

Romanian Parliamentary Debate on the Decisions of the Congress of Berlin in the Years around 1878-1879

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Abstract

The Romanian parliamentary debate around the Congress of Berlin (1878-1879) offers a bird's eye view of the evolution of antisemitic speech in Romania. Naturalization of the Jews - an issue raised by the Great European Powers during this Congress - came into conflict with the wishes of the Romania political class, which presently exploded into a violent antisemitic campaign in the political debates and public speeches. The "Jewish danger" presented by many intellectuals and politicians will be accompanied by the accusation that the Jews constitute a state within the state, a nation within the nation, both devoted to world conspiracy. Amidst this welter of accusations, antisemitic discourse grew heavy with racial arguments. But by far the main characteristic of the Romanian variant of antisemitic discourse was the rapidity of its adoption in the parliamentary debates.

The more or less troubled history of Romania had also an impact on the history of Romanian Jewry. Orthodox Christian Romanians along with Jews have been the witnesses of major historical changes starting with second half of the 19th century.¹ This period is characterized by the creation of the national state, enabled due to the Paris Convention of 1858 after the Crimean War, and the invention of Romanian nationalism.² Its basic concepts (homeland, people, nation) have a "pre-history" with ancient roots in the collective mentality, but they were rewritten, on an intellectual and cultural level. Starting with the first half of the 19th century, an ideology emerged, which increasingly tended to dominate the political and social life in Romania.³

After the fulfillment of the national idea, the Union between the two principalities Moldova and Walachia in 1859, formerly tributary to the Ottoman Empire, and the independence declaration of 1877, the fear of a possible foreign intervention threatened the integrity and sovereignty of the

¹ According to a 1899 census 91.5% of the population were Orthodox Christians, 4.5% Jews and 2.5% Roman Catholics, see Dietmar Müller, *Staatsbürger auf Widerruf. Juden und Muslime als Alteritätspartner im rumänischen und serbischen Nationscode. Ethnonationale Staatsbürgerschaftskonzepte 1878-1941*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 286.

² Thomas J. Keil, *Romania's tortured road toward modernity*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2006); Keith Hitchins, *Romania, 1866-1947*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994); Leon Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă și "problema evreiască". Eșeu despre formele antisemitismului intelectual în România anilor '30*, (București: Humanitas, 1995), 23 [English edition, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism. The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930's*, (London: Pergamon Press, 1994)].

³ Leon Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă*, 23.

new Romanian state.⁴ Xenophobia and distrust towards internal and external foreigners originates from here,⁵ so too, the Romanian antisemitism.⁶

Starting with the 1878 Congress of Berlin, the Jews in the eyes of many Romanians represented an internal and external “danger,” which threatened the existence of the young state. This is the moment when antisemitism, although in its European beginnings, found ardent supporters in Romania, a fact that led to its immediate adoption in accordance with the Romanian context.⁷ In fact, Albert S. Lindemann’s chapter on Romania in his book on the emergence of antisemitism therefore held the title: “The Worst in Europe?”⁸

The Jewish Community in Romania in the last quarter of the 19th century was numerous and diversified.⁹ According to the 1899 census, a trustful one,¹⁰ the Jewish population counted a total of 269,015 persons of which 195,887 lived in Moldova and 68,852 in the Romanian Country. So the Jews represented 10% of the Moldavian and 1.8% of the Wallachian population and about 4.5% of the total population of Romania.¹¹ The same percentage of 4.52% is to be found in 1911, which put Romania at the top of the countries with the largest Jewish population, being exceeded only by Austria.¹²

The Jews were occupied primarily in the crafts and trade area, due to the restrictions on exerting certain occupations and professions that were imposed to them.¹³

Being in contact with Jews on a daily basis, Jews and non-Jews lived side by side and came in contact with each other through economic and social relationships of various kinds, making the so-called “Jewish danger” - conjured by many intellectuals and Romanian politicians – something to which the

⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For an overview on Rumania antisemitism see Mariana Hausleitner, “Antisemitism in Romania. Modes of Expression between 1866 and 2009,” *Antisemitism in Eastern Europe. History and Present in Comparison*, eds. Hans-Christian Petersen, Samuel Salzborn, (Frankfurt/M et al.: Lang, 2010), 199-226; William O. Oldson, *A Providential Anti-Semitism. Nationalism and Polity in Nineteenth Century Romania*, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991).

⁷ For the image of the ‘Jew’ in Rumanian popular culture, see Andrei Oișteanu, *Konstruktionen des Judenbildes. Rumänische und Ostmitteleuropäische Stereotypen des Antisemitismus*, (Berlin: Frank und Timme 2010).

⁸ Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears. Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 306-318.

⁹ In 1878 Romania included Moldova, The Romanian Country and Dobrogea, which was assigned to Romania after the Berlin Treaty.

¹⁰ Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919), De la excludere la emancipare*, (București: Hasefer, 2006), 148 [English edition, *Jews in Romania 1866-1919. From Exclusion to Emancipation*, (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1996)].

¹¹ Ibid., 149-150.

¹² *The American Jewish Year Book 5675*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication of America, 1914), 336-337.

¹³ Avram Andrei Băleanu, “Rumänien”, *Handbuch zur Geschichte der Juden in Europa. Länder und Regionen*, eds. Elke-Vera Kotowski, Julius H. Schoeps, Hiltrud Wallenborn, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2001) Vol. 1, 277-286.

common man could easily relate to. In fact the skills and abilities of the Jews did not always meet with sympathy of their Romanian neighbors, because some of them held the Jews to be responsible for their own difficult social condition.

The Berlin Congress: putting the situation of the Jews in Romania on the European political agenda

As we will see the hatred and the anti-Jewish agitations in the years around the Berlin Congress were strengthened by the interventions of Jewish organizations on behalf of the Romanian Jews, aiming at providing for them full civil and political rights.¹⁴ According to the 1866 Constitution, the Jews were denied full civic emancipation based on religious grounds: Article 7 of the Constitution stipulated that “The quality of being Romanian is acquired, conserved or lost according to the rules settled by civil laws. Only those who have no other than Christian rites can be naturalized.”¹⁵

Naturalization of the Jews in Romania, an issue raised by the Great European Powers during the Congress of Berlin came into conflict with the intentions of the Romanian political class, who unleashed a fierce antisemitic campaign in their political debates and public speeches.¹⁶

The reaction of the majority of the Romanian politicians to the claims raised during the Berlin Congress about the naturalization of the Jews was a very aggressive one and produced the total rejection of this idea. Personalities like Constantin Costa-Foru, Petre Carp or Titu Maiorescu who opted for a positive resolution, could not influence the overall climate, which remained hostile to the emancipation.¹⁷

The large majority of the intellectuals and the political class played an important role in spreading antisemitism through their speeches. A clear distinction between the two political parties that dominated the Romanian political scene, the National Liberal Party¹⁸ and the Conservatory Party¹⁹, with regard to their attitude about Jewish emancipation cannot be established.

¹⁴ For the commitment of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and above all of Adolphe Crémieux for the emancipation of the Jews in Romania see, Carol Iancu, *Bleichröder et Crémieux. Le combat pour l’émancipation des Juifs de Roumanie devant le Congrès de Berlin. Correspondance inédite (1878 - 1880)*, (Montpellier: Centre de Recherches et d’Études Juives et Hébraïques, 1987).

¹⁵ http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/const_1866.php (29.03.2011).

¹⁶ For the Berlin Congress see, *Der Berliner Kongreß 1878. Protokolle und Materialien*, ed. Imanuel Geiss, (Boppard: Boldt, 1978); for the Jewish question on the Congress see, Imanuel Geiss, “Die jüdische Frage auf dem Berliner Kongreß 1878,” *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte* 10 (1981), 413-422; Müller, *Staatsbürger auf Widerruf*; 59-106.

¹⁷ Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă*, 27.

¹⁸ The *Partidul Național Liberal* [PNL] was the oldest political party. She was formed in 1875, originating from the 1848 movements and prince Cuza’s reign. Some of her representatives played an important role in obtaining Romania’s independence. She was founded on 24th of May 1875, under the leadership of Ion C. Brătianu. The members of the PNL mainly belong to the bourgeoisie and came primarily from the industrial and financial but also from the commercial sector. She also included landlords, freelancers, officials, lawyers, engineers,

Some politicians of that time, well-known as Romanian intellectuals, played an important role in spreading antisemitism. Among the most prominent Romanian intellectuals invoking antisemitic stereotypes were Vasile Conta, Vasile Alecsandri,²⁰ Cezar Bolliac,²¹ Mihai Eminescu, Ioan Slavici, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu,²² Vasile A. Urechia,²³ Alexandru D. Xenopol,²⁴ Nicolae Iorga, Alexandru C. Cuza,²⁵ Nicolae Istrati²⁶ and Nicolae Paulescu.²⁷

For most of them, the Jews represented a separate group, with traits and qualities different from that of a true Romanian. The Jews were seen and represented firstly as foreigners who threatened the existence of the young Romanian state.

medical doctors, professors. The main propaganda newspaper during the 1866-1884 period were *Românul* [The Romanian] and *Voința Națională* [The National Will] for the 1884-1914 period.

¹⁹ The *Partidul Conservator* [PC] was founded at the 3rd of February 1880, in Bucharest, having as president Emanoil Costache Epureanu. The core of the party was made out of landlords, the commercial and administrative bourgeoisie, and a big part of the intellectuals, and the main propaganda newspapers were *Timpul* [The Time] (1876-88/1880-1900), *Epoca* [Era] (1885-1889/ 1895-1901) and *Conservatorul* [The Conservatory] (1900-1914).¹⁹ Concerning her attitude toward social problems, PC started from the idea that in the Romanian society there were only two classes: the landlords and the peasants, between them there was the ethnical alienated bourgeoisie. The political doctrine of this party had its roots in traditionalism and evolutionism.

²⁰ Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890) was a poet, folklorist, politician, minister, diplomat, Romanian academician, founder of the Romanian Academy, creator of the Romanian theater and dramatic literature in Romania. It was an outstanding personality of Moldova and Romania then throughout the nineteenth century.

²¹ Cezar Boliac (1813-1881) was one of the leaders of the 1848 revolution, protest lyric poet, journalist and promoter of Romanian archaeological studies.

²² Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, (1838-1907) born as Tadeu Hașdeu was a Romanian writer and philologist. He was considered one of the most prominent people of Romanian culture.

²³ Vasile Alexandrescu Urechia (1834-1901), was a Romanian historian and writer, politician, founding member of the Romanian Academy. He was professor at the University of Iasi and then the one in Bucharest.

²⁴ Alexandru Dimitrie Xenopol (1847-1920), was a Romanian academic, historian, philosopher, economist, sociologist and writer. D. Alexander is author of the first major turn of synthesis of Romanian history, world-renowned philosopher of history, being considered the greatest Romanian historian after Nicolae Iorga.

²⁵ Alexandru Constantin Cuza, (1857-1946) was a Romanian national economist, writer and politician. Alexandru C. Cuza studied in Dresden and Brussels. Throughout his life, Cuza remained strongly engaged in Romanian public life, advocating extreme nationalist and antisemitic views in his lectures, speeches and journalism. Cuza published poetry, epigrams and essay on cultural topics in a number of influential Romanian language journals and literary periodicals. Western European writers, for example Eduard Drumont, Charles Maurras influenced his thinking. As a professor of political economy in Iași University from 1901 and as a authority on art, history and politics Cuza exercised immense influence over the generation of Romanian students, especially in the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁶ Nicolae Istrati (1818-1861), was a writer and Moldovan politician, who served as minister in Moldova during Nicholas Vogoride regency.

²⁷ Nicolae Paulescu, (1869-1931) was a Romanian scientist, physician and physiologist, professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest, found antidiabetic hormone released by the pancreas, called insulin later.

The “Jewish question” appears on the Romanian political agenda simultaneously with the formation of the unified Romanian state, when, inevitably the Jews’ statute had to be discussed.²⁸ The question of Jewish emancipation, as Leon Volovici mentioned, appeared not as an internal problem which should be part of the country’s autonomous political evolutions, but as imposed by the European powers, which in exchange for the recognition of the country’s independence required the emancipation of the Romanian Jews.

The 1878 Berlin Congress reopened the discussions about the “Jewish question,” giving birth to fierce debates in the Romanian Parliament. In almost any parliamentary session during this period the topic of Jewish citizenship was on the agenda. The political struggle was accompanied by detailed press coverage. Intellectuals contributed the most to these debates. Channels for the spread antisemitic sentiments were public speeches and widespread publications delivered by different authors.

The main accusations

The new antisemitic discourse had its roots in the old anti-Jewish hatred, “enriched” with new accusations and adapted to the realities of that time. Volovici states that the observation of a historian over the composite character of modern antisemitism proved true also in the Romania’s case: the traditional antisemitic stereotypes are supplemented with new elements. “It is “ennobled” through the writings of some prestigious intellectuals; it became an asset of the national culture.”²⁹

The political discourse sought to emphasize the poor living conditions of the population, pointing to the Jew as being responsible for this deplorable state of affairs. In this way the antithesis between the “good Romanian,” blessed with numerous qualities, and the “bad Jew,” who seemed to possess only the worst traits, was introduced into the public discourse. Beyond different styles and codes, the radical antisemitic public discourses transmitted the same message: denigration of the Jewish community and of individual Jews.³⁰ This fabricated image of the Jew was used to support the arguments and the accusations of the antisemites.

One of the accusations that obtained a huge success and acquired an important place in antisemitic speeches all over Europe, the “state within state”, “Status in statu” accusation, is also found in the Romanian political language.³¹ In the Romanian Parliament Pantazi Ghica, in the meetings held on February 22 and

²⁸ Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă*, 27.

²⁹ Ibid., 31.

³⁰ George Voicu, *Teme antisemite in discursul public* (București, Ed Ars Docendi, 2000), 56.

³¹ Jacob Katz, “A State within a State. The History of an Anti-Semitic Slogan”, *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4/3 (1969): 29-58.

March 6 1879,³² presented the “Jewish danger” under the “state within state” formulation: “Let’s put the finger on the issue and grasp the role of this alien population which has imposed itself in our country and which until now has formed a state within the state; let’s see how many good things it has done to Romania and how many bad things it has done to Romania, and let us try to see the precautions we have to take.”³³ The meaning of the “state within a state” accusation is explained to us by the deputy Grigore Misail, who, writing the history of the Jewish community in Romania, explained it as follows: “In 1823 the Jews from Iași had the monopoly of bakery, it had to be removed from them, but the prince, in order to console them, in the same year has granted them some more privileges on the organization and the taxation of their communities, [...] These privileges have been renewed on the 1st of February 1845 by prince Sturdza. This is why it has been constructed as a state within the state.”³⁴ In Vasile Alecsandri’s opinion, expressed in the parliamentary session from 11/23 October 1879, the Jews by organizing a state within a state in Romania look only to pursue their commercial goals, sacrificing the country for their economic advantage: “What do they want from us? [...] A social position or an advantageous position? [...] No, because looking at their complaints this is a country of persecution. [...] A homeland? No, because their homeland is the Talmud: they believe in it, they live in it, they die in it! And this brave fanaticism builds their strength, as it is preventing them to assimilate with other peoples, to merge with them; it maintains them as an alien nation among the other nations, like a state within a state. Therefore they seek here not a social position, not a homeland, but a simple property easy to get, cheap to buy, a property that could be given to anyone else if this commercial transaction would fulfill their interests.”³⁵

Directly linked to the state-in-state accusation is the slogan a ‘nation within the nation’. Half a year earlier, this makes its presence known in senator Voinov’s speech, which on the 26th of February/10th of March 1879 session set up the antisemitic discourse: “In whatever country they live, Jews do not merge. They form a nation within the nation and remain in a permanent barbaric state. [...] What I am telling you, it is found in the memo presented in Russia by Mister Brafman, in which he gives an account of the considerable influence of Jews, their exclusive spirit, the existence of an occult government which they have given to themselves to reach their goal.”³⁶

These slogans were directly linked to the idea of transforming Romania into an “Israelite property,” the struggle carried on by the Jews for this purpose being

³² This represents the dates of the Julian calendar, which has been used in Romania along time with the Gregorian calendar until April 1919. After that only the Gregorian calendar is used. The first date represents the Julian calendar date, while the second one represents the one of the Gregorian calendar.

³³ Iancu, *Evreii din Romania*, 220.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Monitorul Oficial* (thereafter *M. O.*), October 11/23, 1879.

³⁶ Iancu, *Evreii din România*, 219- 220.

identified with “modernă judaidă.”³⁷ Therefore the fight of the Romanian politicians against the Jews appeared to be justified and correct, it even became everyone’s duty to oppose these “invaders, who pour unstopped over all the borders of our homeland, on all the mountain paths, over the lands, over the waters.”³⁸

In the opinion of the antisemites, all this scheming and backstage struggling would not be possible without a reliable ally, one to sustain the Romanian Jews unconditionally and one equipped with great power. This partner, sustainer of the Jews was no other than the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, “mysterious name, but sounds as sinister as the name of Nihilists,”³⁹ “the admirable and colossal association. [...] Its commands are undisputable laws. Just one signal from her and hundreds of thousands of people will leave their ancestral home, to silently join together, under the black flag of invasion.”⁴⁰

The fight of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* to obtain civil and political rights for the Romanian Jews,⁴¹ is seen by Kogălniceanu, ministry of internal affairs during that period, as “a lethal war that the *Alliance Israelite* is waging against us since 66 until today,”⁴² being in the same time the biggest enemy from the face of the earth, not only for Romanians but also for the Romanian Jewry. “The Israelites misfortune was mister Cremieux, who has irritated the spirits and hardened even more the fate of the Israelite people by visiting our country in 1866. The *Alliance Israelite* and their president brings a lot of harm to the Israelites, even today mister Cremieux does it with his writings.”⁴³ Kogălniceanu’s speech played an important role in the formation of arguments against the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. The involvement of the *Alliance* in the fight for granting the Romanian citizenship to the Romanian Jews was one of the most disapproved actions in the Romanian public sphere, which influenced the vast majority of the politicians at that time and was one of their preferred themes. This can be seen for example in the speeches of D. P. Grădișteanu, in the session of 16/28 October 1879, in the speech of the deputy V. Conta during the 4th of September 1879 meeting, or of Nicolae Blaramberg during the 4 September 1879 meeting.⁴⁴

World conspiracy was another favorite topic of the antisemites.⁴⁵ In Romania’s case the conspiracy was directly linked to the intervention of the *Alliance*

³⁷ M. O., October 11/23, 1879.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ For the activities of the Alliance see: *Histoire de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle de 1860 à nos jours*, ed. André Kaspi, (Paris: Ed. Armand Colin, 2010). The AIU had held two conferences regarding the situation of the Jews in Romania, 1872 in Brussels and 1875 in Paris: Oldson, *A Providential Anti-Semitism*, 50.

⁴² M.O., October 16/28, 1879.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Nicolae Blaramberg (1834-1896), was a Romanian politician.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Benz, “Jüdische Weltverschwörung? Vom zähen Leben eines Konstrukts,” in Wolfgang Benz, *Was ist Antisemitismus?*, (München: C.H.Beck, 2004), 174-192.

Israélite Universelle during the Berlin Congress in order to make the recognition the existence of a Romanian state depend on the emancipation of the Jews. According to the accusations of the antisemites, Jews from Romania tried to get political rights by collaborating with the national and even the international press: “the entire hostile campaign (against Romania) of the Jews from this country and from abroad, for giving them political rights, is closely related to the Central Committee of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Paris, under whose command everything happens.”⁴⁶ The world conspiracy theory is also put in direct relation to the decisions of the Great Powers at the Berlin Congress, which are considered responsible for the requirements imposed on Romania: “It looks like Europe, and especially Western Europe, having to exercise reprisals against Romania, ordered in the Berlin Congress, the death of the Romanian nation, and as the peak of humiliation and contempt, decided that all of us should die by the hand of the Jew.”⁴⁷ In a statement by deputy Blaramberg this intervention of the Great Powers was seen as one of the greatest harms that could be done to the young Romanian state. Blaramberg’s speech is one of the first Romanian expressions of the world conspiracy theory, accusing the Great Powers to sacrifice Romania and of handing it over to the Jews. From now on this accusation became extremely common, both in the politicians’ speeches as in the press of those times.

The intervention of the Great European Powers in Romania’s internal affairs was seen as an important part of the plan by which “Universal Hebraism” was trying to establish a second Palestine on the territory of Romania.⁴⁸

According to these discourses, the Jews were trying to de-nationalize⁴⁹ the Romanian people: “The Jews from Romania, through their sheer numbers, by continuous immigration, by their tendency to form a state within the state in Romania, by their solidarity with all the other Jews from different parts of the world with whom they conspire to build a Hebrew state at the shores of the Danube, threaten to replace the Romanian nation, instead of merging with it, constitute for us a mortal danger for the State and the Nation.”⁵⁰ In the last quote, all the accusations presented are made with the purpose to sound the alarm concerning the “Jewish danger” which was threatening Romania. The certainty of this fact emerges from the same discourse of Alecsandri which tries to emphasize the character of the Jews and the means they were using:

⁴⁶ “Alianța izraelită universală și evreii din România”, *Unirea*, November 18, 1913. The newspaper was printed by the National Democrat Party and was distributed in Iași on a weekly basis.

⁴⁷ The N. Blaramberg deputy’s speech at 4th of September 1879 meeting, in: *Moțiunea nerevizioniștilor în Chestiunea evreiască și cele trei discursuri ale deputatului colegiului IV de Brăila, Nicolae Blaramberg, precum și discursurile deputatului colegiului III de Iași, Vasile Conta și ale deputatului colegiului I de Bacău, D. Rosseti Tețcanu destinată a-i servi de cometariu*, ed. Nicolae Blaramberg, (București: Tipografia Curții, 1879), 10.

⁴⁸ *M. O.*, October 3/15, 1878, speech of D. N. Ionescu.

⁴⁹ The term used by Voicu in *Teme antisemite*.

⁵⁰ “Moțiunea”, 7.

“What is this new ordeal, this new invasion? Who are the invaders? Whence do they come? What do they want? And who is the new Moses who is leading them to the Promised Land, situated this time on the banks of the Danube? Who are these invaders? They are an active people, intelligent, indefatigable in accomplishing their mission; they are followers of the blindest religious fanaticism, the most exclusive of all the inhabitants of the earth, the least capable of assimilation to the other peoples of the world! [...] their leaders are the rabbis who lay down special laws for them; their homeland is the Talmud! Their power is enormous, for two other powers from their base and their support: religious Freemasonry and gold.”⁵¹

The references to the Jewish religion are accompanied, both in the discourse of different speakers as well as in pamphlets, by the classic religious reproach: “Not by accident a Jew has sold Christ; this is the big example and the big warning. People beware, don’t let yourselves lull to sleep by the mosaic sweet words. Romanians, Judas is preparing to embrace you, raise your eyes to the bloody corpse of the Crucified One!”⁵²

A new accusation was expressed by another deputy: the Jews are instigators of revolution: “They will corrupt our people; they will introduce the commune as in the other countries, because they are the leaders of the communists. You will recall that, as French citizens, in the army during the siege of Paris, instead of fighting the enemy, they provoked civil war, they set fire to Paris. Who did that? The co-religionists of those who now want to insert themselves into the Romanian community.”⁵³

These accusations did not only appear in the Romanian parliamentary discourses, but many of them are also found their way into the press, being from now on a constant feature in the public rhetoric.⁵⁴

One of the novelties in the antisemitic discourse was the racial argumentation. According to Carol Iancu, this was present for the first time at the 26th of February/10th of March 1879 sessions, when senator Voinov was quoting the Marquis of Pepoli, presumably the former minister of commerce and agriculture Gioachino Pepoli, “who defended Romania in the Italian Senate. The Marquis said: ‘In Romania the Jewish question is a racial question. It is not true that the Jews who live in Romania are Romanians; they belong to a race which has superimposed itself on the Romanian people.’”⁵⁵ From this date on, the racial component become more and more present. For the Romanian politician Grigore Misail, the Jewish race has humiliated the Latin race,⁵⁶ and

⁵¹ M. O., October 11/23, 1879, the Vasile Alecsandri speech; Iancu, *Jews in Romania*, 130.

⁵² Carol Iancu, *Miturile fondatoare ale antisemitismului*, (București: Hasefer, 2005), 157-158 he cites Slavici *Soll și Haben*.

⁵³ Iancu, *Jews in Romania*, 130.

⁵⁴ See also George Voicu, “The ‘Judaisation’ of the enemy in the Romanian Political Culture at the Beginning of the 20th Century”, *Studia Judaica. Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca*, XV (2007), 148-160.

⁵⁵ Iancu, *Jews in Romania*, 129.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

deputy Magheru stated that “a state should only contain citizens of a single race.”⁵⁷

The main actors in the discussions about the Jewish emancipation

The racial component was given a well defined form by Vasile Conta,⁵⁸ who, following here Leon Volovici, was the founder of Romanian antisemitic ideology.⁵⁹

As a supporter of the article 7 of the Constitution, Vasile Conta in his speech stressed the necessity to belong to the Christian religion or to convert to it in order to be entitled to full citizenship. He motivated this demand by the fact that non-Christians do not mix with Christians, making special reference to the Jews: “It is known that article 7 does not speak of the Hottentots, neither of the Cafries, it speaks about those non-Christians who come to our country regularly; but the non-Christians who come to our country are the Jews and at most Mohammedans; well, our national history and the daily experience has proven and it proves that of all the foreigners who come to us, the Turks and especially the Jews are the ones who do not mix with us by marriage, while the other foreigners, Russians, Greeks, Italians, Germans, mix with us by marriage.”⁶⁰

Going on with the idea that the “Jewish religion is a theocratic social organization” he proposed in the same session to fight against it, stating that “if we do not fight against the Jewish element, we will perish as a nation.”⁶¹

In a description that Petre Carp gave of Conta, he was presented as “the man who gathered all the mud of accusations against Jews and threw them inside the Romanian Parliament.”⁶² The new element introduced by Conta into antisemitic speech was the fact that it was based on a racial argumentation: “Gentlemen, it is acknowledged by the ones who attack us today, that the first condition for a state to exist and prosper, is that the citizens of that state to be of the same race, from the same blood.”⁶³ So, Conta was marching on the idea of racial purity, of non-interference with other nations. He was also the founder of racial theory in Romania, setting as his goal to lay a scientific

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Vasile Conta was born in 1845 in Ghindăoani village, Neamț⁵⁸ county in a priest's family and died in Iași, in 1882. He made his primary studies in Târgu Neamț and the grammar school at Iași. In 1869 he was sent to Belgium for commercial studies, where started the study of laws and was granted a the doctor in laws diploma of the Bruxelles University. After his return to Romania, he taught at the Civil Law Department of the Iași University. He published in *Convorbiri literare* his first philosophical opera: *Teoria fatalismului* (1875-1876) followed by *Teoria ondulațiunii universale* (1876-1877) and *Încercări de metafizică materialistă* (1879). His philosophical works have also been translated into French, many of them with very good reviews.

⁵⁹ Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă*, 34.

⁶⁰ Speech of deputy V. Conta in the 4th of September 1879 meeting in “Moșiunea”, 26.

⁶¹ Ibid., 29.

⁶² Iancu, *Evreii din România*, 225.

⁶³ *Discursul deputatului Vasile Conta*, 23.

foundation of the discrimination of Jews.⁶⁴ Building his arguments on the idea of blood and religion, the philosopher was probably the first Romanian ideologist with a coherent and fully reasoned fundamentalist antisemitic doctrine.⁶⁵ His activity was not limited only to this period but went on in the years to come. He was also one of the inspirers of doctrine of the Legion of Archangel Michael.

In 1878, Ioan Slavici⁶⁶ published a pamphlet aiming to convince the Romanian Parliament and Europe that the need not to grant Jews full political emancipation was well founded⁶⁷. In his opinion, Jews are those “alien people,”⁶⁸ who “are not of the same race with us”⁶⁹ and who “do not respect anything: His God is the negation of all Gods.”⁷⁰ After he had offered a detailed analysis of the Jewish character, which was presented as the embodiment of the worst possible traits, he reached the conclusion that the Jews will operate for “the destruction of the Romanian people.”⁷¹ The only solution, in order to remove the Jewish danger and to save the Romanian people, would be to close the borders “at a given sign and to cut them into pieces and throw them in the Danube, down to the last man, so there will be no seed of them left.”⁷² If the West would still wish to impose the emancipation of the Jews by force, the Romanians will know how to resist. With a prophetic and macabre spirit, Slavici foresaw the final solution:⁷³ “If the knife gets to the bone, the Christian and indo-Germanic Europe, it will be for us and not for the Mosaic Semites. We know what great popularity it is that the Jews enjoy in the western countries! Let them try to drive us to despair but then they should not blame us when the fire which starts on Romanian land will engulf Bucovina, Transylvania, Galicia, Hungary, Bohemia, Austria and even enlightened Germany.”⁷⁴

Slavici’s pamphlet included all current accusations: the idea of a world conspiracy, the attack on the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, freemasonry, the idea of the state within the state.

⁶⁴ Victor Neumann, *Istoria evreilor din România. Studii documentare și teoretice*, (Timișoara: Editura Amarcord, 1996), 181.

⁶⁵ Marta Petreu, ‘*Chestiunea evreiască*’ la Junimea în Dilemele conștiinței. *Evrei și ne-evrei în Europa Central Răsăriteană* (coordonatori Ladislau Gyémánt și Maria Ghitta), Institutul Cultural Român, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, 84.

⁶⁶ Ioan Slavici, 1848-1925 was a novelist and journalist born in Transylvania. He made his debut in *Convorbiri literare* with the comedy *Fata de birău*. In 1874 he moved to Bucharest where he became the editor of the *Timpu* newspaper.

⁶⁷ Iancu, *Evreii din România*, 223.

⁶⁸ Ioan Slavici, *Soll și Haben, Chestiunea Ovreilor din România*, (București: 1878), 39.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40, Iancu, *Evreii din România*, 223.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷³ Iancu, *Evreii din România*, 223.

⁷⁴ Slavici, “Soll”, 79.

Another one of the eminent personalities who was against emancipation of the Jews was the poet Mihai Eminescu.⁷⁵ Although he did not belong to the political class he must be mentioned because of his public influence as a journalist, with numerous interventions concerning the modification of article 7 of the Constitution, as well as because he was an important member of Junimea.⁷⁶ After his return from studies in Berlin and Vienna, Eminescu adopted one of the main ideas of the European antisemites: fighting against the Jewish influence in the economic sector: “We declare that we are against any juridical or economical concession no matter how small for all the Jews, but this principle does not include hitting with sticks or scrap at individuals of the Jewish community.”⁷⁷ The role played by Eminescu later found a vast echo, when all the antisemitic movements declared him as their precursor (often with little justification).⁷⁸

The spreading of antisemitism in the intellectual and political world was a fact of those times, which was also reported by the French ambassador for Romania in 1900: “L’antisémitisme est plus qu’une opinion en Roumanie, c’est une passion dans laquelle se rencontre des hommes politiques de tout les partis, les representants de l’orthodoxie et, on peut ajouter, tous les paysans valaques et moldaves.”⁷⁹

Even though a large portion of the Romanian political class was infested with the antisemitic “scourge,” there were also voices in opposition to this antisemitic camp. Among those who did not stop fighting against this current, and worth being mentioned were Titu Maiorescu and Petre Carp.

Although Titu Maiorescu rarely expressed his views on the Jewish issue,⁸⁰ he was classified by Panu as an antisemite because of his attitude toward article 7 of the Constitution. Lovinescu however placed him next to Carp, in the “Europeans” group.⁸¹

Maiorescu openly expressed his ideas and feelings about the Jewish issue in the parliamentary session of 4-16 October 1878: “I - and I owe you this personal declaration - have radically different views of the Jewish issue than the

⁷⁵ Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889) a poet, novelist and Romanian journalist, was considered by the Romanian readers and literary critics as the most important romantic Romanian writer in Romanian literature, also called “the star of the Romanian poetry”.

⁷⁶ Junimea was a intellectual and literary circle but also a cultural association formed in Iași in 1863. Its emergence is due to the initiative of some young people returning from studies abroad, led by Titu Maiorescu, Petre P. Carp, Vasile Pogor, Iacob Negruzzi and Teodor Rosetti. Starting its activity with popular speeches, the association soon published a high class magazine, named *Convorbiri Literare* [Literary conversations].

⁷⁷ Mihai Eminescu, *Chestiunea evreiască*, (București: Editura Vestala, 2005), 197.

⁷⁸ Volovici, “Ideologia naționalistă”, 32.

⁷⁹ Ovidiu Morar, *Intellectualii români și chestia evreiască* : <http://cortezn69.blogspot.com/2009/08/e.html> (26.04.2011).

⁸⁰ Titu Maiorescu 1840-1917, (his full name was Titu Liviu Maiorescu) was a Romanian academic, literary critic, politician and writer, prime minister of Romania between 1912 and 1914, Internal Affairs ministry, founding member of the Romanian Academy, remarkable personality of Romania at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

⁸¹ Marta Petreu, ‘*Chestiunea evreiască*’ la Junimea în *Dilemele conviețuirii*, 76.

members of the independent and free faction. I always had, I always will and I believe that I am a good patriot because I have them like this.”⁸² These views are also backed up by the speech he had given on the 10th of September 1879 session when he declared: “I am a friend of the Jews, I have no antipathy against them. Among the Jews I have acquaintances for which I have great respect, both in my country and abroad; and since we are guaranteed our own nationality, I wish them welcome and I will be happy when I will seem them enjoying, in peace, under the Romanian sun, our rights and hospitality.”⁸³

In this way Maiorescu revealed his pro-Israelite feelings, which was also proved by his attitude toward article 7 of the Constitution about which he declared that “I think that art. 7 should not have been in our Constitution at all.”⁸⁴ So one could have expected that Maiorescu, just as Carp, would plead to modify article 7 in such a way that this would lead to a mass emancipation of the Jewish population.

Being under the pressure of the public opinion and his electors, Maiorescu in the end proposed a compromise instead. The solution he proposed was to revise article 7 by removing the religious restrictions, but to keep the “per request” emancipation, individually and after a 10 years probation.⁸⁵

His point of view from September 1879 was, as Z. Ornea observed, a “180 degree” change from his former one. This did not make him an antisemite, as Panu holds, but his position toward the Jewish issue was opaque and he was influenced by the general climate.⁸⁶

Petre Carp had numerous political functions in the governments that lead the country after the departure of prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza (Foreign Affairs Ministry, Ministry of Cults and Instruction, Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, Commerce and Domains, Ministry of Finance), being chosen twice as President of the Council of Ministers.⁸⁷ In regard to the Jewish issue, Carp from the beginning sought a solution by granting the Jews civil and political rights, declaring himself as a “Jewofile” in one of the 1875 parliamentary meetings.⁸⁸

Progressive by formation, Carp always supported the Jewish emancipation. Being aware that the Jewish issue in Romania is a part of European

⁸² M. O., October 4/16, 1878; Marta Petreu, ‘*Chestiunea evreiască*’ la *Junimea în Dilemele conviețuirii*, 77.

⁸³ *Chestia evreilor. Revizuirea articolului 7 din Constituție. Discurs rostit în Ședința Camerei de la 10 septembrie 1879 de Titu Maiorescu (deputat al Colegiului I de Iași)*, (București: Stabilimentul Grafic SOCECU&TECLU, 1888), 26.

⁸⁴ M. O., October 4/16, 1878; Marta Petreu, ‘*Chestiunea evreiască*’ la *Junimea în Dilemele conviețuirii*, 77.

⁸⁵ See Petreu, “*Chestiunea evreiască*.”

⁸⁶ Petreu, “*Chestiunea evreiască*,” 78.

⁸⁷ Petre Carp (1837-1919) made himself known as one of the most important political men of his time. Adept of the “junimiste” ideas, he was one of the leaders of the Conservatory Party during that period. He was chosen numerous times as deputy and senator in the Romanian Parliament.

⁸⁸ Petreu, “*Chestiunea evreiască*,” 73.

discussions, Carp wanted the removal of article 7 of the Constitution, which in his opinion “not only has made no good, but harmed us abroad.”⁸⁹ At the same time he saw the intervention of the Berlin Congress as positive, as it forced the Romanian political class to “look with cold blood in the eyes at the issue itself and to say: this is the harm and this is the way we have to take to fix it.”⁹⁰ Carp was asking for the removal of religious restraints, which mostly affected the Jews.

Not believing in the success of the policy of “restrictions against the Jews,”⁹¹ Carp promoted the idea of a program for the recovery of the Romanian economy: “instead of fighting them we have to use the capital they have for the benefit of our country and to admit them as citizens, according them a serious start for naturalization.”⁹²

In an era when the majority of voices spoke against the Jews, it was difficult for the few opponents, among them the ones mentioned here, to prevail and to produce a change in this matter.

The solution proposed by Romania, which was finally accepted for various reasons by the parties involved in the congress, was adopted and published in the *M.O.* from 13-25 October 1879:

“Law which revises article 7 of the Constitution: Unique article to replace article 7 of the Constitution, which is revised and replaced with the following:

Art. 7 The difference of religious beliefs and confessions is not a reason to obtain civil and political rights and to them.

§ I. The foreigner, whatever his religion, under an alien protection or not, can be naturalized on the following conditions:

a) He will address to the government the naturalization request, in which he will state the capital he possesses, the profession or the craft he exerts and the will to establish his domicile in Romania.

b) He will leave, as consequence of this request, ten years in the country, and will prove by his acts that he is useful to it.

§ II. Can be spared by probation:

a) Those who will bring in the country industries, useful inventions or distinguished talents, or who will start here big commercial or industrial establishments.

b) Those who being born and raised in Romania, from parents established in the country, have never benefited themselves or their parents from a foreign protection.

c) Those who served under the flag during the independence war and who can be mass naturalized after the government proposes that through a law and without other formalities.

§ III. The naturalization can be granted only by law and individually.

⁸⁹ *M. O.*, 29 September – 11 October, 1879.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Petreu, “Chestiunea evreiască”, 75.

§ IV. A special law will determine the way the foreigners can establish their domicile on Romanian territory.

§ V. Only the Romanians or the ones naturalized as Romanians can acquire rural properties in Romania.”⁹³

Consequences of the antisemitic political discourse

The political antisemitic discourse, present in the Parliament while reviewing article 7 of the 1866 Constitution did not remain without consequences in daily life.⁹⁴ As a result, only 85 of the 269.015 Romanian Jews were naturalized until 1900, and until 1911 only 104 further Jews obtained naturalization.⁹⁵ Another result of this situation was that between 1899 and 1904 nearly 42.000 had left Romania.⁹⁶ The adoption of the famous article which allowed only an individual naturalization gave birth to unions, alliances and several congresses. These organizations and congresses tried to make antisemitism popular within the middle and the lower classes. Their deployment took place simultaneously with other similar European events. Among these, the one which marked the beginning of a political antisemitic movement in Romania is the Congress of antisemites,⁹⁷ which took place in Bucharest from the 7th to 9th of September 1886. The congress led to the birth of the *Anti-Israelite Alliance* from Romania, a kind of negative replica of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. Its scope was the fight against Jewish emancipation and the stop of Jewish influence in Romania and the rest of Europe. The year 1895 brought about the founding of another organization: the Antisemitic Alliance⁹⁸, followed in 1910 by the birth of the Nationalist Democratic Party [*Partidul Naționalist-Democrat*], founded by Nicolae Iorga and Alexandru C. Cuza.

Another characteristic of the end of 19th century was the fact that politicians and the press began to connect the “Jewish question” more and more with the

⁹³ M. O., October 13/25, 1879.

⁹⁴ Müller, *Staatsbürger auf Widerruf*, 84-99.

⁹⁵ Iancu, *Evreii din România*, 197. He uses as source a bulletin of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, Edda Binder-Iijima, *Die Institutionalisierung der rumänischen Monarchie unter Carol I. 1866–1881* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag 2003), 525. Binder-Iijima named a number of 552 naturalizations until 1913.

⁹⁶ Iulia Onac, “Die antisemitische Hydra hebt den Kopf. Aspekte der jüdischen Reaktion auf den Antisemitismus in Rumänien vom Ende des 19. bis Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts”, *Einspruch und Abwehr. Die Reaktion des europäischen Judentums auf die Entstehung des Antisemitismus (1879-1914)*, ed. Ulrich Wyrwa (Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 2010), 269-280, 280.

⁹⁷ Iancu, *Evreii din România*, 232-234, Mina Savel, *Judaismul în România*, (Iași: Tip. Petru Popovici, 1896), 70-106.

⁹⁸ This organisation was founded in Bucharest in 1895 by the high school teacher Nae Dumitrescu, who had an important role in the Ministry of National Education. Besides the purpose of stopping the alleged growing Jewish influence in the country, the organisation aimed to fight against the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, who was considered to be responsible for the enforcement of the Article 44 of the Berlin Treaty and the supposed attempts to ruin Romania’s image abroad.

“peasant question,” trying to blame the Jews for the poor state of the peasant population.

During this period, the Jews were turned into a “national danger,” and it was seen as a duty of every good Romanian to fight against this menace. Antisemitism became a trait of good Romanians and good patriots, who had the duty to fight against the Jews. All in all, antisemitism, in its early stage, was a characteristic of the political and intellectual class in Romania of that time.

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