

The lecture of Radu Florescu, former Romanian Chargé d'Affaires in the Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the historical and political basis of Greater Romania and its downfall
Prelegerea lui Radu Florescu, fost însarcinat cu afaceri al României în Marea Britanie și Irlanda de Nord, despre bazele istorice și politice ale României Mari și prăbușirea ei

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Summary

Radu Florescu was the father of Radu R. Florescu, an important historian during Romanian exile. After the interruption of the Romanian-British diplomatic relations in February 1941, the diplomat refused to return to Romania and remained in the Great Britain.

The paper presented regarded a lecture about Romania and its historical evolution in the European context which he was invited to give in order to explain how the country became Nazi Germany's ally unexpectedly. Florescu submitted a copy to the Foreign Office, as he needed British officials' response if he wanted to lecture it. The Foreign Office accepted it but the copy remained. The authors considered (that copy) a relevant topic of democracy, justice and human rights for the vast majority of the Interwar Romanians.

Florescu's cultural and scientific background allowed him to make comparisons between Romania and European countries and reached to rigorous analysis which provided a clear image of the Romanian civilization and its democratic ideal contrasting to then-present Antonescu's regime. For him, Romanians represented a model of nation in eastern Europe as they began to work for a national state before their neighbours.

It is important to mention that Florescu considered Romanian peasants as pro-Jewish because they themselves had to endure oppression for many centuries.

Florescu's assertions allowed us to appreciate the Romanian exile as democratic and with the fear of God even from the beginning.

Keywords: Carol II, Nicolae Iorga, Interwar period, parliamentarism.

Abstract

Radu Florescu a fost tatăl lui Radu R. Florescu, un istoric important din perioada exilului românesc. După întreruperea relațiilor diplomatice româno-britanice în februarie 1941, diplomatul a refuzat să se întoarcă în România și a rămas în Marea Britanie.

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Lucrarea prezentată se referă la o prelegere despre România și evoluția sa istorică în context european, pe care a fost invitat să o susțină pentru a explica cum țara a devenit aliata Germaniei naziste în mod neașteptat.

Florescu a trimis o copie la Foreign Office, deoarece el avea nevoie de răspunsul oficialilor britanici pentru a o putea susține. Foreign Office a acceptat, însă le-a rămas copia respectivă. Autorii o consideră (copia respectivă) un exemplu de democrație, justiție și Drepturile Omului a lui Florescu și a marii majorități a românilor.

Pregătirea culturală și științifică a lui Florescu i-a permis să realizeze comparații între România și țările europene, astfel că a ajuns la o analiză riguroasă care a permis conturarea unei imagini clare a civilizației românești și a idealului său democratic, contrastând cu regimul Antonescu de atunci. Pentru el, românii au reprezentat un model de națiune a Europei de est, deoarece ei au început să-și creeze statul național înaintea vecinilor.

Este important să menționăm că Florescu a considerat țărani români simpatizanți ai cauzei evreiești deoarece ei înșiși au trebuit să îndure vicisitudini de-a lungul mai multor secole.

Afirmațiile lui Florescu ne permit să apreciem caracterul democratic al exilului românesc și frica acestuia din urmă de Dumnezeu chiar de la început.

Cuvinte-cheie: Carol al II-lea, Nicolae Iorga, Perioada Interbelică, parlamentarism.

Short Survey on Roumanian History

I have taken the liberty to speak to you on a subject which does not seem to be in accordance with the concern of the British public opinion in these strenuous days we are living through.

Lady Zimmern was so kind to ask me to speak about Roumania and as Roumania – fact which is to be deplored – was driven by forces beyond her control in the opposite camp to Great Britain, I will try to explain to a certain extent how much a paradoxal situation could have arisen. I say very paradoxal, because normally Roumania in association with Greece, as one of the nations with the oldest cultural traditions in eastern Europe, – both small nations between Russian borderland and the Egean Sea merging out from the ancient world history, should have been fighting for the same ideals as Great Britain. They should have been united in the same purpose as Roumania next to Greece have both risen in eastern Europe earlier than other small nations at the beginning of the last century as supporters of modern democracy.

In trying to explain in the briefest way certain directing lines of our national history, I hope will see that, as it very often happens in history, by fighting on the wrong side and without conviction, our people bring nevertheless the necessary sacrifice to a common human cause which finally aims to more enlightenment rising out of the hardships and sufferings of our present position.

In fact in the present struggle our fighting position was not defined by any kind of ideals, but by the harsh necessity to defend our territory and by the desire not to

split the nation's conscience in two halves fighting one another. Our position was such that from the beginning we were stand to make a stand from both opposing sides as was Spain in the civil war a few years ago. From the earlier days of German-Russian antagonism, there were two fears in Roumania: the one to adopt the communist creed and the other to back German policy.

We were still in a more difficult position than Spain, as we had a common border – a fairly large one with Russia and on the other side we were just as much in touch with the Germans. We were threatened by the Germans through Hungary, a country which has always sided with Germany in all the wars as far as the immemorial times when the Huns came to Europe.

King Carol, with competition with the Iron Guard on one side and Monsieur Titulescu, our deceased Minister for Foreign Affairs in agreement with the leaders of the Peasant Party on other side, were the two champions who supported the two alternatives: King Carol the German one, and Mr. Titulescu, the Russian.

We know how Mr. Titulescu having been dismissed by King Carol for his Russian sympathies, the balance of our foreign policy leaned towards Germany and against Russia.

Beyond the present happenings, it is therefore interesting to see which are the directing forces which are animating the Roumanian nation of 17 million people in eastern Europe, so as to find out what they are fighting for and to find out if their aims are the same as the aims of the Germans with whom they are fighting.

My conclusion will be, that although we are on the wrong side, we are fighting for different aims than the Germans, because just as with other nations fighting now on the side of Germany it is inconceivable that the Roumanian nation should be giving her blood and fighting energy only for insuring the Nazi supremacy in Europe.

Our aim is solely to preserve our national conscience against odds so as to enable the nation to emerge out of the struggle more united and better organized in order to play our part among the nations of south eastern Europe, not only for our benefit but for the joint benefit of all of the small nations, our neighbours.

In the way we have settled our disputes with our neighbours south the Danube we hope in the future, when the democratic and egalitarian ideals will again prevail, that we shall help to build up a commonwealth of nations in central and eastern Europe, based on good faith, on labor and justice.

By talking history in this short lecture you will forgive me if I will avoid to make a parade of facts and arguments.

Out of the history of the Roumanian nation I will try to detach the directing lines on which our national history has moved so as to avoid enumerating datas which – so far my own experience about lectures are boring and of no special interests for a listener who desires first of all to have a broad historical outlook.

I understand the meaning of a broad historical outlook an attempt to visualise the development of a nation out of her spiritual energy and to link the past to the present so that the present should be explained without a too confusing research of arguments and proofs.

The history of a nation to be enlightening has to be short. Not necessarily as short as to exhaust the subject in only one lecture. But historians of our days have to often the tendency to fill their books with erudition, out of which people are unable to draw, as out of a past of common experience, any kind of learning.

If I should choose a model of the most perfect history of a nation I shall say it is the Old Testament for the Jewish nation, because out of some outstanding facts it draws directing lines for the conduct of men and a high inspiration for submission to the divine law.

Without doubt the inspiration which moves through the history of the Jewish nation is unique in its kind. Nevertheless conceived in similar way the history of any nation is part of its own life. Without history a nation is dead as a man without consciousness and without memory. The consciousness of the past gives to a nation the impulse to live and to survive the most terrible odds and never to be discouraged.

I will limit myself today to detach the directing spiritual lines on which our national history has developed and so you will forgive me not to deal so much with facts as with tendencies and impulses.

First I will try to explain what is the Roumanian idea about its own race. Some learned people of our universities are very fond to support the theory that we are of Roman race. Others, I think more wise are more conciliating about the idea of a mixed-race.

My own idea is that purity of a race among any national community is the most ridiculous pretence, because national communities have always been built up on spiritual values and not on material values. The biological concept of race has only a limited significance and none without the spiritual complement.

Roman settlers came on the actual Romanian territory at the end of the first and second century of our era. The Roman occupation on our present national territory was a military one and perhaps the colonisation has not been going far beyond the settlements of officials, of skilled workers and of Roman armies. The Roumanians of today have perhaps as much Roman blood as the British people after the Roman conquest of the Celtic races which formerly lived in this country.

The people who was conquered by the Romans north of the Danube were according to latest researches an early European history of a race much nearer to the Celtic and the Gaelic one. It is the native race out of which the Romanian nation was born.

The interesting feature of the Roman conquest was that administration succeeded to spread the knowledge of the Roman language to such an extensive measure, so that the foundation of the later Romanian language was just as near to Latin as the Spanish, the Portuguese or the Italian.

Another interesting facts in the componse of the Romanian race is that all along, through the period since the downfall of the Roman empire and until the Middle Ages, the Roumanian people had to support all the invasions of primitive peoples coming from Asia. The invaders from Asia, in part settled on our territory, they mixed with the natives and finally were spiritually dominated by the natives,

which proved that natives and invaders created a new national community in which the common language was a kind of vulgar Latin. We know how often it happened that invaders were intellectually dominated by the invaded natives.

A problem of some interest may arise. Why did the Latin language persist in Roumania against all invasions and why it did not for instance persist to the same extent here in Great Britain? The only explanation we can give is that the former invaders who came to these shores including the Norman conquest were seafaring people and thus of a high mental competence and of a high material skill and so were able to impose their own law to the people with whom they made contact. The early invaders who came in our country were of a different kind riding on horseback, coming from Asiatic uncultivated plain and rather of a very primitive education. Their language perhaps being as primitive as their behavior, it seems that they found in the Roman language a more useful instrument for social intercourse.

I would not like to say this to my Hungarian friends knowing that their ancestors came also on horseback in the 8th century. Nevertheless my explanation about race might give to all our neighbours the opportunity to reexamine also their idea about race and finally reach the conclusion that for instance the Hungarians of today are just as little the descendants of the primitive Hungarians of the 8th century or of the huns, then ourselves are the pure descendants of the Roman settlers. I think it can be easily proved that any nation claiming racial precedence is utterly wrong. A nation is in fact a spiritual community which has very little to do with the purity of race.

By discussing nationality coupled with racial qualifications, we must always bear in mind that the very few different races in the world which may be considered as distinctive concerning appearance, gifts and qualities, are unable to give us any explanation about national feeling as we know from the past a man of a different race may be a Great Britain patriot if he loves this country. I would therefore define the nationality as a stabilized and a crystallised cultural product of racial mixture.

Nationality is more a spiritual product dominating the materiality of the race or any racial mixture, just as such as personality is not to be discovered out of the anatomic research of the human body. Nationality is a spiritual product which superimposes its characteristics to the mere biology of the race.

Having said enough about the race, I will try to make you understand the directing spiritual powers which have determined life and politics in the past of the Roumanian nation and which are still bearing their influence into the present.

To be brief I will say that our national life has been enhanced and consolidated during the more remote past and until the most recent events by two major spiritual impulses. They compel us to separate the Roumanian history in two parts. These two parts are:

The first, from the twelfth century until the beginning of the last century, all our political activity as well as the cultural one has been concentrated around the church and the second, from the beginning of the last century until four years ago

our national life has been dominated by the democratic ideals of the French Revolution.

We have thus two distinct periods in the life of the nation, two periods when the national feeling among the people was coordinated around two distinctive ideals.

A student of Roumania will not understand its historical past if he does not keep in mind that more than 600 years we have struggled in three separate political units, as defender of the Christian faith against the non-Christian world which surrounded us. Later since the beginning of the 19 century we have been trying to raise our united nationality supported by a new by a new political standard: it was the political ideal raised out of the French revolution and the teaching of liberalism.

Let us say a few word upon the period when our nationality was supported and at the same time was the support of the evangelical idea represented by the Greek Orthodox church in eastern Europe.

It is a fact worth mentioning that among all the people and nations in south eastern Europe, with the exception of the Greeks, we Roumanians have received Christian missionaries before any other nation in south eastern Europe. Among the Roman soldiers sent north the Danube, during the second and third centuries we know that there were a large number of Christians. These soldiers coming from the Greek parts of the Roman Empire, the earlier parts converted to Christianity, have brought to the Roumanian people living north of the Danube, what the Apostles called the good news for a better world to the future.

As our great historian Nicolae Iorga explains it in the History of Roumania translated in English by Cabe page 22: The references to religion in words shows very clearly that the Christian cult was adopted by the population at a very early period. In fact all the terms in Romanian language referring to the divinity and the faith are of Latin origin. The name for God in Roumanian spells like Dominus Deus.

Later missionaries who spread the gospel among the Slavonic people like Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century have found already the ground prepared for the organisation of a common Slavonic and Roumanian church. This missionary work among the slavs started in Bulgaria was continued in Moravia and Bohemia and we might have been considered as building a geographical link between the Slavonic nations more recently converted to Christianity.

The Christian faith was so completely accepted by the Roumanian people at a time when Europe was still struggling for Christianity that our idea about nationality among the Roumanian common people had since the tendency to be confused with the religious idea.

Until today the name of Christian in the Roumanian popular language is synonymous with "being of Roumanian nationality". *That shows how far in remote times our neighbours were not Christians* (emphasis added).

The confusion in the people's language between Christian and Roumanian comes also from the fact that during five and more centuries our people were constantly at war with non-Christian nations who came from the south and the east threatening

and endangering our national existence. During 5 centuries since the Turks came into Europe we have not had any respite in our constant war against Turks and so the emblem of the church was our national emblem.

In spite of all this long struggle, the Christian feeling among Roumanians as supported by the Greek Orthodox has never been sectarian or intolerant. There were not quarrels between Orthodox and Catholic as it is proved by the Catholic settlements in Moldavia and marriages between Moldavian rulers and daughters of Polish rulers as early as 13 century.

The religious wars which raged over Europe during the Renaissance have left completely uninterested as our church had never the opportunity to be implicated in the European politics. The only result of the Reformation, was the translation of the Bible in Roumanian which has been secured without any kind of opposition. I can mention another example of Christian feeling among Roumanian people in former centuries. For instance the position of Jews in Roumanian social life has never made the object of any difficulty until the second half of 19 century when foreign influence coming from countries where anti-Semitism had a long medieval tradition, have caused the beginnings of the troubles. At the time when ghettos are widespread over Europe, I know documental reports of Jewish families in Roumania proving that Jews had no restriction in exercising their professions.

I can also mention that the fact that during the present racial intolerance which rages over Europe, the Roumanian peasant, according to his own feeling is opposed to the exclusion of the Jews from our national life, because he sympathises with any race which is oppressed as he was himself and because he considers the Jew as a precious commercial and cultural link with the world outside the peasant community.

As a matter of historical information I will mention the fact that at a time when the Balkan countries and as far as the greatest part of Hungary was conquered by the Turks and under Turkish administration the Roumanian rulers since the late Middle Ages until modern times were always to be considered as defenders of the faith, title which was given by the Pope Innocentius the VIII to the Moldavian Prince Stefan in the 15 century.

Explaining the religious trend of mind of our people, I would not like to make you believe that our political organization was anything like a theocracy, as the ruling prince elected by the assembly of nobles of the country was never the head of the church, and the church was always considered as a community for itself dependent from a Higher authority. It was in fact the right interpretation of Christ's teaching "to give Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what is due to God." This principle of our politics was abandoned only in the year 1938 when Carol II established a dictatorial regime and made out of the Head of the Romanian church his Prime Minister.

I tried thus to explain the foundation of the religious feeling as you find it among the Roumanian people.

I will tell you now something about the democratic idea in Roumania as it has been the dominating factor in our national life from the moment the political principles of the French revolution have penetrated in eastern Europe.

Talking about democracy I must insist on the historical link between democracy and national pride as it spread among the nations of eastern Europe, national pride and democracy having risen out of the same impulse.

As representatives of a small nation we must never forget the spiritual link between national feeling and democracy as both are the result of the spreading of liberal ideas in the last century.

I had the opportunity to develop this subject in a lecture I gave at a meeting of the Heads of the free churches in the United States published in the Christian Register of Boston.

Allow me please a few minutes to give you a brief explanation of the significance of this link.

Medieval Europe has established all over the European Continent a political system of class society. Feudality has separated the ruling class from the people. To keep the people under the rule of a few families was considered to be a sacred inherited privilege. In these countries of western and central Europe, the church driven away from its true object, has helped the rulers to enforce the class society rule. It was the continuance of the very old association between church and monarchs in Europe, already denounced in the early Middle Ages by St. Augustine. The same system prevailed in central and eastern Europe until the last war. In the last century we can see the attempt made by the so-called Holy Alliance between the monarchs of Europe to keep down the rising of a new egalitarian society which was growing under the impulse of new social and democratic ideals.

Until the last war, the Habsburg monarchy was the model of a late feudal society where privileges of birth had precedence over individual value.

Class society founded on divine rights in central and eastern Europe represented the denial of the people's sovereignty and as the people under feudal control were of a different nationality as the ruling class, the claiming for national rights in the Habsburg monarchy and the claiming for government of the people and by the people were necessarily connected.

In this way the ideals of the French revolution carried through Europe by the Napoleonic conquest, stirred up in central and eastern Europe as well as the claim for democratic ruling as the claim for recognition of nations' rights both claims being identical.

We must bear this in mind to be able to understand how much nationalism in eastern Europe cannot be separated from the idea of government of the people and by the people.

The national feeling among the different nationalities among the Austro-Hungarian rule as Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Poles, Ukrainians, Roumanians etc., has been raised through the democratic idea. It is obvious that the government of the people had to take into account the language of the people. Democracy was thus even more the creed for the small nations than for the larger one.

In spite of this, the democratic rule among the small nations emerging after the last war was with very few exceptions nowhere a success.

The fact that territorial demarcations between the different national groups could not be defined in the most perfect manner, gave rise to a kind of imperialism of the small nations every one raising territorial claims against the other. It was a stirring up of national ambitions for matters which should have been only a problem of adjustments of the territorial demarcations between the small nations. Out of this ill adjustment arose the idea of minority protection which seems to have failed because it was not supplemented by the idea of which is fundamentally democratic, to build up federations of nations in which the national development of every nation should find its just satisfaction unimpaired by any jealousy or spirit of hatred of one nation towards another.

What is important to remember for my own national history is the fact that the national feeling of the people had to be supported by the democratic rule as the most suitable to give a new life and a new strength to the Roumanian nation.

I will complete my lecture giving you some facts about the progress of the democratic idea in Roumania during the last century.

Just as we were together with the Greeks the first nation in eastern Europe based on Christian ideals, we were again among the first to claim democratic rule and recognition of national sovereignty for our people.

One more we were linked with the Greek people. The link between Greek national and democratic renaissance and the Roumanian democratic renaissance is to be found in the first Greek national revolution intended to free Greece from the Turkish domination which started on Roumanian territory. It is a fact worth mentioning.

The Greek independence movement started in Roumania in the year 1821 when Greek refugees organized themselves under Roumanian protection and under the leadership of Prince Ypsilanty and started the revolution against the Turkish domination. Great Britain supported the Greek national movement and during the war which follows Lord Byron as we know gave his life for the independence of Greece in the battle of Missolonghi. I must remind you that at the same time the Russian policy was also supporting the claim for national independence of both Roumania and Greece.

The first Roumanian move inspired by the democratic idea to obey the law as a higher authority above the rulers' will is to be found on our first Constitutional law in 1831 called the Organic Reglement.

It was as many European constitutions of the same period, an aristocratic organic law. It could not be different at a time when the alliance of monarchs in Europe was still strong against the claim of the people. Our Constitutional law was intended to stabilise the control of the State by a ruling body and to organize the election of the ruler. In fact it must not be forgotten that our rulers or head of State called Princes or Voevods have always been in our past history elected by the assembly of the nobles or "boyars" and that we have not known in our records for nearly seven hundred years until 1866 any other ruling except as elected one, with

very light interruptions, our present Constitutional monarchic changing the elective system dated from the year 1866.

Our first parliamentary Constitution was adopted in the year 1866 after long political struggles which began in 1848.

Since the adoption of the first Constitution altered at different times, I will emphasize that our parliamentary government during 75 years has worked in the most efficient and helpful way. Thanks to our parliamentary government we have always been considered among the most progressive people in eastern Europe and under the democratic banner we have joined our allies and Great Britain in the last war.

Our democratic reputation has come to an end with a new trend of policy inaugurated by King Carol (II) when in the year 1938 decided to abandon the parliamentary rule for the sake of his own personal regime.

What I would give to bring to your notice is that our democratic and parliamentary rule has never been either hatred nor depreciated in Roumanian public mind and that it has been suppressed not by public conviction but by an act of power. As other continental parliamentary regime it has failed not because the people did not want but for the reason that Parliament was considered an obstacle by certain rulers to impose their unlimited ruling will. Carol (II) as King felt inclined to imitate other dictators.

If you allow me a more few minutes, it might be interesting to point why in certain countries the parliamentary rule was so well entrenched that it was able to survive the lust for power of isolated persons and why in other countries such overpowering of the parliament was possible.

I must confess that I have devoted many hours to think over these problems of modern democracy and a conviction imposes itself to my mind resulting from the study of recent changes which have occurred in my country, and from the psychology of younger people in Roumania. The problem for my country as for other countries in similar evolution seems to be the following: why has not democracy successful on the European Continent in the same extent as it has been successful in the Anglo-saxon world?

In democracy, (...) of the Anglo-saxon world or a political organization aiming at universality. I will be short and submit my conclusion to your judgement.

Out of varied connections between past events it seems that in the Anglo-saxon world, democracy has not risen merely out of the political struggles claiming for the people's government, but out of a deep Christian feeling for the achievement of what I will call a Christian community. This feeling results from a genuine Christian faith prevailing among the British people, proved for their keenness for the justice and their genuine kindness for all human beings. Such a feeling is not to be found all over the world, as not every people are inclined to join into a community respecting above all the Christian law.

The Anglo-saxon democracy - in contrast to the larger part of the European democracy prevailing during the last and present century,- I say the Anglo-saxon democracy seems not to have been developed out of any kind of political teaching

or scientific teaching in the age of materialistic philosophy. The anglo-saxon democracy has grown out of the great movement of the reformed churches under the powerful influence of the teaching of Calvin and Knox. In all countries where the teaching of Calvin has been spread, the democratic rule has proved strong and respected because it was supplemented by the Christian rule.

Even if the teaching of the great Christian missionaries is not actual, their influence today is still prevailing in English private and politic life.

On the European Continent democracy except in Switzerland, Holland and in the Scandinavian countries has been nowhere supported by religious principles. On the contrary, all over the Continent the democratic rule has made its way by the sole inspiration of a revolution which has carried its ideals completely estranged from the Christian teaching and largely impressed by the so-called scientific atheism.

I consider this break between religion and democracy on the European Continent as the reason for the failure of European democracy. This applies to my country too remembering some of the last events.

I could give you my ample explanation how I reached this conclusion but that could not be anymore the subject of this present lecture.

It is enough to point out as a guidance for the future that democratic people in the world should learn better of the anglo-saxon example how to conciliate the two great spiritual sources out of which all our modern civilization has risen.

Wheatley 29 June 1941

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