Editorial Foreword

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This issue of Revista Română pentru Studii Baltice și Nordice [The Romanian Journal of Baltic and Nordic Studies, RRSBN] carries selected papers presented in approximately half of the panels of the second international conference for Baltic and Nordic Studies in Romania entitled Black Sea and Baltic Sea Regions: Confluences, influences and crosscurrents in the modern and contemporary ages. The general aim of this conference was to investigate the encounters between the Baltic and the Black Sea regions’ societies since the Middle Ages. The goal was to unearth the complexity of these bonds not only at state level (political, diplomatic, military, trade relations), but also the encounters, forms of syncretism or networks of a commercial, social, cultural, religious nature which are beyond or beneath the state relations and are presumably not only richer, but more interesting and challenging for a researcher as well. Additionally, parallels between the two regions as two buffer zones situated in-between the great empires or great powers of modernity were also assessed. Papers dealing with the effects of world wars, totalitarianism and the Cold War either as comparative approach or in terms of relations, confluences and influences were also invited. Furthermore, the conference also welcomed research results dealing with diasporas, émigré communities or individual destinies in the frame of the general theme of the conference. As such, this conference constituted a real change of research paradigm, relatively little having been previously achieved in this respect. The results of the conference as the two issues of our review will prove were notable.

A number of twenty-eight speakers belonging to twenty-three institutions from nine European countries approached these issues from various angles, the largest number of participants being constituted of historians, alongside whom stood specialists in international relations, minority studies, political sciences, etc.

In the editing of this issue, we have focused on the panels dealing with “Settlements, transfers, encounters and clashes in the Modern Age” and “Baltic, Nordic and Black Sea regions in the international relations:
intersections, meetings, crosscurrents” to which the papers signed by Stefan Donecker, Klaus Richter, Mihaela Mehedinți, Costel Coroban, Veniamin Ciobanu and Claudiu-Lucian Topor belonged.

Let us take a closer look at each of these papers individually. Stefan Donecker and Klaus Richter’s papers approached their subjects from the perspective of histoire croisée, the former researcher studying the humanist hypothesis of a Wallachian origin of Lithuanians and Latvians, while the latter considering the cultural transfers and the role of rumors as manifesting between Kišinyev and Lithuania in a charged climate marked by the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms occurring in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century. The scholarly fantasy circulated by University of Wittenberg’s scholars regarding a Wallachian migration to the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea endured for about one century and half. This prompts Donecker conclude that on the mental maps of Central European scholars, “Dacia respectively Wallachia were not too civilized […], but still civilized enough to provide a reputable and very prestigious ancestry. A Wallachian origin was, indeed, an honorable genealogy.”

The outbreak of a pogrom in 1903 in the Russian guberniya of Bessarabia spread the fear among Jews within the Russian Empire. The expression to be treated “as in Kišinev” was tantamount to pogroms and was enough reason to create panic among the members of this community. The implications were manifold, not the less important of which was the determination of the Jews to defend themselves if such attacks happened or were supposed to take place. Richter also compares the disruptions caused by anti-Semitism in two very different areas of the Russian Empire, the growing industrial city of Kišinev, on the one hand, and the still rural northern part of Lithuania “in order to contextualize anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania on the larger scale of the Russian pogroms.”

Mihaela Mehedinți approaches in her contribution the relations between Transylvania and the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland) in the 19th century as seen in Romanian periodicals from Transylvania, especially in Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură, Familia and Gazeta de Transilvania. The article challenge the assumptions that because of distance the Nordic states were perceived as remote areas and little was known about them. Mehedinți concludes that “in the 19th century, Transylvanians’ image of the Nordic countries is well shaped and has mainly positive connotations” and “the amount of information they had at their disposal was rather large and capable of preserving their representations of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland”.

The papers of the panel “Baltic, Nordic and Black Sea regions in the international relations: intersections, meetings, crosscurrents” provide
interesting insights into three important events unfolded in the Black and Baltic seas rim areas: Swedish King Charles XII’s Stay in the Ottoman Empire, the outbreak of the Lithuanian insurrection (25 March 1831), and the discussion regarding a Romanian-Swedish pro-German alliance going on in the first part of World War I. The first topic is assessed in the light of British documents, the second from the perspective of Swedish documents and the third is based on Romanian diplomatic documents. Costel Coroban investigates the mixture of superhero and tyrant British perception of King Charles XII. The balance was however tilted towards the negative image which spread into Britain mostly as a result of his largely overestimated cooperation with the Jacobites, the archenemies of the Royal House of Hanover, which led to the arrest of Count Gyllenborg, the Swedish envoy in London.

Veniamin Ciobanu approaches the Swedish outlook of the Lithuanian insurrection of March 1831 in the light of the anxiety manifesting in the Stockholm political and diplomatic circles that the severance of the ties between Lithuania and Russia may influence the attitude of the Norwegians who were likewise unhappy with the Swedish rule upon their country imposed at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. No wonder that the Swedish paid increased attention to the events unfolding at the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea and that they unreservedly condemned the Lithuanian aspirations.

Finally, Claudiu-Lucian Topor brings new evidence to a topic which still reserves many new avenues of interpretation to the interested researcher: the Romanian foreign policy in the first two years of World War I. Masterminded in Berlin in summer 1915 among the interested military circles and promoted by the pro-German Romanian envoy to Germany, the project of a Romanian-Swedish alliance to act under the umbrella of German strategic policy, aimed at winning the final victory on the Eastern Front and possibly on the Western Front, too. Utopian as it may seem today, the plan enjoyed the support of certain circles, but finally died out because of the Swedish clinging to their neutrality and of the Bratianu Government understanding of national interest.

Two articles have been selected for this issue from two other panels of the conference. The first article signed by Ioana-Ecaterina Cazacu discusses the role of the Nansen Commission and the Romanian Prisoners of War’s repatriation from the Russian territories, a topic on which the author has already achieved two other notable recent contributions. In order to understand the stakes ahead this Commission, one may recall that the Nansen Commission was capable of repatriating no less than 427,885 POWs, 19,188 of whom, as Cazacu provides evidence of, were Romanians.
Ēriks Jēkabsons of the University of Latvia studies the relations between Romania and Latvia at the beginning of World War II when a permanent Latvian Legation was set up in Bucharest under envoy Ludvigs Ēķis. The remarkable Ēķis’ reports reveal not only the highlights of the Romanian-Latvian relations, but also the priorities and anxieties of Romanian foreign policy in these years full of drama in which both Romania and Latvia were to witness aggression and domination from the two totalitarian European empires, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. As Ēķis concludes, “the Latvian Envoy’s reports reveal striking similarities in the destinies of the two countries and nations in the tragic time”.

The architecture of this issue is completed by the recalling of the exhibition entitled “90 years from the establishment of diplomatic relations between Finland and Romania: exhibition of historical documents” organized by the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies in cooperation with such prestigious institutions as the Embassy of Finland in Romania, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, the “Royal House” National Mueseal Complex of Targoviste, the National Museum of Romanian History of Bucharest, the Cetatea de Scaun Printing House and the like. The itinerant exhibition travelled from Targoviste where it opened on 8 April 2010 to Bucharest, Constanta, Tulcea, Slobozia and Galati. The speeches included in this issue were held on 30 June 2010 at the opening ceremony of the exhibition at the National Museum of Romanian History of Bucharest.

It is our hope that this issue of RRSBN will breed new academic debates with regard to the topics approached herein. It is also our aim to target not only the community of scholars with an interest in these topics in the light of their research interest, but also to answer the general public interest not only in Romania but also abroad. To achieve these goals, a great support was provided by the Niro Investment Group which generously sponsored this publication and to which we extend our full gratitude. The same applies to the other sponsors of the second international conference for Baltic and Nordic Studies in Romania, such as the embassies of Finland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, the Consulate of Latvia, the City Hall of Targoviste, Valahia University of Targoviste, the Lithuanian company based in Romania Arvi Agro, and last but not least to our longstanding collaborators of Cetatea de Scaun Printing House.