As diplomatic efforts were failing in the Russo-Turkish conflict over custody of churches in the Holy Land and the protection of the Porte’s Eastern Orthodox subjects, English and French steamers were sent to the Black Sea in June 1853 and stood anchored at Besika Bay awaiting the outcome of negotiations. In August 1853, Lord Aberdeen decided to dispatch the British Maltese fleet towards Constantinople, ostensibly to protect the westerners in the Ottoman capital in case of armed conflict. Throughout the last months of 1853, appeals to the Ottoman Porte to grant an amnesty to the Romanian exiles of 1848 and enlist their help on the anti-Russian front remained without response from Constantinople. Gheorghe Magheru, the exiled general, whose financial situation prevented him from leaving Vienna, wrote to the Grand Vezir Reshid Pasha, asking for an amnesty of the Romanian forty-eighters, who had always been, he pointed out, faithful to their “legitimate Suzerain” and who would continue to support Turkey. He feared that their continuing absence would lead many Romanians at home to believe the rumours spread by the Russian agents that the exiles had sold out to the Russian cause and had forsaken their occupied country.425

Opinions among the exiles regarding the possible participation of the Romanians in the hostilities were divided: some worried that enrolling in the Ottoman army might appear politically incorrect to those who believed that the Turks should withdraw from Europe altogether. The idea of a Romanian ‘legion’ engaged on the battlefield in the Crimea was not unique among the East-European diaspora groups. Prince Czartoryski’s agent, Mihal Czajkovsky, who had converted to Islam under the name Sadyk Pasha, was authorized by a Turkish ferman of

424 C. A. Rosetti to M. Rosetti, ed. Bucur, 1: 64.
425 Fotino 1: 211.
October 1853 to form a so-called battalion of “Ottoman Cossacks” operating within the Ottoman army, but commanded by Polish officials. The international battalion’s seven hundred volunteers included mostly Poles, but also Cossacks from the Dobrudja, Bursa and the Don, Bulgarians, Romanians, Jews, Armenians and Serbs. Another close associate of Prince Czartoryski, Wladislaw Zamoyski, also created a Polish legion which enjoyed financial and logistic support from both Britain and France. A Romanian legion as such, however, was bound to remain an illusion, although individual Romanian participants were allowed to enrol in the Turkish troops aligned by the Danube. Gheorghe Magheru himself, Christian Tell, and Dimitrie Kretzulescu, a former forty-eighter close to Ion Ghica, enlisted in Omer Pasha’s army, but they were only a handful of isolated beneficiaries of concessions granted to exiled Romanians and to Romanian officers who had joined the Ottoman army previously. “The Turks do not want us”, Rosetti reflected bitterly in his Diary, as he embarked in Marseilles with Dumitru Brătianu and Goleșcu-Albu, bound for Gallipoli, in an attempt to make the Romanians’ wishes heard above the noise of diplomatic misunderstandings and the din of weapons.

Before he left for Turkey, Dumitru Brătianu had been entrusted by Mazzini with one last, sensitive mission: meeting Lajos Kossuth in a last-ditch attempt, on the eve of a major European conflict, to make Romanians and Hungarians shake hands and put a troubled past behind them. Kossuth, who, in Brătianu’s eyes, was an intractable dictator, was not formally a member of the Central Democratic Committee. The two men met in Mazzini’s small room in London and a cautious agreement was reached: if the Hungarians and Romanians of the Austrian Empire were going to be given arms and a chance to fight against the Russians and the Austrians in the imminent war, the two leaders pledged themselves to urge the volunteers to join forces in the common action, although each side was to combat under its own flag. At the end of the hostilities, the Transylvanians were to vote in a referendum to decide whether they were to merge with Hungary.

426 Stan and Ploleşeanu, Utopia, 164.