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Veniamin Ciobanu, *Problema orientală (1856-1923)*, Editura Junimea, Iași, 2009, 259 p.

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The book *The Eastern Question (1856-1923)*, written by the historian Veniamin Ciobanu reflects the author's life-mission, materialized in studies such as *The Northern States and the Eastern Question (1792-1814)*, *Political evolutions in Central and Eastern Europe (1774-1814)*, *Europe and the Porte. New documents on the Eastern Question*. Seven books from his last collection have been published so far, the last of them have been published recently, including memoirs of the Swedish diplomat officials accredited by the Ottoman Empire during the years 1811 – 1814 (*Europe and the Porte. New documents on the Eastern Question*, vol. VII: *Swedish Diplomatic Reports 1811-1814*, edited by Veniamin Ciobanu in collaboration with Leonida Rados and Alexandru Istrate, Editura Junimea, Iași, 2009, 268 p.).

The European Question is a subject that has already been studied by the Romanian historians, as well as by other scholars from the world, such as: A. Oțetea, L. Boicu, Gh. Cliveti, J. A. Marriot, A. Sorel, J. Ancel [Andrei Oțetea, *Contribuții la chestiunea orientală*, în *Scrieri istorice alese*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1980, p. 70-94; Leonid Boicu, *Geneza "chestiunii române" ca problemă internațională*, Editura Junimea, Iași, 1975; Idem, *Principatele Române în raporturile politice internaționale secolul al XVIII-lea*, Editura Junimea, Iași, 1986; Idem, *Principatele Române în raporturile politice internaționale (1792-1821)*, ediție îngrijită de Victor Spinei, Institutul European, Iași, 2001;

Cliveti, Gh., *Un conflict european: "Războiul Crimeii" (1853-1856)* (I), în *Cercetări istorice*, volumul XII-XIII, Iași, 1981-1982, p. 403-424; Idem, *România și Puterile Garante (1856-1878)*, Editura Universității „Al.I.Cuza”, Iași, 1988; Idem, *România și crizele internaționale*, Editura Fundației Axis, Iași, 1997; Idem, *Tratatul din 30 martie 1856 de la Paris. Problema garanțiilor în Congresul de Pace de la Paris (1856) Prefaceri europene, Implicații românești*, volum editat de Dumitru Ivănescu, Editura Junimea, Iași, 2006, p. 87-99; J.A.Marriot, *The Eastern Question. A Historical Study in European Diplomacy*, Oxford, 1918; Albert Sorel, *La question d'Orient au XVIII-e siècle*, troisième édition, Paris, 1902; Jacques Ancel, *Manuel historique de la Question d'Orient (1792-1923)*, Paris, 1923]. A historical phenomenon of high complexity, the Eastern Question represents a historical process expanded throughout different periods. Regarding the beginning of the issue, the scholars' opinions are very different, for there are more theories, but for the end of the process, in its classical acceptance, this has happened during the same time with the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the modern state of Turkey in 1923. Otherwise, as we well know, in the center of the Eastern Question was situated the Ottoman Empire and its possessions, and several aspects are responsible for the beginning of this phenomenon : the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, the struggle of different nations for national identity acknowledgement, and the involvement of the

Great Powers which were pursuing influence over Eastern Europe. Because of these aspects, controversial issues are born, one of these being total control over the Dardanelles and Bosfor Straits, issue that has been the focus of the author in the present book.

Even if the title of his work is a generous one and reaches an extensive amount of time, which is limited by the outcome of the War of Crimea, as an inferior time limit, and the Convention of the Straits from Lausanne in 1923, as the superior time limit, the author emphasised a certain issue of the Eastern Question from this period of time, the one of the legal status of the Straits. Other historians have already studied this issue, as we can understand from the foreword of the book (A.J.P.Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, Oxford University Press, f.a.; Barbara Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers and the Strait Question 1870-1887*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, f.a.; P.P.Graves, *The Question of the Straits*, Bouverie Hous, London, f.a.).

The book is divided in four chapters which represents different phases of the question of the Straits for the period of time taken in consideration by the author. In the first chapter „Implications of the War of Crimea upon the legal status of the Romanian Principalities, as a part of the Eastern Question (1853-1856)”, the author analyses the intentions of the Russian Empire to cause the fall of the Ottoman Empire, one of these intentions being the desire to have free of charges access to the Straits and to Constantinople. Russia's projects being in contradiction with those of the European Powers were not accepted by the United Kingdom, neither by France, nor by Austria. Because of the War of Crimea, the fate of the Romanian Principalities was of high importance due to the strategical geographical position of these South-Eastern European states. During 1853 – 1856 the Great Powers were directly interested in the legal status of Moldavia and Valachia: the Russian Empire desired the fall of the Ottoman Empire and to grant protection over the two Principalities, Austria wanted economical and political expansion over the area

of the Danube and the Black Sea, while Great Britain and France considered that if the Romanian Principalities were to be occupied, thus would create a dangerous train of events which would negatively affect the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Negotiations beared during the Conference of Peace from Wien, in 1855 took in consideration the destiny of the two Romanian Principalities, but the idea of an union between those states was not approved, nor declined, idea that had the equivalent of *formal and official acknowledgement of the validity of the principle*. The fall of Sevastople on September the 8th, 1855 caused the bearing of negotiations to rush, so that, in march 1856 took place the Convention of Peace from Paris, where the issue of the legal status regarding the Romanian Principalities was debated in the articles XXII–XXVII. It was stated that the European powers would grant protection over the two states, while the Ottoman Empire had not the same status, though it had signed the Treaty of Peace.

In the second chapter, „The Issue of the Straits between the Convention of Peace from Paris(1856) and the Convention from Berlin(1878)”, the author is focusing on the 10th article of the Treaty of Paris, which states the authorization of the Stipulation of the Straits (these were to be closed to the sea navigation during times of peace and as well of war) and the 11th article which states that the Black Sea would be neutral. Because of these statements, the authority of the Russian Empire was severely damaged, thus it tried to find a legal way to cancel those articles, after the year 1856, given the international context which was an aid for Russia's diplomatical actions: the Unification of the Romanian Principalities in 1859, the achievement of a large internal autonomy by Serbia in 1868, and the opening of the Suez seaway in 1869; the last fact had an important part to play, because it decreased the interest of Great Britain for the Black Sea and the Straits, in favour of Egypt. The fortunate moment arised when, because of the French-Prussian War in 1870, Gorceakov, the prime-minister of Russia denounced the terms of the Black Sea through a

collective report to the Great Powers in november 1870. Thus, it had been organised the Conference of the ambassadors in London (january-march 1871) which published the Stipulation of march the 13th 1871, which stated that the articles 11, 13, 14 of the Treaty of Paris would be canceled (though the Russians were allowed to have war vessels on the Black Sea, while the principle of closing the Bosfor and Dardanelles Straits was kept in the same form as in 1856, with the amendment that the Sultan would *open the mentioned Straits during times of peace to the friend or allied war vessels*). To present the events regarding the Conference of the ambassadors in London, the author uses a rich bibliographical material, as well as unique documents from the British and Swedish archives. We consider that it would have been interesting to comment Romania's point of view upon this issue, as a country directly interested in the question of the neutrality of the Black Sea. On the other side, during this period of time the political class, as well as the press have insisted that Romania would have a representative in London, an utopic thought because of the legal status of the state. Even after the closure of the Conference in the capital city of Great Britain, Titu Maiorescu thought that the Russian-orthodox war against the Turksih-islam was on the bursting point, giving birth again to the Eastern crisis. The conditions stated in the Stipulation of Straits, signed in London had theoretically the legal bases until the closure of the Stipulation of Straits on July the 24th 1923; but after 1871 rose controversial issues on the interpretation of the legal signifiante of the treaty, which was supposed to be beared by the states which signed the Stipulation, on the matter of whether these were unilateral or multilateral. During the Eastern crisis of 1875-1878, the issue of the Straits was in the centre of european diplomacy, until the Convetion of Berlin, when the adopted decisions didn't modify the legal status of the bays.

In the third chapter - „Statu-quo (1878-1911)” - the author reflects that the issue of the Straits has been continously of high interest for the European diplomacy, on the basis of the birth

of two military blocks: Central Powers and The Triple Entente. There had been a time when Russia tried in different ways to hold control over the Straits: whether through a treaty signed with Germany, or with the Ottoman Empire, and going even further by signing a french-russian alliance, which was born at the dawn of the 20th century and was seen as an act against the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and its control over the Straits. An important step in the further evolution of the issue of Bosfor and Dardanelles Straits was taken in 1907 by signing the british-russian Treaty, when Great Britain resigned from its position towards the Russian projects in that area. We must acknowledge that for the time period wich is emphasized in this chapter - 1878-1911 - the author tried to focus the importance of the issue of the Straits as an integrating part of the Eastern Question and managed to accomplish an interesting historiographical essay, even if this matter hasn't been in the center of the European diplomacy. This diplomacy was concerned with other issues related to the Eastern Question, such as: the Bulgarian crisis in 1885-1887, the Greek crisis from the end of the 19th century, the attachment of Bosnia – Hertzegovina to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in 1908, and the most important of all, the assertion of national movements which had a direct effect upon the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

While for the last chapter, the author analyses the evolution of the issue of Straits before, and during the First World War, having a closure of his research established for the signing of the Stipulation of the Straits in Laussane, in July 1923. During the Balkan Wars, the legal status of the Straits has been under a greater pressure because of the Russian Empire, which wanted it to be conformed to the new political realities, issue taken in consideration during the First World War as well, when the Russian diplomacy asked for the opinion of Great Britan and France regarding the russian control over the Straits and over Constantinople. With the signing of the peace treaty in Brest-Litovsk, by Russia determined the state to quit the War and to cease its demands over the Straits; demands taken on

the other side by Great Britain and France at the end of the War, especially during the signing of the Treaty of Sévres in August 1920. The closure of the Stipulation of the Straits in Laussane, on July the 23rd 1923 granted free navigation to all kind of vessels through the Straits, whoever commercial or war crafts and free of demands flight over for the civilian or war planes, during times of peace or war. The Stipulation was not signed by the Soviet Russia.

So that in 1923, by solving the issue of the Straits and because of the birth of the modern Turkey a solution was found to takeoff the Eastern Question as *an European one*; but even if the Eastern Question is ended at that time, according to the the classical acceptance of the matter, it would leave a lot of unsolved consequences found even today if we were to reffer to the Balkanic issues, the *affairs of the Black Sea* or the conflicts from the borders of modern Turkey.

In addition to the four chapters, the book also includes a *Summary* for a better

understanding of this monography, as well as a series of *Appendices* (which contain insertions of unique documents from the British and Swedish archives refering to the years 1870-1871, as well as the texts of the Treaty of Sèvres regarding the Straits and the Treaty of Laussane). An index is contained as well, for it couldn't be missed in a true scientifal work such as this one, although it lacks some information regarding the first names of certain political figures of those times (i.e. Giers, Izwolski) (Their full name: Alexandr Petrovic Izwolski - russian foreign minister in 1906-1910, Nikolaej Karlovic Giers - russian foreign minister in 1882-1895). The lack of a bibliography at the end of the book is balanced out by a lot of indications and bibliographical comments done at the end of each chapter. The Book represents a masterpiece which was highly need by our historiography, given the conditions that the studied subject, taht of the Eastern Question hasn't been *approached* lately.