6 OCTOBER: THE BRIGHTON MEETING

I feel sure that these Princ.[ipalities] will bring us to grief.
Lord Cowley to Clarendon, 8 June 1855

Both before and during the Congress, questions and motions were put forth in the House of Commons and in the Lords requesting the Austrian evacuation of the Principalities and permission for the refugees to return. Austen Henry Layard, who had met Dumitru Brătianu in 1853, Arthur Otway, the MP for Stafford at the time, and John Roebuck, the radical independent MP for Sheffield, were the ones who usually initiated debates on these and related issues. The anti-Russian Whig, Lord Clanricarde, and Lord Lyndhurst, the law reformer, seconded them in the upper house. However, a shift in Russia’s attitude to the union placed the propagandists in a difficult position. In what appeared to be a well-calculated strategic move, Russia decided to join France in supporting the Romanian liberals’ unionist agenda, and British politicians consequently withdrew their support, unwilling to associate Britain to a policy co-sponsored by the tsar and by a nation recently defeated in a major European conflict, in which so many British lives had been lost. Layard, who had been hugely influential in liaising with the Turks and in introducing Brătianu into British liberal circles, gradually distanced himself, presumably because his own business interests in the Near East made it difficult for him to sustain a cause which would have diminished the Ottoman Empire. When he lost his Aylesbury seat in the 1857 general elections, his support for Brătianu effectively ended.

After the abdication of the old-regime ruling prince of Wallachia, Barbu Ştirbey, on 7 July 1856, the public pronouncements in favour of the union became increasingly outspoken. Alexandru Dimitrie Ghica, a former ruling prince, was appointed caimacam (governor). Nicolae Golescu believed that he was favourable to the return of the exiles as well as to the unionist cause. His brother, Ştefan, believed exactly the opposite, especially given the caimacam’s close relations to...

the anti-unionist British Consul, Robert Colquhoun, who, as shown, was now a nemesis of his former protégés.\textsuperscript{40} Rosetti and the radicals had distanced themselves from the consul, and Effingham Grant had already left his post as consular secretary in 1855 to devote himself entirely to his real estate business.

In the face of British opposition to the union, Dumitru Brătianu reverted to his former subversive tactics, and once again cultivated radical networks contacted via the European Democratic Central Committee. For British reformers and radicals, forming links with foreign republicans and freedom-fighters in exile was a way of putting into practice one of their cherished political convictions, namely that “efforts to extend freedom and rights at home and on the continent were […] interdependent” and that undermining reaction and despotism in the world was a way of ensuring a better international climate for reforms at home.\textsuperscript{41} This alliance of forces led directly to an episode which represented the peak of the exiles’ propaganda campaign in Britain: the Brighton meeting of 6 October 1856, a symbolic gathering of British sympathisers aiming to “propagate a feeling in favour of the union of the two principalities.”\textsuperscript{42} Brighton was chosen partly because Arnold Ruge, a collaborator of Marx and German representative in Mazzini’s European Committee, who had been a British national since 1855, had settled there with his wife, and partly because of its strong radical tradition as well as its proximity to London.\textsuperscript{43} The local liberal-radical alliance, comprising the lawyer Montagu David Scott, the parliamentary Liberal candidate for East Sussex, John George Dodson, as well as another prominent local figure, William Coningham, future MP for Brighton, offered their support in organising the meeting. For Coningham, siding with the pro-union movement must have held added piquancy as a means of settling a recent score with the pro-Turkish, anti-unionist David Urquhart. The men had been co-founders of the “Association for the protection of Turkey and other countries from partition” in 1854, but had fallen out over matters relating to the association’s funding. To the great delight of the press, there had been an argument, the threat of a duel and a day in court, but the

\textsuperscript{40} Fotino 1: 231, 233, and Fotino 4: 164.
\textsuperscript{41} Turner, Independent Radicalism, 95.
\textsuperscript{42} “The Danubian Principalities”, Daily News, 18 October 1856.
\textsuperscript{43} Hope, “Dumitru Brătianu”, 35.