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Pitfalls of Sovereignty: Romanian State Building on the Eve of Independence from the Ottoman Empire

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ABSTRACT

The present article explores the trials and tribulations of the Romanian state in building viable institutions and acquiring independence in the latter half of the 19th century. Starting from a flurry of diplomatic exchanges on the eve of the Russian-Turkish war (1877–1878), which were aimed at securing experienced General Staff officers for the young Romanian army, this article shows how intimately interconnected the domestic and international dimensions of state building were for such fledgling states and explores the inversely proportional relationship between Krasner's notions of sovereignty – legal-international and Westphalian. The article thus proposes a more institutional-oriented approach to state building in South-Eastern Europe and seeks to bring the state and the pragmatics of its creation back into a discussion of independence and sovereignty in the region.

KEYWORDS

Romania; state building; Habsburg Monarchy; Russian Empire; Ottoman Empire; sovereignty

Introduction

The states that emerged in 19th-century South-Eastern Europe out of the fraying fringes of the Ottoman Empire were fledgling polities which, with some exceptions, had lacked an independent political and administrative life of their own for centuries. In order to be recognized and taken seriously by the established European powers of the day, they had to build state institutions from scratch and resort to massive cultural and institutional imports. Apart from the Herculean effort to erect a host of new institutions, the race for sovereignty was what defined the actions of the region's political actors in the nineteenth century. Stephen D. Krasner proposes a fine-grained classification of sovereignty: domestic (an ability to exert authority internally and maintain order), interdependent (controlling transborder movement), international legal (being recognized by other states as sovereign), and Westphalian (preventing other states from infringing on one's own internal authority).¹

Out of these four categories, by far the most pressing concern of the new ex-Ottoman states was to secure the last two dimensions of sovereignty, international legal and

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¹Stephen D. Krasner, 'Problematic Sovereignty' in Stephen D. Krasner (ed.), *Problematic Sovereignty. Contested Rules and Political Possibilities* (New York, 2001), 6–7.

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Westphalian, that is, international recognition of their statehood while also preventing foreign powers from influencing their internal affairs. All countries in the region had achieved the first desideratum by the beginning of the 20th century. What remained, however, an elusive dream was the second, Westphalian dimension of sovereignty. The setting up of new states in the Balkans turned out to be inextricably interwoven with direct or indirect Great Power involvement and intervention. Serbia drew its first generation of public functionaries and teaching staff, as well as its civil code from the Habsburg Monarchy, and its officers and military knowhow from the Russian Empire, all of these being vitally necessary imports for ‘in 1816 Serbia had neither an established central government and administrative system nor written laws’.² Bulgaria acquired its autonomy within the Ottoman Empire as an outpost of Russian interests, drawing its administrative body and superior officers from the Russian Empire. In the neighbouring province of Eastern Rumelia, which was placed in the hands of an international commission and later incorporated into Bulgaria, ‘the British drew up the electoral laws; the Italians drafted the financial sections [of the constitution], the Austrians were responsible for the legal system; the French introduced their own administrative system; and the Russians and French collaborated on the organization of the militia’.³ By the beginning of the 20th century Greece came ‘under a tight regime of supervision by an international financial commission [...] with a major British interest’.⁴ Romania also seesawed between French and Prussian influence and was, for example, only able ‘to obtain credit on condition of the hypothecation of key taxes’.⁵ Bulgaria, Greece and Romania also all brought in German princes as their monarchs and patterned their constitutions and parliamentary systems on Western European ones.

This article focuses on nineteenth-century Romanian institution building, which showcases the complex relationship and tensions between the various Krasnerian dimensions of sovereignty: in particular, it examines the establishment of the Romanian army and Romania’s military involvement in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. This will be done by analysing the tug-of-war between domestic and international politics apparent in informal diplomatic negotiations occasioned by Romanian statesmen’s attempts to recruit high-ranking officers from the Austro-Hungarian army on the eve of the war in order to compensate for the dearth of qualified autochthonous officers capable of serving on the General Staff.

The Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, which broke out after a resurgence of the Eastern Question in the wake of uprisings and bloody repression in Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia, brought into play the fledgling Romanian army for the first time after its establishment in the 1830s. The Treaty of Adrianople of 1829, which concluded a previous Russo-Turkish war, curtailed the power of the Porte over the Danubian Principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia. This meant that the Ottomans could no longer veto the establishment of standing armies in a region which had been

²Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan States, 1804–1920*, (Seattle and London, 2000), 54, 59, 61, 62; Gale Stokes, *Politics as Development: The Emergence of Political Parties in Nineteenth-Century Serbia* (North Carolina, 1990), 108–113.

³Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan States*, 63.

⁴Adam Tooze and Martin Ivanov, ‘Disciplining the “black sheep of the Balkans”: financial supervision and sovereignty in Bulgaria, 1902–38’, *Economic History Review* 64, no. 1 (2011): 34.

⁵*Ibid.*, 33–34.

incorporated into their empire since the fifteenth century.⁶ After successive occupations by the Russians and Austrians, in 1859 the Danubian Principalities achieved a personal, subsequently full, union under Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza under the suzerainty of the Porte, and thus came to be known as the United Principalities. In 1866 a boyar plot brought down Prince Cuza and replaced him with a German prince, the much more influential Carol of Hohenzollern who ensured that the new state enjoyed de-facto, but not yet de-jure, independence by the 1870s.

The 1877–78 war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was a golden opportunity for Romanian statesmen to force through the international recognition of Romanian state independence. In Krasner's terminology, what was all to play for now in the case of Romania was its international legal sovereignty. The way to achieve this was through successfully exercising a fundamental function of statehood: its ability to deploy and effectively wield military power. Hence the need to enter the war between the Russian and the Ottoman Empire, via a military alliance with the former, in the hope that this would result in Romania being awarded full independence at the peace negotiations. As is the case in games of poker, where one has to have some capital before joining the game, the Romanian government had to have an army to field and, more importantly still, commanding officers to lead this army into battle. While the first requirement (army power) could be met more or less through conscription, the second one regarding military command turned into a tortuous quest for officers in the Austro-Hungarian army. The present article maps the progress of Romanian-Habsburg negotiations for the transfer of high-ranking officers from the Habsburg army into the fledgling Romanian army on the eve of the 1877–1878 war amidst a minefield of highly sensitive relations between Austria-Hungary, Romania and the Russian Empire. The article traces the diplomacy surrounding the participation of the Romanian army in this war and highlights the growing pains of the Romanian army as a vital institution in the fledgling state as well as exploring the connection between this domestic institutional process and the complex international relations the new state was navigating at the time. On a more theoretical level, this case study shows the interconnection between the Krasnerian dimensions of sovereignty (legal international, Westphalian and domestic) given that the quest for high-ranking officers to head the Romanian army turned out to be a far from straightforward domestic process as it was dependent on Romania's entangled relationship with the great powers. Paradoxically, the attempt to secure international legal recognition went hand in hand with the loss of Westphalian sovereignty: the fledgling Romanian army was an instrument for gaining international recognition of Romanian statehood, but its establishment also necessitated foreign input and conditionality, and as such a curtailment of the principle of Westphalian sovereignty (whereby foreign powers do not have a say over internal processes).

There is a vast literature that puzzles over how new states in the region were erected amidst constant warfare, international pressures and economic challenges.⁷ Nevertheless,

⁶Nicolae Isar, *Istoria modernă a românilor 1774/1784–1918* (Bucharest, 2006), 80.

⁷Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan States*; Ivan Berend, *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (California, 2005); Gale Stokes, *Politics as Development: The Emergence of Political Parties in Nineteenth-century Serbia* (North Carolina, 1990);

Wendy Bracewell, Ulf Brunnbauer, Diana Mishkova, Joachim von Puttkamer, and Philipp Ther, 'The Past, Present, and Future of Comparative History in East Central Europe and Beyond;

Roundtable Discussion, 22 June 2021', *East Central Europe*, 26 Nov 2021.

in the case of Romania, the scholarship generally focuses on political manoeuvring and nationalism rather than the practical infrastructural considerations behind actually building a modern state. With notable exceptions, mainly coming from economic and social historians but also from younger political historians,⁸ most studies, while acknowledging the challenges of state modernization, remain locked in on high politics and national discourse analysis. Existing literature also gives the lion's share of attention to the later period of state reconfiguration, from the post-World War One period onwards, with a focus on integrating different post-imperial state structures,⁹ while less attention has been paid to the early formative period of 19th-century statehood in terms of this type of institutional history.

What is also less studied is the relationship and interdependence between the two dimensions of state building: domestic and international. How does one build a modern state and what are the challenges implicit in this process? How does one build functioning institutions overnight and recruit the necessary people who are both loyal and knowledgeable? Vitally, how do the trials and tribulations implicit in such domestic reinvention impact on the state's international standing and quest for sovereignty? As Adam Tooze and Martin Ivanov state in their excellent article on Bulgarian international debt entanglements, even in the literature on economic history the interest in the relationship between finance and imperial rivalry has lapsed and the interconnection between international relations and domestic reforms has therefore lost prominence.¹⁰ The interconnection between national and international dimensions of state building is not, however, completely absent. A sophisticated attempt at relating the two is to be found in Andrei Sorescu's analysis of Romanian state nationalism at the intersection between *jus gentium* and *jus publicum Europaeum*, or how Romanian statesmen negotiated with the concepts of sovereignty and suzerainty instrumentalizing international relations vocabulary.¹¹ As regards warfare and state building we also have the thoughtful myth-debunking contribution of Siniša Malešević which calls into question the truism of historical sociology that strong statehood is a function of warfare.¹² For the history of Great Power interventions on the territory of the Ottoman Empire, there is the excellent study by Ozan Ozavci *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security and Civil Wars in the Levant*

⁸John R. Lampe, Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations*, Bloomington, 1982; Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea Decalajelor Economice (1500–2010)*, Iași, 2010; Anders Blomqvist, *Economic Nationalizing in the Ethnic Borderlands of Hungary and Romania: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Annihilation in Szatmár/Satu Mare 1867–1944* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Stockholm, 2014; Calin Cotoi, *Inventing the Social in Romania, 1848–1914: Networks and Laboratories of Knowledge*, (Leiden, 2020); Andrei Dan Sorescu, 'National History as a History of Compacts. Jus Publicum Europaeum and Suzerainty in Romania in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *East Central Europe* 45 (2018) 63–93; Silvia Marton, "'La Belgique de l'Orient' et les chemins de fer – les raisons d'une comparaison: la construction politique de l'État-nation dans le Parlement roumain (1866–1871)', *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, VIII (2008) 1; Constantin Ardeleanu. *The European Commission of the Danube, 1856–1948*. Leiden, 2020.

⁹Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*, (Cornell 1995 & 2000); Ștefan Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to Romanianization* (Basingstoke, 2016); Cornel Micu, *From Peasants to Farmers? Agrarian Reforms and Modernisation in Twentieth Century Romania – A Case Study: Bordei Verde Commune in Braila County*, (New York, 2012); Angela Harre, *Wege in die Moderne: Entwicklungsstrategien rumänischer Ökonomen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, (Wiesbaden, 2014).

¹⁰Adam Tooze and Martin Ivanov, 'Disciplining the 'black sheep of the Balkans'', 33.

¹¹Andrei Dan Sorescu, 'National History as a History of Compacts. Jus Publicum Europaeum and Suzerainty in Romania in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *East Central Europe* 45 (2018): 63–93.

¹²Siniša Malešević, 'Wars that Make States and Wars that Make Nations: Organised Violence, Nationalism, and State Formation in the Balkans', *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie/Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie*, 2012, 53, no. 1 (2012): 31–63.

1798–1864, in which the author explores the rationale behind Great Power involvement as well as the agency of the Levant within the framework of securitization. Ozavci maps the formation of a culture of securitization in the interactions between the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire with ‘repertoires of power ranging from ‘military occupations conducted “for the benefit of the locals”, and so-called “humanitarian” interventions’ to ‘the establishment of international and extraterritorial security institutions [...] or the dispatch of military, naval or civilian advisors’.¹³

As regards state reform, Theda Skocpol has highlighted a fundamental problem in her discussion of state bureaucracies, which she views as indispensable for pushing through meaningful change within a state. Her reflections on classic examples of states that successfully reformed themselves and averted the chaos of social revolution, such as Prussia and Japan, revolve around the need for a strong independent bureaucracy, often military in origin, which preceded the reforms proper and was instrumental in their subsequent success. Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Peter Evans caution that such bureaucracies are, of necessity, a product of time and institutional evolution: they may well be created overnight but they take a long time to come into their own and deliver actual results given that training, expertise acquisition and less palpable but equally important notions such as *esprit de corps* form at only a slow, generational pace.¹⁴

Army Formation: The Case of the Romanian Army

The building of armies in South-East European states presupposed the formation of such bureaucracies as well as massive reliance on imports of know-how, qualified personnel, military gear and weapons from European military powers. This type of military assistance corresponded to the pattern of diplomatic alignment of the time and illustrated deeper political issues between the receiving countries and their more powerful allies. The process of building young armies in nineteenth-century South-Eastern Europe should not be indifferent to historians given the major territorial upheaval wrought by these initially poorly-regarded armies at the beginning of the 20th century: notably the ousting of the Ottomans from Europe in a matter of months without the assistance, or approval, of the Great Powers.¹⁵ It also should not be ignored given that the building of armies as state bureaucracies was inevitably a litmus test for the viability of these states and their organizational powers.

In the Danubian Principalities national militias of ‘armed guards’ as well as the first military uniforms only appeared in the early 1830s in the wake of a relaxation of military restrictions by the Porte consequent on the Treaty of Adrianople. This treaty granted the Principalities the right to establish militias with a view to maintaining internal order as well as setting up cordons sanitaires and quarantine posts along the newly demarcated frontier with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶ This was happening at a time of Russian occupation of the

¹³Ozan Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security and Civil Wars in the Levant 1798–1864*, (Oxford, 2021), 5–8.

¹⁴Theda Skocpol, ‘Old Regime States in Crisis’, in *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge & New York, 1995), 99–111; Dietrich Rueschemeyer & Peter Evans, ‘The State and Economic Transformation: Toward an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervention’ in Rueschemeyer & Skocpol (Eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, 1999), 44–77.

¹⁵Mika Suonpää, ‘Britain, Balkan Conflicts and the Evolving Conceptions of Militarism, 1875–1913’, *History* 99, no. 4 (337) (2014), 632–51.

¹⁶Nicolae Isar, *Istoria modernă a românilor 1774/1784–1918*, Bucharest 2006, 80.

Coman and Giurescu, *România în Războiul de Independență: 1877–1878*, 56.

Principalities, thus this military provision was by no means aimed at granting anything more than domestic sovereignty (the ability to exert authority internally and maintain order). The legal framework of the two Principalities underwent, in the following years, a major transformation as the first proto-constitutional laws were introduced by the Russian authorities (*Les Règlements Organiques*, 1831–1832). Fundamental state institutions were thus created by a foreign power, which in itself nullified any possible claim to Westphalian sovereignty, let alone to any international legal sovereignty.

The establishment of a standing army started out as a process of domestic institution building. Two officer schools were set up in the 1840s and 1850s in Iași and Bucharest, and in 1859 the General Staff was created, followed by the unification of the two war ministries under General Ioan Emanoil Florescu.¹⁷ The 1868 law on army organization structured the military system into a permanent army alongside reserves; the *dorobanți* (local police forces) and border guard corps; militias; civic guard and *gloatele* (the male population fit for military service), which came to replace local militias.¹⁸

The actual capacity for combat and level of training of the young Romanian army was a matter of debate and polemical demonstration during the decade preceding the 1877 war. The consolidation of a viable armed force in the United Principalities served two purposes, a strategic and a political one. The former, and the more obvious of the two, was that of protecting the newly formed state or, as expressed by the Prussian Hohenzollern Prince Carol I in a speech he gave in the Romanian Parliament in 1868, preserving its neutrality in case of an armed conflict.¹⁹ The latter purpose was that of building an army as an indispensable state institution and thereby demonstrating that the new state could function as an independent political unit (which would later on contribute to justifying a claim to political independence). This was part and parcel of a wider process of state building, which encompassed the establishment of a distinct Romanian Orthodox Church, largely completed by 1872, as well as reform of the educational and landowning systems.

There is valuable historical analysis on the cultural, nation-building impact of the introduction of the standing army and universal military conscription in the United Principalities. There, an extensive process of ‘confessionalization’ took place whereby a synergy was forged between the Orthodox Church and state institutions such as the army, in which civic and military values were mediated via religious education.²⁰ In the army ‘from the 1850s to the 1880s the explanation of disciplinary rules was based almost entirely on religious references and exemplified the way in which religious education was promoted as a part of military training’.²¹ Moreover, just as in other armies of the time, military service functioned as a socializing and civilizing institution providing peasant recruits with the rudiments of literacy as well as a civic education. As shown by the catechism included in one of the 1860s military textbooks, the Romanian soldier was

¹⁷Ibid., 58, 60.

¹⁸Ibid., 64.

¹⁹For Prince Carol’s speech in the Romanian Parliament, see, (with commentary), *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv* (hereafter OeStA, HHStA) Politisches Archiv, Konsulate, Karton 178, 1868 Bukarest I-V, Ad Bucarest, 15 January, 1868.

²⁰Silviu Hariton, ‘State-/Nation-building and Confessionalization in South Eastern Europe: Nationalism and Religion in Nineteenth Century Romania’, http://www.hist.ceu.hu/conferences/graceh/abstracts/hariton_silviu.pdf

²¹Silviu Hariton, ‘Religion, Nationalism and Militarism in 19th-Century Romania’, *Etudes Balcaniques*, XLIV, 2008, No. 4, 20.

expected to learn, as part of his military training, the meaning of man, faith, Church, army and fatherland, who he was, how he should behave and what his duties were as both a soldier and a Christian.²²

Contemporary accounts regarding the Romanian army are for the most part polemical and make it difficult to ascertain the actual level of training and capacity for combat of the Romanian army on the eve of the 1877 war. Thus, the image drawn in the 1877 reports of the French diplomat Frédéric Debains is that of a caricature of an army dependent on requisitions from the population, the result of Prince Carol's *vanité* and *forfanteries militaires* (military snobbery)²³ at a time of financial crisis due to administrative mismanagement.²⁴ Austrian military reports convey a similar image of the Romanian army in 1877. The dispatches of General Staff officer Josef Manega, affiliated with the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Bucharest, highlight the hardships plaguing the Romanian army and the makeshift character of its troops and provisions.

The state of the Romanian army is the same as before. The spirits are low both in the higher and in the lower ranks, and their disposition is not at all warrior-like; the supply problems are the same as earlier, and to these of late has been added the lack of linen and footwear. The local War Ministry receives daily requests for clothes. In order to press these requests all the more emphatically, the state of the army clothing is depicted in such a way as is inconceivable in regular army reports.

In order to make up for the perpetually felt lack of officers, 20 military students from the local Military School were prematurely [*vorzeitig*] enrolled as lieutenants in the Prince's army. (Report No. 39 by Captain Josef Manega to the k.k. *Reichs-Kriegsministerium* in Vienna, Bucharest, 11 July 1877)²⁵

An occasional silver lining crops up in diplomatic reports such as that of the General Consul Ritter von Zwiedinek, who acknowledges the good performance of the Romanian army on the actual battlefield:

'Despite the fact, which cannot be doubted anymore, that the young Romanian army has behaved very well on the battlefield, the disposition of the population here is, however, very low'. (Report No. 237, Bucharest, 16 September 1877, from Ritter von Zwiedinek to Graf Andrassy)²⁶

Some of the Romanian statesmen were themselves deeply sceptical of Romania's military ambitions. Former Minister of Finance Petre Mavrogheni dismissed Romania's bellicose action and regarded as 'ludicrous even the mere thought of vying militarily with the European powers' while the diplomat Ion Bălăceanu thought that 'entertaining bellicose ideas with our means is tantamount to wanting to bite off the moon from the sky'.²⁷

²²Silviu Hariton, 'Conscripție militară și educație primară în România (1860–1900)', *Revista de istorie militară* 2003, no. 6, 37, 39.

²³George Ciorănescu and Matei Cazacu, *Războiul de independență a României. Documente diplomatice franceze (1877)*, (Bucharest, 2004), 31, 124.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 130.

²⁵OeStA, *Kriegsarchiv* (hereafter KA), *Kriegsministerium Präsidium* (hereafter KM Präs), 1877, Karton 508, Aktenzahl 47–11/1/44, Report No. 39, Bucharest, 11 July 1877, 3, recto and verso.

²⁶OeStA, HHStA, PA, Konsulate, Karton 218 (PA XXXVIII), 1877, Bukarest – Ber, Bucarest Berichte 1877, Fol. 1–1027, Report No. 237, 16 September 1877, 828/verso.

²⁷First quote '*vouloir peser dans la ute européenne des puissances ce n'est ni plus ni moins que ridicule*', second quote '*Entretenir des idées belliqueuses avec nos moyens, ce serait vouloir prendre la lune avec les dents*'. See OeStA, HHStA, PA, Konsulate, Karton 210 (PA XXXVIII), 1876 Buenos Aires, Bukarest I-VII, Berichte aus Bukarest, Rapport No. 25 Bucarest am 9. February 1876, from Freiherr Calice to Count Andrassy, Folio 97/verso; OeStA, HHStA, PA, Konsulate, Karton 210 (PA XXXVIII), 1876 Buenos Aires, Bukarest I-VII, Berichte aus Bukarest, No. 27 Bucarest le 14 Février 1876, from Freiherr Calice to Count Andrassy, Folio 113/verso.

A polar opposite image of the Romanian troops on the eve of the war is offered by the Romanian nationalist historian Nicolae Iorga, who contrasted what he perceived as disparaging foreign accounts with a more optimistic assessment of Romania's military capacity (albeit again based on foreign newspaper reports). Thus, quoting from *Le Temps*, *Le Constitutionnel*, and other mainly French journals, Iorga depicts a well-equipped, sturdy, high-spirited army eager to prove itself in battle.²⁸ Whenever positive references to the Romanian army cropped up in French publications it was usually in regard to the progress the army had made since its establishment, the ambulance service or the endurance of the Romanian peasant soldiers, regarded as not particularly enthusiastic but hardy nonetheless. The ultimate source of information in all these cases seems to have been the Romanian government, which recognized the importance of foreign powers, and by extension the foreign media's role, in shaping perceptions of the army.²⁹

For all the endemic shortages and inadequacies, which constituted a leitmotif of contemporary foreign reports, for all the attempts on the part of the Romanian diplomacy to play down, or, depending on their political affiliation, to detract from the importance of the constant acquisition of armament, the fact of the matter remains that, by 1877, the Romanian army had come a long way in its development.³⁰ In the 1830s there had been 3 mixed regiments (infantry and cavalry) in Wallachia, amounting to 4,673 soldiers, and 1 mixed regiment of 1,129 men in Moldavia. According to the *History of the 1877–1878 War* drawn up by a group of Romanian officers shortly after the war, in 1876 the permanent army was comprised of 37 Battalions, 42 Squadrons, and 18 Batteries, totalling 38,000 men and 120 cannons.³¹ General Radu Rosetti struck the right balance between deprecatory and eulogistic descriptions by pointing out that the Romanian army that went to war in 1877–78 was not a long standing organism and its evolution did not coincide with that of the Danubian Principalities. It was instead a new creation, roughly forty years old. Thus, many of the problems highlighted by contemporary writers, sometimes in caricature form, were real albeit unsurprising. The fledgling Romanian army was still an inchoate institution, which lacked equipment and trained officers, was plagued by heterogeneous military instruction and armament, incompatible ammunition and lack of enthusiasm for the military among the general population. While there was a silver lining in the organization of the ambulance services and the sappers, food provisioning was entirely improvised and the troops were essentially forced to live off the land.³²

Nevertheless, as the outcome of the war showed, Prince Carol's urgency to build an army and, subsequently, to take active part in the hostilities was not a snobbish conceit, but rather a steadily pursued political strategy, which would eventually turn Romania into a self-standing state, independent of both the Ottoman Empire and Russia. It was therefore a strategy for securing international legal sovereignty for Romania as an independent state.

The mastermind behind this huge effort of building an army from scratch within decades was General Ioan Emamoil Florescu (1819–1893), the descendant of a Wallachian

²⁸Nicolae Iorga, *Războiul pentru Independența României. Acțiuni diplomatice și stări de spirit*, (Bucharest, 1927), 102–106.

²⁹*Le Temps*, 16 June 1877, p. 2; *Le Temps*, 12 June 1877, 2.

³⁰Coman and Giurescu, *România în Războiul de Independență: 1877–1878*, 57, 67; Radu Rosetti, 'Centenarul înființării artileriei române' in *Analele Academiei Române: Memoriile secțiunii istorice*, Seria 3, Tom 25 (anii 1843–1844), (Bucharest, 1943), 214; Coman and Giurescu, *România în Războiul de Independență: 1877–1878*, 65.

³¹Coman and Giurescu, *România în Războiul de Independență: 1877–1878*, 57, 67

³²Radu Rosetti, *Partea luată de armata română în războiul din 1877–1878*, 8, 18–23.

boyar family, who received his military education in France at the *École d'état-major* and returned to Wallachia in the 1840s, like many scions of Central Europe's upper classes, inspired by reforms they witnessed in the West and bent on making a difference at home.³³ After spending a while in Russian service and seeing action during the Crimean War, Florescu resumed his military career after 1859 in the United Principalities under the rule of Prince Cuza, whose right hand he became in military matters. It was under his command as head of the General Staff that the two war ministries, that of Wallachia and that of Moldavia, merged into one as did the two military schools in Iași and Bucharest. As Radu Rosetti appreciated, there was no branch or institution of the new Romanian army in whose organization Florescu was not involved. After the fall of Cuza, Prince Carol of Hohenzollern himself resorted to his services as a highly valued officer and appointed him War Minister in the early 1870s, despite Florescu's Francophile leanings and his former loyalty and support for Prince Cuza.³⁴ During his term as War Minister under Carol, General Florescu concentrated on equipping the new army with modern weaponry.³⁵ Thus investments were made with a view to developing the artillery, in particular by purchasing *Krupp* cannons, initially on Prince Carol's initiative and, subsequently, on General Florescu's direct orders.³⁶ In keeping with the general's Francophilia and his contacts among the French military, purchases were equally made of French artillery.³⁷ The most formidable opposition to his reforms came from the political opposition, which dismissed Florescu's gigantic effort to consolidate the army as a waste of money and economic resources.³⁸

While troops could be readily assembled and expediently drilled to an acceptable level of military performance, skilled commanding officers required a military education tradition and a long process of professional training, which fledgling armies such as the Romanian did not possess. This became apparent on the eve of the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish war. When faced with the unique opportunity of entering a war on the side of their more powerful neighbour, in which the final victory could entail state independence for Romania, the Bucharest government tried to secure a Chief of General Staff and several high-ranking officers of Romanian origin from the Austro-Hungarian army to make up for an endemic dearth of skilled command.

Romanians in Imperial Military Service

Officers of Romanian nationality were recruited from the neighbouring imperial armies, the Austro-Hungarian joint army and the Tsarist army. This was a natural place to look for ethnically Romanian officers given the considerable numbers of Romanians in Transylvania and the Banat, which were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and in the province of Bessarabia in the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire, as well as given the prestige of the two armies.

³³Radu R. Florescu, *Generalul Ioan Emanoil Florescu – organizator al armatei române moderne* (Bucharest, 2004), 33–34.

³⁴Radu R. Florescu, *Generalul Ioan Emanoil Florescu – organizator al armatei române moderne*, 47.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 92.

³⁶Radu Rosetti, 'Centenarul înființării artileriei române' in *Analele Academiei Române: Memoriile secțiunii istorice*, Seria 3, Tom 25 (anii 1843–1844), (Bucharest, 1943), 214; Coman and Giurescu, *România în Războiul de Independență: 1877–1878*, 65.

³⁷Radu R. Florescu, *Generalul Ioan Emanoil Florescu – organizator al armatei române moderne*, 92.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 94.

According to István Deák, by 1910 Romanians represented 6.3% of the total population of the Habsburg Monarchy, 7% of the rank and file of the Monarchy's Joint Army and 0.9% of the career officers.³⁹ The military percentage estimates are approximate given that they are based on Habsburg army records, which, just like those of the Russian army at the same time, were nationally blind and only listed place of birth, religion and spoken languages as identifiers, which were not always conducive to an accurate inference of one's nationality. Moreover, as Deák points out, classifications made on the basis of *Umgangssprache*, 'the language most commonly used in everyday affairs', more often than not obscured the ethnic origin of officers. Historical literature on Romanian officers in the Habsburg army concentrates on those who originated from the Austrian Military Border (*österreichische Militärgrenze*).⁴⁰ By 1918 fifteen officers of Romanian nationality from the former Austrian Military Border had reached the rank of general in the Austro-Hungarian army. As will become apparent in the present article, the Romanian officers wooed by the Bucharest government on the eve of the Russo-Turkish war also came from the Austrian Military Border and were the first Romanian-speakers to reach the rank of General in the Austro-Hungarian army. Precedents of emigration from the Habsburg into the Romanian army existed, the most notable of which was that of Moise Groza, who emigrated to Romania as a young lieutenant from the Banat segment of the Austrian Military Border and rose to the rank of general within the young Romanian army, where he played a vital role as a General Staff officer during the 1877–78 war. The same professional trajectory was later followed by Ioan Dragalina and Traian Moşoiu, who similarly emigrated to Romania from the Banat and Transylvania respectively, and fought as Brigadier Generals in the Romanian army during the First World War.⁴¹

The situation of Romanian officers in the Russian army has been given much less attention in Romanian historiography by comparison with the Austro-Hungarian army. This bibliographical disparity is to be traced back to differences in demographic distribution and political representation of Romanians in the two Empires as well as to the relationship between military status and ethnic identity. The only extensive study on the topic remains Anatol Leşcu's analysis of Romanians in the Russian army in the 18th and early 19th century, that is, before Tsar Alexander II's military reforms.⁴² Leşcu examined the Romanian colonies north of the Black Sea in the Russian Empire around present-day Kharkiv, Kirovograd, Donetsk and in Transnistria. 18th-century waves of colonization brought into Russian territory, among other peoples, also Romanian settlers from Moldavia and Wallachia, who either fled Ottoman reprisals or were in search of land.

³⁹István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: a social and political history of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York and Oxford, 1990), 179–185.

⁴⁰Liviu Groza, *Contribuții la cunoașterea culturii grănicerilor bănățeni*, Fundația Europeană Drăgan, Lugoj, 1993; Liviu Groza, *Din viața și activitatea Generalului Mihail Trapaș*, (Lugoj, 1995); Liviu Groza, *Oameni de seamă din Granița Bănățeană: Generalul Traian Doda*, (Lugoj, 1999); Liviu Maior, *Românii în armata habsburgică: soldați și ofițeri uitați*, (Bucharest, 2004); Antoniu Marchescu, *Grănicerii bănățeni și Comunitatea de Avere (Contribuțiuni istorice și juridice)*, (Caransebeș, 1941); Günter Klein, 'Die rumänischen Offiziere in der k. (u.) k. Armee. Sozialer Aufstieg ohne Verlust der nationalen Identität', *Revista istorică. Serie Nouă*, Tom VII, Nr. 3–4, March–April, (Bucharest, 1996), 175–189; Liviu Maior, *Transilvania și războiul pentru independență (1877–1878)*, (Cluj, 1977).

⁴¹Irina Marin, 'Imperial into National Officers: K.u.K. Officers of Romanian Nationality Before and After the Great War', in P. Miller & C. Morelon (eds), *Embers of Empire. Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918* (New York/Oxford, 2018), 136–156.

⁴²Anatol Leşcu, *Românii în armata imperială rusă: secolul al XVIII-lea-prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea* (Bucharest, 2005).

Some of these colonists formed light cavalry regiments in the Tsarist army of the time and participated in the numerous Russo-Turkish wars that punctuated the 18th century as well as in the Russo-Swedish war (1741–1743) and the Napoleonic wars.

Scholarship on the Russian army in the 19th century stresses that the army functioned as a Russifying institution and that ‘the imperial officer corps was a Russian show’.⁴³ This coupled with the autocratic makeup of the Empire contributed to dynastic loyalty and a culturally Russian outlook of officers recruited from among the non-Russian population of the Empire. This is to be contrasted with the Habsburg officer corps, which, although by no means actively encouraging national awareness among its members, did not however preclude the cultivation of a personal sense of national belonging, which coexisted symbiotically with dynastic loyalty.⁴⁴ From the scant historical literature on the transfer of officers from the Russian into the Romanian army previous to the 1877–78 war, we learn that Cavalry Captain Gheorghe Arion transferred as early as 1861 from the Russian army and ‘Captain Alexandru Colinski and Junior Lieutenant Alexandru Herbaschi, both artillery officers’ moved to the Principalities in 1864.⁴⁵

The Quest for Generals

The preoccupation with military power and acquiring superior officers cropped up regularly from 1848 until 1877 in the correspondence of the doyens of the Liberal Party in Wallachia, Dumitru Brătianu, the Wallachian diplomatic agent in Vienna at the time of the 1848 revolution, and his brother I.C. Brătianu, the future Prime Minister under Prince Carol I. Attempts at recruiting officers from across the border and the flurry of official correspondence surrounding this, showcase, in more than one way, the growing pains of the fledgling Romanian state. They bear out the above-mentioned insight by Ruetschemeyer and Evans that, while a bureaucracy can be created overnight, its efficiency and expertise are only the result of slow, painstaking institutional growth over generations.⁴⁶ Set up in the 1830s, the first military formations of the Romanian army were little more than regimented peasants in arms, for whose training the input of foreign officers was required for there were no autochthonous ones to be had. Moreover, the quest for officers as presented below was not a strictly military affair, it was implicitly a diplomatic matter as well. The very process of looking for such military knowhow across the border tested the diplomatic skills of the Romanian state agents involved and, as will become apparent in what follows, also revealed the limits of diplomatic expertise available in the new state. Just like the army, the diplomatic corps was institutionally speaking a new creation as until the mid-nineteenth century, given their status as autonomous entities within the Ottoman Empire, the Danubian Principalities were not allowed to conduct their own foreign policy, hence the absence

⁴³Walter Pintner, ‘The Nobility and the Officer Corps in the 19th Century’ in Erich Lohr and Marshall Poe Eds., *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450–1917*, (Boston, 2002), 250, quoted in Gregory Vitarbo, ‘Nationality Policy and the Russian Imperial Officer Corps, 1905–1914’, *Slavic Review* 66, no. 4, (Winter 2007), 699.

⁴⁴Florina Raita, ‘Identity Choices Among Romanian Officers in the Habsburg Army’, *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai*, 2021, 17–43; Irina Marin, ‘The Formation and Allegiance of the Romanian Military Elite Originating from the Banat Military Border’, (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University College London, 2009).

⁴⁵Dumitru Preda, ‘The Status of the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers in the Romanian Army over 1859–1877’, *The Army and the Romanian Society* (Bucharest, 1980), 230.

⁴⁶Dietrich Rueschemeyer & Peter Evans, ‘The State and Economic Transformation: Toward an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervention’ in Rueschemeyer & Skocpol (Eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, 1999), 51.

of both a formal army and a diplomatic corps. The latter only came into being after the unification of the Danubian Principalities in 1859. Unlike the army, however, the new Ministry of Foreign Affairs drew on some of the structures and personnel of the former State Secretariat, a governmental institution in both Wallachia and Moldavia, which had among its attributions the handling of foreign correspondence and issuing of travel documents.⁴⁷

As for the army, the quest for officers, including generals, of Romanian nationality stemmed from a keen awareness on the part of Romanian statesmen that any such imports of personnel came with strings attached and pushed the Romanian state into the sphere of influence of one Great Power or another, or at least gave that impression, which, in terms of international diplomacy, could be just as compromising. Indeed, as discussed below, the insistence that ethnic Romanians must be brought into the new army from abroad derived from a sense that foreign input should be minimized thus sidestepping the pitfall of state independence being acquired at the cost of renewed dependence. This quest for officers was, in other words, an attempt to reverse the obvious inversely proportional relationship between legal-international sovereignty and Westphalian sovereignty.

The personal archive of Dumitru Brătianu (1818–1892), in particular his correspondence with the French journalist Paul Bataillard (1816–1894) and with his own brother Ion C. Brătianu (1821–1891) offers insight into this process of recruitment and the way it changed across time. Dumitru and Ion C. Brătianu were scions of a prominent Wallachian boyar family, both of whom studied in Paris and were active members of the Romanian student society in Paris as well as joined the French freemasonry. Ion C. Brătianu initially pursued a military career, then went on to become a prominent statesman as the leader of the National Liberal Party (*Partidul Național Liberal*). He helped topple Prince Cuza and bring to the throne Prince Carol I of Hohenzollern, under whose rule he became a leading politician. He created the notion of ‘*prin noi înșine*’ (single-handedly, by ourselves), which advocated minimal dependence on foreign capital and an orientation towards economic self-sufficiency.⁴⁸

The earliest ascertainable attempts by Romanian statesmen to acquire military power date back to 1848. At that point the intentions were still vague and ill-defined aiming to secure military support for the revolutionary government in Bucharest as testified to by one of Dumitru Brătianu’s letters to Paul Bataillard, in which he asked for support and stressed the need for weapons and for several superior officers with war experience.⁴⁹ In the wake of the revolution, a pamphlet dated 1852, also to be found in Dumitru Brătianu’s archive, includes an Appeal to the Transylvanian Romanians in the Austrian Army (*Apel către Români ardeleni din armata austriacă*), demonizing the Emperor and exhorting all Romanians enrolled in the Austrian army to join the Romanian army for a better life.⁵⁰ Such international appeals and petitions were a feature of Wallachian and Moldavian diplomacy ever since the 1848 revolution and the post-revolutionary change

⁴⁷Bogdan Ceobanu, ‘Înființarea și organizarea Ministerului Treburilor Străine și de Stat (1862–1866)’ in *160 de ani de la Unirea Principatelor: oameni, fapte și idei din domnia lui Alexandru Ioan Cuza*, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” (Iași, 2020), 370–377.

⁴⁸Dan Stoica (ed.), *Dicționar biografic de istorie a României* (Bucharest, 2008), 81–91.:

⁴⁹Al. Cretzianu (ed.), *Din arhiva lui Dumitru Brătianu. Acte și scrisori din perioada 1840–1870*, Bucharest, 1934, Vol. 1, 26.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 283–289.

of emphasis from seeking foreign help to building one's own ethnically Romanian army testifies to the disappointment with failed requests for international help during the revolution.⁵¹

More than a decade later, after the unification of the Danubian Principalities (1859) and also after the *Ausgleich* in Austria-Hungary (1867), Dumitru Brătianu relaunched his campaign for experienced officers for the Romanian army. This time the proposal was much more articulate and was presented as a solution to the diplomatic conundrum of constantly relying on foreign military input. Thus, in a letter dated 23 September 1868, Dumitru Brătianu wrote to Prince Carol about the necessity of hiring several distinguished and experienced Romanian officers from Austria ('*quelques officiers distingués et aguerris*'⁵²) and also about the possible means of rendering the offer more attractive to them, as he explained to his brother Ion C. Brătianu:

I believe we absolutely need at least three or four of the most distinguished Romanian officers in Austria, even if this means that the Prince [Carol] will have to secure their position until this can be regulated by Parliament and, as an incentive, it would be good if they could be promised a higher rank than the one they held or are holding in the Austrian army. I took some steps in this respect when I was in Vienna'.⁵³

This proposal came at a time when the organization of the Romanian army was in full swing and its legal framework was beginning to be articulated with the passing of the first army laws in the 1860s. What Dumitru Brătianu alluded to was the lack of a legal basis for accepting and integrating officers from foreign armies into the Romanian army. It was only in June 1877 that this framework would be defined by a special law stipulating that Romanian officers who had served in foreign armies could be received with the same rank into Romanian military service.

Dumitru Brătianu's suggestion coincides with the frictions and diplomatic malaise occasioned by Prince Carol's introduction of Prussian officers and instructors into the fledgling Romanian army. The source of discontent were the clashes between the Prussian instructors and the members of the French military mission, and, at a diplomatic level, the bellicose message construed by countries like France and Austria-Hungary, who suspected Romania of sliding into the area of dominance of either Prussia or Russia. Against this backdrop of international rumour and suspicion, Dumitru Brătianu reiterated the need to his brother Ion C. Brătianu, for Romanian (as opposed to foreign) officers as a possible solution for lulling suspicions and putting an end to speculations.

Dear brother, the news of Colonel Krenski and other Prussian officers going to Romania as instructors in our army has had a great impact. This measure displeases all Powers and even our best friends criticize and deplore it. If this is true and if there is still time [it would be advisable] to drop or at least postpone this project. All the more so as I do not see that there is any pressing need for foreign instructors; on the contrary, it is a weakness on our part to show the world that, just like the Turks, we are in perpetual need of foreign leaders. We do,

⁵¹James Morris, 'The European Revolutions of 1848 and the Danubian.

Principality of Wallachia', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cambridge University, 2019), 132–133, 153–154.

⁵²Al. Cretzianu (ed.), *Din arhiva lui Dumitru Brătianu. Acte și scrisori din perioada 1840–1870*, Bucharest, 1934, vol. 2, 279.

⁵³Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale București (The Central Historical.

National Archives, Bucharest), henceforth ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 155, p. 1/recto, Letter from Paris dated 23 September 1868, from Dumitru Brătianu to his brother, Ion C. Brătianu.

indeed, need several experienced officers, but [let them be] Romanian, and I have shown to you how they could be obtained. Adding to the suspicions that are already hanging over us the saga of a Prussian military mission of no real necessity would be an unjustified and harmful bravado.⁵⁴

The solution proposed by Dumitru Brătianu was predicated on two fallacious assumptions derived from a fundamentally ethnic reading of the relationship between Romanians within the young Romanian state and those abroad. The notion that the recruitment of ethnic Romanian officers from the Austro-Hungarian army would remove any reasons for diplomatic suspicion was misguided. It simply replaced one type of diplomatic malaise with another: it raised concern among Hungarian officials, who feared that a strong Romanian army would bolster the Romanian claim to Transylvania. Such fears about the prospect of Romanian officers moving countries are indicated by the following official report:

‘Reliable sources communicated to the Royal-Hungarian Ministry of the Interior that several Austrian Romanians, who went to Bucharest, received of late the secret mission of attracting into Moldo-Vlach service officers and NCOs from the k.k. army, especially from Transylvania, and of winning the sympathies of the Romanian troop for the Bucharest government.

Given that the achievement of this goal has been attempted primarily among those demobilized and those on leave, the Royal-Hungarian Ministry of the Interior will issue the strict orders which are necessary for the Hungarian civil authorities to stop this action, but because such agitation could also take place among the Romanians in active service, we bring to your attention the Rescript of 31. I. J. No. 3855/Pres. of the Imperial War Ministry, and we delegate you to forestall such intentions in good time and to communicate to me without delay everything you notice. G.M. Schmering’.⁵⁵

The second assumption that proved wrong was that ethnic Romanian Austro-Hungarian officers, inspired by the promise of immediate promotion, would leap at the opportunity to join the Romanian army. First, this disregarded the fact that such officers were professionally embedded in a military institution which was much superior to the Romanian counterpart and a complex process of extrication would be necessary for them to switch military allegiances. Secondly, some of these officers such as Trajan Doda lived in the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, where openly professing your non-Magyar national allegiance made one the target of official suspicion and was likely to attract legal charges under the accusation of irredentism. Therefore any overtures on the part of the Romanian state needed to be made with the utmost care and diplomacy, a quality that was completely lacking in the approach of the Romanian diplomatic agents.

The Russo-Turkish war started on 24 April 1877. On 10 May 1877 Prince Carol signed Romania’s declaration of independence and from this point on the Romanian government offered military collaboration to the Russians, which was persistently rejected. The main source of disagreement between the two potential allies were the terms of such a collaboration: whereas Romania wished to enter the war under its own separate military

⁵⁴ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 157, p. 5/recto, Letter from Paris dated 26 October 1868, from Dumitru Brătianu to his brother, Ion C. Brătianu.

⁵⁵Antoniu Marchescu, *Grânicerii bănăţeni şi Comunitatea de Avere (Contribuţiuni istorice şi juridice)* (Caransebeş, 1941), 283, 284.

command, the Russians pointed out that Romanian help was not indispensable to them and would only be acceptable under Russian command.⁵⁶ The logic behind Romania's wish to enter the war was that of achieving recognition of its *de-facto* political independence by making the point that it had retained its military independence during the war.⁵⁷ Such an independent military command presupposed the existence of an experienced Chief of General Staff who could effectively lead the army into battle. This gap was then exacerbated when, on the eve of the 1877 war, General Florescu, the former War Minister and also the person who best knew the Romanian army as its main organizer and modernizer, was sidelined through political machinations and denied further military command.⁵⁸ As Glenn Torrey shows in his study of the Romanian army during World War One, the sidelining of capable officers on political grounds would be an ongoing problem plaguing the Romanian army at critical moments.⁵⁹

It is in this context that the Bucharest authorities set about trying to obtain an experienced Romanian general and several high-ranking officers from the Austro-Hungarian army, who could provide the independent military leadership that the Romanian army sorely needed in order to enter the war. The rushed last-minute attempts to make up for this glaring military shortcoming testify to a bull-in-a-chinashop diplomatic approach, which shows the limitations of diplomatic expertise at the time and a lack of knowledge about the very people they were trying to recruit and the political-military system in which they lived.

Personal correspondence between Romanian political leaders in the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, Vincențiu Babeș and George Barițiu, suggests that, as early as autumn 1876, informal attempts were made by the Romanian authorities in Bucharest to secure the services of two Romanian high-ranking officers from the Austro-Hungarian army: Brigadier Trajan Doda (1822–1895) and Colonel David Urs de Margina (1816–1897).⁶⁰ Both of them originated from the Austrian Military Border (the former, from the Banat, and the latter, from Transylvania) and were retired at the time of the Russo-Turkish war. Following their retirement they became involved in the administration and cultural politics of their former Military Border communities. By 1877 Trajan Doda had been elected several times to the Hungarian Parliament as an MP for Krássó-Szörény (Caraș-Severin) County and was a prominent figure among the Romanian intelligentsia of the Empire.⁶¹ David Urs Baron de Margina was a local hero of the First Transylvanian Border Regiment, who had distinguished himself in the Battle of Solferino in 1859 and in the defence of the Lissa Fortress during the 1866 war. This earned him the rank of Colonel and the title of Baron. He was among the founding members of *Astra* (The Romanian Association of Transylvanian Literature and Culture) and generously sponsored Romanian-language education in the schools of the former Transylvanian Military Border.⁶²

⁵⁶Iorga, *Războiul pentru Independența României*, 107–109.

⁵⁷Rosetti, *Partea luată de armata română în războiul din 1877–1878*, 28.

⁵⁸Radu R. Florescu, *Generalul Ioan Emanoil Florescu, organizator al armatei române moderne*, Bucharest, 2004, 102; Rosetti, *Partea luată de armata română în războiul din 1877–1878*, 102, Endnote 96.

⁵⁹Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I* (Kansas, 2011), 28, 42–43.

⁶⁰See Babeș's letter to George Barițiu dated 17/29 November 1876 in George Cipăianu and Mihail Dan, *Corespondența lui Vincențiu Babeș (Scrisori primite)* (Cluj-Napoca, 1976), 23.

⁶¹Antoni Marchescu, *Grănicerii bănățeni*, 361; OeStA, KA, Qualificationslisten 471 (Dobrzensky-Doell), Trajan Doda.

⁶²Simion Retegan, *George Bariț și contemporanii săi. Corespondență trimisă*, Vol. X, (Bucharest, 2003), 451, footnote 4; OeStA, KA, KM Präs, 1877, Aktenzahl 47–11/1–40, Report No. 33, 3 recto and 7 verso.

By spring 1877, tentative diplomatic negotiations were under way between the Romanian and Austro-Hungarian authorities with the aim of arranging General Doda's and Colonel Urs's transfer to join Prince Carol's army. Ion Bălăceanu, (1828–1914), a descendant of an old boyar family, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1876, and Romanian diplomatic agent in Vienna from 1876–78, and Ion C. Brătianu, the Romanian Prime Minister, took the lead in the negotiations.⁶³

Bălăceanu received his instructions from Brătianu, who in turn relayed information to and from Prince Carol. The Austro-Hungarian authorities were represented by Count Gyula Andrassy, who kept the Emperor informed and conveyed his answers to Bălăceanu, who then promptly forwarded them to Bucharest. These telegrams, which form part of the Brătianu family archive held by the Romanian National Archives in Bucharest, throw new light on these negotiations.

The feverish and optimistic tone of Bălăceanu's letters and telegrams, hinting all the time at the impending success of the recruitment operation, are in stark contrast to the correspondence coming from members of the Romanian intelligentsia in Hungary. In a letter dated 17/29 November 1876, Vincențiu Babeș, a prominent Romanian lawyer and politician in Hungary, informed George Barițiu, another lionized figure of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania, of these attempts at recruitment, deploring the tactless manner in which the Romanian authorities proceeded in the matter without seeking the cooperation of the Transylvanian Romanians.⁶⁴ It was only half a year later and less than a month before Romania's actual entrance in the Russo-Turkish war that the diplomatic agent in Vienna contacted Vincențiu Babeș and sought his mediation in contacting Romanian officers. Thus, a letter of 19 May 1877 from Vincențiu Babeș to Bălăceanu reveals the intermediary role played by the former in the negotiations as well as the frictions between the Romanian intelligentsia in Transylvania and the Bucharest politicians. The letter, moreover, provides an insight into General Doda's and Colonel Urs's attitude relative to the Romanian army and also their reasons for refusing to join it in the spring of 1877. It also represents one of the very few personal testimonies throwing light on the nature of these officers' loyalties. As General Trajan Doda put it to Babeș:

It is too late. It is impossible for me to commit myself to such a momentous thing, full of such responsibility, on the eve of the event, ignorant of the means available and without having the time to examine and possibly amend or replace them.

Then: as our Monarchy does not recognize Romania's independence and, on the other hand, wishes to remain neutral, it cannot authorize one of its generals, [...] to take part, let alone in a cardinal capacity, in Romania's war action".

Nevertheless, Babeș's letter also confirmed that both General Doda and Colonel Urs had been ready to join the Romanian army as early as 1868/69, and also that Doda offered his services once again in the autumn of 1876, when, according to Babeș, he was rejected by Brătianu. As Babeș himself explained:

⁶³ *Dicționarul general al literaturii române*, Letters A to B, (Bucharest, 2004), 422–423.

⁶⁴ George Cipăianu and Mihail Dan, *Corespondența lui Vincențiu Babeș (Scrisori trimise)*, (Cluj-Napoca, 1983), 23.

The time was ripe, if not around 1868/69, when Doda and C. Ursu, sounded by the Brătianus, offered their services, but were rebuffed [*reu desconsiderați*], then at least last autumn, when Doda, through the mediation of Senator Deșliu⁶⁵ and encouraged even by the Prince, was ready to go, but suddenly he was rejected by Mr Brătianu! . . .”

Since then [Doda] could have familiarized himself with and even integrated into the Romanian army. It is no longer possible to do that today and it would be an unforgivable foolishness to get involved now only to produce more confusion!

In fewer words Colonel Urs from Sibiu informed me, upon my confidential inquiry, that, at this stage, *under no circumstances* should we count on him. [. . .]

Having heard about the highly inappropriate attempts made here in Transylvania by the Bucharest leaders, I took it upon myself to recommend to Mr Brătianu twice to use other methods and much more caution, that is, to get them to win over General Doda, who was at that time burning with desire to join the Romanian army and prepare it for that which we all knew was going to follow. But the Prime Minister did not answer, and General Doda found out that around Easter Mr Brătianu did not hesitate to commission an emissary of the Hungarian Government, the Hungarian MP Al. R., to hire him. Al. R. thus openly expressed himself before my friend D., whereas we here avoid even as much as touching upon such subjects’.⁶⁶

Although the 1877 diplomatic telegrams in the Brătianu archive do not provide an explanation of the 1868 rejection of officers like Doda, they are, nevertheless, evidence of a poor grasp on the part of the Romanian authorities of the political and military situation in which these officers found themselves. The very request for an Austro-Hungarian general with a view to entering the Russo-Turkish war, which was already under way, and the hope that, if the Prince were to write to the Emperor, this request would be granted were unrealistic in themselves.⁶⁷ Such an action would have signified that Austria-Hungary was indirectly getting involved in the war by encouraging Romania’s entry into the war. Moreover, the assumption that Doda, being the Emperor’s favourite, to use Bălăceanu’s words, was, therefore, more likely to get imperial approval to join the Romanian army comes across as misinformed, at best, and reveals an ignorance of the relationship between the Emperor and his generals. Doda, on the other hand, seems to have been fully aware of both the political and the military implications of such a belated action, as Babeș’s 1877 letter shows. The Romanian authorities continued, however, to press their request, disregarding the international diplomatic configuration and upsetting Transylvanian observers such as Babeș, who were aware of the impossibility of these tardy attempts and the risk of a backlash from chauvinist Hungarians who were busy questioning the loyalty of ethnic Romanians such as General Doda to both Hungary and the wider empire.⁶⁸ As the following telegrams demonstrate, the tone of the Bălăceanu-Brătianu correspondence remained optimistic:

⁶⁵Senator Ion Deșliu was a well-known orator belonging to the Liberal faction in the Romanian Parliament. His speeches were entertaining and always attracted a large audience (C. Bacalbașa, *Bucureștii de altădată: 1871–1884* (Bucharest, 1927), vol.1, 88–89.)

⁶⁶ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 21/1877, 87–92; At least one other Romanian officer, Captain Nichita Ignat from the former Transylvanian Border Regiment, was scouted by Brătianu and successfully made the transition into the Romanian army in 1868: <https://rasunetul.ro/salaoanul-nichita-ignat-luptator-la-plevna> (Accessed on 14.10.2022); Ioan Cernucan, ‘Contemporani ai Războiului pentru Independență: maiorul Nichita Ignat din Salva și învățătorul bărgăuan Ilarion Bozga’, *Arhiva Someșană*, seria II, 4, 1977, 45–49; Victor Motogna, *Un erou din granița năsăudeană: Nichita Ignat (Schiță biografică)*, Dej, 1928.

⁶⁷ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 19/1877, 128/recto.

⁶⁸See Babeș’s letter to Visarion Roman dated 23 June 1877 in Cipăianu and Dan, *Corespondența lui Vinčențiu Babeș (Scrisori trimise)*, 155.

‘Vienna, 29 June 1877

To His Excellence Mr Brătianu, President of the Council [of Ministers], Bucharest.

Doda arrived. I conferred with him for three long hours. I succeeded in abating his resentment, which is Deşliu’s doing. The only obstacle lies in the lack of time in order for him to study and get to know all the workings of the machinery that we want to entrust him with. He will ask permission from the Emperor to come to Romania as a civilian. From there he will send in his resignation if he decides to enter the Prince’s army. The Austrian-Hungarian government will not send an officer to our *Quartier Général* because it has not recognized us as belligerents.

Bălăceanu’.

According to Bălăceanu, the Emperor’s answer, mediated by Andrassy, came at the beginning of July 1877, spelling out the friendly but neutral attitude of Austria-Hungary as well as rejecting the Romanian request for Doda:

‘Brătianu, President of the Council [of Ministers], Craiova.

Vienna, 2 July 1877

For H.H. the Prince. After receiving once again the Emperor’s orders this morning, Andrassy asked me to directly inform your Highness of the following, on behalf of the Emperor: From the triple point of view of Austria’s neutrality, as well as that of our financial situation and of the pretext that would be given to the Cabinets which are only too willing to deny the neutrality we have requested, the Emperor cannot advise your Highness to cross the Danube. But if the Prince considers that he owes to his people and his army the satisfaction of having contributed to the liberation of the Christians in Turkey, Austria-Hungary will not put up any obstacles, directly or indirectly, and will not add a soldier more to the regular garrisons in the towns bordering on Romania, waiting for Romania’s independence to turn from *de facto* into *de jure*. Austria-Hungary will not make any distinction between us and the other belligerents. The Emperor asks your Highness for two things, without which he would be forced to desist from the amicable attitude he wishes to retain towards Romania to the very end: 1) that no battalion should cross the Serbian border; 2) that they should not pursue territorial conquests in Bulgaria. In exchange for this, the imperial government is entirely willing to have a certain part of Dobrogea ceded to your Highness in the future peace treaty. An extended version of this message via letter. The favourable result of the delicate negotiations on this subject is owing to Count Andrassy, whose tireless benevolence and steady sympathy towards Romania were proved on this occasion as well. The reasons that prevented the Emperor from authorizing Doda to go to the Romanian *Quartier Général* are all political. I will communicate them to Mr Brătianu shortly. We can have a superior officer of equal value, but one whom the Romanians of Hungary will not have turned into a national hero. This, unfortunately, seems to be General Doda’s case.

Bălăceanu’.⁶⁹

Bălăceanu thus continued to hope that, even if Doda would not be able to join the Romanian army, they would still be able to secure a general of Romanian nationality from the Austro-Hungarian army. Confidently he wrote to Brătianu on 3 July 1877 that ‘the Emperor will allow any superior officer to go to Romania. We will not wait too long’.⁷⁰ This seems to have been more of a wishful-thinking personal opinion, fuelled probably by Andrassy’s benevolent attitude, rather than what the Austro-Hungarian authorities intended to do.

⁶⁹ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 22/1877, 110/recto.

⁷⁰ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 22/1877, 118/recto.

For his own part, General Doda, although unable to join the Romanian army command, offered instead strategic advice and various suggestions. He urged Brătianu that the Romanians should under no circumstances cross the Danube without a Chief of General Staff with complete war experience but, if they had to, should confine themselves to taking a Russian general. He recommended General Mikhail Dragomiroff (1830–1905), a prominent general in the Tsarist army at the time as well as a military writer, who authored highly regarded studies on the battle of Solferino and the Austro-Prussian war.⁷¹ As it turned out, the Romanian army ended up entering the war under Prince Carol's supreme command while the successful attack on the fortress at Plevna, (now Pleven in Bulgaria), and on other Ottoman fortifications, was conducted under the command of the Tsarist General Eduard Totleben (1818–1884), who made his mark during the Crimean War as the engineer who designed the fortifications of Sevastopol.⁷²

As the plans to recruit either General Doda or Colonel Urs failed to materialize, the Romanian authorities continued to look for other, less famous, high-ranking officers of Romanian nationality in the same slapdash manner. Vincențiu Babeș complained about in his letters. A hectic Brătianu made last-minute suggestions to Bălăceanu: 'As regards the superior officer, find out about Guran, as the other one is impossible to get, but work fast because we are in a hurry'.⁷³ General Alexander Guran, was, just like Doda, a native of the Banat Military Border and had a successful career behind him based on outstanding military skill (several times decorated, director of the *Kriegsschule*, head of the 5th Division in the Imperial War Ministry). At the time of the 1877 Russo-Turkish war, he had been recently appointed Director of the Military Geographical Institute in Vienna, in which capacity he was promoted to the rank of *Feldmarschalleutnant* in 1878.⁷⁴ His answer to the Romanian authorities' invitation to join the Romanian General Staff had been, according to Bălăceanu, negative from the very beginning and there was little hope of him being prevailed upon.⁷⁵ In terse, telegraphic words, Bălăceanu provided the rationale behind this refusal: 'Guran refuses categorically. Among the Romanian officers [it is a] catastrophe to be with the General Staff. There is only Colonel Trapsia left, who is not here. I will have his answer the day after tomorrow'.⁷⁶

Oberstlieutenant Michael Trapsia,⁷⁷ the last name on Bălăceanu's list, was, according to the 1877 entry in his military CV (*Qualificationsliste*), conducting operative and special General Staff works including a trip in Upper Austria, led the exercises of cartography and reconnaissance for the students of the higher artillery and engineering course, and served as a member of the board of examiners for the final examinations in the War Academy and for

⁷¹Ibid., 130/recto; Mikhail Dragomirov (1830–1905) was a prominent general in the Tsarist army and a military writer. He was the author of studies on the battle of Solferino and the Austro-Prussian war and took active part in the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish war.

⁷²F.V. Greene, *Sketches of Army Life in Russia* (London, 1881), 147–148; 'A World At War: There Was Fighting Almost Everywhere from 1860 until 1865'. *Military Images*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2003, 20;

⁷³ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 22/1877, 134/recto.

⁷⁴OeStA, KA, Qualificationslisten 899 (Gunzy-Gurth).

⁷⁵ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 22/1877, 135/recto.

⁷⁶Ibid., 155/recto (handwritten and transcribed telegram – 16 July 1877).

⁷⁷There are various spellings for this officer's surname: Trapsia, Trapscha, Trapşa. He himself used the spelling Trapsia. Present-day Romanian historians use Trapşa, while Austrian official documents employed the Germanized form Trapscha.

General Staff applicants for the army medical corps. In September 1878 he would be sent on a military diplomatic mission as part of the commission in charge of border regulation (*Grenzregulierung*) between Romania and Austria-Hungary.⁷⁸

The answer expected by Bălăceanu from Trapsia is not recorded in any of the telegrams in the Brătianu archive. What is recorded, however, is the fact that Brătianu was not interested in Trapsia, who was not deemed high enough in the military hierarchy to be desirable. That is especially surprising given Trapsia's experience as a graduate of the flotilla school at Klosterneuburg, near Vienna, vital experience considering Romania was about to get involved in a war in which most of the battles would be given along, or in the proximity of, the Danube. Brătianu's hasty discarding of Trapsia as an unsuitable candidate once again demonstrates that the Romanian authorities in Bucharest knew little about the people they were attempting to recruit. As Brătianu wrote dismissively: 'Colonel Trapsia's name completely unknown here. Besides, if he cannot get promoted without delay, he would have no authority over our officers'.⁷⁹

Conclusions

That the Romanian government encouraged and even tried to recruit Austro-Hungarian officers of Romanian nationality was by no means a secret. As shown in the report of 13 June 1877 sent by the military attaché Captain Josef Manega to the *Kriegsministerium* in Vienna, on 6 June the Romanian government promulgated a law stipulating that Romanian officers who served in foreign armies could be received into the Romanian army with the same rank they held previously and with the same rights as enjoyed by all Romanian citizens.⁸⁰ The same Captain Manega adds that, to his knowledge, the names of two Austro-Hungarian colonels of Romanian origin were circulated in the Romanian War Ministry at the time: Urs de Margina, also mentioned in Vincențiu Babeș's letter to Bălăceanu, and Wilhelm Poppovics from the artillery.⁸¹ No mention is made, however, of Doda, Guran, or Trapsia, which may well indicate that these particular negotiations were kept secret. The same conclusion is supported by the conspicuous absence of any such reference in the memoirs of King Carol I.

What does the saga of these abortive attempts to recruit high-ranking officers amount to? And what does it tell us about the nature of the Romanian state and the process of state consolidation? The present Romanian case study shows that building institutions from scratch in a fledgling state did not require only imported structures and forms, but also imported know-how and grey matter and it was the latter that made the difference between a functional effective institution and a mere replica of foreign models that did not work in actual practice. This case study also shows how interconnected on multiple levels the two dimensions of state building were: the setting up of a national institution such as the army and the acquisition of state sovereignty. In this particular case, an army under its own command was a necessity of domestic state building but also, as a result of the Russo-Turkish war, an

⁷⁸OeStA, KA, Qualificationslisten 3532 (Trappl-Traun).

⁷⁹ANIC, Fond familial Brătianu Nr. 1286, Dosar 22/1877, 160/recto (handwritten and transcribed telegram – 18 July 1877).

⁸⁰OeStA, KA, KM Präs. 1877, Karton 508, Aktenzahl 47–11/1–40, Report No. 33, Bukarest, 13 June, 1877, attached copy of the newspaper *Die Epoche*, 1/verso.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 3/recto.

instrument for acquiring independent statehood by direct involvement in the hostilities. Armies, which are the most regimented types of bureaucracies, are not made overnight and military expertise is only acquired over decades by means of specialized schooling and irreplaceable war experience. In the absence of such autochthonous expertise, this had of necessity to be imported, which meant that the process of army consolidation had inevitably an international dimension.

Moreover, the two institutions of state power, the army and the diplomacy, became vital in the process of achieving what Krasner terms international-legal sovereignty, as well as being interdependent: diplomacy was instrumental in navigating international relations leading to the recognition of state independence but also, as apparent in the above analysis, was involved in attempts to secure the superior officers that the Romanian army needed to effectively pursue the same goal, namely state independence. Paradoxically the two institutions were also the ones that had to be created from scratch given the prior autonomous status of the Danubian Principalities within the Ottoman Empire, which presupposed internal autonomy but also an explicit lack of armed power and foreign policy. Thus the failure to recruit high ranking officers from the Austro-Hungarian army reveals the trials and tribulations implicit in conducting foreign policy with an inexperienced diplomatic corps, which lacked vital knowledge of social-political conditions in the neighbouring state and as such failed to find the right timing and manner in which to approach both these officers and the authorities who were supposed to grant them permission.

Equally importantly, the diplomatic saga of recruiting officers on the eve of the Russo-Turkish war was the result of a keen awareness among Romanian statesmen (as was also the case with other Balkan political leaders) of the inversely proportional relationship between international-legal and Westphalian sovereignty. Acquiring state sovereignty in the Balkans often came with a hefty price tag attached to it: that is, international bodies or actors concomitantly acquired influence and could even dictate terms in the internal affairs of the new states. In the case of Romania, entering the Russo-Turkish war under foreign command meant that a prospective victory could not be claimed by the aspiring Romanian state, hence the search for ethnic Romanian officers in the Austro-Hungarian army as a potential solution to this conundrum. The search itself was misguided and mismanaged but the predicament it arose out of was all too real and shows that erecting a state from scratch was a highly charged and complex process of institution building plagued by difficult choices and numerous competing participants.

This has of course been one single case study within the region with all the peculiarities and specificities of such a limited sample. It would therefore be enlightening, as a future project, to place the present case study in a broader comparative framework bringing together similar attempts at institution building in other South Eastern European emerging states in the 19th century and early 20th century. This would allow for more general reflections on the challenges implicit in fledgling state building as well as on the entanglements between national, domestic processes and international relations.

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