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How the State Shaped the Nation: an Essay on the Making of the Romanian Nation

I approach in this study the ways in which the state influenced and shaped the organization of nation on the territory of modern Romania. I understand here the nation as a frame of perception, a conceptual device, a classificatory tool used by the individual to make sense of its surrounding world. Instead of seeing the world divided in people belonging to different religions, or as subjects of various dynasties, the modern man (and woman) tends to perceive boundaries dividing groups of people into homogeneous, horizontally linked community of equals.¹ How did the Romanian-speaking people embrace (or reject) the concept according to which they belong to an (imagined) community usually denominated as the Romanian nation?

I will focus on the organization and activities of the various state-forms that existed throughout the history in the area as my main explanatory variables. My study does not claim that other variables (such as rise of capitalism, the spread of literacy or the common history, language and myths) are not important, and indeed, essential, in understanding the contemporary ethnic and national landscape of Romania. Nonetheless, the presentation of the manner in which the state contributed to the tectonic movements that led to the current 'national' perception and self-perception constitutes the main goal of this essay.

I adopt in this study the 'modernist' perspective, according to which the concept of nation, as an intellectual notion aiming to describe the reality 'out-there', is a modern creation that dates from the 18th century. I intend to il-

¹ Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York, London: Verso, 1983.

illustrate in the next pages the way in which the concept of a “Romanian nation” spread and got its current audience, stressing role of state policies and institutions in this process.

I will open my study with a section on the historical origins of the Romanian, state. I will continue with the survey of the developments that led to the creation of a modern state whose *raison d'être* was a putative Romanian nation. I elaborate on the ways in the state was created by the efforts of a political movement that grounded its claim for power on ethno-cultural terms. Further on, I address the ways in which the political entrepreneurs of the young Romania used state policies and state institutions in order to spread of the idea of a Romanian nation among its putative members, building a sense of community often grounded on the rejection of the non-Romanians—hence, the Jews. I end with three study cases (Bessarabia, Transylvania, and Dobrogea) upon which I test my main thesis: that the state was an essential factor in the building of the contemporary concept of a Romanian nation, as a frame of perception shared by the large majority of its citizens.

Historical origins of the idea of a state for Romanians

The speakers of the various regional dialects of Romanian seem to have shared throughout their known history several regional myths of origin (prince's Dragoș hunting expedition for Moldova, Negru Vodă for Wallachia) but also shared a common one, which made them the “heirs of the ancient Romans.” Nevertheless, they were subjects of different medieval states (Moldova, Wallachia and the Hungarian Kingdom). It is worth noting that, until the modern age, even in the cases in which one of these kingdoms or provinces happened to defeat and conquer the other, none of their rulers thought about uniting them into a single state.² The idea of a Romanian nation, deserving, or claiming its own state, was clearly not conceived, nor claimed by anyone before the XVIIIth century.

The first mention of the idea of a single state for all the people speaking Romanian seems to be born out of international relations arrangements: several XVIIIth century projects of the European diplomatic game suggested the unification of Moldova with Wallachia (and sometimes with Transylvania)

² I consider irrelevant for my purpose the brief intermezzo of less than a year in which the three provinces were ruled, in a personal (but not formal) union, by Michael the Brave, prince of Wallachia between 1593 and 1601.

and the creation of a new Dacian³ kingdom⁴. Although these projects had nothing to do with the idea of a nation ‘deserving’ its state, they were the first to put forward the possibility of a common state for the inhabitants of Moldova and Wallachia. Only few of these projects included also the Romanians from Transylvania, as they were under the solid Habsburg rule, and therefore, difficult to disentangle from the existing empire. The latent assumption that favored the unification of the two principalities emphasized their common features. On the one hand, they shared a similar position in the international arena, as semi-autonomous principalities under an increasingly weak Ottoman suzerainty. On the other hand, they comprised populations sharing the same language, ethnicity and religion. In addition, at least in the tradition put forward by the Russian or Austrian diplomats, the two states shared the same past, as the reference to the Roman province of Dacia indicates.

Another level of analysis that can help us understanding the ways in which the unification of the two principalities became conceivable came into being stresses the parallelisms and the similarities between the Moldavian and Wallachian states. While in the middle age they were autonomous states ruled by local dynasties, the rise of Ottoman Empire transformed them little by little in dependent principalities with no army and no foreign policy, except those of their suzerain, the Sublime Porte.

Between 1711 and 1821 the two principalities were ruled by the Sublime Porte, through the intermediary of its Greek diplomats who could afford to pay their way to the office by bribing the influential figures around the Sultan. The successful ones were appointed princes of Moldova or Wallachia. This practice resulted, naturally, in a very frequent rotation of these ruling princes as the Sublime Porte could always use some more bribes from fresh candidates. Rarely a ruler managed to stay in power for more than three-four years during this period. For example Constantin Mavrocordato, ruled six brief reigns as prince of Wallachia and three as prince of Moldova.⁵ The century of Greek rule stressed, in my view, the similarity, the parallelism and the interchangeability of the two principalities. The historical sources confirm the surprisingly smooth functioning of a system in which one could be this year prince of Moldavians and next year prince of Wallachians (and then the

³ A reference to the state defeated by the Roman Emperor Trajan, which extended over a major part of the territory inhabited by Romanian speakers.

⁴ Barbara, Jelavich: *Russia and the formation of the Romanian national state 1821–1878*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 7.

⁵ Seton-Watson, Robert W.: *History of Roumanians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934. 127.

other way around), transferring clientele, ministers and state clerks from one country to another. This state of affairs has surely eroded the medieval belief in the specificity and uniqueness of each principality.

First political movements justifying in ethnic terms their attempt to control the state

Following this almost “colonial” situation, at the turn of XVIIIth century the local elites began the fight against the “foreign” (Greek) rule, its protégées and its culture, appealing to the suzerain in Constantinople to appoint princes from the Moldavian or Wallachian aristocracy instead of non-Romanians. It was still an argument buttressed with “historic” rights of the local aristocracy but –especially due to the influence of rising Greek nationalism- it began to be permeated by the ideas of a particularistic culture entitled to its own state and development. When the Ottomans restored the local rulers to the thrones of the two principalities in 1821, these princes attempted to “clean” the local culture putting in practice anti-Greek policies: closing Greek schools and expelling Greek monks.⁶

According to John Breuilly’s theory of nationalism⁷ as a form of politics, a political movement becomes nationalist only when it defines its objective as the possession of state power and defends this goal in the name of a specific cultural community. The anti-Greek movement of 1820 in the Romanian Principalities implied *coordination*, a heterogeneous set of political elites, acting in common in the attempt to gain control over the state.⁸ At the same time, the movement had a *mobilizing* aspect, as it was linked to a popular uprising that kept in close touch with influential local aristocrats (if it was not orchestrated by them). The leader of this uprising, Tudor Vladimirescu is famous for stating that: “*Greece belongs to the Greeks, but Rumania to the Rumanians.*”⁹ Yet, he used Rumania as a particularistic term denominating Wallachia or Țara Românească (“The Romanian Land”) and not a putatively Romanian state including Moldova, not to speak about Transylvania. More than that, Vladimirescu’s immediate goal was to re-gain the medieval privilege of having local noblemen rule in Wallachia and another one in Moldova. In this sense, state control was gained by local elites *before* any serious attempt of unifying the two states into a nation-state. It is unfortunate that the illuminating

⁶ Seton-Watson, 202.

⁷ Breuilly, John: *Nationalism and the State*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.

⁸ Breuilly, 382.

⁹ Seton-Watson, 198.

concepts developed by Breuilly are almost ruined in the case-study dedicated to “the Romanians and the Serbians¹⁰” by his insufficient knowledge of the cases he aims to cover. Breuilly sees the Romanian case as a pure case of separatist nationalism, missing perhaps the unique case in the modern European history when unification and creation of a modern state occurs not through conquest of a hegemonic state (such as Prussia or Piedmont, which ‘made’ Germany and Italy) but because of a mutually accepted union of two relatively equal states. As a matter of fact, the history of modern Romania involves all Breuilly’s categories. The so-called “national movement” (*partida națională*) was moved at the same time by *unification nationalism* (as it struggled to unite the two principalities), by *separatist nationalism* (as it looked for complete independence from Ottoman Empire) and by *reform nationalism* (as it intended to modernize and reform the state).

The making of the modern national state and the idea of a Romanian nation

The rise of the modern Romanian state, issued out of the unification of Wallachia with Moldova was shaped by a protracted conflict between a party of usually older noblemen who favored the status-quo, and a group of young aristocrats who, after studying in Western Europe, were looking to modernize the two feudal principalities along national and liberal lines. All of them were members of the restricted oligarchy, which traditionally controlled the state.

Romanian nationalism, understood as the claim there is a Romanian nation, which is entitled to its own state, seems to have been born in the first half of the XIXth century. Under the impact of the Western European ‘national’ master-frame of perceiving and classifying the world, young noblemen studying in France discovered each other as members of a putative nation. In a published letter, a member of this generation remembers a first meeting of Moldavian and Wallachian students in 1835 Paris in a highly significant insight, despite its obviously compressed and literary form: “*our mentors met on the street and began to talk- and we discovered each other, Moldavians with Wallachians, each speaking our provincial dialect, but understanding each other as if we would have spoken the same language. What a revelation! From that moment we weren’t anymore Moldavians or Wallachians, we were all Romanians!*”¹¹ It was these students and their followers who set up to unify the two principalities and orga-

¹⁰ Breuilly, 136.

¹¹ Ghica, Ion: *Scrisori către Vasile Alecsandri*. [Letters for Vasile Alecsandri] București: Editura Librăriei Leon Alcalay, 1905. 155–6.

nize them into a new state, created along the lines of the modern Western European states.

To set the framework for this process, I will note that by 1840–1850's the political arenas in the two principalities were monopolized by a handful of noblemen: 30 *boyards* controlled Moldova while 70 controlled Wallachia.¹² The political and administrative structures in both principalities dated from the middle ages. The modernizing policies pursued by the young Moldavian and Wallachian Westernizers can be seen in the light of Michael Mann's¹³ theory on nationalism. He emphasizes on the *political economy of the state* as a main explanatory variable for the rise of nationalist policies, focusing on the increasing burdens states had to deal with at the beginning of XIXth century. For the young liberals, as well as for a significant part of the dominant class—which used to send their children to study in Western Europe—Moldova and Wallachia were backward and “uncivilized” states that had to be modernized. The hegemonic pattern of the time was the drive toward a centralized, modern nation-state, whose exemplary model, for the majority of the Romanian elite, was France. In consequence the Romanian state mobilized *top-down*, controlled from above by authoritarian forces that imposed a modernizing process upon the rest of the society, within the limits, and using the tools, of the state apparatus. In their attempt to reform the existing regimes, the Romanian Western-educated reformers tried to make space for a larger participation in the political arena, and thus for more of those who would support their policies. The generation gap that separated the young national-liberal group from the older representatives of the status-quo also favored the changes. The young reformers lost in 1848, when their revolutions were crushed by the intervention of Russia and Turkey, but things went better in 1859, when they managed to push through the double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza on both the thrones of Moldova and Wallachia, creating the modern Romania. After this date, few forces opposed the major modernizing lines proposed by them: a modern national state apparatus, the rule of law and a democratic Constitution, independence from Turkey and a foreign prince from a major European dynasty on the throne. While these issues tended to convene the consensus of all the parties that composed the political arena, the major dividing lines turned toward social issues, the relations

¹² Durandin, Catherine: *Histoire des Roumains*. Paris: Fayard, 1995. 105.

¹³ Mann, Michael: *A Political Theory of Nationalism and Its Excesses*. In Periwal, Sukumar (ed.): *Notions of Nationalism*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995. 45.

between peasants and landowners, and agrarian reform, shaping a dual political spectrum: liberals versus conservatives.

In my perspective Romania's case belongs to the category of *state-creating nation* which I relate to the main claim of Mann's approach is that "moderate nationalism is the product of the drive toward democracy¹⁴." In their drive toward the control of the state power, and of reforming the medieval system of taxation and law, the young liberals were keen of obtaining the help of the middle class and of the craftsmen and tradesmen from the major cities. Several times during the 1848 revolution in Wallachia the revolutionary government was saved by Ion Brătianu's capacity of mobilizing Bucharest's masses. Again, after the election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as prince of Moldavia, the young liberal-nationalists mobilized the masses to pressure for his election of the throne of Wallachia too, achieving the creation of the modern Romanian state. The major asset of the 1848 generation was its ability to integrate in the political arena groups such as lower rank noblemen or the urban craftsmen –who, I claim, backed the national idea due to its call to a more inclusive political participation, and its rejection of the medieval oligarchy of few boyar families dominating the political life. In this sense, the drive toward democratization and the modernization of the society made possible creation of the nation-state and the rise of a powerful national-liberal party that will dominate Romanian politics in the years to come.

The role of the international arena

Another aspect that emphasizes the importance of state-related variables in the explanation of the creation of the Romanian nation has to do with the realm *international relations*. No historical development I have covered in the previous pages can be understood without an in-dept understanding of inter-states politics of XIXth century Europe, the so-called Concert of Europe. Without the Leibach Congress of 1820, and without the pressure coming from the Holly Alliance, the tsar might have chose to support the cause of the Greek rebellion "Hetairia," and the Ottomans would have not reverted to the appointment of Romanian princes in the principalities in 1821. Without the Russian defeat in the Crimean war, the Principalities would not have changed Russian protectorate for collective European guarantor-powers, and the double elections that allowed the unification would not have take place. Without the weakness of a set of seven protectors

¹⁴ Mann, 45.

who were unable to take rapid decisions and to enforce them, the *fait accompli* pushed through by liberal Romanian elites by creating the personal union of Moldova and Wallachia against the decisions of the Paris Convention, would not have been tolerated. Also, the image of Napoleon III as the ‘godfather’ (*parrain*) of the modern Romanian state is, perhaps, not entirely misleading. The creation of the modern Romanian state remains the fortunate result of the skilful and daring way in which several groups of local elites took advantage of the structural configuration of international relations at certain propitious historical moments.

The modern state

It was after the creation of the modern Romania that the state had a major task: to create Romanians, citizens loyal to the new young state and to the new nation. Before the advent of the state only a rather small enlightened elite shared the ‘national ideas’. This fact was so universally accepted that even classical short stories, often included in children text-books imply it as an undisputed fact. Ion Creangă’s 1880 famous “Old Ion Roată¹⁵” tells the story of a group of young noblemen trying to convince some peasants of the necessity of the unification of the two provinces. The Old Ion Roată, the archetypal peasant, cannot see the putative advantages of creating a Romanian state out of the two principalities. His wits make the story turn into a social fable: irrespective whether the two states unify, the hardship of taxation and work always to be bore by the peasants, and as long as that does not change, unification (and thus nationalism) does not mean much for him. In other words, to paraphrase a well-known Italian adagio, while the young reformers made Romania by 1859, they still had to make Romanians. It was the task of the new state to change the state of affairs. The process I am set to sketch in the following paragraphs is somehow similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to the pattern described by Eugene Weber’s “Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernization of rural France, 1870–1914.” After 1859 the Romanian state changed in a radical manner. I follow Eric Hobsbawm¹⁶ in covering these changes. According to him the modern state uses its powerful machinery for communications with its inhabitants. The main element of this communication is constituted above all by primary schools, which have to disseminate the image and heritage of the ‘nation’ and to inculcate

¹⁵ Creanga, Ion: *Moş Ion Roată*. In *Opere* [Writings] Chişinău: Literatura Artistică, 1989. 30.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

attachment to it and to attach all “to country and flag, often using ‘invented traditions’ or even nations for this purpose”.

The new free and universal elementary education system, created in 1865 by prince Cuza, although under funded by a poor state, increased significantly the number of those able to read and write. At the same time, it shaped loyal citizens of Romania: history was re-invented and re-wrote as an inevitable march toward the modern state and the fulfillment of the nation-state. Patriotic poetry had to be learnt by heart, as well as the newly created national anthem and national symbols. At a different level, the modern Romanian state commissioned the writing of its history and supported research that produced Romanian-centered accounts on the regional events. Grammar and orthography were standardized, and the Latin alphabet replaced the old Cyrillic one. The state was the main sponsor of the development of national culture, national arts and national industry. In fact, the adjective “national” seemed to have pervaded almost everything in the public life of the young Romanian state. One of the classics of Romanian literature, Ion Luca Caragiale poked fun around 1893 of the “national” vogue of the time writing about firms like “The national doughnut” or jobs such as “national wall-painter”: “*I used to be a Romanian wall-painter, your honor, ...but when I saw I was terminated by the competition of the foreigners I opened a lottery at the fly-market*¹⁷.” The claim Caragiale’s hero is making using the Romanian/foreigner dichotomy is that the national criterion should take precedence even over the market forces: it does not matter whether he was a good craftsman or not, it was enough he was a Romanian one.

The army represented a double way of transforming peasants into Romanians. On the one hand, most of the conscripts had never gone further than the villages neighboring their birthplace. The army offered a meeting place for people from different regions, speaking slightly different dialects, who learned they are all a part of the same entity, Romania, and that they are all *Romanian* soldiers. On the other hand, the young Romanian army intervened actively in the Russian-Turkish war of 1877 on the Russian side. The war (and the victory) offered the occasion to heighten the patriotic spirit and to reinforce the recent Romanian identity in its fight against the old master, the Ottoman Empire.

Last but not least the modern state institutions created after 1861, the new codes of law, the new administrative organization of territory, the civil

¹⁷ Caragiale, Ion-Luca: Justiție. [Justice] In *Momente* [Moments]. Cluj: Biblioteca Apostrof, 1997. 248.

procedures took away from the church recording of births, weddings and deaths, all created a new structural framework that help shaping the national awareness among previously indifferent individuals. The electoral law allowed for a two steps voting system in which a larger part of the (male) population was involved in national politics, including the better off peasants and craftsmen. The liberal Constitution of 1866, although a slightly altered copy of the Belgian constitution (“*offered to us by Mr. Carada after a sleepless night of translating*”, according to the same sparkling Caragiale), proved able to set up the modern institutions and structures of the modern state.

The building of railways, the new communication facilities (modern roads, the national telegraph company) as well as the protective tariffs and regulations that shaped local and regional trade along the lines dictated by the state, all represent aspects that emphasize the role of the state in the creation of a Romanian national consciousness. In the vein of Mann¹⁸ I will claim that the modern nation state *penetrated* its territories with both law and administration, increasing its *infrastructural power*. At the same time, citizens and parties also penetrate the modern state, making it more accountable toward its citizens. In conclusion, within the new state, “*more of social life is coordinated and shaped by state institutions caging more social relationships within the “national” boundaries and along the radial lines of control between center and territories.*”¹⁹

Rejecting the Jew

At the same time, creating Romanians meant defining non-Romanians: the Jews, in the case of post-1859 Romania. Although state-led, the post unification nationalism cannot be equated with Hobsbawm’s²⁰ concept of *state patriotism*. According to Hobsbawm, the modern state faces to major tasks: it has to create a complex and efficient machine of administration and it has to capture the loyalty of its citizens. In order to reach this second goal, the state promotes a secular religion of ‘nation,’ the state-based patriotism. For Hobsbawm, ethnicity is entirely irrelevant to this sort of nationalism, as the “revolutionary concept of the nation” embraces of the members of the political community. If there are cases of xenophobia and ethnic or racial distinction, these appear because of a different sort of nationalism, “whether demotic xenophobia or chauvinism.”

¹⁸ Mann, Michael: *The Sources of Social Power, vol. II, The Rise of Classes and Nation-States*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹⁹ Mann, A Political Theory of Nationalism ..., 59.

²⁰ Hobsbawm, op. cit.

Yet, the politics and the constitutional law make a strong argument in favor of a state-led definition of the Romanian nation that rejected non-ethnic Romanians and non-Christians. According to the medieval tradition protecting the principalities from Turkish interference, non-Christians were forbidden to owe land or to become citizens of the two states. From this study's perspective the major difference separating the Romanian Constitution of 1866 from the Belgian one consist in the inclusion of this medieval provision in the text of the fundamental law. The Article 7²¹ was used as a weapon against the Jewish population, which settled in the two principalities at the beginning of XIXth century, denying its rights to citizenship. The state elite, embarked on a program of modernization and 'Romanianization' of the country, took advantage of every legal possibility of keeping away from the political arena the significant Jewish population, which, especially in Moldova, overwhelmingly dominated the urban areas, the middle class occupations and the industry. Thus, the definition of the Romanian nation involved a powerful religious exclusionary dimension. In 1878, the major European powers conditioned their recognition of Romania's independence from Turkey by the removal of article 7. It was only in these conditions that the Jewish population became from a legal point of view a full member of the state. In reality, anti-Semitic feelings continued to be present at different levels of the society and culminated with a strong indigenous fascist movement in 1930's and 1940's.²²

How the state created the nation— three case-studies: Dobrogea, Transylvania and Bessarabia.

The distinction between members and non-members of the nation involved more than rejecting the Jewish population. I will cover here three case-studies of projects aiming at changing the boundaries of the nation in order to highlight my state-centered thesis.

Bessarabia: a land Moldavians who did not turn into Romanians.

The medieval kingdom of Moldova was partitioned in 1812, as a consequence of the Russian-Turkish war. The defeated Ottomans agreed to split

²¹ Foçșăneanu, Eleodor: *Istoria Constituțională a României, 1859–1991*. [The Constitutional History of Romania, 1859–1991]. București: Humanitas, 1992. 30–31.

²² See Livezeanu, Irina: *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation-Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995; and Mann, Michael: *Fascists*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Moldova into two parts, along the river Prut. The Eastern side became a part of the Russian empire and it is usually called Bessarabia, while the Western part remained an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty. Thus, the Romanian-speaking population from Russian Bessarabia was not included in the political project that ended up in the creation of the modern Romanian state. The existence of this population beyond the reach of the nationalizing policies²³ of the young Romanian state allowed for the preservation of the (Moldavian) regional identity shared by the majority of its inhabitants, as opposed to a (Romanian) national one. In her illuminating chapter on Bessarabia, Irina Livezeanu²⁴ offers strong documentary and ethnographic proofs that by the time Bessarabia joined the Romanian kingdom in 1918, its inhabitants did not consider themselves Romanians, nor was there a grass-roots, well-spread national movement as it was the case in another province beyond the Romanian kingdom borders, Transylvania. I suggest that the spread and the acceptance of the idea that there is a Romanian nation, and that Romanian-speaking people are its members it is due to a large degree to the nationalizing policies pursued by the modern Romanian state. For those beyond the reach of these policies, the process of turning peasants into Romanians simply did not take place.

Also, the Tsarist Empire was less keen to make sure that the Romanian speaking population from Bessarabia was to be Russified, although it did put in practice its own nationalizing policies. Moreover, the urban and middle classes, which are mostly affected by nationalizing exclusionary state policies, formed just a tiny fragment of the overwhelmingly rural society of Bessarabia. Therefore, the province remains until today an illustrative case study of a putative member of the Romanian nation whose members do not identify with it, despite meeting all the cultural, historical and mythical attributes that would make them ‘Romanians.’

Transylvania – nation making by (another’s) state policies

The same story would have been repeated in another Romanian-speaking province, Transylvania. Yet, this province of the Hungarian kingdom experienced and active and well-entrenched nationalist mass movements, involving not only the bourgeoisie and the urban classes, but also large categories of peas-

²³ Brubaker, Rogers: *Nationalism Refrained: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

²⁴ Livezeanu, 111–157.

ants.²⁵ I claim that the difference between the two provinces should be assigned to the modernizing and nationalizing policies of the Hungarian state. It is the Hungarian state, which is the major responsible agent for the success of the process of Romanian nation building in Transylvania.

Transylvania was the largest and the richest of all the provinces inhabited by Romanian speaking populations. In the pre-world war I era 51.1% of its population was literate, compared to 39.3% in the old kingdom of Romania and 19.4 in Bessarabia. According to the Hungarian statistics, by 1910 its population included Romanians (53%), Hungarians (31%), Germans (11%) and Jews (3%).

In a situation that parallels that of Irish under the British rule, historically the Romanians from Transylvania were mostly poor peasants and serfs, inhabiting overwhelmingly the rural areas. They were denied political rights in Transylvania, their Easter-Orthodox church was not officially recognized, and they were restricted from buying land or settling into most cities. Since early XIXth century, the Hungarian landed aristocracy that dominated Transylvania and Hungary proper (which were two distinct administrative bodies) had to face the challenges raised by the modern state. Many members of the Hungarian landed aristocracy, as well as by the middle class and urban Hungarian strata soon backed a political movement seeking Hungarian rule for the lands of the historic kingdom of Hungary and directed against the Habsburg Empire.

This movement, articulating its demands in national terms, provoked the counter-nationalisms²⁶ of the other ethnicities that inhabited regions that historically belonged to the Hungarian kingdom. In my view the Romanian national movement in Transylvania was a direct response to the Hungarian national movement, especially to its exclusionary provisions codified in its projects, laws and state policies. Had the Hungarian liberal nationalists provided for some minority rights for populations they claimed to rule, history would have probably took a different turn. Unfortunately, if Hungarians were keen to defy their Habsburg rulers over the issue of national rights, they were utterly against granting the same rights to the non-Hungarian speaking inhabitants of their kingdom (Slovaks, Croats or Romanians). After the 1866 partition of the empire in two distinct sides, one ruled from Vienna and the other from Budapest, the Hungarian political elite embarked on a relentless state policy of Magyarization of the all other nationalities. According to

²⁵ See Hitchins, Keith: *The Rumanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1780–1849*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press and also Livezeanu, op. cit.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, op. cit.

Kahn²⁷ “in 1910, the Hungarian parliament included only eight non-Magyars, though Hungarians were only 45% of the population. Some 96% of government employees were Magyars.”

In my perspective, these figures are suggesting the reasons that gave birth and nurtured a Romanian national movement led by unsatisfied intellectuals and small bourgeoisie, to whom the Hungarians denied access to state jobs. Consequently, the Romanian political entrepreneurs developed their own nationalistic claims, which would have entitled them to a slice of the state cake.

As the advent of capitalism and of the modern state created the conditions for the development of a Romanian middle class in Transylvania, the nationalist Hungarian policies forced the Romanian elite to take sides and to look for support among the other Romanians. The anti-Hungarian peasant war led by Avram Iancu during the revolution of 1848 is a clear illustration of the way in which Romanian political elite from Transylvania managed to get mass support for its national-minded perspectives.

At the time when the Hungarian state collapsed due to its defeat in World War I, the modern Romanian state found in Transylvania a well-organized, mass-based national movement that facilitated province’s unification with Romania. The unification itself was due as much to the national mass movements of the Transylvanian Romanians, as to the capacity of the Romanian kingdom to successfully occupy and manage the province, and to use the international relations arena in order to adjudicate Transylvania.

Dobrogea: constructing the nation – a success story

In my last case, I cover the case of a region that was not considered Romanian, (despite the fact that some Romanians lived there) got incorporated, territorially and conceptually in the body of the nation. Dobrogea²⁸ is a region between the Danube and the Black Sea, delimited to the North by the Danube Delta. During the 1877 Russian-Turkish war, Romania fought alongside with Russians, and won its independence from the Turks. At the end of the war, the Russians occupied two Romanian counties that included the Danube delta and the North of it (currently Ukrainian territory), offering as compensation the region south of the

²⁷ Kahn, Robert: *The Multinational Empire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1950. 110.

²⁸ I ground my case study mainly on the illuminating article of Constantin Iordachi: *Californians of the Romanians*. In Trencsényi et. al (eds.): *Nation-building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian case studies*. Budapest and Iași: Editura Polirom and Regio Books, 2001.

Danube Delta, the so-called Northern Dobrogea, previously under Ottoman control. The first reaction of the Romanian political class and society was outrage. The prime minister rejected the “onerous bargain” and promised to fight for the integrity of the country, stabbed in the back by an unfaithful ally. In time, and after consultation with the major European powers, the Romanian leaders had to face the inevitable and to accept what has been offered. In a matter of weeks Dobrogea became a “ancient Romania land,” historians remembered an illustrious medieval prince of Wallachia who conquered and controlled Dobrogea in the XIXth century and an invented coat-of-arms of this region was soon to be added to the Romania’s coat-of-arms. The history of Dobrogea became an integral part of national history. Until very recently, this official history emphasized as much as possible the links between Romanians and the region and downplayed or literally neglected the role of all other ethnic groups that inhabited the region. A protracted and successful process colonization and Romanization of the new province was put into practice. It involved a selective access to citizenship which granted to the Romanian colonists and to the rural population (mainly Romanian and Bulgarian) and which disenfranchised the urban one, mainly Greek, Armenian and Jewish. In long term, the process of integration was a twofold success: today Romanians constitute the absolute majority in Dobrogea and most of the ethnic groups were assimilated. Nobody questions anymore neither the position of Dobrogea as an organic part of the Romanian state, nor the links make the inhabitants of Dobrogea consider themselves, and be considered as organic members of the Romanian nation.

Conclusions

It is the claim of the present article that the birth and the spread of the idea of a Romanian nation, as a frame of perception and classification of reality, can be perceived as the resultant of various state policies and state organizations. I surveyed the history of the various state-forms on the territory of present-day Romania, focusing on the instances and inflection points in which these forms produced, reinforced and catalyzed the spread of an ethnic and cultural frame of perception which melted Moldavians, Wallachians, Transylvanians into Romanians, and legitimized the modern nation state. I see here the idea of a Romanian nation from a cognitive perspective²⁹ and

²⁹ Brubaker, Rogers: *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. 64–88.

I test my thesis on three case-studies (Bessarabia, Transylvania and Dobrogea). I claim that each of them reinforces my conclusion: that the success (or the lack of it) of the political entrepreneurs of promoting a 'national' understanding of the reality is due in a large part to the state and its policies as crucial explanatory variables.