

CHARLES JOSEPH EDMOND DE BOIS-LE-COMTE'S REPORTS ON THE PRINCIPALITIES OF MOLDOVA AND THE WALLACHIA

IOANA ILISEI *

Abstract: Despite France's low interest in the Romanian people, the ties between the two peoples expanded in the first half of the 19th century. Before that, the consular activity was limited to unimportant reports, which targeted different abuses of the administration, without reference to the political conditions of Moldova and Wallachia. After 1830 and especially after the Treaty of Adrianople, when Turkish control over trade on the Danube is removed, France and the other European states begin to show a greater interest towards the Principalities of Moldova and Wallachia. The crisis of the Ottoman Empire increased this interest of France.

Although the French were not interested in the problems of the Principalities, in the mid-nineteenth century, an image of Moldova and Wallachia began to emerge in France. This image was especially drawn in the diplomatic and scientific circles due to the great influx of information regarding the Romanians.

Keywords: Moldavia, French travelers, Romanian Principalities, Bois-le-Comte, diplomacy.

Born in Paris on February 2, 1796, Charles Joseph de Bois-le-Comte is one of the important figures in the French travel literature of the first half of the 19th century. Bois-le-Comte (or Boislecomte after some sources) has been in French diplomatic service since 1814. He has been consecutively secretary of affairs and in charge of business in Vienna, St. Petersburg, Madrid and London. In 1829, during which Jules de Polignac, Prime Minister of France, also served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bois-le-Comte was appointed *directeur des Affaires politiques* in the French diplomatic apparatus. After the revolution of 1830, which led to the fall of the Bourbons, the diplomat resigned from the ministry especially because of his

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"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași. E-mail: ioana.ilisei1@yahoo.com.

approach to Jules de Polignac, incarcerated by the new regime for crimes against the parliamentary political system. Historiography implied a connection between Bois-le-Comte and the so-called 'Polignac' project, which, in the context of Russian expansion to Constantinople, it was a revision of borders in Europe¹. Bois-le-Comte returned to the ministry very quickly, during 1830². Between 1833 and 1835, Count de Rigny, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, entrusted Bois-le-Comte with a traveling mission to Egypt, Syria and European Turkey. The mission is motivated by the concern, shared by the British government, regarding Russia's position in the Straits and in the Black Sea basin. The Ottoman Empire is undergoing a severe crisis caused by the insurrection led by Mehmed-Ali in Egypt. The great powers intervene and support the Ottoman Empire against Mehmed Ali, who eventually made a temporary peace with the Sultan. A new war between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt was to take place between 1839-1841.

On June 26, 1833, Russia concluded with the Sultan the treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi, in which the Tsar promised military and naval assistance in the event of a threat, and the Sultan obliged by a secret article to prohibit the entry of warships of other powers into the Dardanelle (for eight years). Through this treaty, Russia consolidates its authority over the Ottoman Empire. However, while the Ottoman Empire was facing a crisis of internal authority, Russia was becoming more and more powerful. Thus, a few months after the conclusion of the Hünkâr İskelesi treaty, Russia concludes in Munich with Austria a convention. In this convention the Habsburg and the Russian empires declared their wish to maintain the Ottoman Empire and pledged to cooperate in case there will be a problem with its succession. In response to this Russian action, France and England have tried to lay the foundations for an alliance. But until the Crimean War, this diplomatic approach did not work.

After completing his trip to Egypt and Constantinople, the French diplomat also arrived in the Romanian Principalities. Between April 10 and 22, 1834, Bois-le-Comte was in Bucharest and between April 26 and May 4, he visited the capital of Moldova. Bois-le-Comte's impressions of the Romanian Principalities have been the subject of reports sent to Paris, which represent the background of our analysis. These reports are among the most interesting foreign texts published on Romanians during the regulatory period³.

A true historical source, the memoir emphasizes the economic and strategic importance of the Principalities. The data on the two principalities was made available by the rulers of the Principalities. At the same time, the report also reflects the evolutionary stage of the Romanian-French relations that were amplified with the establishment of the French

¹ T. G. Djuvara, *Cent proiecte de partajare de la Turquie (1270–1913)* (Paris: Editura Félix Alcan, 1914), 387–391.

² Paul Cernovodeanu, Georgeta Filitti, Adriana Gheorghe, Adrian Silvan Ionescu, Marian Stroia, Lucia Taftă, Raluca Tomi, Șerban Rădulescu Zoner (coordonatori), *Călători străini despre țările române. Serie nouă*, vol. III (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2006), 95 [cited next *Călători străini*].

³ Ovidiu Muntean, *Imaginea românilor în Franța la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Napoca Star, 2005), 93.

consulates in Bucharest and Iași in 1796. Bois-le-Comte also notes that the presence of French consuls in the Principalities makes the Russian mixing not too brutal. The French emissary adds that “the attitude of the representatives of France, Lagau in Bucharest and Mimaut in Iași is full of convenience, tact and measure, the two enjoying the general consideration”⁴. At the beginning of the report, emphasis is also placed on the general state of Moldova and Wallachia. Bois-le-Comte specifies the political status of the two Romanian principalities, their position towards the neighboring powers at that time: “descendants of the Roman colonists from Dacia, the Romanians formed three independent states: Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldova, which subsequently fell under the protection of the neighbors”⁵. However, the author also points out that the Romanians, in the desire to escape the Ottoman suzerainty, appeal to the help of Russia – to which the Austrians also joined – who occupied the Principalities for a quarter of a century following the wars with the Ottoman Empire over the years 1770 and 1834. On the other hand, the Russian influence prevailed after the annexation of Bessarabia. According to Bois-le-Comte, the Russian influence diminishes after Tudor Vladimirescu’s movement of 1821⁶. Moreover, the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople, by its provisions, contributed to the removal of the Ottoman monopoly on Danube trade in the Principalities and opened the way for their entry into the great European economic circuit, which resulted in the integration into the world capitalist system. In this context, Romanian capitalism has also developed. The emergence of the Romanian bourgeoisie is related to obtaining the freedom of trade in the two principalities.

The French diplomat was interested in the physical geography, the natural resources, the state of the industry, the demographic elements, the degree of occupation of the population and the administrative and territorial organization of the two Principalities. Part of the memoir is especially dedicated to observing the level of cultural development of the society. Also, the French traveler attached to the memorandum an appendix containing the description of the situation and prospects of trade on the Danube, the main navigable artery of the country, and the interests of the neighboring empires. The appendix ends with an analysis of their internal political situation. As historian Eric Hobsbawm points out, “the forces that made Europe’s economic evolution possible existed everywhere, without necessarily delivering the same results, given the diversity of social and historical circumstances. It must, however, take into account the fact that on a global scale, the transition from feudalism to capitalism is a type of nonlinear evolution. The triumph of capitalism occurs completely only in one part of the world, which in return transforms the rest of the world”⁷. And by the penetration of

⁴ *Călători străini*, 96.

⁵ Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor. Corespondență diplomatică și rapoarte consulare franceze (1825-1846) publicate după copiile Academiei Române de Nerva Hodoș*, vol. XVII (București: Editura Academiei, 1913), 328–359 and 359–403 [cited next Hurmuzaki].

⁶ *Călători străini*, 97.

⁷ *Apud*. Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român* (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic GOLD, 2011), 209.

Western capitalism, and especially the English capitalism, in Wallachia and Moldova after 1820, a slow evolution was achieved, with many difficulties and not entirely from the backwardness to which their long Ottoman suzerainty condemned them.

Throughout the report, the author's critical attitude towards Russia is noted. Russia was considered a potential economic competitor of France, but also a factor in curbing the modern evolution of the two countries⁸. Bois-le-Comte also noticed that Russia was dealing with the assessment of wealth in the Principalities. In this regard, notes the French diplomat, the Russians have done thorough research of soil riches in Wallachia and Moldova for five years, as long as they controlled the administration of the Danube countries.

The Organic Regulations, legislative documents summarizing the wishes expressed by Romanians in the previous period, marked an important stage from the point of view of modernization. Referring to them a decade later, the French Saint Marc Girardin said "reading them we believe oftentimes that we read some of those great and solemn reports that a Durant, a Lilly Tallendol, a Talleyrand, a Barnave made in the Constitutional Assembly. They are the same ideas, the same points of view"⁹. The historian A. D. Xenopol, on the other hand, points out that the law emphasized "in the most vivid light, the contradiction between the wishes and the aspirations of the Romanians and the factual state in which it was incubated". Xenopol also noted, rightly, that the Organic Regulation "is a significant progress on the chaotic state of before. It introduces fixed and steady rules instead of momentary thinking and good pleasure, it restricts arbitrariness, replacing it with guiding rules, it introduces legal responsibility instead of irresponsibility, it puts for the first time in the Romanian society the idea of public interest as something individually superior [...], it was the substitution of the legal life to the arbitrary one until then, the idea of the state was born for the first time in Romanians, in its modern conception, as a life of a whole, drawn up on public standards, that is, laws"¹⁰. The Organic Regulations were largely the result of Romanian contributions, although the continuous control of the protective power made their reception by the nation to be an act elaborated by a foreigner and imposed from abroad¹¹.

The information on the surface, physical aspect, the altitude of the soil, population, and the localities of the provinces, the character, the natural products and the industrial production served Bois-le-Comte in drawing an elaborate portrait of the principalities of Moldova and Wallachia. The diplomat uses the statistical data of 1831, obtained at the Census of Wallachia. It is mentioned in the report that the two principalities comprise almost two million inhabitants¹².

⁸ *Călători străini*, 95–96.

⁹ Cornelia Bodea, *Anul 1848 în Principatele române. O istorie în date și mărturii* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1982), vol. I., 565–566.

¹⁰ A. D. Xenopol, *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Traiană*, vol. 10, București, 1930, p. 100.

¹¹ Cornelia Bodea, *op.cit.*, 404.

¹² *Ibid.*, 98–102.

Wanting to know the opinions of the different political circles on the situation of the Principalities, Bois-le-Comte met with a series of personalities from the capitals of the two Principalities. These include: the former prince Grigore IV Ghica, the Metropolitan Grigore, the magistrate Gheorghe Filipescu, the general Nicolae Mavros, Barbu Știrbei, the steward (stolnicul) Ianache Văcărescu, the vice-president of the Divans, the general Teodor Iakovlevici Mirkovici, Mihail Sturdza (the prince to be of Moldova), the Metropolitan Veniamin Costache and other members of the Moldovan Administrative Council. Following the discussions and meetings with these representatives of the political elite, Bois-le-Comte created an idea about the wishes, fears and hopes shared by his various interlocutors. He managed to appreciate the character and results of the Russian military administration. At the same time, he outlined an overview of the importance of the Principalities in the Eastern issue. The observations of Baron Charles de Bois-le-Comte on the capital of the Romanian Country and on the spirit of society are encouraging. The diplomat states that “Bucharest was ravaged by wars, internal disturbances and fires, recovering quickly. A mixture of beautiful palaces and poor huts, when under the appearance of a large village and when under those of a European city, this settlement, has in its entirety the appearance of a capital. The exaggerated luxury that reigns here deviated from his Asian appearance, closer to our morals, it was once maintained by the great wealth that the boyars in the administrative positions gathered. Today, however, the income of these positions is limited; the boyars remain with the assets wasted due to their debauchery and inability”¹³.

The state of mind encountered in Bucharest gives Baron Bois-le-Comte the doubt that there would be any real public opinion in the capital of Wallachia: “It is a mixture of principles, ideas and opposing morals. It is the painted icon of a time of transition that has not yet reached a dominant opinion, present ideas, a general rule of teaching and expression; there is a general uncertainty about rights, duties and obligations, a mixture of French and Russian ideas, independence and servitude, liberalism and boyar privileges, besides some Turkish ideas in all their brutality. But the ‘tone’ of the city is entirely French; language, society outfit, clothes, fashion, even books”¹⁴. Despite recent improvements, writes Bois-le-Comte, the Romanian society has formed its vices which it cannot escape: laziness, inclination towards drunkenness, lack of moral ideas and common sense, corruption of morals, despicable and persevering cunning or falsehood¹⁵. The causes were many: on one hand, the corrupt regime to which the two principalities were subjected, and, on the other, the prolonged foreign oppression. But Bois-le-Comte notes the good side: there have been changes in the political regime and in the leadership of the two countries once the elites have realized the misfortune in which they were, making real progress. For example, in the case of peasantry, Bois-le-Comte writes: “The progress that the peasants make is so rapid, Filipescu told me, that every year we had to change the way we spoke with them in the previous year and that happen to no longer

¹³ *Hurmuzaki*, 358.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹⁵ *Călători străini*, 102.

match the moral state and the development of their ideas. Another time he needed only a stick to hold them; you still have to prove to them the justification of what you ask for. But when you prove it, you can get anything. As the memory of the oppression in the former times departs from them, their character becomes distinct and the feeling that there is a right for them slowly becomes accustomed to the idea that they have duties to fulfill.”¹⁶

In another register, the emissary of the French government points out that the Romanians want to redeem their independence from the Ottoman Empire by an amount of 50 million piastres, an amount that in the opinion of its interlocutors would be sufficient to break the links of the protective power: “we want to get rid of the protector as well as the sovereign, redeeming our independence from the Gate through a pecuniary sacrifice”. Attached to this request was the project of unification that the Romanians from Moldova and Wallachia wanted. The idea of national unity was widely embraced by modern Romanian society. Bois-le-Comte notes in this regard that “the two Principalities united by their common origin, language, history and their current political position aspire to merge into one state”¹⁷. As for the riches of the land of Wallachia, Bois-le-Comte observes their wealth, unexploited for political reasons. The French traveler cites the example of Prince Caragea who had found a very rich mercury mine from which “merely content to collect the ore that came out of the earth, he made significant sums”¹⁸. At the advice of his friends in Constantinople he gave up because if the Ottoman Empire had found out, it would have asked Wallachia to supply them with quicksilver¹⁹. The diplomat also notes the presence of fuel oil, which is a rare product – found only in Saxony, Switzerland and the island of Zakynthos²⁰ – it is not exploited. The only mineral that is widely exploited in the two Principalities is salt. In 1832, the operation amounted to 45 million kilograms, meaning a quarter of the production of France, which brought to the state a third of the income²¹. On the other hand, in addition to the different types of wheat exported to Russia, Turkey or Serbia²² or the rich quantities of wines and spirits, Moldova and Wallachia were renowned under the Turkish regime also for the large number of cattle owned. For two years the Principalities fed the Russian armies and exported to the Habsburg Empire, the German states and the Mediterranean area²³.

According to Bois-le-Comte, agricultural exploitation is more profitable due to the unusual soil fertility and external demand. However, Wallachia industry has 1068 factories, including pottery, blacksmiths, tanneries, which also produce products for the external market

¹⁶ *Hurmuzaki*, 338; *Călători străini*, 103.

¹⁷ Marian Stroia, ‘Călători europeni și realitatea politică românească în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. O vedere de ansamblu’ in Irina Gavrilă, *Celălalt autentic: lumea românească în literatura de călătorie (1800–1850)* (București: Editura Oscar Print, 2010), 190–191.

¹⁸ *Hurmuzaki*, 338.

¹⁹ *Călători străini*, 103.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

²¹ *Hurmuzaki*, 338.

²² *Ibid.*, 343–344.

²³ *Călători străini*, 105–109.

of the Principalities, soap factories, hats or breweries. There is after Bois-le-Comte also a household-type industry that allows people to produce their household necessities and maintain their habits²⁴.

The freedom of trade and its increase through the considerable exchange of goods have determined in Wallachia a beginning of well-being and intellectual development especially among the peasants, who, as Bois-le-Comte states, “use our cotton and wool fabrics quite a lot nowadays; they begin to raise their dwellings that were dug in the ground like the burrow of animals.”²⁵ However, the development of trade requires solid bases, and until they are done, people do not dare to speculate, although “the internal customs does not impede the movement and sale of goods”²⁶. The customs tax represents only three percent, as shown by the treaties concluded by the Romanian Principalities with the Ottoman Empire.

The administration’s adoption of a new financial system has led to a mismatch between rapid development of production and population and lower revenues, more than during the Greek princes. The French observer believed that this phenomenon could be a mixture of two explanations: “If you ask a Russian what the explanation of this difference is, he replies to you ‘Sincerely wanting the prosperity of this country, we have lowered taxes’. If you ask the boyars, some give the same explanation, but most give another, ‘Russia, they say, set taxes at a quota under necessities and then forced us to adopt as a guiding principle that we will not be able to increase them without her consent. Through this provision it has in hand the development of our well-being and the entire leadership of the state’”²⁷. Bois-le-Comte also states that the budget has decreased. The total income represented 11 million francs before the Greek insurrection, but after the disappearance of tasks, the budget only rises to 6 100 000 francs²⁸. The country was experiencing this decrease in taxes also because of the adoption of the Organic Regulations. The new organization “started by deciding to abolish all existing taxes, then establishing the new financial system. At the base of this system is the personal tax or capitation. It produces half of the public income. The monopoly of salt represents a quarter and the quarter that remains is fulfilled by the customs and state domains”²⁹. The shortcomings found by a review commission in the years 1830-1831 led to the radical change of the financial system through the regulations of the Organic Regulations. These changes provided by the regulations were: constitution of the budget of incomes and expenses, creation of the Common control for the verification of the budget, fixing the taxes.

In addition to this, the French emissary reproaches the boyars for their exempting from the land tax and their refusal to participate in public tasks. The future prince Barbu Știrbei responded to this indirect accusation by the following: “If we were the citizens of a state

²⁴ Ibid., 107–108.

²⁵ *Hurmuzaki*, 342.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 344–345.

²⁸ Ibid., 345.

²⁹ Ibid., 346.

whose existence would have given us some guarantees, we would have been happy to pay such an advantage, sacrificing most of our income. But for whom would we have made these sacrifices? Maybe tomorrow we will be Russians and once Russia finds the tax placed on our estates, it would make our task more and more difficult, until it would crush us, as it did with the Polish and Bessarabia nobles. Therefore I thought well when I kept as a fundamental right the privilege of paying nothing”³⁰.

The tribute was set at 30 piasters, but it was modified according to each social class, so that “the yeoman, descendants of the families who are no longer boyars, who no longer occupy public positions, are exempted, according to the custom of the country, but pay 45 instead of 30 piasters. The gypsies pay 50. The others pay only the tribute. A foreigner settling in the country is exempt from the tribute for five years and in the following years pays only half. The villages are responsible for all the inhabitants who live in them”³¹.

In Wallachia, during the visit of Bois-le-Comte, the civil administration included a minister “of internal affairs” or the great governor in the person of Gheorghe Filipescu. The Minister of Justice was the great chancellor Alexandru Filipescu. The Minister of Finance was the great treasurer Alexandru Nenciulescu. The minister of cults, was the great chancellor Barbu Știrbei. The War minister was the supreme commander Constantin Ghica. The Minister of “outside affairs” was George Bibescu. The position of general controller of incomes and expenses was occupied by Filip Lenș. For the provincial administration, the French emissary mentions the great governor, eighteen governors or rulers of counties, chief magistrates or the landlords in villages; the metropolitan and the bishops of Râmnic, Buzău and Argeș, who were appointed by the Assembly, regarding the church administration. For the judicial administration were the Great Divan, two courts of appeal, a court of first instance in each county, a village court or a court of peace in each village and commercial tribunals in the main cities³².

Regarding the country’s army, the French emissary notes that it is made up of three categories of soldiers: the militia or the army, which included 4,660 people; infantry or gendarmes who were recruited from counties and numbered 5,234 people and military villages under arms that had 1,000 people. However, in practice, the shortcomings and lack of knowledge for using different types of weapons were observed. For example, the colonels, who were also infantry and cavalry, were accustomed only to a certain type of weapon. The supply of guns by the army was practically non-existent. The Russians left Wallachia without guns after the Brăila, Giugiu and Turnu citadels were torn down. The military development of the Romanian Principalities was contrary to the Russian interests. Wallachia has taken over the Austrian border defense model. The villages on the Danube had military organization: men had to perform military service from 20 to 50 years, but without uniform. These villages were thus exempt from taxes or recruiting for the militia and the permanent number of people for the

³⁰ Ibid..

³¹ Ibid., 347.

³² Ibid., 347–348.

Danube border was 474 and 13 armed vessels, with eight rowers, an officer and several infantry soldiers. And for the border from Austria and along Moldova, there were no more than one man for 20 taxpayers, so that there were permanently 421 peasants with arms and, respectively, 105. But after the destruction of the cities on the Danube, the Principality remained as an open plain, either to force the Romanians to resort to the help of the Russians, or because the Russians did not believe that the Romanians could defend their borders³³.

Bois-le-Comte also pays great attention to the school in Wallachia. The French observer appreciates the activity of the great chancellor Știrbei in this field. The new government dealt with rural education, so that the Assembly decreed the establishment of schools in each village. The study program was the same as in the big cities or in the big colleges in Bucharest (Saint Sava College) and Craiova (Central School), where about 2955 young people benefited from free studies at the time of the French emissary's visit. The duration of studies was for the three-year primary education and included basic elements in disciplines such as arithmetic, grammar and geography, while the basis of higher education was the French language, to which six years were devoted. Thus the French culture was given special attention in the two Principalities. And besides the two big colleges in Bucharest and Craiova, there were three private pensions and two special pensions for the girls' education, the latter using only French. Also, Bois-le-Comte observes the influence in society of those who had studied in Paris. It was known that boyar was the only class that could constitute the elite, which through education received abroad could improve the laws of the country and influence the national spirit. In this regard, the boyars reached the antithesis with the clergy, who had no other means of training and remained unchanged despite any innovations. An example of this can be considered the case of the metropolitan who considered a social attack the change of the writing to Latin characters proposed by the boyar Văcărescu.

In terms of reforms, Bois-le-Comte recognizes the role and necessity of the help of a foreign power. The French observer mentions the role of Kiseleff. He found, on one hand, a middle ground in the conflict between the boyars and the governors, and a more just regulation in the relations between peasant and boyar, on the other. Thus, the number of functions occupied by the boyars was reduced, and, regarding the peasants, new regulations were introduced. Otherwise, the situation of the peasants, little improved by the reforms of the ruler Mavrocordat, has changed for the better. The peasant received by law a certain area of land from the harvest of which gave a tenth and provided also 18 days of work on the land left to the boyar. Although the freedom of movement of the peasants was subject to high taxes, the boyar had the right to withdraw the peasant lot for another in return. So, in the hope that the property right would be renewed, the class of peasant owners was recognized on the lots that they cultivated, the ones having previously an agreement with the boyar³⁴.

The city administration was the result of the large extension of the elective principle granted to the villages. There was a city council that governed, fixed the taxes and self-

³³ Ibid., 349–351.

³⁴ Ibid., 355–356.

administered, with the obligation to present the budget of the receipts of the representatives of the central administration. The electing deputies, appointed from the ranks of the Christian owners of buildings worth 700 francs every 3 years, chose among their residents, who owned buildings worth 2800 francs, the four members who made up the city council³⁵.

The country's assembly consisted of 43 members. In addition to the metropolitan who served as president, there were three prelates, 20 first-class boyars and 19 county deputies, the latter having to be part of the ranks of the owners and the boyars. Bois-le-Comte notes that the Russians were charged with the right by which they had been allowed to change the connection between the prince and the Assembly, or the composition of the latter, which had previously consisted only of first-class boyars. Article 50 of the Regulation "establishes, in principle, that any act of the Assembly or of the prince that would contravene the privileges of the country, the treaties, the decree issued by the sultan, the rights of the sovereign court or of the protective court, it will be by itself null and void. According to articles 53 and 54, the prince cannot, in case of internal turmoil, dissolve the Assembly and summon another, without having previously obtained the consent of His Majesty the emperor of Russia's consul. Finally, the Assembly can address the country's wishes directly to the two courts and make proposals in this regard. These three articles, which alone would be enough to destroy all the maps and all the governments in the world, were sent ready to be drafted from St. Petersburg"³⁶. The French emissary detects the rapid and efficient constitutional progress in Wallachia, despite the vices of the new political system. In fact, he manages to attend one of the meetings of the Assembly, although they were not public. Bois-le-Comte wrote the following: "I found the deputies sitting face to face, as in the English parliament. Almost three quarters were still dressed in the old Oriental costume, which is worn by the elderly and deputies from the province. The tone of the discussion was that of a salon conversation; and the habit of speaking from his place, when seated, allowed each one to make his observations without intimidation, avoiding any declamation and emphasis. After the presentation of the Minister of a nation led, as this until now, it is already much to have acquired such a habit. I have to do justice to General Kiselev and to say that in everything that did not touch the country's relations with Russia very directly, he permanently encouraged freedom of discussion."³⁷. Aside from this Assembly, there was also the Extraordinary Assembly that met only for the appointment of the prince. It was also presided over by the metropolitan and included 189 members: three prelates, 50 first-class boyars, 73 second-class boyars, 36 county deputies and 27 deputies from the city guilds who represented the middle class³⁸.

As for Moldova, Bois-le-Comte shares a certain superiority complex of Moldovans. Moldova would have overtaken Wallachia through wealth, power and military glory. Although Moldova stretched from the Ottoman Empire to the Bug, the Black Sea and to the mouths of

³⁵ Ibid., 357.

³⁶ *Călători străini*, 127.

³⁷ Ibid., 128.

³⁸ *Hurmuzaki*, 358.

the Danube, it eventually lost Bessarabia to Russia and northern Bucovina to Austria. At the time of the French diplomat's mission, Moldova would have "an area equal to that of the New Greek state" and a population of 1,138,000 inhabitants. Unlike the French population, the emissary noted in Moldova other bases of its formation, but also special combinations to the Moldovan population from a social point of view. First of all, the first-class boyars were proud of their seniority and wealth, but kept a much smaller distance from the other boyars compared to Wallachia. Bois-le-Comte correlated the French middle class with the second and third class boyars, who were subject to government authority because of their precarious situation and modest wealth. However, they had representatives in the Assembly with the changes brought by the Regulations. On the other hand, the clergy in Moldova had less influence on the people. Although the monastery revenues were only 1,300,000 francs, the clergy also owed debts due to the poor administration of the properties. Instead, the people had the sense of reckoning, so that the peasants would follow their boyars or priests only after a cold analysis of the purpose to which they want to guide them. The Moldovan bourgeoisie was composed almost exclusively of foreigners. Moreover, the French emissary also perceived the unsuspecting spirit of the Moldovans who came in contradiction with Wallachia. This led to conflicts with the Russians when reforms were introduced, when the armed forces were needed in many villages, resulting in losses on both sides. The Orthodox religion was a majority in Moldova, which helped to establish a connection with Russia. However, as a result of the emigration from Transylvania and Poland, 40,000 Catholics and 1000 Protestants arrived. The Catholics, in a much larger number than in Wallachia (6,200) where they had no political influence, in Moldova they were under the jurisdiction of the Congregation "De Propaganda Fide". Austria took France's place in protecting or influencing Catholics in the Principalities through religion. Bois-le-Comte also mentions the great presence of the Jews in Moldova. They were mostly refugees from Russia and Poland, under the protection of the Austrian or Prussian consulate. Bois-le-Comte considers that "the presence of [the Jews] is especially felt in the brandy's trade. The boyars, who have the exclusive privilege to make this drink and sell it on their estates, give up this privilege". In addition to the Jews, Bois-le-Comte also noted the presence of the Gypsies. This community numbered about 170,000 people. According to Bois-le-Comte, the Gypsies were divided into two categories, as in Wallachia: those from the cities and from the houses of the boyars and the nomads, who stayed in the mountains in summer and in the proximity of the cities in winter. After the abolition of the gypsy serfdom at the middle of the last century, they remained in both Principalities in state ownership, having full independence provided with the condition to pay a fixed tax, or being exempt from taxes as the inhabitants of some boyar's estates. In fact, the emissary could see that the Gypsies had their pride and wanted to serve only the boyars. Even if the state did nothing to improve their condition and character, which would have caused them to leave the Principalities, "their physique and intellect are not at all rude and seem rather to belong to a delicate and distinguished race. They are very intelligent and capable of doing everything that their laziness and messy life allow them. In the midst of all their vices, at least they excel in family spirit. Many of them have proven themselves faithful to their masters in difficult circumstances.

There is something in our nature that does not allow us to lose hope for a whole race of people, as with Gypsies³⁹.

In relation to the natural riches of Moldova, the French emissary stated that Moldova was in many respects superior to Wallachia: "The soil is black and clay, suitable for the cultivation of all varieties of wheat. The mountains contain the same wealth as Wallachia and remain unexploited. Only minerals, whose annual output is fifteen million kilograms, are extracted from minerals. [...] Moldova produces a quantity of wheat that exceeds its own needs and its quality is by no means worse than that of Podolia. Towards the shedding of Prut, the soil is more fruitful than the one from Wallachia, the wheat producing here usually twelve to eighteen grains a seed". Although in Moldova there was less land and more population than in Wallachia, the potato culture had grown significantly in recent years (in 1833 it would have been obtained eight times more), as well as the wheat, barley, oats, corn, millet or pearl barley. In this regard, the qualitative superiority of the Moldovan wines can also be mentioned. Nonetheless, Moldova would have a lot to lose with the Russian customs regulations, which stopped the supply of these wines in Poland, Galicia and Russia. On the other hand, not the same quality had the oak wood and pinewood, a problem that led to the cessation of trade with the French. However, the main wealth of the country remained the large number of cattle that also supplied the Russians: "each peasant family has on average four to five oxen, up to three horses and fourteen to fifteen sheeps. After this calculation and adding the great oxen herds and the horse studs of the Armenian merchants and the horses in the cities, the total number of domestic animals in the country is 2,820,000 heads". Despite the fact this wealth would be three times greater than in France and twice as large as Wallachia, the Moldovan trade experienced a regression towards the one in Wallachia. "The Moldovan export is carried out on the Danube and on land. The former tends to develop greatly; but the trade on land has been almost destroyed since the Russian customs closed its borders and the losses of Bessarabia have deprived Moldova of its main export goods. The land trade consist of the export of four main articles: cattle, salt, wine and cereals". On the other hand, "the import of manufactured products from Europe and especially from Lipsa [Leipzig] is done on land. The main import at sea consists of colonial goods worth 1,300,000 francs and oil and olives worth six to eight hundred thousand francs". As follows, the closure of the Russian borders, but also of the Austrian ones, led during the war to the decrease of the Moldovan trade by a quarter to Wallachia⁴⁰.

In terms of income, the Principalities have the same system that is based on the capitation (paid by the peasants and by the patents), to which are added the indirect income from customs and *ocene*. "The land, regardless of the quality of the owner, is tax free. Only the monastery estates are exempted from this general rule, having to pay to the ward a quarter of

³⁹ Ibid., 359–363.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 364–367.

the income. One fifth of the inhabitants, with the title of members of the clergy, boyars, their servants or foreigners is exempted from the capitation"⁴¹.

According to Bois-le-Comte's observations, the Organic Regulation was applied in Moldova only in the external forms. "After a first attempt, the old state of affairs was better and in some cases they returned to it." As for justice, there were bigger problems and more pronounced than in Wallachia, so that although the code published by the great chancellor Constantin Sturdza in 1833 was a benefit, it "could not remedy the evil because it existed in the morals of the nation and in the venality of the judges"⁴².

As for the Danube trade, the French diplomat noticed how little the great river was used. The only way of linking Central Europe with the Black Sea and Asia was impracticable, because of the natural obstacles in Banat. Bois-le-Comte had noticed that some changes had occurred, however, regarding the navigation on the Danube. With the years 1828-1829, the Principalities became more connected to Europe, which led to a greater focus on the Danube. Also, Bois-le-Comte observed the growth of trade through the Black Sea. The cereals from Moldova and Wallachia were the most requested products by the external market. The trade was done through the ports of Brăila and Galați. "Most transports are done towards Constantinople", writes Bois-le-Comte. From the Ottoman capital, cereals take the Mediterranean Sea. Other products exported are tallow, skins, pastrami, cheese or salted butter, as a result of the increase in the number of cattle in both Principalities. But also is added the export of honey, vegetables, wine, and salt, building wood, tobacco or flax seeds. This important trade in the two free ports led to the development of the two cities. Despite the advance of the city of Galați, Brăila made rapid progress, so that "out of 236 ships arriving in Galați in 1833, 60 were ionic, 30 Greek, 42 Russian, 36 Austrian, 30 Turkish and 18 Sardinian", and in Brăila entered the same year 384 vessels⁴³.

At the end of his exposing, the French emissary makes a presentation of the Principalities' relations with the Ottoman Empire and with the Russian Empire. The Ottomans had lost almost all authority in Moldova and Wallachia. With reference to the relations with Russia, these were regulated by the provisions of the Akkerman Convention and the Treaty of Adrianople. Undoubtedly, the memory of the French diplomat remained a first-rate source for the historical analysis of the general state of Romanian society from the first half of the 19th century. In his analysis, Bois-le-Comte noted the differences between the Principalities of Moldova, Wallachia and the West, more important in the world of villages, but also the proximities between the two spaces.

⁴¹ Ibid., 368.

⁴² Ibid., 370.

⁴³ Ibid., 371–378.