

Iulian Oncescu,
***România în politica externă a Franței (1866-1878)*, Editura Transversal,**
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It has become a truism the fact that Romania's bonds with France and Romanian elite connection to the French culture and language has represented the most important lever to modernity for the South-Eastern European society during the 19th century. Numerous books, articles, journals, memoirs, diaries, volumes of documents have been dedicated to this relationship and to its outstanding significance in the progress of the Romanian society. Little seems likely to be still delivered to this knowledge, maybe only nuances to what has been already written and some documents that may still be found in the archives. To this optimistic assessment opposes, however, Iulian Oncescu's monograph, a result of his Ph.D. work defended in Suceava University under the guidance of Professor Dumitru Vitcu and tutelage of Professor Ion Stanciu. It is not only the fact that every generation writes its own history, but it is also the period that Oncescu chooses to approach that makes a difference to what had been already published on the subject.

If the period until 1871 France showed herself a supporter of Romania and tried to make of this country a tool in advancing its interests in South-Eastern Europe, after 1871 a defeated France turned into itself and diminished its level of interest in Romanian developments. Gradually, toward the end of the century and the beginning of the next one, the relations between the two states once again started to evolve prompted as they were by feelings and interests. During World War I and the interwar period France's 'stature' in Romania was again at the peak, to be followed by a quarter of century when the two countries evolved in different geopolitical spheres. It was only after General de Gaulle's opening toward Romania that the French – Romanian relations once again started to be at least working and pragmatic if not heartfelt. Although some 150 years have passed since the period analyzed in Oncescu's book, little time was left to critical assessments on areas of the French – Romanian relations when they were relegated to the background as it happened between 1871 and 1878. Much more attention was paid to periods and areas where the relations were fruitful, warm or even cordial.

This is what makes it for the importance of Oncescu's book. The author has studied the published literature and documents, the Romanian and French sources to write a voluminous and critical story of this relationship on her way from the cordial and fervent during Alexandru Ioan Cuza's reign to the habitual or even dissensions after 1871. This is the reason why France played such an unimportant role in one of the most important chapters in Romania's history, its independence, a fact which the author does not neglect as some historians before him have done.

The book is structured in three main chapters investigating the role of France in the

creation of Romania's modern state between 1856 and 1866 (pp. 20 to 146), the position of Romania in the French eastern policy between 1866 and 1870, the largest and most important chapter of the book (pp. 148 to 248) and Romania and the South-Eastern Europe in the foreign policy of the third French republic between 1870 and 1878 (pp. 250 to 308). The subchapters of this work, judiciously structuring the presentation, approaches the general lines of European international relations and the position of France and Romania within this setting, especially as regards the opportunities and boundaries it set on their bilateral relation.

Iulian Oncescu's book is proof that feelings are useful but never enough to construct a foreign policy on this fragile basis. Oncescu believes that interests are often what matters in practical foreign policy and it is only when they coincide with feelings which turn a relation into the cordiality.