"Civilisation" and Eastern European state formation: The case of Romania

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Research Question: *To what extent did Western European ideas of civilisation and modernity influence their perceptions of Eastern European polities?*

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Introduction

Since the foundation of the field in the aftermath of the First World War, the primary calling of international relations scholars has been to crack open and inspect the mechanisms upholding the international system. I believe that task is impossible to undertake without a proper recognition of the fact that much of the Western-led system we analyse today is the direct inheritance of the modern international society, as it was constructed during the early modern period and perfected during the long nineteenth century (Buzan & Lawson, 2012).

Throughout the academic exercise of piecing together our understanding of the making of modern international society, countless narratives have been constructed. Eurocentric accounts are being increasingly challenged in the literature, creating a complex and diverse image of the factors and historical processes contributing to the birth of international society. Yet one piece of this image has been remarkably under-challenged:
that of *Europe* – Europe, as the homogenous space of sovereign states, the centre of the international, law-based "family of civilised nations". The crux of the debate regarding the making, the functioning, and the consequences of modern international society seems to have been constructed around two poles: Europe – which almost always refers to Western European colonial powers – and *the rest* (Gong, 1984; Watson, 1984; Keene, 2002).

This approach fails to take into account the complexity of intra-European relations which go beyond the traditional story about Western European empires (Keene, 2014). The experience of Eastern European polities represents a section of history which has been consistently overlooked yet is just as compelling for our understanding of imperialism, modernity and civilisation in the context of modern international society (Snyder & Younger, 2018). This is crucial, because these three elements have become widely accepted in the academic community as the driving force behind the emergence of a Western-led order during the nineteenth century, whose lasting influence remains evident today (Keene, 2002; Buzan & Lawson, 2012).

The aim of this paper is to bridge the literature gap regarding the history of Eastern European polities and their relation to, and role within the complex intra-continental dynamics of nineteenth century European imperialism. As such, this research project will address the following question: *To what extent did Western European ideas of civilisation and modernity influence their perceptions of Eastern European polities?*

The relevance of closing the literature gap regarding the historical status of Eastern Europe and its place in the modern international system goes beyond furthering academic knowledge of a region which has been largely overlooked. The findings arising from this also contribute to debates surrounding the contemporary international system. The perception of Eastern Europe might have been created in the imperial context of the nineteenth century, but the discourse of modernity and civilisation still makes its way into European affairs today (Nicolaidis, Vergerio, Onar, & Viehoff, 2014), particularly in the case of European Union enlargements and the admission of new member states in the Schengen area (Dimitrov & Plachkova, 2021).

The first section of this paper will be dedicated to a literature review of existing academic contributions to the debate regarding the status of Eastern European polities during the nineteenth century and the ways in which Western European conceptions of sovereignty and civilisation led to the construction of a perception of Eastern Europe as a *backwards* and *uncivilised* region. Section two will then focus on the conceptual framework this paper will make use of. As such, I will discuss the ways Western ideas of civilisation and modernity have been addressed in academic literature. Section three will present the research design of this research project, including a discussion of the case selection – namely the Romanian state formation process – and the significance it holds, and of the methodology the project will follow. Section four will be dedicated to the analysis and the presentation of findings, and section five will offer concluding remarks, including a discussion of the limitations and implications of this paper.

1. **Literature review: The emerging interest into Eastern European history**

Academic inquiry into the history of Eastern Europe and its integration into the wider historical processes of the continent has thus far been severely limited. Scholars are just starting to uncover the complex ways in which the region has contributed to and the part it played in European history.

The vast majority of International Relations literature addressing non-Western participation in the modern international system relates to the experiences of China and Japan (Watson, 1984; Suzuki, 2009; Buzan, 2014) or Russia and the Ottoman Empire (Gong, 1984; Kaczmarska, 2016; O'Quinn, 2018). Russia and the Ottoman Empire represent the closest example in

mainstream academic literature of the heterogeneity of experiences in the European-centred international system. While most extra-European territories – with the exception of Japan– were pulled into the system as a result of colonisation and on the basis of the centre-periphery relations with European colonial powers, Russia and the Ottoman Empire managed to join on the basis of the fulfilment of the standard of civilisation and as a result of their rising power in the European continent (Buzan, 2014). This process can only confirm the narrative of an exclusive standard through which the "appropriateness" of polities was measured against Western levels of measurement (Keene, 2007; Pitts & Armitage, 2017). Before it could be recognised and included in the international system, Russia underwent an extensive process of modernisation and emulation of Western ideals of civilisation during the seventeenth century (Gong, 1984; Kaczmarska, 2016). Similarly, despite its presence and territorial expansion in the European continent for centuries (O'Quinn, 2018), the Ottoman Empire was only admitted "to the Concert of Europe" following the 1856 Peace Treaty signed in Paris in the aftermath of the Crimean War (1853-1856) (Iordachi, 2019, p. 166). This was simultaneously due to an alignment of British and French interests regarding the survival of the Ottoman Empire, and the concessions made by the Empire under the Treaty to adjust its internal policy according to Western standards (Temperley, 1932; Gong, 1984).

Until the early 2000s, there has been an almost complete lack of interest for Eastern European history, which recent studies have attributed to the widespread view of the region as a peripheral and *backwards* part of Europe (Snyder & Younger, 2018). Nonetheless, several recent studies deserve to be recognised for their contribution to shedding light on the importance of the region for the understanding of the political and cultural history of Europe during the nineteenth century (Snyder & Younger, 2018). For the purpose of this review, I will address three of their findings which are relevant for the present research project.

First, as opposed to the common assumption that it is a homogenous and static region throughout most of the era of European Empires, Central and Eastern Europe were characterised by a great deal of cultural and political diversity (Trencsényi, Baar, Falina, Janowski, & Kopecek, 2016). Its historical development was widely influenced by its strategic placement at the centre of the imperial competition between the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman empires, which gave way to a complex web of political entities and authority structures (Todorova, 2009; Trencsényi et al., 2016). The homogeneity assumption has long

justified Eastern Europe's total neglect or tangential mention in most historical debates (Trencsényi et al., 2016).

Second, Eastern Europe was far from a passive recipient of European influence. Instead, recent historical analysis focused on the Balkans suggests that the region was an active participant to the political and cultural debates of the modern period, with elites being engaged with the ideas of the Enlightenment, liberalism and nationalism, and actively translated them into the local political and cultural contexts (Todorova, 2005; Snyder & Younger, 2018). Furthermore, Eastern Europe was fully integrated into the continental economic networks, especially through the expansion of railway networks and international trade (Snyder & Younger, 2018).

Third, the study of the Balkans' political and cultural development has been hindered by a backwardness complex (Todorova, 2005; Snyder & Younger, 2018) which was the result of its repeated subjection to a particular form of Orientalism (Todorova, 2005, pp. 144-146). The origins of the Orientalist discourse has its roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when European scholars and travellers first began to study the region, their accounts taking a range of stereotypes and caricatures back to Western societies which have persisted to this day (Todorova, 2009). The Balkans were imagined as a *backwards, barbaric* and *exotic* region, and its people were depicted as violent, irrational and primitive, and the writings of those early travellers were later perpetuated through a range of cultural forms and internalised into Western perceptions of the region (Todorova, 2009, p. 11). These stereotypes helped establish the belief that Eastern Europe is inherently inferior to Western Europe and must first catch up in order to be considered modern (Todorova, 2005, pp. 144-146). This remains highly significant even today, as the stereotypical image of Eastern European countries continues to affect intra-European relations in the context of debates regarding European Union enlargements and, more recently, Schengen enlargements (Dimitrov & Plachkova, 2021).

Although these contributions made important progress for the study of Eastern European historical processes, several shortcomings uphold the need for further research. Firstly, the vast majority of the literature focuses on the history of the Balkans. Although the region is significant for and reflects broader Eastern European history, there is a great deal of diversity which is yet to be analytically explored (Trencsényi et al., 2016). Secondly, while significant

progress has been made for establishing the cultural origins of the backwardness complex (Todorova, 2009), the concept is yet to be integrated with the broader literature regarding sovereignty and the standard of civilisation and its role in shaping intra-European power dynamics. The following section will discuss the construction of the standard of civilisation in academic literature and the ways in which the existing conceptual frameworks surrounding it can be employed in this research project.

2. Conceptual framework: Sovereignty and the standard of civilisation

There is an acknowledged body of literature establishing the decisiveness of imperial expansion for the development of the concept of sovereignty. Similarly, there is consistent and growing academic work being done establishing that, during the nineteenth century, a full recognition of sovereignty was exclusively granted to members of the international society through the instrumentalization of the standard of civilisation (Keene, 2002, 2014; Buzan & Lawson, 2012).

The standard of civilisation is generally understood as embodying the mechanisms against which societies were measured to establish their admissibility into the European-centred modern international society (Bowden, 2005). However, the concept appears to hold contentious interpretations and boundaries in the literature. I will address three distinct ways in which the standard of civilisation remains the subject of conceptual debates.

First, scholars disagree on the nature of the standard in the modern international society. On the one hand, the standard of civilisation is considered an inclusionary tool, which gives polities on the outskirts of the international system the possibility to be admitted and earn full sovereignty rights. Gong (1984) argues that prior to the late eighteenth century there cannot be a discussion of one inter-connected international society. In this conception, the standard of civilisation was created by European powers as a way to create an universal order in the newly-integrated society of states, and used to allow other states a path to enter into equal relations within this society (Gong, 1984). The most common examples used in this strand of literature are those of Japan and the United States, who were the only non-European state to be recognised and included in the European system (Watson, 1984; Buzan, 2014). On the other hand, critiques of this approach maintain that an international society – based on the more inclusive principles of the *law of nations* (Pitts & Armitage, 2017) – existed prior to the late eighteenth century. Through the rise of positivist international law and the construction of

the standard of civilisation, European powers managed to rewrite existing patterns of interaction in the international system, and established an international norm around the idea that territorial sovereignty is a privilege of "civilised nations" (Keene, 2014). In this conception, the standard was an exclusionary tool, which abolished the principles under which pre-nineteenth treaty-making was conducted. For the purpose of this project, this latter narrative appears more theoretically sound, as it accounts for the fact that interconnectedness existed in earlier historical periods, as Western powers entered into equally binding treaties with a wide variety of polities prior to the late eighteenth century.

Second, scholars continue to disagree on which types of international relations the standard was primarily regulating. A growing body of work examines the ways in which the standard of civilisation was employed in the context of colonial expansion and relations to extra-European polities (Bowden, 2005; Benton, 2010; Pitts & Armitage, 2017). Keene (2002) stresses the fact that colonial practices outside Europe created the context in which modern ideas of sovereignty emerged and were instrumentalised to serve European expansionist goals. Furthermore, he contends that the development of international law was shaped by the power relations between European powers and the rest of the world (Keene, 2002). Conversely, some scholars challenge this perspective, arguing that the standard was primarily used in legal practice, to settle disputes among the members of international society. Wallenius (2017) shows how the British government claimed the existence of the standard of civilisation in customary international law as early as the 1840s, in an effort to justify its intervention in the domestic affairs of Greece (Wallenius, 2017). This argument is particularly compelling in the context of this research. It shows how, regardless of the standard's use in a colonial context, it was also employed within Europe, against polities which were fully-recognised members of the international society.

Third, there is a discrepancy between a generic understanding of the standard of civilisation, and a historical view of its definition (Nicolaidis et al., 2014). On the one hand, those supporting the former usually define the standard of civilisation as "any kind of rule-setting whereby one dominant (block of) state(s) determines which entity is to count as a legitimate political community entitled to self- rule, and based on what criteria" (Nicolaidis et al., 2014, p. 723). This approach has been criticised by some scholars for its use of "analogical reasoning by essentialising features of the historic *Standard*", and thus can be considered to provide less theoretical clarity than the alternative (Nicolaidis et al., 2014, p. 724). On the

other hand, the historical definition of the standard of civilisation is rooted in the renewal of the European imperial expansion during the 1870s, when previously held ideas about civilisation and modernity were codified by European international law practitioners and used as the normative mechanism determining membership in the international society of sovereign states (Gong, 1984; Nicolaidis et al., 2014). This conceptualisation of the standard of civilisation, referring strictly to its codified form which emerged only at the end of the nineteenth century, is incompatible with the scope of this research project, which limits its time-frame to the historical events of the 1850s. However, since the generic definition is considered insufficiently precise, I will focus my analysis on Western European ideas about civilisation and modernity. This decision is informed by the fact that, although the standard of civilisation as a legal instrument is only identifiable after 1870, the ideas and principles supporting it were present in Western mentalities, discourses, and political-conduct long before that (Wallenius, 2017).

One further aspect which should be addressed regarding the modern international society literature is that, so far, it has been mostly confined to exploring relations between Western European Empires, and their interaction with extra-European polities (Watson, 1984; Gong, 1984; Keene, 2002; Bowden, 2005; Pitts & Armitage, 2017). There has been little integration between the literature surrounding the expansion of Western ideas of civilisation and the study of Eastern European historical experiences. During the nineteenth century, nationalism intensified in Eastern European societies (Todorova, 2005; Trencsényi et al., 2016), and progressively led to the emergence of new independent or semi-independent states which sought to be included in the international society (Snyder & Younger, 2018). I argue that this broader discourse of civilisation and modernisation was of paramount importance in the context of historical debates around the independence and recognition of East European states such as Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia or Greece during the second half of the century.

3. Research Design

3.1. Case selection: Romania – on the fringe of international society

To fill the research gap surrounding the diversity of Eastern European polities and the lack of analytical inquiry into the role of ideas of civilisation for their recognition and status in the nineteenth century international society, this research project will be organised as a study of Romanian state formation, a historical space which has been neglected by the studies discussed in the previous sections.

Romania is a critical case for the purpose of this research because of its unique historical and cultural context. Romanian territories – Wallachia, Moldova, and Transylvania – were located at the border of the rivalry between three major European land empires – Ottoman, Russian and Austrian (Hitchins, 1996). While Transylvania was under the Hungarian, and later Austrian, sphere of influence until the end of World War One in 1918, Moldova and Wallachia were under Ottoman suzerainty, and for several decades during the 19th century under Russian protectorate and the collective guarantee of the European Great Powers (Sclifos, 2015; Iordachi, 2019).

In contrast to the much more researched Balkan region (Todorova, 2009; Snyder & Younger, 2018), which was under rigid Ottoman domination and formed an integral part of the Empire, Romanian territories "succeeded in preserving their political autonomy and with it their traditional social and economic structures" (Hitchins, 1996, p. 2). Moreover, Romania had a peculiar path to emancipation, which was highly dependent on the nineteenth century European power dynamics, especially those resulting from the Russian-Ottoman Wars, and the diplomatic efforts of domestic elites (Sclifos, 2015; Pop, 2019).

3.2. Methodological considerations

The timeframe this project will focus on will be restricted to the 1850s, to be able to zoom in on the incipient stages of Romania's struggle for sovereignty recognition in the international system. Specifically, the major European historical events under examination will centre on the period following the Russian-Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856), and until the signing of the Paris Convention of 1858, when Romanian polities succeeded in obtaining a partial recognition of their sovereignty, and the unification of Moldovia and Wallachia (Sclifos, 2015). Special attention will be paid to the deliberations between the European Great Powers regarding the union of the two Principalities, starting with the Vienna Conference of 1855 and particularly during the Paris Peace Congress of 1856.

The analysis will rely on primary sources such as extracts from the Conference proceedings and first-hand accounts of the negotiation processes as recorded by official correspondence published in various historiographical works, and supplemented by secondary sources. Unfortunately, the primary sources for the 1856 Paris Peace Congress are not yet available online. Thus, due to the limited scale of and timeframe available for this research project, I

will rely my analysis on the 1929 account of W. G. East, *The Union of Moldavia and Wallachia, 1859,* which is based on a reliable body of archival documents including the Conference proceedings and international correspondence from the same period.

The aim of the analysis will be to identify the extent to which ideas of "civilisation" and "modernity" played a part in the positions European Powers took regarding the process of Romanian state formation. I will focus primarily on identifying the ways in which European powers constructed arguments during the negotiations regarding the organisation of the Romanian Principalities which are explicitly or implicitly rooted in the logics of Western superiority, Eastern *backwardness* or the *civilising* role of Europe.

4. Analysis

In order to properly evaluate the positions taken Western European Powers with regard to the union of the Principalities, and the extent to which they reflected ideas of "civilisation" it is important to establish the chronology of the Romanian state formation process as it emerged in the aftermath of the Crimean War. The first part of this section will provide an overview of the chronology and of the role played by each European Power in settling the Romanian question. The second part will then delve deeper into the arguments constructed by France and Great Britain regarding the union.

4.1. Historical Context and the Paris Peace Congress (1856)

The Crimean War (1853-1856) brought the question of the Romanian Principalities, Moldavia and Wallachia into the forefront of continental rivalries and disputes (Iordachi, 2019). In 1853, the territories of Moldavia and Wallachia were simultaneously under Ottoman suzerainty and Russian protectorate – justified by Russia's self-proclaimed "responsibility to protect Christian Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire" (Hitchins, 1996). The Russian Empire used its position in the Principalities as a bargaining chip to advance its ambitions of an extensive protectorate over the Orthodox population in the Balkans and occupied their territory in June 1853 to put pressure on the Sublime Porte (Iordachi, 2019, p. 165). The Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia in retaliation, and in turn, the Russian Empire framed its campaign against the Ottoman Empire as an effort "to re-establish the injured rights of Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman Porte" (Iordachi, 2019, p. 165). As a result, Western European Powers – France, Great Britain, and the Kingdom of Sardinia – entered the war seeking to protect the integrity of the Ottoman Empire

as a means to limit Russian ambitions (Temperley, 1932). In 1854, following a convention signed with the Ottoman Empire, Austria occupied the Principalities (East, 1929, p. 26), joining the arena of European Powers whose interests for the Romanian territories would clash during the peace process.

When the war begun in 1853, Western Powers had little knowledge of, and limited interest in the affairs of the Principalities (East, 1929, p. 27). However, during the war, it became apparent that the problem of the Danubian Principalities could no longer be ignored, as they created a constant point of contention and instability between the Russian and Ottoman Empires (Sclifos, 2015). Thus, the territory of the Principalities was essential for wider continental stability, and they remained instrumental for transportation and navigation routes on the Danube River and in the Black Sea (Temperley, 1932).

The first effort to settle the Romanian Question was initiated in 1855, when representatives of the Great Powers met in Vienna (Iordachi, 2019, p. 168). It was here that the official positions of Great Britain, France, Austria, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire began to take contour. At that time, British interests in the "Near East" guided by two principles which also informed its opinion on the best solution to the organisation of the Principalities: the first was undermining Russian influence, and the second was maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire (East, 1929, p. 29) which the allied powers in the Crimean War committed to protect in 1854 (p. 26). As such, the British called for an immediate abolition of the Russian protectorate over the Principalities and a return to the "status quo ante bellum", stating that "There would be no occasion to interfere, at least in principle with the system of local governance established in those Provinces, or to place the rulers of the Provinces in more direct dependence to the Sovereign Power than they now are" (East, 1929, p. 30). It becomes apparent – from their referral to the Principalities as "provinces", and to the Porte as the "Sovereign Power", as well as from their instructions regarding the rights of the Sultan over their territory – that the British position in Vienna was focused on supporting Ottoman control of Moldavia and Wallachia. The Austrian position was in line with that of Britain, but additionally called for placing the privileges enjoyed by the Principalities under the collective guarantee of European Powers, seeking the opportunity of "constant interference […] in disputes between the Principalities and the Porte" (East, 1929, p. 34). Britain opposed the idea of a collective guarantee at this stage, for the very same reasons (p. 39). The Ottoman Empire arguments during the Vienna conference revolved around strengthening its ties with

the Principalities, maintaining that the only acceptable avenue for limiting Russian interference in their affairs was to "tighten the Bonds of suzerainty" (p. 37).

Most interesting at this stage of negotiations, however, were the positions of France and Russia. The French representative in Vienna was the only one to suggest as desirable the political union of Moldavia and Wallachia, with the goal of establishing a "natural barrier" to Russia, " si jamais cette réunion était jugée de nature à faciliter leur administration et à favoriser leurs intérêts bien entendus" (East, 1929, p. 37). The French proposal proved even more progressive, by arguing in favour of a hereditary prince of native or European origin, and by seeking to cater to the interests of the Moldavian and Wallachian population. Russia, on the other hand, was already aware that its exclusive protection privileges over the Principalities had crumbled during the war. Thus, it sought to maintain the favour of the Moldavian and Wallachian populations and was the first proponent of consulting "the wishes of the country" on matters related to political organisation and reform (p. 34), a principle which ended up guiding the final decision of 1856.

The Vienna Conference failed to foster an agreement (East, 1929, p. 38), so did an attempt to resolve the matter at Constantinople between France, Britain, Austria and the Porte (pp. 40-44), and the Romanian Question was to be addressed again at the Paris Peace Congress.

And yet, when European Powers met in Paris in February 1856, opinions on issue of the most suitable organisation of the Principalities remained just as difficult to reconcile. The French representatives were instructed to press for the political union of the Principalities under a hereditary prince by any means available, and to promote the "consulting the freely expressed wishes of the inhabitants themselves" (East, 1929, pp. 47-48). Russia and Sardinia supported the French proposal for the Principalities. While more moderate in their official statements in favour of union, the British delegation encouraged the French plan of "consulting the wishes of the Principalities expressed through representative Divans *ad hoc*" (pp. 50-51). However, the Austrian and Turkish plenipotentiaries arrived at the Congress with adamant opposition to both the union of the Principalities and the idea of hereditary princes (p. 46). The Turkish arguments stressed the danged that under a hereditary prince the Principalities would likely seek independence and turn to Russia for assistance, while Austria argued that union "suggested a second Kingdom of Greece and [it] did not think that 'that creation had been a satisfactory experiment'" (p. 46). Furthermore, the two Empires interestingly argued that

between the Principalities there are "real differences in manners and customs and that popular opinion in those countries did not favour union" and thus there was no reason for their unification under the same internal administration (p. 48). This line of argument is particularly intriguing, considering the Congress took place merely twenty years after the creation of Belgium, an exercise in which the Great Powers did not seem to consider cultural, linguistic and religious differences (Blom & Lamberts, 2006) which were far greater than the ones existing between the two Romanian-speaking Principalities. Compelled by the existential threat a unified Romanian state would pose to both Empires – one because of the risk of independence and the other because of its large Romanian population in Transylvania – Austria and Turkey remained uncompromising during the course of the Congress.

Therefore, the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856 was signed without a coherent solution to the Romanian problem, with the main concern of the signatory powers being the limitation of Russian influence in the region (Iordachi, 2019). To this end, the Treaty of Paris (1856) included five main points which were consented to by all the signatory powers: (1) the abolition of the Russian protectorate over Moldavia and Wallachia and the Russian loss of Bessarabian territory with access to the Danube; the Principalities remained under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire and the collective guarantee of the European Great Powers, (2) the free navigation of the Danube was placed under the collective guarantee of the European Great Powers (Art. XV), (3) the neutralisation of the Black Sea (Art. XI), (4) the Ottoman Empire was admitted to participate in European public law and in the concert of Europe (Art. VII), provided it guaranteed the privileges and rights of its Christian subjects (Art. IX), and (5) establishing the right of European Powers to agree on further conditions related to the first four points (Oxford Historical Treaties, 1856).

With regards to the Principalities, however, the Treaty did make one further provision, that of entrusting the Porte with the immediate convocation of a representative Divan *ad hoc* in each the Principalities, composed of members of all social classes, with the purpose of establishing their preference for their future organisation (Art. XXIV). Furthermore, the Powers were to convene in Paris once more after the decisions of the Divans had been recorded, to draft a definitive organisational act for Moldavia and Wallachia (Art. XXV). The establishment of the Divans *ad hoc* as a means of settling disagreements between European Powers is remarkable, as "it constituted the first application of the principle of self-determination through a plebiscite, protected by a collective European guarantee" (Iordachi, 2019, p. 189).

The Divans *ad hoc* were elected and issued their demands in 1857, which unanimously called on the Guaranteeing Powers to provide a system of government which will include: (1) union, (2) under a foreign prince, (3) a Representative Assembly, and (4) the Collective Guarantee by the Powers (East, 1929, p. 146). In May 1858 Great Powers reconvened in Paris to discuss the recommendations of the Divans and decide on the future organisation of the Principalities (p. 151). Much to the dismay of Romanians however, the final draft of the 1958 Paris Convention, which was to serve as their constitution displayed little resemblance to their original wishes. The vehement opposition of Austria, which was even more firm than that of the Porte, played a decisive factor in the provisions of the Convention. Austria resisted any sanctioning of Romanian unity, arguing repeatedly that strengthening Romanian national identity threatens Austria "in the marrow of its bones" due to the large proportion of ethnic Romanians under its rule (p. 48, 152).

As such, the Paris Convention maintained the *de facto* separation of the Principalities, providing for an administrative union including the separate election for life of princes (hospodars) from the Romanian nobility, two representative bodies and two armies. The Principalities were allowed the name "The United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia", and there was one common institution set up to guard the implementation of the Convention and draft common legislation. Additionally, the convention reaffirmed Ottoman suzerainty, but placed their internal autonomy under the Collective Guarantee of European Powers (Oxford Historical Treaties, 1858). However, under the guidance of France and Russia, Romanians saw a loophole in the fact that the wording of the Convention did not specifically require the Principalities to elect different persons for the highest office (p. 159) , and thus in 1859 Alexandru Ioan Cuza was elected as hospodar in Moldavia (January 17) and in Wallachia (February 5) (p. 164).

The following section is dedicated to an analysis of Western European arguments regarding the union of Moldavia and Wallachia and the interests and ideas which can best explain them.

4.2. Western European positions on the unification of Moldavia and Wallachia
France

As previously stated, when the Great Powers met again in Paris, the positions expressed in Vienna only grew in their firmness, particularly in the case of France. If in Vienna, the French

representative stated that "nous ne voulant pas exclure la possibilité de reunir un jour les territoires des 2 Principautés en un seul" (East, 1929, p. 37), indicating a desire to consider union as an *option*, in Paris Emperor Napoleon III wrote to his Foreign Minister, Count Walewski, "stating in strong terms that no peace would be solid or durable which did not provide for the union and the independence of the Principalities" (p. 47). Walewski proceeded to call on the Congress to "admit and proclaim union" as the best interest of the Principalities (p. 48). The fact that the French Emperor became the champion of Romanian political union in the aftermath of the Crimean War has been established by numerous historical studies (East, 1929; Sclifos, 2015; Pop, 2019; Iordachi, 2019). As early as 1853, the French representative at Constantinople welcomed the idea of the "independence of the Danubian Principalities" (East, 1929, p. 46) However, the motives behind this enthusiasm remain somewhat debated.

The official stance of French diplomacy between 1853 and 1859 supported the desire for Moldo-Wallachian union through two main arguments: that of creating a natural barrier against Russian aggression towards the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and that of upholding the nationality principle according to which "separate nationalities should form separate political entities" (East, 1929, pp. 54, 62). East (1929) makes a compelling case for why the first one could not have genuinely guided French unionist sentiments. First, because rather than being hostile towards Russia in the aftermath of the war, Napoleon III sought to secure Russia's friendship (East, 1929, pp. 58, 61-62) to such an extent that the British worried that "if any serious dispute arose, France and Russia would probably become allied against us" (p. 61). Second, because despite committing to several treaties guaranteeing the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, the Emperor had no genuine interest in its survival (pp. 56-57). In fact, French attitudes towards Ottoman integrity and sovereignty are most revealing for their policy towards the Principalities. I argue that it was a combination of France's disregard of Ottoman civilisation and government, and the Emperor's affinity for the doctrine of nationality which led to their support for the political union of the Principalities.

First, Napoleon III had entered into international agreements safeguarding the integrity of the Ottoman Empire more out of obligation to his British ally, than out of a genuine interest or belief in its survival (East, 1929, p. 55). However, the Emperor did not shy away from privately revealing his views to the British Ambassador to France, Lord Cowley. In 1856, following the conclusion of the Congress, the Emperor stated "that he wished to see the

coasts of the Mediterranean in the hands of Christians alone" (p. 56). Moreover, in 1857 Cowley reported on "His Majesty's conviction that the Turkish Empire cannot last, that Mahommedanism and civilisation cannot coexist and that it would be a blessing for the world in general were the Crescent everywhere replaced by the cross" (p. 195). These statements clearly paint the picture of the French belief that the Turkish system and society are inferior to those of the Christian powers, thus dragging behind the territories and populations it controls, and implicitly that these territories would be better off under the influence of Christian civilisation.

Second, the principle of nationality (*nationalité*) has been an integral part of French identity, internal and foreign policy in the aftermath of the Revolution (Murray-Miller, 2014, p. 4), but it was positively revived and strengthened during the period of the Second Empire (p. 6). Indeed, in 1857 Cowley reported that "the agglomeration of people of the same race under one rule is a theme so consonant to the Emperor's ears, that His Majesty would be likely to listen with complacency to any scheme the basis of which is the restauration of nationality" (East, 1929, p. 195). More interesting for the purpose of this analysis however, is the connection of *nationalité* with France's imperialist policy during the nineteenth century. Murray-Miller (2014) explores the ways in which Napoleon III sought to reconcile his belief in the principle of nationality with that in France's "civilising mission" which demanded that France had a duty to bring progress, modernity and enlightenment to other nations (Murray-Miller, 2014). Indeed, contemporary French public opinion trusted that "the emperor perceptively understood the integral nature of nationality to modern society that resisted all forms of 'conquest, fanaticism, aristocracy and privilege'" (Murray-Miller, 2014, p. 7). This perspective brings a whole new light to France's seemingly "philanthropist" (East, 1929, p. 201) sympathies for the union of the Principalities.

Ntina Tzouvala identifies two mechanisms through which the European standard of civilisation, and broader discourses of civilisation, were employed in the nineteenth century. The first one, the "logic of improvement" maintains the idea that civilisation could be improved, and that non-Western societies could be brought up to the level of European civilisation through various forms of intervention. The second, the "logic of biology", saw non-Western societies as inherently inferior, and therefore in need of domination and control (Tzouvala, 2020). Although her arguments are primarily based on colonial expansion practices, I argue that in the case of Romania, following the Congress of Paris (1856),

France's interest in the Principalities followed a logic of improvement which highlighted the backwardness of the local systems of government as a result of their historical dependence on the Ottoman Empire and called for the sustained intervention of the Guaranteeing Powers in their affairs for the purpose of modernisation and the progress of Romanian civilisation. By contrast, French perceptions of the Ottoman Empire's incompatibility with "modern society" were guided by the "logic of biology" (Tzouvala, 2020), as they rest on the assumption that the Empire's system of governance was beyond hopes of repair and that its integrity was of no real value for European interests (East, 1929, p. 56). Moreover, this argument is also supported by East's (1929) observation that Napoleon's support for the Romanian cause, while likely guided by the nationality principle and a wish to "appeal to the wishes of subjects not of rulers" (p. 65), was not entirely selfless. Rather, in settling the Romanian Question, the Emperor also sought to re-establish France's standing on the continent and "achieve some reward in prestige and self-esteem" by securing France's sphere of influence over Ottoman territories (p. 65).

Great Britain

The evolution of Great Britain's position regarding the union of the Romanian Principalities is a stark reflection of its policy towards the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century. As I have shown in the previous section, Britain's strategic interests in the region held no regard for the particular organisation of the Principalities (East, 1929, p. 30), its position being rather guided by a balancing act between the wish to limit Russian power and to ensure the survival of the Ottoman Empire (p. 29). This dual policy is expressed by the inconsistency of British attitudes towards union. At the Vienna Conference (1955), Britain refrained from taking a stance on the issue, choosing to align its views with those of the Porte and safeguard its right to decide on the appropriate organisation of its "Provinces" (p. 39). By contrast, at the Paris Congress (1856), Britain was compelled by the argument of establishing a natural barrier against Russian expansion and supported France's pro-unionist lobbying (p. 48). In the aftermath of the Congress, British discourses adopted a firm stance opposing the union. In fact, the British government only outlined its official position on the issue in August 1856, six months after the signing of the Peace Treaty, deciding "in favour of the existing political separation" (p. 88) after the Porte expressed serious concerns regarding the impacts of the union for the Empire's integrity (p. 70).

The relation between British attitudes towards union and its policy towards the Ottoman Empire demands a closer examination of the latter. I argue that Britain's engagement with the Empire proves a belief in Ottoman system's lack of civilisation, but its policies the followed a "logic of improvement" to safeguard the Porte's survival, which was underpinned by self-interested commercial motives.

First, the discourse adopted by British elites reflect the county's public opinion of the time, which saw the Turkish nation as "'people not fit to rule' or 'not deserving to be among the civilised men'" (Kocabasoglu, 1995, p. 251). Indeed, the British prime minister of the time, Lord Palmerstone, maintained that "it was wrong to compare Turkey with 'civilised nations', but that it had made 'immense' progress" (Steele, 2014, p. 45). This perceived inappropriateness of the Ottoman system is further proved by Britain's subjection of the Empire to the practice of extraterritoriality, which Western powers justified by invoking the "unbridgeable civilisational gaps" of "Oriental" legal systems (Tzouvala, 2020, p. 75).

Second, Britain's response to Ottoman "backwardness" and instability was to frame itself as a reliable ally and mentor in order to interfere in the Empire's affairs and influence its policy, rather than pursuing formal domination tactics. Palmerstone believed in "Europeanising Turkish institutions" and proceeded to commit his government to a policy of providing financial and institutional support, lobbying for reform, and formally guaranteeing the Empire's sovereignty under European public law (Steele, 2014, p. 45; Tzouvala, 2020, p. 56). These patterns of interaction clearly point to a British belief in the ability of the Empire to be restructured and reformed, and in Britain's role in nurturing these reforms.

Thirdly, British policy was not guided by sincere belief in the ability of the Porte to survive, nor by purely political concerns for the balance of power, but rather by a desire to maintain the commercial advantages it secured with the Empire. Palmerstone stressed the importance of preserving the Ottoman Empire by arguing that "there was no foreign country with which we carried on intercourse in which the tariff was so low and so liberal as that of Turkey" (East, 1929, p. 30). The self-interested nature of British protection of Turkey's rights in the international system allowed it to uphold its promises only when it suited British ambitions in the international system. This explains the contradictory nature of Britain's position towards the union of the principalities. Throughout the negotiations, Britain repeatedly referred to the Sultan's rights as the suzerain power yet proceeded to dismiss "the Porte's unjustifiable use of

the term 'sovereign rights' to describe its relations with the Principalities" (p. 70). Similarly, Britain argued for the right of the Sultan to establish matters of internal affairs yet joined the effort of placing the Principalities under the collective guarantee of the European Powers, a move which implies that the Porte's inability and unreliability to uphold its obligations to the territories (pp. 39, 49).

The findings discussed by this section testify to the salience of ideas of "civilisation" and "modernity" in French and British policies towards the "Near East" during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Central to Western attitudes were their views of the Ottoman Empire, and Turkish civilisation and their held beliefs in the merit of its survival. While the analysis did not reveal explicit discourses of "civilisation" in relation to Romanian civilisation during the negotiations, it did show the views they held on the Ottoman Empire. These views shaped their divergent wishes for the future of the Empire and consequently, their policies towards the union of the Principalities

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate the extent to which ideas of "civilisation" and "modernity" were influential in shaping Western perceptions of Eastern European polities. By examining the process of Romanian unification in the 1850, I sought to trace the evolution of Western views on matters of Eastern European state formation, and the arguments which underpinned their policies. The findings of this research pose interesting and unexpected revelations, which go beyond my initial expectations. First, the analysis showed that ideas of "civilisation" did play a part in Western perceptions of the "Near East", and they did influence Western positions regarding the union of the Romanian Principalities. However, it is difficult to establish the extent to which these perceptions were directly tied to beliefs regarding Romanian civilisation. Rather than forming arguments of Romanian inappropriateness and inability of self-governance, Western positions were guided by the perceived "backwardness" of the Ottoman Empire as the suzerain power in the region. These perceptions had opposing effects on the French and British policies towards the Principalities. While the former sought to strengthen Romanian independence to "free" a Christian nation from the inadequate system of the Porte, the latter wished to secure the Sultan's position in the Principalities, to ensure the survival and continued reform of the Empire. Second, while the idea of "civilisation" was hardly explicitly mentioned during the negotiations, the analysis revealed subtle logics of argumentation which confirm the findings. This is to be expected, as

the Romanian Question was salient prior to the formalisation of the standard of civilisation in international law, which meant that Great Powers showed more restraint in expressing such views.

That being said, while the findings of this research do offer insights into Western perceptions of Eastern European polities it, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. First, as I explained in the research design section, access to primary information posed significant challenges for the extent of the analysis. While the account of East (1929) is extensive and reliable, it primarily rests on the British Foreign Office correspondence of the time, which does come with a slight bias in terms of which positions are most extensively covered by the book. Access to French, Russian, Austrian and Turkish archives, together with an analysis of Western public opinion as expressed by the media would broaden the scope of the analysis and allow more accurate insights into their perceptions of Romanians per se. Second, while this research posed a broad question referring to Eastern European polities, the research design limits the ability to generalise the findings. Further research should thus, inquire whether similar patterns were formed with regard to neighbouring Eastern European state-formation efforts in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Finally, the decision to examine the events of the 1850s was guided by the limited timeframe available for this research project. Further research should strive to produce a more complete analysis of Western perceptions of Romanian polities, which should include insights from the 1878 Berlin Conference which recognised Romania's independence from the Ottoman Empire and the 1919/1920 Versailles Peace negotiations following the end of the First World War, when Romania achieved full territorial integrity.

Nonetheless, these limitations do not invalidate the findings of this research project, which can prove of interest to historians and international relation scholars specialising in the study of nineteenth century European nationalism and Western-Eastern European relations. International relations scholars studying the intersections of ideology, state formation processes and foreign policy decision-making would also find this research highly relevant. Finally, scholars working in the field of European imperial history and the application of standard of civilisation would find this paper of interest and complementary to their research, as it begins to unravel the ways in which ideas of "civilisation" were applied beyond the sphere of Western European colonial relations.

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