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Dr. ANDREW FALL
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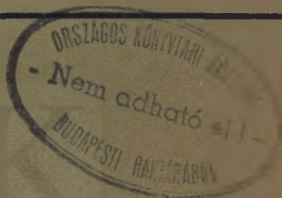
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CAROL I OF RUMANIA (II*)

BY

ZSOMBOR DE SZASZ

After taking the oath to observe the Constitution Prince Carol had declared that "having been spontaneously elected Prince of Rumania by the entire nation", he had unhesitatingly left his family and former fatherland to respond to the call of the people which had wished to lay its future in his hands.

These were fine words, and the legislative assembly cheered enthusiastically on hearing them. But there was a slight drawback connected with them. The Hohenzollern Prince could not be elected "Prince of Rumania", for the simple reason that there was as yet no State bearing the name of Rumania. In 1886, when the election occurred, there was a State composed of two loosely connected provinces, the "United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia" created ten years before by the Congress of Paris and subjected to the suzerainty of the Turkish Sultan, a suzerainty which the Congress of Paris left intact. Prince Carol became the ruler, not of a Rumania which had no existence in the community of nations, but of the two semi-independent Principalities under Turkish control, Moldavia and Wallachia.

This was an intolerable situation, not so much for the Rumanian people, "who naturally had no understanding for the complexities inherent in the international status of their country", as for their Prince, who, coming as he did from one of the mightiest dynasties of the Continent, keenly felt the weakness engendered by the want of unity and the indignity of being subjected to the control of a non-Christian Power. In a conversation he had soon after his election with Wilhelm, King of Prussia and head of the Hohenzollern

* See the previous article under the same title in the January 1942 issue of this review.

family, Prince Charles declared that this acceptance of Turkish overlordship was only temporary and accompanied with „the tacit reservation that he would free himself from it as soon as possible, by the force of arms if necessary.” These too were brave words more easily spoken than carried out. A war between two Great Powers, Russia and Turkey, had to intervene before Rumanian independence could be realised.

Neither of the two questions, the union of the Principalities and the independence of a future Rumania, was of general European concern. As we endeavoured to show in a previous article, the attitude of the Great Powers was divided on the subject. But even France and England, the Powers in favour of a union, took so little interest in the Rumanian question that there were times when they were prepared to sacrifice even the existence of the Principalities in order to further the solution of other European problems.

In the early sixties the Piemontese Government conceived the idea that Austria might be induced to surrender Venetia, if she were to be compensated with the two Danubian Principalities. The plan was favoured by the British Government and was laid by Lord Russell before the French and Turkish Governments. His proposal did not meet with success, nor did, later on, after the fall of Cuza, Napoleon's similar endeavour to settle the Austro-Piemontese question by ceding the two Principalities to Austria in compensation for Venetia and Lombardy, although the Grand Vizier, Ali Pasha, declared that if they were to be lost to Turkey, the Porte would rather see them in Austrian hands than independent. Thiers was inclined to cede them to Austria independently of the Italian question. The plan was wrecked on Austria's reluctance. The Rumanians had never been genuinely liked in Western Europe. "The Moldo-Wallachians", — wrote Professor T. Riker, the historian who wrote "The Making of Rumania" — "were not looked upon as having any of the charm with which the romantic spirit of the nineteenth century had clothed the revolting Greeks, and, west of Vienna, Europe was not greatly interested in the Danubian Principalities." "It was rather" — he went on, — "because the question presented, as some-

what remote questions often do, a test of strength between opposing parties among the Powers."

The consequence of this European attitude was that Prince Carol was left to fight out his battle with his suzerain single-handed.

His first endeavour was to secure the Sultan's recognition, which proved no easy task; in fact, it was a long time before an agreement could be reached. The Sultan was bent on maintaining intact his right of suzerainty, secured to him by treaty; the Prince was just as anxious to deliver his new country from the brutal bonds of vassalage. The first clause of the draft *firman* sent by the Grand Vizier declared that "Prince Carol pledges himself and the Principalities to acknowledge the suzerainty of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan and never to try to loosen the ties of vassalage which unite them with the Ottoman Empire." Clause 2 stipulated that "the Principalities shall be called 'United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia'". Clause 4 excluded from the succession to the throne "those members of the Prince's family who lived in Germany". In addition, the draft stressed the unity of the Ottoman Empire, of which the Principalities were only a part; the latter were not to be allowed to send representatives to foreign countries, but were to be represented abroad by Turkish diplomats. The creation of Rumanian decorations and a separate coinage was also forbidden. And provision was made for the presence of a Turkish Government Agent in Bucharest.

The Rumanian Government naturally rejected the Turkish draft.

In their counter-proposal they agreed to maintain the ancient tie which bound the Principalities to the Turkish Empire, but declared their intention of assuming for their country the name of "Rumania" or "United Rumanian Principalities". The other clauses were either rejected outright or accepted in an altered form. The phrase to which Prince Carol objected most strongly, refusing absolutely to accept it, was that declaring that the Principalities formed "*une partie integrante de l'Empire Ottomane*".

A prolonged period of haggling followed, in a gradually changing atmosphere. After an incredibly short campaign

Austria was defeated by Prussia, which therewith became one of the most important factors in European politics, her ruling dynasty heading the most formidable army on the Continent. The Porte could not avoid being influenced by these events. It became increasingly tractable, so that at the end of October 1866 an agreement was finally reached. The idea of a *firman* was abandoned, and the Porte's stipulations were embodied in a letter addressed by the Grand Vizier, Mehemmed Rushdi Pasha, to Prince Carol and dated October 18; the latter replied in a letter to the Pasha the day after.

Neither letter contained any provision in regard to the country's future name, but in the Grand Vizier's letter it was alluded to throughout as "the United Principalities" or "Moldo-Wallachia", the people being mentioned as "Moldo-Wallachians". Carol was recognised as hereditary Prince and empowered to maintain an army of 30,000 men; this number was not to be increased without the permission of the Sultan. The State was to be allowed to mint its own coins, though with the emblems of the Empire stamped on one side; but it was not permitted to create orders or confer decorations. The annual tribute to be paid to Turkey was to be increased, but the time and manner were not specified.

The Grand Vizier's letter concluded with an invitation to Prince Carol to "come to Constantinople and hear from the Sultan's own lips His sincere wishes for the good fortune and prosperity of the Moldo-Wallachian population."

Prince Carol accepted the invitation with pleasure. He had, as a matter of fact, intended to present himself to his suzerain lord some time before, but it had been intimated to him that his visit would not be acceptable in Constantinople so long as the conditions of his recognition were not settled. This difficulty being now removed, there was no longer any obstacle to the visit.

Soon after the exchange of the letters which regulated the recognition, the Prince started for Constantinople, where he was received with special honours and extreme cordiality by the Sultan.

The Memoirs of Prince Carol give us an interesting and picturesque account of this visit.

Carol arrived in the Turkish capital in the morning of October 24, and was at once captivated by the magnificent situation of the town, which reminded him of that of Lisbon. He was received by high officials of the Sultan and by the dragomans of all the foreign Embassies.

At half past two in the afternoon, attired in the uniform of a Rumanian general, he boarded the Imperial Yacht, which took him to the Sultan's palace, the Dolma Baghtse. He was met at the entrance by the Grand Vizier, who conducted him to a comparatively small room, where the Sultan already awaited him and greeted him in the most friendly manner, shaking him by the hand.

The Sultan seated himself on a large sofa, by the side of which a chair had been placed for the Prince. The latter, however, took no notice of this arrangement and, relying on the privilege accorded by equal dynastic rank, sat down on the sofa beside his suzerain lord.

The Sultan was a young man of thirty-one, short and corpulent, with a sinister expression. As he spoke neither French nor German, the services of a dragoman had to be called in.

The conversation started on neutral subjects, such as the weather and the Prince's journey. But soon the visitor turned the talk to political questions and took the opportunity to assure the Sultan that he was honestly determined to respect the existing treaties. The Sultan graciously accepted his protestations, then went on to discuss the internal situation of the Principalities, more especially as regarded their finances.

After the conclusion of the conversation the Sultan, not without embarrassment, handed the Prince a "paper", that is, the *firman* of investiture, which the latter placed on the table before him unread, while he asked the Sultan for permission to introduce to him his Ministers, who were waiting in the adjoining room. Before even the requested permission was granted, he opened the door, bade the waiting men enter, and introduced them one by one to the Sultan. After the introduction he took the "paper" from the table and gave it to his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Prince Stirbey, to take home with him.

Prince Carol spent some days in Constantinople, receiving and returning the visits of the Turkish Ministers and high officials, of the members of the diplomatic corps, the Orthodox Patriarch and the Primate of the Uniate Church. At the last minute of his sojourn he received the Sultan's permission to create a special Rumanian military order.

At midnight on the 30th of October he left Constantinople, not only *de facto* but also *de jure* Prince of the United Principalities. In the course of the following months he was recognised also by the European Powers, and "instead of the half-baked status inaugurated by the events of 1859 the State now enjoyed a new and regularised position".

In connection with the recognition of the Porte, we may perhaps be allowed to quote some remarks of the late Professor Iorga, one of the most eminent historians of modern Rumania.

According to Professor Iorga, the long-drawn-out negotiations and bargaining could have been easily avoided by means well-known to Rumanian statesmen but unknown to a Prince brought up in the West, and inexplicably not divulged to him. All that was needed was to address themselves, not to the diplomatist or official, but to the *man*. During the Prince's journey 250,000 *lei* were expended in *backsheesh*; had four times that sum been laid out judiciously, the desired goal would have been reached more completely and with much greater dispatch than by negotiation. All the world knows, — wrote Professor Iorga in 1923, — that Constantinople, for all its thin layer of constitutionalism, adheres to the old law that it is better to pay and spare one's words than to talk with empty hands.

During the next few years the new ruler was fully occupied in reforming every branch of political, social and financial life.

His first care was the creation of a modern army. The existing army was a dirty and badly equipped rabble, its arms a heterogeneous assortment of rifles of various makes, its ammunition far below the requisite quantity. Professor Iorga tells us that the *morale* of the soldiers, and especially of the officers, was not "extraordinary", meaning thereby that it was extraordinarily bad. They accepted bribes

from the Turks, and desertions from the frontier regiments were of daily occurrence.

The country's finances were in a ruinous state, its means of communication deplorable. In 1866 there was not so much as a mile of railroad in the two Principalities, and the high-roads were simply awful — deserts of dust in summer and oceans of mud in the autumn. It was, as Prince Carol expressed it in German, "*ein unfertiges Land*", an unfinished country. In his first Speech from the Throne he demanded more honesty, more industry and more economy.

Such speeches were little relished by the masses, nor did the Prince's reforming zeal appeal to a people whose life had been ruled for centuries by oriental quietism, traditional indifference and religious orthodoxy, and who, far removed from the centres of European thought, had been left almost untouched by the revolutionary movements and currents of the nineteenth century. The Prince was not popular.

His unpopularity was enhanced by the fact that he was one of the most ardent champions, in fact the embodiment, of the union of the two Principalities. The Moldavians had never looked on the union as a desirable goal — in fact they detested the idea. For centuries the two provinces had had a separate existence, each being ruled by its own Prince and government, and having its own capital. For Moldavia the union meant relegation to the background, Wallachian preponderance, the elevation of Bucharest as the sole capital, and the decline of Iassy to the level of a provincial town. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that there was a strong anti-unionist movement in Moldavia. At the first general elections one third of the elected members were separatists.

A detailed description of the country's internal politics and their development would lie outside the scope of this article. It would take more space than we have at our disposal to tell the story of the dynastic crisis of 1870 and 1871. In 1870 an open rebellion broke out, and a republic was declared in Ploesti, but the movement was quelled without difficulty. In March 1871 the Bucharest mob broke the windows of a house in which the German colony was celebrating the Prussian victories over the French. Carol promptly

abdicated, but reconsidered his decision on being assured that he could place full reliance on the Conservatives, and by degrees the crisis subsided. But he never became a really popular ruler, and suffered under the knowledge to the end of his long and laborious life.

The Prince's investiture brought no change in regard to the international status of the Principalities. They were more closely united than they had been under Cuza, but their official name was, as before, "The United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia", and, far from being an independent State, they were still subjected to the suzerainty of the Porte.

On January 1, 1867, the representative of France used the name "Rumania" when tendering his New Year's greetings; but his example was not followed, and the Porte never recognised the name. In the draft of the Turkish Constitution of 1877 the territory of Rumania is alluded to as "the privileged Provinces".

From January 1873, when Prince Carol first discussed the subject of the country's independence with his Ministers, he never for an instant lost sight of this objective, notwithstanding the fact that he received no encouragement in the matter. When, in June of that year, he mentioned the subject to Count Andrassy, the latter dissuaded him from taking individual action. His father, Prince Anthony, also advised him to wait and see what turn Balkan affairs were going to take.

Space forbids our enlarging on the development of the Eastern question. The Rumanian problem formed part of it and could not be solved independently. If a peaceful solution could be reached on the larger issue, then Rumania's problem would also be solved peacefully; if not, then it would have to be decided by war. By 1876 it became increasingly evident that the latter was the only possibility left open; that summer war was already imminent between Russia and Turkey; and Rumania had to make up her mind whether she should participate in it, and if so, to what extent.

In October the Rumanian Prime Minister, I. Brătianu, visited the Tsar in Livadia, and later in April 1877, a treaty was concluded settling the conditions under which the

Russian forces would be permitted to cross Rumanian territory. The supposition was that Rumania would remain neutral; Russian statesmen were convinced that their country could dispense with the military assistance of the Rumanians. "Russia does not need the aid of the Rumanian army", Prince Gortshakov had haughtily declared. Under the treaty Russia guaranteed the territorial integrity of Rumania; but the Rumanians distrusted the Russians, and were convinced that they would eventually seize Bessarabia. "The Russians", wrote Creţulescu from Berlin, "will violate the Paris Convention and take Bessarabia. We have no power to prevent this, but in return for our compliance we must have independence, and Rumania must become a kingdom."

At the end of April the Russian forces began to cross the Rumanian frontiers, and a few days later, on May 10, the Rumanian Parliament announced Rumania's rupture with Turkey and declared her independence.

The Russians, meanwhile, progressed but slowly; they crossed the Danube and seized the Balkan passes, but were met at Plevna by the invincible resistance of Osman Pasha. They suffered such heavy losses that they were forced to appeal for assistance to Prince Carol, who, hastily appointed Commander of the united Russian and Rumanian troops, came to their aid with 50,000 men. After a prolonged siege Osman Pasha was forced to surrender, and it transpired that the Turkish army was practically broken. In January 1878 armistice negotiations commenced which led to the Treaty of San Stefano, which caused keen disappointment among the Rumanians. They had not been allowed to participate in the negotiations, on the ground that, pending recognition by the Powers, Rumania was not yet an independent State. The Treaty restored to Russia the three southern districts of Bessarabia which the Treaty of Paris had given to Rumania. After coming to Russia's succour and saving her from defeat, holding in their hands a treaty which guaranteed the territorial integrity of their country, the Rumanians were rewarded for their assistance by losing half of Bessarabia.

They were, naturally, shocked and indignant. Prince and Parliament, Ministers and public opinion protested, but

protested in vain. "You cannot alter our decision", said Gortshakov to General Ghica, — "it is unchangeable. You are faced by a political necessity." It was rumoured that the Tsar had declared that he would disarm the Rumanian forces and occupy the entire country if the Rumanians persisted in their protests. Which alleged threat Prince Carol countered by remarking that he did not believe the Tsar could have uttered those words, but if he had, the Rumanian army, which had fought side by side with the Russians, "would let itself be annihilated but never disarmed."

The Russian decision was "unchangeable". Prince Carol and his Government centred their hopes, as a last resort, on the Congress of Berlin, but were once again disappointed. The Russian standpoint was that Rumania was not an independent State, but part of the Turkish Empire. Russia had guaranteed the territorial integrity of Rumania only against Turkey, and the retrocession of the Bessarabian territories was demanded from Turkey, not from Rumania, which country still formed part of the Ottoman Empire. If the Rumanians refused to comply, Russia would take Bessarabia by force.

On July 1, 1878, the two Rumanian Ministers, Brătianu and Kogălniceanu — they were not members of the Congress — were given permission to read to the assembly a memorandum on the Bessarabian question. No one listened; Rumania was a *quantité négligeable* in European politics, and the Powers had other and more important problems to consider than the grievances of the Rumanians. Not a single voice was raised in their favour, and Bessarabia was lost to them. Lord Beaconsfield remarked to Brătianu by way of consolation: "in politics ingratitude is often the price of the best services".

Nevertheless Rumania did not return from the Congress quite emptyhanded. As compensation for the lost Bessarabian districts she was given a strip of land in the Dobrudja, and, what was even more important for her, her independence was recognised. The recognition was, however, made dependent on two conditions: that she put no hindrance in the way of the cession of Bessarabia, and that the removal of all religious disabilities would be enacted in her Constitution.

Having no friends at the Congress nor any other support to fall back upon, she had perforce to yield.

Writing to his father in August, Prince Carol said:

"It is sad that Europe should have forced a young and virile State, which has shown its strength and vitality in the course of a murderous war, to acquiesce in the cession of a province. It may have been all right for the Berlin Congress to restore to Russia what the Treaty of Paris had taken from her; but it is deeply insulting to make our independence, won by us on the battle-field, dependent on the cession of Bessarabia; much patience and moderation are required to suffer such an affront with calm. But we will show the Powers that we can bear even the worst that can befall us without losing our honour."

Soon another obstacle arose to impede the realisation of the cherished dream of independence. The removal of all religious disabilities involved the emancipation of the Jews, and this the Rumanians would not grant. Repeated drafts of the clause in question were made and submitted to the Powers, only to be rejected again and again, until, after two years of haggling, a formula was devised which they found acceptable. At last, in February 1880, the Powers intimated their readiness to recognise the independent Rumanian State.

There was only one step more towards complete statehood: Rumania had to be made a kingdom.

This, too, was accomplished. Although the idea was not popular among the Liberals, the proposal to proclaim the country a kingdom was made and accepted in Parliament on March 26, 1881. On May 10, (Old Calendar), Prince Carol and Princess Elizabeth were crowned King and Queen of Rumania. The King's crown was forged from the steel of a cannon captured at Plevna.

It was sixty years last May since Rumania as an independent kingdom first took her place in the community of European States.