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052152251X - Russia and the Formation of the Romanian National State 1821-1878

Barbara Jelavich

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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.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 1984  
First paperback edition 2004

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Jelavich, Barbara, 1923–  
Russia and the formation of the Romanian national  
state, 1821–1878.

Bibliography: p.

1. Romania – Politics and government – 1821–1866.
2. Romania – Politics and government – 1866–1914.
3. Romania – Foreign relations – Soviet Union. 4. Soviet  
Union – Foreign relations – Romania. I. Title.  
DR242.J44 1984 949.8'01 82-23578

ISBN 0 521 25318 7 hardback  
ISBN 0 521 52251 X paperback

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Prince Charles  
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A contemporary American map of the military operations  
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## 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,

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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 protection 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 competitive, 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 political preponderance. The Romanian peasants were enfranchised 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 redemption 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 nineteenth 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 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, businessmen 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 representation under the Romanian constitutional system as under the Russian autocratic institutions.

In terms of power, whether political or military, Russia and the Principalities 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,



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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 Plevén. A completely standard and uniform system is an impossibility.

This narrative is based primarily on Russian and Romanian diplo-

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matic 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.

The author wishes to thank Professors Keith Hitchins, University of Illinois; Frederick Kellogg, University of Arizona; and Paul E. Michelson, Huntington College, for their comments on the manuscript. Her husband, Charles Jelavich, as usual, had a major part in the preparation of the book. She would also like to acknowledge her deep gratitude for the assistance given her in her research in the archives and libraries in Romania. As before, she would like to thank Serge Giers for allowing her to use the papers of his grandfather. The preparation of this study was aided immensely by a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, which allowed the author the time necessary for research and writing, and by research grants from the Office of Research and Advanced Studies, Indiana University, which covered, in particular, copying and microfilm expenses.

The author is also indebted to Debbie Chase, who typed the final manuscript; to Lin Maria Riotto, who prepared the index; and especially to Janis Bolster, whose expert editorial comments added much to the final text.