

The Romanian Principalities in the Focus of Interest of Russian Foreign Policy

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“The welfare of the Russian Empire . . . is in no way dependent on incorporating Moldavia and Wallachia.”

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IN THE game of diverging interests between France, Russia, Turkey and Austria, it was for warfare to decide upon the fate of the Romanian Principalities. The Russo-Turkish Peace Congress launched in Bucharest on 15 December 1811 was a good opportunity for Napoleon I to pledge the Romanian Principalities to the Habsburg Empire in recognition of its war effort, if Vienna should enter war against Tsarist Russia. Concurrently, Emperor Napoleon I was urging the sultan to keep fighting the Russians in exchange for the Romanian Principalities, the Crimean Peninsula, safeguards concerning the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and the restoration of Poland’s territorial integrity. In such a political-diplomatic context, Bernadotte, designated crown prince of Sweden, “proposait à la Porte Ottomane la conclusion d’une alliance, même au prix du sacrifice d’une bonne partie du territoires des provinces roumaines.”¹ He went even further than that, “préconisant même le détachement

de la Transylvanie de l'Empire des Habsbourg et sa cession à la Russie, mesure qui, à son avis, aurait définitivement détaché cette dernière de la France."²²

The Ottoman Empire seemed unwilling to give in to imperial Russia's pressure on the political, diplomatic and military fronts. Even less willing to give up any of its territorial claims, the British Cabinet declined any suggestion that involved territorial exchanges. However, the possibility of a territorial exchange does emerge from a report A. A. Prozorovski sent from Bucharest to the Russian War Minister A. A. Arakceev on 9 December 1808. Supposing the Ottomans did not accept the Danube as a natural border and that the truce agreement were broken, once warfare resumed, he believed that it was only "sheer force of arms that would compel the Turks to recognize the Danube as the border separating the two empires."²³ In the meantime, Russia's position on the status of the Romanian Principalities was clearly expressed in a note from 20 July 1810 that Chancellor Rumiantzev sent St. Julien, Austrian diplomatic representative to Saint Petersburg, writing that "Considering Moldavia and Wallachia provinces of His Empire that are in want of administration, according to imperial law, His Majesty the Emperor [Alexander I] resolved to replace Turkey in the exercise of its specific rights,"²⁴ which "empowered him to inform St. Julien that any person born in the two provinces is deemed but a Russian subject."²⁵

The prospect of a war with France, which everyone had started to talk about as early as September 1810, brought a sense of urgency to a Russo-Turkish peace, even at the cost of territorial compromises, as C. V. Nesselrode, counselor at the Russian embassy in Paris, informed the Cabinet in Saint Petersburg. Count N. S. Mordvinov, president of the State Economy Department of Russia, reported to the tsar on 25 August 1810 that "the welfare of the Russian Empire . . . is in no way dependent on incorporating Moldavia and Wallachia."²⁶

In the light of an impending war with France, Russia's territorial claims gradually shrank: from both provinces to the province of Moldavia, but only up to the Siret River, then even less, to the Moldavian area bordered by the Dniester and the Pruth rivers. It only took several months for the Russians to settle for less and less.⁷ On 5 May 1812, a preliminary Russo-Turkish Peace Treaty was signed in Bucharest. The final Peace Treaty was signed in Bucharest on 16 May 1812, but its ratification was postponed for 2 July 1812. Tsarist Russia expanded with the annexation of Bessarabia, whereas Moldavia and Greater Wallachia were returned to the Ottoman Empire.

The collapse of the Napoleonic empire (15 June 1815) enabled Tsarist Russia to strengthen its international status and dominate the international relations system. The Congress of Vienna of the victorious Great Powers began in September 1814 and was concluded on 28 May 1815. The Vienna negotiators "not only acknowledged the tsar's authority over the Kingdom of Poland, but also accept-

ed Finland's and Bessarabia's annexation; however, that was as far as they went: Eastern and Southeastern Europe were left unchanged."⁸ On 15 January 1815, Tsar Alexander I claimed in front of the other Great Powers Russia's right to protect all Christians from the Ottoman Empire. The Court in Saint Petersburg was "altogether adverse to the proposals advanced by the English and the Austrians to append the so-called *Oriental issue—the issue of the Principalities* included—to any of the treaties of 1815."⁹

The Congress of Vienna safeguarded Russia's territorial rights to Bessarabia, although the Ottomans strove to repeal the Treaty of Bucharest of 16 May 1812 and even engaged the Russians in several battles fought on the banks of the Danube. The Habsburg Foreign Minister, Count von Metternich, opposed the Russians in their intention to dismantle the Ottoman Empire, perceived as "a crucial equalizer . . . in rectifying Europe's general balance of powers . . ."¹⁰ Count von Metternich actually charged his secretary, von Gentz, to relay to the Ottoman Porte (through the Wallachian Hospodar Ioan Gheorghe Caragea) that "Austria will defend the interest of the Porte as if it were her own, that she will not be afraid to jeopardize her relations with Russia if Russia should bring prejudice to the Porte"¹¹ anywhere in the Romanian Principalities. On 2 December 1816, the Russian Ambassador to Istanbul, G. A. Stroganov, voiced Russia's discontent with the Ottomans' political outlook, their foreign policy in particular, stating that they had broken the existing treaties and violated the rights of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, especially those living in the Romanian Principalities. The Russo-Turkish antagonism also emerges from the note of 20 February 1818, empowering Ambassador Stroganov to communicate to the sultan that Russia could not possibly subscribe to the ousting of Hospodar Ioan Gheorghe Caragea of Wallachia and Hospodar Scarlat Callimachi of Moldavia, which was a violation of the hatisherif edicts of 1802.¹² That the sultan would appoint new hospodars in the Romanian Principalities was a bone of contention between the Ottoman and the Russian Empires. On 19 February 1820, Baron Stroganov addressed the Ottoman Porte again, in need of a compromise on a host of issues: trade and sailing rights of the Russian ships in the Black Sea and the violation of the Christians' rights and freedoms by the Ottomans. As for the role and place of the Romanian Principalities in the international arena, by the end of 1814, the British General Consul to Jassy and Bucharest, William Wilkinson, wrote that "the Porte suzerainty over the Principalities shattered peace in Europe, so the Porte would better give them up and let them turn into either a buffer zone isolating Russia or a territory to be split between Russia and Austria."¹³

At the Conference of Aix-la-Chapelle (October 1818), the Habsburg Empire opposed the Russian claims in the Balkans, whereas Great Britain tried to eliminate Russia's influence in the Balkan Peninsula. If the political and territorial sta-

tus quo was to survive in Europe, then the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain favored Metternich's political views. Russia's foreign policy focused on three main areas between 1815 and 1828: a) Central Europe, where it took advantage of the rivalry between Austria and Prussia in their fight for supremacy in the German Confederation; b) the Pacific, Central Asia and Transcaucasia, where Great Britain was a major stakeholder; c) the Balkans, the Straights and the Eastern Mediterranean area, where it counted on the support of the Christian peoples from the Balkans. The court in Saint Petersburg tried to stir these people against the Ottoman Empire. In the general strife of the Greeks against the Ottoman Porte, Russia gave a helping hand in the establishment of Philiké Hetairia, an organization set up in Odessa in 1814 aimed at forming "an armed union of all Christians in the Ottoman Empire so as to make the Cross triumph over the Crescent."¹⁴ This was actually the international context in which the uprising led by Tudor Vladimirescu broke out in Wallachia in 1821.

Points 33 and 34 of Vladimirescu's Proclamation of 23 March 1821 clearly stated the wish for real autonomy, while not breaking away from the suzerain power and still depending on the "protection" of Tsarist Russia and the Habsburg Empire, as it were. The Proclamation reiterated both the province's submission to the Ottoman Empire and the "rights of the country," but the Porte was in no way held responsible for their violation. The same ideas were reflected in the first "arz-magzari" sent to the sultan through the Pasha of Vidin. The overall tone was diplomatic, courteous even, but firm enough: for the time being the sultan should let things run their course and see the outcome, when the inner evil was cured.

Vladimirescu sent memos to the suzerain power and the other two powers which he hoped would support his cause by the Porte and extend protection if necessary. The tsar and the emperor of Austria were presented with the document in Laybach by his envoy, Ghiță Opreșan of Orșova, whereas the "arz" for the Porte was handed over to the Pashas of Ada Kaleh and Vidin by "the people," i.e. a party made up of common people, dressed in ragged clothes, the very image of suffering, poverty and thirst for justice.¹⁵

The Ottomans crushed the revolutionary movement in Wallachia in the summer of 1821 and occupied the Romanian Principalities, complicating the relation with Russia. Upon the refusal of the Porte to meet the demands of Saint Petersburg, Russia broke diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire on 10 August 1821. The Russian consular offices in Jassy and Bucharest discontinued their activity. The US Ambassador to Saint Petersburg, Henry Middleton, reported to Washington: "The Russians will agree to resuming their relations with the Porte provided the Turkish troops permanently withdraw from the Principalities and they restore native rule, possibly under the diplomatic pressure

of European countries, England and Austria most of all, if not otherwise.”¹⁶ Habsburg diplomacy would also have a say in mediating relations between the two rival empires at the mouths of the Danube.

In July 1822, the Ottoman Empire restored the right to the appointment of native rulers in the Romanian Principalities, but it did not call back its troops. Ioniță Sandu Sturdza and Grigore Dimitrie Ghica were the first native rulers appointed after 1711 in Moldavia and Wallachia, respectively. On 6 February 1822, the Russian Foreign Minister sent a circular note to the Russian ambassadors to Vienna, Berlin, London and Paris explaining why Tsar Alexander I could not consent to either the postponement or the amending of the proposals he made to the Ottomans in his ultimatum of 6 July 1821. The tsar believed that the Allied Powers “vont insister avec une nouvelle force auprès du Divan sur l’adoption franche et loyale des mesures de salut que lui propose la Russie.”¹⁷

On 19 June 1822, the Porte let the ambassadors of the Great Powers know that it would not accredit any other representative but those in Jassy and Bucharest, and that officials must necessarily be their nationals. Subjects of the Ottoman Empire were not entitled to represent other countries in front of the Porte. The Russo-Turkish relations remained very tense as long as the Ottomans refused to withdraw their troops from the Romanian territories. To dignitaries in Saint Petersburg, in times of peace, the Romanian Principalities were a means of influence and action in the Christian provinces of the Ottoman Empire whereas in times of war they were a precious supplier of cereals for the Russian army and a place to recruit volunteers for the Russian imperial army. The protracted refusal of the Ottomans to withdraw their troops and Russia’s threat of war made the Great Powers step up their interventions with the sultan. The Habsburg Empire advocated for the withdrawal of the Ottoman army for fear Russia might respond with the force of arms and win the fight. Should the Russians beat the Ottomans in the Romanian Principalities, the latter could be incorporated in the Russian Empire. On the other hand, Great Britain was keen on preserving the status quo in Southeastern Europe and on curbing the expansion of the Russians in the region, therefore it also insisted on a fast withdrawal of the Ottoman army from the Romanian Principalities. In November 1824, the Ottomans slowly made their way out of the Romanian territories in an attempt to show that the Porte was still holding in front of international pressure.

After the Russian ultimatum of 5 March 1826, the Ottoman Porte accepted to negotiate with Russia over a possible restoration of the Romanian Principalities to their previous state. Article 3 of the Convention of Akkerman of 25 September 1826 safeguarded the agreed privileges Moldavia and Wallachia should enjoy. The existence of the two distinct political entities was thus consolidated and their rights and privileges were accordingly guaranteed by international law. The agree-

ment of Akkerman provided for the Romanian hospodars to be elected by the General Assembly of the Divans and to be validated by the sultan. The Russian protectorate also involved Russia's mediating role in case the Porte refused to validate the candidate designated the General Assembly of the Divans. A hospodar could be replaced only if Russia agreed. The Convention of Akkerman also restored the Principalities' right to reform part of the administration, if this was deemed necessary by the hospodar or the Divans. The appendix to the Convention of Akkerman provided for the return of the territories recently seized and incorporated in the Turkish rayas of Brăila, Giugiu and Turnu. It was a first attempt to do away with the system of Turkish rayas and to set the frontier along the Danube. At the same time, the Ottoman troops on Romanian territory dwindled and the cavalry no longer had the right to intervene in Romanian internal affairs or to take military action against the Principalities. The Romanian Principalities were exempt from the payment of tax for two years and future taxes were capped to what had been agreed in the hatisherif edict of 1802.

IN THE general context in which the Great Powers competed for influence in Southeastern Europe, and implicitly in the Romanian Principalities, political elites in both Moldavia and Wallachia found themselves faced with a dilemma: which Power to side with so as to get the most support for the emergence and affirmation of the Romanian state. The French General Consul to Bucharest, Chevalier Hugot, wrote in a report of 25 May 1825 about "the general repulsion of the inhabitants of Wallachia to the 'Ottoman yoke.'"¹⁸ The Russian Empire and Habsburg Austria were not seen with good eyes by either the Romanian people or their leading political elites. The Romanians preferred to "strengthen their status within two distinct state entities, without completely breaking away from the Ottoman Empire."¹⁹ Boyar Ionică Tăutu pointed out in his report of 1828–1829 that Moldavia's foreign policy "should not focus for the time being on abolishing the suzerainty of the Turks, because internally the country would keep 'its laws, rules and customs,'"²⁰ therefore "actions should be channeled towards persuading the suzerain power to respect Moldavia's identity and curbing any intervention in domestic matters."²¹

The prospect of another Russo-Turkish war urged the boyar parties in the Romanian Principalities to search for solutions to remove the Turkish suzerainty and to achieve independence with the help of a protecting power. On 7 April 1827, the French diplomat Lagan reported to Paris from Jassy that almost all the boyars envisaged a change in Moldavia's international position that could be made possible with Russia's support, but no more than that.

From the end of the Russo-Turkish war of 1828–1829 until the spring of 1834, the Romanian Principalities learned what Russian military occupation was like.

The war that broke out in April 1828 was to end on 2 September 1829, with the signing of the Peace Treaty of Adrianople. Under Article 5 of the treaty, following the terms of surrender, Moldavia and Wallachia would remain under Ottoman suzerainty but it was for Russia to safeguard all the privileges and immunities granted either under the mentioned “treaties,” the other agreements the two Great Powers had concluded, or the hatisherif edicts issued by the Ottomans. Article 5 made specific mention of the fact that the Romanian Principalities would enjoy “freedom of religion, perfect safety, independent national administration and complete freedom of trade.”²² The rayas of Turnu, Giurgiu and Brăila no longer existed and the banks of the Danube became a quarantined area for both Christians and Muslims. The Romanian frontier guard would take over the Principalities’ border surveillance. The Ottomans no longer held monopoly over trade in the Romanian Principalities, which turned the Danube into a free trade route linking the Principalities to the West. The Russo-Turkish agreement of Saint Petersburg of 17 January 1834 laid out that the Romanian national militia and trading ships were entitled to fly distinct banners and flags. The same agreement capped the amount of the tribute to 6,000 purses, i.e. 3,000,000 Turkish piasters. Hospodars of the Principalities were to enjoy a life mandate, as compared to the previous 7-year mandate, but both the Russian and the Ottoman Empires reserved the right to intervene in the two principalities’ domestic issues, should the hospodars’ policies cause them prejudice.

The Russo-Turkish Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi of 8 July 1833 obliged the Ottomans to close the Straights in case the Russian Empire came into conflict with another power, which caused the outrage of the West. The French Consul to Bucharest, Thiers, reported to Paris on 4 July 1836 that by “closing access to the Black Sea to all Western warships, Russia had actually obstructed any form of assistance to the Ottoman Empire,”²³ which rendered the Ottoman Empire vulnerable from all sides to the attacks of the Russian troops, as long as Moldavia and Wallachia were dependent on Russia. The hospodars stepped down from office during the Russian military occupation of the Romanian Principalities (1828–1834) and the Joint Divans were chaired by so-called presidents, Count Pahlen (1828–1829), Generals Jeltuhin (1829) and Kisselev (1829–1834). The Russian protectorate would impose the law of the Organic Regulations that were adopted by the Extraordinary Assemblies of the Representatives in 1 July 1831 in Bucharest and on 1 January 1832, in Jassy, Moldavia. In opposition to what the Organic Regulations stipulated, the Russian Empire and the Porte appointed the first organic statute rulers in April 1834. They were Michael Sturdza in Moldavia (1834–1849) and Alexander Ghica in Wallachia (1834–1842). George Bibescu (1842–1848) was the first ruler elected according to the rules laid out in the Organic Regulations. The Russian troops officially withdrew from the Romanian

Principalities in April 1834, but the documents of the time show that by the end of December 1834 there were still 5,774 Russian officers and soldiers stationed in Tutova, Tecuci, Focșani and inland. Under the pressure of the British, a new Russo-Turkish agreement was signed on 3 August 1836, forcing the Russians to leave the citadel of Silistra. In the time to come, Saint Petersburg would be left with only two strongholds in its Eastern European policy, i.e. its two embassies in Bucharest and Belgrade. The two were known at the time under the name of “the seat of suzerainty” or “the way to power.” Candidates to state leadership or ministerial positions had to be “on friendly terms” with the Russian consul, who was reputedly the “man with a finger in all pies” and the final grantor of all favors. The Russian consuls’ intrusion in the domestic affairs of the Romanian Principalities was a constant reality and caused fierce antagonism between the hospodars and the boyars interest group, on the one hand, and the representatives of Russia, on the other. In 1836, Michael Sturdza, hospodar of Moldavia, asked that Besak, the Russian consul to Jassy, be recalled, but his successor, Consul Kotzebue, interfered even more in Moldavia’s executive administration, overturning court decisions, among others. Russia depended a lot on the establishment of a philo-Russian party organization in the Principalities, a political structure that would implement its local interests. “It is really difficult to see what the Russians are after, they seem to be at a loss themselves and are failing to find a way to curb the discontent of the boyars whom they perceive as a crucial element to propagate their influence in the Romanian Principalities,”²⁴ Alexandru A. C. Sturdza noted in a study on Michael Sturdza’s rule. The Russians severely suppressed all Romanian attempts to resist. The Romanian boyars that confronted the Russians’ abuses against the autonomy of the Romanian Principalities were sometimes locked up in monasteries or even sent to prison.²⁵

This was the time when the Romanian national movement began to emerge, aimed at defending Moldavia’s and Wallachia’s political status in front of the perversion of a protectorate and a suzerain. Whereas the Great Powers fiercely competed for influence in Southeastern Europe, the “national party” in the Romanian Principalities sought much-needed support from the Great Western Powers. □

Notes

1. Palaghia Radion, *Principatele Române în politica externă a Rusiei (1815–1856)* (Bucharest: Oscar Print, 2006), 100.
2. *Ibid.*, 101.
3. *Ibid.*

4. Ibid., 102.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 103.
7. In a report he sent to the Austrian Emperor by the end of December 1811, Metternich wrote that “the Porte will not cease fighting unless it is granted acceptable peace conditions; every hour that passes works in favour of the Ottoman government and the imminent war between the Russian and the French will build momentum for the sultan to carry on the fight” (apud Sergiu Columbeanu, “Contribuții privind situația internațională a Țărilor Române între anii 1806-1812,” *Revista de istorie* (Bucharest) 29, 5 (1976): 673).
8. Dan Berindei, *Românii și Europa în perioadele premodernă și modernă* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1997), 117.
9. Gheorghe Cliveti, “Românii și concertul european (1815–1878),” in *Românii în istoria universală* (Jassy: A. I. Cuza University, 1987), 261.
10. Boicu, 273.
11. Ibid.
12. It is worth noting that France and Great Britain first suspended the activity of their vice-consular offices to Jassy in 1817, followed by their consulates in 1818.
13. Boicu, 285.
14. Nicolae Ciachir and Gh. Bercan, *Diplomația europeană în epoca modernă* (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 279.
15. Colonel I. P. Liprandi, head of the intelligence office of the Russian troops in Bessarabia wrote: “To create a stronger impact, Tudor would always address such letters to the chiefs of the Turkish forts. They were delivered by a party of three or four of his followers, called ‘panduri,’ barefooted, dressed in their traditional long shirts with a kind of belt made of lime tree bark around their waist, bearing the additional message that the pashas could see for themselves from the misery of the messengers what was the state of the people who wilfully submitted their fate to the Porte, but whom the Levantine rulers and the boyars had robbed of all possessions so as to enjoy the luxury of gold-embroidered clothes, sable furs and cashmere, while depriving the peasants even of their ploughs, which they traded for luxurious European carriages. The pashas could only be sympathetic. They always sent their own envoys to Tudor’s camp to bring him their answer” (apud *ibid.*, 122).
16. Dumitru Vitcu, *Relațiile româno-americiene timpurii (convergențe—divergențe)* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2000), 21.
17. Radion, 144.
18. Apostol Stan, *Protectoratul Rusiei asupra Principatelor Române, 1774–1856* (Bucharest: Saeculum I.O., 1999), 63.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 80.
23. Ibid., 82.

24. Alexandru A. C. Sturdza, *Règne de Michel Sturdza* (Paris: Plon, 1907), 38.
25. In 1838, Ion Filipescu was dismissed from his position as police chief, Emanoil Băleanu was exiled to a monastery and Ion Oteteleşanu and Iancu Russet were persecuted. Of all those who had to face the dire consequences of the Russian brutal repression we shall only mention Ion Câmpeanu (who left the country), Cezar Bolliac (exiled), Professor Lazarescu from Mihăileană Academy of Jassy and Vaillant, the principal of St. Sava College.

Abstract

The Romanian Principalities in the Focus of Interest of Russian Foreign Policy

Even before the Romanian unitary national state was established, the Russian Empire would look at the Romanian territory from a multiple perspective, seeing it as a means of gaining influence and taking action in the Christian provinces of the Ottoman Empire in times of peace, a critical supplier of cereals for the Russian troops fighting in the Balkans, and a place to recruit volunteers for the imperial army in times of war. The other Great Powers did not share the Russian interest in the Romanian Principalities. As a result of such divergent interests, the Romanian Principalities would often be ravaged by military conflicts and faced with obstacles on their way to consolidating a stable state structure. They often turned into a theatre of war that served the interests of the Great Powers and were forced to a lengthy exercise in diplomacy in preparation for a national state of the Romanians who were the majority population on this territory.

Keywords

Romanian Principalities, Tsarist Russia, Bessarabia, native rule, suzerain power, protectorate, Organic Regulations