

THE DANUBE, A STRATEGIC VECTOR FOR THE PROJECTION OF FORCE IN THE WAR OF 1877-1878

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Abstract: *The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 ignited out of considerable tensions amassed in the second half of XIX century between Russia and Ottoman Empire over extending control in the Balkan Peninsula. For the people from this area, the new conflict was merely an opportunity to promote their independence and sovereignty aspirations. Romania's involvement in this war was focused on achieving national independence. The way in which this strategic option was implemented by supporting transit of the Russian and landing on the other side of Danube. But most important contribution was employed by Romanian army in the battles and fights that occurred in different locations in the south of Danube area, such was the case in Plevnen, Grivița and Smârdan. In the framework of Romanian army operations, securing the control on Danube was one of the strategic priorities involving a significant degree of complexity in developing infrastructure works for several crossings of substantial contingents. These aspects were highly relevant especially in the most intense phases of war, being one of the most visible aspects in the newspaper's correspondence of that time.*

Keywords: *Russo-Turkish War, War of Crimea, San Stefano Treaty, Berlin Treaty, Charles I, Skobelev, Cernat, Danube, Alexander II.*

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The outbreak of a new Russo-Turkish war in April 1877 was placed in an international context already strongly marked by the so-called "Oriental Question" which essentially consisted of two components. First, it was about the nineteenth-century geopolitical competition associated with the survival of the Ottoman Empire in the face of Russia's expansionist policy. This dynamic had occasioned a dramatic succession of wars between the two empires, intensified especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. In this interval are recorded the Russian-Turkish conflicts of 1828-1829 and that of 1853-1856, the latter much better known as the Crimean War. Regardless of the configuration of the alliances that gravitated around these confrontations, the stakes have always been the same regarding the Russian-Turkish competition for control of the Black Sea and, subsequently, of the Balkan Peninsula.

The results can be assessed as changeable but inscribed on a constant trend of extending Russia's control and influence to the heart of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the takeover (following the war of 1828-29) of an important portion of the northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea,

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doubled by the Russian advance in the Caucasus, is placed. The outbreak of the Crimean War and the combined reaction of the great European powers against Russia's expansion in the east of the Black Sea generated a strong retreat of this policy simultaneously with a consolidation of the position of the Ottoman Empire. The peace treaty signed in Paris, on March 30, 1856, enshrined these realities as well as the reopening of the Black Sea and the Danube to international circulation. The situation will continue for less than two decades, in 1870 Russia unilaterally giving up the application of the Paris provisions. The decision was followed by the resumption of the enlargement program, respectively by the reconstruction of the Black Sea fleet, which was mostly destroyed under the conditions of the Paris Treaty.

The second component of the context of this period concerned the situation of the peoples of the Balkans and the south-eastern perimeter of Europe. The period prior to the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 saw significant developments through the outbreak of a chain of revolts against the Ottoman authority, as is the case of those in Serbia (1817, 1833), Greece (1820-21), Wallachia (1821), Albania (1831), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1831-32). They will shake the Ottoman presence in the area to its foundations, demanding additional military efforts on their part in order to keep the situation under control. Gradually, the revolts became generalized in the second half of the nineteenth century, taking on the profile of real wars. Russia's support for national movements gradually strengthened, becoming one of the main reasons that contributed to the outbreak of the new Russian-Turkish war. This approach will also be highlighted in the Proclamation of Tsar Alexander II (1818-1888), adopted in Chişinău, on April 2/24, 1877, an act considered to be the declaration of war associated with the new conflict.

Four days later, Russia signed a Convention by which Russian troops received permission to transit the territory of Romania for the continuation of an offensive towards Constantinople. The option assumed by the government in Bucharest was inscribed on the coordinates constantly promoted after the achievement of the union of 1859, in the sense of obtaining independence from the High Porte. The Act of Union was recognized by the Ottoman Empire at the Conference of Representatives of the Ottoman Porte and the Guarantor Powers, which took place in the last quarter of 1861. Under Cuza's reign, the unification process proceeded at an accelerated pace, after the arrival of Carol I, the first Constitution was adopted (July 1, 1866) by which the United Principalities began to be called Romania. During this period, the relations between the Romanian state and the High Porte evolved towards an independent behaviour of the authorities in Bucharest, in which the support of the peoples of the Balkans against the Ottoman occupation was an important feature. In this sense, Romania has

supported, through various means¹, the uprising movements in Serbia and Bulgaria, including through the transit of weapons and ammunition to them.

Also, in the context of the Balkan Crisis, Romania intensified its actions² with the High Porte regarding the recognition of independence, which were rejected by Constantinople. The outbreak of the Russian-Turkish war was an opportunity to validate the options assumed by Romania. Amid the escalation of tensions between the two empires, Romania began to mobilize its own forces, through the Decree of April 6/18, 1877. A month later, the number of troops called up to arms reached 120,000, of which about 50% represented the operational core of the Romanian army.

From an operational perspective, the Convention concluded by the Romanian government and ratified in Parliament on April 16/28, 1878, did not provide for Romania's participation in military actions against the Ottoman Empire. On this point, the negotiations with the Russian side failed due to the refusal to accept operational cooperation and the distinct nature of a potential Romanian contribution. However, following the successive bombardments carried out from the Turkish positions south of the Danube on the city of Calafat, the state of war between Romania and the Ottoman Empire was *de facto established*, from the first moments after the outbreak of the war. Towards the end of April, the operational dynamics on the Danube line evolved into intense artillery duels that will cover the Oltenița-Bechet segment. Subsequently, in the solemn session of the Parliament on May 9/21, 1877, Romania's independence was declared.

Securing the left flank and taking control of the Danube in the Dobrogea perimeter

The rapid succession of events was to confirm the efforts of the Romanian authorities to increase the combat capacity of the Romanian army. The main challenge of this period was to create the conditions for Russian troops to cross the Danube as quickly as possible and with the avoidance of significant losses. The campaign plan drawn up by the Russian command followed, in general terms, the coordinates used during the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29. Thus, it was envisaged to cross the Danube, after the transit of the territory of Romania, of a substantial number of troops (150-200,000) and a few units of Bulgarian volunteers. In parallel with the actions on the Balkan front, the outbreak of the war was immediately followed by the launch of operations in the Caucasus, with the

¹ Romanian Academy, *Istoria românilor*, vol.VII, tom I, Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 639-640

² The Memorandum of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihail Kogălniceanu of July 15-27, 1876 – *Documents on the – Documente privind istoria României. Războiul pentru independență* - DIRRI ½, pp. 192-208 and in *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VII, tom I, p. 641.

objective of conquering the fortress of Kars and opening the road to Erzerum.

The actions carried out in the Danube perimeter had a particular significance for the creation of the bridgehead and the securing of the right bank, which will allow the Russian troops and, subsequently, the Romanian ones, to quickly cross the river. Equally, the crossing of the Danube represents one of the important episodes of the confrontations of the nineteenth century, both from the perspective of the speed of displacement and from that of the logistical effort.

At the beginning of the war, the course of the Danube was relatively well fortified, being supported by a consistent defensive system in which the main positions of the Turkish army were at Vidin, Rahova-Nicopole-Şiştova, Rusciuc, Silistra, Varna. The fortifications in these locations included more than 70,000 soldiers. About 20,000 were deployed in different locations in Dobrogea, supported by the Ottoman fleet on the Danube, made up mostly of medium-tonnage ships. In the face of this device, the option of the Russian command was aimed at securing the left flank of the core of forces in the Brăila-Galaţi perimeter in order to eliminate the threat of the Ottoman troops in Dobrogea. On these coordinates, on April 24/May 6, 1877, Russian troops began transit. The core of the forces entered through the Ungheni point, while a smaller grouping, made up of elements with superior mobility potential, under the command of General Mikhail Skobelev (1843-1882) passed through Leova, about 150 km south. The objective of the latter was to secure the crossing points over the Danube on the left flank of the Russian forces, which was to be achieved by May 8, 1877. In parallel, the bulk of the Russian forces are advancing on the Ungheni-Iaşi-Roman-Focşani route.

The rapid action of the Skobelev group was also possible through the support of the Romanian forces in the area that prevented the Ottoman passage beyond Galaţi. After the arrival of the Russian troops, they took over the responsibility of securing the perimeter, installing artillery pieces through which they managed to eliminate the danger posed by the Ottoman fleet³. The Russian land actions were supported by the Romanian Navy through military ships (Stephen the Great, Romania, the Lightning and the Swallow) with the help of which the actions of the Ottoman flotilla were neutralized. Subsequently, Dobrogea was cleansed of the Ottoman troops by building, on June 10/28, 1877, a pontoon bridge. It is worth mentioning that in order to consolidate the bridge crossing system, a series of works of wood transported to Siret and collected in Brăila were improvised⁴.

³ The sinking of an Ottoman battleship (*Lüft-ü Celil*) on 19 April/1 May 1877. Lawrence Sandhurst. *Naval Warfare, 1815-1914*, Routledge, London-New York, 2001, p. 123.

⁴ F.Maurice. *1877. The Russo-Turkish War*, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1905, p. 56.

The high level of the Danube made it impossible to build a fixed bridge. The chosen solution was to use floating pontoons and other boats that were in the area. The Turkish resistance on the other bank was quickly overcome by the first elements disembarked, thus allowing the crossing of the Danube to take place quickly during the day. From here the front-line advances towards Constanța and Cernavodă, with Russian troops managing to take control of most of this region⁵. For the next period of the war, the Cernavoda-Constanta line will represent the alignment of the front in the lower perimeter of the Danube. About 15,000 Turkish troops will be immobilized in this perimeter to prevent the resumption of the offensive.

The combined action of the Russian troops supported by Romanian naval capabilities allowed the main effort to be concentrated towards the Danube line, up to the mouth of the Olt. The right flank of the Russian army continued to be secured by the Romanian troops who kept under observation the Turkish attempts to cross the Danube, both with land forces and especially through intense artillery barrages.

At the south of Danube

The second episode of the Danube crossing took place near the mouth of the Olt River, involving the nucleus of the Russian forces led by Grand Duke Nicholas (1831-1891), brother of Tsar Alexander II. The geographical proximity of the Ottoman fortresses to the right bank of the Danube required particular attention in identifying the crossing point. The concern of the Russian command was to camouflage as much as possible the crossing perimeter to allow the construction of the bridge in the absence of attacks or raids by the Ottoman Black Sea fleet and the monitors stationed in support of the Ottoman garrisons along the right bank. The main threats were represented by the heavily fortified Nicopolis and Rusciuk (Ruse) and from where dangerous attacks could be launched for the passage of troops. The chosen location was represented by the perimeter adjacent to Zimnicea, with a reserve option Flămânda. The geographical and relief configuration offered the possibility of collecting construction materials, mostly moved on the Olt, away from the eyes of the Ottoman garrisons on the opposite bank.

In order to secure the passage corridor, minesweepers were brought to the railway and placed a network of explosive devices between Giurgiu and Islaz, thus preventing the aggressive movements of the Ottoman flotilla. In parallel, a plan was implemented to divert Ottoman attention to a point located 50 km west of Zimnicea, on the Romanian bank of the Danube. Here, the small village of Flămânda was chosen to divert the enemy's attention, including by establishing the headquarters of Tsar Alexander in

⁵ *The War Correspondence of the "Daily News" 1877*, MacMilland and Co., London, 1878, pp. 170-171.

Turnu Măgurele. The strategy worked well, massing Russian troops between June 13/25-15/27, in the Zimnicea perimeter, escaping Turkish observation. The concealment of the landing was to be significantly supported by the Romanian troops who executed consistent artillery fire during June 14-15/27, thus camouflaging the preparations for the landing⁶.

On the night of June 14/26-15/27, 1877, the first elements of the Russian forces, led by General Mikhail Dragomirov (1830-1905) crossed the Danube in boats (210 boats of different sizes). The duration of the crossing was, on average, about an hour. On the opposite bank, near the landing point, there were substantial Ottoman troops, including a brigade (about 3,500-4,000 soldiers) from the garrison of Shishtov, located in the immediate vicinity of the bridgehead opened by the Russians. Taken by surprise, the Ottoman troops try to organize an attack on the landed troops. Intense fighting took place between the first disembarked forces and the Ottoman troops. The result is changeable for several hours, with moments when the landing is questioned. The landed troops completed the capture of the action by launching the attack on Shishtov. The Ottoman resistance, although fierce, acted disorderly, not being able to use superior firepower in the first moments of the landing. The victory of the Russian troops is finally decided by the artillery support on the Romanian shore and the maintenance of the constant pace of landing. The losses recorded by the Russian troops amount to about 850 wounded and dead, at a level almost similar to those recorded by the Ottoman forces. On the morning of June 15/27, the Ottoman troops withdrew, which allowed the consolidation of the bridgehead with forces brought on board Romanian monitors from Turnu Măgurele.

The pontoon bridge was to be completed on July 2, 1877, allowing the triumphal passage, under the leadership⁷ of Tsar Alexander II, of the last contingents massed at Zimnicea. From the other bank, the Russian troops will engage in the implementation of the plan designed for the conduct of the war, which aimed to advance, through the Balkans, towards Constantinople. Soon after crossing the Danube, Russian troops would face a reality they had not anticipated. The Turkish troops in the garrisons on the banks of the Danube as well as those in Bosnia-Herzegovina represented a considerable force, of about 150,000 soldiers, with a firepower of over 250 cannons, mostly of German production, Krupp. Obviously, this situation was far from the plans on which the Russian strategy had been built, revealing the asymmetry between the level of its own forces in relation to those deployed in the area by the Ottoman Empire. However, Grand Duke Nicholas opted to continue the offensive on a semi-circular front around

⁶ Romanian Academy, *Istoria românilor*, vol.VII, tom I, Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 671.

⁷ Barry, Quintin. *War in the East. A Military History of the Russo-Turkish War, 1877-78*, Helion, 2012, pp. 78-79.

Shishtov. By mid-July, they managed, with the support of the Romanian artillery from Turnu Măgurele/Fămânda, to occupy Ruse and Nicopolis, thus extending the control over the right bank of the Danube.

He also made important progress in the interior of the territory by conquering Veliko Tarnovo and from there launching the attack on the Şipka Pass, in order to cross the Balkans. Repeated attempts to cross fail dramatically for Russian forces who are forced to retreat with significant losses. At the same time, the Ottoman apparatus in Bulgaria was reorganized as a result of the energetic action of General Osman Pasha (1832-1900) and the arrival of new reinforcements from Bosnia, under the command of Suleiman Pasha (1838-1892). He had been appointed by Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842-1918), the commander of the Ottoman troops in the Balkan Peninsula, being one of the most titled senior officers of the Ottoman Empire.

Osman Pasha's actions would focus on building an advanced system of fortifications around Pleven that was to be the main obstacle in supporting the effort to cross the Balkans. Under these conditions, the attention of the Russian command is focused on the conquest of Pleven the first attack being launched on July 8/20, 1877. As a result of these developments, work is being carried out on the construction of a new bridge over the Danube that will allow the rapid transit of superior personnel and, why not, ensure an eventual withdrawal of Russian forces in the event of an Ottoman counteroffensive. The decision corresponded to the situation on the ground, given the major failure recorded in the second attack of the Russians (July 18/30, 1877) which also resulted in major losses and deepening the feeling of panic among the Russian troops. Their retreat was carried out in relative disorganization, seeking refuge on the Romanian bank of the Danube. Some of them cross the bridge from Shishtov.

Crossing of the Romanian forces to the south of Danube

The difficulties faced by Pleven determined the request for Romania's support. Until that moment, the Russian attitude towards the participation of Romanian troops in the fighting in Bulgaria was negative. The changes in front of Pleven determined the reconsideration of this position, so that on July 19/31, Nicholas sent a telegram to Prince Carol I requesting the support of the Romanian army⁸. The appeal of Grand Duke Nicholas opens the third episode that involved the organization of the Danube crossing. Even during the preparations for the passage of Russian troops to Zimnicea, the problem of opening another point was a priority for

⁸ full text in *Memoriile regelui Carol I al României*, vol. III, p.191-192, Machiavelli Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994.

the Romanian army. The options taken into consideration targeted the western perimeter, looking for an option near Vidin (Gruia-Salcia).

The option of an additional bridge in this area had as its main reason the opening of a new front that would eliminate communication between the Ottoman device in Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also, the crossing of the Danube in this area would have allowed the consolidation of the measures of the Romanian forces in Oltenia to be capitalized, which would have ensured a rapid and constant flow of forces on the right bank. The concretization of such a perspective could not be achieved in the conditions of divergences of opinion between the Romanian and Russian commands. The latter's option was much more attached to preserving Russia's central role in leading the war and, subsequently, coordinating the war effort south of the Danube⁹.

The seriousness of the situation of the Russian troops was adequately appreciated by the Romanian ruler, who had already ordered the transfer of some troops of the Romanian 4th Division to the garrison in Nicopolis. It should be noted that Duke Nicolae's request offered the opportunity to capitalize on the Romanian plans to open a new crossing point west of Zimnicea, the request for support targeting the Jiu-Corabia perimeter meant to increase the pressure on Plevna. In order to capitalize on the Russian support on the right bank, however, it was necessary to move forces and logistical support from the perimeter anticipated to be used and the crossing in front of Vidin¹⁰. On July 28/August 9, discussions between Prince Carol and the Russian imperial headquarters continue on the landing site.

An alternative put forward by the Russian side was to approach a position in the Nicopolis perimeter in order to benefit from the support of Russian troops. On the same day, the opinions of the Romanian command were in support of the Măgura – Siliștioara variant, which would have allowed the development of a movement to envelop Plevna. Also, the arguments of the Romanian side concerned the fact that the adoption of this course of action would have allowed the preservation of the distinct character of the contribution to the war, which could only be taken into account following the conclusion of a convention that would "clearly decide the role of the Romanian army in different phases of the war".¹¹ These opinions were shared by Prince Carol and from the perspective of the importance for the theatre of operations south of the Danube, being able to

⁹ *Istoricul Resboiului 1877-1878. Participarea României la acestu resboiu*, Partea I, Romanian Academy Tipography, 1887, pp. 212-213.

¹⁰ *Memoriile regelui Carol I*, p. 194.

¹¹ Telegram of Colonel Gheorghe Slăniceanu from the command of Corabia to Prince Carol I, *Memorii*, pp. 199-200.

contribute significantly to the cutting of the lines of communication between Sofia and Plevna, respectively the isolation of Osman Pasha's troops.

Basically, the positioning of the bridgehead became one of the points of divergence between Carol I and Grand Duke Nicholas. The firm option of the ruler of Romania was to create an area of operations distinct from that of the Russian troops, so that Romania's participation in this war could be adequately quantified at the peace negotiation table. In the following days, correspondence on this subject intensified, with the Russian side indicating interest in the passage of the 3rd Division into the Nicopolis perimeter, positioned near Corabia. At the same time, under the pressure of the unfavourable course of the fighting in front of Plevna indicates flexibility in terms of cooperation in the theatre of operations. On August 10/22, the Romanian ruler specifies his preference for the Romanian army to keep its "individuality and unity of command in relation to the imperial army".¹² At the same time, he accepts the deployment of two cavalry regiments to cross the Danube near Nicopolis but avoids giving the order to place them under Russian command.

The works on the bridge for the passage of the Romanian troops began on August 12/24, 1877 in Siliştoara, according to the initial plans developed by the Romanian command. The engineer units move on to the construction of a pontoon bridge, while part of the Romanian forces cross the Danube on ferries. All this takes place under the careful coordination of Prince Carol who had moved his headquarters to the Gardens in order to be closer to the site of the works. On the evening of August 16/28, Charles arrives at the Russian headquarters where a Military Council is held in which Tsar Alexander II also participates. On this occasion, the ruler imposes his point of view regarding the taking command of the troops in front of Plevna¹³.

Two days later, Carol, back in Corabia, held a War Council with the Romanian officers, as a result of which the decision was taken to cross the Danube as quickly as possible on August 20/September 1 in order to allow synchronization with the Russian actions on the other bank. Also, a relatively questionable measure was adopted aimed at dismantling the bridge and moving to Turnu-Măgurele, near Nicopolis, after the passage of the Romanian troops. The reason for this decision was to ensure additional conditions for a possible withdrawal of a part of the Russian troops in front of Plevna, strongly affected by the intense fighting of the recent period¹⁴.

¹² Carol I to Grand Duke Nicholas, 10/22 August, *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 213.

¹⁴ Paul Lindberg. *Regele Carol I al României*, Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2016, p. 213 and Ioan Scurtu. *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi*, vol.I - Carol I, Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 105.

However, the adoption of such a course of action represented a decision with complex implications for the Romanian troops who were to cross the Danube. Thus, the relocation of the bridge would have limited the connection between them and the Romanian shore, which implied the extension of the logistics lines and, last but not least, generated a series of risks in the event of a decision to evacuate quickly.

Assuming these risks, the Romanian command continued the implementation of the Danube crossing plan according to the established parameters. On 20 August/1 September, the nucleus of the Romanian forces crossed the pontoon bridge deployed at the Siliștoara point. The action took place during a ceremony presided over by Prince Carol and a part of the Romanian government. The bridge, built in an extremely short period of time, measured 800 meters, being made up of 120 pontoons allowing the passage of 25,000 soldiers in a single day. After the crossing, the Romanian troops will march during the night to reach the perimeter of Plevna where they will join the Western Army, placed under the command of Prince Carol I. Another segment of the Romanian troops will cross the Danube on August 22/September 3, which will increase the number of forces deployed on the right bank to about 40,000. Two days later, the bridge will be dismantled and moved to Vidin.

On August 25/September 6, 1877, the command of the Romanian prince issued the first battle order for the resumption of the attack against Plevna. At the same time, a special order was issued for the Romanian army led by General Cernat, whose contribution was decisive for the outcome of the battles in Bulgaria and, in particular, for the surrender of Plevna. In this context, the general attack on the fortifications of Plevna on August 30/September 11 resulted in significant losses for the Romanian army, calling into question the offensive strategy. After the adoption of the decision to start the siege of Plevna, the Romanian troops managed to occupy the Grivița I redoubt (30 August/11 September). Subsequently, the participation of the Romanian forces was also valued by occupying the Rahova redoubt (7/19 – 9/21 November 1877). On December 1/13, 1877, the Romanian troops entered Plevna and managed to occupy the redoubts of Grivița 2 and Opanez and during the winter they continued to advance towards Vidin (the battle of Smârdan on January 12/24, 1878) and Belogradcik, which they would besiege until the signing of the armistice on January 23/February 4, 1878.

Conclusions

Clearly, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was one of the key moments of the late nineteenth century that goes beyond the logic of competition between Tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire within the extended perimeter of the Black Sea. Although neglected by contemporary

historiography, this conflict marked the parameters under which Europe would evolve, culminating in the outbreak of the First World War.

The peace negotiations were conducted, in the first instance, in a limited format. Thus, on February 19/March 3, 1878, the Treaty of San Stefano was signed by Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Despite the substantial contribution of the Romanian troops to the defeat of the Ottoman troops, as well as the support given to the passage of the Russian troops, Romania was not accepted at the negotiations, which will not allow the capitalization of the Romanian effort at the negotiating table. Conceived by Russia as a way to quickly capitalize on the operational reality in the theater and the disaster suffered by the Ottoman troops in the Balkans, they provided for major reconfigurations in this area. Thus, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro were recognized as independent states. The territory of the Romanian state was to include Dobrogea, being forced to cede the south of Bessarabia, which was taken over by Russia. The treaty also provided for the creation of the Bulgarian state whose borders covered an extensive territory from the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea. Also, the regression of Ottoman authority in the area was also reflected in the achievement of autonomy by Bosnia-Herzegovina, simultaneously with the recognition of the positions occupied by Russia in the Caucasus. Last but not least, Russia's influence in the Balkans and South-Eastern Europe was recognized in relation to the situation of the Orthodox peoples in this perimeter.

The provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano were quickly called into question by the intervention of the great European powers dissatisfied with Russia's expansion with the potential for action towards the eastern perimeter of the Mediterranean. Also, Romania's position was placed on the coordinates of firm opposition regarding the imposition of the cession of southern Bessarabia. Against this background, negotiations were resumed in an extended format that would lead to the signing of the Treaty of Berlin on June 1/13, 1878. Within the new Treaty, the provisions on Romania's independence were resumed, as well as the clauses on the cession of southern Bessarabia and the annexation of Dobrogea, respectively of Snake Island. Despite the efforts of the Romanian representatives at the Berlin negotiations, Romania's point of view "was heard but not listened to".

Beyond the political-diplomatic reconfigurations that followed the Russian-Turkish War, the conduct of operational actions reconfirmed the importance of the Danube, both in the European context and in terms of regional dynamics. Within the press reports of the time that accompanied each stage of the battles, the crossing of the Danube benefited from particular attention, highlighting the unusual nature of the techniques used, as well as the exemplary way in which the Romanian army was able to manage the complexity of this problem. The capitalization of the strategic positions of the Romanian army on the left bank of the Danube allowed the

adequate preparation of the passage with minor losses of important troops and the rapid engagement of battles with the Ottoman troops. The artillery support constantly provided by the Romanian batteries, as well as the performance of the engineering units in the construction of the bridges over the Danube, also represented significant contributions of the Romanian army to the victory against the Ottoman troops. In this context, it should be emphasized that despite the young age of the Romanian army, the development of the complex works to secure the bridge construction works as well as their completion were carried out in an extremely short period of time. Basically, the value of the Danube as a formidable safety line for the defense of the southern border of the territory of the Romanian state will be valued in the coming decades, generating formulas for the advanced disposition of the Romanian forces, supported by complex infrastructure works.

Equally, the successive episodes of crossing the Danube are also of special relevance from the perspective of the relations between Russia and Romania during the war. Thus, important valences of the firm option of the Romanian command to assume the distinct profile of the contribution to the war can be distinguished. The differences of opinion regarding the establishment of the crossing point of the Romanian forces represent a relevant aspect in this direction, being, at the same time, an important indicator for the ability of the Romanian command to plan and conduct complex operations.



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