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TRADE AND SHIPPING ON THE MARITIME DANUBE DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD (1919–1938)

Abstract: The paper presents the evolution of trade and shipping via the Danubian ports of Brăila, Galați and Sulina, which faced, after 1918, the new economic realities and aspirations of Greater Romania. The decline of Brăila and Galați continued, as the central Romanian authorities did not encourage their development, and the local communities did not manage to adapt themselves to the new economic and social conditions of the interwar period.

Keywords: maritime Danube, Galați, Brăila, Constanța, Sulina, navigation, trade, grains, timber.

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The outbreak of World War I greatly affected Romania's foreign trade, especially after Turkey closed free navigation through the Straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Consequently, Romania's grain exports and a very large part of the imports ceased. After the end of the conflict, until the dissolution of the Inter-Allied Commission of the Danube, inland navigation was completely encumbered by the numerous interferences of the French military forces that controlled the Lower Danube¹. The Romanian administration endeavoured to remove the obstacles impeding proper navigation: mine fields, drifting mines and numerous wrecks (several vessels had been deliberately sunken, so as to close the fairway). Many obstacles had been planted by the Romanians themselves, especially in the autumn of 1916, when Romania's military situation was going from bad to worse².

After World War I, Romania had a new territorial structure, which implied major changes within the national economy. Domestic trade completely changed its

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¹ Iulian Cârțână, Ilie Seftiuc, *Dunărea în istoria poporului român* (Bucharest, 1972), p. 132.

² Regarding this question, it should be mentioned that a large part of the floating material from the Danube was greatly affected during the war; in a memorandum sent to the General Inspectorate of Shipping and Ports (based in Galați) by the Harbour Office of Tulcea (April 10, 1917), it is stated that all important floating material in the port had been evacuated to Chilia Veche and then to Russia – *cf.* Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Galați [The National Archives – Galați County] (hereafter SJANG), *Inspectoratul General al Navigației și Porturilor*, file 3/1917, f. 34. Previously, on December 23, 1916, the port of Braila was evacuated – *Ibid.*, file 2/1919, f. 124; *Ibid.*, file 3/1917, f. 5, dispatch no. 2/January 4, 1917, from Galați Harbour Office, with the information that the personnel was no longer able to work at the headquarters because the port had been bombed, and the headquarters were temporarily moved to the city.

direction, causing abnormal situations and major derangements of the entire economy. During the first interwar years, Romania had great economic difficulties, owing both to the military destructions³ and to the loss of the national treasury (consequently of the gold reserve currency). The need to cover the banknotes issued during the German occupation (1916–1918)⁴, as well as the inhabitants' decreasing purchasing capacity affected the national trade and the country's economic debt, valued at 32.4 billion new (stabilised) lei. Free trade could not be promoted in the context of the state's control and by the imposition of a prohibitive import and export tariff⁵. The authorities' most urgent task was to save the credibility of the national currency, as much as it survived the war, and the stabilisation of the Romanian leu lasted for almost a decade.

There was little commercial cooperation at a European and regional level at the beginnings of the 1920^s. From a political perspective, Romania had initiated the Little Entente, but it was much more difficult in economic terms, as organizations promoting economic collaboration among European countries revived difficultly⁶. Nevertheless, the Little Entente put the basis of a regional economic partnership that encouraged mutual trade in the Danubian area⁷. Regarding this project, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Milan Stojadinović, stated in 1936, at the 20th session of the Permanent Council of the Little Entente in Belgrade, that "the spirit of respecting present treaties does not hinder the Little Entente member states to energetically attempt to encourage economic partnerships among Danubian states"⁸, a statement connected to his desire to cooperate with Germany and other Axis countries.

These diplomatic declarations became more material the following year, but not for Romania's benefit, as on March 25, 1937, political and economic agreements between Italy and Yugoslavia⁹ were signed at Belgrade, by which Yugoslavia re-directed its foreign trade towards the Adriatic ports, especially towards Trieste. Despite the activity of the Economic Council of the Little Entente, it was hardly possible to redirect Yugoslav grains from the Adriatic Sea to the maritime Danube, as the Italian offer was far better than the Romanian one. Italy granted direct access

³ Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River* (Boulder–New York, 1987), p. 443. From a total of 899 ships belonging to Romanian companies, recorded in 1916, before Romania's belligerence in the Great War, only 694 ships survived the end of the conflict, i. e. a loss of about 25 %.

⁴ The famous case of the General Bank of Romania.

⁵ Ion Zăineanu, *Politica economică a României în primii ani după Marea Unire, un model european și specific românesc*, in Maria Mureșan (ed.), *Economie, instituții și integrare europeană* (Bucharest, 2007), p. 169. Export taxes were introduced starting with July 1914–August 1915 – cf. Victor Jinga, *Principii și orientări ale comerțului exterior al României (1859–1916)* (Cluj-Napoca, 1975), p. 257. For more details on export and import taxes after the end of the war, see *Comerțul exterior al României în anii 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922* (Bucharest, 1924), p. 12.

⁶ The French geographer A. Allix wrote in 1939: "Although the resources on different sides of its basin [of the Danube] seem to complete themselves, it is mostly an inappropriate means as compared to the sea or the railway" – cf. A. Allix, "Le Danube jusqu'en 1939", *Les Études rhodaniennes*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1942), p. 97.

⁷ M. Niederle, *L'évolution et l'état actuel de la collaboration économique dans le bassin du Danube* (Prague, 1938), p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

to the Adriatic Sea, modern warehouses, a good railway system, a preferential tariff (including the principle of the most favoured nation).

What could Romania offer instead? The old warehouses from Brăila and Galați, with the same characteristics as when first operated (1891–1892), as they had never been modernised; the Sulina passage, with an uncertain depth, high navigation tariff on the maritime Danube, small tonnage ships and high freights etc.. It can be easily noticed what made the Yugoslavs choose the Italian offer over the Romanian one.

All European countries had great economic difficulties¹⁰, and Romania was dealing with the major challenge of exceeding its pre-war agricultural and industrial potential; as Victor Axenciuc pointed out, “the most important chain of the recovery process, from easily understandable reasons, was the transport system”¹¹, and fluvial and maritime shipping had to play a significant role until the reconstruction of Romania’s railways. All other Eastern and Central European countries were facing similar problems, and only one of them, Czechoslovakia, managed to re-launch its production at a faster rate, as compared to its pre-war overall situation¹².

During the period 1919–1928, the volume of Romania’s foreign trade increased, from total exports of 109,000 tons in 1909 to 5,886,000 tons in 1928; imports grew similarly, from a total of 414,000 tons in 1919 to 957,000 tons in 1928¹³. Exports kept on rising to a volume of 7,409,084 tons in 1938, whereas imports recorded a level of 820,603 tons the same year, fairly low if compared to 1919 and to the real needs of the Romanian economy¹⁴. The increased volume of exports also influenced the country’s share on the global market: from 0.75 % of European trade and 0.40 % of world trade in 1922, to totals of 1.33 % and respectively 0.52 % in 1928¹⁵.

Regarding the grain trade, the veritable backbone of pre-war Romanian commerce, its part in the total exports decreased, mainly owing to a marked increase in domestic consumption, as Romania’s population grew following the Union of 1918¹⁶. Although the agricultural domain also developed, from 6.6 million to 14.6 million hectares¹⁷, pre-war grain surplus ceased to be available for export. Naturally, the grain trade of the maritime Danube was affected by these new demographic and economic premises.

¹⁰ Aron Petric, “Trăsăturile generale ale dezvoltării României în primul deceniu interbelic”, *Cumidava*, 2 (1968), p. 314.

¹¹ Victor Axenciuc, “Unificarea organismului economiei naționale și refacerea economică postbelică a României”, *Revista de istorie*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (1977), p. 936.

¹² I. Berend, G. Ranki, “Economic Problems of the Danube Region after the Break-Up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1969), p. 173.

¹³ Ilie Puia, *Relațiile economice externe ale României în perioada interbelică* (Bucharest, 1982), p. 83.

¹⁴ Ministerul Finanțelor. Oficiul de Îndrumare și Coordonare financiară, *Comerțul exterior al României. Decembrie 1938* (Bucharest, 1939), p. 9.

¹⁵ I. Puia, *Relațiile economice*, p. 88, Table 5.

¹⁶ Ion Agrigoroaiei, Ovidiu Buruiană, Gheorghe Iacob, Cătălin Turliuc (eds.), *România interbelică în paradigma europeană* (Iași, 2005), p. 176.

¹⁷ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria contemporană a României (1918–2005)* (Bucharest, 2005), p. 16.

The imposition of export restrictions for grains, during the period 1921–1922¹⁸, a practice recommenced after 1932, proves how the authorities attempted to combat speculum and famine in Romania. Keynesian methods were the only ones capable to prevent such a difficult situation. Better products delivered from USA, Canada or Argentina caused prices for Romanian grains to go down. Nevertheless, until 1927 grain exports represented 50 % of Romania's total exports, a percentage that decreased in the subsequent years. If in the interval 1921–1925 the percentage of grains in the total exports of Canada and Argentina was 35.7 % and 41.3 % respectively, Romania recorded an amount of 41.4 %¹⁹. There were little changes in Romania's grain exports during the following years; for instance, in 1926 exports represented 38 % and in 1927 49.4 % of the country's total exports²⁰. Romania's grain trade was based on three major products (maize, wheat and barley), followed by other less important goods, such as oats, rye, millet, colza and etc.

Since the exports of grains and derivatives from Northern America increased after World War I by 141 % (USA provided more than 50 % of the world maize production), and from Australia by 183 % (during the reference period, i. e. 1921–1925²¹), it was obvious that Romania's future grain trade was not bright. The Romanian products were not internationally classified, a fact that led to a constant decrease of their price, especially in the context of the Great Depression.

Oil exports represented the core of Romanian interwar exports, as grain exports recorded maximal values only in 1923, 1927, 1931 and 1936 and minimal ones in 1920, 1925, 1928 and 1928²².

When analysing the naval traffic through Brăila, the first post-war year did not commenced in a promising way, as export possibilities were limited by the consequences of the newly ended war. Similar remarks are also valid for imports. Thus, it was hardly possible to expect a fast recovery to pre-war values, which had peaked in 1911, with about 1,000,000 tons of imported goods and 1,600,000 tons of exported goods, most of which, over 90 %, were grains from the domestic and foreign production (re-shipments)²³. 749,902 tons of grains left Brăila in 1924, being both Romanian cereals and re-shipments of grains²⁴ coming from the Yugoslav area.

¹⁸ Exporters were compelled to sell on the domestic market, at maximal prices, 50 % of the exported quantities, the rest was being exported after paying due taxes – D. I. Gheorghiu, “Politica vamală și comercială a României după război, comparativ cu politica altor state”, *Buletinul Institutului Economic Românesc*, Vol. 7, No. 1–2 (1929), p. 4.

¹⁹ I. Puia, *Relațiile economice*, p. 89, Table 5.

²⁰ Gheorghe Ionescu-Sisești, “Participarea României la producția și comerțul mondial de cereale”, *Buletinul Institutului Economic Românesc*, Vol. 7, No. 5–6 (1928), p. 197.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

²² D. Gusti (ed.), *Enciclopedia României*, vol. IV (Bucharest, 1943), p. 438.

²³ Paul Demetriad, “Viața din 1927 a portului Brăila față de activitatea din trecut”, *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1929), p. 10.

²⁴ Transshipping grains in the harbour of Brăila was recorded since 1874 – Viorel Bratosin, “Brăila, poarta României moderne spre Europa (1829–1914)”, in M. Mureșan (ed.), *Economie, instituții și integrare europeană*, p. 103.

In certain periods, the transit of foreign grains played an important role in the overall traffic of the maritime Danube. Such a year is 1925, with a total of 982,181 tons of grains, 444,581 of which came from abroad. The great fluctuations between domestic and foreign grains can be noticed in the following table²⁵:

Year	Grain exports through Brăila Customs (Tons)	Foreign grains (transit) (Tons)
1924	67,724	682,178
1925	537,600	444,581
1926	657,224	481,297
1928	202,677	87,350
1929	536,677	519,000
1930	1,121,172	292,775
1931	765,945	274,912
1932	605,035	183,905
1933	535,678	756,080

The problem with this inland traffic of foreign and Romanian grains was that it did not generate an intense economic activity within the Danubian harbours; only floating elevators were used for transferring the cargoes from barges to the larger sea-going vessels, so that the stevedores and the port installations were practically useless.

It can be also noticed that the quantities of grains coming by barges increased, whilst those coming via Romanian railroads decreased, a fact mainly caused by the high costs of handling, which added to the high penalties for unloading time that exceeded six hours (in the USA this interval could be up to 24 hours)²⁶.

In 1927, Louis Louis Dreyfuss²⁷, owner of the most important European grain trading company and, in the same time, Romania's consul general in Paris, visited Brăila. In his statement in front of the members of the Trade and Industry Office, Dreyfuss asserted that the port could re-become a key player in the European grain trade if port installations were rapidly modernised²⁸.

The modernisation of handling installations was continuously requested by all parties involved in the commerce of Brăila (except for the stevedores), as manual labour was extremely expensive. The President of the Trade and Industry Office, I. G. Sassu, stated, on July 4, 1927, that "the price of grain handling is the highest in

²⁵ P. Demetriad, "Viața din 1927", p. 13; Idem, "Activitatea portului Brăila și Docurilor Brăila în cursul anului 1929 față de activitatea anului 1928 și precedenții", *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 1, No. 4-6 (1929), p. 57; Idem, "Activitatea portului Brăila în 1930", *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1930), p. 18-19.

²⁶ Idem, "Activitatea portului Brăila și Docurilor Brăila în cursul anului 1930 față de activitatea anului 1929", *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 3, No. 3-4 (1931), p. 196.

²⁷ His company owned a large number of shares of *Société de Navigation Danubienne* (the next *Société Française de Navigation Danubienne* - 1930): 490 shares in 1926. We also can find the French company *Fraissinet* among the initial share holders. See Anne-Marie Cassoly, "Une flotte danubienne sous pavillon français au XX^{ème} siècle", *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, 40-41 (2001-2002), p. 265.

²⁸ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Brăila*, Vol. 9, No. 11 (1927), p. 1.

the country and there are currently no shipments of grains towards Brăila because of the high costs of labour²⁹. Consequently, many export companies chose to move their headquarters and operations to harbours where labour was cheaper (at Reni, for instance)³⁰.

“The excessive expensiveness of manual labour” generated conflicts between investors and stevedores. A sentence given by the Commercial Court of Brăila in 1927 stipulated: “[...] it is a known fact that for some years there is an economic crisis in the port and city of Brăila, a crisis which has peaked lately to such an extent that this port, which used to be the first export port of the Old Kingdom before 1916, has now few transactions, low exports, the port and the city warehouses are almost empty and the labourers are generally jobless³¹”.

It can be noticed, in the table below, that in 1927 Brăila had the most expensive cargo handling system, as compared to its neighbours, Galați and Reni³²:

Ports	Prices, in lei (from the railway directly to the wagon)
Brăila	2100–2300
Galați	1700
Reni	1100–1300

Thus, it is evident why Brăila did not benefit from the export of Romanian grains, and the handling of about 20,000 railway wagons during the harvest season was the constant rate, as compared to a maximum of 97,000 wagons recorded before the war³³.

It should be mentioned that in 1927 stevedore unions demanded 50 % salary increase for manipulating drilling installations, as the fact that they were greased with bitumen at both ends was considered extremely inconvenient. Consequently, if 8,446 tons of drilling installations had been handled in 1924, only 470 were operated in 1927; the obvious decrease was also caused by the inflexibility of port labourers³⁴. The lack of constant jobs in the harbour generated a massive drop in the number of workers; from a recorded number of 10,000 people before the war, there were only

²⁹ “Procesul-verbal nr. 1/1927 al ședinței Consiliului de Administrație al Camerei de Comerț și Industrie Brăila din 4 iulie 1927”, *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Brăila*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (1927), p. 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, No. 9 (1927), p. 7.

³¹ *Ibid.* Another cause for this declining trade was related to the infrastructure connecting Brăila to neighbouring urban centers; in 1929 there was no paved road to link Brăila to Galați (there was only a railway bridge, also used by pedestrians, carriages, cars). There were no paved roads to Râmnicu Sărat or Buzău, no bridges over the river Buzău, the river being crossed by means of manual ferries. On rainy days or in winter time, communications between these urban centers were almost impossible. In such circumstances, no wonder that peasants and traders preferred the railway system and not the fluvial route for transporting their goods – cf. Radu Portocală, “Evoluția negoțului internațional al Brăilei”, *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 1, No. 2–3 (1929), p. 66. Things were not much better in 1937 – cf. *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Brăila*, Vol. 19, No. 1–3 (1937), p. 18.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³³ P. Demetriad, “Activitatea portului Brăila și Docurilor Brăila în cursul anului”, p. 57.

³⁴ Idem, “Viața din 1927”, p. 16.

approximately 3,000 employees in 1930 (as compared to 2,000 people working in the local industry)³⁵.

An extraordinary amount of 1,127,394 tons of grains were exported in 1931 on the maritime routes, much more than the record quantity of 1,054,792 tons in 1911. Yet, this massive volume of handled grains did not bring the lost prosperity, as prices had gone down after the depression and most of this quantity was handled while still on floating barges, requiring a small volume of labour from stevedores and handling installations as compared to the case when these goods would have come by rail³⁶.

Fluvial traffic witnessed a minimum of entrances in 1919 – 1,854 ships and 431,886 tons dead weight³⁷, while a maximum of 6,789 ships³⁸ was recorded in 1927 (for displacement, the highest value was in 1933 – 3,685,086 tons)³⁹. Maritime traffic amounted to a minimum of entrances in 1919, when only 102 ships called at Brăila, with a total tonnage of 175,972 tdw⁴⁰; the highest values were in 1930, when 677 ships with a total 1,686,759 tdw entered the harbour⁴¹.

The participation of the Romanian flag at the total inland navigation recorded a minimum value of 55.35 % in 1929⁴² and a maximum one of 82.03 % in 1919⁴³; compared to this rate, foreign flag recorded a minimum value of 17.96 % in 1919 and a maximum one in 1929 – 44.64 %. Regarding maritime traffic, the highest values belong to foreign flags, which recorded a minimum rate of 58.82 % in 1919⁴⁴ and a maximum one in 1929 – 96.30 %⁴⁵.

The lowest entrances by land in the commercial traffic through Brăila⁴⁶ were recorded in 1919, with only 252,518.34 tons (40,772 of which were grains and derivatives, plus 211,746.34 tons of various goods)⁴⁷. The highest values of

³⁵ N. N. Matheescu, "Problemele muncitorimii brăilene", *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 1, No. 4–6 (1929), p. 78. As the author noticed, it was extremely difficult to state the exact number of labourers in Brăila due to the fact that no official authority recorded them.

³⁶ P. Demetriad, "Activitatea portului Brăila și Docurile Brăila în cursul anului 1930", p. 196.

³⁷ Ministerul Finanțelor, Direcțiunea Statisticii Generale a Finanțelor și Comerțului Exterior, *Mișcarea porturilor în anii 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922* (Bucharest, 1923), p. 13.

³⁸ Ministerul Industriei și Comerțului. Regia Autonomă a Porturilor și Căilor de Comunicație pe Apă. Inspectoratul General al Navigației și Porturilor, *Raport de mișcarea porturilor României cu vase fluviale și maritime pe anul 1930* (Galați, 1931), p. 60.

³⁹ Idem, *Raport de mișcarea porturilor României și de efectivul vaselor marinei comerciale pe anul 1933* (Bucharest, 1934), p. 90; see also Annexes 1, 2 and 3.

⁴⁰ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 13.

⁴¹ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1930*, p. 62.

⁴² Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Brăila (henceforth SJBAN), *fond Căpitănia Portului Brăila*, file 2/1929; *Raport de mișcare a porturilor României cu vase maritime și fluviale pe anul 1929* (Galați, 1929), p. 23.

⁴³ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1929*, p. 36.

⁴⁶ Both entrances and clearances also have the quantities from transit or transshipments.

⁴⁷ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 11.

entrances were in 1930, when 1,508,078 tons of goods were operated in the port (1,269,971 tons of grains and derivatives, plus 238,107 tons of various goods)⁴⁸.

Regarding exports from Brăila, the lowest quantities were recorded in 1919 – 53,795.536 tons (of which 16,128 tons grains and derivatives, plus 37,667.536 tons of various goods)⁴⁹. The largest volume of cargo was exported in 1930 – 1,714,819 tons (of which 1,626,832 tons of grains and derivatives, plus 87,987 tons of various goods)⁵⁰.

It can be noticed, when analysing these statistics, that grain entrances by rail (thus operated by port installations and stevedores) dramatically decreased after World War I, occasionally even three times less, a situation that had greatly affected both the harbour and the city during the entire interwar period. The owners of floating elevators were the only ones who thrived, profiting of the trade represented by the fluvial shipment and transit of foreign grains⁵¹.

Period	Arrivals by land (average) tons	Arrivals by water (average) tons
1908–1913	744,830	593,652
1920–1933	204,360	740,939
1934–1938	246,390	718,421

Referring to the share of Brăila in Romania's total trade during the best interwar year for the Danubian port (1930), the exports amounted to 13 % of the country's export trade, whereas imports recorded a maximum share of 40 % in 1933⁵², with an average value varying between 10–20 %⁵³.

Destination of exports through Brăila in 1930 (tons)⁵⁴

Destination	Grains	Wood
United Kingdom	64,223	1,867
America	3,735	–
Africa	770	–
Algeria	596	–
Belgium	99,383	–
Denmark	22,159	–
Egypt	8,943	13,977
France	63,856	1,821
Greece	1,841	6,779
Germany	103,141	12,844

⁴⁸ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1930*, p. 60-63.

⁴⁹ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 11.

⁵⁰ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1930*, p. 60-63.

⁵¹ Vasile T. Ciobanu, "Comentarii asupra activității portului și Docurilor Brăila între anii 1911–1938", *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 12, No. 1–2, 1940, p. 32.

⁵² P. Demetriad, "Activitatea portului și Docurilor Brăila în anul 1933", p. 57.

⁵³ For a synthetic analysis of the naval and commercial traffic through Brăila during the interwar period, see the already mentioned study published in 1940 by the Director of Brăila Dockyards, V. T. Ciobanu.

⁵⁴ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1930*, p. 61.

Italy	147,716	–
Norway	8,802	–
Holland	133.345	42
Sweden	300	–
Spain	619	666
Turkey	456	1,701
Portugal	8.211	–
Gibraltar	–	–

As the table above proves, the greatest amount of grains exported through Brăila headed to Western Europe, with Italy, Holland, Germany, Belgium, United Kingdom and France contracting the highest quantities. It can be also noticed that the Danube was not directly involved in the great transatlantic trade, without any consistent shipments towards the Americas and Asia. Wood (timber) was not a common product in Brăila's exports, this type of shipments being rare and amounting to very small quantities as compared to the neighbouring port of Galați.

Galați recorded the lowest fluvial traffic in 1919, with 1,207 ships calling at the Moldavian port (total deadweight – 335,742 tons)⁵⁵. The highest number of ships entered the port in 1938 – 3,321⁵⁶ ships, whereas the largest deadweight tonnage was recorded in 1933 – 1,920,048 tons⁵⁷. 309 maritime ships called at Galați in 1919, totalling 374,277 register tons⁵⁸, whereas the maximum values were recorded in 1921 – 721 ships⁵⁹ and 1930 – 1,344,289 tons⁶⁰. Regarding the share of different flags, Romanian vessels dominated fluvial shipping, their number representing 91.65% in 1920⁶¹ and 83.47 % in 1929⁶². The foreign ships presence in inland traffic was not great, their share in the total navigation being 8.34 % in 1920 and 16.52 % in 1929.

As in all Romanian Danubian ports, maritime traffic presented a different situation, being dominated by foreign flags: from a minimum percentage of 54.04 in 1919⁶³, their presence reached a maximum value of 94.86 % in 1929⁶⁴. Similarly, the Romanian flag amounted to only 5.31 % in 1929, but reached a maximum value of 45.95 in 1919.

The entrances of cargoes in Galați⁶⁵ varied between a minimum value of 41,417.662 tons in 1920 (31,775.644 tons of grains and derivatives, plus 9,642.018

⁵⁵ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Ministerul Aerului și Marinei. Direcția Marinei Comerciale, *Raport statistic de mișcarea porturilor României. 1938* (Bucharest, 1939), p. 79.

⁵⁷ *Raport statistic ... 1933*, p. 100.

⁵⁸ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁰ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1930*, p. 73.

⁶¹ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 25.

⁶² *Raport de mișcarea ... 1929*, p. 23.

⁶³ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 36.

⁶⁴ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1929*, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Both entrances and clearances have the quantities from transit or transshipments.

tons of various goods)⁶⁶ and a maximum of 326,148.17 tons in 1923 (45,265.63 grains and derivatives, plus 280,882.54 tons of various goods)⁶⁷.

Concerning the clearances of cargo through Galați, the lowest quantities were recorded in 1919 – 55,745.257 tons (5,303.214 tons of grains and derivatives, plus 50,442.043 tons of various goods)⁶⁸. The largest exports were in 1929, when 879,117 tons of goods were shipped (290,630 of which were grains and derivatives, plus 588,478 tons of various goods, mostly wood)⁶⁹.

Statistics concerning the trade of Galați⁷⁰

Year	Imports		Exports	
	Quantity	% of total imports	Quantity	% of total exports
1911	302,375	–	763,000	–
1920	96,610	32	139,331	9
1921	157,226	26	267,759	10
1922	86,889	15	481,914	12
1923	98,943	14	511,999	10
1924	120,375	15	704,662	15
1925	102,000	11	760,000	16
1926	81,802	8.60	640,580	10.50
1933	78,130	–	461,195	–
1936	57,475	9 %	425,108	–

Destination of exports through Galați in 1930 (tons)⁷¹

Destination	Grains	Wood
United Kingdom	25.863	4.902
America	–	23.801
Africa	1.333	5.595
Bulgaria	–	438
Belgium	34.285	1.438
Denmark	25.615	510
Egypt	176	98.420
France	29.177	28.118
Greece	3.119	78.911
Germany	89.286	2.155
Italy	97.451	42.406
Norway	1.348	9

⁶⁶ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Ministerul Finanțelor, Direcțiunea Statisticii Generale a Finanțelor și Comerțului Exterior, *Comerțul exterior al României și mișcarea porturilor pe anul 1923* (Bucharest, 1924), p. 627.

⁶⁸ *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920, 1921 și 1922*, p. 11.

⁶⁹ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1929*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Roger Ravard, *Le Danube maritime et le port de Galatz* (Paris, 1929), p. 185. See also Constantin Cheramidoglu, "Portul Galați în perioada interbelică", *Anuarul Muzeului Marinei Române*, 8 (2005), p. 216.

⁷¹ *Raport de mișcarea ... 1930*, p. 61.

Holland	71.225	7.714
Palestine	40	20.395
Spain	1.373	9.885
Turkey	710	3.156
Syria	36	20.959
Persia	–	3.524

As the table above proves, the highest share in the grain exports through Galați belonged to Western Europe, the largest quantities being contracted by Italy, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and United Kingdom; wood was mainly sent to Egypt, Greece, Italy, France, but also to Turkey, Syria and Palestine.

The shipping of the Sulina canal and port was regularised after the removal of the sunken ships and mine clusters obstructing Danube navigation. From a total of 142 loaded ships which cleared the river in 1917 (with a capacity of 146,373 register tons), this number grew to 414 loaded vessels in 1919 (600,300 register tons)⁷². In 1920, 597 ships exited the Sulina mouth (940,437 register tons), without taking into account the vessels that left in ballast – 51 (with a capacity of 18,126 register tons)⁷³.

The naval and commercial recovery of Sulina was fast, the number of ships clearing the river in 1920 being four times bigger than in 1917 and almost three times bigger than in 1918. But the most remarkable situation was the sudden redressing of Danubian trade, also proven by the increased capacity of ships, from 302,465 tons in 1918 to 940,437 tons in 1920 and 1,604,848 tons in 1926.

Naval traffic through Sulina mouth reached maximum values in 1926 (964 ships that entered and cleared)⁷⁴ and 1925 (868 ships entered / 837 ships cleared)⁷⁵. The capacity of entered ships in 1925 was 1,482,247 register tons, and of those which crossed the Sulina bar in 1926 reached 1,604,848 register tons. The number of ships that entered Sulina between the years 1925–1938 was 8,775, with a total capacity of 18,360,249 register tons, i.e. an annual average of 626.7 ships (annual average capacity of 1,311,446.3 register tons)⁷⁶. In the same interval, the number of ships that cleared Sulina mouth was 8,708, with a total capacity of 18,310,124 register tons, i. e. an annual average of 622 ships and an average capacity of 1,307,866 register tons⁷⁷. The flags which dominated the traffic on the Sulina canal during the years 1925–1938 were: Greek, British and Italian. In 1926 there were recorded 364 entries of Greek ships (521,706 register tons), 144 Italian vessels (257,602 registry tons) and 118 British ships (221,797 register tons)⁷⁸.

In 1926 three products (wheat, corn and barley) recorded a total volume of 1,549,447 tons, plus 1,423,108 cubic metres of timber⁷⁹. The distribution of these

⁷² *Mișcarea porturilor... 1919,1920 și 1921*, p. 49.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Bulletin de la Commission Européenne du Danube*, 1–2 (1927), p. 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1–2 (1926), p. 7.

⁷⁶ It should be mentioned that the statistics of the European Commission of the Danube (ECD) do not correspond with those compiled by the Romanian authorities.

⁷⁷ *Bulletin de la Commission Européenne du Danube*, 1–2 (1926), p. 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1–2 (1927), p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

exports in 1926 per destinations is extremely interesting (the quantities of cereals are in tons and those of timber in cubic meters⁸⁰):

Wheat	Italy	141,681	Timber	Greece	297,220
	Belgium	78,127		Egypt	290,579
	Gibraltar	154,455		Italy	252,450
	France	25,795	Barley	Germany	229,614
	Italy	127,440		The Netherlands	84,394
Corn	The Netherlands	196,680		Gibraltar	50,140

The common destinations of these products, mostly of Romanian origin, were: wheat – Belgium, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom; corn – the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Gibraltar, the United Kingdom, France; barley – Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands; timber – Greece, Egypt, Italy.

In 1930 there were exported 2,487,424 tons of these three main cereals (plus 764,810 cubic metres timber), the largest quantity of grain exported through the Sulina mouth during the years 1924–1938⁸¹. As for Sulina's share in Romania's economy, the table below presents the avatars of Sulina's trade and shipping⁸²:

Year	Ships fully loaded at Sulina and partially in upstream ports	Register tons	Cleared ships, fully loaded in upstream ports	Register tons
1918	–	–	142	146,373
1919	17	52,093	397	548,207
1920	23	50,109	574	890,328
1925	63	129,181	774	1,274,136
1926	42	91,915	922	1,571,017
1927	60	127,950	746	1,363,791
1928	7	15,125	467	810,399
1929	15	38,440	633	1,370,663
1931	88	217,217	603	1,335,994
1932	21	50,633	535	1,271,566
1933	23	63,830	524	1,381,654
1934	4	13,775	419	1,001,290
1935	4	8,482	364	795,453
1936	1	1,092	575	1,293,609
1937	32	66,946	540	1,140,990
1938	6	14,643	413	912,350

As it can be noticed in the table above, the average number of ships fully or partially loaded at Sulina between the years 1925–1929 was 37.4 ships per year, whereas the average for the interval 1931–1938 was 22.37. Although the latter average is smaller by about approximately one third, the decline of Sulina, in

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8 (1930), p. 8.

⁸² Based on data from *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920 și 1921* and from the collection of *Bulletin de la Commission Européenne du Danube* (1924–1939).

comparison with the total trade of the maritime Danube, was much more serious because during the 1930^s there were several years with very small totals of ships loaded (1934, 1935 or 1938). This situation was due both to the competition of Constanța, but also to the fact that vessels called at the ports where labour force was cheaper, i.e. Reni, Galați or Brăila.

This is a brief situation regarding the evolution of ships – goods traffic at the Sulina mouth⁸³:

Year	1910	1920	1930	1938
Number of ships	1,350	640	850	419
Tonnage (register tons)	2,300,000	950,000	–	927,000
Merchandise (tons)	3,925,000	940,000	3,640,000	1,856,000
Grains	3,400,000	860,000	2,750,000	893,000
Timber	400,000	50,000	800,000	871,000
Other	125,000	30,000	90,000	92,000

Regarding commercial traffic, the largest amount of goods exported through the Sulina mouth was registered in 1936 (1,893,108 tons) and 1937 (1,650,832 tons⁸⁴). If we refer to the most important products exported through Sulina in 1936, (the best year), the first position is occupied by wheat and its derivatives (flour etc.) with a total quantity of 850,971 tons, the most important purchasers being Italy – 301,543 tons, United Kingdom – 205,257 tons and Greece – 149,040 tons. Corn came second, with a total of 353,889 tons, with the following destinations: United Kingdom – 90,411 tons, Denmark – 50,190 tons, Belgium – 38,224 tons, Germany – 31,530 tons and France – 7,484 tons. Barley recorded a quantity of 286,221 tons, the largest part being shipped to the United Kingdom – 120,529 tons, Belgium – 68,862 tons, Denmark – 35,225 tons and the Netherlands – 26,368 tons. Wood totalled 263,162 tons, the most important buyers being: Greece – 82,261 tons, Egypt – 69,564 tons, Syria – 35,798 tons, United Kingdom – 32,856 tons and France – 13,663 tons.

A very interesting aspect is the fact that in 1937 Germany exceeded British imports through the Sulina mouth, and, moreover, it surpassed Great Britain even by the tonnage of the ships which cleared the Danube⁸⁵.

Referring to the general aspect of maritime Danubian ports, as it is presented in the specialised literature⁸⁶, it results that during the interwar period these ports were not structurally improved or extended. They preserved their features, and major investments were carried out neither by the Romanian authorities, nor by the private owners of different facilities or warehouses.

⁸³ *Enciclopedia României*, p. 121.

⁸⁴ *Bulletin de la Commission Européenne du Danube*, 1–24 (1936).

⁸⁵ Arthur Tuluș, “Gurile Dunării în context geopolitic ante și post Sinaia (Aranjamentul din 18 august 1938) – zonă de convergență a intereselor marilor puteri”, *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C. S. Nicolăescu-Ploșșor» din Craiova*, 10 (2009), p. 402.

⁸⁶ *Raport de mișcare ... 1929; Raport statistic ... 1932* and Al. Vasilescu, *Anuarul Dunării* (Bucharest, 1936).

Regarding the activity of the maritime ports, in terms of imports, a very large volume was handled in Brăila, which exceeded about five times that of Galați, six times Reni and, curiously enough, 7.8 times Constanța⁸⁷. Considering these quantities, Brăila should have flourished, but it was not the case. This was caused by the fact that more than 90 % of these goods came from transshipment and transit, providing jobs to only a small number of labourers and occupying a small fraction of the functional capacity of the port. Transited merchandise represented the export of countries such as Bulgaria, Yugoslavia or Hungary, but these quantities used to come temporarily and inconsistently.

Analyzing the commercial traffic of Danubian ports during their best year, the largest share for exports belonged to the goods traded at Brăila, which represented twice the quantities loaded in Galați and five times those in Reni. On the other hand, compared to Constanța, Brăila was shipping 3.6 times less quantities; if Constanța mainly exported oil products (an average of 91.23 %), Brăila exported almost entirely grains and derivatives (94.86 %).

Best year (1919–1938)	Cleared goods in the best year from the 1919–1938 interval (tons)		
	Cereals and Derivatives	Others	Total
Brăila (1930)	1,626,832.00	87,987.00	1,714,819.00
Galați (1929)	290,630.00	588,487.00	879,117.00
Reni (1930)	301,576.57	6,339.05	307,915.62
Isaccea (1930)	–	39,432.33	40,048.65
Tulcea (1930)	6,103.08	71,417.70	131,520.79
Ismail (1920)	101,281.00	4,589.49	105,871.23
Chilia Nouă (1930)	236,735.00	551.00	237,286.00
Chilia Veche (1931)	116,525.00	589.00	117,114.00
Vâlcov (1919)	–	2,825.52	2,825.52
Constanța (1936)	543,195.00	5,657,200.00	6,200,395.00

The port of Galați had a more balanced situation, 66.94 % of the shipped quantities being represented by wood and 33 % by cereals and derivatives. The port of Reni, the third port of the maritime Danube by exported quantities, relied, similarly to Brăila, on cereals from neighbouring areas or on grains brought from upstream ports (98 % of the shipments were composed of these goods).

When analysing the interwar commerce of Constanța, one can notice the decline as compared to the pre-war period: if the level of pre-war exports was only reached in 1926 due to increasing oil exports, grain exports never reached the maximum value of 1903 – 912,928 tons. Imports remained, until the 1930^s, under pre-war values, the same situation as for the maritime Danube⁸⁸.

⁸⁷ Data from *Mișcarea porturilor ... 1919, 1920 și 1921* and *Raport statistic ...*, for the period 1930–1938.

⁸⁸ Mariana Cojoc, *Constanța – port internațional. Comerțul exterior al României prin portul Constanța (1878–1939)* (Bucharest, 2006), p. 239.

Constanța could not export the same large grain quantities as the Danubian ports (in 1929 Brăila exported 536,677 tons and Constanța – 284,409 tons of grains), but Constanța had the advantage of oil exports, which compensated both by volume and by the invested capitals. If Galați, by its exports of grains and wood, managed to redistribute its activity based upon momentary necessities, Brăila faced disastrous situations, and the port developed only due to the great grain exports.

It should be noticed that Bessarabian grains, which could have been exported by the neighbouring ports (Chilia or Ismail), were not shipped there. An explanation is the fact that Chilia and Ismail were not connected to the Romanian railway system. It was as difficult for these cereals to get to the larger Danubian ports, due to the poor means of land communication. Galați could attract grains from Bessarabia only by regularising and maintaining the navigability of the Prut, a river occasionally used by small barges⁸⁹.

An illustrative example of the role that Danubian ports played in Romania's foreign trade is provided by the table below, with data on the goods exported through three Romanian customs (1922)⁹⁰:

Episcopia Bihorului	356,606 tons
Salonta Mare	390,280 tons
Brăila	327,861 tons

In 1911, the ports of Brăila, Galați and Constanța⁹¹ held a share of 66 % of Romania's commerce; in 1921 this dropped to 56 %, in 1922 to 38 % and in 1923 to only 36 %⁹²; the fall was dramatic if we consider that the traffic through Romanian ports dropped by 30 % in 12 years. This fact should be related to the reorientation of Romania's foreign trade by using the national railway company CFR ("Căile Ferate Române") and the port of Constanța, which operated throughout the year, unlike Danubian ports, closed during the winter, when the Danube was frozen.

The representatives of the main companies interested in this field of activity complained, at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Galați (January 21, 1925), that maritime Danubian ports had to face problems such as the high tariff of the CFR and the poor organisation and endowment of the ports⁹³. The taxes imposed at the Danube mouths by the European Commission of the Danube (ECD), but also the variable depth of the Sulina mouth also greatly affected Danubian navigation. For example, Brăila manoeuvred, starting with 1925, large

⁸⁹ P. Demetriad, "O latură a organizării comerțului de cereale în România", *Buletinul Institutului Economic Românesc*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1922), p. 392.

⁹⁰ Ilie Gh. Christescu, "Brăila economică. Traficul portului Brăila înainte și după război. O situație paradoxală în aparență. Cauzele scăderii activității portului Brăila", in S. Semilian, *Anuarul economic al municipiului Brăila* (Brăila, 1933), p. 43.

⁹¹ We did not include the traffic of Tulcea, as it was too small and oscillating (the port had a handling capacity of only 6.000 wagons per year); see also Victor Ciorbea, *Dobrogea între anii 1918–1944. Contribuții la cunoașterea problemelor economice, sociale și politice*, Ph.D. Thesis (Iași, 1982), p. 42.

⁹² *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 23, No. 10–12 (1924), p. 303.

⁹³ "Ședința Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați din data de 21 ianuarie 1925", *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 24, No. 1–3 (1925), p. 48.

quantities of grains from the Serbian–Croatian–Slovenian Kingdom, but this traffic was not recorded in 1927, mainly due to the difficulty of crossing the Sulina bar, when the navigable depth was extremely low⁹⁴.

Despite these problems, a significant and constant transit trade was conducted from countries such as Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Germany. Following these changes, present starting with 1931, new countries were involved in this commerce: Denmark, Syria, Canada, China, Norway, USA, Spain and Sweden, so that their transit through Romania increased in only two years (1931–1933) by 181.58 % (a plus of 571,056 tons). If this data is compared to the quantities for 1924 (83,801 tons – the best year of the 1920^s–1930^s), the growth is by 956.7 % (a plus of 801,731 tons)⁹⁵.

This traffic was also going through the ports of the maritime Danube, but it was not constant, and it mainly consisted of cereals embarked in ports upstream the river and sent to Braila; most often, these were Yugoslav grains.

Due to the insufficient number of ships and the excessive taxation by the ECD, the attempt to establish a cabotage service between Romanian ports failed in 1929⁹⁶. Nevertheless, this service operated since 1933, after the ECD lowered its tariff for the ships that transported goods between the port of Bugaz and the Lower Danubian ports⁹⁷. This reduction of taxes was necessary, taking into account the high freights, following a double taxation at Sulina (traders had to pay both when the ships entered and cleared the Danube). Due to this, the ECD approved to make some changes of the tariff, but did not abolish the double taxation.

These kind of problems affected Danubian ports, so that in 1928 Galați had a share of only 14 % of the total Romanian imports, as compared to 15 % in the case of Constanța or 17 % for the customs of Nepolocăuți⁹⁸. Things were much worse in the fourth decade, when the share of Galați recorded a continuous drop: 1935 – 9.7% and 1936 – 6 %⁹⁹. This decrease is visible for most products – iron, machineries, food, beverages, and colonial goods – which had secured the prosperity of Galați¹⁰⁰. It was obvious that these transformations severely affected not only import–export companies, but also the entire local community.

A consequence of the Romanian authorities' lack of interest in supporting the Danubian ports was the fact that, at the end of 1938, wood exports through Galați dropped in an alarming manner. The president of the Romanian Timber Exporters Association, Jean Steurman, stated that if in 1928 timber represented 80 % of the total exports of Galați¹⁰¹, in 1938 it amounted to only 34 %¹⁰². One of the major

⁹⁴ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 26, No. 10–12 (1927), p. 104.

⁹⁵ Fl. Codrescu, *Tranzitul prin România* (Bucharest, 1935), p. 41.

⁹⁶ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 28, No. 10–12 (1929), p. 57.

⁹⁷ A. V. Tuluș, “Aspecte privind deschiderea liniei de cabotaj Bugaz – porturile Dunării maritime (1930–1932)”, *Anuarul Muzeului Marinei Române*, 8 (2005), p. 282.

⁹⁸ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 27, No. 10–12 (1928), p. 4.

⁹⁹ C. Cheramidoglu, “Portul Galați în perioada interbelică”, p. 220.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ SJGAN, *Fond Căpitănia Portului Galați*, 1/1926, f. 16. Women were also employed in the port, as the timber exporters complained of the lack of male workforce.

factors that eventually caused the reduction of timber exports were the taxes requested, from 1927–1928¹⁰³, for transporting timber on the Romanian railroads¹⁰⁴; consequently, the volume of timber that entered Galați fell dramatically¹⁰⁵:

Year	Wagons of 10 tons
1925	48,006
1926	51,116
1927	30,140

In this sense, the following situation is relevant, as it presents the same aspects that have been mentioned earlier¹⁰⁶:

1926	1,221,985 m ³
1928	904,982 m ³
1934	744,484 m ³
1936	494,323 m ³
1937	447,720 m ³

Another problem was the fact that in 1928 Turkey doubled the customs taxes for timber, raising them from £ 28–30 to £ 60 for a cubic meter, a decision that had negative consequences for Romanian exports, as it is known that Romania's main partners in the timber trade were Turkey and Greece. Thus, if the port of Izmir received, before this tax increase, 8,000–10,000 wagons of timber, it manoeuvred in 1927 only 50–100 carriages, “and these with special dimensions and merchandise”¹⁰⁷.

As the main exported product through Galați was timber, this dramatic fall also determined the decay of the city, as affected by the fact that it did not manage to attract a significant volume of grains carried via the Romanian railroads. This is why on February 21, 1937, E. Codreanu, member in the Romanian Parliament for the county of Covurlui and former mayor of Galați, bitterly announced that: “The port of Galați slackens, without almost any activity. The workers are endlessly looking along the Danube, waiting for a ship to give them work [...] The budget of the city of

¹⁰² *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 37, No. 10–12 (1938), p. 61.

¹⁰³ A statement of Steuerman is relevant for how costs for timber transport grew in only a decade: “Regarding the present railways taxes, as long as they remain as such, transports, especially of timber, will be zero. [...] In other countries, the transport tax for a kilometer ton ranges between 0.70 and 1 leu. In our country, this tax is between 2 and 2.4 lei, as opposed to 0.03 per kilometer ton before the war. The increase is, thus, 70 or 80 times of what it was in 1916” – *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 26, No. 4–6 (1927), p. 59.

¹⁰⁴ R. Ravard, *Le Danube maritime et le port de Galatz*, p. 194

¹⁰⁵ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 27, No. 1–3 (1928), p. 24. For example, in January 1929, carrying a wagon of timber on a distance of 400 km cost 4,300 lei, but according to the new tariff it was 6,250 lei, or an increase of 50 %.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, No. 1–3 (1929), p. 4 and Vol. 37, No. 10–12 (1938), p. 61.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, No. 1–3 (1928), p. 25.

Galați, which in 1928 had incomes of 155,000,000 lei, has today an income of only 62,000,000 lei, a sum which cannot be collected”¹⁰⁸.

Although it was obvious that wood exports¹⁰⁹ did not bring the same benefits as the export of finite wood products, the only viable alternative was to make fruit boxes (also for citrus), particularly designed for export. Naturally, this activity could not use the entire timber sent to Galați, especially as there were absolutely no necessary storage spaces in the harbour area¹¹⁰.

The high tariff on Romanian railroads, both for domestic and foreign transport, the lack of proper warehouses (which generated the devaluation of the goods and the decrease of their price), the closing of the river during the winter were among the factors that redirected a significant part of the timber trade. The same situation is valid for grains, as the Danube became too expensive for exporters¹¹¹. In 1938, it was much more profitable to ship timber from northern Moldavia by railways than by the Danube, as it is results from the following table¹¹²:

Town of shipping/Destination	Port of transhipment	Transport costs per timber wagon (lei)
Câmpulung Moldovenesc – Garston, Preston (Marea Britanie)	Hamburg	14,740
	Galați	20,617
Piatra-Neamț – Garston, Preston (Marea Britanie)	Hamburg	15,690
	Galați	19,390

It can be easily noticed why exporters preferred railroads: by choosing the maritime Danube, their profits were diminished by at least 20 %.

The poor facilities of Danubian ports often caused hilarious situations, as it was the case in 1938, when the majority of barges which descended the Prut river with cereals were directed to unload at Brăila, not at Galați, as Brăila had elevators with a higher capacity. Unlike Galați, Brăila also offered large private warehouses, besides the silos within the Dockyards¹¹³. Poor facilities made Galați lose more than half of its total volume of exported timber, due to the lack of warehouses, making exporters seek for other routes or means of transport.

¹⁰⁸ E. Codreanu, *Redresarea portului Galați* (Galați, 1937), p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Jean Bart, *Cartea Dunărei* (Bucharest, 1933), p. 91-92. Commander E. Botez also noticed that timber, because of its specific large volume, was usually stored on the deck of ships. Yet, during powerful gales, ship-masters were forced to throw it overboard, in order not to jeopardise the ship's safety. Thus, insurance companies were not very happy to pay for the damages, especially as there were recorded cases when the traders and ship-owners, working in collusion, claimed indemnities from the underwriter.

¹¹⁰ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 37, No. 10-12 (1938), p. 40.

¹¹¹ A similar situation also occurred before the World War I: the transport of a ton of cereals from Giurgiu to Regensburg cost 36 francs for 2,000 km, and on the Giurgiu-Hamburg route (via the Maritime Danube-Black Sea-Mediterranean Sea-North Sea), a distance about three times bigger, the cost was only 15-20 francs – cf. Constantin I. Băicoianu, *Le Danube. Aperçu historique, économique et politique* (Paris, 1917), p. 188.

¹¹² *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 37, No. 10-12 (1938), p. 62.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 55-56.

An evidence of bad commercial policies on the Danube was the rationing of the freight market between companies such as *Navigația Fluvială Română*, *Societatea de Navigație pe Dunăre SRD* and *Erste Donau Dampfschiffahrts Gesellschaft D.D.S.G.*, which also transformed their barges into floating warehouses, for which they collected a daily rent¹¹⁴.

The railroad tariff hindered not only the reorientation of the Romanian commerce towards the Danubian ports, the same situation being valid for the foreign goods. A study conducted in 1934 by the commercial authorities of the *Societatea Maritimă Română*¹¹⁵ clearly revealed that Polish goods shipped towards the East via Hamburg or Gdańsk (Danzig) had an expedition cost much lower than if sent through Constanța. Considering this fact, it can be guessed what the expedition costs for these goods would have been if they were sent via the ports of Brăila or Galați, which did not enjoy a preferential tariff on Romanian railways, as the port of Constanța had.

For Romanian exporters another problem was that of the taxes imposed by the ECD beginning with 1928, which aggravated trade on the maritime Danube and added to the problems of Galați and Brăila. The taxes were unrealistically established, on the main criteria of the ships' register tonnage, not on the volume of cargo (or at least a combination of the two). The main consequence was the augmentation of the freight, which determined a deep dissatisfaction both among traders and ship-owners, already affected by the severe problems from Sulina¹¹⁶.

The tax established by the ECD in 1927 affected large capacity ships (exactly those offering a low freight), which were charged by the register ton. Thus, if there was a bad agricultural year and large quantity of cereals for export were not available (from domestic production or transit), it was not profitable for charterers to use large capacity ships, because costs were very high (fact certified in 1928 by the Romanian senator Apostol Popa)¹¹⁷.

In the condition of a dramatic drop of agricultural prices, because of the Great Depression, this initiative of the ECD directed Danubian commerce towards Constanța, which had the advantage of preferential taxes on Romanian railways¹¹⁸. As a curiosity, it was more profitable to sell cereals from the district of Brăila through the stock market of Constanța (the goods also had to be shipped from there), than to trade them by the stock market of Brăila; the difference per ton was 200 lei, money which returned to the trader¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, No. 10, 11 and 12 (1929), p. 55 "For this reason the freight Galați-Ruscuc, for example, rose from 800–1,000 lei per wagon to 2,500–3,000 lei".

¹¹⁵ Fl. Codrescu, *Tranzitul prin România*, p. 50.

¹¹⁶ C. Mihailopol, "Porturile și mijloacele de comunicație pe apă ca factor de progres", *Buletinul Porturilor și Căilor de Comunicație pe Apă*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1938), p. 3.

¹¹⁷ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 27, No. 10–12 (1928), p. 43.

¹¹⁸ Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării: diplomație, suveranitate, cooperare internațională* (Galați, 2002), p. 270.

¹¹⁹ P. Demetriad, "Activitatea portului și Docurilor Brăila în anul 1933, față de activitatea anilor precedenți", *Analele Brăilei*, Vol. 6, No. 4–6 (1934), p. 62.

The revaluation of taxes on the railways and their economic “independence” determined, at least in the case of Danubian ports, a change in the direction of imports and exports. For example, Brăila, instead of exporting in 1927 the double tonnage of 1926, symmetrical with Romania’s total exports, lost approximately 10,000 wagons. On the other hand, Cernăuți, a new centre on the economic map of Romania, registered about 60,000 wagons of export cereals¹²⁰, a new evidence that the Romanian commercial traffic and the transit trade rapidly changed their orientation after new economic realities.

The same tariffs caused the appearance of several anomalies, one of them being the following: although the distance by rail between the towns of Bukovina and the Polish port of Gdańsk was approximately three times bigger than that between these towns and Galați, tariffs were almost identical for a grain wagon towards both destinations. As we have shown before, the Romanian tariff disadvantaged at that time (1937) domestic transport on long distanced, and thus hindered exports and imports by the Danube river¹²¹.

The local authorities raised in 1938 the taxes for the commercial offices in the port of Galați by 32 %, without repairing the quay of the New Dockyards, which had collapsed into the water and could no longer be used. In the autumn of 1938, a new problem was the fact that *Suceava*, the only ship of the Societatea Maritimă Română¹²², which secured the connection with the Oriental market, had been removed from this route without notifying traders in advance, so they were forced to find other shipping companies for continuing their commerce with Syria and Palestine¹²³. In the same time, the Sulina mouth, the navigable canal and maritime Danubian ports could not receive ships larger than 10,000 tdw, which needed a depth of at least 27–29 feet (9–9.66 m). Due to their large transport capacity, these ships offered a low freight, which would have been advantageous for the ECD (as the new tariff of 1928 was imposed on the ship’s register tonnage) and for traders, through lower transport price.

Beginning with 1926, the Ministry of Transports decided to redirect the commercial traffic of the maritime Danube towards the port of Constanța. The best evidence is a memorandum, also addressed to the Romanian representative in the ECD, Constantin Coșescu, document which stated¹²⁴: “The duty of the Government

¹²⁰ One of the problems which affected the interwar Romanian economy was the fact that the railway network between the newly united provinces and Romania was either not connected to the one from the Old Kingdom (as it was the case with Bessarabia), or were only partially connected (Transylvania and Bukovina). Thus, Danubian ports and Constanța were not attractive for traders. Romania was at that time connected to Bulgaria by only a line of secondary importance, Medgidia–Oboriște, whereas the connection with Yugoslavia was totally absent; see also *Buletinul Institutului Economic Românesc*, Vol. 11, No. 7–9 (1932), p. 388.

¹²¹ D. N. Panaitescu, G. Eșanu, *Importanța portului Galați* (Bucharest, 1937), p. 10.

¹²² The company had great problems in the interwar period, although it enjoyed generous subsidies for the increase of the floating park; see also C. Cheramidoglu, “Considerații privind comerțul de tranzit derulat prin porturile de la Dunărea de jos în perioada interbelică”, *Analele Dobrogei*, new series, vol. 6, No. 1 (2000), p. 123.

¹²³ *Buletinul Camerei de Comerț și Industrie din Galați*, Vol. 37, No. 10–12 (1938), p. 63.

¹²⁴ SJGAN, *European Commission of the Danube, Delegatul României*, file 132/1926, f. 7.

is to take measures for every situation; the only means which is in our hands is to secure the flow of goods to the sea on another route than that of Sulina, when navigation is hindered or prevented on this branch. That is why I propose [...] to double the railroad from Cernavodă to Constanța, and from Fetești to Borcea, as the new bridge built over this branch is designed for two tracks. [...] In such cases, goods which usually used the Danube would be declared seasonal goods and would benefit of important discounts of the railway transport tariffs”.

Thus, it is clear that the problems of Danubian ports accumulated in a long time, their businesses gradually declined, everything in the context of a narrow-mindedness of local traders who did not manage to cope with the new national economic and social realities. By considering these details, we can conclude that between the years 1919–1938 the maritime Danube was in search of its future identity, dominated by the profound transformations which occurred in the national economy. Although the golden age of Danubian ports was long gone, there were several initiatives that aimed to re-establish free zones which promised the restore the old prosperity of Brăila and Galați, a fact that proves once more the economic and human potential of this area.