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THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER:
MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION
OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE WORLD

“SAVAGE PEOPLES” IN THE MIRROR: DOBRUJA IN ROMANIAN PUBLIC DEBATE DURING THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN (1878)

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Dobruja was made part of Romania after the Congress of Berlin, when the Great Powers have agreed on its Independence, the restitution of South Bessarabia (counties of Cahul, Ismail and Bolgrad¹) in favor of the Russian Empire and the annexation, in exchange, of Dobruja, Danube Delta and Serpents Island.

The Congress of Berlin was officially acknowledging, concerning Romania, the decisions taken by the Treaty of San Stefano, signed by the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire after the War of 1877-1878.

The period between the two moments (March 3rd – July 13th 1878) has represented for Romania a problematic moment made obvious at the level of the political class and of the Romanian society by nationalist speeches, rough accusations and effervescent press releases, while Romania was in the position of giving up a territory, even though it was a victor of the war.

In this context, although Dobruja was considered Romanian territory, historically, by the majority of political and culture personalities in Romania, the inclusion of the province into the borders of the country as currency for giving up Bessarabia was harshly criticized and has led to polemics of all kind.

Parallel Images. The Politicians and the Press, Hand in Hand in Dobruja's Enigma

On January 26th /February 7th 1878, when the intentions of the Russian Empire of claiming Bessarabia were clear, Romanian deputies in all political groups have unanimously voted (93 votes from the Chamber of Deputies and 46 votes from the Senate) against the renunciation to the Romanian province, by all means. Animated by a strong nationalist agitation, those have decided that “They are determined to maintain the integrity of the country's territory and they do not admit alienation, under no name and no territorial compensation”².

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¹ To ensure a good textual flow we will use, throughout the entire document, the term “Bessarabia” in exchange for “South Bessarabia”. The three counties joined the Principality of Moldavia in 1856, by the Peace Treaty in Paris, signed after the ending of the Crimean War (1853- 1856).

² “Monitorul Oficial al României” (“MOR”), No. 21, January 27th /February 8th 1878, p. 445-451.

Four days later, during the meeting from January 30th/February 11th 1878 of the ordinary session of the Romanian Senate, the Vice-President of this Chamber and representative of the National Liberal Party, Dimitrie A. Sturdza³, was heavily accentuating, in the applauses of the entire reunion, that Bessarabia must not be given up in exchange of anything whatsoever:

*"[...] We cannot give up Bessarabia in exchange of any territory, no matter how good this could be, nor can we give it up against a monetary compensation, irrespective of the amount of such, since by giving it up we would abdicate from the position won in Europe, we would abdicate from our independence that we have won with our blood!"*⁴.

A month away, the decisions of the Treaty of San Stefano were shadowing the joy of the recognition of Romania's Independence by an important territorial loss: by article 19, the Russian Empire was giving the province of Dobruja, the Mouths of Danube and the Serpent Island to Romania, in exchange of Bessarabia's annexation. During those treaty negotiations, the Romanian representatives were not allowed to be present, so that Prince Carol⁵ and the politicians have decided not to recognize the agreement between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire⁶.

Another month away from the agreement sealed by the Russian and Ottoman representatives, the National Liberal Party's paper, namely *Românul* (The Romanian), was already beginning to introduce in the public space the idea that the annexation of Dobruja is a good thing and even more, was writing about the kindness of Russia and about the help the Romania's ally in the Independence War had been given us.

This way, the Liberal journal was opening its edition from April 19th – 20th 1878 with a brief preamble on the blunt debate, in opposition, on the issue of Bessarabia and Dobruja as it appeared in European journals:

"The news abroad is contradicting one another. Nothing is yet decided [...] Foreign newspapers – English, German, French, Austrian-Hungarian and even Russian – are continuously concerned with our country. [...] We publish below – and we will ceaselessly publish – some parts of the most significant journals dealing with us, with the sole purpose for the Romanians to know

³ Dimitrie Alexandru Sturdza, Prime-Minister of Romania during four mandates: October 4th/16th 1895 – November 21st/December 3rd 1896, March 31st/April 12th 1897 – April 11th/23rd 1899, February 14th/27th 1901 – December 22nd 1904/ January 4th 1905, March 12th/25th 1907 – December 27th 1908/January 9th 1908, President of the Senate in 1897 and President of the National Liberal Party during 1892-1909.

⁴ "MOR", No. 25, February 2nd/14th 1878, p. 578-579.

⁵ Carol I of Romania, Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, was Prince of Romania from May 10th 1866 and King of Romania during May 10th 1881 – October 10th 1914.

⁶ Mite Kremnitz, *Regele Carol al României. Povestea unei vieți*, Corint Press, București, 2014, p. 111.

*what is being said, either good or bad, either just or unjust. [...] We cannot publish many of the articles of the foreign press, since some of them are too much attacking Russia and others Austria*⁷.

On the very next page, after showing the opinions expressed in the foreign media, the correspondent in Berlin of *Românul* journal was mentioning in an article named *Cestiunea retrocedărei Basarabiei* (*The matter of Bessarabia's restitution*):

*"We know well that from this matter of Bessarabia's restitution some have made a machine of war between parties. Some have used it to attack the present ministry with such a fury and under such terms which, in any other constitutional states in Europe would have brought their authors to the court [...] The Russians are victors. The Romanians are covered in glory. The time for signing the peace has arrived. Or, in its monstrous ingratitude, as a few days ago was written in a newspaper in Bucharest, does Russia turn its back and forgets about its ally in the eve? No! Yet it says: now I should give you the best part I can give; yet, if you would be so kind to make disappear any unpleasant memory about the war in Crimea, you would willingly give in to me the insignificant Bessarabian patch of land which has less than two thousand inhabitants, and in return I would give you the mouths of Danube, Dobruja and three seaports which would be of the greatest use [...] Since, from 1856, everybody in Europe knew very well that the very first time Russia will be able to, it would take possession again of this strip of land from the Bessarabians, a strip that had been snatched away from it by the Treaty of Paris to be given to the small Principality of Moldavia. In Romania also, there was no one else who did not know this fact"*⁸.

In other words, four months away from the political unanimity expressed on surrendering Bessarabia and from the incisive speech of the leader of the National Liberal Party, Dimitrie A. Sturdza, in Parliament, the National Liberal Party's paper was pleading for friendship with the Russians which wanted to dislodge Bessarabia from Romania, and were depicting in bright colors the inclusion of Dobruja to the Romanian borders. The decisions of the Treaty of San Stefano had already changed the rules of the game in Romania.

Although officially the political class and Prince Carol did not admit the provisions of the Treaty between the two great Empires, the press body of the governing party was announcing, by its editorial line, that the liberals were beginning a new politics characterized by pragmatism, in spite of a nationalist politics which implied the refuse of giving up Bessarabia.

⁷ Bucuresci, 19 Priaru, in "Românul", April 19th -20th 1878, p. 375.

⁸ *Cestiunea retrocedărei Basarabiei*, in "Românul", April 19th -20th 1878, p. 377.

Yet the new approach had disadvantages. Ensuring peace at external level, by the decision of meeting the rules imposed by the Great European Powers, was contradicting the accusations of the political Opposition (Conservative Party) and of the Romanian society regarding a too easy surrendering of a Romanian historical and ethnographic territory. The fact that the Russian Empire had not yet retreated its troops from the Romania's territory, and considering the historical revisionism of the same Empire as to the Romanian territories, an additional pressure was enforced on the decision next to be taken by the governing party as to giving up Bessarabia and the annexation of Dobruja.

From that moment on, Prince Carol and the governing Party were obliged, in the view of ensuring their continuity in governance and the internal peace of the country, to find the fine balance and the needed diplomacy to satisfy both sides. And all these because the stake was very high: the Congress of Berlin was to decide upon the Independence of Romania.

The decision of taking over Bessarabia by the Russian Empire was not a final one yet, and this was certain, at least up to the moment when the Great Powers were to express themselves within the Congress in Berlin which was to come a few months later, yet the signals received from the Romanian emissaries from the European chancelleries did not contradict such a scenario.

Dobruja in Political Terms

This territory exchange proposed in the beginning and imposed in the end by the Russian Empire, consisting in giving up on Bessarabia in exchange of Dobruja, has provoked a political war in Romania which has caught all the decision factors of the state in its swirl. The Russian troops, still present on the territory of the country, were representing an additional pressure and the decisions taken by the political Power in Romania could have influenced the fate of the state's Independence.

At this level, the political and public rhetoric has changed according to the moment and context. In the beginning, the idea of losing Bessarabia has represented the main reason of altercation, while later, as the opening date of the Congress of Berlin was approaching, the annexation of Dobruja has become the main topic of debate.

Firstly, in the mist of February, once the information according to which Romania was to lose Bessarabia started to appear and agitate the press everywhere, the Conservative Party was requesting Prince Carol to abdicate rather than being forced to give up on Bessarabia⁹, while rumors in the background were implying that the Prince knew about this province exchange for quite some time.

⁹ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I de un martor ocular*, Part IV, Volume XIII, ErcPress, p. 57.

During the Senate meeting from February 13th 1878, the Conservative Emanoil Costache Epureanu¹⁰ was accusing the Government of acknowledging on Russia's desire of taking over Bessarabia and of offering Dobruja in exchange, long before the Parliament was informed on this matter, and was stating that this was the reason for which a team had been sent to the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea, namely to gather information on these lands. During an incendiary debate in the Parliament which took several hours and with the implication of many major leaders of the Romanian political life, Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu¹¹ and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihail Kogălniceanu¹² have rejected all accusations¹³.

In the beginning of March, immediately after the signature of the Treaty of San Stefano, the National Liberal Party, in Power, was also profoundly disturbed by an internal altercation, the Prime Minister Brătianu asserting in front of Prince Carol that Mihail Kogălniceanu must not remain Minister of Foreign Affairs after this failure¹⁴.

Even if it was not conducted in absolute terms, the conflict between the Liberal Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs has continued throughout the entire time span between the Treaty of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin, the visions of the two being discordant as to surrendering Bessarabia and accepting Dobruja. Shortly before the Congress of Berlin both Prince Carol and Mihail Kogălniceanu, considering that Bessarabia is lost, were requiring Brătianu to lead the best negotiation possible with the Russians to benefit at the most from this exchange. Brătianu was uncompromising¹⁵.

The Romanian political class was fermenting faced to the possibility of losing a territory after a war which Romania has got out of victorious, and the context was favoring the Conservative Opposition into bringing forward nationalist themes and to express emotional speeches, especially since the former Conservative Government had ended its mandate in April 1876, shortly before the beginning of the War of 1877-1878.

From the tribune of the Parliament the political quarrel has reached the pages of the journals and the editors of such were divided in groups, according to their political preferences.

¹⁰ Prime-Minister of Romania for two mandates: April 20th /May 2nd - December 18th /30th 1870 and April 27th / May 9th - July 24th /August 5th 1876 and President of the Conservative Party in 1880.

¹¹ Prime-Minister during July 24th /August 5th 1876 - April 10th /April 22nd 1881 and June 9th /June 21st 1881 - March 23rd /April 4th 1888, President of the Chamber of Deputies during 1868-1869, and President of the National Liberal Party during 1875-1891.

¹² Prime-Minister of Romania during October 11th /23rd 1863 - January 26th /February 7th 1865.

¹³ "MOR", No. 39, February 18th /March 2nd 1878, p. 1004-1007.

¹⁴ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I de un martor*, Part IV, Volume XIII, ErcPress, p. 69.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

While the Liberal journal *Românul* was looking for the best reasons to put in the best possible light the loss of Bessarabia and the annexation of Dobruja (territory exchange the Liberals were forced to present as a success to remain as the governing Party), embracing many times the Russian rhetoric, the official gazette of the Conservative Party, *Timpul* (The Time), was accusing the Power of high treason and of bargaining for the country with foreign invaders. The nationalist themes and the external enemies were renewed and emphasized with alarming vigor.

Dobruja in Economic Terms

Another aspect intensely debated when it became pretty clear that Dobruja was to be part of Romania was represented by the economic status of the province. Once Dobruja was regained, the lack of an adequate infrastructure for Romania's level of development and its marshy and unproductive territory represented a topic even more vigorously debated within the Romanian society.

The public space had become saturated with alleged exorbitant amounts of money that were to be spent for the new province.

Although one of the most fervent supporters of the idea that Dobruja was historically a Romanian territory, Mihai Eminescu, the main voice of the Conservative journal *Timpul*, has found himself in the position of putting the history aside and to define the situation in pragmatic, economic terms.

An acid criticizer of the political class, Eminescu has rapidly introduced in his portfolio of themes the leitmotif of wasting the public money:

*"We are already being told about the high retributions the patriots are planning to fix for themselves; the newspapers are already starting to show projects of bridges across the Danube, channels between the Danube and the Black Sea, and by fiction and under the pretext of creating an Eldorado, attempts are being made to persuade the public opinion to accept the idea of some expenses which will prove to be enormous"*⁴⁶.

At the same time the newspaper *Presa* (the Press), of Conservative origin itself, was publishing a manifest in the same sonority about the massive investments to be made in Dobruja:

"To maintain the savage population of Dobruja in respect and good order we will have to keep there a considerable army. A considerable army in Dobruja meaning several millions which will be spent every year, meaning a source

⁴⁶ Mihai Eminescu, *Am avut adeseori ocazia...*, in "Timpul", October 5th 1878, in Idem, "Opere", Vol. X (Publicistică. 1 Noiembrie 1877 – 15 februarie 1880. "Timpul"), coordinated by Dimitrie Vatamaniuc, Editura Academiei, București, 1989, p. 121.

*of economic weakness for the Romanian state. To make it possible to put down roots in this swampy country, to make it productive, we must spend tens and maybe hundreds of millions. The expenses we will make for Dobruja will be much more significant than the incomes it could give back. And when, finally, after 10 or 15 years when we would have spent hundreds of millions to make Dobruja productive, the Government of Bulgaria would easily find a pretext to claim back Dobruja and... in case this would also be beneficial to Russia... Dobruja will be taken away from us much easier than Bessarabia is today*¹⁷.

The history has proven the Conservative journalists of the time to be right. After Dobruja was included within the borders of Romania, the politics of Carol was focused towards massive investments into the province between the Danube and the Black Sea and, it is indeed true, vast amounts of money were spent for the development of the new Romanian territory.

At the border between the 19th and the 20th century some of the most important projects of Romania were meant to be implemented in Dobruja (fact which has generated many polemics within the Parliament of Romania). The construction of Cernavodă Railway Bridge – the longest in Europe at that time, built in 1895 – and the inauguration of the Constanța modern Seaport in 1909 – which, in the interwar period, has become the most important port at the Black Sea – have represented exceptional engineering successes, yet they have financially drained the state treasury.

Nevertheless history has also proved that the money invested by the Romanian state turned Dobruja into one of the most important economical engines of the country.

Constanța Seaport is today one of the main economic pylons of Romania and the touristic segment in Dobruja, with the holidays resorts on the Romanian seaside and Danube Delta, has also become a successful business in economic terms, besides the fact of being an extremely important recreation destination.

Dobruja in Ethnic and Confessional Terms

Not lastly, the structure of the population in Dobruja before 1878 has represented a delicate aspect in the debate pro and against the annexation of the province between the Danube and the Black Sea.

In lack of official censuses for the population in Dobruja, the statistics of Ion Ionescu de la Brad (1850) represents the best source for the structure of the

¹⁷ Mihai Eminescu, *De-o seamă de vreme...*, in "Timpul", August 2nd 1878, in Idem, "Opere", Vol. X (Publicistică. 1 Noiembrie 1877 – 15 februarie 1880. "Timpul"), coordinated by Dimitrie Vatamaniuc, Editura Academiei, București, 1989, p. 82.

population of the province in the middle of the 19th century: 15,764 families, including Muslims (47.58%), Romanians (23.19%), Bulgarians (14.04%) and Slavs (11.66%), at an estimated population of over 100 thousand persons¹⁸.

“Savage population” – this was, briefly, Dobruja’s image in 1878 as to its demography. The Slav and Turkish populations which inhabited these territories were seen by the majority of the Romanian political class and opinion leaders as being an utmost weakness in the process of unification with Romania.

The same Mihai Eminescu was mentioning in *Timpul*:

“Romania’s mission is on the left side of the Danube, it has nothing to do with the right side which, although is dwelled by many Romanians, yet the majority of the population is of Slav origin (...) From its [Russia’s] equity and wisdom and from that of Europe’s we could only ask for the Danube Delta which was ours, and for the compensation related to our war damages”¹⁹.

In line with many Conservative political faces, Eminescu and *Timpul* have lead an incisive press campaign by which they asked for Dobruja to be annexed only with the consent of its population.

The other Conservative newspaper, *Presa*, was mentioning on this matter that: *“To maintain the savage population of Dobruja in respect and good order we will have to keep there a considerable army”²⁰.*

The same publication was indicating in August, when the annexation of Dobruja was already a certainty:

“Our political and historical importance in this part of the Oriental Europe was and still is represented by the fact that we are a nation of a homogenous Latin race and we disrupt the incredible unity of the Slav race. Getting in contact, mingling with the Slav race from Bulgaria, we are to lose this importance. Serbia has protested when the Romanian army headed for Vidin to occupy it, formulating ethnographic and historical claims on Vidin. There is no doubt that Bulgaria’s government will see with a very unfriendly eye Dobruja’s occupation by the Romanians; there is no doubt any more that continuous fights will arise between Bulgaria’s government and the Romanian one; naturally, Russia will continuously interfere to reconcile us.

¹⁸ Răzvan Limona, *Populația Dobrogei în perioada interbelică*, Editura Semănătorul, 2009, p. 16.

¹⁹ Mihai Eminescu, *În numărul nostru de vineri...*, in “*Timpul*”, February 19th 1878, in Idem, “*Opere*”, vol. X (Publicistică. 1 Noiembrie 1877 – 15 februarie 1880. “*Timpul*”), coordinated by Dimitrie Vatamaniuc, Editura Academiei, București, 1989, p. 51.

²⁰ Mihai Eminescu, *De-o seamă de vreme...*, in “*Timpul*”, August 2nd 1878, in Idem, “*Opere*”, Vol. X (Publicistică. 1 Noiembrie 1877 – 15 februarie 1880. “*Timpul*”), coordinated by Dimitrie Vatamaniuc, Editura Academiei, București, 1989, p. 82.

*It is about the intervention of a large state into the affairs of a small state, namely about losing the freedom and independence of action of the latter*²¹.

Certainly, these opinions were contradicted by the Liberal journal *Românul*, which supported the inclusion of Dobruja within the borders of the country, in its attempt to legitimate the political actions of the liberals.

Nevertheless, many of the Liberal politicians considered that the multitude of ethnicities and confessions which populated Dobruja in 1878 was sufficient reason for Romania to refuse to take over the province administratively.

*"Yet the second cause which makes of this matter a matter of principle is represented by the fact that the strength of the Romanian State consists in the homogeneity of its people. As we are a homogenous people, as this country is inhabited only by Romanians – with just a few foreigners scattered amongst them – we feel strong by being united. As soon as we would try to evolve beyond the Danube in a country in which the Romanian element has little importance, we would weaken; we would immediately enter into conflicts with our neighbors and we would no longer have the strength we have today. This is why we have said that in order to remain a compact nation, as we are for centuries in Romania, we should not begin the fight with our neighbors, by expanding our territory. Not only a part of Bulgaria, namely Dobruja, we reject in exchange for Bessarabia, yet we reject even the whole Bulgaria"*²², was declaring the Liberal Dimitrie A. Sturdza in the Senate, yet in February 1878.

The multitude of ethnicities and confessions in Dobruja was not appreciated and this aspect was considered to represent, for the future, reason enough for other countries to claim their rights on Dobruja, and we refer here only to Russia and Bulgaria.

Thus, the Legislative structure, the rights of the minorities, gaining citizenship and acquiring land in the new province proved to be a difficult attempt in the vision of the Romanian political class.

And this is exactly what has happened. For seven years, Dobruja was governed by special regulations and by a special organic law named "Dobruja's Constitution", until the Constitution of Romania has included also the integration of Dobruja, on January 8th 1884²³. Concerning the political rights of the inhabitants in Dobruja, those were won not sooner than 1912²⁴, when this population has participated for

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² "MOR", No. 25, February 2nd/14th 1878, p. 578-579.

²³ For details on the governing of Dobruja in the first years after the unification see Adrian Rădulescu, Ion Bitoleanu, *Istoria Dobrogei*, Chapter XV, Editura Ex Ponto, Constanța, 1998, p. 352-357.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 374.

the first time in the parliamentary elections in Romania. The province with savage populations has yet become, in a short time, an instance of ethnical coexistence, since in the history of the Romanian Dobruja after 1878 no major conflict was ever recorded between the coexisting minorities or between minorities and majorities.

Nowadays, Dobruja preserves an exceptional patrimony of the multiculturalism of this territory and the city of Constanța expresses the meritorious coexistence of minorities in an exceptional Confessional Octagon existing within the space delimited by the old Ottoman Kiustenge²⁵. The Orthodox Cathedral “Saints Michael and Gabriel”, the Ashkenazy Synagogue, the Catholic Basilica “St. Anthony of Padova”, the Armenian Church “Saint Mary”, the Greek Church “Methamorphosis”, the Bulgarian Church “Saint Nicholas”, “Hunkiar” Mosque and “Carol” Mosque have lasted through time as proofs of the example of a good coexistence in Dobruja²⁶. It is also the case of Tulcea, the second greatest city in Dobruja, where the multitude of places of worship of various confessions – the Orthodox Cathedral “Saint Nicholas”, “Azizye” Mosque, the Coral Temple, the Greek Church “Annunciation”, the Armenian Church “Saint Gregory the Illuminator”, the Roman-Catholic Church “Saint Archangel Michael” – maintain the multiethnic aspect of the region.

Dobruja in the Eyes of Prince Carol

There is no doubt that Carol I, Prince of Romania from 1866 and King of the country starting with 1881, was the main factor of decision in the matter of Bessarabia and Dobruja. Solving this territorial and historical dilemma was representing for the young prince the most difficult and delicate diplomatic mission of his from the arrival in Romania. After a hard war, Carol has found himself at the leadership of a country which had to pay its state Independence won by sacrifice on the battle field, by giving up an important territory with the possibility of a subsequent construction of a seaport at the Black Sea. The matter of Bessarabia was a difficult mission and Dobruja, in the beginning of year 1878, was not yet a significant topic for the Prince. Both for him and for the entire Romanian political class, Dobruja's inclusion within the borders of the country as a currency was just a matter related to surrendering Bessarabia and nothing more.

In those times of confusion for a small country newly ending the war, the Russian troops still in its territory, and with a proclaimed Independence but not yet confirmed by the European chancelleries, Romania was at the will of the Great Powers. External confirmations were extremely important for Carol and the

²⁵ The Turkish name of Constanța city.

²⁶ Florin Anghel, Cristian Andrei Leonte, *Octogonul confesional – mărturie a toleranței în Constanța Veche*, in “Info Sud-Est”, Constanța, Year VI, No. 88, June 24th -30th 2015, p. 5-7.

Government, although the Romanian political class had already decided, by the unanimous vote in the Parliament against giving up Bessarabia, that it was in other words declaring war to the Russian Empire.

Under these circumstances, the correspondence between the Prince of Romania and his father, Karl Anton of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen²⁷, has had an utmost role in the subsequent decisions of the future King of Romania and in the way his politics has influenced the decisions made by the governing party. This exchange of letters is otherwise extremely often evoked in his memoirs and they depict the change of perspective of Prince Carol during 1878.

After receiving news from Prince Carol on the situation in Romania following the unanimity vote of the Legislative Chamber of disagreeing with giving up Bessarabia, Karl Anton wrote his son in a letter dated February 8th 1878:

*"The attitude of the Romanian Chamber against the claim of Russia of getting back the Danubian Bessarabia, included in Romania by a solemn treaty, was a noble one, yet it could have put only a moral pressure, since a material resistance would have been a reckless thing. Considering the situation of nowadays, Romania has no hope of being supported by either side (...) The nonproductive territory of Dobruja does not compensate, of course, the loss of Bessarabia; yet Dobruja, together with Constantza, can be welcomed, since gaining this port to the Black Sea would possibly be of utmost importance for the future of Romania's commerce"*²⁸.

It was the moment when, even before the signature of the peace of San Stefano, Dobruja was regarded by Karl Anton, from somewhere near the place Danube was streaming out, as a province of maritime and commercial future opportunities, while Bessarabia was treated as a lost cause, in terms of a realistic policy with no emotional ingredients. It was the attitude Prince Carol I would embrace only five months later, before the Congress of Berlin, when the renunciation to Bessarabia was already a fact.

Yet, at that moment, in the beginning of February 1878, the idea of losing Bessarabia remained unconceivable for Carol:

"The matter of Bessarabia has provoked here a colossal excitement (...) Yet in our protests we must avoid everything that could offend Russia. Nevertheless, I personally have told Ignatiev I am scandalized by Russia's intention of abducting part of the territory of its ally and that, besides this,

²⁷ Head of the House of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen and Prime-Minister of Prussia during November 6th 1858 – March 12th 1862.

²⁸ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I de un martor ocular*, Part IV, Volume XIII, ErcPress, p. 45.

*the compensation it wants to offer us makes too little impression on me*²⁹, was responding the Prince of Romania in the return letter sent from Sigmaringen.

Immediately after the two conflagrant Empires in the War of 1877-1878 have signed the Treaty of San Stefano, Karl Anton has warned his son that losing Bessarabia is inevitable and that a moderate position should guide him into giving up this territory:

*"The loss of Bessarabia must be seen as inevitable. No hand will move in favor of Romania. Your protest is completely justified, yet it will have no echo. Nevertheless, it has a moral value and it cannot be enough emphasized. An armed protestation would be a suicide. Let us hope that all the parties in Romania will admit that one must suffer what one cannot reject! (...) No Great Power, except for Austrian-Hungary, would express in favor of Romania"*³⁰, was advising Karl Anton his son, Prince Carol, in a letter sent on March 12.

On April 6th, Karl Anton was even more convincing and was advising his son to take wise decisions, with no excitement:

*"[...] The fervor of the national radicalism in the matter of Bessarabia would become ridiculous in the end. To protest and then to give in, this is the wisest thing"*³¹.

As the Congress of Berlin approached and the Romanian diplomacy was not succeeding in getting any promise for help from the Great Powers as to the matter of Bessarabia, the issue of the Dobruja province was stressed out more and more often both in the interior public speech, and in the letters Prince Carol was sending and receiving from his father. Moreover, the reasons which justified the development potential of Dobruja were ever increasing in number; there appeared the possibility for the province to become an important commercial hub and to offer Romania the maritime profile needed for its economic development and for "a new era of governing" as cousin Friderick Wilhelm³², the heir prince of Germany, was mentioning to Carol. Yet, this was a prediction that could not hide the strong resentments towards the Russian ally expressed by the majority of the political class and of the society: a few years after winning together the War of 1877-1878, Romania

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

³² Frederick III of Germany, King of Prussia for 99 days in 1888, son of Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany and cousin of Carol I of Romania.

and Russia were separating geopolitically and strategically from each other, as Romania was accepting the military alliance with Germany and Austrian-Hungary (1883).

On July 14th, immediately after the end of the Congress of Berlin, Prince Karl Anton was writing his son, in a letter sent from Krauchenwies:

*"Your declaration, according to which you would obey the decision of the European Areopagus, is a very noble one. You must reconcile with the idea of losing Bessarabia and you must make efforts to get from Dobruja the benefits of the maritime position, now belonging to Romania"*³³.

Once the Congress of Berlin was settled, Carol has changed his speech almost radically and in less than half a year, the one to become the first King of Romania was seeing the province between Danube and the Black Sea no more as a currency offered by the Russians in exchange for renouncing to Bessarabia, yet as a war compensation given by Europe, and was foreseeing a glorious future for Dobruja, specifying in details the benefits he found in these territories, namely aspects related to road infrastructure, to the development of the cities, to the benefits of the sea side:

*"The territories beyond the Danube are not given to us as a compensation for Bessarabia; we are taking them as war indemnity and because Europe has given them to us from its initiative. Thus we have won a lot from a material and moral point of view and no one can deprive from the respect we deserve. The districts the Congress has given us have a great future; I hope to bring them to a blooming state in a few years. The population out there is very happy to be united with Romania and it has sent me numerous Letters I have not yet answered. Upon taking possession of Dobruja I would state a proclamation and maybe not later than this autumn I would visit this new country. I know the cities from the Danube; a few years ago I was welcomed in Tulcea and Sulina with ample manifestations. Constantza is a beautiful seaport that, like the railroad to Cernavodă, was built by an English company. Installations for sea water baths and several fine hotels are there. The climate is beneficial for the health. Mangalia is a small village and it is significant only for the fact that an excellent seaport can be built there, protected from the winds from North and East. Upon the delimitation of the frontier we will seek to get as close as possible to Silistra, since the Danube is not very wide out there and it could be easier to build a bridge"*³⁴, was Carol writing to his father on July 23rd, immediately after the Congress of Berlin was accomplished.

³³ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I de un martor ocular*, Part IV, Volume XIV, ErcPress, p. 56.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

Moreover, on November 14th³⁵, on the day the Romanian troops have entered Dobruja, Prince Carol was mentioning in a speech, on the left side of Danube:

*“By the fights beyond the Danube the independence and enlargement of Romania were strengthened; today we cross Danube a second time yet this time in inoffensively and calmly, to take possession of a country that our army has won by its heroism!”*³⁶.

The letters between the Romanian Prince and his father have had a major impact on the decisions taken by Carol, considering the external implications the Prince was facing for the first time from his arrival in Romania.

Although in the beginning of 1878 Bessarabia was representing the most important topic for Carol and Dobruja was seen only as a currency much too cheap on the market, the new Romanian province was becoming more and more present in these correspondence, as the date of the Congress of Berlin was approaching.

At the same time, Karl Anton, detached from the Romanian internal politics and judging the matters from a geopolitical context, was considering an intensification of the conflict between Romania and the Russian Empire as useless and estimated that the future of Dobruja could be a luminous one, and the territory exchange was seen as a good business in the end.

Carol I had remained in the memory of the Romanians as a King that has brought to the country a maritime vision once Dobruja, now within the borders of the country, has developed the commerce at the Black Sea by building the modern Port in Constanța and by creating the maritime fleet of Romania.

Originating from the southern lands of Germany, Carol loved very much the Danube and, until 1878, he had never looked beyond the mouths of the river in terms of economic growth.

With Dobruja's inclusion within the country frontiers, by special circumstances and by an enforcement resulted from the Congress of Berlin, the maritime vision of the Romanian sovereign was fueled by the advices of his father which was estimating, much in advance to the taking over of the new province, that Romania would have a lot to gain from this business.

Meanwhile, Carol's name was associated with the province between the Danube and the Black Sea, and Constanța, the most important city of Dobruja, has become a place with three royal residences in which the sovereign family was spending a lot of time, both for solving the affairs of the country, and for relaxation during sea water baths.

³⁵ The date on which Romanians celebrate the Day of Dobruja (unification of Dobruja with Romania).

³⁶ *Memoriile Regelui Carol I*, Part IV, Volume XIV, ErcPress, p. 14.

Conclusion

Romanian Dobruja has registered the most important development amongst the regions in Romania, if we relate to economic, social and infrastructure terms from 1878, before the Congress of Berlin.

Included to the borders of the country by a context of circumstances and not at all by the will and explicit request of the political decision factors of that time³⁷, as it has subsequently happened in 1918 with Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania, Dobruja has proved to be a successful project of Romania, and its disadvantages have rapidly turned into assets: from the marshy province economically retarded in 1878 it has now become a major economic engine of Romania by the activities of Constanța Port, by the commerce at the mouths of Danube, by resorts well-known in summer time and by the tourism caused by the beauty of Danube Delta, and from the territory with savage populations it has become an example of coexistence, a multi-ethnic crucible with an exceptional patrimony.

There is no doubt that the public debate and the political conflict in Romania in 1878 would have looked totally different if the opportunity of Dobruja's annexation would not have appeared in exchange for giving up Bessarabia.

Yet time has proved that the anxieties of the Romanian society as to the annexation of the province between the Danube and the Black Sea, a Romanian one historically, yet economically regressed and demographically exotic for the conservatism of those times, were not sustained and no one can imagine today how Romania would look without Dobruja.

³⁷ See Constantin Iordachi, *The California of the Romanians: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea into Romania, 1878-1913*, Chapter 1.2. (From a "Fatal Gift" to an "Ancient Romanian Land": Mith-Making in the Romanian Nationalist Discourse about Dobruja), in "Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies", Balázs Trencsényi, Dragoș Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi and Zoltán Kántor (eds.), Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 124-128.