



# Alexandru Ioan Cuza

Ruler, the artisan of the Principalities' Union, great reformer (1820-1873)

“Of middle build, he had fair hair ... a broad forehead ... an intelligent gaze...”

D. Bolintineanu



Alexandru Ioan Cuza was born at Huși on 8 March 1820 and died in Heidelberg on 3 May 1873. He studied at Pavia, Paris and Bologna. In 1839, he returned to the country and joined the army, then became a director in the Ministry of Interior. When the Russians entered Moldova in 1848, he was arrested because he had joined the revolutionary movement but escaped and fled to Vienna. After the departure of the Russians, he returned as a tribunal president, and shortly thereafter re-entered the military. He was appointed prefect of Galați (1857), but resigned to protest against the interference of the government in the elections for the ad-hoc divans. This resignation was a signal for the patriots' coming together. On 5 January 1859, he

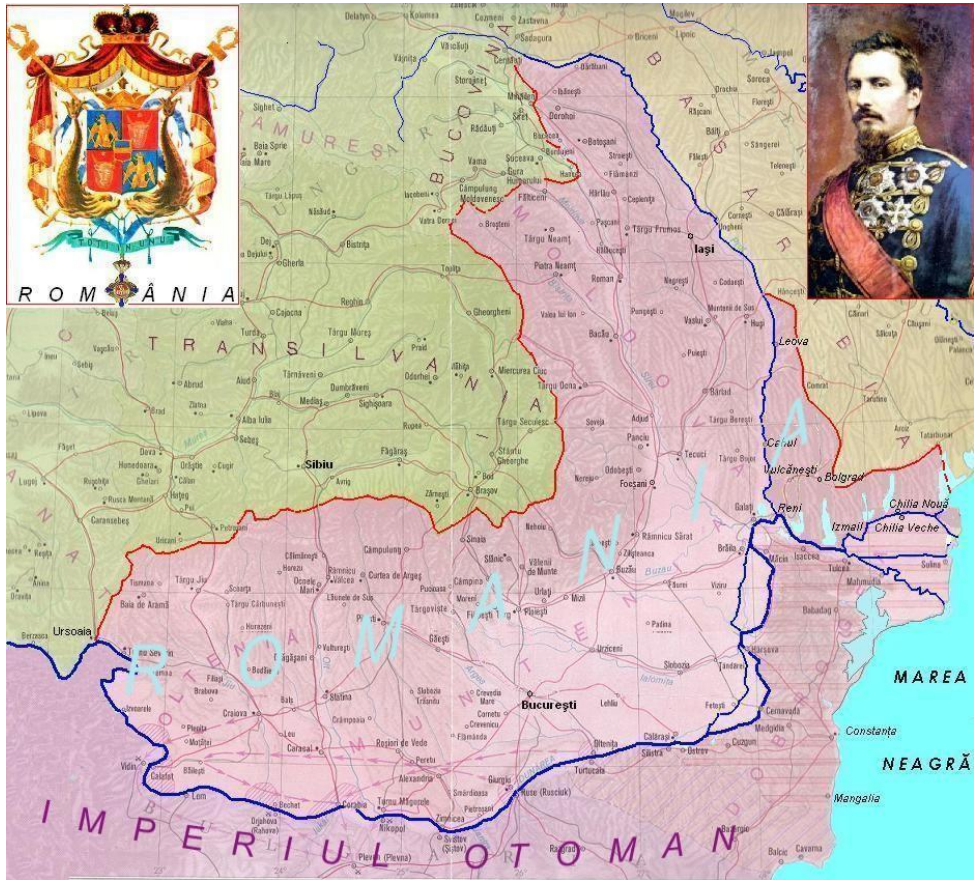
was elected Prince of Moldavia, and on 24 January he was also elected as Prince of Wallachia. Here is Cuza's oath: "I swear in the name of the Most Holy Trinity and before my country that I will sacredly guard the rights and interests of the Motherland, that I will be faithful to the text and spirit of the constitution, that throughout my reign I will watch the observance of the laws by all and in all, forsaking all persecution and hatred, loving both the one who loved me and the one who hated me, holding before my eyes only the wellbeing and the happiness of the Romanian nation. So help me God and my compatriots."

The correspondent of the Paris newspaper *L'Europe* wrote (on 11 February 1865) that the prince sought "merit" "without distinction of caste, rank or title. Cuza possesses this quality in the highest degree. Since his enthronement, there has been no man of certain value, brought to his attention... whom he has not put to the test and in his rightfully deserved place, when that man honourably passed the trial. He has elevated to the highest offices lawyers, teachers, poets, who could only be recommended by their personal merit; he appointed as ministers young people of 28-30 years of age, simply because they had distinguished themselves in their studies."

Forced to abdicate by the monstrous coalition because of the rural and the electoral laws on 11 February 1866, Cuza refused the support of France which would have enable him to keep his throne!



Cuza laid the foundations of the modern state. He knew and had the courage to maintain and enforce autonomy from the Porte, bordering on independence: he would admit no armed Turkish garrison even on the Danube, where the other bank was Turkish!



In just three years he achieved *the full union* despite the provisions and interests of Turkey, Austria and Russia, ensuring: a single Parliament, a single government, a single capital, a single army, a single customs service, a single administration, a single health service.

In 1863, he secularised the estates of the monasteries “dedicated” to the foreigners, which were vilely anachronistic, and abolished serfdom. Many magnates, the great boyars lost their positions of influence and formed an opposition (also referred to as “monstrous”), which became increasingly unmanageable. To continue modernisation, he did not hesitate to take the most drastic measures. He dissolved Parliament (2 May 1864) and gave a new Constitution that was subjected to popular ballot and obtained 682,621 votes in favour, 1,307 against, and 70,220 abstentions. He passed the rural law whereby 511,896 families received 2,038,640 hectares of land (about 4 hectares per family)



and abolished serfdom. There followed the electoral law - which considerably broadened the electoral pool, the administrative organisation law, the law of public instruction - which established free and compulsory primary education, the Civil Code (even today, in 2010, in force), and the Penal Code. On 27 September 1864, he introduced the metric system of weights and measures. On 15 December 1864, he signed the decree establishing the national synodal authority, which provided for the autocephalous status of the Romanian Church in relation to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. He established the universities and conservatories in Iași (1860) and Bucharest (1864), the Belle-Art School, the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy, the School of Bridges and Roads, Mines and Architecture, the Court of Cassation and Justice, the Court of Auditors, CEC (Deposits and Consignments House), the Commission of Historical Monuments, the Permanent Councils of Counties, etc. He developed the telegraph service required by the new structure of the country, started building the Bucharest-Giurgiu railway line (1865), launched the first riverine war ship, etc. Many other “edifices” started during Cuza’s reign, such as, among others, the adoption of the national currency, were completed under the reign of Charles I.

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His achievements brought him great popularity, which continued to grow although for propaganda reasons, the new monarchic regime tried to downplay his achievements. Even today, the pathetic political-cultural activists present the achievements of Cuza and of Carol I in antagonistic terms, when, in fact, the historical realities are strung on the same axis, of modernisation! Carol continued Cuza at a “more digestible pace for the Conservatives and the Liberals,” as the American Professor Keith Hitchins opines, a good and objective connoisseur of our history.

O.C.