

**Moldavian Conservatism in the “Federalist” Interlude (1859-1862):
Lascăr Catargiu
(Abstract)**

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The last years of the history of the Moldavian Principality (1859-1862) were little studied by the historians, in contrast to the years after the administrative centralization of the Romanian state. The political role played, in this period, by Lascăr Catargiu – influential political leader and former candidate of the unionist conservative faction to the throne – also remained obscure. After quitting his post as minister of the Interior in the government Manolache Costache Epureanu (September 21/October 3 1859), Catargiu disappeared for several months from the public life. In February 1860, he was re-elected to the Elective-Legislative Assembly. Until the resignation of the Manolache Costache cabinet, the deputy adopted a cautious attitude. His association with the controversial Moldavian government forced him, more than once, to give explanations to his colleagues in the Chamber; at the end of April, Catargiu was even threatened with legal action. After the designation of Mihail Kogălniceanu, an old adversary of the former minister of the Interior, as prime minister (April 30/May 12 1860), Catargiu became a systematic opponent of the government. Nevertheless, until the end of the legislative session (July 1860), he did not manage to cause serious difficulties to the cabinet. But the policies of Kogălniceanu, and, most of all, the suspension and arrest of the Metropolitan Sofronie Miculescu, soon eroded the executive's support in the Assembly. At January 17/29 1861, Catargiu presented, in the name of a parliamentary commission, a report condemning unequivocally the management of the „affair Sofronie” by the prime minister; the same day, Kogălniceanu presented his resignation. Three days later, Lascăr Catargiu achieved another political

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success, being elected vice president of the Chamber (office in which he was confirmed in December 1861). Before the administrative centralization of the United Principalities, the deputy had one more significant intervention in the debates of the Assembly. In May 1861, a Parliamentary Question of the politician regarding the enthronement of a foreign prince (one of the sensitive subjects of debate, at the time) had a considerable impact. Its reception among the conservatives in the Wallachian Chamber brought Catargiu „national” notoriety, assuring him a favorable political situation in view of the upcoming unification of the two Assemblies. Even though the almost permanent tensions between the parliamentary majority and the reigning Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza limited the political influence of Lascăr Catargiu, he consolidated his position in the ranks of the „right”. Thus, the conservative leader remained relevant after the transition of the Romanian state from the „federalism” of the first years of Cuza’s reign to the centralism which decisively marked its existence from 1862 onwards.