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Romania's relations with the Ottoman Empire between 1878 and 1912

DOCTORAL THESIS

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Abstract

The present work, whose main purpose is to reconstruct an overview of the nature of the relations between a former vassal state and the suzerain power, tries to contribute to the Romanian historiography's enrichment, by providing a starting point for future research in the domain of diplomacy and the history of international relations at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

The Russian-Turkish conflict of 1877 has offered Romania the chance to free itself from the Porte's suzerainty. The War for independence and the negotiations conducted in order to attain the new statute's international recognition have received a generous attention, as the specialised literature dedicated ample spaces to both events. Romania's foreign policy and its relations with the Balkan States and with the great powers after 1878 – but not those with the Ottoman Empire – were, likewise, highly debated in the historiography.

Except for Silvana Rachieru, whose interest for this subject has been intense and has materialised in a doctoral thesis entitled *Relații româno-otomane între anii 1878-1909* (*Romanian-Ottoman relations between the years 1878-1909*), Bucharest, 2009, the study of the Romanian-Turkish relations did not receive the same amount of attention amongst historians and researchers. Thus, specialised literature is meagre in information concerning the evolution of the relations, of any type, between the young independent state and its former suzerain power. Nevertheless, this subject was tangentially treated in the historiography in studies of various lengths, which served as a starting point for our undertaking. Of these, we would like to mention the works of the well-known Romanian historian Nicolae Ciachir¹, of Daniela Bușă² or those of Gheorghe Zbucea³, who have provided especially political, but also economical factual data. In

¹ N. Ciachir, *Istoria popoarelor din sud-estul Europei în epoca modernă (1789-1923)*, Bucharest, Oscar Print, 1998; Idem, *Marile Puteri și România, 1856-1947*, Bucharest, Albatros, 1996; Idem, „La conclusion de la paix de Bucarest en 1886 au lendemain des événements balkaniques de 1885-1886” in *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 10, no. 3-4, 1965; Idem, „România și țările balcanice în perioada 1878-1900” in *Revista de istorie*, tom. 33, nr. 2, 1980.

² D. Bușă, *Comerțul exterior al României cu țările din sud-estul Europei (1878-1914)*, Bucharest, Oscar Print, [2010?]; Idem, *Modificări politico-teritoriale în sud-estul Europei între Congresul de la Berlin și primul război mondial (1878-1914)*, București, Paideia, 2003; Idem, „Relațiile României cu statele balcanice în primii ani după independență”, in *Istorie și diplomație în relațiile internaționale. Omagiu istoricului Tahsin Gemil*, D. Flaut, I. Țighiliu (coord.), Constanța, Ovidius University Press, 2003.

³ Gh. Zbucea, *Relațiile României cu sud-estul european la începutul secolului al XX-lea (1900-1912)*, Bucharest, Paco, 1999; Idem, *O istorie a românilor din Peninsula Balcanică, secolele XVIII-XX*, Bucharest, Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 1999.

what concerns Dobruja's administration, a province which became a part of Romania after the Treaty of Berlin (1878), and the fate of the Muslim Turks and Tatars who inhabited this region, we used Mehmet Ali Ekrem's work, *Din istoria turcilor Dobrogeni (From the history of Dobruja's Turks)*, Bucharest, Kriterion, 1994, and those of historians A. Rădulescu and I. Bitoleanu⁴.

Having in view the shortage of data about the evolution of the relations between Romania and the Ottoman Empire from political, diplomatic, economical or any other type of viewpoints during the interval 1878-1912, our initial objectives were extremely vast. Delineating them was based on the unpublished sources consulted especially at the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to which we added the information extracted from the correspondence found at the Romanian Academy Library or in the funds Brătianu and Kogălniceanu that belong to the National Library of Romania, Special Collections service.

During our undertaking we have strived to correctly interpret the two main types of sources, namely unpublished and published, by corroborating them with titles that provided the general information which was essential in order to establish both the internal and especially the international context that influenced the foreign choices of the targeted countries. The diplomatic reports, notes or telegrams sent by Romania's extraordinary envoys at Constantinople represent the most valuable and consistent sources of this doctoral thesis and we have therefore analysed them both quantitatively and qualitatively, as objectively as possible. The material contained by the seven archival funds consulted (approximately sixty volumes) have allowed us to definitise the thesis's structure, but also to trace the evolution of the connections between the two states, an evolution extremely favourable which represented an unprecedented case in the history of the 19th century's international relations.

Thus, the present research was structured into five chapters, which were subsequently divided in subchapters. For a better understanding of the character of certain foreign directions or decisions which were taken by the two states with regard to each other, we have considered it would be appropriate to broadly sketch the Ottoman Empire's and Romania's internal situation in the first chapter, having in view especially their political regimes.

⁴ A. Rădulescu, I. Bitoleanu, *Istoria românilor dintre Dunăre și Mare: Dobrogea*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979; Idem, *Istoria Dobrogei, Constanța, Ex Ponto*, 1998.

The thesis' second chapter is the amplest and also the one which comprises the most substantial arguments. While concentrating our attention on the actual evolution of the political and diplomatic relations between Romania and the Ottoman Empire, we have focused upon debating some matters that could eventually emphasise these connections' harmonious nature. Before getting at the heart of the subject, we have deemed it necessary to review the context in which the diplomatic relations between Romania and its ex-suzerain power were broken, the moment of the former's proclamation of independence, but also the international recognition of this new statute, which allowed the North-Danubian country to achieve a remarkable development and incontestable progress on almost every domain.

The Treaty of Berlin, signed by the Great Powers' representatives as a result of the talks held with the occasion of the peace congress from the summer of 1878 which ended the Russian-Turkish War (1877-1878), stipulated that Romania would change its statute from a vassal state to a sovereign one. The Ottoman Empire, defeated in this last conflict, has officially and unconditionally recognised the independence of its former vassal. During the last two decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the latter state will become a tireless supporter of the old empire, now in a visible decline. In order to attain its foreign objectives, vaguely stated at that moment, but related to maintaining the peace and the status quo in the Balkans, the Romanian government decided to resume the diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire as soon as possible. Thus, in the autumn of 1878, the two countries exchanged diplomats and those will constitute the bond between the Porte and the Cabinet of Bucharest.

One of this chapter's major objectives was the identification of the Romanian extraordinary envoys and plenipotentiary ministers accredited to "His Majesty the Sultan", but also of the consuls who were appointed to defend Romania's interests at the diplomatic bureaus of Constantinople, Saloniki, Bitola, Ioannina.

The Romanian diplomats accredited to Constantinople were chosen amongst the Kingdom's most reliable people in what regards foreign policy. Outstanding personalities, great names of history had the opportunity to be assigned to the post of extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister of the king in the Empire's capital. Although the relations between the two states were characterised by cordiality and amity during the period 1878-1912, political, religious or economical matters which arose have required countless and long negotiations and in some cases they were never solved. This was a well grounded reason for which the Romanian

diplomats at Constantinople were rather frequently transferred on similar posts in other European cities or discharged from service. Most missions had the length of three years, except that of Mihail Mitilineu, who held this position for seven years, or that of Ion N. Papiniu, who occupied it for five years. The briefest stays at Constantinople as head of the Romanian legation were those of Grigore Ghica (Brigadier) and Nicolae Mișu, both lasting one year.

In comparison with the Romanian diplomats appointed to the Ottoman capital, amongst which the majority were highly experienced in this domain, such as Dimitrie Brătianu, Petre Mavrogheni, Ion Bălăceanu or Alexandru Ghica-Brigadier, the high officials accredited by the Porte to Bucharest were only at the debut of their diplomatic career, the missions to Romania representing the first serious attempts in this quality for the eight Ottoman representatives. With a single exception, namely Balk Bey, the Ottoman Empire's extraordinary envoys to the most developed state in the Balkan Peninsula were relatively young, being approximately 40 years old.

The intellectual profile, the accumulated experience, but also the political inclinations towards the governing party were the criteria for appointing the Romanian diplomats to certain missions. Maintaining the existing relations constituted the main task for each plenipotentiary minister assigned to Constantinople and their diplomatic abilities were rendered evident during the key moments which have marked the evolution of the connections between the two states. The Serbo-Bulgarian War was the first armed conflict to take place in the Balkans after the Congress of Berlin and Romania adopted a neutrality position towards it, a position positively regarded by the Ottoman Empire and which brought the former the honour of hosting the peace talks. Another important moment was represented by the Ottoman State's direct involvement in the war with Greece (1897), when, threatened by the Cabinets of Sofia and Belgrade, the government of Constantinople asked for Romania's military help. The executive of Bucharest refused to sign a political and military treaty with the Porte, a fact which had as a consequence the temporisation, from the part of the Sultan, of the negotiations conducted with the Romanian diplomat, Trandafir Djuvara, in order to officially recognise a religious head for the compatriots inhabiting the Empire's territory, but also of the Romanian nationality as a distinct nationality.

The year 1905 brought, after numerous discussions and negotiations, the Romanian nationality's acknowledgement from the part of the Ottoman State, a fact which we considered a

real diplomatic success of Al. Em. Lahovari. The Romanian language could be used freely in schools and churches from that moment forth.

The major change which occurred in the Ottoman Empire in 1908 through the Young Turks' Revolution, an event which we deem it was tacitly supported by the government of Bucharest and by the King himself, has intensified the official visits between the two states. In April 1910, general Crăiniceanu, the Romanian minister of war, made a visit to Constantinople and in the month of August of the same year, the grand vizier Hakki Pasha spent a few days at Bucharest. The visit of the heir prince, Yussuf Izzedin, at the Peleş Castle, in August 1911, has provoked countless discussions in the European press, but especially in that of the Balkan states, which have regarded the Ottoman prince's trip as one of a crucial interest for the Porte, being related to signing a military treaty with Romania against Bulgaria. Although the existence of such a convention was denied by both parties, the Balkan newspapers have debated this issue in detail.

Chapter III of the present research was devoted to the province of Dobruja and the Muslim population which inhabited this area at the moment of the Romanian administration's establishment, in the autumn of the year 1878. We desired to observe the manner in which the authorities from Bucharest, but also the local ones decided to organise, from administrative and judicial viewpoints, the new territory that was given to Romania through the Treaty of Berlin. We have also traced the treatment granted to the Sultan's subjects from the former Ottoman province, both those who in November 1878 inhabited that region and those who had emigrated within the Empire's borders due to the last war and were going to return home. Another aspect had in view in this chapter was the regulation of land ownership in Dobruja. In what regards the Islamic population which had emigrated during the war, the Romanian authorities have taken certain measures that made reference to the fact that abandoned properties would be returned to their previous owners, as soon as they would offer evidence that they had owned the possessions they claimed before 1877.

In the last part of this chapter we have focused our attention on some cultural matters and thus we reviewed the existence of certain Turkish journals both at Constanța and Bucharest. A large part of these newspapers reflected the Young Turks' activity by propagating their revolutionary ideas amongst their compatriots from Romania.

In the fourth chapter we have concentrated on two religious issues, namely the recognition of the Romanian Orthodox Church's autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and acknowledging Metropolitan Antim of Kruševo as the religious head of the Empire's Aromanians. Apparently, these matters have nothing in common, but they have been included in our research to render evident, in both situations, the intense activity carried on by the period's Romanian diplomats from the capital of the Ottoman State in order to solve these two issues of a great interest to Romania. In the first case, three of King Carol's representatives, Dimitrie Brătianu, Petre Mavrogheni and Grigore Ghica (Brigadier), have conducted countless negotiations with Patriarchs Joachim III and Joachim IV for obtaining the Patriarchal Tomos through which the Romanian Orthodox Church was recognised as autocephalous.

In what concerns appointing a spiritual head for the Romanians from the Ottoman Empire's territory, after the repeated directives received from the minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihail Mitilineu began the talks with the Porte and these were continued by the illustrious diplomat Trandafir Djuvara. Despite all the efforts made during the latter's three years of service, this issue was not solved, the Sultan conditioning it by signing a political and military treaty with Romania during the war with Greece of 1897.

Chapter V treats the nature of Romania's commercial connections with the Ottoman Empire starting with the year 1878 and until 1907, the year when the last commercial convention between the two states expired. The Romanian executive's intentions to start the negotiations in order to sign a commercial agreement with the Porte met the latter's repeated refusal in 1879, 1882 and 1885, due to the fact that the two governments could not reach common grounds. At the moment when Romania adopted a new autonomous customs tariff, in July 1885, which affected the products of the countries that had not signed commercial agreements with the Romanian state, the Porte declared a customs war to Romania. In an attempt to end the state of belligerency, the officials at Bucharest proposed an immediate commencement of the talks and, after a year and a half of discussions, on 10/22 November 1887, the first commercial convention with Turkey was signed and it remained in force until 28 June/10 July 1891. Because the treaty was not immediately renewed, a tense situation arose between the two countries and it lasted over five years, until the new negotiations began. In April 1898, a second commercial and navigation convention was signed and it expired in 1900; a new state of belligerency followed. In

August 1901, as a result of some complex talks, the Romanian and Ottoman representatives concluded the third commercial agreement, valid until 1907.

The actual imports and exports, which depended in a direct manner upon the commercial treaties between Romania and the Empire, were characterised by periods of increase, stagnation or even decrease. We can assert that the Ottoman State did not represent the most loyal commercial partner or the most important client for the North-Danubian kingdom, the reverse statement being also true. Romania did not export to the Orient nor did it import from the Empire more than 5% of its total annual commercial exchanges.

Following the historical research we conducted we have ascertained that Romania's relations with its former suzerain power were resumed shortly after the works of the Congress that ended the 1877-1878 war were finished, a fact which constituted a novelty in the history of the 19th century's international relations. The more than satisfying evolution of the connections between these two states was mostly owed to Romania's conciliatory attitude and to the politics it promoted in Europe, that of maintaining the peace and the status quo.