The Romanian Principalities and the transition to political modernity:
From native prince's reign to the organic regulation regime
(Abstract)

Based on the experience accumulated in my academic career, my previous work in the committees for the supervision of doctoral candidates in modern history or as a referent of doctoral dissertations, the habilitation thesis, through which I am submitting to become a doctoral coordinator, is composed of three chapters, with the intention of making a connection between the conclusions of my previous research, focused more on the chronological interval 1774-1821, and future ones, oriented towards the period of the Organic Regulation and the 1848 revolution. The three chapters include studies completed in the last year, some of which have been published recently. They approach a problematic concerning the features of the transition to modernity in the Romanian case, in addition to the conclusions presented in publications from previous years: the connections between Tudor Vladimirescu, the Serbian movement and the Eterist movement, in search of the ideological and political sources of the revolutionary movement led by Vladimirescu, which have been insufficiently clarified until now; the impact of the events of 1821 on political practices and internal structural reform projects, in the context of tensions between the Great Powers and the reconfiguration of their interests in the Lower Danube, during the period of the native princes' reign; the first clear manifestations shown by historical sources of a project for the union of the Principalities with a foreign prince (Gustav of Vasa), conceived by a few boyars of the "reform committee" in 1830. In other words, a few examples of the transition from the regime of traditional rule to the political regime of the constitutional monarchy, which was in its early stages.

Since the beginning of my research activities, I have been involved in the investigation of the political groups of the nobility (the boyars), interested in their political ideas, in the extent to which they included a national component, in the forms of legitimation and manifestation of political action, but also in the configuration of these groups, in the identification of the characters and the links between them, in the context of the elaboration of my Ph.D. thesis on the origins of the "national party" in the Romanian Principalities. In the research plan that I have conceived, I have followed several successive stages, outlined as knowledge advanced. Initially, starting from the Romanian historiography of the subject, in search of an appropriate methodological path, the critical historical investigation of the politograms catalogued by Vlad Georgescu, their framing in a precise political context, associated with the course of internal

and external events in which they were elaborated, constituted a first step in delimiting the origins of the "national party", the repertoire of ideas and projects specific to the boyars' groups.

Upon completion of this research, materialized in the publication of the book *The Origins of the "National Party" in the Romanian Principalities* (I, *Under the Sign of "Boyars' Politics" (1774-1828)*, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Publishing House, Iasi, 2013, 784 p), awarded with the "Nicolae Iorga" Prize of the Romanian Academy, I have launched into the scientific circuit a new vision on the origins of modern Romanian political groups, new terms ("tarafuri" and "frății" boierești), new points of view on the authorship, chronology, meaning and political objectives of some memoirs and political projects of the boyars. On the whole, my research focused on identifying the personalities involved in politics, many of them barely known, beyond the classic attribution of political memoirs to rather confusing historical entities (great boyars group, small and middle boyar group), on getting to know the people of the epoch. I was also concerned with a critical analysis of the historical sources and the delimitation of the defining features of the boyars' political act up to the Organic Regulations, the nature and extent of its interferences with the vocabulary, language and themes of the Romanian national culture, in this early phase of its crystallization. The publication of the book substantiated the new phase of my research activity, following the Ph.D. thesis, being dedicated not only to political history, but also to the overall features of the nobility as a social elite, from an innovative methodological perspective on patronage relations, social identities and legitimacies, in an attempt to capture the nature of relations of domination within and outside the elite structure, both before and after the adoption of the Organic Regulations, whose provisions, once applied, gradually but irreparably eroded the traditional power structure of the nobility. Concerns related to political and cultural practices, social history and genealogy have been extended by a systematic study of the interactions between the aristocratic elite and the Russian political and juridical culture, with the Russian intentions of reforming the institutions, an expression of an attempt at institutional and juridical "colonization" of the Principalities (in preparation for annexation), invoking the principles of "good governance" proper to the "welfare state" model, in line with Russian interests in the Lower Danube area.

The research into the internal typologies of the elite, the categories within it, reflecting a vertical structuring, linking the "great boyar families" with the provincial boyar families and the small rural boyars, contrary to the well-known historiographical thesis of social organization in two categories (the class of the great boyars and the class of the small and middle boyars, in competition with each other), led to the publication of the volumes *Elitele puterii - puterea elitelor în spațiul românesc*; *Social and Administrative Elite in the Romanian Space*, both in

collaboration with Mihai-Bogdan Atanasiu, *Elita românească și itinerariile modernității: Omagiu Profesorului Mihai Cojocariu* and several other studies.

Another level of research focused on ideological practices, the renewal of political language and representations of social space and political community, in other words, the transition to modern political discourse. The study of sources showed that Enlightenment ideas penetrated in the political texts and practices selectively and with difficulty. Until the years of the Organic Regulation, political discourse remained attached to tradition, ritualized, centered on symbolically charged gestures and expressions. It was not until this period, with the emergence of the modern public space for the germination and circulation of ideas (journals, literary societies, salons), that a public debate gradually crystallized, particularly in the cultural field. In the political sphere, the debates in public assemblies attracted little attention to the historical research, but they were politically motivated and connected to other debates in the public sphere. Starting from here, I will trace in future research the structuring of parliamentary discourse up to 1856. From the beginning, it had a cultural-political dimension, barely visible under the censorship of the years of the regulatory reigns, but also a legal, normative component, linked to legislative strategies and procedures.

At the end of the book about the origins of the "national party" I concluded that "for the period before the fall of the Phanariot regime, the identification of a national policy, whose existence since the years of the Russo-Turkish war (1769-1774) is credited by historiography, has proved to be in discordance with the historical sources, with the profile of society and politics specific to the period", a conclusion to which I still subscribe. For the following period, opened by the revolutionary movement of 1821, returning to a theme insufficiently explored in the publications of previous years, some new research directions have been outlined, based on recently studied sources, on which I have focused in the pages of my habilitation thesis.

Called in several ways by historians - uprising, insurrection, revolutionary movement, revolution - the political action of 1821 led by Tudor Vladimirescu and a few great boyars from the prominent families, is, first of all, the expression of the traditional society, of the power relations and political ideas proper to it. A Christian Orthodox society under the domination of an empire overly concerned with economic exploitation, without offering protection and stability in return. In addition, faced with the presence of a Levantine political and commercial elite, increasingly powerful and skillful in exploiting the political, religious and economic resources of these "tributary provinces", especially in Wallachia.

Unlike the inhabitants of the Romanian Principalities, the Balkan Orthodox lived in a world in which the Muslim religion played a capital role in the formation of the state, dominated

by Ottoman elites, but in a deep crisis of resources and functioning institutions. They lived in a state, the Ottoman Empire, which was less and less able to ensure order and justice, and to effectively resolve conflicts between provincial communities and local rulers. Like the Romanians, they looked with hope to an external factor, Russia, which claimed that only its protection could restore order and social peace. Under the pressure of the changes brought about by the lost wars, by the ideas from the West, the expansion of international trade and Russia's Pan-Orthodox propaganda, only the respect and fear of the secular legitimacy of the Sultan remained from the *Pax Ottomanica*.

The recent studies emphasize the attempts of some local *pashas* to restore the social stability by resorting to strategies of attracting the Christians (Pazvantoglu, Regep Aga of Ada-Kaleh, Ali Pasha of Ianina) and resisting the growing fiscal pressure applied by the central Ottoman authorities. But also in the opposite direction, reflecting the inability of the Porte to curb abuses at the local level, caused by out-of-control rulers or military, such as the janissaries in the Pashalic of Belgrade and the Ayans in Rumelia. In this context, the similarities between the first Serbian uprising (1804-1807) and the first phase (in Oltenia) of Tudor Vladimirescu's rebellion are obvious. Not by any historical coincidence or as a result of copying a model, but as a result of the inconsistent way of functioning of the administration and the differences in perception towards the goals of Russian policy. The new sources studied show the importance of Tudor Vladimirescu's relations with leaders of the Serbian movement, the influence exerted by the Serbian emancipation experiment on his ideas and methods of action, but also the inconsistency of theories related to Tudor's collaboration with future Eterists before 1820.

In the years following the events of 1821, a "threshold epoch", as Paul Cornea so inspiringly put it, the political scene in the Principality experienced great turmoil, plots, intrigues, reforming initiatives, but also the efforts of the refugee boyars to undermine the legitimacy and authority of the newly appointed princes. The Ottoman military occupation, oppressive and costly for the two Romanian countries, was also a central political issue. The defeat of the Romanian and Eterist movements of 1821, together with the Ottoman military occupation, proved to be heavy blows to the politics and influence of Kapodistrias and the Philhellene circles in the Russian Empire. However, until the Congress of Verona, he maintained a relevant weight, skillfully maneuvering, in much more complicated conditions than before 1821, in favor of political solutions to undermine the Ottoman authority in the Balkans, to strengthen Russian control over the emancipation movements of the Orthodox peoples of the region. By openly discouraging any new "insurrection" on the Danube, leaders of the Greek diaspora, in connection with prominent Russian officials who were partisans of

the war with the Ottoman Empire, played a role that is emerging as important in maintaining a state of uncertainty and instability in Moldova, Wallachia and Serbia. The aim could not have been other than the preparation of a political solution to restore the Russian influence on the Danube region, to protect the anti-Ottoman movements, as long as the prospect of an immediate war was contrary to the Tsar's supreme will.

Therefore, in my opinion, the outbreaks of rebellion in the extension of the movements of 1821 cannot be understood, in their motivations and context, without taking into account the Great Powers, the diplomatic relations related to the "Eastern question" after 1821. Treated only as episodes of the "revolutionary wave", in antithesis to "the spirit of Vienna", to the legitimist Europe of the Holy Alliance, they appear as sequences of a kind of revolutionary romanticism, a legacy of the Great Revolution, carbonari, masonic and rather naive. Also, this approach in the logic of the "revolutionary wave", creates links between events and characters based on assumptions and logical constructions, on common ideological elements, leaving aside documentary inadequacies, but also differences in ideas, aims and means between the Eterists, the "carvunars" of Moldova and the future Decembrists. We should not forget the anti-Greek orientation of many "carvunars", the Eterist perception after 1821 of the "betrayal" of the Moldovan-Wallachian nobility or the extremely critical opinions about the Eterists present in the texts of Russian authors such as Filip Wiegel, I. P. Liprandi or Pestel.

In this complicated and tension-generating internal and international context, Ioniță Sandu Sturdza's reign could not have started under good auspices, despite the initial enthusiasm triggered by the appointment of an "native patriot" to the princely seat. The country had been ruined by the Eterist "zavera", burdened with heavy debts, the most prominent boyars had gone abroad, and the crisis in Russo-Turkish relations was creating a state of uncertainty and could degenerate into a new war. From the moment of his appointment until the ultimatum addressed to the Porte by the new Tsar Nicholas I (4/16 April 1826), the prince and his "comrades" sought support in Constantinople to stabilize the internal situation and counter the opposition of the refugee boyars. His loyalty to the Ottoman suzerainty and his tendency to move to a "new regime", with some "carvunar" overtones, are apparent in 1823 and more strongly in the context of the political crisis of 1824. At the same time, the rich correspondence with the Austrians shows us a ruler of Moldavia who was aware that the stability of his rule did not depend solely on the Porte and the faith of the divided boyars. The interests of the neighboring Great Powers, their intentions, and the sharpness of the influence of the refugees, which he could not accurately measure, had to be taken into account.

The complicated network of personal contacts, political influences and financial circuits aimed at strengthening the legitimacy and authority of the prince could not compensate for the modest and transient support enjoyed by Ioniță Sandu Sturdza from the really important boyars, from the prominent families. The limited resources of the country, the debts inherited from the time of Mihai Suțu and the "zavera" prevented him from pleasing the ruling nobility. The unremitting hostility between the "parvenus" and the "true nobility of the country" forced the prince to oscillate between illusory plans for "constitutional" reform, with the support of the "innovators", the bought support of the Ottoman officials, and the attempt to raise a new "political class", made up of the boyars of the noble families left in the country, in opposition to the one that had fled, and to win them over to a new, more reserved policy towards Russia. The death of Alexander I, the determination that the new tsar was to show in his relations with the Porte, materialized by the ultimatum of April 1826, after the brutal suppression of the Decembrist movement, were to politically annihilate these timid emancipation plan patiently and often skillfully designed by Ioniță Sandu Sturdza.

These ideas and plans, still rather confused and with limited consistency, were to crystallize in the new political context generated by the drafting of the Organic Regulations. Several extremely important documents (1829-1830), consular and diplomatic correspondence and political memoirs belonging to the Moldovan boyars of the "reform committee" of 1830-1831, drawn up in immediate connection with the London Protocol on the "Greek question" and the Treaty of Adrianople, convey the idea of the *Union of the Romanian Principalities*. The authors propose the union under the collective guarantee of the Great Powers, constitutional regime, hereditary monarchy, foreign prince in the person of the former heir to the Swedish throne, Gustav of Vasa. In spite of some obvious folds and ambiguities, explicable by the political context, the prudence and the boyar's duplicity learned in decades of living with Russian interventionism, the rationality of the political project of the Union with a foreign prince and the collective guarantee of the Great Powers is unquestionable and, at the same time, accessible to boyar's political thought, in forms of unexpected subtlety. The march of this project of capital importance for our history was now beginning, inspired by the model of the Greek question and by a young candidate, of royal blood, with a military education and high connections (nephew of Tsar Nicholas I, related to the British royal house and engaged to a Dutch princess, a senior officer in the Austrian army), a "precursor" of Prince Charles of Hohenzollern, to use a figure of speech. But by 1829, Russia was the victor, not the vanquished of the Crimean War.