

NATIONAL-HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS ON POLITICAL-JURIDICAL STATUS OF THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES DURING 1683–1880

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Abstract: The failure of the second siege the Ottoman Empire Army carried against Vienna, in 1683 (the first was in the time of the Sultan Suleyman Kanuni –The Magnificent, in 1529), was the moment the Ottoman Empire was on defensive positions until 1878, the time for the Romanian independence.

The article points out the main opinions on the international status, as they appear in the national historiography.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire, Habsburg Empire, Romanian Principalities, national historiography.

I. PRELIMINARIES

Status changes in the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century

The Romanian Modern Age history can be defined as a merge between two fundamental manifestations, the programmatic action and the revolutionary one, to which were added the wars of European and international importance. It is noticeable that in all these types of actions, the diplomacy and the political speech had a determinant role. In 1856, it is ended up the long period of the foreign military occupations in the Romanian Principalities, Moldova and Wallachia. The revolutions from 1821, 1848–1849, the uprising of the frontier guards during the foreign occupation from the Crimean War period, showed that the Principalities needed modernisation. The Tsarist Russia was intending to introduce a series of reforms that would allow the possible annexation of the Principalities, while the Romanian progressists, involved in the revolutionary European current wanted the emancipation of the Principalities. After the Congress of Paris Congress from the 30th of March 1856, the Romanian Principalities were entering under the collective

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guarantee of the Great European Powers, concluding the Tsarist Protectorate, and keeping the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire¹.

Firstly, in the second half of the 18th century, the external status of the Principalities changed, through the elimination of the Ottoman economic monopoly and the emerging of the interest shown by Russia for the Principalities. Russia, on its way towards the straits, needed to be able to control the situation from the Principalities. To fight against the Ottomans in the Caucasus was more difficult from the military point of view and much more complicated, on addressing the war expenses.

The historian Daniela Bușă notes down: “*If analysing the international status of the Principalities and excluding the interest Russia was showing for the area (the control of them and the expansion towards the Lower Danube and the Straits), its protectorate brought the Romanian Principalities the beginning point for re-establishing the full autonomy, many times infringed by the Porte during the 18th century. Thus, between 1774–1821, there were reconfirmed the former provisions that were guaranteeing the autonomy as: the interdiction of the Ottoman subjects to enter the Principalities without a special firman, to own properties, the ones obtained abusively being mandatorily returned, the restriction of the Ottoman traders to enter the northern Danube region, the regulating on addressing the sentencing in the cases that involved Ottoman and Romanian subjects, the establishing of the ruling period for 7 years, and, extremely important, the conditioning to have the agreement of the suzerain and the protective powers for the earlier dethronement. Far from representing new regulations, they were nonetheless acknowledging the observing of the autonomy for the Principalities, which “were receiving the European recognition, especially through the fact that Russia was instituted as its guarantor”*”².

Undoubtedly, the 1848 moment, which was continuing the desiderates from 1821, was the milestone in changing the status of the Romanian Principalities. Europe saw the fight of a people that wanted to have a unite country, not the isolated fight of some related ethnic groups. The fact that the nephew of Napoleon I, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, was leading France as a president impelled by the revolutionary context, and then as an emperor, Napoleon III, made that the former Italian or Romanian revolutionary men to find sympathy in his plans, due to the fact that he paid attention to the memoires and the campaigns carried out by the exiled Romanian forty-eighters. These people’s exile managed the bringing forward of the Romanian issue on the agenda of the great chancellery.

Balta Liman Convention from 1849 provisioned that the rulers, who were chosen for seven years, to be appointed high officials of the Ottoman Empire,

¹ Romanian Academy, *Istoria Românilor*, Volume VII, Book I, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing, 2003, pp. 228–229.

² For details, see <https://identitateinter.wordpress.com/istorie-si-relatii-internationale/consideratii-privind-statutul-juridic-al-principatelor-romane/>, accessed on July 4 2020.

which was not tolerated by the Romanians, especially by the exiled forty-eighters. Thus, the Principalities were, in 1849, under an abusively extended suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire and a harsh Protectorate of Russia.

When Russia attacked the Ottoman Empire in 1853, England, France and Austria decided to support the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and, at Paris, in 1856, the Romanian issue became a European one, that is, the Union of the Principalities was an applying plan.

The academician Dan Berindei notes that: *“Since the summer of 1856, at Craiova, there were meetings taken place ‘almost every day’. The welcoming of the European commissaries also offered the opportunity of organising great manifestations. At Bacău, France’s commissary was welcomed by 3,000 people, who ‘were crowding’ into his carriage, unharnessed the horses and then pulled the carriage using ‘scarves in the colours of the national flag of the Union’”*³.

The compromise from Osborne between England and France from 1858, the Convention from the same year, represented the signal for the continuation of the Romanian fight for the Union of the Principalities. England and France were aware of the fact that Russia would become closer to the Ottoman Empire again, that the German nations might have an influence in Europe, therefore, the emerging of a new state located at the Danube mouths could have been seen as a “successful recipe”, a reiteration of the anterior support of England for Belgium and Holland, meaning that the Rhine mouths could not have been French or German. Thus, the Danube mouths were to be international, Russia was to be removed, and the international status should have been somehow supported by the future buffer-state of the United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova.

The Romanian forty-eighters understood what they were expected. Later on, they knew how to present the already materialised situation to Europe.

Thus, the diplomacy, the merging between the revolutionary sympathies and the manner in which the Romanian forty-eighters approached the idea of the Union, from the perspective of some veritable states people, represented the key for the success of the double election, in January 1859, of the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza⁴.

The historian Iulian Oncescu notes that: *“Following its course, with a sinuous trajectory, with its stages and resorts, the French policy that was aiming at, since 1856, the Union of the Romanian Principalities as a target in the south-eastern Europe, was therefore being registered, in January 1859, the expected success, through exclusively diplomatic means. The gratitude of the Romanians, officially formulated by Cuza, was real and solid, and Napoleon III was its first personal*

³ See more, Florin Nacu, *Împlinirea dezideratului revoluționar pașoptist în timpul domniei lui Alexandru Ioan Cuza*, Opera Omnia Collection, Cartea de Istorie, Iași, Tipo Moldova Publishing, 2015.

⁴ See more, Florin Nacu, *European influences in reforming social structures of modern Romania*, in “Sociology, Education Sciences, International Relations”, Conference GIDNI 2, “ARHIPELAG XXI” Press, 2015, pp. 274–278.

beneficiary. France was “our great friend”, “the protector of the Principalities”, as it was affirmed at Iași at some point, and such a relation, became, inevitably, for the Romanians, the solid ground for the difficulties inherently expected after the recently accomplished Union.

There can be noticed that France, which gave a decisive support to the Romanian cause, in 1856–1859, even if, on the way, there were also registered some halts, also made use of the secret plans of the emperor Napoleon III, who interfered personally for solving the Romanian issue. In reality, as one of the most important and well-informed historian on the Romanian-French relations from the Union period said, “the facts are way more complicated than they are depicted in the diplomatic documents”⁵.

II. THE STATUS OF THE PRINCIPALITIES BETWEEN 1856 AND 1880

Consequently, the period 1856–1859 was the last opportunity for accomplishing the Union. The Paris Convention from 1858 represented the constitutional base for the Union, the ground for the international status of the Romanian Principalities, which were to become united. England and France wanted to have a close relation with the political elite from Bucharest, in order to have control over the disputes between the Ottomans and the Russians, which were to start in the next 21 years. England and France knew that neither Russia, nor Prussia were going to stand still, wishing to expand their territories on the account of Austria, and they were even familiar with the situation that, at some point, Germany was going to push towards a bigger war, due to the ambitions expressed by Otto von Bismarck.

In the period of 1857–1859, in the Principalities, there were two tendencies manifesting, a unionist and a loyalist one, specific for the liberals and respectively to the conservatives. The first were representing the forty-eight elite who reached its maturity, the others, the conservative majority, in accordance to the legislation based on the qualification. Between these two groups, there were the peasants, the main economic producers and performers of the military service, lacking political rights, but having great fiscal obligations. Europe, as in the case of Greece before, was considering that only a foreign prince was going to be able to ensure the modernisation of the Principalities, which were going to have a formal union. Yet, through memoirs, speeches, diplomatic actions, the Romanian liberal elite managed to impose itself and present Europe with a “fait accompli”, represented by the double election of the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, in both Moldova and Wallachia.

⁵ For details, see [https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/politica-orientala-a-lui-
napoleon-al-iii-lea-si-destinul-romaniei-
moderne?fb_comment_id=909293852529218_909379559187314](https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/politica-orientala-a-lui-napoleon-al-iii-lea-si-destinul-romaniei-moderne?fb_comment_id=909293852529218_909379559187314), accessed on July 6 2020.

The academician Dan Berindei notes that: *“The foreign military occupation and the regime, set up through the agreement between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires, could not erase from the collective memory of the revolutionary days. To that, it was added the restless activity of the revolutionary leaders, exiled abroad, the urges received through their correspondence or publications, along with the actions of the people involved in the revolution, who had suffered, most of them, from the internal rigors. Very significant was the international transformation that occurred in the summer of 1853, not only after the breaking of the Crimean War, but especially after the South-East Europe and the Low Danube regions had been included in the circle of interests of the great western powers. If they had not manifested opposition against the repressive actions of Russia in 1848, this time, they interfered with the arms, and manifested their undoubtful desire to include, in the following period, the Principalities, in their direct area of interest. It was not by chance that a correspondent of “The Augsburg Gazette” was writing, in 1856, that “The rapid change that has occurred among the public opinion from the Principalities, since the beginning of the oriental crisis, might look extraordinary, if not inexplicable, to a stranger to the situation”*⁶.

Undoubtedly, the double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza was a registered mark of the forty-eighters’ diplomacy, who passed the exam of transforming themselves from revolutionaries into state people.

Dumitru Brătianu was writing that: *“The cry that announces the Union of the Principalities! The sovereignty of the Romanian state! Let it pierce the mountains, pass through our fields, valleys and hills, and fill the air, let it reach the most remote places on earth, for the whole world to find that the Union is the breath of the Romanian people, is the voice of Romania itself”*.

On the 24th of January 1862, that is, three years after the double election, there could be mentioned the name of Romania, as a modern, unitary state, yet without the national independence. It was obtained 15 years later, when the international context allowed it, although certain actions had also been seen during the ruling of Alexandru Ioan Cuza. His dethroning was done through an action as a compromise between the liberals and the conservatives, which was intending the fulfilment of the decisions from 1857, of bringing a foreign prince. Although the age of Cuza was one of the great accomplishments, although his dethroning was sometimes perceived as a great injustice, the reasons that imposed this measure can lean the balance of accepting it as part of the history, more than the lack-of-honour manner, in which it was done. Alexandru Ioan Cuza had assumed the authoritarian governing on the 2nd/14th of May 1864, excluding the parliamentary debate, which was natural only during a transitional period⁷.

⁶ For details, see <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/propaganda-pentru-unire-inainte-de-adunările-ad-hoc>, accessed on July 6 2020.

⁷ Vladimir Osiac, *Istoria modernă a României*, Craiova, Universitaria Publishing, 1999, p. 147.

The Romanian political class had to fight for the consolidation of the Union. The adversaries of the Union became the opposition of Ruler Cuza, only that he had understood that the interest of the country was to not encourage the former forty-eighters. Napoleon III supported Cuza, on the acknowledgement of his double election and the Union, including the Ottomans and the Austrians, during his life period. Cuza knew that, in 1857, it was decided that the ruling of the principalities to be taken over by a foreign ruler, and that the forty-eighters would not hesitate to change him, at the right moment.

Knowing that he had a limited mandate, he tried to dedicate his time to the great reforms, but he also undermined his position, especially after he tested the alliance with the Italian, Polish revolutionaries, after supporting the crossing of the armies bought from Russia, by the Serbians.

Consequently, the abdication of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the arrival of Prince Carol must be regarded as a necessary measure for the continuation of the Union.

Napoleon III, due to the success generated by the Italian support, to the fights between the German and Austrian fights, decided to support the acknowledgement of the Prince Carol ruling by the Sultan, who, having the advantage that he was part of leading dynasty from Germany, had to be received with respect by the sultan, who needed the German capital and the technicians from Prussia.

The transition period assumed by the Ad-interim Rulers from the 11th/23rd of February 1866 to the 10th/22nd of May 1866 led, due to Napoleon III mediation, to the enthronement of Prince Carol of Hohenzollern Sigmaringen. He would promulgate the Constitution of modern Romania in July 1866, a new electoral law and would be proclaimed king on the 14th of March 1881, after he had obtained the acknowledgement of the Romanian independence in 1878-1880, after he had led the Romanian Army in the Russian-Turkish war, in 1877–1878⁸.

King Carol I assumed his role as a mediator and arbiter for the Romanian political class. The liberal and conservative political currents represented the foreground of the political life from Bucharest. The liberals owned the leadership of the forty-eight fight, along with the struggle for bringing Prince Carol in Romania, but neither did the conservatives owned less, trying to get themselves closer to the power zone, due to the deterioration of the French-German relations, in the interval 1866-1870, culminating with the defeating of the Napoleon III and the proclaiming of the German Empire.

“After his return at Bucharest, Carol I would address the Sultan a thanking letter for the “the honours and the consideration” he enjoyed during his stay at Constantinople. It was a resourceful attitude, which would show its outcome really fast. Towards the end of November 1866, G. Știrbey, the Romanian Foreign Affairs minister would bring from the Ottoman capital a letter sent by the Great Vizier, in which there were included the latter concessions of the suzerain Court: the right to

⁸ Anastasie Iordache, *Originile conservatorismului politic din România*, Bucharest, Political Publishing, 1987, p. 8.

institute a Romanian military award, the small coinage that was to be introduced would not bear the sign of the Turkish Empire, the right to have a Romanian trade agent at Varna, the founding of an international postal service, the concluding of a convention on the reciprocal extradition of those accused of murder. Thus, the journey to Constantinople would prove fruitful, the new regime from Bucharest obtaining the long-awaited acknowledgement, without the influence of the guarantor Powers, expressed for one or another course of events”.

III. THE NATIONAL HISTORIOGRAPHY ON THE PRINCIPALITIES AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL STATUS

It is a known fact that the Habsburg Empire did not give its agreement on the Union, because it had in its possession both Romanian and Italian territories, and the Italian, Romanian and German unification disagreed with its interests and could lead to a loss of territories. Thus, the fact that Vienna wanted to falsify the consultation result from 1857, on the union of the Principalities.

When referring to the proving of the falsification from 1857, the academician Dan Berindei states that: *“When the attempt to falsify the election in Moldova occurred, it was resorted to the protest-petitions signed by thousands of people, the instructions of the unionist movement being that it had to be obtained “a general protest against the elections”. It was significant that the peasants also took part to this action. The protests were showing an obvious patriotic involvement. At one of these protests, the people were talking about “the national feeling that at least the present moment shall be positioned above all”. The unionist propaganda and agitation, manifested in different manners and coordinated by the leadership of the movement for the Union in Principalities, contributed efficiently to the mobilisation of the entire society and the transformation of the people’s will into an unstoppable force, to which few adversaries would resist, the inside ones, and at all the outside ones! Before Europe, the Romanians showed a behaviour that impressed and attracted praise. The propaganda actions contributed, skilfully guided, to the gathering and the expressing of positive energies, which determined an unprecedented mobilisation of the nation. The union of the Principalities appears as a result of this socio-political process”.*

Thus, the Union from 1859 changed the international status of the Principalities, who were under Ottoman suzerainty, but the collective guarantee of the European Powers. The fact that the Developing Statute of the 1858 Convention, elaborated by Cuza in 1864 was acknowledged as “an additional act of the Convention”, in 1864–1865, was another diplomatic triumph. The justification of the Great Powers was that the United Principalities had changed their situation dramatically, in 1864, due to the events, compared to the reference year of 1857. Even if the Statute was issued as a consequence of the coupe d’état, its legitimacy assured the success in the historic events that were presenting the Principalities as international law subjects.

The academician Victor Spinei states that: *“The act of the Principality Union represents a crucial moment in the destiny of the Romanian people, and without this milestone in our historic transformation, the Great Union would not have been possible. The succeeding of the internal and external events, which had as common point the union of the Principalities – thoroughly investigated by a long line of historians, scholars and politicians, periodically evoked in treaties and at festive manifestations –, is generally known not only by the specialists, but also by the general public that shows interest in history. His consistent approach is due to the great synthesis works dedicated to the Romanian past, wrote by A.D. Xenopol, Nicolae Iorga, C.C. Giurescu, and the collaborators to the treaties coordinated by the Romanian Academy, and in the ample monographs written by Dan Berindei, Gheorghe Platon, Leonid Boicu, and other prestigious scholars”*⁹.

It can be evidenced the fact that the accomplishment of the Union and the later evolution of it were directly supported by both England and France, while their interests were respected. During the 22 years that passed between the Peace Congresses of Paris 1856 and Berlin 1878, France collapsed, to become a remarkable presence on the European stage at the end of the 19th century only, when it is laid the foundation for the alliances that would lead to the breaking out of World War I.

Through the position Carol I had at Bucharest, Romania had to depend on Germany in its external policy. Germany wanted to keep Russia away from France, thus, Romania had to cease the Southern Bessarabia, receiving Dobruja at Berlin, in 1878. The idea of the rights on Bessarabia could not be officially stated, because Germany wanted to deal with Russia tactfully.

Historian Iulian Oncescu writes that: *“Generally, of all the great powers, firstly France, and then England, had a direct influence on the evolution of the complicated negotiations that led to the Romanian-Ottoman bilateral arrangement. Although France, officially, had, during the year of 1866, a sinuous attitude on the issue of the union and the foreign prince, it offered, also due to its refined secret diplomacy, both the chance and the efficient solutions that led to success after the effort carried out by the Romanian political elite, that of showing the fact accompli to Europe, once more.*

Moreover, France was still interested in the Black Sea region and the Lower Danube, a fact indicated by both the conditions imposed to Russia in 1856, and the activity carried out by the representatives of France in the European Commission of the Danube, whose presidency it had. Nonetheless, the collective guarantee was preserved after 1866 too, the collective tutelary instance that the Romanians had to take into consideration furthermore.

The instauration of the foreign hereditary monarchy on the Romanian throne was, obviously, possible not only due to the role played by the internal political

⁹ For details, see https://acad.ro/academica2002/rev2018/pag_acad2018_nr327_328_ian_feb.pdf, accessed at 9 July 2020.

factors, but the external ones too. Once more, the external circumstances were favourable for the actors of the action from the 11th of February 1866, and some European powers, as in the case of France, offered their support, discretion and suggested the necessary limits. Yet, the relation of this power with the new Romania, resulted after the events of 1866, was in its beginning, and a new French policy was shaping on the horizon”.

Basically, once with the acknowledgement of the double election, the idea of independence arose both in the plans of Cuza (“since this day forward, you have a country to love and defend, since now you own a part of the Country’s body”, as he declared in the Proclamation to the Land Reform in 1864).

The academician Dan Berindei noted: *“The union of the Principalities – supported and accepted by most of the political powers – represented the birth certificate of Romania. The result owed not to the gathering of two thirds of the Romanian population, but their European joining and the modernisation of the state. Half of century later, they were to become citizens of Great Romania. Romania displays as an entity who has a new international status confirmed. The attention of Cuza and Carol on the military factor underlined the care for independence and the wish for recognition, respectively, the will of a culture that would embrace the entire nation, elements that defined the context and the popular support. All of us have to contribute to the balanced process of Romania in Europe, which means efforts, along with the involvement of the partners too. What happened 140 years ago, is a model of how to act presently”.*

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Years of 1875 and 1880, represented the moment the two political forces emerged, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. If the first was structured as a Party, the second one was based on a network of clubs, founded around some conservative personalities, as Manolache Kostache Epureanu¹⁰.

Despite their differences of approach, the both parties faced dissidences, political migration of some conservatives towards the liberals and inversely, during the liberal governing (1866–1871), the conservative one (1871–1876) and liberal again (1876–1888). There was even an attempt of a boyar family, Văcărescu, to obtain the kinship with the royal family, by initiating a love story between Elena Văcărescu and the heir Prince Ferdinand, an attempt harshly reprehended by King Carol I, who discovered the involvement of Queen Elisabeta, of Elena Bibescu, daughter of M.K.Epureanu.

After 1888, gradually, the great forty-eighters left the political and life stage. The loyal conservatives also disappeared, their place being taken by progressive-view characters, called Junimea (approx. “the Youth”).

¹⁰ *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VII, book II, p. 138.