Russia and the formation of the Romanian national state
1821–1878

This book has a double emphasis: it examines the role played by tsarist Russia in the formation of an independent Romanian national state, and it discusses the reaction of a Balkan nationality to the influence of a neighboring great power that was both a protector and a menace. In the early nineteenth century the centers of Romanian political life were the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which were both under Ottoman rule but which had separate, autonomous administrations. Although welcoming Russian aid against the Ottoman Empire, the Romanian leadership at the same time feared that the Russian government would use its military power to establish a firm control over the Principalities or would annex Romanian lands, as indeed occurred in 1812. Here this difficult relationship is examined in detail as it developed during the century in connection with the major events leading to the international acceptance of Romanian independence in 1878. The conflicts that arose in this period, in particular the issues of political domination and the possession of Bessarabia, have remained disturbing elements in the relations of the two states.
Contents

List of maps and illustrations  page vii

Preface  ix

I The Russian protectorate 16
  Toward a Russian protectorate: the Greek revolution, Tudor Vladimirescu, and the Russo-Turkish War 21
  The protectorate established 31
  The resistance to the protectorate: the national opposition and the revolutions of 1848 39
  The protectorate renewed, 1849–1854 50
  The Romanian emigration 52
  The Crimean War 55

II The European guardianship 61
  The Romanian question at the Paris conference 66
  The implementation of the congress decisions: the double election of Alexander Cuză 71

III The Cuză era, 1859–1866 101
  The recognition of the double election 102
  The administrative and legislative union of the Principalities 109
  Revolutionary Europe 122
  The Dedicated Monasteries 130
Contents

The coup d’état of 1864 142
The overthrow of Cuza 146

IV Prince Charles, 1866–1871 153
The provisional government 153
The accession of a foreign prince 164
The first years of Charles’s reign, 1866–1869 179
The crisis of 1870–1871 198

The Catargiu government: the first period 215
The St. Petersburg agency 219
The commercial conventions 221
The first phase of the Eastern crisis: Romanian neutrality 227
Toward a Russian agreement 241
War and independence 259
The Congress of Berlin 277
The implementation of the Treaty of Berlin 286

Conclusion 292
Notes 301
Bibliography 335
Index 346
Maps and illustrations

Maps

The Ottoman Balkans, 1815  page 18
The Danubian Principalities, 1859  99

Between pages 148 & 149

Illustrations and map

Alexander Cuza
Prince Charles
Nicholas I
Alexander II
A contemporary American map of the military operations in the summer of 1877.
Preface

The purpose of this narrative is twofold: on the one hand, to examine the role played by tsarist Russia in the formation of an independent Romanian state, and on the other, to study the reaction of a Balkan nationality to the influence of a neighboring great power that was both a protector and a menace. The period of emphasis is the years from 1821, when a revolt with both Romanian and Greek leadership occurred in the Danubian Principalities, to 1878, when Romanian independence was accepted by the powers in the Treaty of Berlin. All of the events pertaining to Russian–Romanian relations do not receive equal attention; the weight is placed on those episodes that were crucial to the formation of the modern Romanian state and its leadership: the establishment of the Russian protectorate, the revolution of 1848, the reorganization of the Principalities after 1856, the double election of Alexander Cuza and his subsequent unification of the administrations and legislatures of the Principalities, the advent of Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen in 1866, and, finally, the Balkan crisis of 1875–1878.

The relationship of Russia and the Romanian Principalities involved far more than the issues common in diplomatic history. The conservative nature of Russian autocracy and the basically liberal stance of the Romanian national leadership after 1848 made political ideology a major cause of friction. The Russian government was always deeply concerned about the political institutions established in the Principalities. In addition, two related questions, the revolutionary movements and the status of Orthodox institutions, played a major role in the mutual relationship. The Russian government throughout the nineteenth century was repeatedly troubled by the fact that the Principalities were a center of revolutionary agitation, both national and liberal,
Preface

which involved dangers for Russian interests. At the same time Russian
officials watched diligently over the interests of the Orthodox church
not only in the Romanian lands, but throughout the Balkans. The pro-
etection of Orthodoxy was regarded as a religious duty as well as a good
policy for the securing of Russian influence in the peninsula.

Less attention is devoted to economic and social issues, except as they
relate to diplomatic, political, and ideological questions. In the period
under study Russia and the Principalities had parallel, but not com-
petitive, economies. Both were agricultural, and large estates worked
by peasant labor prevailed. Their social structures were also similar.
In both, the landed aristocracy held absolute social, economic, and po-
itical preponderance. The Romanian peasants were enserfed until
the middle of the eighteenth century, the Russian until the 1860s. That
decade witnessed land reforms in both areas. The large estates were
divided, with a part of the land given to the peasants in return for re-
demption payments. Because both regions were exporters of grain,
there was some limited competition for markets between Russian and
Romanian producers, but this condition never caused major conflicts
like those that arose, for instance, between Romania and the Habsburg
Monarchy over similar issues.

Both governments were in theory under autocratic rule, either by
tsar or by sultan. In fact, in each the predominating influence was exerted
by landowners or those connected with landed interests. As the nine-
teenth century progressed, other educated groups in both societies – the
government officials, army officers, merchants, lawyers, writers, and
teachers – played an ever-increasing role in politics. Because neither re-

region had an industrial economy, workers and capitalists, with their
unique interests and problems, had little influence. In the Principalities,
where commerce tended to be in the hands of those of a non-Romanian
background, including Jews, Greeks, Armenians, and Germans, busi-
essmen were not major participants in political life, although there
were important exceptions. In both Russia and the Principalities the
peasantry, the overwhelming majority of the population, was effectively
excluded from political affairs. They had almost as little actual repre-
sentation under the Romanian constitutional system as under the Rus-
sian autocratic institutions.

In terms of power, whether political or military, Russia and the Prin-
cipalities were entirely unequal. By the beginning of the eighteenth
century Russia was a great European power with a vast national territory
and a strong army; the Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and
Wallachia were weak states under Ottoman control. However, although
they were a part of this Muslim empire, they did enjoy, at least in theory,
Preface

certain rights that separated them from the rest of the sultan’s domains. In contrast to other Balkan lands, they were never Turkish pashaliks. Thus Ottoman administrators did not directly govern Romanian lands. Instead the Principalities were entrusted to native princes, often called hospodars in the diplomatic correspondence of the day. Their power in turn rested on the support of a native aristocracy, the boyars, who controlled local administration. Despite the fact that they enjoyed internal autonomy, the Principalities were under Ottoman jurisdiction as far as foreign policy and military matters were concerned. In their relationship with the Porte (a term regularly used in diplomatic correspondence, along with Sublime Porte, to refer to the Ottoman government), the position of the provinces varied over time. A low point was reached in the eighteenth century. In addition to submitting to the suzerain powers of the sultan, the Principalities were required to pay a large tribute as well as certain taxes and gifts, and the Ottoman authorities had the right of preemption over Romanian agricultural products. Constantinople in the eighteenth century was provisioned from these rich lands.

This narrative deals mainly with events in Moldavia and Wallachia. Although a predominantly Romanian population lived in Transylvania and Bukovina, under Habsburg rule, and in Bessarabia, under Russian control after 1812, the affairs of these regions only marginally affected Russian relations with the Romanian political center, that is, with the Danubian Principalities. Therefore developments in these areas are discussed only as they became important in international relations or played a major role in the Romanian national movement.

At this time both Russia and the Principalities, as Orthodox states, used the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar. Therefore double dates are usually given. It is, unfortunately, at times difficult to determine which system was used in a particular document. A Russian or Romanian writing from Paris, for instance, might employ either style. When doubt exists, the date on the document cited is used. Otherwise, all single dates are in the new style.

Some difficulties are also to be encountered in the spelling of proper names. Many Russian and Romanian diplomats, for instance, used French versions of their names. In this text the form that is in common use today has generally been adopted. Some first names have been anglicized; others remain in their national spelling. Geographic place names are usually in the form commonly used in diplomatic histories and in the documentation. It is thus, for instance, Jassy, not Iași, and Plevna, not Pleven. A completely standard and uniform system is an impossibility.

This narrative is based primarily on Russian and Romanian diplo-
Preface

mation documentation, material that is listed in the Bibliography. Because of the great amount of writing on diplomatic history and in particular on the "Eastern Question," that is, on the international controversies caused by the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the notes are of necessity limited to a citation of documents and the major works in Russian and Romanian used in the preparation of this book. Only some of the many valuable works in other languages have been included. Similar limitations have been placed on the Bibliography.

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