and tools, materials used in the construction of oil pipelines, tanks, wagons, drums, refineries plans, boilers used in distillation, lamps, oil stoves, appliances etc. [16]. Small apparatus could be sent directly, whereas larger ones, such as installations, could be presented by means of photographs and sketches. The aim was to "satisfy the requirement that, on the one hand congressmen may have in front of their eyes all that was new and exciting in the oil industry" and, on the other hand, producers could be known [17].

As the opening of the congress was approaching, the information about this event became increasingly visible and consistent. Thus, on June 1, 1907 *Oil Gazette* published the information about the congress on the first page. They announced new adhesions from abroad, the appointment of new personalities in the Romanian committee, the composition of the Congress Guide which provided information about Romania, about the programme of the congress and of the exhibition, about scheduled trips, list of participants etc. The organizers already counted on the success of the future congress noting "with satisfaction, that the trend in favour of the Petroleum Congress from those concerned both in the country and abroad was steadily increasing" [18].

In the next issue of *Oil Gazette* there was published, also on front page, the article *Importance of the Petroleum Congress*, which pointed out that, as oil had become "an object of study and world trade", organizing this congress was fully justified. The oil industry had become one of the most complex industries and it produced the energy necessary to other industries, their interdependence being obvious. The article also emphasized the value of the Romanian technical body involved in organizing

the congress, which was a guarantee of its effectiveness. Thus, there were overcome some of the drawbacks of the previous edition of the oil congress. The Congress in Bucharest had, besides the scientific and technical opportunities, a practical importance for Romania, namely that of enabling "the congressmen to see and appreciate the richness of deposits in Romania as well as their importance for the future international trade" [19].

The appointment of Anghel Saligny, President of the Romanian Academy, as President of the future congress was favorably received by *Oil Gazette*, which published a brief but laudatory presentation [20]. Saligny received from the Council of Ministers full authority in the endorsement of all the congress' affairs [21]. Simultaneously, *Monitorul petrolului* continued to present the work of the national committees from different participating countries and their adhesions [22, 23].

The debates of some committees were extremely consistent. For example, the English Committee addressed their government the request to appoint an official at the congress. The French Committee deliberated on subjects to be approached by their delegation and on several priorities of the future congress, such as the names of oil products, unifying the flash point etc. The Galician Committee sent a special delegate to Bucharest in order to collect information on situ about the future congress. The German Committee showed interested in printing all the materials that were to be presented at the congress and highlighted the involvement and interest of the German capital and industry in the development of the Romanian oil industry [24, 25]. Several foreign national committees met on a regular basis in order to analyze technical or scientific problems, to discuss the alternative of their participation in the congress being sponsored by companies, private persons or by the state and to communicate with the Romanian Committee [26].

In Bucharest, there was projected the publication of a special issue of *Monitorul petrolului* that would reflect exclusively the unfolding of the Congress. It was also organized an international press service [27]. The Romanian Committee held a highly active and effective correspondence with the congressmen who were invited to express their options regarding the programme of the congress, the trip preceding the congress. They were also inquired about the point of entry on the Romanian territory so that there may be sent the permit of free movement on the Romanian railways (excepting Orient-Express train) [28]. Three weeks before the opening of the congress,

Oil Gazette published the updated programme and list of scientific papers that were to be presented [29].

Two weeks before the opening, preparations entered the final stage: a journal of the congress was to appear daily in French, nine stenographers were to record in French, English and German the debates and papers presented in the congress, an official photographer of the congress was appointed, there were printed, in exceptional graphic conditions and in limited edition, two albums presenting Romania and its most interesting oil regions. The government provided to Anghel Saligny all the necessary funds.

Accompanied by Ludovic Mrazek and Constantin Alimănişteanu, Anghel Saligny went to Prahova oil region, where they met the prefect and other officials of Câmpina in order to make sure that all roads would be repaired and the best conditions to welcome foreign guests would be provided

The plan of the University of Bucharest was published in order to indicate the 11 rooms reserved for the Congress. (Their distribution was as follows: Rooms 1 and 2 - Secretariat and Information Desk, Room 3 - Cash desk, Room 4 - Locker, Room 5 - Pay Office, Room 6 - Press Office, Room 7 - Telephony, Room 8 - Section I of the Congress, Room 9 - Section II, Room 10 - Section III, Room 11 - the Committee). As the number of the foreigners enrolled exceeded the available number of participants, the Romanian delegates had to drop the trip to the oilfields [30].

The exhibition was organized in the following sectors: Sector 1. Oil geological and civil engineering works, Sector 2. Survey devices and systems, Sector 3. Oil warehousing and transport, Sector 4. Technology and Oil Chemistry, Sector 5. The use of oil in lighting, types of lamps, fuels and equipment, Sector 6. Oil and petrol engines, Sector 7. Trade and Statistics, Sector 8. Miscellaneous [30]. *Oil Gazette* presented the exhibition in detail, as proven in the following excerpt: "In the main gallery, The Oil Commission has exposed two showcases with fossils, shells and rocks. To the right of the entrance, there is a miniature of Constanța oil port and of the oil reservoirs. Nearby, one may see the works of the Romanian Railways and the exhibition of the State Monopolies, as well as the interesting works of the Romanian Geological Institute and of the School of Bridges and Roads"[31].

Among the important objectives aimed at during the Congress of Bucharest, we highlight the following: to unify the methods used to measure and analyze oil, to unify the flash point, to define various products obtained by refining oil etc. [29].

The issue of *Oil Gazette* preceding the opening of the congress thanked the International Committee

involved in organizing the event from Bucharest. In this committee, there were 39 members representing 13 nations. Romania was represented by C. Alimăneşteanu, L. Edeleanu and L. Mrazec. Other members represented Austria, Galicia, Hungary, France, Algeria, Holland, Italy, Russia, Sweden, United States, England, Belgium. *Oil Gazette* stated that "Our country is very honoured to welcome the representatives of one of the most important industries in the world" [32].

The publication specified the members of the Organizing Committee. The congress was held under the patronage of Crown Prince Ferdinand. Minister of Estates Anton Carp was the Chairman of Honour, Executive Chairman was Anghel Saligny. Among the eight vice-presidents, there were Vintilă Brătianu, the mayor of Bucharest, L. Mrazec, L. Edeleanu and executives of major oil companies. The General Secretary was C. Alimăneşteanu, chief engineer and deputy. The secretaries of the three sections of the Congress were G. Murgoci, I. Tănăsescu, C. Osiceanu. Dimitrie Sturdza, Prime Minister of Romania along with other former prime ministers, ministers or public personalities were among the 12 honorary members of the committee. More than 120 other personalities representing the government (ministers, such as Grigore Antipa), oil companies and professional associations (N. Cantacuzino, L. Catargiu, V. Iscu, V. Tacit, C. Torocanu, Duiliu Zamfirescu), rectors, deans and professors from universities and faculties in Bucharest and Iasi (Grigore Ştefănescu, Saba Ştefănescu, Obreja, I. Simionescu, M. Longinescu), mayors of Bucharest, Ploieşti, Câmpina, Constanţa, Giurgiu and Târgovişte, prefects of Ilfov, Prahova, Vlaşca, Constanţa, Dâmboviţa and Bacău counties, representatives of the Chambers of Commerce and of the most important banks were included as members of the organizing committee [32].

As far as the participants enrolled at the congress were concerned, they reached over 300 foreigners coming from 17 countries (Austria, Germany, England, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada,

France, United States, Guatemala, Italy, Mexico, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Sweden) [32] and about 500 Romanian attendants. The organizing committee issued 838 cards of congressman. The highest participation from abroad was that of the Austria-Hungarian delegation (about 90 people). Several countries were represented by a governmental official: Austria, Germany, Belgium, France, Hungary. Among the guests there were professors, representatives of oil companies, industrialists (sometimes accompanied by their wives) etc. Among the Romanian guests there appeared the names of C. Angelescu, P. S. Aurelian, Alexandru Averescu, I. I. C. Brătianu, C. Barbacioru, P. Bujor, C. Bacalbaşa, Emil Botta, P. P. Carp, Gh. Gr. Catacuzino, Nicolae, Filipescu, C. C. Costa – Foru, Luca Elefterescu, Spiru Haret, D. Hurmuzescu, I. C. Istrati, I. Kalinderu, I. Lahovari, V. Missir, Stelian Popescu, Petre Poni, Max Schapira, I. Tănăsescu, Virgil Torocanu, Virgil Tacit etc.[32, 33].

The proceedings of the Third International Petroleum Congress took place from 26th to 31st of August 1907. The opening session was held at the Romanian Athenaeum and the Congress was hosted by the University of Bucharest. The programme was very well structured and included, besides the three sections and the exhibition, organized visits, banquets and speeches in a thoroughly prepared, elegant and sumptuous atmosphere. The congress was preceded and succeeded by a series of visits to the oil regions from Prahova, Moldavia and Constanţa. In Constanţa, there were visited the city, the port and oil facilities. The Romanian Maritime Service provided "Dacia" ship for the congressmen to visit Constantinople [34]. As a result, the activities related to the 3rd International Petroleum Congress began on August 22nd and ended on September 2nd.

CONCLUSIONS

The organization of the Third International Petroleum Congress in Bucharest was undoubtedly an event of great significance. Its triggering aspect was oil, as a vital element of the industrialized, modern world. This natural resource could bring huge profits to both states and private investors and it totally changed the traditional paradigm of the society's functioning, scientific research itself playing an important role in this trend.

This congress was the first international scientific event of such a scale ever organized by the Romanian state. It benefited from the contribution of several renowned Romanian intellectuals, providential for the spiritual development of the national community. Personalities such as Anghel Saligny, Ludovic Mrazec, Lazăr Edeleanu, Gheorghe Munteanu Murgoci etc. represented a genuine business card for the Congress, as they ensured a peer dialogue between representatives of the Romanian and world science.

Romanian oil fields constituted a veritable magnet, so foreign industrialists and capitals were well aware of this and wanted to take advantage. The Romanian state seemed to realize that and, although financially it had lost the control, it did not want to lose the battle on the political field. Therefore, the Romanian government became an organizational partner of the congress, agreed on and facilitated visits to oil regions. They wanted to show the economic potential of the country and to boost its development.

In preparing this congress, there was, undoubtedly, exploited the experience gained at the organization of the Royal Jubilee from 1906. Some arrangements could be used and the exhibition held in Carol Park a year before undoubtedly become a useful landmark and a good source of inspiration.

In fact, the celebration from 1906 could be one of the reasons for the political decision-makers to have refused carrying out the Second International Petroleum Congress in Bucharest. Obviously, one cannot ignore the financial situation of the country after the economic crisis from the early 20th century and the attitude of the liberal politicians. Although we did not find such references in the literature, it is possible that the most powerful party, namely the Liberal Party, did not consider appropriate for the congress to be held in Romania at that time (1902-1903). It is also possible that the "by ourselves" principle might have needed further decanting in the vision of the liberals on oil.

The programme and activities of the Third International Petroleum Congress were carried out flawlessly and represented a real maturity exam of the Romanian hospitality, intelligence and organization.

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