

Moldavian press and the issue of the Principalities Union (1855-1859)

- abstract of the doctoral dissertation -

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ABSTRACT

The Crimean War (1853-1856), involving the Western European powers, produced the Russia recoil and, simultaneously, the entering of Moldavian statehood in the last stage. The Russian influence decrease was followed, among the immediate consequences, by censorship relaxation since 1855, when has been opened wide field of the press expressing problems agitating Romanian society in the context of the major reformations in Carpathian area. The importance of these years for the Romanian national state constitution makes periodicals from Moldavia as not just a local or state media, but a national press following the interests of the majority of the Romanians. More, the editions in foreign languages (especially French), and special publications printed abroad makes Moldavian press an European press, having an outstanding contribution in the formation of a favorable Union opinion required by the most Romanians.

The present doctoral disseration¹ is the result of systematic research on the Moldavian press (or initiated by Moldavian journalists, as „The Danube Star” - „L'Étoile du Danube” in Brussels)² during 1855-February 1859, and at this point we want to explain our choice. First of all, it is based on some personal inclination in regular appearances analysis of this period, „inheritance” of research during university studies. We wished therefore to look profound this phase in the history of the press in Moldavia, given that the publications investigation to date, have been brought to light sporadically, inequally and incompletely. Secondly, following the Romanian media histories, we can see many issues to be reconsidered. For example, in the media periodization historiography has been proposed „fixed” steps, didactical, without making the necessary nuances for understanding this field with its own different „dynamic”, however, for the modern political history of the Romanians. Chapters - in some special works - such as „the press in the middle of the nineteenth century (1840-1859)”, or „ the press from the Union to Independence (1859-1878)”³ does not have much relevance, at least for Moldavia. Moreover, it has to made necessary distinctions between the media in the two principalities. If, in Wallachia, 1848 year is a remarkable time, for Moldavia is nothing significant, „revolution” (in the press) starting since 1855, when was a true renewal of the Romanian media. Reappearance of „ The Bison” and new publications, Vasile Alecsandri's „Literary Romania” and Mihail Kogălniceanu's gazette, „The Danube Star” (thereupon must be added the emergence of the first yiddish world newspaper, „Korot Haitim”), is the beginning of a effervescent journalistic period which Wallachia, the other Romanian Principality, will know that later, from 1857⁴.

The central topic of the debate was, in Moldavia especially, Union of the Principalities. This is the theme of many studies and analysis in the Romanian historiography

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² Moldavian journalists publications in this period were abbreviated in the thesis. Its appeared only in Iassy, and attempts outside the capital we considered journalistic projects. I mentioned its in the Chapter I repertory.

³ Ilie Rad, *Incursions in the Romanian press history*, Accent Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, pp. 29-62.

⁴ In 1857, in addition to "Time", appeared more journals: "Concord" - "Romanian" ("Concordia" – "Românul"), "The National" ("Naționalul"), "The Century" ("Secolul"), "Romania" ("România").

and besides. At the end of the nineteenth century, along with the publication of the first large collections about the period documents⁵, historians have had a large hand material which has been more or less systematically investigated. Other volumes appeared later (staggered between 1959-1984) in *Documents on the Principalities unification and Romania in 1859* collections, which increased the documentary base but, simultaneously, the difficulty of the whole research of the period. To these large collections of documents should be added the press period, including (in significant proportion, in the first selection of historical mentioned sources), but leaving out major publications - such as „The Bison” - which brings new light on the timing of onset the preparation of public opinion in favor of the Union project.

In historiography, the beginning of this major step in the evolution of Romanian is established as the year 1856, after the Paris Peace Congress. Although well fixed date, we consider that it should be reconsidered. From many points of view, and between them the evolution of the media in Moldavia, more appropriate, as we noted above, is 1855, when the Union, from the Vienna diplomats debates passed in the Moldavian press debates first, and later in Wallachia. Claimed first by „The Bison” (and it boasted about - deserved of course - in this primacy), the idea became the motto of a regular sheet, „diary of Unification” (self-considered, with good reason) „The Danube Star”. Moreover, these temporal limits are valid for Union debate in the European press.

This doctoral dissertation aims to be, equally, an analysis of the Union preceding period, and a study of the history of the press in Moldavia. As a treatise on Romanian press history is a desirable objective for the specialists (and also, necessary) we intend to make to put our little „stone” lifting this „building”. Concretely, we tried to clarify some mistakes in the press history, seeing that there are often timing errors (the Press Law is 13, not May 12, 1856) or semantic („suspension” press law is not the same as „cancellation”, „suppression” with „self-suspension”, „French edition” is not synonymous with „French series”, „prince „order” is not „law” etc.).

Our analysis begins with a referring part to the Moldavian press censorship. We tried to study thoroughly - using our research and another made by Radu Rosetti or, more recently, Marian Petcu - the issue of censorship in the Moldavian press, exemplifying the deleted passages from regular sheets and trying to recompose the original text. Further, in the first chapter, we did an extensive research on the Moldavian law press of 1856, which was the foundation of the Romanian press legislation. First, we have shown - convincing, we hope - that the law, dated from epoch until today: May 12, 1856, was promulgated, in fact, on May 13, 1856 (when it was published in the Moldavian official gazette). About this law we showed favorable assumptions (a liberal attitude of the ruler, Grigore Al. Ghica, the press campaign), the route from intention to promulgation, possible European legislation models (French, most likely), apparition echoes, the special role in the cultivation of public opinion and Union idea diffusion. The press freedom period proved to be extremely fecund in debating the most important problems of Romanian society: the Union and the status of Principalities, the reforms, the issue of Hebrew, the education situation etc. Law suspension - not canceling - and censorship re-entering on September 8, 1856, represented a major step back for the Moldavian press history because, except „The Moldavia Gazette”, all other journals have stopped its appearance (its have been self-suspended) not because its have been prohibited, but because the editors realized that it was not possible an open discussion and the authorities have shown quite clearly anti-Union position and their desire to control the media.

Chapter II is dedicated, in the first part, of the Moldavian periodicals from this period. We made a comprehensive publications repertory, including journalistic projects unfinished also. With few exceptions, Moldavian journals, in announced period, have not benefited from

⁵ *Papers and documents relating to the history of Romanian renewal, Vol I-IX, Printing Göbl Carol, Bucharest, 1888-1901.*

any special studies, either because it had aroused the interest of researchers (until now), or because it does not exist in the most Moldavian university important center, Iassy (where, natural, collections had to be complete, even microfilmed, which is not the case). Therefore, we realized a synthetic presentation of each journal in part and, then, a detailed analysis about the long appearance journals („The Moldavia Gazette”, „The Bison”, „Literary Romania”) or shorter („The Impartial”, „The Constitutional”, „Romania”), seeing both „ordinary” aspects (appearance, editors, collaborators, debates) and other, less common in media history studies: relations with the authorities, diffusion or documentary value. Thereby, we believe that we have developed a research model that can be used for most periodicals. Furthermore, we tried to overcome the seen part of the newspaper and look into the media „kitchen”, highlighting the copy editors involvement and responsibilities, printing work (including printing houses, paper costs) and the dissemination of periodicals in the capital and provinces, aspects that demanded, then more today, not only talent, but a lot of work and sacrifice. At the end of the chapter, we presented our arguments in favor of documentary value of the press and showed the results of a statistical survey on the percentage of material release of the first collections of documents relating to Principalities Union. The 1855-1858 press date has a great documentary value, firstly meant everything about Union: the idea promotion, debates, achievement, figures or governances. But it should not be limited to these, and our surprise came when we found that, appeared in press censorship and, then, in the freedom press period, the media approached many subjects which, taking into account the chronological landmarks, we did not expect: Organic Statute, the Mihail Sturdza’s reign, the revolution from 1848, censorship history, Gypsy liberation, Israelitean issue, Bessarabian problem and others. It was like a relieving for the journalists, after years of censorship, to give his opinion about people and events from that, long time, they could not openly express.

For deepening the 1859 moment on Romanian history we dedicated the next chapter, entitled *The Union and its problems*. We tried to highlight how the newspapers were discussed major themes of interest for Romanian carpathian area, especially, and analyses regarding the Moldavian situation and its perspectives as an autonomous state. Although we agree the press is not a first class historical source for political history, for example, in the present work it is undoubtedly the most precious source of information and contact with the „breathing” of the epoch. We wanted, therefore, to understand people agitation and struggle, when the elites had concerned with finding the solutions to all the issues of the Romanian society in the sixth decade of the nineteenth century.

The Union could not be a purpose in itself. It was seen, however, as the sine qua non condition which should lead to the creation of the modern state, to a rules set similar to those taken from the European civilized states. Moldavian debates were particularly tense because here it was understood quite clearly, from the beginning, that the Union will have to this principedom painful effects. Maybe that's why the energies involved and some frustrations led to more heated debates here than in Wallachia, and this has been noted since the epoch, a clear discussion of the ad-hoc Assembly in Iassy (consistent to of those dotted from Bucharest), but, we add, and the heated polemics in the press, especially as it has been openly manifested an anti-union attitude in Moldavia. Although the period has been studied from different points of view, however its were superficial treated problems such as Union motivation, which we analyzed it from different perspectives that make us say that the Union was not for Moldavians only matter of nationality or the accomplishment of a „golden dream” began in the medieval period; the Union was a chance (unique, thought in that moment) to ensure Moldavia’s security and development prospects that alone, at the time, was far from having them. Also, the reforms problem must reconsidered, from our point of view, meaning that there were favorable conditions, especially in the Moldavia, since 1855, to initiate true radical measures on the situation of Gypsy slaves, censorship, the need for Central bank, the

situation of schools, monasteries (many of them, rich in possessions, dedicated to serve for different „holy place” from Greece or Palestina) and which, once adopted, were brought major changes in the areas mentioned and opened, in fact, the „epoch” reforms, as it is known in history, the Alexander John Cuza reign, especially after 1863. I watched at the same time, social issues, analyzing Moldavian society cleavage and especially Hebrews issue, which I tried to complete and deepen the studies of the origins for some hostility attitude to the growing number of the Jews in Moldavia, and especially in Iassy. Or, as we show in this work, the media contributed significantly both to record public perception and to shape it.

We have allocated a special chapter to competition for Moldavia. Because prince's appointed term expires in 1856 after Balta Liman Convention of 1849 and the new prince election, by Elective Assembly, was established only in 1858 by the Paris Convention, the pretenders went initially (from 1855) on the variable - considered „infallible” and applied for centuries - to ensure (through money, promises, matrimonial alliances etc.) – the support of the Suzerain power, the Ottoman Empire, and other powers who signed the Paris Treaty from 1856 (notably Austria, France and England). For the first time, however, those with ambitions to rule tried to influence public opinion, for which we sought the involvement of the press and how it revealed unusual electoral battle between father and son, respectively Michael and Gregory Sturdza, and the press campaigns and applications for Caimacams Teodor Balsche and Nicolae Conachi Vogoride, less or no issues highlighted in the literature. The apparition of the first newspaper dedicated to a prince candidacy (we name „The Constitutional” and his master, Gregory Sturdza) is a first in the Romanian media history, but also an approach that increased the attractiveness and beauty of the printing by polemics, caricature release (which arises in this period) or humorous heading.

The freedom of the Press Law discussion (put back into effect by the three Caimacams to October 26, 1858) and the existence of a press representing, both, the „power” („The Danube Star” and „The Bison and the Eagle”) and the „opposition” („The Constitutional”, „The Moldavia Gazette” - „Homeland”) represented a unquestionably gain to the Elective Assembly campaign, but also for the history generally, because it has been highlighted many historical facts and evidence about the closer or more distant past representing a valuable documentary source. Also here we present the „Couza solution” seen by the national party interests whose press organs have sketched a „photo-fit” of the one that who was going to take the Moldavian throne, provided to pursue the national Romanians interest and the fulfillment of the national interest expressed into the ad-hoc Assembly. This gave us, also, a new perspective for understanding Alexander John Couza ascending in Moldavia, which significantly diminishes the speculations on this point. We wanted to show that the elites tried - and succeeded - to identify a special person with administrative and diplomatic skills, who had, moreover, to assume a sacrifice role, and not as a ruler in the full sense. In the same chapter we followed how the press characterized the atmosphere from Moldavia after January 5, 1859, and from both principalities, after January 24, which is why the research could not stop at the end of 1858, but should go until mid-February 1859 when gradually are beginning to blur the double election echoes and it goes, with all the inherent difficulties, into the new organization stage to a modern state.

The most significant journal of this period into Moldavia was, undoubtedly, „The Danube Star”. It was the first and most important newspaper engaged in the fight for the Union Romanian principalities in the country and contributed (unanimously recognized by contemporaries and Romanian media historians both) to achieve this goal. The unionist gazette (we called it *unionist missionary journal*, to differentiate it from *other* publications who promoted, among other things, the union) not only covers the entire period (it appeared, intermittently, between 1855 and 1860), but is an Union issues debate synthesis totaling all Moldavian press avatars during the announced period: founded with a different name than the

initially proposed, suspended on several times, with a French edition in the country and a series in the same language in Belgium, with two-three times appearance weekly, and daily from 1858, the gazette has joined into a single journal in 1859, its own and editorial staff of „The Bison” (became, shortly before the Union, since November 1858, „The Bison and the Eagle”). These avatars and the Union sheet significant - „studied – as has confessed Mr. Alexander Zub academician, over four decades ago – until now only briefly, and still hard to say in all its extent”⁶ - justified, in our view, the allocation of a special chapter in this work. We tried thereby to realize a valuable monograph of a newspaper from all points of view. For this research we have done a Belgium stage, seeking to deepen the apparition problems for a newspaper in another country (printing, distribution) and the results (below expectations, we recognize) were presented into special section dedicated to this publication.

The systematic and comprehensive Moldavian press research from the 1855-1859 period was difficult but fruitful work, in our opinion, for several areas of interest, especially Romanians Union history and media history. Other „beneficiaries” could be the history of literature, the representative people biographies, the mentalities history, local history, economic, social and cultural studies. Of course, these directions are valid to any period systematic review. We appreciate, however, that there are periods in the Romanians history (and the media history) more „rich” and more „poor” for researchers, and that studied by us belongs, no doubt, to the first category. I tried to build in this media history area where are so many to do.

As for the Union research, we believe that, by the exhaustion of the last major sources of documentation represented by the pre-double election achievement press (Moldavian, we remind, but the most important for the question issue), we basically closed - and we are not doing a special merit of this because it is merely an observation - the circle of historical sources where the researchers could add significant contributions to this reference moment in the Romanian modern history. This does not mean the end of the Union historiography. Definitely, will emerge exciting studies and analyzes, but its, perforce, will have to focus on Unification reinterpretations, on reflections and revivals, and less on highlighting new aspects, only if we will discover another historical sources unknown to us (such as, to illustrate, memorials, correspondence or unknown journals from outside Europe).

We tried also, in our work, based on systematic research of the press, to make an Union motivations summary, without pretending that we have exhausted entire range of them. The Union was promoted, desired, supported or thought as a unique solution for saving Romanian people, a way to give life to a nation state consists of two provinces, Moldavia and Wallachia (the nucleus of Pan-Romanian future state) who had to respond to the century challenges and to make economic, social and political reforms to raise the dignity of Romanians among the other European nations. The media has substantially contributed to creating an imminent change atmosphere, to exacerbate the expectations for the young state and national elected leader. Many of the dissatisfaction and frustrations after 1859 (or after 1866, when it was far-fetch the foreign prince) are originated in the extraordinary atmosphere and in the preceding union expectations which the Moldavian press had its „blame” and merits.

⁶ Al. Zub, *Michail Kogălniceanu (1817 -1891). Biobibliography*, Romanian Encyclopedic Publishing / Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 1971, p XI.