Romania and the Crisis of 1876-78 in Southeastern Europe

The uprising in Bosnia and Hercegovina during 1875-76, followed by the Bulgarian revolt, attracted the attention of the European powers to Southeastern Europe. At that time Romania's *de facto* position reflected the entire evolution of the Romanian nation, while its *de jure* position had been established by the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856, the Paris Convention of 1858, and subsequent amendments.

Founded in the fourteenth century, Wallachia and Moldavia enjoyed unbroken political continuity until 1859-61 when the two states joined as the United Principalities of Romania. This continuity subsisted despite over four hundred years of Ottoman suzerainty which, on the one hand, had gradually restricted the two countries' rights—primarily in foreign relations—and had forced repeated territorial losses on the Romanians. On the other hand, Ottoman suzerainty was for Romanians a means of maintaining their individuality and autonomy—with a territory, boundaries, and a customs system of their own; with a distinct social and economic structure: with specific administrative and state institutions; and with a specific cultural heritage and creativity. Their uninterrupted political existence for over 550 years is the distinctive trait of Romania's role in European history. This was the foundation for the establishment and development of modern Romania.

During the nineteenth century, a number of rights were gradually restored to Romanians. The revolution of 1821 in Wallachia was an integral part of the revolutionary movements that marked the history of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Serbia, and Greece in the 1820s and 1830s. Moreover, the Romanian revolution of 1848-49 occurred simultaneously with movements that stirred Italy, France, Prussia and other German states, as well as Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, Croatia, and Slovenia. Also important were the union of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859-61 under the name of Romania; the subsequent significant structural reforms during the reigns of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza and Prince Charles of Hohenzollern; the growth and modernization of Romanian armed forces; the accrediting of diplomatic agents in Paris, Belgrade, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Rome, and, of course, Constantinople;

conclusion of commercial conventions with Austria-Hungary and Russia; the use of a national flag and of a national monetary system; and adherence to the Latin Monetary Union. All of these happenings signified that the prerogatives and sovereign rights of the Romanian state were gradually being restored.

Concerning Romania’s de jure position, the Paris Peace Treaty of 30 March 1856 (articles 22 and 23) recognized the “capitulations,” that is, the bilateral understandings previously concluded between the Romanian principalities and the Ottoman Porte. The treaty also confirmed the full autonomy of the two countries and their separate government—with “an independent national administration, and unrestricted freedom of culture, legislation, trade, navigation . . .”2 Nevertheless, the principalities remained under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire while guaranteed by the signatory powers of the Paris Treaty: Austria, France, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire. The Paris Convention of 19 August 1858—together with subsequent amendments by the suzerain Turks and by ambassadorial conferences of the guaranteeing powers—acknowledged Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s election, the union of the two principalities under Cuza, and the later election of Charles of Hohenzollern in 1866.3 But Prince Charles’ firman of investiture indicated that the Romanian state was still considered part of the Ottoman Empire.4 In the mid-1870s, therefore, it was imperative that Romania recover full independence and that its independence be officially sanctioned by an international agreement.

We will now describe Romania’s attitude during the Eastern Crisis of 1875-76 and its attempts to realize its major desiderata.5 The program of the new liberal government, submitted to the Chamber of Deputies and Senate in Bucharest on 20 April and 10 May 1876, stressed observance of “the international treaties that established Romania’s political condition, ensured its independence and guaranteed its neutrality.”6 Notions of independence and neu-


3. The ambassadors’ conferences were held at Istanbul in 1859 (26 August/7 September), in 1861 (4 December), and in 1866; Constantin C. Giurescu, Viața și opera lui Cuza Vodă, 2nd ed. (București: Editura științifică, 1970), pp. 86-87, 104-15; Paul Henry, L’abdication du prince Cuza et l’avènement de la dynastie de Hohenzollern au trône de Roumanie: Documents diplomatiques (Paris: F. Alcan, 1930), p. 417.


5. On developments in 1876-78, cf. Radu D. Rosetti, Partea luată de armata română în războiul din 1877-1878 (București: Cultura națională, 1926); N. Iorga, Războiul pentru independența României: Acțiuni diplomatice și stări de spirit (București: Cultura națională, 1927); and Dan Beîrdei, Știri despre România în 1856-1877 (București: Meridiane, 1976).