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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

The relevance and importance of researching the topic concerning the Bessarabian question in an international context (1853–1878) stem from the need to understand the evolution of this issue of European significance in relation to both past and present developments. The Bessarabian question, examined throughout the period 1853–1878, forms part of the broader dynamics of relations between the Great Powers and border regions. Against the backdrop of growing geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe (in particular, the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine) and the evolving relations between the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Russia, the subject under consideration acquires particular significance, providing a historical framework for a better understanding of contemporary developments.

The period under investigation spans from the Crimean War (1853–1856) to the Russo-Romanian-Turkish War of 1877–1878, following which Romania gained international recognition of its independence, but at the cost of losing southern Bessarabia, which was re-annexed by the Russian Empire as a result of the decisions adopted at the Congress of Berlin in the summer of 1878.

The issue of Bessarabia, viewed in the context of the interests pursued by the Great Powers in southeastern Europe, constitutes a subject of research of contemporary significance. From 1812 onwards – a year often regarded as the 'genesis' of the Bessarabia issue – it became part of the dynamics of the „Eastern Question", emerging as an important element in the geopolitical rivalry among the Great Powers, against the backdrop of the decline of the „Sick Man of Europe" – the Ottoman Empire.

The course of events in the nineteenth century, marked in particular by the Russo-Turkish wars, demonstrates that Bessarabia's status was determined not solely by national considerations, but primarily by strategic interests and the balance of power. The decision taken in 1856 to return only the southern part of Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia, rather than the entire territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers, reflects the predominantly pragmatic nature of European diplomacy, which was aimed, in particular, at limiting Russian power in the Danube region and was at no point intended to bring about „historical redress".

The current relevance of this research topic also stems from the fact that some of the mechanisms identified between 1853 and 1878—such as behind the scenes negotiations, territorial adjustments imposed by the Great Powers, and the restriction of the interests of states considered 'small'—can also be observed, in various forms, within contemporary geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, Russia's re-annexation of southern Bessarabia in 1878, following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and against the background of shifts in the balance of power on the European continent—in particular, following France's defeat by Germany in 1870–1871—highlights the manner in which changes in the European balance of power could directly affect territories situated along the borders of the great empires.

Against the backdrop of contemporary geopolitical realities and the Republic of Moldova's position in southeastern Europe, this research topic is of particular relevance. The analytical approach examines the Bessarabian question within the context of international relations in the second half of the 19th century, with a focus on the Russo-Turkish wars, negotiations between the Great Powers, and the practices of secret diplomacy, particularly those pursued by the Russian Empire. The topic is of particular significance both from a historical perspective and from the perspective of international law; the research examines principles relating to territorial integrity, the role of international treaties (in this case, the Treaty of Paris of 1856 and the Treaty of Berlin of 1878), and the manner in which the Great Powers legitimized or contested territorial annexations carried out by certain powers to the detriment of smaller states.

The topic is also relevant because it raises a number of issues that remain highly topical today, including territorial conflicts—one of which persists in the immediate vicinity of the Republic of Moldova—and debates concerning the legitimacy and delimitation of borders (with particular reference to the work of the Commission for the Delimitation of the Bessarabian Border in 1856–1857).

Last but not least, the proposed topic is of current interdisciplinary academic relevance, constituting a field of research relevant to such disciplines as history, international relations, diplomacy, security studies, and political science.

Description of the current state of research in this field. Romanian historical research; the subject was addressed only briefly in 1978, in the context of the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, by historians such as V. Maciu, L. Boicu, D. Berindei, N. Adăniloaie and N. Ciachir. The contribution of the Romanian exile community during the communist period is also

noteworthy, particularly that of George Ciorănescu. Soviet and Russian historiography approached the Bessarabian question from perspectives that generally sought to justify the re-annexation of southern Bessarabia in 1878, as well as Russian's unfounded claims to the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers (A. Lazarev, V. Vinogradov, V. Grosul). Western historiography, for its part, did not entirely neglect the subject; notable examples include the studies and works of B. Jelavich, H. Seton-Watson and F. Kellogg, which devote considerable attention to Russian-Romanian relations in 1877–1878 and, by extension, to the Bessarabian question. Following the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' and the end of the communist regime in Romania, the Bessarabian question in an international context (1853–1878) was investigated more extensively by historians such as P. Cernovodeanu, M. Cojocariu, D. Vitcu, C. Ardeleanu, Sorin Liviu Damean and, with regard to certain aspects, I. Varta. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of studies examining the attitudes of the various powers towards the Bessarabian question within a broader international context; nor is there a monograph devoted specifically to the entire period, with the exception of the synthesis compiled by P. Cernovodeanu, covering the years 1812–1940, and the work by N. Ionescu, which focuses on the War of Independence and the Bessarabian question. Last but not least, there is no comprehensive published volume of documents from Western archives devoted specifically to this subject.

The aim of the research is to examine the complexity of the Bessarabia issue in the context of international relations between 1853 and 1878, by identifying the interests and strategies pursued by the Great Powers in southeastern Europe, based on a rigorous analysis of diplomatic documents identified in the archives of Chișinău, Bucharest, Paris, London and Vienna.

The general objectives of the research are as follows:

- To clarify the role played by Bessarabia in the politics of the Great Powers during the second half of the nineteenth century;
- To analyse analysis the interpretations offered by Romanian, Soviet/Russian and Western historiography on the research topic and to clarify certain controversial aspects in the treatment of „diplomatic episodes" relating to the Bessarabian question;
- To provide an overview of the development of the Bessarabian question within the context of international relations (1853–1878), with a focus on the impact of the Russo-Turkish wars on this issue and the rivalries between the Great Powers;

- To reassess the impact of international treaties on the Bessarabian question (the Treaty of Paris of 1856, the Treaty of London of 1871, the Treaty of Berlin of 1878);
- To investigate the role of the Great Powers (France, the United Kingdom, Austria-Hungary, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire) in resolving the Bessarabian question and the strategic interests they pursued;
- To place the Bessarabian question within the much broader context of the '„Eastern Question";
- To highlight the process of internationalisation of the Bessarabian question;
- To assess of the impact of 'secret diplomacy' on developments in the Bessarabian issue within an international context;
- To highlight the central importance of the Bessarabian question in Roumanin-Russian relations and its 'privileged place' in the foreign policy of Romania and Prince Carol;
- To demonstrate the significace of the Bessarabian question as an issue of European importance.

The research hypothesis. This study is based on the hypothesis that, between 1853 and 1878, the Bessarabian question extended beyond the sphere of Romanian national interests, but rather became an instrument of diplomatic negotiation within the framework of European international relations, with the Great Powers treating the status of the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers in accordance with their own strategic interests, whilst the Russian Empire consistently sought, through diplomatic, legal, and military means, to recover the southern part of Bessarabia that it had lost under the Treaty of Paris of 1856.

Methodology of historical research. The subject matter is approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, which combines methods specific to political and diplomatic history with analytical tools drawn from international law. The research methodology aims to critically reconstruct the evolution of the Bessarabian issue between the Crimean War and the Treaty of Berlin, drawing on diplomatic documents, contemporary press reports, and Romanian, Russian and Western historiography. The fundamental method employed is the historical method, based on a chronological analysis of major events in which the Bessarabian issue played a key role. This has enabled the identification of causal relationships between the Russo-Turkish wars, as well as the interpretation of territorial transformations in Europe, as reflected in the decisions of major diplomatic forums (such as the Congress of Paris and the Congress of Berlin). The present study is based on the internal and external criticism of historical sources, involving an analysis of the

provenance of documents and an interpretation of diplomatic language, with a view to identifying the strategic interests of the Great Powers. In addition, the comparative method is employed to analyse how the Bessarabian issue fits into the broader typology of European territorial conflicts (such as the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina or Alsace and Lorraine), as well as to highlight variations in the Great Powers' attitudes across different political and diplomatic contexts. Furthermore, the research utilises the chronological method, tracing the phased evolution of the Bessarabian issue from the Crimean War to the Congress of Berlin, with particular emphasis on the Russian Empire's efforts to re-annex southern Bessarabia, which it had lost under the Treaty of Paris of 1856.

The novelty and originality of the work. This study is the first work to examine the development of the Bessarabian question in the context of relations between the Great Powers between 1853 and 1878. Firstly, this thesis analyses the Bessarabia question from the very outset of the Crimean War and the position adopted by the Great Powers regarding the Romanian émigré community's desire to regain Bessarabia. Subsequently, the 'plan' to return southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia is analysed in detail, providing a comprehensive picture of these diplomatic negotiations, in which powers with no 'affinity' with Bessarabia or the Danube were also involved. Drawing particularly on Western diplomatic documents (French, British, Austrian, German and Italian), the study highlights the discussions concerning Bessarabia that took place in the run-up to the Congress of Paris in February–March 1856, which constitute another original aspect of the work. With regard to the Congress of Paris, new, previously unpublished material has been identified that illustrates the complexity of the discussions concerning the Bessarabian question and the demarcation of the new border between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the minutes of the Congress sessions held in the French capital, the 'behind-the-scenes' discussions have been presented, demonstrating that the Great Powers had conflicting interests in this matter of national importance for the Romanian Principalities. Through the examination of a wide range of diplomatic correspondence, it was possible to determine the position adopted by each of the Great Powers towards the subject in question. Furthermore, the minutes concerning the demarcation of the Bessarabian border were identified and utilised in this study. Subsequently, after southern Bessarabia was returned to the Principality of Moldavia, St Petersburg's attempts to draw closer to France and secure its support in regaining the lost territory were examined. Despite 'privileged' relations between the two powers, marked by the existence

of a secret treaty, the Polish uprising of 1863 caused Russia to turn its attention towards the 'Germanic world', which, after 1870, emerged as a dominant force in Europe. The originality of this work is also evident in the fact that the period 1853–1878 is addressed systematically, rather than in a piecemeal fashion, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of this era.

New key findings for the field of history. Research into issues relating to the Bessarabian question in an international context (1853–1878) has led to the identification of significant new findings of relevance to historical scholarship in general, as well as to related fields, particularly international relations. One such finding is the demonstration, supported by substantial evidence, that the Bessarabian question was not merely a „dispute" between the Russian Empire and Romania, but rather an issue of European significance to the Great Powers, while Romanian interests until the achievement of independence in 1877 were formally represented by the Sultan. Based on a comparative analysis of the attitudes towards this issue adopted by powers such as France, Great Britain, the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary, their respective interests with regard to the Bessarabian question have been established. Another notable finding of the research is the identification of the main stages in the evolution of the Bessarabian question between 1853 and 1878 and of the efforts undertaken by Russian diplomacy to re-annex southern Bessarabia. In Romanian historiography, the period 1857–1875 is often overlooked; some commentaries focus solely on the 1860 uprising of Bulgarian settlers in southern Bessarabia and Colonel Milkovski's incursion at Coștangalia in 1863. The scholarly novelty of this research also lies in the use of the international press as a source for analysing the Bessarabian question, demonstrating that this issue of European significance was not merely a matter of concern to the principal political actors of the time, but also an integral part of contemporary public debate.

The theoretical value of the research. Our academic approach makes a significant theoretical contribution to the study of the history of international relations and European diplomatic history in the second half of the nineteenth century, by examining the Bessarabian question as a case study in the functioning of the international system following the defeat of the Russian Empire during the Crimean War. The study goes beyond the national historiographical framework and offers a comprehensive interpretation of the issue under analysis, examining the interplay between legal principles, the geopolitical interests of the Great Powers, and their diplomatic practices – mechanisms that contributed to the internationalization of the Bessarabian question. This work contributes to a better understanding of the relationships between historical

rights, principles of international law and the balance of power in Europe, emphasising the selective manner in which such principles were applied, often in accordance with the interests of the Great Powers.

The practical value of research. Firstly, the thesis provides a suitable analytical framework for interpreting a territorial issue of European significance – the case of Bessarabia – and may serve as a useful tool for researchers and specialists in history, international relations, international law, journalism and communication studies. The thesis can be used also as teaching material at both secondary and university levels, within courses on modern history, diplomatic history and international relations. Furthermore, the information contained in this study can be used to develop a comprehensive overview of the Bessarabian question in the 19th century. Last but not least, the research may also serve as a useful reference for Romanian and Western circles in reassessing approaches towards the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers and its geostrategic significance for European security.

Main scientific results submitted for the thesis defence. The main findings of the research into the Bessarabian question in an international context are: 1) Clarification of the role played by the Bessarabian question within the Concert of Europe; 2) Assessment of the impact of the internationalisation of the Bessarabian question between 1853 and 1878, both at the international level and within the Romanian sphere; 3) Elucidation of the complexity of the territorial issue of Bolgrad, by examining the positions adopted by all the signatory powers to the 1856 Treaty of Paris; 4) Identification the methods and mechanisms through which the Russian Empire sought to overturn the clause concerning the restitution of southern Bessarabia; 5) Assessment of the impact of the Bessarabian issue on Romanian and European public opinion.

Approval of scientific results. The subject addressed in the present thesis has been a research interest of the author for several years, which has provided opportunities to present the research findings at a number of national and international academic forums and conferences. The findings of the present research have been presented at more than 20 conferences held both in the Republic of Moldova and abroad. These include the following academic events: the *National Congress of Romanian Historians*, Iași, 29 August–1 September 2018, with the paper "Austria and the Bessarabian Question (1856–1857)"; the Conference *Conflict, Diplomacy and Public Opinion: Case Studies in the Context of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, organised by the Centre for the History of International Relations of the Faculty of History, University of Iași, 30–31 March

2021, with the paper "France and the Bessarabian Question (1856–1857)"; the International Scientific Conference *Historian Nicolae Iorga – 150 Years since His Birth*, Chișinău, 13 May 2021, with the paper "Nicolae Iorga and the Bessarabian Question in the International Context (1856–1916)"; the International Scientific Conference *The Crimean War, the Peace of Paris and Its Consequences*, Chișinău, 27 May 2021, with the paper "Sardinia and the Bessarabian Question (1856–1857)"; the *National Congress of Romanian Historians,* Alba Iulia, 8–10 September 2022, with the papers "Napoleon III, Walewski and the Bessarabian Question (1855–1856)" and "The Question of Southern Bessarabia in the French Press (1878)"; the *International Moldovan-Polish-Romanian Congress*, Chișinău, 11–13 March 2023, with the paper "Napoleon III and the Discussions at Compiègne concerning Bessarabia (1856)"; the Conference *Military Occupations and International Relations in Modern Times: Case Studies from Romanian and World History,* Iași, 2–3 November 2023, with the paper "La question de la Bessarabie durant la guerre russo-turque (1877–1878)"; the International Scientific Conference *Latinity, Romanity, Romanian Identity*, 7th edition, Chișinău, 2–4 November 2023, with the paper "The Bessarabian Question as Reflected in the Iași Publication «Steaua României» (January–July 1878)"; the *National Congress of Romanian Historians*, Chișinău–Suceava, 27–31 August 2024, with the papers "Russian Policy in Bessarabia in Diplomatic Reports and the French Press in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century" and "The Evolution of the Bessarabian Question in the International Context (1856–1876)"; the *Moldova International Forum: History, Culture, Civil Society*, Chișinău, 14–17 October 2024, within the seminar *Moldova as a Historical Region and a Republic: History, Present and Future*, with the paper "The Bessarabian Question in Austrian and German Diplomatic Documents during the Russo-Turkish Wars (1853–1856; 1877–1878)"; the International Conference *Integration through Research and Innovation*, Chișinău, 7–8 November 2024, with the paper "The Bolgrad Question in Belgian Diplomatic Documents (1856)"; the International Scientific Symposium *Bukovina and Bessarabia: Between Traditionalism and Modernity: Regional History, National Perspectives and European Geopolitical Stakes. 250 Years since the Annexation of Bukovina by the Austrian Empire,* Suceava, 4–7 June 2025, with the paper "The Great Powers and the Bessarabian Question during the Congress of Paris (1856)"; the International Scientific Conference *Prospects and Issues of Integration into the European Research and Education Area*, 12th edition, Cahul, 6 June 2025, with the paper "The Coștangalia Incident in the Contemporary Press (1863)"; the *Scientific Conference of the National Museum of*

History of Moldova, 35th edition, 23–24 October 2025, with the paper "The Bessarabian Question at the Berlin Peace Congress as Reflected in the British Press (June–July 1878)"; the International Conference *Integration through Research and Innovation*, Chișinău, 6–7 November 2025, with the paper "The Bessarabian Question as Reflected in the French Newspaper «Messager du Midi» (1856)"; and the International Scientific Conference *Latinity, Romanity, Romanian Identity*, 6–8 November 2025, with the paper "French Publicists and the Bessarabian Question (1856)".

Publications related to the thesis. The research findings have been published in 2 monographs, two collections of documents, and 34 articles in scientific journals (including one Scopus-indexed publication, five CEEOL-indexed publications, six publications included in the ANACEC register, five published in other journals, and 17 articles published in scientific journals, scientific collections, and the proceedings of national and international conferences). The research findings have also been disseminated through presentations, including one delivered at a plenary session, at 27 national and international conferences.

Structure and lenght of the thesis. The thesis comprises 287 pages of main text and consists of: an Introduction, five chapters divided into subchapters, General Conclusions and Recommendations, a bibliography, the author's CV and a Declaration of assumption of responsability. The thesis also contains abstracts in Romanian and English.

Keywords. The Bessarabia issue, international relations, European diplomacy, the Eastern Question, the Crimean War, the Congress of Paris (1856), the Congress of Berlin (1878), southern Bessarabia, the Russian Empire, the Great Powers, Romania, geopolitics, borders.

THESIS CONTENTS

The Introduction presents the relevance and significance of the topic, the research methodology, the aim and objectives, the research hypothesis, the scientific novelty of the results obtained, the theoretical significance and practical value of the thesis, the validation and dissemination of the research results, and an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 1 – **Legal, Historiographical and Documentary frameworks concerning the Bessarabian question in an international context (1853-1878)** - presents the evolution of Bessarabia's legal status between 1812 and 1878 was presented; the conceptualisation of the 'Bessarabian question' in an international context; Bessarabia within the framework of international relations through the prism of the concept of the balance of power, the

internationalisation of the Bessarabian question, and the identity and national dimensions. I have also examined the main documentary sources, both primary and secondary, used in the preparations of this study. In the subchapter on the **legal status of Bessarabia between 1812 and 1878,** I demonstrated that, in the first half of the 19th century, the concept of sovereignty was dominated by the paradigm of legitimacy conferred by international treaties, while the principle of self-determination had not emerged as a recognized principle of international relations. The origins of the Bessarabian question date back to 1812, when, following the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest, the Ottoman Empire ceded to the Russian Empire the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers. However, a major contradiction arose: the Ottoman Empire exercised suzerainty over the Romanian Principalities, rather than full sovereignty. The historian N. Iorga noted, with reference to this event: „The Turks ceded a territory that did not belong to them and which formed part of a country for which they had undertaken to respect nothing more than its integrity”[1].

We have demonstrated that the issue of Bessarabia was gradually integrated, from the mid-19th century onwards, into the broader framework of the European security system, in direct connection with the status of the Romanian Principalities. Although, from a legal standpoint, the cabinet in St Petersburg legitimised its rights over Bessarabia through the Treaty of Bucharest of 1812, this interpretation is contested, based on the aforementioned premise that the Sublime Porte did not hold full sovereignty over the Romanian Principalities. We have shown that in the period that followed, the Russian Empire tenaciously pursued the goal of extending its influence towards Constantinople over the straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, whilst also consolidating its position in the Balkan Peninsula. In 1829, Russia consolidated its control over the mouths of the Danube, thereby restricting the commercial access of certain riparian states.

As we have noted, the Treaty of Paris (1856) formally enshrined the internationalisation of the Bessarabian question, which thus transcended the framework of a bilateral Russian-Ottoman dispute and was integrated into the system of collective guarantee. We have observed that a significant transformation had taken place in the legal nature of sovereignty over this territory. Consequently, southern Bessarabia, which was to be reintegrated into the Principality of Moldavia, was to come under the collective guarantee of the Great Powers. The establishment of a European Commission for the delimitation of the Bessarabian border confirmed the collective nature of this decision. We have established that the decision to ‘restore’ the three counties in southern

[1] Iorga, N. *Adevărul asupra trecutului și prezentului Basarabiei*. București, 1940, p. 54.

Bessarabia (Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail) was based on two major considerations: the restoration of the European balance of power, a fundamental principle of international law at the time, and the safeguarding of free navigation on the Danube. In this regard, I concluded that in 1856 this was not a matter of 'historical redress', but rather a border rectification justified by the imperatives of European security.

For the year 1878, I found that two dominant theoretical principles prevailed: geopolitical realism and the flexibility of borders, depending on the strategic interests of the Great Powers.

In the subchapter **The Historiography of the Bessarabia Question in an International Context (1853–1878)**, works and studies on the subject within Romanian, Soviet/Russian, French, English, German and American historiography were analysed. Our subject of study is reflected in interwar Romanian historiography, in particular in the comprehensive works of the historians Ion Nistor[2] and Alexandru Boldur[3] (author of a work dedicated to the Bessarabian question in the light of Russian-Romanian relations[4]). We have noted the significance of the works by the historian Gheorghe Brătianu on the Bessarabian question, published following the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union[5]. The Bessarabian question, in the context of international relations between 1853 and 1878, had already attracted the attention of Romanian historiography during the interwar period. During the communist era, this subject was effectively excluded from historical research. However, the issue was not completely ignored, having been addressed, in particular, by Romanian historians in the diaspora[6]. Following the fall of the Iron Curtain in Romania, the Bessarabian issue relating to the period 1853–1878 saw a significant revival of scholarly interest; however, such endeavours were often limited by restricted access to Western and Russian documentary collections.

[2] Nistor, Ion. *Istoria Basarabia*, ediția a IV-a. Cernăuți: Glasul Bucovinei, 1924.
[3] Boldur, Alexandru. *Istoria Basarabiei: contribuții la studiul istoriei românilor*, vol. III. Chișinău: Editura Dreptatea, 1940.
[4] Idem. *La Bessarabie et les relations russo-roumaines: la question bessarabienne et le droit international*. Paris: J. Gamber, 1927.
[5] Brătianu, Gheorghe I. *La Moldavie et ses frontieres historiques*. Bucarest, 1940; Idem. *Bessarabie. Droit natiaux et historiques*. Bucharest, 1943.
[6] Ciorănescu, George. *Bessarabia: Disputed land between East and Wes*t. București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1993.

In analysing Romanian historiography since 1990, we have established that this issue is reflected in the studies by Paul Cernovodeanu[7] and Mihai Cojocariu[8], which address the 'attempts' made by Romanian émigrés in 1848–1849 to demand, during the Crimean War, the return of the whole of Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia. I have shown that there have been other studies concerning the attitude of certain powers towards the Bessarabian question during the period under investigation, in particular those of the historian Sever-Mircea Catalan[9] regarding the role played by the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers in French foreign policy.

I have mentioned that the only studies on the Bessarabian question in the context of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, which draw on certain Russian documents, are those by Chișinău-based historian Ion Varta[10]. I have found that the existing studies mainly address Romanian-Russian relations in relation to the Bessarabian question and reflect the mood within Romanian society in the response to the loss of southern Bessarabia.

I have observed that, since 2010, interest in the issue of Bessarabia within an international context (1853–1878) has grown considerably. Firstly, the issue of Bessarabia was placed within the broader context of the Union of the Romanian Principalities[11]. Subsequent studies have examined the Great Powers' positions on this issue, based on rigorous research in Western archives. We would like to mention the valuable studies by the historian Constantin Ardeleanu, an expert in british archival sources, which address both Great Britain's attitude towards the Bessarabian question[12] and the manner in which the Bessarabian border was demarcated, drawing,

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[7] Cernovodeanu, Paul. *Basarabia. Drama unei provincii istorice românești în context politic internațional (1806-1920)*. București, 1993; Idem. Inițiative românești de redobândire în perioada Războiului Crimeii (1854-1856). În: *RI*, nr. 1-2, 1992, pp. 81-96.

[8] Cojocariu, Mihai. *Basarabia în contextul Unirii Principatelor*. În: *Probleme actuale ale istoriei naționale universale*, coord. Anatol Petrencu, Chișinău, 1992, pp. 46-50; Idem. *Încercări Românești de recuperare a Basarabiei (1853-1859)*. În: *Slujind-o pe Clio. In Honorem Dumitru Vitcu*, coord. Gheorghe Cliveti, Mihai Iacobescu, Dinu Balan. Iași: Editura Junimea, 2010, pp. 94-103.

[9] Catalan, Sever-Mircea. La politique tsariste en Bessarabie pendant l'année 1855 (selon un rapport du consul français à Jassy, Victor Place). În: *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, Bucharest, 1993, vol. 32-33, pp. 47-54; Idem. Cu privire la locul Basarabiei în politica franceză (1856-1861). În: *Patrimoniu. Revistă de Istorie istorică*, 1993, nr. 2, pp. 150-158.

[10] Varta, Ion. Rusia și chestiunea basarabeană în perioada războiului pentru independență (1877-1878) (în lumina unor documente din arhivele Rusiei). În: *RI*, tom. 1992, III, nr. 7-8, pp. 735-752; Idem. . Rusia și chestiunea basarabeană în perioada Războiului ruso-română-turc (1877-1878). În: *RIM*, 1992, nr. 3 (11), iulie-septembrie, p. 3-15 ; Idem. Documents inédits sur la politique russe à l'égard de la Roumanie en 1878. În: Revue des Études sud-est européennes, Civilisations. Mentalités, juillet-decembre 1994, tome XXXII, nr. 3-4, pp. 229-240.

[11] Ivănescu, Dumitru. *Unirea Principatelor Române*, *Rusia și Problema Basarabiei.* În: *Dilemele identității*, volum editat de Flavius Solomon, Alexandru Zub, Fundația Academică „A. D. Xenopol", 2001, pp. 147-154.

[12] Ardeleanu, Constantin. *Sfârșitul războiului Crimeei și chestiunea Basarabiei -1856*. În: *Basarabia -1812. Problemă națională, implicații internaționale*, coord. Gheorghe Cliveti, Gheorghe Cojocaru, București, Editura Academiei Române, pp. 507-509.

for the first time in Romanian historiography, on the reports of the British commissioner to the Bessarabian border demarcation commission, Edward Stanton[13]. The research by Dumitru Vitcu also falls within this category; drawing on contemporary sources, he analysed with particular meticulousness the vicissitudes of the demarcation of the Bessarabian border in 1856[14].

For the period of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and its aftermath, the work by the historian Sorin Liviu Damean[15], which focuses on Romania at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and also addresses the Bessarabian question, remains a valuable resource. Sorin Liviu Damean examines in much greater detail the nature of Romanian-Russian relations following the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano on 18 February/3 March 1878 and their impact on the Bessarabian question in several important studies[16].

The legal aspect of the Bessarabian question following the end of the Crimean War was examined by the legal scholar Dumitru C. Grama, who, in a pertinent analysis, demonstrated, on the basis of documentary evidence, that the territory returned to the Principality of Moldavia was smaller than had been envisaged at the end of 1855[17].

In analysing Soviet/Russian historiography, I have found that, from this historiographical perspective, the annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 was regarded as nothing more than a „legitimate act", with the Romanian national dimension of the issue being completely ignored. The issue of Bessarabia between 1853 and 1878 is analysed from the perspective of the rivalries between the Great Powers, without giving due consideration to the legitimate claims advanced by the Romanian Principalities. For the period of the Crimean War and the diplomatic negotiations in Paris (1853–1856), we have identified the correspondence of the Russian plenipotentiaries in Paris and their attempts to retain the town of Bolgrad, though without any deailed analysis of the

[13] Idem. Riding the line. Expertise and the making of the Bessarabian border, 1856-1857. În: *Journal of Modern European History*, 2024, vol. 22, issue 1, 2024, pp. 10-24.
[14] Vitcu, Dumitru. *Tratatul de la Paris (1856) și avatarurile delimitării hotarului european între Rusia și Turcia*. În: *Congresul de pace de la Paris (1856). Prefaceri europene, implicații românești*, coord. Dumitru Ivănescu, Dumiru Vitcu, Iași, Editura Junimea, 2006.
[15] Damean, Sorin Liviu. *România și Congresul de Pace de la Berlin (1878)*. București: Editura Mica Valahie, 2011.
[16] Idem. Problema Sudului Basarabiei la nivelul relațiilor româno-ruse (1878). În: *Studii și Articole de Istorie*, 2011, LXXVII.
[17] GRAMA, Dumitru. Revenirea Basarabiei de Sud-Vest în 1857 în componența statului românesc cu suveranitate internă. În: *Basarabia după 200 de ani* (Conferința Internațională Basarabia după 200 de ani, organizată cu sprijinul Consiliului Județean Iași și al Universității „Petre Andrei" din Iași). M. Bacciu, S. Bocancea (coord). Iași: Institutul European, 2012, pp. 193-195.

question. Historians S. Tatishchev[18] and N. Petrov[19] have highlighted in their works the importance of the Bessarabian question for the Russian Empire.

I have found that, in Soviet historiography, the issue of Bessarabia was incorporated into a broader analysis of the Russo-Turkish wars of the second half of the 19th century. Consequently, the Russo-Turkish War of 1853–1856 and its consequences were presented as the result of decisions imposed from outside, regarded as 'hostile' to the Russian Empire, rather than as a recognition of the historical rights of the Romanians over southern Bessarabia. As regards the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, Soviet historiography emphasised the role of the Russian Empire in the process of national liberation of the Balkan peoples from Ottoman rule. The re-annexation of southern Bessarabia was interpreted as an act of restoring the 'historical borders' of the Russian Empire and as a 'correction' of the injustice resulted from the decisions of the Congress of Paris in 1856. Furthermore, Soviet historiography rejected historical and ethnic arguments regarding the belonging of the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers with the Romanian historical and national sphere. The work of the historian A. Lazarev follows this line of thinking; it challenges Romania's historical rights over Bessarabia and provided a distorted interpretation of the consequences of the 1877–1878 war[20].

In analysing Russian historiography since 1990, I have identified a number of studies that address the Bessarabian issue in the context of Romanian-Russian relations, whilst paying less attention to the positions adopted by the Great Powers. One such Russian author is V. Vinogradov, known during the Soviet era for a work devoted to the union of the Romanian Principalities[21], a work praised for its documentary rigour, but in which the Bessarabian issue is absent. In some of his studies published after 1990, Vinogradov regards the Bessarabian question as a central element and a veritable 'litmus test' in the development of Russian-Romanian relations in the second half of the nineteenth century[22]. Over the past 20 years, the historian Vl. Grosu's focus on the Bessarabian issue has been notable. A work of his published in 2018 provides an overview of the

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[18] Татищев, С. С. *Император Александр II. Его жизнь и царствование*, т. 1, Москва, 1903.
[19] Петров А. Н., *Русские дипломаты на Парижском конгрессе 1856 г*. În: *Исторический вестник*, 1891, nr. 1-1891, с. 198-220.
[20] Лазарев, А. М. *Молдавская советская государственность и бессарабский вопрос*. Кишинёв, 1974, p. 114.
[21] Виноградов, В. Н. *Россия и объединение румынских княжеств.* Москва, 1961, 329 с.
[22] Idem. *Бессарабия – камень преткновения в российско-румынских отношениях*. În: *Очаги тревоги в Восточной Европе* (Драма национальных противоречий). М., Институт славяноведения и балканистики РАН, 1994, с. 15.

evolution of the Bessarabian issue in an international context, with a focus on the years 1812 and 1940, regarded as key milestones in the dynamics of this issue[23]. Previously, in a 2006 study, Vl. Grosu highlighted the significance of this issue for the Russian Empire during the Congress of Paris in 1856, drawing on several documents from Fund II (the Chancellery of the Governor of Bessarabia), although these were not sufficiently explored[24].

In analysing French historiography, I have noted that the issue of Bessarabia was, at certain times, perceived as a matter of 'European interest', though without becoming a central focus of research. I have observed that, in the context of the Crimean War and the negotiations during the 1856 Paris Peace Congress, French historians and journalists could not ignore the fact that one of the main 'obstacles' to peace was the clause concerning the return of southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia. One such figure, Louis Debrauz, a correspondent for the newspaper 'Le Constitutionnel'[25], paid particular attention to the rectification of the Bessarabian border, regarding it as a matter of significance for European diplomacy. Well versed in the geographical and historical realities of Bessarabia, he concluded that a seemingly secondary issue was likely to generate tensions within the Concert of Europe. The works of Édouard Goudron[26], which address the essence of the Bessarabian question during the Congress of Paris, and Félix Bamberg[27], who examines as the diplomatic relations between the Great Powers in the years 1853–1856 and the tensions surrounding the restitution of southern Bessarabia, also fall within this context. Last but not least, we note the contribution of Paul Bataillard[28], in whose view the first 'point' of the Eastern Question was the union of Moldavia and Wallachia, which could not be complete without the return of Bessarabia—a territory 'unlawfully seized from Moldavia'[29]—to the Romanian sphere.

As we have observed, the works of Frédéric Damé and Catherine Durandin offer relevant perspectives on the issue of Bessarabia, placing it within the context of the political and diplomatic developments of modern Europe. In examining F. Damé's overview, we have highlighted that he addresses the issue of Bessarabia within the broader framework of the history of modern

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[23] Гросу, Владислав. *Бессарабия в международных отношениях нового времени*. Кишинёв, 2018.
[24] Idem. Парижский конгресс 1856 г. и формирование новой юго-западной границы России. În: *Русин*, 206, nr. 2, 2006, c. 95-104.
[25] Debrauz, Louis. *Le Traité de Paris du 30 mars étudié dans ses causes et ses effets*. Paris, 1856.
[26] Gourdon, Édouard. *Histoire du Congrès de Paris 1856*. Paris, 1857.
[27] Bamberg, Felix. *Histoire diplomatique de la crise orientale de 1853 à 1856*. Bruxelles et Leipzig, 1858.
[28] Bataillard, Paul. *Premier point de la question d'Orient: les principautés de Moldavie*. Paris, 1856, p. 48.
[29] Iorga, N. *Un colaborator francez al Unirii Principatelor Române Paul Bataillard*. București, 1923, 16 p

Romania[30]. We have observed that, in his view, the return of southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia in 1856 was not determined by the principle of nationalities and historical rights, but by strategic considerations, aimed, in particular, at ensuring free navigation on the Danube. The French historian devotes separate chapters to the issue of Bessarabia, analysing the protests of the Romanians and the consequences of the decisions adopted under of the Treaty of San Stefano at the Congress of Berlin[31].

The studies by Catherine Durandin[32] are based on solid research in French and Romanian archives. In analysing her study on the territorial reorganisation of the Balkans following the Congress of Berlin, I have highlighted the importance attached to the issue of Dobruja, presented as a compensatory territory offered to Romania in exchange for southern Bessarabia. We have shown that the French historian supports the position of French diplomacy—namely, that of Foreign Minister W. Waddington—according to which Romania was expected to accept the territorial exchange. Broadly speaking, her article seeks to highlight the 'benefits' of this territorial exchange, alluding to the fact that a section of the population in southern Bessarabia wished to return under Russia's „scepter". Evidence is provided, in particular, in the form of reports from the French consul in Galați on this matter.

I have also presented the contribution of the historian Yves Bruley to our understanding of Franco-Russian relations, particularly during the period 1856–1857, and of the impact of Count Morny's mission to St Petersburg with regard to the Bolgrad issue. The French historian highlights the fact that France adopted a stance favorable to Russian interests. This stance was determined both by diplomatic considerations and by the personal relationships and economic interests existing between certain French circles and the Russian Empire[33].

In examining British historiography, I have found that the issue of Bessarabia is, in places, dealt with in some depth – evidently within the broader context of the Eastern Question and the differences between the Great Powers. One of the leading British historians of the interwar period, Harold Temperley, addressed the consequences of the 1856 Treaty of Paris in two remarkable

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[30] Damé, Frédéric. *Histoire de la Roumanie contemporaine depuis l'avènement des princes indiginènes jusqu'a nos jours*, Paris: Félix Alcan éditeur, 1900.
[31] *Ibidem*, p. 297-314.
[32] Durandin, Catherine. La Russie, la Roumanie et les nouvelles frontières dans les Balkans [Le cas de la Dobroudgea]. În: *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, janvier-mars 1979, vol. 20, nr. 1, pp. 61-77.
[33] Bruley, Yves. *Morny ambassadeur en Russie*. În: *Morny et l'invention de Deauville*, Eric Anceau, Dominique Barjot et Nicolas Stoskopf (dir) Paris: Armand Colin, 2010, p. 255.

studies[34]. The British historian examined the consequences of the Treaty of Paris in detail, drawing on an extensive body of source material, included both unpublished and published documents from the Foreign Office archives. Whilst the first article examines the issue of Bessarabia during the proceedings of the Congress of Paris, in the second study Temperley highlights the Russian Empire's conduc following the signing of the peace treaty, such as the destruction of the fortifications at Ismail and Reni. Temperley paid particular attention to the dispute over Bolgrad. Through a thorough analysis of the Great Powers' positions, the British historian highlighted the firm opposition of the British government to any form of concession to St Petersburg, in contrast to France's position, which supported keeping the town of Bolgrad under Russian control, and Austria's position, which aligned with that of Great Britain.

I have also noted the works of the historian W. E. Mosse, which highlight the central role of the Bessarabian question in shaping the European order following the Treaty of Paris. I have observed that, by drawing on a variety of sources, Mosse illustrates the deep divisions amongst the Great Powers, particularly regarding the dispute over Bolgrad and Serpents' Island[35]. The English historian highlights the Russian Empire's attempts to avoid the return of southern Bessarabia, including through compensatory proposals such as the exchange of the fortress of Kars for southern Bessarabia[36]. According to W. E. Mosse, the Bessarabian question remains an unresolved matter following the Congress of Paris and a major source of tension in relations between the Great Powers.

The historian A. J. P. Taylor is the author of a remarkable synthesis of European rivalries during the period 1848–1918[37]. I have noted that, although dealt with briefly, the dispute over Bolgrad is used to highlight the diplomatic manoeuvring and tensions between the Great Powers following the Treaty of Paris. I have found that, for the British historian, the issue of Bessarabia during the period under investigation is a purely strategic one, a fact reflected in the diplomatic negotiations leading up to the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

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[34] Temperley, Harold. The Treaty of Paris of 1856 and its execution (part.I). În: *The Journal of Modern History*, sept. 1932, vol. IV, nr. 3, p. 387-414; Idem, The Treaty of Paris of 1856 and its executions (part. II). În: *The Journal of Modern History*, dec. 1932, vol. 4, nr. 4, pp. 523-543.

[35] Mosse. W. E. Britain, Russia and the questions of Serpents Island and Bolgrad: two incidents în the execution of the Treaty of Paris, 1856. În: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, dec. 1950, vol. 29, nr. 72, pp. 86-131.

[36] Idem. How Russia made peace september 1855 to april 1856. În: *The Cambdrige Historical Journal*, 1955, vol. 11, nr. 3, pp. 297-316.

[37] Taylor A. J. P. *The struggle for mastery in Europe 1848-1918*. Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. 92.

In the works of the British historian Seton-Watson, the issue of Bessarabia is addressed within the broader context of British foreign policy in relation to Romania. The British historian devotes considerable attention to the Eastern Crisis of 1875–1878[38], emphasizing the strategic and national significance of the restitution of southern Bessarabia. For the year 1878, the author provides a summary of the Great Powers' positions on the Bessarabian question, emphasizing the tense relations between Romania and the Russian Empire[39].

In the course of this research, I have also examined German historiography, identifying several works address aspects of the subject of Bessarabia in an international context (1853–1878). Although it was not one of his primary research topics, the historian W. Baumgart[40] did address this issue. For his part, Ernst Schule[41] incorporated the Bessarabian question into his analysis of Franco-Russian relations, focusing on the Bolgrad dispute and its strategic implications. We found that the works of Katharina Weigand[42] and Bernhard Unckel[43] reflect this issue within the broader context of Austria's role in the new European order following the Crimean War.

In analysing American historiography, I have noted the valuable studies by the historians Barbara Jelavich and Frederick Kellogg. Firstly, the professor emerita at Indiana University addressed the Bessarabian question in the context of the War of Independence (1877–1878) and Romanian–Russian relations, whilst also emphasizing the evolution of the Romanian question in an international context from 1821 to 1878[44]. In a comprehensive study, based on rigorous research in Romanian and foreign archives, Jelavich reconstructs the diplomatic „path" that lead to the re-annexation of southern Bessarabia by the Russian Empire is reconstructed. In this study by Barbara Jelavich, the focus is on Romanian-Russian relations and the dispute over Bessarabia, particularly given that this issue was a taboo subject in Romania at the time. Frederick Kellogg analyses

[38] Seton-Watson R. W. *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question. A study in diplomacy and party politics*. London, 1935.
[39] Idem. *Britain in Europe (1789-1914). A survey of Foreign Policy*. London, 1937.
[40] Baumgart, Winfried. *Der Friede von Paris 1856: Studien zum Verhältnis von Kriegsführung, Politik und Friendensbewahrung*, Oldenbourg, 1972
[41] Schule, Ernst. *Russland und Frankreich vom Ausgang des Krimkrieges bis zum italienischen krieg 1856-1859*. Ost Europa, 1935.
[42] Weigand, Katharina. *Osterreich, die Westmachte und das europäische Staatensystem nach dem Kriemkrieg (1856-1859)*. Hamburg, Matthiesen Verlag, 1997.
[43] Unchel, Bernhardt. *Osterreich und der Krimkrieg. Studien zur Politik der Donamonarchie in den Jahren 1852-1856*. Hamburg, 1969.
[44] Jelavich, Barbara. *Russia and the Rumanian National Cause, 1821-1878*. Indiana University Press, 1959; Idem, *Russia and the formation of the Romanian State*. Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Romania's path to independence in relation to the Great Powers[45]. The American historian pays particular attention to the ties between the governments in Bucharest and St Petersburg in 1877, highlighting the risky nature of these relations in the context of the Bessarabian question[46].

In the subchapter **Historical Sources of the Research**, I have listed the main primary and secondary sources used. Thus, several collections of documents held at the following institutions were utilised: the National Archives, the Library of the Romanian Academy and the National Library in Bucharest; the National Archives Agency in Chișinău; the Diplomatic Archives in Paris and Nantes, the National Archives in Paris and the National Archives in London and Vienna. For the period 1853–1856, which saw the 'reopening' of the Bessarabian question in an international context, a number of collections from Romanian and Western archives were utilised. Most of these relate to the end of the Crimean War (1855) and 1856, the year in which the Bessarabian question was on the agenda of European chancelleries. Reports by the French ambassadors in St Petersburg[47], London[48], Vienna[49], Constantinople[50], Turin[51]–and Berlin[52] were utilised; these contain numerous discussions regarding the Bessarabian question, which was becoming increasingly important and a matter of 'paramount importance'. In the present study, I have examined the reports of the British ambassadors in Paris[53], St Petersburg[54], Vienna[55], Constantinople[56], Berlin[57]–and Turin[58]. To ascertain Austria's stance, I examined certain collections identified at the State Archives in Vienna. Thus, the reports of the Austrian ambassadors in Paris[59] and St Petersburg[60]were utilised.

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[45] Kellogg, Frederick. *The road to Romanian independence*. Indiana University Press, 1995.
[46] Idem. *A perilous liaison: Russo-Romanian relations in 1877*. În: *Labyrinth of nationalism. Complexities of diplomacy. Essays in honor of Charles and Barbara Jelavich*, ed. By Richard Frucht, Colmbus, 1992, pp. 290-317.
[47] AMAE. La Courneuve. Correspondance Politique, Russie, vol. 212, 213, 214.
[48] AMAE. La Corneuve, Correspondance Politique, Angleterre, vol. 704, 705, 707
[49] AMAE. La Courneuve. Correspondence Politique, Autriche, vol. 463, 464, 465.
[50] AMAE. La Courneuve. Correspondance Politique, Turquie, vol. 326, 327.
[51] AMAE. La Courneuve, Correspondance Politique, Sardaigne, vol. 339, 340.
[52] AMAE. La Courneuve, Correspondance Politique, Prusse, vol. 326, 327.
[53] TNA, FO 27/1127; 27/1128; FO 27/1129; FO 27/1131; FO 27/1133; FO 27/1134; FO 27/1135; FO 27/1136, FO 27/1137; FO 27/1139.
[54] TNA, FO 65/471; FO 65/472; FO 65/473; FO 65/474.
[55] TNA, FO 7/474; 7/480; 7/485; 7/486; 7/487; 7/489; 7/490; 7/491.
[56] TNA, FO 78/1181; FO 78/1184; FO 78/1189; FO 78/1191.
[57] TNA, FO 64/416; FO 64/417; FO 64/418; FO 64/420.
[58] TNA, FO 67/218.
[59] HHST, Politisches Archiv IX/Frankreich, karton 52, 53.
[60] HHST, Politisches Archiv X, Russland, berichte 1856, karton 43.

For the period 1857–1876, I have studied a series of documents relating to the controversy surrounding the events in southern Bessarabia (1860–1861) and the incursion by the Polish Colonel Milkowski from Coștangalia (1863). A number of unpublished documents from the Diplomatic Archives in Nantes[61] and the National Archives in London were utilised, as well as the archival collections held in Bucharest[62].

The period 1877–1878, corresponding to the Russian–Turkish War and Romania's direct involvement, has received considerable attention in Romanian historiography, having been documented through the publication of numerous volumes of documents, which also address the Bessarabian question. Alongside these sources, valuable unpublished documents have also been identified, in particular the diplomatic correspondence of the French representatives in St Petersburg (General Le Flô) and in Vienna (Vogüe)[63].

In Chapter II – **THE BASARABIA QUESTION DURING THE CRIMEAN WAR AND THE PARIS PEACE CONGRESS (1853–1856)** – I examined the 'reopening' of the Bessarabian question during the Crimean War by the Romanian émigrés residing in European capitals, from its emergence in this context up to the Paris Peace Congress (February–March 1856). In the subchapter **The Romanian diaspora and the internationalisation of the Bessarabian question (1853–1856)**, I analysed how the Bessarabian question was 'reopened' in the context of the Crimean War, a moment that marked a crucial stage in the evolution of this issue on the international stage. In analysing the general context, we highlighted the particularly important role played by Romanian emigration, which succeeded in integrating Romanian national demands into a coherent political programme. We noted that Romanian emigrants demanded the restitution of the entire territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers, which they considered an integral part of historic Moldavia. At the same time, Romanian emigrants supported the union of the Romanian Principalities under a foreign prince and the establishment of a collective guarantee by the Great Powers, which demonstrated a mature political vision that was fully integrated into the European socio-political context. I have emphasised that the period 1853–1856 was characterised by intense diplomatic activity, during which the Bessarabian question became a subject of negotiation point within the broader framework of the 'Eastern Question'. I have shown

[61] CADN, Constantinople (Jassy), vol. 193 ; TNA, FO 78/1507; FO 78/1518; FO 78/1747; FO 78/1584.
[62] BAR, Arhiva Alexandru Ioan Cuza, vol. I, II, III, VII, IX, X, XIV, XVI, XVII, XIX, XXVIII
[63] AMAE La Courneuve, Correspondance Politique, Russie, vol. 256 ; Corespondance Politique, Autriche, vol. 522.

that the Great Powers viewed the Bessarabian question as a matter of the European balance of power, seeking to remove the Russian Empire from the mouths of the Danube, as evidenced by the proposal put forward by France to integrate Bessarabia into Austria's defensive system.

In the subchapter **Diplomatic Preliminaries (November 1855–January 1856)**, I highlighted the complexity of the diplomatic negotiations at the end of 1855 and the position adopted by the Great Powers regarding the clause put forward by Austria concerning the return of southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia. I have shown, on the basis of contemporary diplomatic documents, that the Bessarabian question was reintegrated into the agenda of European negotiations as part of efforts to restructure the balance of power in the Danubian region, against the backdrop of the conclusion of the Crimean War. I explained that the reintroduction of the Bessarabian question into the discussions was not the result of Romanian diplomacy, but was driven by the strategic interests of the Great Powers, in particular those of the Vienna cabinet. Austria promoted the idea of returning southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia, tenaciously seeking to remove the Russian Empire from the mouths of the Danube and to limit Russian influence in Southeastern Europe. I have outlined the Great Powers' positions regarding this initiative for territorial restitution. France supported it with certain reservations and nuances stemming from Emperor Napoleon III's desire to maintain a balance between sanctioning the Russian Empire and avoiding excessive destabilisation of the European system. This ambivalence on the part of Paris was reflected in its support for compromise solutions regarding territorial issues. Great Britain agreed to such a scenario, given that the 'maximum system' proposed by Lord Palmerston was not supported by France. We have shown that the Russian Empire's initial position was to reject this territorial clause, but under pressure exerted, in particular, by Austria, the cabinet in St. Petersburg cabinet was compelled to accept, during the preliminary phase of the negotiations, the principle of the return of southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldavia. A notable development was the stance adopted by the states of the German Confederation, which did not support Austria's move to include the clause on the return of southern Bessarabia in the preliminary peace terms. I have noted that, at this preliminary stage, no definitive solution was reached, but rather a general framework for the negotiations was outlined, which was to be formalised at the Paris Peace Congress. I have shown that, ultimately, following consultations amongst the leading statesmen of the Russian Empire, Emperor Alexander II decided to accept the clause concerning southern Bessarabia. This stage laid the political and diplomatic groundwork

for the decisions of the Paris Congress, but the Russian Empire was „testing the waters" regarding the possibility of for a secret agreement with France on the Bessarabian question.

In the subchapter **Count V. Esterhazy's mission to St Petersburg and the issue of the Bessarabian rectification**, we analysed, particularly in the light of Austrian diplomatic documents, the manner in which the Vienna cabinet presented the preliminary peace terms to St Petersburg. We highlighted that the main objective of Count Esterhazy's mission to St Petersburg was to convey Vienna's firm stance that it would not accept any deviation from the peace preliminaries. We have shown, that initially, the Russian Empire adopted a rigid stance, characterised by a refusal to accept this territorial alteration; however, faced with the prospect of diplomatic isolation, Russia was compelled to adopt a more conciliatory position, accepting, in principle, the idea of a border revision in southern Bessarabia. I have identified the main discussions held in St Petersburg between the envoy of the Vienna government and the Russian Chancellor K. Nesselrode, which centred on the border rectification in southern Bessarabia, emphasising that this was being undertaken in the European interest – a view that the Russian Empire did not share. We concluded that this diplomatic mission demonstrates the profoundly geopolitical nature of the Bessarabian question, highlighting the fact that the redefinition of borders was not the result of national claims, but of a complex diplomatic manoeuvring by the Great Powers.

In the sub-chapter **Russian proposals for territorial exchange**, I noted the steps taken by the St. Petersburg cabinet towards a territorial exchange, in the context of the diplomatic negotiations prior to the opening of the Congress of Paris. We have established that this diplomatic initiative was driven by the major strategic importance that southern Bessarabia held for the Russian Empire, particularly in terms of access to the Danube. From this perspective, St Petersburg sought to avoid the loss of a European territory, which it considered essential, by offering in exchange the fortress of Kars, which, whilst of military importance, did not possess the same geopolitical value. I highlighted that this proposal was not accepted by the Great Powers, who rejected the idea of an exchange of territories between distinct geographical areas. The only power willing to compromise was France, for which the Bessarabian question did not seem to hold the same strategic significance. I have shown that the efforts to exchange Kars for southern Bessarabia represent a significant episode in understanding the diplomatic strategies adopted by the Russian Empire in the wake of its defeat in the Crimean War.

In the subchapter **Behind the scenes at the Congress of Paris (February–March 1856)**, we noted that discussions on the Bessarabian question took place 'behind the scenes', with Russian diplomacy attempting to remove this issue from the formal debates of the Congress held in the French capital. I have analysed the mechanisms of informal diplomacy, highlighting how the Bessarabian question was debated outside the official framework of the proceedings. I have demonstrated that decisions concerning southern Bessarabia were not determined exclusively in the plenary sessions of the Congress of Paris, but were largely the result of parallel negotiations conducted between representatives of the Great Powers in restricted circles. I have noted that France assumed the role of mediator, attempting to reconcile the positions of the Russian Empire, Austria and Great Britain. I have identified an attempt to reach a consensus amongst the Russian, French and British plenipotentiaries, excluding Austria; however, due to Britain's firm position of strength, no agreement was reached that would satisfy all parties. In this context, I have noted the good relationship between the Russian plenipotentiaries and Emperor Napoleon III and the French Foreign Minister Walewski, who were willing to support the Russian Empire's claim to retain the town of Bolgrad, on the grounds that it represented the administrative centre of the Bulgarian colonists in southern Bessarabia.

In the subchapter **The Bessarabian Question during the proceedings of the Paris Peace Congress (February–March 1856)**, I analysed the place occupied by the Bessarabian question within the plenary sessions. I have demonstrated that the Bessarabian question was addressed not so much from the perspective of the historical rights of the Principality of Moldavia as from that of the geostrategic interests of the Great Powers. In this context, I have shown that their main objective was to limit the influence of the Russian Empire in the Danubian region. I have shown that, during the diplomatic negotiations at the Congress of Paris, the application of this principle was marked by significant differences of opinion amongst the Great Powers, particularly regarding the precise demarcation of the territory. I have found that France, in contrast to Great Britain and Austria, was willing to favour certain compromise solutions. I highlighted the complexity of the discussions regarding the demarcation of the Bessarabian border, which led to the use of additional mechanisms, such as the establishment of a European Demarcation Commission. I thus demonstrated that this stage marked the inclusion of the Bessarabian question within the European diplomatic sphere.

In Chapter 3, **THE EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF THE BOLGRAD ISSUE (MAY 1856–JANUARY 1857) IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**, we analysed the emergence and evolution of the Bolgrad issue, highlighting how it came to assume significant proportions. We have demonstrated that the Bolgrad issue arose as a result of ambiguities and omissions in the wording of the Treaty of Paris, particularly with regard to the precise demarcation of the border between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. In the subchapter **The establishment and work of the European Commission for the demarcation of the border in southern Bessarabia (May 1856–January 1857)**, I have shown that, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Paris of 18/30 March 1856, a joint European Commission was established, comprising representatives of the five signatory powers to the Treaty (France, Great Britain, Austria, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire). The Commission's main task was to demarcate the new border on the ground between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, which involved assessing the geographical, administrative and ethnic realities of the region, as well as identifying solutions that would meet the requirements of Article 21 of the Peace Treaty. I noted the controversy surrounding the town of Bolgrad and the hamlet of Tabac, which gave rise to intense debates, demonstrating that the border was not merely a geographical line, but an element with major political and strategic implications. I observed that France was willing to make concessions to the Russian Empire, in contrast to Great Britain and Austria, which did not agree to such a scenario. I have shown that this demarcation process spanned a period of one year, thereby also delaying the commencement of the European Commission's work in the Romanian Principalities.

In the subchapter **The Bolgrad Issue in Franco-Russian Relations**, I have shown that this matter brought the cabinets in Paris and St Petersburg much closer together. I have emphasised the importance the Russian Empire attached to retaining the town of Bolgrad, citing arguments of an administrative and ethnic nature, as well as strategic considerations. We analysed, in the light of French diplomatic documents, France's stance on the Bolgrad issue, which demonstrated a clear degree of flexibility, as it was prepared to accept compromise solutions regarding this town in order to avoid major tensions with the Russian Empire. I have shown that, in Franco-Russian relations, the Bolgrad issue served as a test of the two powers' ability to reach an acceptable compromise. We have examined the role of Count de Morny's extraordinary mission to St

Petersburg (1856–1857) and its impact on the Bolgrad issue, which the French diplomat regarded as a ‘secondary’ matter.

In the subchapter **The territorial dispute in British-Russian relations**, I have highlighted the fact that this issue was a sensitive one in relations between the two powers, being closely linked to Great Britain’s strategic objective of limiting the influence of the Russian Empire in the Danubian region and Southeastern Europe. We noted that, in general, Great Britain adopted a firmer stance than France in supporting the strict application of the provisions established at the Congress of Paris (1856). We demonstrated that British diplomacy consistently demanded that St Petersburg renounce any claim to the town of Bolgrad. Drawing on British diplomatic sources, I have highlighted the persistent tensions between London and St Petersburg, particularly in connection with the presence of two British ships in the Black Sea.

In the sub-chapter **The Vienna Cabinet and the border dispute**, I have examined Austria’s position and diplomatic actions regarding the Bolgrad issue. We have highlighted the active role that Vienna played in the process of demarcating the border in southern Bessarabia. We have emphasised that Austrian diplomacy adopted a firm and consistent stance in support of the Russian Empire’s withdrawal from the Danubian region, considering that its presence there ran counter to Austria’s strategic interests. By analysing Austrian documents, I have shown that Austria strongly supported the inclusion of the town of Bolgrad within the Principality of Moldavia, with the aim of creating a buffer zone between the Russian Empire and Southeastern Europe. I have noted that Austrian diplomacy consistently opposed the Russian Empire’s attempts to retain control over Bolgrad.

In the subchapter **Ottoman diplomacy and the Danube Delta issue**, I highlighted the Ottoman Empire’s distinct position regarding the Bolgrad dispute. I have shown that the Ottoman Porte, whilst supporting the principle of the return of Bolgrad to the Principality of Moldavia and the benefits arising from this, was far more interested in the Danube Delta coming under its own control. I also highlighted certain Franco-Russian attempts to persuade the Ottoman Empire to cease supporting the return of Bolgrad to the Principality of Moldavia, offering it the Danube Delta and Serpents' Island as ”compensation”. Ultimately, I have demonstrated the influence exerted by Vienna Sublime Porte’s decision to support the return of the town of Bolgrad to the Principality of Moldavia.

In the subchapter **Sardinia, Prussia: involvement in the Bessarabian border issue**, I highlighted the position of two signatory powers to the Treaty of Paris, which had no representatives on the Commission responsible for demarcating the border in southern Bessarabia. As regards the Kingdom of Sardinia, I have shown that this power wished to adopt an impartial stance, supporting the views of both Great Britain and France. I have demonstrated, on the basis of Italian documents, that Prime Minister Cavour was placed in the position of acting as a mediator in the Bolgrad affair, given that it was anticipated that, during the forthcoming Paris Conference, Piedmont's vote would carry considerable weight. From this perspective, I have shown that Sardinia was 'courted' by the Western powers, but also by the Russian Empire. However, ultimately, due to the involvement of Emperor Napoleon III, Sardinia was advised to support the British position on the Bolgrad issue. As regards Prussia, I have provided evidence that this power wished to be excluded from any potential conference, seeking to maintain a neutral stance. Upon examining certain diplomatic reports received from Berlin, I have shown that Prussia was more reserved and less involved in the Bolgrad issue.

In the subchapter **Behind the scenes of the Bolgrad issue. Napoleon III at Compiègne and St. Cloud (October–November 1856)**, I emphasised the French emperor's personal involvement in resolving the Bolgrad dispute. Based on a study of the private correspondence between Emperor Napoleon III and the French ambassador to London (Persigny), I examined the latter's main arguments regarding the interpretation of the Bolgrad issue, which he regarded as 'secondary' whilst remaining unaware of all its details and strategic importance. We have shown that, following Count Persigny's arrival at the French Emperor's residence in Compiègne, the Emperor completely changed his mind, persuading Cavour to support the British position on the Bolgrad issue. I have noted that Napoleon III was thus preserving his alliance with Great Britain, whilst at the same time maintaining the prospect of a future alliance with the Russian Empire.

In the sub-chapter **The Paris Conference and the settlement of the territorial dispute**, I emphasised that the opening of a new diplomatic forum in the French capital was purely a formality, as the Bolgrad issue had been resolved behind the scenes. We analysed the proceedings of the Paris Conference, highlighting its role in clarifying and implementing the provisions previously established at the Congress of Paris (1856), particularly regarding the issue of Bolgrad. We have noted France's position, as it assumed the role of mediator between the divergent positions, promoting the idea of territorial compensation to the Russian Empire for the loss of the

town of Bolgrad. Consequently, St Petersburg received the town of Comrat. Last but not least, the Paris Conference also decided on the deadline by which Austrian troops were to leave the territory of the Romanian Principalities and British ships were to withdraw from the Black Sea.

In the subchapter **The Bolgrad Issue in the Press of the Time**, I analysed the attitude of European public opinion towards the Bolgrad dispute. The press played a significant role in internationalising the Bolgrad issue, transforming what appeared to be a local matter into a subject of European interest. We have shown that the British press firmly supported the need for strict compliance with the provisions of the peace treaty and for Russia's withdrawal from southern Bessarabia. In comparison with the British press, the French press adopted a more nuanced stance, with some newspapers promoting 'compromise' solutions regarding the status of the town of Bolgrad. I have shown that, even within the European press, there were differences of opinion between the Great Britain and France, and that the newspapers played a key role in bringing this issue onto the international stage.

In Chapter 4 – **THE DYNAMICS OF RUSSIAN REVISIONISM REGARDING SOUTHERN BESSARABIA (1857–1876)** – I examined the attempts by Russian diplomacy to re-annex the territory lost following the decisions of the Congress of Paris in 1856. In the sub-chapter **The Revision of the Provisions of the Treaty of Paris in Franco-Russian Relations (1857–1863)**, I analysed the foreign policy of the Russian Empire, which was primarily focused on revising provisions imposed by the Treaty of Paris (1856), which had led to the loss of southern Bessarabia (the three counties of Cahul, Bolgrad, and Ismail) and to the clause regarding the neutralisation of the Black Sea. In particular, I examined the evolution of relations between France and the Russian Empire following the signing of the Treaty of Paris and highlighted how the 'Bessarabian question' influenced the diplomatic dialogue between the two powers. During the period 1857–1859, I have traced the dynamics of Franco-Russian relations, characterised by a relative easing of tensions, driven by both sides' desire to avoid a new confrontation and to destabilise the European balance of power. St Petersburg constantly sought to test the firmness of the French position on the Bessarabian question. I highlighted France's attempts to reach a written agreement with the Russian Empire in the context of a new European conflict (the Franco-Austro-Sardinian War of 1859), with Napoleon III seeking to secure the neutrality of the St. Petersburg cabinet. In this context, I emphasised that, during the diplomatic negotiations between the two powers, one of the Russian Empire's main demands was France's support for the re-annexation of

southern Bessarabia. Although it made certain promises for the future, Paris opposed any Russian attempt to revise the Treaty concluded in Paris in 1856. I noted that between 1857 and 1863, Franco-Russian relations were characterised by a fragile balance, oscillating between cooperation and rivalry, and the Bessarabian question remained a sensitive point. Shortly afterwards, Napoleon III – an advocate of the principle of nationalities – became significantly involved in the Polish uprising of 1863, a moment thatcoincided with the reorientation of Russian foreign policy towards Austria and Prussia.

In the subchapter **Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza's policy towards the Bulgarian colonists and its international repercussions (1860–1861)**, we identified and examined a controversial episode in the history of southern Bessarabia's inclusion within the Romanian Principalities from 1860 to 1861, namely the unrest of that period. We noted that the Bulgarian settlers in southern Bessarabia enjoyed certain specific administrative and economic privileges, inherited from the period when the region was under the rule of the Russian Empire. In 1860–1861, the authorities in Bucharest introduced a series of measures aimed at standardising the administrative and fiscal system of the territory, thereby integrating southern Bessarabia into the structures of the modern Romanian state. One of the reforms that dissatisfied the Bulgarian settlers in southern Bessarabia was the introduction of compulsory military service. As a result, some of the settlers sought external protection, invoking the old rights granted under Russian administration. The situation quickly took on an international dimension, being closely monitored by the Russian Empire, which used the issue of the settlers as a diplomatic tool to reaffirm its influence in the region and to criticise the domestic policy of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza. France and Great Britain closely monitored developments in southern Bessarabia, but adopted a reserved stance, upholding the Romanian state's right to organise the administration of its territory. In managing this complicated situation, Prince Cuza sought to assert the Romanian state's sovereignty over southern Bessarabia. The tensions generated by this issue reflect the vulnerability of the Romanian Principalities in the face of the Russian Empire, which continued to regard southern Bessarabia as an area of major interest.

In the subchapter **The Coștangalia Incident: diplomatic and European impact (1863)**, we highlighted the attempt by the Polish colonel Milkowski to transit the territory of the Romanian Principalities and the reactions of European governments. We have shown that, although it appeared to be a local conflict, it was soon amplified and escalated to the diplomatic level. The

Polish colonel's military incursion into southern Bessarabia on his way to Poland was an event with major repercussions for the status of the Romanian Principalities. In accordance with the provisions of the 1858 Convention of Paris, their territory was inviolable and neutral, and the transit of foreign military forces through it threatened the possibility of a Turkish-Russian occupation. The reactions of the Great Powers were nuanced. France and the United Kingdom avoided direct involvement, but supported the maintenance of the status quo established in 1856. I have shown that Prince Cuza disarmed Milkowski's band, which gave rise to numerous interpretations, particularly within diplomatic circles. Initially, France perceived this move as an affront to itself, as it supported the Polish cause; subsequently, Prince Cuza's action was interpreted as a move to safeguard territorial integrity. This incident demonstrated that any tension in southern Bessarabia could be exploited diplomatically and militarily by the Russian Empire with a view to paving the way for a possible revision of the 1856 Treaty of Paris.

In the subchapter **'Behind the scenes of secret diplomacy'. The Bessarabian question in an international context (1870–1876)**, I examined the secret manoeuvres of Russian diplomacy aimed at the re-annexation of southern Bessarabia and the positions of the Great Powers. I highlighted that between 1870 and 1876, the Bessarabian question gradually returned to the centre of European diplomatic manoeuvring, being reignited in the context of the geopolitical realignments brought about by the weakening of the system established following the signing of the 1856 Treaty of Paris. The year 1870 marked a turning point, when the Russian Empire, taking advantage of the Franco-Prussian War, unilaterally denounced the clause regarding the neutralisation of the Black Sea. This revisionist move highlighted the fragility of the collective guarantee mechanism and paved the way for the St. Petersburg cabinet cabinet to reconsider certain provisions of the Treaty of Paris, namely those concerning southern Bessarabia. Following the denunciation of the Black Sea clause, the Bessarabian question was addressed predominantly through 'secret diplomacy' and unofficial agreements between the Great Powers. Russian-Austro-Hungarian relations and the rapprochement between Russia and Germany played a key role in this context. The Reichstadt Agreement (1876) represented a defining moment in secret diplomacy, through which the Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary informally agreed on the redistribution of spheres of influence in the Balkans in the event of a war with the Ottoman Empire. During this meeting in Bohemia between Emperors Alexander II and Franz Joseph, a consensus was reached: the Russian Empire was to re-annex southern Bessarabia, whilst Austria-Hungary was to acquire

Bosnia and Herzegovina. For its part, Germany, under the leadership of Otto von Bismarck, adopted a pragmatic stance, aimed at maintaining the European balance of power, but willing to support Russian initiatives provided they did not affect the interests of the Berlin government. On the other hand, France—weakened following its defeat in the war with Prussia—and Great Britain remained relatively disengaged from the Bessarabian question, pursuing their own strategic interests and thereby enabling Russian Empire to consolidate its diplomatic position. Thus, the issue of Bessarabia was not treated as a matter of international law, but as a negotiable element within a system of alliances and compromises between the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary and Germany.

In the subchapter **The Romanian–Russian meeting at Livadia and its effects on the Bessarabian 'dossier' (1876)**, we analysed the impact of this high-level meeting on the development of relations between Bucharest and St Petersburg. This diplomatic episode took place against the backdrop of intensified diplomatic negotiations concerning the 'Eastern Question' and reflected the asymmetrical relations between Romania and the Russian Empire regarding the Bessarabian question. We found that during the discussions between representatives of the Romanian Government, led by Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu, and the Russian imperial authorities, led by Emperor Alexander II, the Bessarabian question was also raised. Although the issue of the re-annexation of southern Bessarabia was not explicitly stated, it is evident from contemporary correspondence and accounts that St Petersburg hinted at its intention to revise the provisions of the 1856 Treaty of Paris. In this regard, in our view, Russia 'tested' the Romanian Government's willingness to accept possible territorial compensation, namely Dobruja in exchange for southern Bessarabia.

In Chapter V – **THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR AND THE BASARABIAN QUESTION ON THE AGENDA OF THE BERLIN PEACE CONGRESS (1877–1878)**, I examined the significance of the Russo-Turkish War and its aftermath, highlighting how the Great Powers decided, to Romania's detriment, that southern Bessarabia would be re-annexed to the Russian Empire. In the sub-chapter **The Bessarabian Question in Romanian-Russian Relations (1877–1878),** I analysed the relations between the two powers, which were deeply marked by a fundamental divergence regarding the Bessarabian question. At the outset of the conflict, Romania agreed to military cooperation with the Russian Empire, permitting Russian troops to pass through its territory and actively participating in military operations, in the hope that its independence

would be recognised and its territorial integrity respected. I have highlighted that, although the Russian Empire had firmly committed itself under the Convention of April 1877 to respect Romania's 'current integrity', Russian diplomacy subsequently failed to honour this commitment. Throughout the war with the Ottoman Empire, we have emphasised that St Petersburg adopted an ambiguous stance on the issue of southern Bessarabia, paving the way for its re-annexation. This intention became evident during the preliminary negotiations, when the Russian Empire explicitly formulated this territorial claim. The Romanian Government, through Ion C. Brătianu and Mihail Kogălniceanu, protested strongly, emphasising the illegality of such a territorial claim in light of the provisions of the 1856 Treaty of Paris. Despite Romanian diplomatic efforts with European chancelleries, I have found that the Russian Empire succeeded in securing the re-annexation of southern Bessarabia, offering Dobruja in exchange—a compensation that was not perceived as equivalent, from a political and symbolic point of view.

In the subchapter **European diplomacy and the question of southern Bessarabia (January–May 1878**), I have examined the attitude of European diplomacy towards the Russian Empire's desire to re-annex the territory lost in 1856. We found that the Great Powers approached the question of southern Bessarabia from the perspective of their own geopolitical interests rather than on the basis of the principles of international law. Germany, under the leadership of Otto von Bismarck, adopted the role of an 'honest broker', favouring the maintenance of European stability without opposing Russian claims. Austria-Hungary and Great Britain, although they expressed reservations about the expansion of Russian influence in the Danubian region, focused their opposition on the Bulgarian question rather than on the Bessarabian question. I have emphasised that France, weakened by the war against Prussia, was no longer able to play an active role as it had in 1856, confining itself to general support for the principles of the European balance of power. Italy, for its part, having recently been unified and keen to maintain its position within the international system, adopted a conciliatory stance. We have concluded that between January and May 1878, European diplomacy turned the Bessarabia question into a bargaining chip, carefully 'laying the groundwork' for the final decisions of the Congress of Berlin in the summer of that year.

In the subchapter **Romanian diplomacy and the Bessarabia issue (February–May 1878)**, I highlighted the Romanian diplomatic efforts directed at the European chancelleries to support Romania's desire to retain southern Bessarabia. I have shown that Ion C. Brătianu and

Mihail Kogălniceanu conducted sustained diplomatic efforts with the Great Powers, invoking not only Romania's decisive military contribution during the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), but, above all, the principles of international law enshrined in the Treaty of Paris of 1856, as well as the guarantees given by St Petersburg in the Romanian–Russian Convention of 1877 regarding Romania's territorial integrity. These efforts came up against the limitations of Romania's international status and the geostrategic interests of the Great Powers, which treated the issue of southern Bessarabia as a negotiable matter. Despite the protests of the Romanian Government and arguments of a historical and legal nature, Romanian diplomacy failed to secure firm guarantees from the Great Powers regarding the retention of southern Bessarabia, having been sidelined in the process of making crucial decisions.

In the sub-chapter **The Berlin Peace Congress and the redrawing of borders in south-eastern Europe (June–July 1878)** I examined the proceedings of the European forum that established the status of southern Bessarabia. I emphasised that, despite the diplomatic efforts of Ion C. Brătianu and Mihail Kogălniceanu, the final decision was influenced by the geostrategic interests of the Russian Empire and the other powers in maintaining the European balance of power. I noted that Romania, although recognised as an independent state following these diplomatic negotiations, was compelled to accept the loss of southern Bessarabia, receiving Dobruja as compensation. I highlighted the supportive interventions of certain European diplomats (such as the French plenipotentiary Waddington) who, during the proceedings of the Congress of Berlin, called for greater concessions to be made to Romania. I have presented the speeches of the two Romanian plenipotentiaries during the session on 1 July, who argued for respect for Romania's rights and as an independent state, protesting against the illegitimate nature of the reannexation of southern Bessarabia. Ultimately, the acceptance of Dobruja was presented as an imposed compensation, not a voluntary one.

In the subchapter **European public opinion and the Bessarabian question (1878)**, I have examined the stance of European public opinion regarding the Bessarabian question and the Russian Empire's claim to re-annex the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers. We noted that the European press displayed considerable support for Romania's efforts to retain southern Bessarabia, harshly criticising the Russian Empire's 'behaviour' towards its former ally.

In the subchapter **The Romanian–Russian Dispute over Bessarabia as Reflected in the Romanian Press (1878)**, we analysed one of the dominant themes of Romanian public discourse.

We noted that publications such as *Românul*, which was close to the Liberals, adopted a firm stance against the Russian Empire's claims, denouncing the abusive nature of the demand for the return of southern Bessarabia. I identified rhetoric centred largely on the idea of Russia's ingratitude towards Romania's decisive military involvement in the 1877–1878 war and its breach of the 1877 Convention. We noted that another important publication of the time, *Timpul*, through the articles of the poet Mihai Eminescu, took an uncompromising stance against Russian imperial policy, entering into a polemic with Russian newspapers regarding Romania's inalienable historical rights over Bessarabia. The Romanian press frequently invoked the provisions of the Treaty of Paris to argue the legitimacy of southern Bessarabia's belonging to Romania, as well as historical and legal arguments. We have highlighted that, in the Romanian press of 1878, the dispute with the Russian Empire over Bessarabia was reflected in a predominantly polemical and patriotic tone, contributing to the consolidation of a national consciousness centred on the idea of historical rights and state sovereignty.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we have shown in our thesis, the Bessarabian question in the international context of the years 1853–1878 emerged and was debated during a period marked by two Russo-Turkish wars (1853–1856; 1877–1878), when the Russian Empire sought to deliver the 'final blow' to the 'sick man' of Europe, the Ottoman Empire. During the period under investigation, the Bessarabian question occupied a 'prominent' place amongst the concerns of European diplomacy, which had divergent interests in this matter. The „Bessarabian dossier" was reopened with the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War in 1853, which culminated in a new Russian military occupation of the Romanian Principalities in the summer of that year. The Romanian émigrés of 1848–1849 believed that the time was ripe not only for the abolition of the Russian protectorate over the Romanian Principalities, but also for the Great Powers to carry out a 'historical redress': the return of the territory between the Pruth and Dniester rivers, annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812. However, as we have seen, subsequent events showed that only the 'European interest' prevailed; as a result, only southern Bessarabia was returned to the Principality of Moldavia. Although southern Bessarabia remained under the administration of the Principality of Moldavia/Romania for 22 years, the Russian Empire never came to terms with the loss of this territory and made numerous

attempts to re-annex it. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the 1878 Congress of Berlin decided that southern Bessarabia should be re-annexed to the Russian Empire, whilst Romania received, as ‘compensation’, Dobruja, the Danube Delta and Serpents' Island.

Our focus has been on the Bessarabian question in the international context between 1853 and 1878, and the positions adopted by Russia and by European and Ottoman diplomacy towards it it during this period, alongside the shifting „perspectives” of certain powers involved in the ‘Bessarabian question’.

Our examination of unpublished and published sources, together with an assessment of Romanian and Western historiography, has led us to several conclusions regarding the subject of this doctoral thesis, namely:

1. Following an analysis of Romanian, Soviet/Russian and Western historiography, we have found that, to date, there is no monograph covering the period 1853–1878, although there are studies on specific periods and issues. During the period of Soviet rule, the Bessarabian question in the context of the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1853–1856 and 1877–1878, as well as the status of southern Bessarabia within the Principality of Moldavia / Romania, remained an unexplored subject. Although several valuable studies have appeared since 1989, authored by Paul Cernovodeanu, Mihai Cojocariu, Sever-Mircea Catalan, Dumitru Vitcu, Ion Varta, Sorin Liviu Damean, Constantin Ardeleanu and others, the Bessarabian question is addressed in these works only tangentially or in a fragmentary manner, particularly in the context of the Russo-Turkish wars, with the exception of Paul Cernovodeanu’s comprehensive work. The volume of documents *The Delimitation of the Border in Southern Bessarabia between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire* (1856–1857), published in 2024, includes, for the first time, the reports of the *Commission for the Delimitation of the Bessarabian Border*, representing an important source for the study of the Bessarabian question.

2. An analysis of diplomatic sources and international events from the period 1853–1878 confirms the hypothesis of this study, namely that the Bessarabian question was not treated primarily as a Romanian national claim, but as a bargaining chip and an instrument of diplomatic negotiation. The Great Powers determined the status of the Bessarabian territory according to their own geostrategic interests.

3. It has been demonstrated that when the Bessarabian question was ‘reopened’ in 1853, the Great Powers sought to abolish the Russian protectorate over the Romanian Principalities and

replace it with their collective guarantee, while the reopening of the Bessarabian question was largely due to the efforts of Romanian political figures active in European capitals, such as Ion Ghica, C. A. Rosetti, the Golescu brothers, Gheorghe Magheru and others. They called upon the European chancelleries to restore the whole of Bessarabia, which had been fraudulently annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812.

4. We have concluded that, during the period 1853–1855, the Great Powers adopted differing stances on the Bessarabian question. Although it represented an important strategic territory – as evidenced by Omer Pasha's attempt to cross the Pruth in 1855, which was ultimately abandoned – European diplomacy did not, however, show any particular interest in Bessarabia. It is true that around 1854, consideration was given to the possibility of separating certain territories from the Russian Empire, including Bessarabia. However, France placed particular emphasis on the Danube question and freedom of navigation, while Britain advocated the incorporation of Bessarabia, together with the Romanian Principalities, into the Austrian Empire.

5. Following a rigorous analysis of documentary sources, in particular, I have concluded that in 1855, when the Austrian Foreign Minister Buol proposed that southern Bessarabia be returned to the Principality of Moldavia, this idea was not, entirely his own, as it had already been discussed in 1854 by the French Foreign Minister (Lhuys), with a view to the whole of Bessarabia being ceded to Austria in order to strengthen its border.

6. Having examined the diplomatic documents, I have concluded that by the end of 1855 the Great Powers had reached a consensus regarding the preliminary terms of peace to be imposed on the Russian Empire, specifically concerning the clause on the return of southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldova. On this occasion, we noted that Russian diplomacy had turned its attention to Napoleon III, who had emerged as a leading figure in Europe, in an attempt to retain southern Bessarabia.

7. Our investigations have led us to the conclusion that, at the beginning of 1856, Great Britain and France held opposing positions on the Bessarabian question. Whilst France agreed to the exchange of territories proposed by Russia—Kars in exchange for southern Bessarabia—Great Britain, on the contrary, rejected any such 'deal'. We have shown that even during the proceedings of the Paris Peace Congress in February–March 1856, there were 'frictions' between Great Britain and France over the issue of the Bessarabian border. Behind the scenes, Napoleon III "solemnly" promised Russia his support on this issue, whilst the Russian plenipotentiaries sought to retain the

town of Bolgrad, a move which ran counter to the objectives of the territorial demarcation: to remove the Russian Empire from the Danube.

8. I have established that the Russian Empire provided inaccurate maps to the European commissioners in an attempt to obstruct their work on the ground, where it was discovered that there were two localities named Bolgrad. Following research into archival sources and various scholarly works, we have demonstrated that, with the emergence of this 'dispute' over Bolgrad, the conventional division of the signatory powers to the Treaty of Paris of 18/30 March 1856 into two opposing 'camps' became even more pronounced: Great Britain, Austria and the Ottoman Empire versus the Russian Empire, France, and allegedly Prussia, while Sardinia maintained a neutral position. It was Prussia and Sardinia, in particular, whose votes could ultimately prove decisive.

9. I have highlighted the „ambiguous" stance of Emperor Napoleon III on the Bessarabian question, which he skilfully exploited to „draw closer" to the Russian Empire via the Bolgrad affair, considered a 'non-essential' and 'minor' issue for France. Upon examining the French emperor's private correspondence, in particular that exchanged with the French ambassador to London (Persigny), I discovered that he claimed he had not been properly informed by Foreign Minister Walewski regarding Bolgrad. Ultimately, as I have shown, Napoleon III, the master of diplomacy, resorted to 'behind-the-scenes manoeuvring', persuading the Sardinian minister (Camillo Cavour) to 'side' with Great Britain on the Bolgrad issue, and thus against France. Consequently, Napoleon III maintained his alliance with Great Britain, whilst at the same time preserving the prospect of a future alliance with the Russian Empire.

10. Our research confirms that, following the return of southern Bessarabia to the Principality of Moldova, the Russian Empire sought 'partners' to revise this clause of the Treaty of Paris as swiftly as possible. The analysed materials illustrate that France, too, through Baron Noury's mission of 1858–1859, sought to secure the neutrality of the Russian Empire in the war with Austria. Although, as mentioned, following the conclusion of the secret Franco-Russian treaty in 1859, the Russian Empire did not obtain the France support it had anticipated regarding the Bessarabian question. Nor, following the annexation of Nice and Savoy in 1860, was France willing to support the revisions of the relevant provisions of the Treaty of Paris sought by the Rusian Empire.

11. I have highlighted the Russian Empire's attempts to 'co-opt' the Bulgarian settlers in southern Bessarabia in an effort to destabilise the situation in the Romanian Principalities, capitalising on the fact that they had enjoyed certain privileges under Tsarist rule. We have demonstrated how, in 1861, a 'Bessarabian delegation' travelled to Constantinople with the aim of criticising the rule of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza. However, these subversive efforts were unsuccessful, as the Great European Powers supported the position of the Romanian prince, who adopter a conciliatory attitude and offered certain concessions to the Bulgarian settlers.

12. We also emphasised the entry of the Polish detachment, led by Colonel Milkowski, into southern Bessarabia in the summer of 1863, and concluded from this incident that Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza could not be accused of russophilia, as he acted resolutely to ensure respect for the inviolability of the Romanian Principalities. At the same time, we emphasised that this action was not intended bring about Cuza's dethronement.

13. Another of our conclusions is that, as it drew closer to Austria-Hungary and Germany, the Russian Empire succeeded in 'bringing the question of southern Bessarabia back onto the agenda'. We have demonstrated how, during the secret negotiations between the Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary, held at Reichstadt in 1876, a verbal agreement was reached that, in the event of a victorious war against the Ottoman Empire, St Petersburg would re-annex southern Bessarabia, whilst Vienna would acquire Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, from an examination of diplomatic documents and other sources, I have concluded that the Romanian Foreign Minister Mihail Kogălniceanu learnt of the Reichstadt arrangements in the summer of 1877.

14. Based on the sources examined, I have established that, during the Romanian–Russian meeting at Livadia in 1876, Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu raised the issue of southern Bessarabia and even the possibility of a territorial exchange involving Dobruja.

15. I have shown that, following the conclusion of the Romanian-Russian Convention of April 1877, which guaranteed Romania's territorial integrity as well as the transit of the Russian army through Romanian territory, Russian diplomacy did not raise the issue of the re-annexation of southern Bessarabia whilst Emperor Alexander II and Russian officials were in Ploiești. It was only after the victory over the Ottoman Empire, achieved with Romania's decisive military support, that P. Ignatiev, the Tsar's envoy, arrived in Bucharest in January 1878 and presented the Romanian authorities with the Russian claim to southern Bessarabia.

16. I have concluded that at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the signatory powers to the 1856 Treaty of Paris did not support Romania's position on the Bessarabian question, having shifted ther priorities away from free navigation on the Danube and the objective of distancing the Russian Empire from the mouths of this European river. Thus, as we have observed, once again the selfish interests of the Great Powers prevailed to the detriment of the smaller states, the 'Bessarabian dossier' serving as a case in point.

17. We concluded that Romania's historical claims to Bessarabia were not taken in account at the Berlin Peace Congress, and Russian diplomacy was compelled, in response to the historical arguments advanced by M. Kogălniceanu and Ion C. Brătianu, to justify itself, claiming that this matter was one of 'honour' for Emperor Alexander II.

18. We have concluded that Romania acted resolutely on the international stage, with a significant section of international public opinion supporting it, whilst criticising the lack of involvement by the European powers in supporting the young Eastern European state.

Thus, the development of the Bessarabian question in the international context between 1853 and 1878 was marked by two Russo-Turkish wars, with significant implications and consequences for the Romanian Principalities/Romania. Whilst in 1856 the Bessarabian question was internationalised and the Principalities were placed under the collective guarantee of the Great Powers, by 1878 the major European chancelleries, preoccupied with other matters, had abandoned Romania, and the Bessarabian question became the „litmus test" of Romanian-Russian relations. Following the loss of southern Bessarabia in 1878, Romania reoriented its foreign policy towards Germany.

Recommendations

Following the research into *The Bessarabia Question in an International Context (1853–1878)*, and in light of the conclusions and generalisations set out above, we hereby formulate a series of recommendations:

1. Further research into the Bessarabian question in an international context, from the Congress of Berlin until to the Great Union of 1918. National and Western archives contain documentary material that has not yet been examined in the context of such a study.

2. The inclusion of our research topic as a subject of study within a course covering the evolution of the Bessarabian question from 1812 to 1878, and possibly up to 1918, intended for faculties of history, political science and international relations, European diplomacy, etc.

3. The production of a comprehensive volume entitled *The Evolution of the Bessarabian Question in an International Context (1812–1918)*, to be translated into foreign languages so as to be accessible to researchers, diplomats, political scientists, students, and all those interested in international relations in the Republic of Moldova and abroad.

4. Participation in international projects focused on identifying, presenting and publishing Western diplomatic documents from the period 1856–1878, with the involvement of specialists Romania and other European countries.

5. The organization of public lectures in higher education institutions and secondary schools, focusing primarily on the Bessarabian question in an international context (1853–1878), whilst also examining its relevance to contemporary international relations.

6. More in-depth research into European public opinion during the period in question and the place occupied by the Bessarabian issue in the writings and reports of journalists of the time.

7. Wider dissemination in the media of Bessarabian question in its international context during the nineteenth century – an issue whose repercussions and consequences are still felt today – in order to facilitate our society's efforts towards European integration.

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ANNOTATION

Author: Sclifos Eugen-Tudor

Title: The Bessarabian Question in an International Context (1853–1878), habilitation thesis in History, Chișinău, 2026.

Structure of the thesis: introduction, five chapters, 29 subchapters, general conclusions and recommendations, a bibliography comprising 507 titles, and 287 pages of main text.

Keywords: Bessarabia; Eastern Question; Crimean War; Great Powers; European diplomacy; Treaty of Paris (1856); Treaty of Berlin (1878).

Field of study: History of the Romanians.

Aim and objectives of the thesis: To examine the complexity of the Bessarabian question within the context of international relations between 1853 and 1878 by identifying the interests and strategies pursued by the Great Powers in Southeastern Europe. The objectives of this research are to examine the Bessarabian question within the system of international relations (1853–1878) and to analyse the process through which this question became internationalised.

Scientific novelty: The thesis represents a study devoted to the evolution of the Bessarabian question within the context of relations among the Great Powers between 1853 and 1878, approaching the Bessarabian question from the perspective of the European system of international relations and the political and diplomatic interests of the principal actors involved.

Results obtained: The investigation of the complex aspects of the Bessarabian question has led to the substantiation and demonstration that this question represented not merely a 'dispute' between the Russian Empire and Romania, but an issue of European significance forming part of the broader 'Eastern Question'.

Theoretical value: The theoretical value of the thesis derives from the comprehensive interpretation of the subject under investigation, highlighting the interaction between legal principles, the geopolitical interests of the Great Powers, their diplomatic practices, and the mechanisms through which the Bessarabian question became internationalised.

Practical value: The results of our scientific research may be applied to the development of history curricula, school and university textbooks, and comprehensive works on national and world history, foreign policy, and the history of international relations. They may also contribute to the development of courses on the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

Implementation of the results: The results of this habilitation thesis have been implemented through the publication of monographs, articles, studies, and collections of documents intended for the academic and university communities, as well as for the wider public interested in history, political science, international relations, diplomacy, and foreign policy. They may also serve as a basis for the preparation of works on modern history at bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels.

SCLIFOS EUGEN-TUDOR

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