

**From a “Geopolitical Trap” to an “Ancestral Romanian Land”:
The Integration of Dobrudja in Romania, 1878-1913**
(Abstract)

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This paper focuses on the integration of Northern Dobrudja into Romania, which is celebrated in Romanian historiography as the second stage of the creation of the national and unitary Romanian state, after the 1859 union of Wallachia and Moldavia. From this perspective, the mechanisms of assimilation used in Dobrudja by Romanian political elites prefigured the more complex and arduous process of administrative integration and cultural homogenization that took place in interwar Greater Romania. Nevertheless, while the process of national consolidation in Greater Romania has been recently subject to comprehensive research from non-teleological theoretical perspectives, the case of Dobrudja’s assimilation into Romania has received much limited attention.

Chronologically, the article covers 35 years (1878-1913), and encompasses the main stages of Dobrudja’s assimilation into Romania, namely the administrative organization (1880), the regulation of the property regime (1882), the introduction of the capitalist economy in the province, and, finally, the gradual process of granting political rights to Dobrudjans (1908-1913). It is argued that Northern Dobrudja served as a kind of “Internal America” for Romania – a dynamic frontier zone for expanding the national economy and ethnic boundaries. The integration of the province into Romania followed the model of “internal colonialism”: in order to foster the incorporation of the province, Romanian political elites designed a threefold mechanism composed of ethnic colonization, cultural homogenization, and economic modernization. This mechanism had at its core the citizenship legislation; thus, despite its formal incorporation into Romania, Northern Dobrudja was subject to a *separate, extra-constitutional administrative organization* between 1878 and 1913. Under this status, the Dobrudjans enjoyed a local type of citizenship, which denied them political participation and the right to acquire properties outside the province.

The analysis focuses on the mechanism of assimilation implemented in Dobrudja by the Romanian political elites, and is organized in several parts. The first part of the article explores the formation of the Romanian nation discourse about Dobrudja, and the way Romanian political elites approached the organization of the province. The second

part examines the post-1878 administrative organization of Dobrudja, with an emphasis on citizenship and property legislation. The third part explores the association between national consolidation and modernization, and its side-effect, namely the uneven economic development in the province. It also highlights the relationship between Bucharest's excessive administrative centralization and regionalist tendencies in Northern Dobrudja. The fourth part focuses on the political emancipation of Dobrudjans, and looks at the consequences of this event for the socio-political life in the province. The paper ends with the Second Balkan War (1913), after which, by the Treaty of Bucharest, Romania annexed Southern Dobrudja from Bulgaria. This event had a great socio-political and demographic impact on the entire province, and inaugurated a new stage of Dobrudja's integration into Romania. In conclusions, some specific characteristics of the process of nation- and state-building in the province are highlighted, in an attempt to add the complementary case-study of Northern Dobrudja's pre-World War One assimilation into Romania to the process of administrative integration and cultural homogenization in interwar Greater Romania.