CHAPTER 10

From Tolerance to Exclusion? The Romanian Elites’ Stance towards Immigration to the Danubian Principalities (1829–1880s)

Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis

In a letter to his brother, dated 27 June 1848, Dimitrie G. Golescu, the Wallachian governor of Braila (Brăila), the Principality’s main port, underscored the main characteristic of the city, namely its ‘foreignness’: “Braila est une ville étrangère, une colonie (...) dans la Principauté” as its great majority was composed of foreign subjects. Despite Golescu’s regard of Braila as somewhat of an exception in the Principality, European visitors to the Danubian region during the 1830s and 1840s testified to the numerically strong and economically leading position of the non-native merchants and artisans in the urban centers, mostly Greeks, Italians, and Bulgarians in Wallachia and Jews in Moldavia.

Edouard Thouvenel, a French traveler to Wallachia in 1839, observed that in the Bucharest (Bucureşti) theatre one could meet apart from Romanians, many Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians, while at Galatz (Galaţi) one witnessed the predominance of Greek, Italian, and Jewish merchants. The increase of the foreign element in the Principalities was intimately connected with the dawn of a new economic era in the area after the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), with the growth of commerce and navigation, and with the strengthening of the economic and cultural relations of the Principalities with Central and Western Europe. What has been, relatively, insufficiently studied was the

1 The place names are given in their most common English form. At first instance, the Romanian form is also mentioned.
3 Thouvenel, La Hongrie et la Valachie, pp. 175, 269.
4 The Treaty of Adrianople, which concluded the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–29, not only strengthened the autonomy of Wallachia, to which it accorded the ports of Braila, Giurgiu, and Turnu, and of Moldavia vis à vis the Ottoman Empire, but also stipulated that the latter could no longer control the external trade of the Danubian Principalities. Moreover, all kind of restrictions were abolished as the commerce of cereals was liberalized and the entry of foreign vessels in the Danubian ports was not subject to any limitations. See Focas, The Lower Danube River, pp. 101–06.
5 The development of trade and navigation in the second quarter of the 19th century has been extensively analyzed by Cernovodeanu, Relațiile comerciale româno-engleze, pp. 51–160 and Ardeleanu, International Trade and Diplomacy at the Lower Danube, pp. 17–130.
stance and the policies of the local elites towards immigration. At times the Principalities have been characterized as a haven for Bulgarians, persecuted by the Ottomans, and for the Jews, neglected by the Russian or Habsburg authorities, while for the Greek and Italian traders they were a ‘New California’ – a land full of promise. Yet the Principalities had been rebuked by contemporaries (journalists, foreign travelers, and diplomats) for the systematic marginalization, even persecution, of the immigrants, especially the Jews, and for its periodic oppressive assimilation-policy towards its Balkan Orthodox population. In light of the above, this chapter aims to explore the attitude of the political and intellectual elites of the Romanian Principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia) towards immigration as it evolved in the second and third quarter of the 19th century. The ‘immigration’ policy, formulated and enforced by the local authorities, though fraught with contradictions and dissension, allows us to delineate several ‘key’ phases in its evolution.

Specifically, it will be argued that both the Russians, who controlled the Danubian Principalities (1828–34), and the local governments in the 1830s and 1840s followed a fairly systematic strategy of luring immigrants, granting them substantial privileges, and creating a propitious institutional and legal framework for settling. But in comparison with the past, their policy was accompanied by a stricter definition of the term ‘foreigner’, in particular with respect to the Jews. By the late 1850s, in the context of the strengthening of Romanian nationalism and more wide-ranging ‘state-building’ efforts, central as well as local authorities undertook a series of measures to undermine the privileged position of the permanently established Balkan Orthodox and Western European merchants. Further, they halted measures designed to promote the fuller integration of the Jewish population into the local society. The discrepancy of the migration policy of these two phases reveals the clash between the inherited ‘old’ imperial traditions of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire and the

---

6 The term ‘elites’ is of course elusive and hard to define. In the context of the 19th century Principalities it is meant to include mainly the local politicians, almost exclusively of boyar origin, who usually owned large or medium sized landholdings. Moreover, since the role of several intellectuals (poets, historians, economists, and critics), in the formulation of the Romanian nationalistic ideology, was seminal, it is necessary to address their contribution. For a penetrating approach to the history of the boyars and the higher bourgeois strata see Platon and Platon, Boierimea din Moldova în secolul al XIX-lea, and Platon, Geneza burgheziei în Principatele Române.

7 This chapter describes part of a more comprehensive research, tentatively titled: Migration and Urbanization in 19th century Romania. It should be noted that the bibliography on migration and population movements in the Principalities, albeit rich in specialized and well-documented studies devoted to one ethnic group, still lacks a more wide-ranging approach.