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Dossier: From Rapallo via Locarno to Munich (1922-1938) The Road to War? German and Romanian Perspectives







DIN SUMAR:

- British Officers Observe the *Reichswehr*: Reports, Observations and Analysis, 1919-1938
- Debates on Military Doctrine Reflected in the Romanian Military Publications of the Interwar Period
- The Land War of the Future in German Military Journalism during the Interwar Period, 1919-1939



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DOSSIER: FROM RAPALLO VIA LOCARNO TO MUNICH (1922-1938) – THE ROAD TO WAR? GERMAN AND ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVES

BRITISH OFFICERS OBSERVE THE *REICHSWEHR*: REPORTS, OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS, 1919-1938

ALARIC SEARLE *

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Abstract

This article examines the attitudes of British officers towards the Reichswehr, identifying varying degrees of sympathy towards the German armed forces during the 1930s. While the attempt to assess the German military and strategic threat proved especially difficult, a clear bias towards German positions can be identified. It was only gradually after the dissolution of the armed forces known as the Reichswehr *in 1935 that a more realistic picture of the military danger posed by the Wehrmacht began to take hold. But many British officers proved remarkably slow in recognising the danger of the German armed forces.*

Keywords: Reichswehr, *British Army, military attaché, threat assessment, attitudes to National Socialism*

The history of the *Reichswehr* found itself for many years sandwiched uneasily between the German Revolution of 1918/19 and the establishment of the National Socialist dictatorship. For the early historians of the armed forces of the Weimar Republic, their outlook was essentially that of the political historian: to discover how culpable the *Reichswehr* leadership was in the rise and accession to power of Hitler's NSDAP. Take the assertion by Gordon Craig in 1955:

> By an adroit combination of passive resistance to, and skilful evasion of, the restrictive clauses of the Versailles Treaty, it advanced much farther along the road of military recovery than had been thought possible by the men who had drafted those clauses in 1919; and, before the end of the decade, [the German army] had laid the foundations for its later expansion under Hitler.[1]

There were similar trends in other works, which tended to focus on the army, paying less attention to naval policy.[2] Treatment of subjects such as the *Reichsmarine*, or the co-operation with the Red Army, largely belonged to the 'second wave' of historiography of the *Reichswehr.*[3] Research then moved into what

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can be described as a third wave,[4] followed by a fourth, which was more concerned with the details of tactics, doctrine and technology.[5]

One subject which has not been investigated fully is how other armies viewed the resurgence of the *Reichswehr*. This paper is concerned with the attitudes, analysis and observations of British officers on the German armed forces, primarily the *Reichswehr*, but concluding with the moment when British public opinion shifted decisively as a result of the Munich Agreement. If we consider British views of the interwar German armed forces, there were in essence three groups of officers who considered developments in Germany: the military attachés in Berlin; the staff and intelligence officers tasked with assessing the capabilities of the German armed forces; and officers who wrote about military developments in the country. Although it would be possible to add additional categories, such as the officers of the Inter-Allied Control Commission, sent to Germany in the 1920s, or officers who travelled through the country, these three categories provide the groups whose analyses offer the most insight into the history of the *Reichswehr* and, likewise, attitudes towards it in the British Army.

I. The Three Phases, 1919-1939

In terms of the development of attitudes towards the German armed forces, there were three broad phases – 1919-1929; 1930-1934/35; 1935/36-1938/39. During the first period there were two key dimensions of the control of defeated Germany which at least framed officers' attitudes. The first was the Inter-Allied Control Commission, which was employed by Britain, France and the United States (the US was an 'Associated Power') to ensure that some of the conditions of the Versailles Treaty were adhered to, i.e., the agreement on German disarmament and arms limitations. However, the Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control, which was based in Berlin, ceased to function on 28 February 1927, despite the warnings of some of its members that Germany was circumventing the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.[6]

While the French Army occupied the Ruhr territory between 11 January 1923 and 25 August 1925, the British maintained an occupation garrison in the city of Cologne and the surrounding region until January 1926. The occupation of the British zone around Cologne also saw British tanks on the streets.[7] The British headquarters based in Wiesbaden continued to operate until the final withdrawal on 30 June 1930, although the 2nd Brigade was withdrawn in October 1929, meaning essentially that the occupation was *de facto* over by the end of that year.[8] In many ways, British officers' thinking was coloured by the part played by the army in maintaining control over the former enemy from the Great War.

A further role played by British troops was the deployment of around 1,500 men in 1934 to the Saar region, where they were to guarantee security for the plebiscite on the future of the region, at that time under League of Nations control. They were one element of an international force consisting of Italian, Swedish and Dutch troops. The presence of the international force failed, though, to combat voter intimidation, and over 90% of the votes cast were in favour of the return of the Saar to Germany. This should have served as a warning to British officers of what lay ahead following the National Socialist takeover of power in January 1933. In some ways, the vote in the Saar plebiscite marked the end of the second phase.

The final phase was marked by a range of foreign policy developments which saw tension increasing between Germany and Britain, as well as a series of events which saw Germany move towards open rearmament, for instance, the Law for the Expansion of the Wehrmacht of 16 March 1935, which introduced general military service, and the announcement that the peacetime army would consist of 36 divisions. This was followed by the *Wehrgesetz* of 21 May 1935, which stated that every man would have to perform military service, while in wartime, every German man and woman would be required to serve, and that the Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht was the Führer and Reichskanzler. There followed the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, which began on 7 March 1936 and saw Germany start to gain the upper hand over Britain and France, with another critical date represented by the *Anschluss* between Nazi Germany and Austria on 12 March 1938.[9]

These three phases each exerted a distinct influence on the way in which British officers regarded Germany as a military power. As

military analysis is always driven by unfolding events, it seems most logical to proceed in a chronological fashion.

II. The First Phase, 1919-1929

The first phase was clearly conditioned by the postwar atmosphere in the British Army, Navy and Air Force: with cuts to their budgets, much effort was spent on reflecting on the lessons of the Great War. A typical example of this is the book by Lieutenant-Colonel Philip Neame, *German Strategy in the Great War*, based on lectures at the Staff College, Camberley, between 1920 and 1923. It was a sober analysis of German strategy and mistakes committed during the war and, as such, strongly reflected thinking in the army at the time. Although both Helmuth von Moltke and Alfred Graf von Schlieffen were quoted as military authorities, it was pointed out that control of strategy in Germany was divided between the Supreme Command (military) and the Imperial Chancellor and ministers (civilian). Britain was seen as possessing superior control of the war effort through the office of the Prime Minister.[10] There were many such studies, but they offered few judgements on Germany or its post-Armistice situation.

When it came to military theory, British military writers were arguably the leaders in thinking about future war in the 1920s. There were lively debates on the future of air and tank warfare, the principles of war, strategy and joint operations. Many of the articles and books of two highly influential British military theorists were translated and published in an internal Reichswehr journal, *Kriegs- und militärorganisatorische Gedanken und Nachrichten aus dem Auslande*, renamed *Wehrgedanken des Auslandes* in 1930. While other authors were also reprinted in translation, the then Colonel J.F.C. Fuller's writings on tank and future war were considered especially noteworthy. Articles by the army captain and military journalist Basil Liddell Hart were also translated, most of these concentrating on infantry tactics and British military policy. While it would be going too far to assert that the articles of British officers influenced German doctrine, they most certainly contributed significantly to debates in the *Reichswehr*.[11]

In the 1920s, there appeared to be little in the way of a change in attitude towards the German armed forces from the war years. It is interesting that J.F.C. Fuller, a later enthusiast for Germany, showed attitudes typical of the officer corps of all three services when he expressed the view in 1926 in his book *Imperial Defence* that Kaiser Wilhelm II had sought world domination, also describing Bismarck as 'that sinister man'; at the same time, he criticised both Lloyd George and Winston Churchill for underestimating the German threat before 1914. As war loomed, Germany had 'established a system of peaceful penetration which directly menaced the tranquillity of the world', she had engineered the Casablanca incident in 1909, the Agadir incident in 1911, and had 'quite wrongfully gained control of a considerable proportion of the French Congo.' By 1912, there was no longer any doubt as to Germany's intentions.[12] This was in great measure a reflection of the attitude prevalent among British officers regarding Germany's war guilt.

The opinion of the senior British leadership towards the German armed forces could be seen at the close of the decade in a memorandum written by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir George Milne.[13] He ascribed the fundamental military conception of the Reichswehr to Hans von Seeckt, who desired a small professional army, backed up by a system of universal military service. He considered that Germany was working towards a situation of equality as regards military preparations. Milne had already argued that Germany was in no position to wage an aggressive war, nor even to defend itself if attacked. Hence, despite his awareness of the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, he displayed a certain sympathy for German officers who had had to contend with Communist uprisings and general internal instability while at the same time being tasked with defending the country's borders. Having studied the training regulations, Milne thought the army would try to conduct a delaying action if attacked, for which mechanisation and motorisation would be essential. He was aware that, despite the prohibition of tanks by the victorious powers, technical experiments with new weapons were being carried out. Due to limitations in training and the lack of reserves, Milne saw little reason to consider the German Army a threat in January 1929; in fact, there was a hint of sympathy for

the situation in which the military leadership found itself.[14]

There were, of course, voices in the 1920s which warned that Germany had not forgotten her armed traditions, and that she was unlikely to consider her defeat in the war as final. Thus, overall, throughout the 1920s there was a general acceptance among senior officers that Germany had been responsible for the outbreak of war in 1914, that the Versailles Treaty was just, and that the task of the British armed forces was to maintain order across the Empire. One or two officers had begun to warn that the Germans were evading the condition of the Versailles Treaty, yet there was no major shift in opinion in the 1920s. As Britain was the leader in military thought in Europe, it was the German military which looked to Britain for inspiration in the development of new tactics.

III. The Second Phase, 1930-1934/35

It is difficult to identify exactly what caused the change in attitude towards Germany, but it seems likely that German arguments that the country had been treated badly in 1919 started to be taken seriously in Britain.[15] Moreover, the rise of National Socialism came to be used as an argument as to why Versailles had been a mistake; likewise, the Bolshevik threat was considered a justification for the direction in which the country was moving. The emergence of paramilitary organisations was seen as a reflection of the German character since they enjoyed regimentation and marching, and it was no business of other nations to tell the Germans how they should run their country. These types of views began to be reflected in the writings of military officers. It should be remembered, of course, that in early 1933, few commentators in Britain felt they could predict what the establishment of a National Socialist government would bring with it. Questions were asked as to whether the country would revert to the prewar imperial system, or establish a radically different form of state, or whether the Nazis would fail completely.[16]

The ambivalent reactions which the establishment of the Third Reich generated among officers were reflected in the editorials of the journal *The Army Quarterly.* In January 1933, the comment was offered that 'Misguided though the leadership of the Nazi movement may be, there is no doubt that it is the expression of a genuine patriotic revival which has enlisted the enthusiastic support of many of the best elements of the German nation.'[17] In July of the same year, it was claimed that despite the suppression of individual rights, Hitler had 'shown considerable respect for constitutional forms.'[18] In October, it was suggested that he had 'displayed a far less bellicose attitude than was expected of him', and, likewise, that if his object was to wage war on Bolshevism the world might be grateful to him later if he were to be successful.[19] In April 1935, it was observed that 'No one who has visited Germany recently can fail to have been impressed by the revival of life and energy among the German people.'[20]

This attitude of benevolence towards Germany could also be seen in the statements of the British military attaché in the same period, Colonel A.F.A.N. Thorne, who served in Berlin from April 1932 to May 1935.[21] In the first instance, however, he reported developments in military affairs with a degree of accuracy. On 6 June 1934, he noted that an official document known as the 'Articles of War' had undergone a transformation since 1930, with the title of *Reichswehr* now replaced by the term *Wehrmacht*. Earlier promises to allow military attachés to visit manoeuvres had been rescinded and there was clearly a great deal which was being concealed.[22] In July 1934, Thorne reported in detail on the military expansion that had been taking place. His report included evidence that there was a move towards mechanisation and that parts suitable for the development of German tanks were in production. He predicted that there would be a speeding-up of military measures, so that by April 1935 the *Reichswehr* would most likely consist of 300,000 men.[23]

Not surprisingly, Thorne reported in detail on the passive attitude of the *Reichswehr* towards the Night of the Long Knives on 30 June 1934. This was explained by the lack of their own system of communications and the dispersion of isolated garrisons, so that a concentration of troops would have been difficult to achieve. He also mentioned that Ernst Röhm had destroyed the fighting capacity of the *Stahlhelm*, long considered by the *Reichswehr* to be an indispensable reinforcement. Nonetheless, Hitler had gone with the advice of the military leadership against that of the SA. According to Thorne: 'To a great extent, the officers of the

Reichsheer are favourably disposed towards Hitler, however much they may be nationalists at heart.' He also thought that the German people had capitulated before a loud minority after January 1933. He further thought it 'most unlikely that the Reichsheer will attempt to interfere with the Nazi Government as long as Hitler allows the Reichsheer to continue its work of reconstruction.'[24]

This sober assessment should, though, be placed in the context of two observations made by the Foreign Office on Colonel Thorne's reports from Berlin. Reacting to a report sent from Berlin on 16 August 1934, in which Thorne reported on a conversation with a member of the *Reichswehr-Ministerium* about the development of the German air force, an official noted he had read the second paragraph of the report 'with considerable surprise'. The statement by the German official that the pace of development was too fast and that the air force needed fewer bombers and more fighters was considered to be 'incriminating'. This was because the creation of a German air force was in direct breach of the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty. By not commenting on this admission of the construction of an illegal air force, this might have been considered to be a tacit acceptance of the flouting of Germany's treaty obligations. At the same time, there was now no prospect of a disarmament convention, so it was seen as, unfortunately, a pragmatic position for the military attaché to take: in essence, the tacit recognition that Germany was violating the military clauses of the Treaty. It was accepted that Colonel Thorne was probably right to adopt an 'understanding' attitude towards the German position, so that he could gain far more extensive and useful information on the construction of the new German air force. According to the official:

> There are of course manifest objections to a tacit acquiescence over an indefinite period in the flagrant violation of an international Treaty, but in the present case I frankly see no alternative. We don't want Germany at the present moment formally to denounce the military clauses, and neither we nor the French – and none of the other signatories count – are ready either to arraign Germany before the League as Treaty breaker or to legalise the Treaty breaches.[25]

Even more revealing, however, are some of the statements made by Thorne in a detailed report of 31 December 1934, sent to London from Berlin on 7 January 1935: it was 'impossible for a foreign observer to withhold a large measure of admiration' for the officer corps of the *Reichswehr.* This was because, although only 4,500 strong, it was the only body that had thwarted the plans and ambitions of the Nazi Party:

> The efficiency and professional qualifications of the Reichsheer are respected everywhere and the moral[e] is extremely high, as indeed it has every right to be. The Third Reich is now within measurable distance of possessing an army which Herr Hitler has described in his New Year's message to the defence forces as one which is to achieve peaceful equality with those of their neighbours and thus provide honour and security for Germany.

This statement reflects the attitude of many British officers at the time, who harboured quiet – and on some occasions – open admiration for the Third Reich, or at least its armed forces.[26]

Of further interest is Thorne's final report from Berlin before handing over to his successor, Colonel F.E. Hotblack,[27] in which he reported on a conversation with General von Reichenau,[28] who told him, without making a definite statement, that the best course of action for Britain would be to give Germany 'a free hand' in Europe, including Russia; in return, Germany would agree to non-interference in British affairs outside Europe. Order could be kept in Europe if one power dominated — and that power ought to be Germany.[29] When passing on Thorne's final report of 11 May 1935, the ambassador Sir E. Phipps noted the 'unusually good relations with Germans of every class' which Thorne had established; he concluded, moreover, with the remark, 'I view his departure with the utmost regret.'[30] This provoked a reaction from the Foreign Office in London to the effect that these good relations had only become possible because Thorne clearly sympathised with German positions, such as their 'encirclement' by other powers, which he appeared to have accepted as a definite fact. It was suggested that Thorne had become convinced

of Germany's military potential and could see 'no way out of the dangers which loom ahead save by making friends with our enemy'. Foreign Office officials were clearly unhappy that 'General von Reichenau was able to hold forth without producing any reaction at all in his two English listeners.'[31]

The Foreign Office in London were not far wrong in their assessment. Many British officers displayed an obvious admiration for both Germany and Italy until 1935. There were several reasons for this position. On the one hand, the real enemy had been seen in the 1920s as the Soviet Union (and Bolshevism), which was a threat to India, Ireland, and Britain itself. By the early 1930s, a clear evolution of this view had taken place among many officers who saw an alliance with Germany as the best way to combat the threat of the Soviet Union and Bolshevism. Added to this was either open or latent anti-Semitism, not to mention admiration of Germany and Italy as fascist states, partly because the transformation of these countries' armed forces was seen as something which Britain's armed services were being denied by successive penny-pinching governments. This attitude was, at times, stated quite openly, such as in an article by the respected military commentator Major-General Sir Henry Rowan-Robinson in August 1934, who wrote, in relation to his 'bias towards fascism', that he had 'distinct leanings towards Fascist economic theories, regarding them for the most part as sound, and accepting the fact that they can only be enforced in a disciplined state.'[32]

This picture of favourable attitudes towards the Third Reich was not universal, though. When it came to the officers entrusted with strategic planning, the picture which emerges is very different.[33] In terms of predictions of the German ability to produce aircraft, there was an estimation of increasing German capacity to build aircraft, with a solemn warning delivered in March 1934 that 'the capacity of the Aircraft Industry will in a short time assume considerable proportions.' In May 1934, it was estimated that the Luftwaffe would be able to expand to a force of 1,640 frontline aircraft by 1945; but only a year later they revised their estimate to an air force of 1,500 aircraft by April 1937.[34] The War Office was much slower than the Air Ministry in assessing the expansion of the German Army. The principal source for assessments was, in fact, the reports by Colonel Andrew Thorne, the military attaché in Berlin. Until covert rearmament ended, it would be difficult to reach definite predictions on the size of the army, not least of all on account of the many paramilitary organisations. The first shock for the intelligence organisations came when Hitler announced in March 1935 that the new German Army would number thirty-six divisions. Adjustments came, however, when it became clear that many claims made by Hitler – for instance, that there was parity between the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force – were exaggerations.[35]

In short, the favourable views which appeared during the second phase always need to be contrasted with the estimates of the various intelligence organisations inside Whitehall. An indication of the generally realistic assessments was the judgement made by the Principal Supply Officers Committee in 1932 that the minimum period necessary for British industrial mobilisation would be five years. Based on this calculation, they stated that the year of maximum danger would be 1939. The first report issued by the Defence Requirements Committee in March 1934 stated, likewise, that British preparations for facing Germany in a war needed to be completed by 1939; Germany was now identified as 'the ultimate potential enemy.'[36]

IV. The Third Phase, 1935/36-1938/39

When considering the third phase in British officers' thinking on military developments in Germany, it is important to contrast the views openly expressed with the intelligence assessments. It is notable that in the editorials of the *Army Quarterly*, which was funded by the War Office, it took until April 1937 before a clear note of criticism was sounded when the editor wrote that Hitler's foreign policy was 'unpleasantly reminiscent of that of Germany before the Great War.'[37] But with the open threat to peace posed by Hitler's aggressive behaviour and military expansion, opinion gradually began to divide into different factions. More significant, however, is how long it took before a majority of officers accepted that war with Germany was highly likely.

This was due to the fact that by the end of 1936 there was still no agreement in intelligence assessments, a consequence in turn of

the disagreements inside the *Reichswehr* as to the doctrine which needed to be developed for a future war. The successor to Thorne as British military attaché in Berlin, Colonel F.E. Hotblack, provided reports which were disputed. The first indication of the likely direction of the employment of armoured divisions came in combined forces manoeuvres in Germany in September 1937, attended by Hotblack. Ten divisions took part, along with 800 tanks and 20,000 vehicles, but there were still extensive teething troubles, with only light tanks participating and a lack of cooperation between land and air forces. Although Hotblack successfully identified an offensive doctrine based around armoured divisions, this largely accurate view was contradicted by his successor, Colonel Noel Mason-Macfarlane,[38] who took over as military attaché in December 1937. He thought that German doctrine considered the main force to be the infantry, even if an offensive would begin with air attacks, followed by limited early actions by motorised formations.[39]

But while there was disagreement over German doctrine for land warfare, estimates of German Army strength suffered from a different problem – an overestimation of the actual number of divisions. Thus, the War Office considered in September 1938 there to be 43 infantry divisions, three panzer divisions, one mountain division, and 74 divisions in total, whereas the number of infantry divisions was 34, while there were four rather than three panzer divisions. Nonetheless, the overall total came quite close to the actual number of German units. However, an overestimation of actual German combat strength proved damaging in the Munich crisis as the War Office advised that the German Army would overwhelm the Czechoslovak Army if an attack was launched. The Air Staff, on the other hand, had a much harder task of estimating German strength in aircraft and continually overestimated their number.[40]

British intelligence on Germany in the 1930s relied on four main sources of information: wireless intercepts, secret intelligence, political and industrial intelligence, and the collation of available evidence, such as in press reports. Where the Germans were especially successful in hindering British intelligence work was when it came to strategic surprises: the march into the Rhineland in 1936, the Anschluss with Austria in 1938, and the takeover of the rump of Czechoslovakia in 1939. Hitler himself kept knowledge of these surprise moves within a tightly controlled circle. This was also a function of his opportunism in foreign policy. Yet the significant areas of failure in intelligence confused the debate over the threat posed by Germany among British officers, many of whom were still influenced in this period by admiration for what their future opponent's armed forces had achieved.[41]

Outside the War Office intelligence committees, others were making their own assessments. Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, who had retired from the army in December 1933, published a book in 1936, *The First of the League Wars*, which considered the implications of the Italian-Abyssinian War. In a chapter on 'The Foundations of Totalitarian Warfare', he defended Germany as being no more amoral than other nations because of her treatment after the Great War. He noted that the leading tactical idea of the totalitarian attack was to strike at the civil will, most notably from the air. Given that surprise was key, the cumbersome procedures of the League of Nations would act as a brake on action among the democracies. He predicted that the aeroplane would force the democratic countries to adopt the practices of the totalitarian states. He observed not only that Hitler had turned Clausewitz's dictum that war was an extension of politics by other means on its head, but also that his aim was the unification of German-speaking peoples in central Europe. The main message of the book was, in fact, the proposal of an alliance between Britain, Germany and Italy against the Soviet Union.[42] But in seeing Hitler's drive for expansion as primarily economic, he failed to grasp the violent, militaristic and expansionist nature of National Socialist ideology. While there were some critical reviews, one in the *Army Quarterly* thought that Fuller's views 'should be read and studied seriously', indicating the continuing sympathies among British officers towards Germany, even in 1936.[43]

Another analysis by Fuller of totalitarian warfare was provided in a lecture in November 1936 for the Royal Artillery. The fact that an invitation had been extended to a retired officer who was known to be a member of the British Union of Fascists tells us that in late

1936 there was still some degree of tolerance towards pro-German voices. The lecture itself expanded on Fuller's thoughts on totalitarian warfare. He began by identifying the four most radical changes required during wartime: first, the increasing need for authority, second, the need for national discipline, third, the need for national self-sufficiency, and fourth, the increasing power of mass armies. Against this background, he criticised the Allies for their postwar policies but praised the *Reichswehr* for having prevented Bolshevism from taking over Germany. Out of this experience of postwar chaos, Hitler had established a dictatorship, determined that Germany would become self-sufficient; at the same time, he had succeeded in transforming the German theory of war. This held that a new war would depend upon rapidity of action, so that mobilisation would need to be reduced to a minimum, while it would be necessary to place the state on a war footing. The civil will would become the first target in time of war, so the entire nation would need to be highly disciplined. For Fuller, Germany appeared to have applied the lessons of the World War to her military preparations, whereas the democracies had not.[44]

While Fuller remained sympathetic to German propaganda claims even beyond the outbreak of war in 1939, what is significant here is that he was not alone in this attitude. There were several factors which drew a small but influential group of officers to pro-German positions. In addition to anti-Bolshevism, the military policies of the British Union of Fascists (support for a strong air force and navy, and mechanisation in the army) after its foundation on 1 October 1932 added to the attraction. Two further factors played a major role: the first was the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, with the majority of military and foreign policy elites more sympathetic to Franco; and the second was a genuine desire to avoid a war with Germany. The presence of not only Fuller in the ranks of the British Union of Fascists, but also Admiral Sir Barry Domvile, lent the party a credibility which lasted until the Munich crisis.[45]

In addition to the British Union of Fascists, the Anglo-German Fellowship was founded on 2 October 1935. By 1 December 1936, membership stood at 450. The fact that Fuller and Domvile were both members highlights the role of military officers in the organisation. The aim of the Fellowship was, ostensibly, to foster cultural relations with Germany, phrased as follows: 'so much misunderstanding had been created as a result of the revolution in Germany, and the countries threatened to drift apart in consequence.'[46] The Spanish Civil War led to the creation of a further right-wing group: in January 1937, the Friends of National Spain was founded, with the aim of influencing the government to adopt a more sympathetic attitude to the Nationalists under Francisco Franco. Until the worsening of relations with Germany in 1938, as a result of the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938, this organisation maintained a degree of respectability due to some of the politicians and high-ranking military officers who were members.[47]

Conclusion

Considering the three phases in the development of British military attitudes to the German armed forces, what conclusions can be drawn? What do the different British reactions to the *Reichswehr*, then the Wehrmacht, tell us about the British armed services and their German counterparts? First, intelligence assessment is only one part of the story of the observation of, and reporting on, a potential opponent. Although until the mid-1930s, the dynamism of military developments in Germany was such that assessments were a huge challenge, British officers' sympathies for the German armed forces complicated threat assessment, contributing to an initial underestimation of German capabilities, which then turned into an overestimation.

An important question remains, however: what can explain the shift from the traditional British military attitude towards Germany in the 1920s to the adoption of a more positive attitude during the 1930s? Not surprisingly, there are multiple causes of this phenomenon: on the one hand, there was a societal shift in British attitudes towards the First World War which began at the end of the 1920s; this also involved a sense that the real threat to the British Empire was Bolshevism, which represented a threat to India, Ireland, and the British mainland. That Russia under the Bolsheviks had abandoned its allies in wartime was not forgotten by officers. Added to this were the effects of budget cuts on the armed forces, which caused many officers

to admire the transformation in Italy and Germany, countries where the armed services appeared to be held in greater esteem. Furthermore, many officers were sceptical about the League of Nations, regarded Germany as having been punished unfairly through the Versailles Treaty, and still adhered to the idea of the five Great Nations running world affairs, a system which essentially existed in parallel with the new world order which was being administered by the League. Reactions to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia would seem to confirm this, with contemporary British military publications appearing almost to approve of the Italian action.[48]

Ultimately, there was a form of professional and ideological identification with the German armed forces which was only finally dispelled by the Munich Agreement in the autumn of 1938. Yet, despite this, military attaché reports, lectures and publications by British officers provide an extremely useful and often overlooked perspective on the history of the *Reichswehr* and the prewar Wehrmacht, thereby adding greater nuance to the history of the German armed forces in the first half of the twentieth century.

NOTES

[1] G.A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945,* Oxford, 1955, 382.

[2] H.J. Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926,* Princeton, NJ, 1957, F.L. Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik, 1918-1933,* Köln/Berlin, 1964.

[3] W. Rahn, *Reichsmarine und Landesverteidigung 1919-1928. Konzeption und Führung der Marine in der Weimarer Republik,* Munich, 1976; M. Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee. Wege und Stationen einer ungewöhnlichen Zusammenarbeit,* Munich, 1993.

[4] For an excellent overview of the development of research on the Reichswehr, see D. Werberg, *Die Reichswehr: Deutschlands Militär 1919-1935,* Berlin (forthcoming), pp. 13-41.

[5] M. Strohn, *The German Army and the Defence of the Reich: Military Doctrine and the Conduct of the Defensive Battle 1918-1939,* Cambridge, 2011, 17-202, for the Reichswehr period.

[6] J.P. Fox, 'Britain and the Inter-Allied Military Commission of Control, 1925-1926', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4 (April 1969), 143-64.

[7] Several photographs can still be found of British Mark V tanks parked in front of Cologne Cathedral during the April 1920 strike in the city. See, for example, https://www.bridgemanimages.com/de/noartistknown/english-tanks-in-front-of-the-cologne-cathedral-1920/photograph/asset/5177196 [accessed 6 July 2026].

[8] The Commander of 2nd Rhine Brigade, appointed in July 1929, Brigadier J.F.C. Fuller wrote in early September 1929 that he expected to be in Germany until 15 October. Doc. 252, Fuller to B.H. Liddell Hart, 7 September 1929, in *The Military Papers and Correspondence of Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, 1816-1933*, ed. Alaric Searle, Publications of the Army Records Society, Vol. 37, Stroud 2017, 327-28.

[9] Background to the major events can be found in: Werberg, *Reichswehr*, 'Epochenüberblick'; Johannes Hampel, *Der Nationalsozialismus. Band II: Friedenspropaganda und Kriegsvorbereitung 1935-1939,* Munich, 2d ed, 1993, 105-32.

[10] Lt.-Col. P. Neame, *German Strategy in the Great War,* London, 1923, esp. 1-5. For a brief biography of Neame, see J. Lunt, 'Sir Philip Neame (1888-1978), army officer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), DOI: 10.1093/ref:odnb/31489.

[11] A. Searle, *Die Rezeptionsgeschichte der Theorien von J.F.C. Fuller und Basil Liddell Hart im Spiegel deutscher Militärzeitschriften der Zwischenkriegszeit. Einige Randbemerkungen*, in M. Pöhlmann (ed.), *Deutsche Militärzeitschriften im 20. Jahrhundert,* Potsdam, 2012, 49-60.

[12] J.F.C. Fuller, *Imperial Defence, 1588-1914,* London, 1926, 43,67, 77-8, 80.

[13] For biographical background on Milne, see G. Nicol, *Uncle George: Field-Marshal Lord Milne of Salonika and Rubislaw*, London, 1976.

[14] The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), WO 190/57, George Milne, Memorandum by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, SECRET. Military Training in Germany, Jan. 1929.

[15] G.M. Gathorne-Hardy, *A Short History of International Affairs 1920-1939*, London, 1950, 357.

[16] G.D.H. Cole and M. Cole, *The Intelligent Man's Review of Europe To-Day*, London, 1933, 234.

[17] *Army Quarterly*, 25 (Jan. 1933), 198.

[18] *Army Quarterly*, 26 (July 1933), 200-1.

[19] *Army Quarterly*, 27 (Oct. 1933), 5-6.

[20] *Army Quarterly*, 30 (Apr. 1935), 10.

[21] For a brief biography, see C. Mann, 'Sir (Augustus Francis) Andrew Nicol Thorne (1885-1970)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50362.

[22] TNA, FO 371/17695, M.A. Berlin to M.I.3 Colonel, War Office, No. 276. New version of articles of war, 6 June 1934.

[23] TNA, FO 371/17695, CONFIDENTIAL. Military Attaché, Berlin, to Sir E. Phipps, 3 July 1934.

[24] TNA, FO 371/17695, Military Attaché to Phipps, 3 July 1934, esp. 8-9.

[25] TNA, FO 371/17695, fol. 226, Mr. Newton to Sir John Simon, 24 Aug. 1934, Colonel Thorne to Mr. Newton, 16 August 1934, fol. 224-225, minute sheet, signed W. Sargent, 1 Oct. 1934.

[26] TNA, FO 371/18822, fol. 241, Sir E. Phipps to Sir John Simon, 7 Jan. 1935, fol. 241-246, Colonel Andrew Thorne, G.S., Military Attaché, Report by the Military Attaché on the German Army in 1934, 31 Dec. 1934.

[27] Major-General F.E. Hotblack (1887-1979): served in the First World War as an intelligence officer before transferring to the precursor organisation of the Tank Corps; he attended the Staff College, 1920-21; became Brigade-Major of the Rhine Brigade in 1921; prior to service as military attaché in Berlin (1935-37), instructor at the Staff College; commander, 2nd Armoured Division, 1939; invalided out of the army in April 1940.

[28] *Generalfeldmarschall* Walter von Reichenau (1884-1942). Even before the National Socialist *Machtergreifung* in 1933, he was known for his sympathies with the NSDAP. On 1 February 1933, he received a post in the Reichswehr Ministry; in February 1934 he was promoted to *Generalmajor,* while around the same time he came into conflict with Ernst Röhm, the head of the SA. In October 1935, he received promotion to *Generalleutnant*, the following year to *General der Artillerie*, in 1939 to *Generaloberst*, in July 1940 he was promoted to Field Marshal. He is generally considered as the general most culpable in enabling the Nazi State to bring the armed forces into line with Hitler's policies during the 1930s. For a brief biography, B. Boll, 'Generalfeldmarschall Walter von Reichenaus', in G.R. Üeberschär (ed.), *Hitlers militärische Elite. Band 1*, Darmstadt 1998, 195-202.

[29] TNA, FO 371/18840, fol. 96-97, Col. Andrew Thorne to Sir E. Phipps, Berlin, 11 May 1935.

[30] TNA, FO 371/18840, CONFIDENTIAL. Sir E. Phipps to Sir John Simon, Berlin, 15 May 1935.

[31] TNA, FO 371/18840, minute sheet, German rearmament and security problem, 16 May 1935.

[32] Col. H. Rowan-Robinson, 'The military implications of fascism', *Army, Navy and Air Force Gazette*, 75 (9 August 1934), 630, 632. Major-General Sir Henry Rowan-Robinson (1873-1947): Rowan-Robinson came from a military family; an artillery officer, he served in the First World War but spent the Second World War as a military commentator on account of his age. He was most influential as a military writer in the interwar period. Unfortunately, he has yet to be the subject of a biography.

[33] For a general overview of British assessments of the military threat in the interwar period, see D.C. Watt, 'British intelligence and the coming of the Second World War in Europe', in E.R. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars*, Princeton, NJ, 1984, 237-70.

[34] W.K. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939,* London, 1985, 50-1. It is worth noting that while Wark's study remains the standard work on the subject, several historians have challenged some of his assertions, for instance, J.P. Harris, 'British military intelligence and the rise of German mechanized forces, 1929-40', *Intelligence and National Security*, 6 (1991), 395-417.

[35] Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 82-86.

[36] Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 30-33, 225.

[37] *Army Quarterly*, 34 (Apr. 1937), 5.

[38] Biographical details in E. Butler, *Mason-Mac: The Life of Lieutenant-General Sir Noel Mason-Macfarlane*, London, 1972.

[39] Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, 94-98.

[40] Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, 99-102. See also W. Murray, 'Munich 1938: the military confrontation', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2 (1979), 282-302.

[41] D.C. Watt, 'British intelligence and the coming of the Second World War in Europe', in E.R. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars,* Princeton, NJ, 1984, 237-70.

[42] J.F.C. Fuller, *The First of the League Wars: Its Lessons and Omens,* London, 1936, pp. 195-225. It is worth noting the book was translated as Generalmajor J.F.C. Fuller, *Der erste der Völkerbundskriege: Seine Zeichen und Lehren für Kommende,* Berlin, 1937.

[43] Review, *Army Quarterly*, 33 (Jan. 1937), 371-3.

[44] J.F.C. Fuller, 'The development of totalitarian warfare: a lecture delivered at the Royal Artillery Institution', *Journal of the Royal Artillery*, 63 (Jan. 1937), 441-52.

[45] For an overview of this subject, A. Searle, '«Mind Britain's Business»: fascist splinter groups, British officers and resistance to war against Germany, 1937-1941', in G. Gahlen, D.M. Segesser and C. Winkel (eds.), *Geheime Netzwerke im Militär 1700-1945,* Paderborn, 2016, 184-203.

[46] Rt.Hon. Lord Mount Temple, P.C., 'Some account of the Anglo-German Fellowship', *Anglo-German Review*, 1 (November 1936), 19-20, quote, 19. An example of the enthusiasm for Germany is M. Mordant, 'Changing the face of Germany: an amazing achievement in economics', *Anglo-German Review*, 1 (Dec. 1936), 77-8.

[47] TNA, HO 262/7, "B" Division Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 10, 12 December 1940. The Society of the Friends of Spain; Searle, 'Mind Britain's Business', 191-5.

[48] See, for example, H. Rowan-Robinson, *England, Italy, Abyssinia,* London, 1935, 30-2, 40-1, 48-9, 97, 111-3, 140-3, which, between the lines, demonstrates his distaste for the League of Nations.

ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLITICAL EVOLUTIONS IN GERMANY (1922-1939)

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Abstract

After the Great War, Romania considered that an alliance with the victorious Western powers and regional alliance systems could guarantee the integrity of the new borders. However, the predominantly agrarian nature of the Romanian economy, the revisionist policies of Hungary and the Soviet Union towards their neighbours, and the manifest inability of the Western powers to guarantee the security of the countries of Central Europe led Romania to reorient itself towards restoring relations with Berlin. The assertion of Nazi Germany starting in 1933 led the government in Bucharest to pursue the establishment of economic relations with Germany, in the hope that Berlin, interested in Romanian raw materials and Romanian oil, would not support either Budapest's claims over Transylvania or Moscow's claims over Bessarabia.

***Keywords**: border security, regional alliances, economic exchanges, the rise of Nazi Germany*

For modern Romania, relations with Prussia, and later with Germany, had a special significance. Prussia supported the unification of the Principalities in 1858–1859; from Prussia came the foreign ruler that the modernising Romanian elite wanted, and the achievement of German unity following the victory over France was one of the elements that consolidated the reign of the prince, later King Carol I. In 1883, Romania joined the Triple Alliance with Germany, Austria–Hungary, and Italy. The Romanian Government joined this alliance in the hope of receiving German military support in the event of Russian incursions into the Balkans. Loans from Germany contributed significantly to the modernisation of Romania, and in 1914 Romania's external debt of about 1.9 billion gold lei came mostly from Germany and Austria–Hungary[1].

The fact that Romania became Germany's enemy during the War of Unification, together with the Paris Peace Treaties, severed these ties. The Western powers appropriated German investments in Romania, including oil

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assets. France became the centre of Romania's alliance system and, economically, its main creditor and one of its most important investors, along with Great Britain and the United States. Germany was now among the revisionist countries, morally supporting Hungary's demands for the return of Transylvania. Throughout the 1920s, Romanian–German relations cooled.

Romania's foreign policy solution to face the new geopolitical challenges after the Great War was to create a regional system of alliances with states that had the same objective. This is how the Little Entente came into being in 1920–1921 through bilateral treaties with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, together with the Romanian–Polish alliance of March 1921.

The architects of this system of alliances were the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Edvard Beneš, and the Romanian Foreign Minister, Take Ionescu. Regarding the latter's policy, the French diplomatic representative in Bucharest, Émile Daeschner, wrote in September 1920:

"(…) Mr. Take Ionescu sees in the alliance of the states resulting from the dismemberment of Austria–Hungary the formation of a bloc that will have to serve the Entente and especially France, as a point of support for counterbalancing the danger of a remilitarised Germany, the even more serious danger of this power's alliance with Russia and Italy. Mr. Take Ionescu's thesis–Daeschner wrote at the end of his report–does it not deserve to be appropriated and encouraged?"[2]

The Little Entente would constitute a barrier both to a Germany wishing to destroy the Treaty of Versailles and to a possible alliance with Soviet Russia; once Germany was strong enough to violate the treaties, it would annex Austria, and Budapest would become its outpost in Central Europe.

Therefore, the Little Entente was not directed against Hungary, but at the origin of the project was the rebirth of the German danger, and the immediate causes of the establishment of the organisation were multiple[3].

The Bucharest government was concerned about the interest that German political and financial circles had in the existing possibilities in Russia, as well as in the evolution of the latter's relations with the countries on its western border. At the end of 1921, the Romanian minister in Berlin, C. Nano, made the following observations after a meeting with President Ebert: "I was also able to note in this circumstance the great interest that politicians in Germany have in our relations with the Soviet Government. I did not fail to inform Mr. Ebert once again of Romania's policy regarding the question of Bessarabia, which for us is definitively settled". As for German–Soviet relations, Nano stated: "Asking Mr. President Ebert what the views of the German Government were on the resumption of relations with Russia, he told me that, from an economic point of view, the establishment of relations with Russia was an imperative necessity, because Europe cannot do without the raw materials that abound in this country, and that only by establishing economic ties would it then be possible to exert influence in the political field. This rapprochement with Russia, envisaged in President Ebert's words, is shared by almost all political circles in Germany." The Romanian minister added: "All German politicians turn their eyes to Russia (…). Russia is currently considered an immense source of unexplored wealth, to which German capital could give its true brilliance and value. The attention of the Germans is particularly directed to the iron deposits discovered in central Russia, for the exploitation of which Hugo Stinnes, the great German industrialist, is willing to make available the enormous capital at his disposal." Referring further to political aspects, Nano emphasised that "The idea of revenge, maintained with all due care through the press and other means of propaganda, is fuelled by the blind trust that the nationalist Germans have in the competition they would find in the Russian masses, which, organised and led by German officers, would not fail to have their full effect". At the end of his interesting report, Nano specified that "this sympathy of Germany, based almost solely on interests, towards Russia finds in the latter an equally lively interest and equally open arms"[4].

A special moment in the history of interwar Europe was the signing of the Locarno Agreements in October 1925, by which Germany, represented by Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, recognised its western borders but not its eastern ones. Europe was thus divided into states with guaranteed borders and states with unguaranteed borders.

In December 1925, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs subjected the Locarno Agreements as a whole to a serious analysis, drawing realistic conclusions about their character and the prospects for the evolution of the international situation. Of course, one of the problems that concerned Romania was the "fundamental differences" in treatment between the western and eastern borders of Germany. The Eastern Treaties lacked the basis of the Pact of Mutual Guarantee. The difference was further accentuated by the fact that the pact contained no precise provision regarding the inviolability of the eastern borders, and the Eastern Treaties did not stipulate anything regarding the maintenance of the territorial *status quo* and its inviolability. And finally: "By its entry into the League of Nations, the Reich will have the first role to play in all areas of peace. The German minorities await with nostalgic impatience the day when the Reich, in Geneva, will act to defend them."[5]

Romania's diplomacy was primarily concerned with the pursuit of its financial claims against Germany, formulated under the Paris Treaties, including war reparations. Romania's accession to the collective security system, supported by France, is linked to the name of the Francophile Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu. During his tenures as Foreign Minister, from 1927 to 1928 and again from 1932 to 1936, Titulescu sought to strengthen Romania's position within the collective security system. In 1933, he was one of the promoters of the Pact of the Organisation of the Little Entente. This pact stipulated that no member of the Little Entente would conclude any political or economic agreement with another state without the consent of all the member states of the Entente. Titulescu also contributed to the establishment of the Balkan Entente. During the 1930s, both Germany and the Soviet Union reemerged as major players in European affairs. Titulescu's diplomacy focused on drawing the Soviet Union into the collective security system in order to counter the growing power of Germany. Titulescu wanted to prevent what he called "the return of Bismarck's policy—that is, the German–Russian friendly relationship" —, which he believed would occur at the expense of the small countries of Eastern Europe.

The agrarian structure of the Romanian economy made it difficult for Romania to establish trade relations with its neighbouring states. The Danubian states were mainly agrarian and therefore did not need Romanian agricultural products. Even the most industrialised country among them, Czechoslovakia, could not absorb Romania's surpluses. In 1936, only 29% of Romania's trade was with the Danubian countries.[6]

As early as 1926, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann had recognised the importance of securing German economic markets for Romania and Yugoslavia. In this sense, Germany was creating the possibility of weakening the French security system in Eastern Europe by creating disagreements between the member states of the Little Entente. This idea was revived by the German Foreign Minister, Julius Curtius, after the economic crash of 1929, when it was clear that neither France nor Britain could provide important economic markets for the countries of Eastern Europe[7].

In these conditions, the traditional trade relations with Germany, which had been the priority before the First World War, took on special importance.

Thus, despite the importance that the Western states had as investors after the First World War, Germany imported more Romanian products than France and Great Britain combined. In any case, trade between the two states was affected by the Depression. In 1930, the Romanian minister in Berlin, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, tried hard to convince the Germans to develop trade with the Romanian state, arguing that economic exchanges would lead to increased German political influence in Romania[8].

On 18 June 1930, a provisional trade agreement was signed with Romania[9], followed on 27 June 1931 by a preferential treaty[10]. However, due to the autarchic policy and German agricultural protectionism, the Reich Foreign Minister found it difficult to penetrate the economic systems of the countries of Eastern Europe. This was the situation in the first year after the establishment of the Nazi regime.

An important problem was the relations between the Reichswehr and the Soviet Red Army. They were of concern to the Romanian intelligence services. The note of 25 October 1932 from Bureau 2 states that the relations between the two armies "have not ceased to develop with the consent of the responsible authorities (...) they increasingly tend to assert themselves in the light of day, with the approval of the high German military authorities (...). Since 1930, exchanges of visits have multiplied".[11]

On 11 December 1932, in Geneva, an agreement was signed by which Germany obtained "Gleichberechtigung" in matters of armament, and "agreed" to return to the Disarmament Conference, which it did on 14 December. The decision adopted by the five countries—France, England, the USA, Italy, Germany—over the heads of the members of the Disarmament Conference and outside it emptied of content and made useless the entire Geneva debate devoted to disarmament. Meeting in Belgrade on 18–19 December 1932, the Conference of the Little Entente subjected to a thorough analysis the serious situation created by the act of 11 December for the general security but especially for that of the small and medium-sized states of central and southeastern Europe. In the published Communiqué, it was stated that the three allies, noting the unfavourable development for peace and security in Europe, "have decided to improve the organisation of the Little Entente, completing its current status". It was about tightening the ranks of the Little Entente in the face of growing external dangers[12].

The response to the growing aggression of Germany with the establishment of Nazism on 30 January 1933, and the response to the lamentable failure of the Disarmament Conference of 1932 was the pact to organise the Little Entente made in February 1933; in the same sense must be understood the establishment of the Balkan Entente on 9 February 1934—an anti-revisionist organisation that brought together four states in the Balkans, two of which were also members of the Little Entente[13].

From 1933, Alfred Rosenberg, since April leader of the Foreign Policy Office of the Nazi Party, sought to convince the Romanian minister in Berlin, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, that support for Hungarian revisionism was no longer a significant element in German foreign policy[14]. In 1935, Rosenberg proposed to King Carol II a Romanian–German friendship treaty, which would provide for German recognition of Romanian borders, together with a large-scale commercial treaty. This plan failed due to Titulescu's threat to resign if such a treaty were signed[15].

Similar assurances regarding Hungarian revisionism were given to Romanian officials by Hermann Göring. Although Göring was not appointed to deal with foreign policy, his closeness to Hitler justified his involvement in many foreign policy issues. He established important contacts with Austria, Poland, and the Balkan countries[16]. In the autumn of 1934, Göring was sent by Hitler to Belgrade as the official representative of the Reich for the funeral of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia. Here, Göring informed King Carol II that the Reich was not willing to support Hungarian revisionism against Romania. The aim was not only to destroy the unity of the Little Entente, but also to strengthen Germany's economic position in Romania. His statement coincided with the opening of economic negotiations with the Romanians in the autumn of 1934. Göring's anti-revisionist statements were denied by the German Foreign Minister, von Neurath[17]. Similar statements by Göring in the following years were also denied by the Foreign Minister, who remained much more open to the Hungarian revisionist cause. These conflicting attitudes led to considerable confusion in the Romanian camp. Like Göring, the German Führer also showed much greater flexibility

towards revisionism than the German Foreign Minister. Hitler was willing to forget, for the moment, about ideology in exchange for long-term goals. Throughout the 1930s, he made a series of statements to Romanian officials to the effect that, in exchange for Romania's goodwill, Germany would not support Hungarian revisionism[18]. In order to strengthen Germany's political and economic influence in Yugoslavia and Romania, to destroy the unity of the Little Entente and to isolate Czechoslovakia, Hitler was prepared to cool relations with Hungary. Both the Yugoslavs and the Romanians were given assurances by Hitler and Göring regarding the borders with Hungary. Starting in 1936, Hitler encouraged Hungary to exercise its revisionist claims only over Czechoslovakia, so that the Reich could maintain its good relations with Yugoslavia and Romania[19].

On 23 March 1935, Romania and Germany signed a treaty of settlement, commerce, and navigation[20], and on 24 May 1935 both countries signed a payment agreement and a tourism agreement[21].

On 27 July 1935, in the instructions he sent to the Romanian minister in Berlin, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, Nicolae Titulescu stated: "If we were to conclude a mutual assurance pact with the Soviets, we are willing to conclude an identical one with Germany, provided that she in turn guarantees us the territorial integrity of ourselves and of the countries allied to us"[22].

In March 1936, the whole world saw that France was unable to defend its own geopolitical interests: on 7 March, German troops entered the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland. The governments of Paris and Brussels protested on 8 March against this move, which violated the treaties established in 1919. On 10 March, a government meeting was held in Bucharest, which expressed solidarity with this protest note[23]. But no military response followed.

On 14–19 March, the 91st extraordinary session of the Council of the League of Nations was held in London, convened at the request of the French and Belgian governments on 8 March in connection with the entry of German troops into the demilitarised zone of the Rhine. Nicolae Titulescu stated that "the Treaties of Versailles and Locarno have been violated" by Germany and spoke in favour of "a satisfactory solution" to the request of the two governments, "which would restore justice in their favour and thereby remove the danger of precedent". The League of Nations took no effective measure against Germany, contenting itself only with noting the contravention committed by the German Government (19 March)[24].

The inauguration of the Four-Year Plan in Germany in May 1936 increased Romania's economic importance to the Reich. The plan was designed to prepare Germany for war in four years. Attention was focused on the production of synthetic materials, with the import of food and raw materials being only a temporary measure.

However, the scale of the Reich's rearmament campaign and its inability to produce synthetic materials in sufficient quantities led to an increase in imports of raw materials and food. The mineral resources of Southeastern Europe, especially Romanian oil, were of critical and growing importance to Germany. In 1940, Germany requested that Romania supply it with 3 million tonnes of oil, out of a total of approximately 10-12 million tonnes. As commissioner of the Four-Year Plan, Göring was tasked with promoting economic ties between Romania and Germany. From 1936 onwards, he gave numerous verbal assurances of non-support for Hungarian revisionism in exchange for Romanian foreign policy neutrality and economic collaboration. However, such statements continued to be denied by the German Foreign Minister. This created difficulties for the Romanian Government in establishing the nature of German policy towards Romania[25].

On 17 July 1936, Octavian Goga sent a letter to King Carol II demanding Titulescu's dismissal. Although Goga's strong pro-German leanings were at odds with those of most Romanian politicians, the reasons for the appeal were largely shared by them. Goga criticised

Titulescu for alienating Romania from its traditional allies, such as Poland, and from Germany and Italy, while trying to bring Romania into an alliance with "our old enemy, Russia". With Germany and Italy becoming increasingly powerful in Central Europe, Goga feared that Romania risked being isolated between Russia and the German-Italian bloc, which could support Hungarian revisionism. On the other hand, Goga indicated that, if Romania promoted a policy of neutrality towards Germany, the Reich would be willing to guarantee Romania's territorial integrity[26].

On 4 September 1936, a new additional protocol to the Romanian-German payment agreement of 24 May 1935 was signed. Among other things, it stipulated that Romanian petroleum products, to the extent that they did not exceed 25% of Romanian exports to Germany, were to be settled quarterly, and if they exceeded 25%, they were to be paid through special agreements between the two parties[27].

From 29 August 1936, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the direct leadership of King Carol II, considered that the country's borders would be best defended by adopting a course of unofficial neutrality and friendship towards all the Great Powers. As for the Western powers, this policy implied the gradual strengthening of relations with Great Britain, in order to compensate for the weakening of France. However, of the relations with the Great Powers after the First World War, the relationship with Germany had been the least solid. Thus, the strengthening of relations between Romania and Germany required special attention, within the framework of this new policy of neutrality between the powers. From 1936 onwards, the Romanian Government showed itself open towards the Reich, trying thereby not only to obtain economic advantages, but also a potential protection against the Soviet Union or the territorial claims of Hungary. Thus, Germany returned to the position it had in its relationship with Romania before the First World War[28].

Immediately after Titulescu's dismissal, the new Foreign Minister assured the German representatives that his government would no longer promote the previous policy. On 6 September, Victor Antonescu confirmed to Dr Wilhelm Fabricius that Titulescu's pro-Soviet orientation had been one of the main reasons for his replacement. Victor Antonescu also stated that "no alliance with Soviet Russia would have been concluded anyway (…)" and went on to say that Romania wished to avoid involvement in European affairs, being aware of the danger of becoming "the theatre of war between Germany and Russia"[29].

The Romanians were especially disappointed that traditional arms suppliers, such as France, Britain, and even Czechoslovakia, did not give them priority. In this way, Germany became an alternative source of arms supply. By the protocol concluded on 24 September 1936 between Romania and Germany, all Romanian oil exports exceeding the 25% limit established by the March 1935 agreement would be paid for by arms deliveries. Additional requests for arms were silenced by Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu later that year[30].

While the Romanians assured the Germans of their change in policy towards the Soviet Union and their "neutral" attitude towards the Reich, they did not fail to emphasise that the alliance with France was still the centre of Romania's treaty system. The king and his ministers hoped that relations between the Western powers and Germany would improve. This would create a stable foundation for maintaining friendly Romanian-German relations, without forcing Romania to grant favours to one power bloc or another. During the discussion with Fabricius, on 7 October 1936, Carol II informed the German Foreign Minister that "I am not a sympathiser of Bolshevism and my desire is to orient the policy of my country towards closer and friendlier relations with Germany. But (…) Romania's policy is one of treaties with France, Poland and the Little Entente (…). If Germany manages to have better relations with France (…) it will be possible for me to become more open"[31].

Shared anti-Bolshevism and the issue of Hungarian revisionism were important

elements of Gheorghe Brătianu's discussion with Hitler on 16 November 1936. The historian and politician Gheorghe Brătianu was already known in Berlin as a strong opponent of the pro-Soviet policy led by Titulescu and as a *Deutschfreundlich*[32]. As early as 1934, Brătianu expressed his fears about Soviet expansion in the Balkans and argued that Romania should improve its relations with Germany by increasing economic exchanges. Although Brătianu, leader of the dissident Young Liberals Party, had no official position on foreign policy, he was in constant contact with King Carol. Following his trip to Berlin in November, he presented his views to Carol. The King often used him as an unofficial "ambassador" to Berlin. Brătianu's foreign policy ideas profoundly influenced Carol's policy throughout the 1930s. Brătianu himself was particularly influenced by the foreign policy pursued by Poland, Yugoslavia, and especially Belgium[33].

During his talks with Hitler on 16 November 1936, Brătianu confirmed that Romania no longer sought an alliance with the Soviet Union and that his country was not included in the Franco-Soviet Pact of 19 May 1935. Indeed, Brătianu explained, Romania considered itself a bulwark against the spread of communism. He indicated that Romania, together with Yugoslavia and Poland, intended to establish a "form of neutrality" similar to that declared by Belgium on 14 October. Brătianu added that the Romanian Government wished to build strong and optimal economic relations, the country "being thus eager to obtain political ties with Germany". However, in conclusion, he expressed concern that Axis support for Hungarian revisionism directed against Romania would prevent the Romanian Government from moving closer to the Reich. Hitler tried to allay Brătianu's concerns by recommending that he read Alfred Rosenberg's article, "Underdrilckte Volker und Revizionismus", in the *Völkisher Beobachter* newspaper, published on 15 November 1936. In this article, Rosenberg stressed Germany's lack of interest in Hungarian revisionism. Hitler confirmed this position during his discussion with Brătianu and pointed out that Germany was "concerned with the creation of a strong and independent Romania and Yugoslavia, considered barriers against Bolshevism". He concluded that if "Romania becomes an outpost of the European order, no nation will be more interested in maintaining its position than Germany"[34].

In a discussion with the German minister in Bucharest, Dr Wilhelm Fabricius, on 7 December 1936, Victor Antonescu specified that King Carol II wished "to get closer to Germany by any means, taking into account the existing treaties at the same time". He added that a systematic rapprochement of ties with Germany would begin with the progressive development of economic relations[35].

Like the moderate Gheorghe Brătianu, Goga believed that Romania's foreign policy should not be dictated by its allies. He subscribed to the formula already proposed at the Bratislava Conference of the Little Entente in September, whereby each member country should have the freedom to act in its relations with other countries[36]. Meanwhile, in the foreign policy debates of 14 December 1936, A.C. Cuza, Goga's radical political ally, recommended full cooperation with Germany against Bolshevism and Romania's immediate accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact[37]. As a result of these foreign policy debates, the German minister in Bucharest, Fabricius, conveyed to Berlin that "in the last few months, great changes have taken place in Romanian foreign policy, aiming at stronger ties with Germany". While King Carol II, who had the final say in Romania's foreign policy, had decided that its alliances would remain intact, many politicians wanted a certain independence for Romania in its relations with its allies. Such a change left the way open for strengthening relations with Germany. Of great importance in this regard, as Fabricius correctly noted, was the attitude of the pro-French leader of the National Peasant Party, Ion Mihalache, now interested in good relations with the Reich[38].

Of crucial importance in this regard was the conversation between the Romanian minister in Berlin, Comnen, and Göring, on

4 December 1936. Göring brought up again the statement made by Hitler to Gheorghe Brătianu on 16 November, in which the Führer had distanced Germany from the cause of Hungarian revisionism. Göring generously offered the German guarantee of Romania's territorial integrity and aid in the development of the Romanian economy and army. In return, the Romanian Government was neither to enter into any "combination" directed against Germany nor to extend its Little Entente obligations beyond mutual assistance against Hungarian aggression. Göring also demanded that the Romanian Government forbid Soviet passage on Romanian territory. If Romania adopted such a policy, Göring promised that Germany would take care that Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionist tendencies were not unleashed against it. He added that Germany had in no way encouraged Hungary in its desire to achieve its revisionist demands. However, if Romania refused this "olive branch", Germany would establish closer relations with Hungary and Bulgaria[39].

On 20 March 1937, Comnen gave his government's official response to Göring's statement of 4 December 1936. Comnen confirmed that the Romanian Government would not renounce any alliance or obligations under the League of Nations. If Germany clearly guaranteed Romania's territorial integrity, Romania would assure the Germans that it would not conclude any alliance or agreement related to the transit of Soviet troops through its territory. Comnen concluded that his government had agreed not to participate in any "combination" against Germany and to develop economic relations with it[40].

On 25 March 1937, the Romanian Government rejected Hermann Göring's proposals of 4 December 1936, stating that Romania did not intend to abandon "any of its present friendships and alliances" and would remain faithful to the obligations arising from the Covenant of the League of Nations. "If Germany is willing to guarantee us precisely and categorically our territorial integrity, Romania would be willing to give assurances that it will not conclude with the Soviets any treaty of alliance or any particular convention for the transit of military forces", that it will not take part in "any combination directed against Germany and that it will develop economic relations with it according to Romania's possibilities, her obligations and her specific needs"[41].

In the spring of 1937, Atta Constantinescu, Gheorghe Brătianu's political friend, met with Göring, conveying King Carol II's thanks for the anti-revisionist declarations made by Hitler and himself at the end of 1936. Göring replied that he and Hitler had "accepted" all of Comnen's demands of 20 March, in response to the offer of a guarantee. Göring confirmed that "Hitler wants an agreement with Romania at any price"[42].

The growth of Germany's importance in the Romanian economy, during Victor Antonescu's ministry, culminated in the economic agreement signed on 9 December 1937. As a result of this agreement, economic exchanges between the two countries increased by a third. The head of the German economic delegation, Helmut Wohlthat, reported, upon his return to Berlin, that he had observed some hostility on the part of some members of the Romanian National Bank towards the growth of Germany's importance for the Romanian economy. However, he concluded that the signing of the Romanian-German economic treaty during the visit to Bucharest of the French Foreign Minister Delbos was "proof of the growth of German influence that had been established in these years, after the conclusion of the 1935 commercial treaty".[43]

During the parliamentary debates of 15 December 1936, regarding the new directions of Romanian foreign policy, in which Mihalache strongly supported the preservation of the alliance with France, he could not help but emphasise at the same time that economic ties with Germany were of vital importance for Romania. Mihalache believed that "the structure of the two countries made possible a closer connection than with any other country"[44].

During Wohlthat's audience with King Carol II and other politicians on 14 December 1937, Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu

presented the Romanian Government's economic plans. According to Tătărescu's statements regarding the "economic community of interests" between Germany and Romania, these plans also included proposals for German support in developing the Romanian economy by bringing new technology to agriculture, by exploiting raw materials and oil fields, expanding the armaments industry, and developing Romanian infrastructure. These proposals would form the basis of the economic treaty between Romania and Germany of March 1939, which ensured an increasingly large role for foreign capital in the Romanian economy[45].

In 1937, Germany was already receiving 19% of Romania's exports and supplying 29% of its imports[46].

Despite the electoral pact concluded on 14 November 1937 with the pro-Western Iuliu Maniu, leader of the National Peasant Party, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was not shy about showing his pro-Axis inclination. In response to Maniu's statements in favour of the League of Nations and Romania's alliances, Codreanu declared: "I am against the Little Entente. I am against the Balkan Entente and I have no sympathy for the League of Nations, in which, moreover, I do not believe. I am for a foreign policy of Romania with Rome and Berlin. I stand with the national-revolutionary states against Bolshevism... within 48 hours of the victory of the Legionary Movement, Romania will have an alliance with Rome and Berlin"[47].

Unfortunately for King Carol II, the National Liberal Party, with which the king hoped to govern, failed to obtain, in the December elections, the 40% of the votes needed to form a new government. Neither the National-Peasantists, who had obtained 21% of the votes, nor the Iron Guard, with 16%, could be accepted by him. The king then decided to form a government under the leadership of Octavian Goga and A.C. Cuza, whose National-Christian Party had obtained 9% of the votes. Carol anticipated that this government would be a prelude to his long-awaited plan for a royal dictatorship. In his diary, he expressed his belief that the Goga-Cuza government "would not last long", and that he would then be "free to take more radical measures", beyond the interests of the parties[48].

On 13 March 1938, in Bucharest, a small meeting was held between King Carol II, Armand Călinescu, Minister of the Interior, and Gheorghe Tătărescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs a.i., regarding the consequences of the annexation of Austria by Germany (12 March). Proposals: 1. postponement of the king's trip to London; 2. immediate liquidation of the Guards by arresting Codreanu and all the leaders; 3. drawing up and beginning the implementation of a large constructive programme—armaments, armament factories, communication routes, increasing agricultural potential. The Ministry would quickly draw up the programme. Means: mobilisation.[49]

However, the absorption by the Reich of the commercial treaties concluded by Austria with Romania led to the increase of Romania's economic dependence on Germany. The Great Reich now absorbed 27% of Romania's exports[50].

On 22 May 1938, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Petrescu-Comnen, declared to the German minister in Bucharest, Wilhelm Fabricius, that "«everything that endangers the existence of Czechoslovakia will not leave us indifferent» and drew attention to the fact that a German–Czechoslovak war (...) would indisputably provoke a European war"[51]. On 24 May, the Czechoslovak Government thanked the Romanian Government for this intervention.

On 24 May 1938, Armand Călinescu laconically wrote in his notes: "I admit that France is in crisis although on the verge of recovery. But we have England. Here we must anchor our policy. Method. Clear, dignified and independent attitude. The Germans have succeeded so far by bluffing. Lack of timely reaction. When they face resistance, they will not venture. That is why the warning. One thing is friendship and economic affairs with Germany and another is the policy towards its aggressive expansion."[52]

While the Czechoslovaks were acquiring Soviet aircraft, the Romanian Government

wanted to build up an aviation industry with German help. This ambition gave the Romanians another reason to want to remain in Germany's grace during the Sudetenland crisis. France's failure to supply the anti-aircraft guns and aircraft ordered in 1937 led the Romanian Government to accept, in August 1938, the sale of oil and grain to Germany in exchange for war materials. This agreement marked a new stage in Romania's increasing dependence on German, rather than Czechoslovak or French, armaments[53]. In mid-September, Göring invited the Romanian Air Force representative in Berlin, Gudju, to inspect German aircraft[54]. A week later, Göring conveyed to Gudju "the gratitude of the Reich Government for the attitude taken by Romania towards a possible passage of Russian troops"[55]. The restoration of the Romanian aircraft industry with German aid was to constitute a major element of the economic agreement signed between Romania and Germany in March 1939.

On 4 October, King Carol II noted that the Romanian minister in Berlin, Radu T. Djuvara (1881–1968), "(...) asked me to authorise him to declare to the Führer that we would not allow Russian troops to pass through our territory. I told him that I could not make a firm commitment, but that if the question arose, he should answer that they knew our point of view and that nothing had changed in this regard"[56].

At the end of October 1938, Romanian–German negotiations began in Bucharest, which would take place in several stages, with a view to concluding a new economic agreement between the two countries.

At the end of November, King Carol II made a private visit to Germany, during which he had talks with Hitler (Berghof, 24 November) and Göring (26 November). In the conversation with Hitler, Carol II inquired about Germany's attitude "towards the revisionist aspirations of Hungary and towards the problem of Subcarpathian Ukraine". In his response, Hitler sought to avoid getting involved since the diplomacy of the Third Reich considered that the "fundamental idea" of German policy towards Romania and Hungary "must be to keep the two beasts in the fire and to shape them in the interests of Germany, in accordance with the evolution of the situation". During the conversation, Carol II requested the recall of a German diplomat in Bucharest who was plotting with "undesirable" elements (legionaries - a.n.) from Romania; his request was granted. In the conversation with Göring, the king emphasised that for him it was very important to maintain the integrity of the country's borders; the two "agreed to promote to a greater extent the development of economic relations" between Romania and the Reich.

During the crisis in Romanian–German relations, the Romanian minister in Berlin, Radu T. Djuvara, was returned the decorations that King Carol II had awarded to German politicians during his visit to Germany (22–28 November 1938). Later, after the crisis was over, Hitler would reconsider this decision.

At the end of January, Grigore Gafencu, the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, had a meeting with the German minister in Bucharest, W. Fabricius, who had returned to his post after an absence of more than a month, and communicated to him the Romanian Government's decision to resume economic negotiations between Romania and Germany. After this meeting, the crisis in Romanian–German relations began to ease.

On 12–13 February 1939, the German economic delegation paid a visit during which the Romanian authorities gave their consent to the conclusion of a Romanian–German economic treaty. The Romanian Government intended to obtain, through economic concessions, a normalisation of relations with Germany and a commitment from the Reich Government to respect and guarantee Romania's territorial *status quo* or, at least, a clear recognition of Romania's borders by Germany. However, the German Government avoided assuming any political obligations, seeking only economic advantages.

On 10–13 March 1939, the final round of economic negotiations between the Romanian and German governments took place. The German delegation's plans to impose a true monopoly on the Romanian economy and

exploit its natural resources in its favour encountered resistance from some members of the Romanian Government, which led to the negotiations taking place in a state of permanent tension.

The Romanian minister in London, Viorel Virgil Tilea, made two interventions at the Foreign Office, on 16 and 17 March, in which he pointed out the danger of a German attack on Romania, in the context of German pressures to obtain satisfaction of their economic demands, and requested a clarification of Great Britain's position towards Romania. V. V. Tilea's interventions caused a reactivation of British interest in the Southeastern European area.

The Romanian Government denied the news regarding the existence of a German economic ultimatum addressed to Romania.

Faced with the danger of a Hungarian or Hungarian–German attack, which, according to the assessments of the Romanian General Staff, could occur around 20–21 March, the Romanian Government ordered a preventive concentration of troops in Transylvania[57].

On 22 March, King Carol II wrote in his diary: "I also corrected some points and made it a *sine qua non* condition for the withdrawal that Germany immediately authorise the shipment of the contracted armaments to Czechoslovakia."[58] According to the agreements concluded with the Romanian state, Czechoslovakia still had to deliver: 299,980 "Mauser Z.B." rifles, calibre 7.92 mm; 252 howitzers of 100 mm calibre; 56 howitzers of 150 mm calibre; various categories of combat equipment and significant quantities of ammunition.[59]

Finally, on 23 March the agreement was signed. King Carol II wrote: "A letter was received guaranteeing all our orders from Czechoslovakia, a letter that I had made the *sine qua non* condition for the release. In the afternoon, finally, the treaty was signed and I received Wohlthat in a departure audience at 6 ½"[60].

The treaty provided for the development of a multi-year economic plan, based on the principle of balancing economic exchanges and which would "take into account German import requirements" and the development possibilities of Romanian production, Romanian needs and "the needs of Romania's economic exchange with other countries". The economic plan envisaged: the development of forestry and the wood industry; the development of the extractive industry, the formation of joint ventures in the exploitation of chalcopyrite, chromium, manganese and bauxite; the formation of joint ventures in the field of oil exploitation; industrial collaboration; the creation of free zones in which industrial and commercial enterprises, warehouses and transshipment facilities for German shipping would be installed; supplies of German armaments to Romania; the development of communication routes and means of transport; cooperation between banks from both countries, etc. (art. 1). Articles 2–5 provided for the bodies responsible for implementing the Treaty, the method of making payments, etc. The Treaty was signed on behalf of Romania by Grigore Gafencu and Ion Bujoiu, minister of national economy, and on behalf of Germany by Minister Plenipotentiary W. Fabricius and Helmuth Wohlthat (1893–1982), ministerial director.

On 1 April 1939, Armand Călinescu recorded his discussion with King Carol II:

"First, it is certain that in the event of a general war we will go with England, because that is where the victory will be and so is the public sentiment. Those who were at the concentration now noticed the same army spirit. King: Yes.

Me: I want to say that if we made the economic agreement with Germany it was to gain time and some economic advantages, not to get closer to Germany politically. King: Yes."[61]

An analysis by *Time* magazine concluded on 3 April that the treaty „(…) converted Rumania from an independent nation to a German dependency. In no instance of modern times has one State made such humiliating, far-reaching economic concessions to another as Rumania's King Carol II made in Bucharest last week to Dr. Helmuth Wohlthat, Führer Hitler's traveling salesman."

However, on 31 March, in Paris, an Agreement on trade payments between Romania and France was signed, by virtue of which trade payments between the two parties were made in free foreign exchange. The trade protocol for 1939 provided for the doubling of the export of petroleum products to France (490,000 tonnes), in exchange for which Romania imported engines, automobiles, industrial installations, iron, steel, etc., and for 200,000 tonnes of this quantity it obtained foreign exchange (90% francs-10% dollars).

On 13 April, King Carol II wrote in his diary: "Călinescu spoke first, who presented the problem in the form I see it, adding that he is not only convinced of the Anglo-French victory, but that he wants it, because he believes that a German victory would be a disaster for us, even if we were on their side."[62]

In his 15 April memo on foreign policy, Grigore Gafencu stated that "our economic agreement represents an understanding that puts an end, for the time being, to the German pressure exerted on us"[63].

On 18–20 April, Grigore Gafencu, at the invitation of the German Government, paid a visit to Berlin, during which he had talks with Joachim von Ribbentrop (18 April), Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring (19 April) regarding bilateral relations and the situation in Europe. Grigore Gafencu reaffirmed Romania's desire not to engage in the conflict between the great powers, aiming in particular to have good neighbourly relations at its borders, to consolidate the territorial *status quo* and peace in Southeastern Europe; Gafencu expressed to his interlocutors the anxiety of small nations regarding the policy of "living space" and "spheres of influence". Hitler made clear that he did not support Hungarian revisionism "as long as he could count on Romania's friendship" and promised to satisfy Romanian requests regarding the purchase of armaments. From the talks held, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs concluded that "an immediate threat is no longer to be feared" for Romania from the Reich.

On 13 May, a Romanian–German Protocol on collaboration in the forestry industry was concluded. It was the first agreement concluded on the basis of the treaty of 23 March 1939.

On 1 July, a Romanian–German Protocol was signed in Bucharest regarding the export of Romanian cereals, establishing an annual quota of 1.5 million tonnes of cereals (half of which was to be wheat), for the next five cereal periods.

During a meeting with Hitler, on 11 July, General Wilhelm Keitel reported that the Economic Treaty with Romania of 23 March had not been fulfilled in any respect due to the resistance of Romanian officials.

On 27 August, Grigore Gafencu declared to the German minister in Bucharest, W. Fabricius, that the Romanian Government was determined to maintain neutrality "in any conflict between Germany and Poland, even if France and Great Britain also became involved in this conflict."[64]

In view of the Soviet threat, the Romanian Government was prepared to make a series of new economic concessions to the Germans. By mid-August, Prime Minister Călinescu had already intervened personally to ensure the delivery of oil to Germany. Deliveries had initially been blocked due to delays in arms supplies[65]. Following the outbreak of war, Călinescu was prepared to make further concessions. On 16 September, he asked Germany to supply Romania with large quantities of war matériel from the surplus captured from Poland. In return, Romania would supply wheat and oil in much larger quantities than before. Călinescu was prepared to continue these deliveries for several years, "thus contributing decisively to meeting (German) needs in the event of a war lasting several years"[66]. This request formed the basis of the May 1940 pact—"Oil for Arms"—which was crucial to the delivery of sufficient oil to support the German war effort[67]. As with the economic agreement of March 1939, the Romanians initially made offers that resulted in major concessions to Germany. The Romanian Government considered these concessions essential to maintaining German support in the face of a possible Soviet threat[68].

On 31 August, Prime Minister Armand Călinescu rejected the German Government's

request not to allow the transit of 5,000 kg of bombs and projectiles destined for Poland through Romania. The Romanian prime minister gave assurances regarding Romania's neutrality and compliance with the economic commitments assumed, provided that the German side also respected them. The next day, a significant quantity of weapons and aircraft, accompanied by British officers, was granted transit rights through Romania to Poland[69].

On 8 September, the German Government asked the Hungarian Government not to attack Romania, but not to follow up on the Romanian proposal regarding the conclusion of a Romanian–Hungarian Non-Aggression Treaty.

On 15 September, King Carol II wrote: "At 12 ½, Călinescu, who asked that Ernest (Urdăreanu) also attend the conversation. First, he presents a plan for economic negotiations with Clodius. He proposes that we provide Germany with what it needs for several years in advance, but, in return, to immediately deliver us armaments and, in particular, the armaments taken from the Poles. For the Germans, it would be an advantage to receive what they need, in exchange for armaments that cost them nothing, and for us, the possibility of equipping ourselves as quickly as possible. For the Allies, the advantage is that this armament passes into the hands of a friend and will not be able to serve the enemy. The plan seems good to me, as long as they receive it (…) Călinescu had a meeting with Fabricius this evening, to whom he presented the idea of an exchange for armaments. He immediately understood what armaments were in question and declared himself delighted with the idea."[70]

On 20 September, King Carol II also wrote: "We are having difficulties with the Polish armaments with the same excuse as this spring with the Czechoslovakian one, namely that it is not inventoried."[71]

Călinescu's willingness to make major economic concessions to Germany made it unlikely that senior German officials would have agreed to his assassination by the Iron Guard on 21 September[72]. He was apparently prepared to make even greater concessions to the Reich in exchange for territorial guarantees. Shortly before his death, Călinescu sent the ethnic German senator, Hans Hedrich, on a delegation to Berlin. The exact nature of this Romanian mission is unclear, but according to German sources, the senator claimed that, before his death, Călinescu had offered the German Government all of its oil production in exchange for guaranteed borders[73]. Although Hedrich may have exaggerated such an offer, it is clear that Călinescu's death was detrimental to German interests. Moreover, the formation of a pro-German government at that stage of the war would have exposed the Romanian oil fields to possible attacks by the Allies.

German officials, on the other hand, blamed the crime on the British secret services and Polish circles, who wanted to destroy Romania's neutrality policy, supported by Călinescu, in favour of Romania's entry into the war on the Allied side. Although this theory can be rejected, it should be noted that, in the autumn of 1939, Romania's neutrality affected Western interests rather than those of Germany. German sources reported that Anglo-French pressure was being exerted on the Romanian Government at the end of August to force Călinescu to resign.

The death of Călinescu, who had been the most important pro-Western supporter until the Russian invasion of Poland, strengthened the pro-German attitude of those around the king. They had long claimed that the Soviet Union was a greater threat to Romania's interests than Germany. On 25 September, Minister of the Court Urdăreanu informed Fabricius that, due to Romania's concerns for Bessarabia, not only was Romania willing "to turn more towards Germany" but that "the whole of Romania looks hopefully towards Germany".[74] On 28 September, a new government was established under the leadership of Constantin Argetoianu[75].

On the same day, in Bucharest, several economic agreements were signed regarding the delivery of armaments by Germany in exchange for Romanian agricultural and petroleum products, on a clearing basis, and a Forestry Convention.

On 12 October, the Romanian Government rejected the request of the German legation in Bucharest to stop the departure of Polish refugees aged 18–50 from the country, stating that such a measure would be contrary to the stipulations of the Hague Convention, which only provided for the internment of soldiers and not all persons capable of fighting.

A Romanian–German Trade Agreement was concluded at Bucharest on 21 December, under which, in exchange for the delivery of armaments and industrial products, the Romanian Government undertook to increase the monthly quota of oil for export to Germany to 130,000 tonnes (this quantity was never reached before the summer of 1940). At the same time, a Convention was concluded regarding the creation of a joint company for the intensification of the cultivation of oil plants, in which German capital accounted for 49%.

Economic realities led Romania to pursue closer political relations with Germany, the only country capable and willing to buy Romanian agricultural products and raw materials in exchange for industrial products. The Hitlerite Reich could not pursue its armament plans without Romanian oil.

Equally, Hungary's revisionist claims aroused fears among the leaders in Bucharest that they might benefit from German support. In this way, hopes were raised that by winning the goodwill of an expanding Germany, Hungarian claims would not enjoy effective support. Leaders in Berlin fuelled these hopes by asking Romania not to join any anti-German alliance and not to allow the Red Army to pass through its territory. The Bucharest government was willing to believe that by affirming Romania's neutrality and showing itself willing to support German economic demands Berlin would not tolerate Budapest's threats to Romanian territorial integrity.

Added to these considerations were the fears of the Bucharest government regarding the threat posed by the Soviet Union to Bessarabia. Under these conditions, good relations with Germany should have been a counterweight to Soviet claims. All Romanian political calculations would be refuted by the evolution of events in 1940.

NOTES

[1] Victor Axenciuc, *Introducere* în *istoria economică a României. Epoca modernă* (*Introduction to the Economic History of Romania. The Modern Era*), Editura Fundației „România de Mâine", București, 1997, p. 182.

[2] Viorica Moisuc, *Premisele izolării politice a României 1919–1940* (*The Premises of Romania's Political Isolation 1919–1940*), Editura Humanitas, București, 1991, pp. 106–107.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 111.

[4] *Ibidem,* pp. 67–68.

[5] *Ibidem*, pp. 195–196. The Locarno Agreements, report compiled by Radu Djuvara, 16 December 1925.

[6] Rebecca Haynes, *Politica României față de Germania între 1936 și 1940* (*Romania's Policy towards Germany, 1936–1940*), Editura Polirom, Iași, p. 15.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 16.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 17.

[9] ***, *Istoria politicii externe românești în date (A History of Romanian Foreign Policy in Dates)*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2003, p. 263.

[10] Romania was granted a 60% reduction in customs duties for corn, a 50% reduction for barley, as well as some advantages for the export of butter, cattle and pigs (*Istoria politicii externe românești*, p. 268).

[11] Viorica Moisuc, *op. cit*., p. 309.

[12] Viorica Moisuc, *op. cit*., p. 321.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 218.

[14] Seppo Kuusisto, *Alfred Rosenberg in der nationalsozialistischen Aussenpolitik, 1933–1939*, Helsinki, 1984, pp. 223–225, 230.

[15] Radu Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat pe evreii din România* (*I Saved the Jews of Romania*), Editura Roza Vânturilor, București, 1994, pp. 113–118.

[16] Richard J. Overy, *Goering: The 'Iron Man'*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1984, pp. 32–34.

[17] Stefan Martens, *Hermann Göring, "Erster Paladin des Fuhrers" und "Zweiter Mann im Reich"*, Ferdinand Schöning, Paderborn, 1985, pp. 40–46; see also Hans Mommsen, "Reflections on the Position of Hitler and Goring in the Third Reich", in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, New York, 1993, pp. 86–97.

[18] As, for example, in his discussions with Gheorghe Brătianu in November 1936.

[19] Martin Broszat, "Deutschland-Ungam-Rumänien. Entwicklung und Grundfaktoren nationalsozialistischer Hegemonial und Bündnispolitik, 1938–1941", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 206, 1968, pp. 45–96.

[20] ***, *Istoria politicii externe românești*, ed. cit., p. 286.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 287.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 288.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 291.
[24] *Loc. cit.*
[25] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[26] ANIC, Fond Casa Regală, Dosar nr. 7/1936, p. 9, the so-called "Scrisoarea Vittell" of Octavian Goga to King Carol II, 14 July 1936.
[27] ***, *Istoria politicii externe românești*, ed. cit., p. 296.
[28] Since the summer of 1936, the Romanian Army generals stated that, if France were to isolate itself and the Central European states were compelled to choose between Germany and the USSR, they would choose the Reich. They voiced ardent hopes for a military alliance between France and the Petite Entente. (Nicole Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: The Dilemmas of French Impotence*, 1918–1940, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 188–189)
[29] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
[30] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[31] *Ibidem*, p. 29.
[32] *Ibidem*, p. 28.
[33] Corneliu Mihail Lungu, Ioana Alexandra Negreanu, *România în jocul marilor puteri 1939–1940 (Romania in the Game of the Great Powers, 1939–1940)*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2000, pp. 90-91.
[34] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[35] *Ibidem*, p. 40. Wilhelm Fabricius (1882–1964) was a counsellor at the Embassy in Türkiye from 1932 to 1936. He was minister plenipotentiary to Romania from April 1936 to January 1941.
[36] *Universul*, 29 noiembrie 1936: Camera Deputaților, 27 noiembrie 1936, „Discursul d-lui Octavian Goga – Necesitatea raporturilor cu Germania" (*The Need for Relations with Germany*).
[37] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[38] *Ibidem*.
[39] *Ibidem*, p. 35.
[40] *Loc. cit.*
[41] ***, *Istoria politicii externe românești*, ed. cit., p. 299.
[42] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 27.
[44] ANIC, Fond Casa Regală, Dosar nr. 44/1936, pp. 3–27, Foreign policy statements made by Ion Mihalache before the Parliamentary Commission, on 15 September 1936.
[45] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
[46] Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, Arhon Books, 1969, p. 214.
[47] Constantin Argetoianu, *Însemnări zilnice*, 30 noiembrie 1937, pp. 325–326.
[48] Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *Însemnări zilnice*, ediție Viorica Moisuc și Nicolae Rauș, vol. 1 (11 martie 1937 – 4 septembrie 1938), (*Daily Notes* - Notes from 11 March 1937 to 4 September 1938), Editura Scripta, București, 2001, pp. 129–135.
[49] Armand Călinescu, *Însemnări politice 1916–1939*, edition Al. Gh. Savu, Editura Humanitas, București, 1990, p. 392.
[50] Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, Arhon Books, 1969, p. 215.
[51] ***, *Istoria politicii externe românești*, ed. cit., p. 304.
[52] Armand Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 392.
[53] C.M. Lungu, I.A. Negreanu, *op. cit.*; the agreement was signed in September 1938.
[54] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[55] *Ibidem*.
[56] Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
[57] ***, *Istoria politicii externe românești*, ed. cit., p. 310.
[58] Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 43.
[59] Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *op. cit.*, nota 71, p. 329.
[60] Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 45.
[61] Armand Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 413.
[62] Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 67.
[63] Viorica Moisuc, *op. cit.*, p. 354.
[64] ***, *Istoria politicii externe românești*, ed. cit., p. 317.
[65] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
[66] *Ibidem*.
[67] Corneliu Lungu, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
[68] *Ibidem*.
[69] Armand Călinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 428.
[70] Carol al II-lea, Regele României, *op. cit.*, pp. 431–432. The agreement sent by Fabricius for this exchange, on 18 September.
[71] *Ibidem*, p. 224.
[72] Rebecca Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
[73] *Ibidem*, p. 116.
[74] *Ibidem*.
[75] According to Rene de Weck, the Swiss minister in Bucharest, Argetoianu's appointment represented a "victory for Germany" (*Cine a fost Armand Călinescu. Mărturii – Who Was Armand Călinescu. Testimonies*, Editura Presa Națională, București, 1992, p. 157).

A PENDULUM BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: GERMAN–ROMANIAN RELATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GERMAN FOREIGN OFFICE, 1922-1938

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Abstract

The article reconstructs German–Romanian relations, 1922-1938, from the internal perspective of the German Foreign Office, using the ADAP (Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik – Documents on German Foreign Policy). It conceptualises Romania as a "pendulum state": formally embedded in the French-led security order yet deliberately flexible under economic strain and regional insecurity. The analysis traces three phases. 1922-1929: security observation and diplomatic distance, as Berlin avoided confrontation after Rapallo and the occupation of the Ruhr while probing weaknesses in the Little Entente and settling war-related financial issues. 1930-1935: economic instruments as strategic influence, with provisional trade accords, clearing arrangements, credits tied to oil and grain, and patience towards Paris; Romania's dependence grew while formal alignments persisted. 1936–1938: strategic rapprochement and political caution, amid the Locarno crisis, Titulescu's dismissal, competing German channels, and offers linking armaments to oil. Throughout, policy aimed not at open revision but at the gradual loosening of French steering through bilateral ties and calculated interdependence. The conclusion is "rapprochement without alliance": influence conceived as a process, privileging economic, diplomatic and security coupling over treaties. The study does not include Romanian or French records; it reconstructs how German diplomats perceived Romania's manoeuvring and converted time into strategic capital, laying the foundations for deeper influence after the Munich Agreement and gradual consolidation without predetermining the path to war.

Keywords: *German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt), German–Romanian relations, pendulum state, Little Entente, Romania 1922-1938, interwar period*

In the autumn of 1924, Werner von Grundherr, a legation secretary in the German Foreign Office, sketched a picture that clearly captured the tensions in German–Romanian relations: politically almost everything was open, yet open conflict was avoided. Romanian Prime Minister Ion Ionel Constantin Brătianu declared that there were

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no political contradictions with the German Reich. Bucharest expected Germany to re-emerge in the future as a foreign-policy actor of growing weight in Europe.[1]

Grundherr called the cohesion of the Little Entente – the French-backed defensive alliance of Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia intended to stabilise Southeastern Europe and contain Hungarian–German revisionism[2] – "illusory".[3] This referred less to its formal architecture than to Berlin's calculus of gradually prising Romania out of the French system. In Berlin, Romania was seen as geopolitically exposed, economically vulnerable and politically less fixed than Czechoslovakia. It appeared to be the most open link in the Little Entente, and thus a starting point for hollowing out the status quo step by step.

The Foreign Office avoided confrontation and relied on bilateral contacts, economic incentives and strategic patience. The aim was not ideological affinity but long-term gains in influence.

This marks the central tension: Romania was formally bloc-bound yet perceived as flexible, malleable and open. The "pendulum state" did not denote erratic foreign policy but calculated flexibility under resource and security pressure: Romania balanced alignments, kept commitments shallow and options reversible. Analytically, the term stands for opportunity-driven foreign policy between commitment and autonomy.

Against this background, the focus here is on the years 1922 to 1938: which interests, strategies and assessments shaped relations with the Kingdom of Romania from the perspective of the Foreign Office?

There is a gap in the research. While relations from 1938 onwards – raw materials and military cooperation – are well studied, the prewar period remains underexposed from the Foreign Office's perspective.[4] More recent work focuses on macroeconomics and alliances; the level of diplomats' perceptions and actions remains marginal.[5] Yet the phase before 1938 laid the foundations for subsequent influence.

The period under review begins after the Treaty of Rapallo,[6] viewed with suspicion in Bucharest, and extends to the Munich Agreement,[7] which reordered the security environment in East-Central Europe: French influence waned, Czechoslovakia was hollowed out, and Romania appeared less tightly bound from Berlin's vantage point. This opened room for manoeuvre.

The central thesis is as follows: Romania oscillated between security-policy commitments and foreign-policy autonomy. Driven by economic constraints, regional uncertainties and a determination to preserve room for manoeuvre, the Foreign Office responded with strategic patience: economic cooperation, diplomatic observation and long-term influence, aimed at gradually loosening Romania from French influence. Relations thus do not appear as a linear precursor to open expansion but as a policy of gradual shift through interweaving and calculated dependencies. Influence is conceived as a process: less through formal alliances than through the gradual coupling of economic, diplomatic and security-policy relations.

Because the road to war also ran through structural shifts and long-term strategies of influence, German–Romanian relations are illustrative: the Foreign Office undermined existing orders through economic interdependence, political restraint and tactical calculation – not as a stage for open confrontation, but as a quiet front line.

The source base consists of the published *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik* (ADAP). They include correspondence with Romanian officials and German memoranda, reports, assessments, evaluations, recommendations and circulars. Their evidentiary value is high, as they were drawn up for internal use. At the same time, bilateral communication involved conscious information management. The study is limited to the internal perspective of the Foreign Office: it reconstructs the perceptions, interpretations and decision-making logic of German diplomats. Romanian or French counter-records are deliberately excluded. The aim is to trace how the Office constructed Romania as a flexible factor and derived room for manoeuvre from it.

1922-1929: Security Observation and Diplomatic Distance

In the early 1920s the Foreign Office viewed Romania as firmly anchored in the French-dominated security system. As a pillar of the Little Entente it offered hardly any levers for rapprochement; Berlin observed.[8]

Romania's reaction to the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo was distant: Brătianu told the German envoy Hans Freytag that the agreement complicated relations since it strengthened Soviet Russia. Yet he expressed interest in returning to the good prewar relationship. Freytag remained sceptical: Romania was still too closely tied to France.[9] Financial negotiations over the consequences of the war stalled,[10] and the Little Entente did not prove uniformly cohesive. After the failed Habsburg putsch in Hungary,[11] State Secretary Edgar Haniel von Haimhausen spoke of a lack of resilience; Romania acted more cautiously than Prague and Belgrade.[12]

In June 1922 Brătianu signalled to Freytag the necessity of good relations with the Weimar Republic and the fear of being "crushed by Slavdom". A strong Central Europe appeared as a counterweight to Soviet expansion. In Berlin, these motives were interpreted as security-related rather than ideological. Freytag nevertheless remained cautious: tactical calculation rather than a change of course.[13]

The French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 strained relations further. In Bucharest, France appeared militarily dominant and economically expansive; distance from the Reich grew.[14] Negotiations on economic issues and reparations stagnated; Romania demanded additional compensation for damage caused by the German occupation.[15]

The Office sought new options. State Secretary Adolf Georg Otto von Maltzan wanted to exploit Romania's fear of Soviet Russia: a coordinated German–Russian stance on the Bessarabia question[16] could bind Romania. A Soviet assurance to refrain from action against Romania for the time being was meant to move Bucharest out of a defensive posture.[17] After failed Soviet–Romanian talks, the Romanian envoy Constantin Nano repeatedly asked for German mediation. Maltzan sounded out the Soviet ambassador Nikolai Krestinsky and hoped, incidentally, to clarify the liquidation of German property,[18] but declined an official mediator role.[19] Such restraint corresponded to the German line: patience, no commitments.

In August 1924, the Office noted that the Little Entente was acting with foreign-policy disunity. Formally stable, internally brittle.[20] Time and patience were deemed the best means of opening up room for manoeuvre.

From 1925 onwards, economics moved to the fore. Negotiations remained tough, but Romania sought support. The Locarno Treaties[21] boosted Germany's standing; Berlin once again appeared a legitimate partner in Bucharest. Economically, Romania offered great opportunities; politically, however, the Reich's Soviet-friendly posture and its antagonism towards Poland prevented stable trust. An active German political role in the Southeast was considered unrealistic; targeted influence, by contrast, seemed possible. Success promised to come from keeping contradictions open and addressing them selectively. Interest in preserving Greater Romania remained limited; a strictly anti-Russian line was considered untenable.[22]

Even so, initiatives followed: in November 1926, Berlin offered a substantial commodity credit and up to 30 million Reichsmarks to settle outstanding disputes.[23] In 1927, Romania did assume leadership of the Little Entente, but at the same time expressed a desire for closer relations with the Reich if financial questions could be resolved.[24] Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu, under domestic pressure, told Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann that relations with the Entente were not uniformly friendly; Romania felt abandoned.[25] This pointed to strategic uncertainties – and to opportunities for economic rapprochement.

In 1928, long-standing financial issues could be settled, also due to Romania's need for loans.[26] This opened the way to closer economic ties.[27] Moscow voiced concerns. Stresemann replied that Romania posed no danger due to economic weakness; its large territory stood opposite a tight state budget.[28]

Berlin's line remained: economic levers, diplomatic restraint, long-term positioning. The aim was to loosen French dominance

without breaking formal bloc alignment. Political limits remained visible. Foreign Minister Titulescu was regarded as a consistent advocate of French interests.

Three objectives were central: first, to weaken France's steering of Romania; second, to interlink Romania economically and thereby make it politically influenceable; third, to settle outstanding property and compensation issues from the First World War in order to create legal certainty and economic normalisation.

In retrospect, Romania in this phase appeared neither an adversary nor a reliable partner, but a strategically observed buffer state: formally bound, politically flexible. Berlin relied on time, economic influence and soundings. Not revision, but structural shift shaped the line. This flexibility also reflected domestic instability: frequent changes of government, crises and social tensions reduced predictability. The rise of the Iron Guard signalled social radicalisation, weakened confidence in traditional parties and fostered foreign-policy pragmatism as an attempt to shore up domestic stability.[29] The Office registered this as tactical adaptability.

Conclusion for this phase: time as strategic capital. Economic and diplomatic ties were built without creating political liability. Observation turned into cautious influence; the search for position replaced open initiative.

1930-1935: Economic Instruments as Strategic Influence

The Great Depression hit the Reich and Romania hard. Berlin hoped to use Romania's plight to exert targeted influence in Southeastern Europe. In 1930, the Office prepared a trade programme and began treaty negotiations.[30] In June, a provisional trade agreement followed with scope for expansion. The Romanian market was considered attractive for German industrial exports and supplies of raw materials.[31] Romanian oil became the core of a long-term raw-material strategy. It did not function as an immediate instrument of war, but as a medium of structural coupling: price agreements, delivery guarantees and lines of credit created economically rational ties that were politically steerable. Berlin linked bilateral credits to oil and grain commitments; Romanian agricultural products were preferentially included in the clearing system. This interlocking served as a lever for political willingness to negotiate. Germany depended on imports, while Romania had strong production; cooperation promised value for security policy.[32]

Legation Councillor Emil Wiehl noted that the focus was deliberately on bilateral preferences with Romania, and that other states were informed only to undercut a unified appearance by the Little Entente.[33] Despite these openings, Romania was still regarded as tied to France.[34] In 1931, Paris protested against the German approach: this was not mere economic interest but politics. Bucharest should not decouple from its allies.[35] Romania subsequently interrupted the negotiations and turned away a German delegation; officially, French pressure was denied. Berlin nevertheless took careful note.[36] For Paris this was less proof of Romanian loyalty than an expression of its own desire for control; Bucharest used economic openings as a counterweight.

Titulescu engaged in damage control and reaffirmed Romania's interest in stable relations with the Reich.[37] Berlin remained cautious: let France take the lead; if it failed, Germany's room for manoeuvre in the Southeast would grow.[38] Regional constellations also provided entry points for German influence. Romania resisted Polish plans to expand strategic railways despite alliance obligations,[39] Soviet–Romanian non-aggression talks failed over Bessarabia, while Poland concluded an agreement with Moscow in 1932.[40] In Berlin these frictions were seen as windows for economic and political rapprochement.[41] At the end of 1932 France and Italy complained about their trade balances with Romania vis-à-vis the Reich – an indication of Germany's growing presence.[42]

Romanian envoy Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen soon declared that commonalities with Germany should not be obstructed by arrangements within the Little Entente. Romania would keep out of Germany's revisionist demands if Berlin left the Southeast territorially

untouched.[43] This was a remarkable position, especially for a state that officially took an anti-revisionist stance.

In March 1933 Titulescu requested direct contact with Adolf Hitler.[44] Berlin initially reacted sceptically. Although the Reich Chancellery recognised the medium-term importance of closer economic relations, it remained reserved in view of its own economic crisis. In May Hitler expressed disappointment: Romania had behaved in a politically unfriendly manner.[45] Nazi foreign policy combined soothing rhetoric outwardly with internal planning for expansion. The German–Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934 was closely followed in Bucharest. In the Office it was seen as a relief in the East and as a possible frame of reference.

Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath also noted Romania's earlier attempts to prevent Germany's resurgence. Titulescu stated that Romania rejected a restoration of Austria–Hungary, but would not oppose an Anschluss of Austria as long as Berlin did not support Hungarian revisionism.[46] Ministerial Director Karl Ritter stressed internally: rapprochement only with a visible change of course in Romania.[47] In 1934, disillusionment prevailed: Romania under Titulescu was unreliable; announced cooperation had little effect.[48] Economic sacrifices were conceivable only for states that did not counteract German aims.[49] Envoy Friedrich-Werner Graf von der Schulenburg pointed out, however, that King Carol II might be making only formal concessions to Paris.[50] The Office initially shifted its focus more strongly towards the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.[51]

In November 1934, Titulescu again struck a conciliatory tone: there were no open disputes with Germany; the Reich could be trusted with economic preponderance in the Balkans.[52] Berlin remained mistrustful, but took this as a possible signal. Titulescu was not seen as a principled opponent, but as a tactical actor operating under domestic and alliance constraints.

In 1935, Germany's position improved, while Romania encountered difficulties. A comprehensive trade agreement was recorded as a partial success that France could hardly block any longer.[53] This increased opportunities for political influence.

The reintroduction of conscription in March 1935 marked a decisive break with the Treaty of Versailles. From then on, security-relevant raw-material regions, especially in Southeastern Europe, gained importance in Berlin. Romania appeared not only as an economic partner but increasingly as a logistical and strategic link in long-term armaments planning. Economic interdependence was to be converted into political steerability without formal alliances.

The security situation remained tense. Internally, Romania was regarded as a potential avenue of approach for Soviet forces, especially for the air force. Titulescu's cautious opening towards the Soviet Union contrasted with Carol II's scepticism and his gaze towards Berlin. The Little Entente loosened; Romania's primary objective remained to fend off Hungarian revisionism, while openness to better relations with the Reich grew.[54] France's uncertainty about the political reliability of the Southeast increased. In Berlin Romania was increasingly seen as part of a permeable periphery that could be detached from Paris when the opportunity arose.

Balance sheet 1930-1935: the long-term weakening of French influence through economic offers, patience and selective channels. Politically, Romania remained uncertain; economically, its dependence increased, and with it the Foreign Office's room for manoeuvre. The ambivalence of 1934/35 was programmatic: Romania edged closer to Berlin without detaching itself. Berlin responded with controlled restraint. Romania remained on the edge of fixed orders – formally bound, politically permeable. Trade served as an instrument, not an end; interdependence served as a positional gain, not as a means of open revision. The focus shifted from economic utility to strategic planning for influence.

1936-1938: Strategic Rapprochement and Political Caution

Between 1936 and 1938, the Foreign Office saw Romania as ambivalent in security-policy terms and economically attractive. Romania

was neither a reliable partner nor an open opponent, but a flexible state whose malleability could be exploited.

German policy towards Romania was embedded in the regime's dual strategy: pacific rhetoric outwardly, expansive aims at home. Beyond revising Versailles, Berlin strove for continental preponderance. Economic penetration of Southeastern Europe, securing raw materials and diplomatic influence were seen as prerequisites for further expansion. Romania was not an immediate target of attack but a geostrategic bridge.

In early 1936, Embassy Counsellor Wilhelm von Pochhammer stressed that Romania was attached to the status quo but could serve as a partner against the Soviet Union. Its stance towards Moscow was decisive. To counter a drift towards the Soviet sphere of influence he recommended intensified political, military and cultural strategies of influence.[55] Neurath made it clear to Brătianu that Germany had no commitments towards Hungary – a central point for Bucharest in light of Hungarian revisionism.[56] Formally, Berlin remained reserved; internally the aim was to undermine the substance of the Little Entente through asymmetric bilateral contacts.[57]

The Locarno crisis heightened tensions in 1936. Titulescu's opening to Moscow alarmed Berlin.[58] Petrescu-Comnen denied official negotiations,[59] but envoy Wilhelm Fabricius reported contacts to secure Bessarabia.[60] At the same time Titulescu emphasised his desire for good relations with Germany.[61] Strategically, Romania remained important – also as a possible transit corridor for the Soviet Union.[62] Hitler demanded that Romania be a bulwark against communism.[63] After the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, the Office considered a Romanian rapprochement with the Soviet Union.[64] King Carol II declared that he wanted no treaties directed against Germany, but criticised German support for right-wing Romanian groups.[65] Romania's foreign policy remained shaped by alliances,[66] yet it sought rapprochement with the Reich within its existing commitments.[67]

The dismissal of Foreign Minister Titulescu in August 1936[68] was a turning point, not a German triumph but a Romanian power move: a signal of domestic capacity to adjust course. Neurath discerned in Carol II and Foreign Minister Victor Antonescu a willingness to distance themselves from Titulescu's line and tilt more to the West.[69] Antonescu emphasised that Romania did not seek an alliance with the Soviet Union, but wanted to complement the Paris–Bucharest axis through closer relations with Poland and Germany.[70] Berlin continued to rely on economic interdependence as a door-opener; raw-material and trade agreements were linked to security considerations,[71] with access to oil moving to the centre.[72] Nevertheless, the loosening of the Little Entente remained the guiding line.[73] By 1938 at the latest, military planning was likely counting on Romania as part of the strategic raw-material base for the coming war.

Despite all successes from a German perspective, mistrust remained. In 1937, Fabricius reported that Romania did not seek any treaty commitment with Germany.[74] Carol II displayed openness and reserve at the same time – an expression of pragmatism that maximised room for manoeuvre. This reflected internal tensions between the king and the government and a claim to national sovereignty. In Berlin, the domestic reconfiguration was interpreted as an opportunity for foreign-policy repositioning under authoritarian auspices.

Within Germany, policy towards Romania was not frictionless: the Foreign Office competed with the NSDAP's Foreign Policy Office, which sought its own channels through contacts with right-wing groups and the Iron Guard. Diplomats such as Fabricius rejected this as dilettantish and risky because it jeopardised the long-term line. Berlin tried to keep control in official hands and limit party-political interventions.[75] This institutional dualism explains inconsistent signals to Bucharest and marks the limits of political control even within an authoritarian system.

At the beginning of 1938, Prime Minister Octavian Goga expressed in a telegram to Hitler his desire for closer relations.[76] At the same time, the line of the Little Entente shaped by Paris and Prague began to falter.[77] The Romanian war minister told the Polish envoy that

the German threat was now greater than the Soviet one.[78]

The fall of the antisemitic Goga cabinet[79] was not seen in Berlin as a setback but rather as an opportunity for cautious rapprochement.[80] The Office nevertheless warned against exaggerated expectations and recommended observation.[81] In 1938, indications of Soviet overflight and transit plans across Romanian territory mounted. Bucharest issued denials but was not militarily capable of preventing overflights towards Czechoslovakia.[82] Reichskommissar Hermann Göring offered Carol II anti-aircraft guns in exchange for additional oil – economic advantages were linked to military influence.[83] In any potential German-Czechoslovak conflict, Romania's stance was relevant: intervention only in the event of a Hungarian attack, not in the event of German action.[84] In September 1938, Petrescu-Comnen reaffirmed neutrality.[85] This was not mere passivity but a calculated intermediate position: keeping German supply relations open, reducing Soviet pressure and eluding the French logic of binding.

Economically, Berlin exploited the situation: higher purchase prices for agricultural products secured access to raw materials and deepened dependence.[86] Envoy Carl August Clodius spoke of a "profound transformation" of Romanian public opinion in Germany's favour. France remained a guarantor of protection but lost steering capacity; Berlin filled the vacuum with individual contacts.

By late 1938 the Office concluded that Romania was realigning its options – also because of dwindling French credibility. Carol II signalled a willingness to bind, though only with protection against the Soviet Union.[87] Fabricius recommended cautious consolidation: military deliveries, economic cooperation, limited aid; Romania should make the proposals.[88]

The Munich Agreement fundamentally changed the strategic environment. With the destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, a central pillar of regional stability disappeared. Bucharest found itself isolated; Berlin gained room to draw Romania into its political and economic sphere of influence. The German approach to rapprochement remained gradual and calculated and it respected formal sovereignty. An internal directive of January 1939 stressed: Romania was still domestically unstable and externally volatile. The goal was long-term alignment with the Axis, not through fixed treaties but through indirect influence; for the time being, one should wait.[89]

In retrospect, from the Foreign Office's perspective Romania remained a pendulum state: militarily bound, economically vulnerable, manoeuvring in foreign policy. This flexibility was not seen as a weakness but was used as a strategic lever. The strategy relied on patience, observation, selective influence and structural shifts. Thus, the basis emerged for more overt forms of influence from 1939 onwards – economically anchored, calculated in security terms and domestically flanked by authoritarian restructuring in Romania.[90]

The finding is rapprochement without alliance. German strategy transformed dependence into influence without risking formal commitment. By the end of the 1930s a differentiated strategy of indirect influence had developed. Perception and action converged: the Office understood Romania as a permeable yet steerable border state whose economic dependence promised political compatibility. This laid the ground for the next phase of German policy towards Southeastern Europe – a policy increasingly structural rather than merely situational.

Conclusion: A Policy Beyond the Road to War

How did relations with the Kingdom of Romania between 1922 and 1938 take shape from the Foreign Office's point of view – and did they indicate a road to war?

The Office pursued no open alliance policy, but economic penetration, diplomatic patience and selective binding. Romania did not appear as an ideological partner but as a geopolitically exposed, economically manipulable state – a "pendulum state" whose flexibility opened foreign-policy opportunities.

From the mid-1930s, strategic importance grew: oil, Danube ports and the border with the Soviet Union moved Romania into Berlin's

security calculus. The goal was not formal obligation but functional integration: trade agreements, favourable terms, technological cooperation – binding not through pacts but through dependencies.

At the same time, Romania preserved its autonomy. Under Carol II, it made use of economic cooperation with Germany but avoided security-policy commitments. This pendulum movement was deliberate: between Western alignment, national autonomy and an opening towards Berlin.

Even after the Munich Agreement of 1938, the Office intensified economic influence. Despite dissonances – for example after the elimination of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu – the line remained constant: interdependence instead of formal commitment.

Romania was not a mere follower of German interests but an actor in its own right. For precisely that reason, the Reich was able, through restrained, targeted influence, to create constellations that facilitated closer cooperation until 1941 – not inevitably, but prepared through economic and diplomatic interweaving.

The result places Romania within a policy beyond the road to war: power gains through interdependence, the relativisation of sovereignty through dependence, the expansion of spheres of influence through patience. German policy towards Romania was less an episode of rapprochement than a gradual shift in the balance of power. It worked in a preparatory way – economically anchored, diplomatically patient, opportunity-oriented – and created conditions that facilitated later developments until 1941 without determining them.

NOTES

[1] Memorandum by Legation Secretary Grundherr, 28 Nov. 1924, in: *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik* (ADAP), 1918-1945, A 11, no. 190, p. 459.

[2] On the Little Entente from a German perspective see: Pierre Köckert, "The Little Entente from the Perspective of the German Foreign Office 1920-1938," in: *A New Central Europe: 100 Years since the Creation of the First Regional Defensive System*, Bucharest, 2023, pp. 75-127; for a broader view: Magda Ádám, *The Little Entente and Europe (1920-1929)*, Budapest, 1993; Eliza Campus, *The Little Entente and the Balkan Alliance*, Bucharest, 1978.

[3] Memorandum by Legation Secretary Grundherr, 28 Nov. 1924, in: ADAP, A 11, no. 190, p. 459.

[4] For example: Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu. Die deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen 1938-1944*, 2nd ed., Wiesbaden, 1965.

[5] See e.g.: Paul Bagiu, *Das Dritte Reich, Rumänien und das Erdöl: deutsch-rumänische Erdölpolitik im Krieg*, Saarbrücken, 2015; Dietmar Müller, "Die Zwischenkriegszeit: politisches System und Staatsbürgerschaft," in: Thede Kahl, Michael Metzeltin and Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu (eds.), *Rumänien: Raum und Bevölkerung, Geschichte und Geschichtsbilder, Kultur, Gesellschaft und Politik heute, Wirtschaft, Recht und Verfassung, historische Regionen*, Vienna, 2008, pp. 279-296; Ekkehard Völkl, *Rumänien: vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*, Regensburg, 1995; Berthold Puchert, "Die Handelsbeziehungen des Deutschen Reiches zu Rumänien zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen," in: *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 3 (1983), pp. 51-76.

[6] The Treaty of Rapallo (16 Apr. 1922), concluded on the margins of the Genoa Conference, restored diplomatic relations between the German Reich and Soviet Russia, stipulated mutual renunciation of war and compensation claims, and granted most-favoured-nation status in trade. See Stephanie C. Salzmann, *Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union: Rapallo and After, 1922-1934*, Woodbridge, 2013; Carole Fink, Axel Frohn and Jürgen Heideking (eds.), *Genoa, Rapallo, and European Reconstruction in 1922*, Cambridge, 1991; Magda Ádám, *Richtung Selbstvernichtung: die Kleine Entente 1920-1938*, Budapest, 1988, pp. 68-71.

[7] The Munich Agreement (30 Sept. 1938) between Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France permitted the Reich to annex the German-speaking Sudeten districts of Czechoslovakia and marked the high point of British–French appeasement towards the Nazi regime. See Mary Heimann, "Czechoslovakia, Czecho-Slovakia and the Munich Agreement," in: Julie Gottlieb, Daniel Hucker and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Munich Crisis, Politics and the People: International, Transnational and Comparative Perspectives*, Manchester, 2021, pp. 19-43.

[8] The Foreign Office obtained information via the press or personal contacts maintained by its own envoys in the respective countries, by foreign envoys in the Reich, or through trips by prime ministers or its own staff. This follows from the correspondence in ADAP 1918-1945.

[9] Envoy Freytag to the Foreign Office, 30 June 1922, in: ADAP, A 6, no. 137, p. 282.

[10] Memorandum by Privy Legation Councillor Rümelin, 28 Nov. 1922, in: ADAP, A 6, no. 252, p. 518; Envoy Freytag to the Foreign Office, 9 Dec. 1922, in: ADAP, A 6, no. 267, p. 549.

[11] This putsch (Oct. 1921) refers to former Emperor Karl I (King Karl IV of Hungary) attempting for a second time, with monarchist troops, to regain the Hungarian throne; the uprising ended with defeat after fighting at Budaörs and led to the final disempowerment of the Habsburgs in Hungary. See Nikolai N. Stankov, "Habsburgs' Attempts of the Restoration in Hungary in 1921 and the International Relations in Central Europe," in: *Central-European Studies* 4/13 (2021), pp. 207-224.

[12] Circular by the State Secretary in the Foreign Office, Haimhausen, 7 Jan. 1922, in: ADAP, A 5, no. 236, p. 474.

[13] Envoy Freytag to the Foreign Office, 30 June 1922, in: ADAP, A 6, no. 137, p. 282.

[14] Memorandum by Legation Councillor Gooß, 17 Feb. 1923, in: ADAP, A 7, no. 92, p. 201.

[15] Envoy Freytag to the Foreign Office, 10 May 1923, in: ADAP, A 7, no. 230, p. 567.

[16] This denotes the political and legal dispute between Romania and Soviet Russia over the territory between the Prut and Dniester, annexed by Romania in 1918 and claimed by the Soviet Union in 1940. See George Ciorănescu, *Bessarabia: Disputed Land Between East and West*, Bucharest, 1993.

[17] State Secretary Maltzan to the Ambassador in Moscow, Brockdorff-Rantzau, 7 June 1923, in: ADAP, A 8, no. 10, p. 27.

[18] Memorandum by Maltzan, 25 Apr. 1924, in: ADAP, A 10, no. 38, p. 96.

[19] Undated memorandum without signature, n.d. [24 Apr. 1924], in: ADAP, A 10, no. 46, p. 116.

[20] Circular by State Secretary Maltzan, 26 Aug. 1924, in: ADAP, A 11, no. 53, p. 129.

[21] These treaties (Oct. 1925) recognised Germany's western borders with France and Belgium, bound the parties to peaceful dispute settlement and provided for Britain and Italy as guarantors; the Reich's eastern border remained unaffected. On their significance for the Little Entente: Ádám, *Richtung Selbstvernichtung*, pp. 71-75.

[22] Envoy Freytag to the Foreign Office, 20 Nov. 1925, in: ADAP, A 14, no. 251, p. 631; Circular by the Foreign Office, 29 Dec. 1925, in: ADAP, B 3, no. 12, p. 27.

[23] Memorandum by Senior Legation Councillor Simon, 20 Dec. 1926, in: ADAP, B 3, no. 248, p. 496.

[24] Envoy Koch to the Foreign Office, 17 May 1927, in: ADAP, B 5, no. 163, p. 363.

[25] Undated memorandum by the Foreign Minister, n.d., in: ADAP, B 6, no. 232, p. 504.

[26] Memorandum by Senior Government Councillor Michaelis, 13 Sept. 1927, in: ADAP, B 6, no. 192, p. 424; Memorandum by Ministerial Director Ritter, 29 Nov. 1927, in: ADAP, B 7, no. 159, p. 388; Foreign Office to the Legation in Bucharest, 9 Feb. 1928, in: ADAP, B 8, no. 78, p. 165; Memorandum by Ministerial Director Ritter, 8 Aug. 1928, in: ADAP, B 9, no. 221, p. 545.

[27] Memorandum by Ministerial Director Köpke, 17 Nov. 1928, in: ADAP, B 10, no. 137, p. 334.

[28] Unsigned memorandum, 10 May 1929, in: ADAP, B 11, no. 228, p. 518.

[29] Völkl, *Rumänien*, pp. 103-107; Armin Heinen and Oliver Jens Schmitt (eds.), *Inszenierte Gegenmacht von rechts: Die Legion Erzengel Michael in Rumänien 1918-1938*, Munich, 2013.

[30] Memorandum by Ministerial Director Ritter, 23 Jan. 1930, in: ADAP, B 14, no. 45, p. 113.

[31] Envoy Mutius to the Foreign Office, 16 June 1930, in: ADAP, B 15, no. 86, p. 195.

[32] Cf. Bagiu, *Das Dritte Reich*, pp. 13-58; Dietrich Eichholtz, *Krieg um Öl: ein Erdölimperium als deutsches Kriegsziel (1938-1943)*, Leipzig, 2006.

[33] Senior Legation Councillor Wiehl to Embassy Councillor Kirchholtes, 8 Dec. 1930, in: ADAP, B 16, no. 97, p. 247.

[34] The Ambassador in Moscow to the Foreign Office, 29 Dec. 1930, in: ADAP, B 16, no. 126, p. 323.

[35] Wilhelm Regendanz to the State Secretary of the Foreign Office, 4 Apr. 1931, in: ADAP, B 17, no. 66, p. 173.

[36] The State Secretary of the Foreign Office to the Legation in Bucharest, 13 Apr. 1931, in: ADAP, B 17, no. 73, p. 196; Memorandum by the State Secretary of the Foreign Office, 11 May 1931, in: ADAP, B 17, no. 124, p. 313.

[37] Foreign Minister Curtius to the Foreign Office, 20 May 1931, in: ADAP, B 17, no. 138, p. 346.

[38] Ministerial Director Ritter to Ministerial Director Posse, 27 May 1931, in: ADAP, B 17, no. 147, p. 361.

[39] The Legation in Warsaw to the Foreign Office, 24 July 1931, in: ADAP, B 18, no. 76, p. 145; Polish–Romanian Guarantee Treaty, 15 Jan. 1931, on territorial integrity, mutual defence, military convention, no separate peace, coordination of foreign policy, no agreement with third parties against the partner (text in: Georg von Gretschaninow, *Garantiepakte, Bündnisse, Abkommen über politische Zusammenarbeit, Nichtangriffs-, Neutralitäts-und Abrüstungsverträge der Nachkriegszeit*, vol. 1, Berlin, 1936, p. 39).

[40] Polish–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, 25 July 1932: renunciation of force, neutrality, no agreement with third parties against the partner, peaceful settlement of disputes (text: Gretschaninow, *Garantiepakte*, p. 320).

[41] Envoy Schulenburg to the Foreign Office, 3 Sept. 1932, in: ADAP, B 21, no. 34, p. 81; Unsigned memorandum, 29 Sept. 1932, in: ADAP, B 21, no. 82, p. 181; Circular by Ministerial Director Köpke, 23 Dec. 1932, in: ADAP, B 21, no. 236, p. 499; Envoy in Warsaw to the Foreign Office, 25 Jan. 1933, in: ADAP, B 21, no. 275, p. 588.

[42] Memorandum by Ministerial Director Ritter, 21 Dec. 1932, in: ADAP, B 21, no. 232, p. 487.

[43] Memorandum by the State Secretary of the Foreign Office, 22 Feb. 1933, in: ADAP, C 1.1, no. 32, p. 68.

[44] Memorandum by Senior Legation Councillor Heeren, 27 Mar. 1933, in: ADAP, C 1.1, no. 118, p. 217.

[45] Memoranda by Senior Government Councillor Thomsen and Ministerial Councillor Willuhn, 7 Apr. 1933, in: ADAP, C 1.1, no. 142, p. 258; Memorandum by Foreign Minister Neurath, 27 May 1933, in: ADAP, C 1.2, no. 264, p. 487.

[46] Memorandum by Foreign Minister Neurath, 21 June 1933, in: ADAP, C 1.2, no. 328, p. 580.

[47] File note by Ministerial Director Ritter, 8 Aug. 1933, in: ADAP, C 1.2, no. 395, p. 720.

[48] The Foreign Office to the Embassy in Rome, 12 Mar. 1934, in: ADAP, C 2.2, no. 318, p. 578.

[49] Memorandum by Foreign Minister Neurath, 28 May 1934, in: ADAP, C 2.2, no. 468, p. 832.

[50] Envoy Schulenburg to the Foreign Office, 27 June 1934, in: ADAP, C 3.1, no. 41, p. 91.

[51] Foreign Office to the Embassy in Rome, 12 Mar. 1934, in: ADAP, C 2.2, no. 318, pp. 576-581. On German rapprochement with Yugoslavia and Romania see also: Michael Portmann, "Politische Geschichte Südosteuropas 1918-1945," in: Konrad Clewing and Oliver Jens Schmitt (eds.), *Geschichte Südosteuropas: vom frühen Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich, 2011, pp. 573-574.

[52] Envoy Dehn-Schmidt to the Foreign Office, 12 Nov. 1934, in: ADAP, C 3.2, no. 322, p. 603.

[53] Embassy Counsellor Pochhammer to the Foreign Office, 26 May 1935, in: ADAP, C 4.1, no. 110, p. 207.

[54] Circular by the Foreign Office, 25 May 1935, in: ADAP, C 4.1, no. 105, p. 194; Embassy Counsellor Pochhammer to the Foreign Office, 26 June 1935, in: ADAP, C 4.1, no. 175, p. 353; Embassy Counsellor Pochhammer to the Foreign Office, 15 Oct. 1935, in: ADAP, C 4.2, no. 353, p. 717.

[55] Embassy Counsellor Pochhammer to the Foreign Office, 1 Jan. 1936, in: ADAP, C 4.2, no. 478, p. 924.

[56] Memorandum by Foreign Minister Neurath, 23 Jan. 1936, in: ADAP, C 4.2, no. 514, p. 1007.

[57] Memorandum by Legation Councillor Busse, 21 Feb. 1936, in: ADAP, C 4.2, no. 577, p. 1143.

[58] Embassy Counsellor Pochhammer to the Foreign Office, 16 Mar. 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 131, p. 160.

[59] Memorandum by Senior Legation Councillor Renthe-Fink, 17 Mar. 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 142, p. 171.

[60] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 29 Apr. 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 300, p. 448.

[61] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 19 June 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 385, p. 602.

[62] See e.g. War Ministry to the Foreign Office, 16 June 1935, in: ADAP, C 4.1, no. 153, p. 304; Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 29 Apr. 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 300, p. 448; Legation Councillor Altenburg to the Legation in Prague, 4 June 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 241, p. 308.

[63] The State Secretary and Head of the Presidential Chancellery Meissner to Foreign Minister Neurath, 16 Nov. 1936, in: ADAP, C 6.1, no. 38, p. 68.

[64] Circular by the Foreign Office, 20 June 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 392, p. 616.

[65] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 23 June 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 397, p. 624; Unsigned memorandum, 7 July 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 440, p. 694.

[66] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 7 Oct. 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 576, p. 974.

[67] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 9 Dec. 1936, in: ADAP, C 6.1, no. 83, p. 161.

[68] Hillgruber, *Hitler*, p. 12.

[69] Memorandum by Foreign Minister Neurath, 7 June 1937, in: ADAP, C 6.1, no. 410, p. 882.

[70] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 6 Sept. 1936, in: ADAP, C 5.1, no. 528, p. 881.

[71] Editors' note, in: ADAP, C 5.2, pp. 931-932.

[72] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 17 Nov. 1936, in: ADAP, C 6.1, no. 42, p. 79; Bagiu, *Das Dritte Reich*, pp. 3, 13, 17.

[73] Memorandum by Foreign Minister Neurath, 15 Jan. 1937, in: ADAP, C 6.1, no. 145, p. 312.

[74] Envoy Fabricius to the Foreign Office, 11 Feb. 1937, in: ADAP, C 6.1, no. 197, p. 428.

[75] Hillgruber, *Hitler*, pp. 11-12.

[76] Memorandum by Presidential Councillor Kiewitz, 1 Jan. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 157, p. 181.

[77] The Envoy in Prague to the Foreign Office, 12 Jan. 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 47, p. 179.

[78] The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 10 Feb. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 169, p. 198.

[79] Hillgruber, *Hitler*, pp. 14-15.

[80] Circular by the Foreign Office, 9 Mar. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 179, p. 210.

[81] State Secretary Weizsäcker to Envoy Fabricius, Apr. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 189, p. 223.

[82] The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 24 May 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 205, p. 266; The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 3 June 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 236, p. 305; The Ambassador in Moscow to the Foreign Office, 18 June 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 258, p. 333; The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 24 June 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 267, p. 345.

[83] The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 15 July 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 212, p. 243.

[84] The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 24 May 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 205, p. 266; The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 17 Aug. 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 363, p. 457; The Chargé d'Affaires in Budapest to the Foreign Office, 23 May 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 198, p. 261; The Chargé d'Affaires in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 6 Sept. 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 434, p. 558.

[85] The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 27 Sept. 1938, in: ADAP, D 2, no. 650, p. 784.

[86] Ministerial Director Wohlthat to Prime Minister Colonel General Göring, 13 Dec. 1937, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 154, p. 174; Memorandum by Envoy Clodius, 13 Dec. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 264, p. 294.

[87] The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 29 Sept. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 227, p. 258.

[88] The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 30 Sept. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 228, p. 259; The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 7 Oct. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 231, p. 262; The Envoy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, 15 Oct. 1938, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 234, p. 266.

[89] Undersecretary Woermann to Envoy Fabricius, 31 Jan. 1939, in: ADAP, D 5, no. 279, p. 315.

[90] For further reading: Hillgruber, *Hitler*, pp. 23-235.

DEBATES ON MILITARY DOCTRINE REFLECTED IN THE ROMANIAN MILITARY PUBLICATIONS OF THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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Abstract

The interwar period in Romania was marked by significant debates on military doctrine. One of the main forums for these debates was the specialised military press, with România Militară *at the forefront. These journals offered officers a platform through which to assess strategic ideas against the realities of Romania's geography, regional threats and material constraints.*

Romanian military theorists discussed the nature of modern warfare, the structure of the armed forces and the country's strategic posture within an unstable European security environment. Contributors identified with striking clarity the core dilemmas facing Romanian defence policy: the simultaneous threat posed by three revisionist neighbours (the USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria) and a limited industrial base that restricted the development and acquisition of modern weaponry.

Throughout the interwar years, these debates addressed contentious issues such as the suitability of French tactical models, the balance between offensive and defensive strategies and the role of modern technologies such as aviation, tanks, and mechanised forces.

Keywords: *mechanisation, motorisation, military technology*

Romanian Military Publications in the Interwar Period

România Militară was the most important review of the Romanian Army on military matters, serving as the semi-official voice of the General Staff throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Its revival under direct military authority in 1921, following the interruption of its prewar publication[1], gave it unmatched legitimacy, ensuring that the studies it published were both rigorous and aligned with strategic priorities. Its annual essay competitions, which awarded substantial prizes, encouraged broader participation in doctrinal debate[2]. Specialised journals also developed around the army's main branches, giving infantry, cavalry and artillery officers their own professional forums through *Revista Infanteriei, Revista Cavaleriei*

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and *Revista Artileriei*. The Air Force and the Navy likewise maintained dedicated periodicals – such as *Revista Aeronauticii* and *Revista Marinei*.

In this article, I focus on Romanian perspectives on broader doctrinal and organisational questions, analysing articles published in *România Militară* between 1921 and 1938 that addressed military strategy and doctrine, military organisation, operational tactics, and the integration of new technologies into warfare. I have therefore set aside contributions devoted mainly to Romanian military history, highly technical subjects or translations and commentaries on foreign military literature.

Debates on Romania's Strategy and Military Doctrine

To better understand Romania's military doctrine in the interwar period[3], it is necessary to outline the country's specific strategic challenges. Greater Romania had a population of approximately 18-20 million inhabitants and covered 295,650 km², with around 3,400 km of frontiers, two-thirds of which were natural and defined by major geographical features of strategic importance, such as the Danube, the Black Sea coast, and the Carpathian Mountains. Its geostrategic position was highly vulnerable, as it lay between three revisionist neighbours – the USSR, Hungary, and Bulgaria – and was therefore exposed to potential attacks from several directions. These vulnerable sectors represented more than half of Romania's land borders, while the Black Sea coast was also exposed to possible Soviet naval operations. In response, Romania relied on regional alliances, including the Little Entente (1921), the Balkan Pact (1934), and its partnership with Poland (1921), as well as on the system of collective security represented by the League of Nations, while also developing its independent military plans for national defence[4].

Historically, Romanian military doctrine drew heavily on the French model, which provided the main guidelines for military organisation, training, operational planning, and the disposition and employment of troops. In 1930, Major Gheorghe Ion argued that "adopting the general framework and principles of French military doctrine for our army is not only a necessity imposed by circumstances, but also a consequence of our country's political orientation", since "all our allied armies", including those of the Little Entente states and Poland, "follow French doctrine, and any divergence would only create difficulties in command, constant misunderstandings between different headquarters, and potentially serious consequences on the battlefield"[5].

A contrary view had already been advanced in 1927 by Major Ion Cernăianu, who stated that Romanian military doctrine could not simply copy the French model. His main contention was that Romania's geography offered extensive operational spaces and multiple strategic axes, favouring deep manoeuvre and envelopment rather than frontal breakthroughs along narrow sectors, as in the French approach: "The length of our frontiers, in relation to our own resources and those of our probable adversaries, leads us to conclude that we shall never be able to achieve a significant concentration on the front, either at the strategic or tactical level, as admitted and advocated by French doctrine. (...) Tactical gaps will likewise become the rule, since our large units will be forced to fight on broad fronts. A Romanian division will frequently attack on a frontage of 10-12 kilometres, whereas French divisions attack on no more than 5-6 kilometres."

Furthermore, unlike France, Romania could not rely on vast reserves of manpower or munitions; it had to wage war with the resources available from the outset, prioritising mobility, surprise and strategic economy of force: "The scarcity of our resources, combined with the need for the defence to preserve its forces until the decisive moment, will compel us to abandon the French concept of conducting the defence in a single position or in a very limited number of positions, since our lack of resources cannot give us hope that we might crush enemy attacks within a short period. Our defence will therefore be conducted across a deep zone, using an extensive system of positions."[6] Similar ideas to those of Cernăianu – namely, that Romania's specific conditions required a doctrine centred on mobile rather than static or attritional warfare – were also supported by Major Polihron Dumitrescu[7] or Captain Gheorghe Berdan[8].

Going even further, Cernăianu argued in 1929 that Romania had to cast off the "rigid, fire-dense cordon" derived from French regulations and build a doctrine rooted in its own strategic conditions. Calculating that "in time of war, we could not count on more than 60 divisions", while "our enemies would likely field around 150 divisions today, and potentially even more in the future", Cernăianu warned that "even relying on all possible alliance combinations and applying economy of force with the utmost skill and daring, it becomes clear that the troop density we could achieve across three extensive fronts, facing vastly superior enemies, would be entirely insufficient". "Moreover, even our levels of armament and equipment would fall far short of the theoretical standards upon which Western doctrine is based." Thus, "we will undoubtedly enter any future war with inferior forces, and our only hope of victory lies in eventually tipping the balance of means in our favour so that we can seize the initiative."[9]

Cernăianu therefore rejected the formula "hold the terrain at all costs", stating that the real purpose of defence was to wear down the attacker until the balance of forces shifted, and then to exploit the moment with speed and initiative[10]. "The command must assume two obligations: a) on the one hand, to find the means by which to wear down the attacker to the necessary extent; b) on the other hand, to resort to every possible method by which to preserve the maximum operational capacity of its own troops."[11]

While such concerns were not absent from military education[12], efforts to articulate a distinct Romanian military doctrine were largely confined to individual initiatives. In 1935, Lieutenant Colonel Aurelian M. Moldoveanu envisioned military doctrine as an intuitive, historically grounded synthesis of national realities, continuously refined through case studies and sensitive to both the moral and material dimensions of war[13]. In 1937, Captain Mircea Tomescu, a frequent prize-winner in the essay competitions organised by *România Militară*, published his major work, *Știința militară și doctrina românească* (*Romanian Military Science and Doctrine*), arguing that Romania needed a national doctrine centred on the defensive use of terrain[14].

In 1931, Captain Gheorghe C. Ștefănescu contended that a true Romanian military doctrine must be built on clearly defined fundamental principles – or "dogmas" – such as: strategic posture, the balance between fire and manoeuvre, preferred forms of action, command style, and national military temperament. These core choices should guide all regulations, training, and planning[15]. In the same year, Lieutenant-Colonel Ioan Petroianu argued that a genuinely Romanian doctrine must grow from Romania's own strategic circumstances rather than mirror the French, British or German models, which could serve only as points of reference. Romania's "special conditions", above all "the ratio between the extent of the threatened frontiers and the strength of the army at our disposal", showed, in his view, that the army would be compelled to operate "with and against unsupported flanks". For this reason, manoeuvre warfare (*războiul de mișcare*) had to be treated as the normal framework of combat, rather than positional warfare (*războiul de poziții*), inherited from the French experience of trench warfare. Petroianu found support for this in the British *Field Service Regulations*, which stated that "the army must be trained above all for manoeuvre warfare" and that "any tendency to regard positional warfare as a normal form of war must be repressed", and even more so in the German regulations, which offered "a broader and more complete development" of the problem of manoeuvre, especially the use of flanks and envelopment[16].

In 1936, General Iosif Iacobici, a former Austro-Hungarian officer born in Transylvania, citing "one of the most recent, most valuable and, above all, most courageous works on tactics, whose importance is further enhanced by the fact that it represents the doctrine of our Higher War School"[17], warned that "we are facing a moment of crisis in our military doctrine" because of a dangerous mismatch: while high-level guidance (*Instrucțiunile asupra întrebuințării Marilor Unități*) had adopted the principles of mobile warfare, the regulations for each combat arm still reflected outdated French trench-warfare norms. To resolve this contradiction, he called for a comprehensive overhaul of all branch regulations to reflect Romania's actual

strategic context: broad fronts, difficult terrain, limited resources, and the need for speed, flexibility and manoeuvre[18]. In an article published two years earlier, Iacobici had already framed this adaptation as a strategic necessity. He described manoeuvre on interior lines as "above all the weapon of the side inferior in forces", whose importance increased in direct proportion to that inferiority. Given the geostrategic situation created by the Great Union, the country would probably have to fight "on at least two, if not three, fronts at once", while the likelihood of facing overwhelming enemy superiority was "so great as to become almost a certainty". The necessary response was therefore "the completion of the national tactical doctrine that would give greater attention to mobile warfare and introduce the notion of an elastic battle designed to gain time", in order to "confront marked enemy superiority and avoid a decisive engagement on secondary fronts". In practical terms, this also made transport infrastructure crucial, since manoeuvre on interior lines depended on the rapid transfer of forces between fronts[19].

On a similar note, in 1937, Lieutenant-Colonel Aurelian Moldoveanu argued that Romania's exceptionally long and irregular frontiers made "large-front defence" the rule rather than the exception: Romanian divisions would often have to hold frontages of 20 km or more, a span that the French considered extraordinary but that Bulgaria already treated as normal, because Romania simply lacked the forces to maintain the dense defensive frontages of 4-5 km prescribed in Western manuals. Moldoveanu therefore conceived large-front defence as an initially dispersed but manoeuvrable system: since "the principle of freedom of action" obliged the defender to begin with "an initial dispersion of forces", so that "no feasible enemy axis would remain unobserved", the defence had to use the terrain intelligently. Forces would be "split up and grouped on and around natural cover", while in covered and compartmented terrain they would concentrate around the lines of communication. Once the attacker was channelled into such corridors, whose flanks were "highly vulnerable", the defender could re-establish local superiority through a "succession of offensive reactions", striking the enemy's flank and rear and, as Bulgarian military theorist Halacev put it (as quoted by Moldoveanu[20]), destroying the enemy "in the labyrinth of our mountains", i.e., the Carpathians in Romania's case[21].

Planning for the Future War: Strategic Priorities

What would a future war actually look like and what strategic priorities should guide Romania's preparation for it? Throughout the interwar period, Romanian military authors proposed different answers to these central questions, shaped by their understanding of technological change, Romania's strategic environment, and the lessons of the First World War. While many predictions inevitably reflected the uncertainties of their time, some displayed remarkable intuition in anticipating key features of the next conflict.

In a lecture delivered to the Sibiu garrison on 3 December 1923, Colonel Ioan G. Florescu opened with a fundamental premise: "Every state requires an army organised and prepared in accordance with its particular circumstances and specific needs." From this starting point, he pleaded for a Romanian military doctrine based on self-reliance rather than on fluctuating alliances. Diplomatic ties were useful, but the army had to be organised "as if they did not exist", since only a force raised in advance and continuously trained could deter Romania's neighbours: "It is true that today our alliances offer a certain degree of relative peace, but we must understand that alliances have a fundamental flaw: they are limited in both time and scope and often lack sincerity. Therefore, when we think about safeguarding the national heritage – achieved through so many sacrifices and so much blood – we must envisage preserving it by relying solely on ourselves. The instrument that guarantees the integrity and independence of the state is the army, and its strength must be proportional to the scale of the threat. Since the threat is great, the army must be strong. And since alliances are temporary, the army must be organised as if they did not exist."

Drawing lessons from military geography, he argued that Romania's defence plans for the Eastern frontier should provide for an elastic defence across the Dniester–Bessarabian steppe, followed by a defensive retreat as far as the Moldavian Carpathians and the Lower

Siret, where the Romanian forces would establish a positional defence along the Focșani–Nămoloasa–Galați line "until the enemy had been sufficiently worn down", before launching a counteroffensive. Holding this front was crucial because "the penetration of an army from the East into the Transylvanian bastion, the redoubt of our defence, would cause the collapse of our military and political equilibrium"[22].

In 1927, Colonel P.D.[23], in an article entitled *Romania Needs a Strong Army*, argued that post-1918 Romania lay "in the jaws of three resentful neighbours", Hungary, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union. Because disarmament conferences and defensive pacts were reversible, and alliances were "as temporary as the interests behind them", Romania's only reliable shield was its own power. The author estimated the combined strength of Romania's probable adversaries at 130-135 divisions, but assumed that only about 100 could actually be deployed against Romania, since roughly a quarter would have to be retained on other frontiers. As Romania would be fighting defensively, he considered that a force equal to about two-thirds of this attacking strength – 60-65 divisions – would be sufficient, while the broader target of 75 divisions was meant to ensure adequate coverage of the country's 1,500 km of vulnerable land frontiers, with denser deployment in open plains and wider intervals along strong natural obstacles such as the Danube. In addition, the author argued that Romania had to finance in advance a fully equipped mass-mobilisation army, compensate for its weak domestic industry through peacetime stockpiles and industrial expansion, and maintain sufficient air and naval assets to deter aggression or, if deterrence failed, to defend every frontier until victory[24].

Would the Next War Be Dominated by Manoeuvre Warfare or Positional Warfare?

Would the next war be dominated by manoeuvre warfare or positional warfare? This was not merely a theoretical issue, for it shaped the organisation, training and tactical preparation of the army. In 1923, Colonel Christea Vasilescu challenged the post-1918 French "firepower dogma", which he considered, in line with other previously cited authors, unsuited to the Romanian context because of the imbalance between troop numbers and the length of the front. He argued instead that "the main factors of decision are manoeuvre and movement; fire remains the essential means of destruction and fortification the means of preservation". This view, however, was not entirely shared by the journal's editorial board, which, in a comment added to the article, insisted that manoeuvre could not succeed without the effective use of fire and terrain[25].

In 1927, attempting to answer this question, Captain Radu N. Dinulescu anticipated that "it is highly probable that a future war will compel us to fight on two or three fronts", since "Romania is surrounded by countries, almost all of which have territorial claims against her". Examining the scenario of a two-front war on the Western and Eastern borders, he argued that "it is highly probable that the bulk of our forces will have to be concentrated on the Eastern Front, where the strongest adversary is located". On the Western Front, facing Hungary, the numerically inferior Romanian forces would be compelled to conduct an elastic defence, gradually withdrawing towards the Apuseni Mountains and the Carpathian defensive line. Depending on developments in the East, this retreat could eventually evolve into a prolonged positional defence. By contrast, on the Eastern Front, operations would initially take the form of manoeuvre warfare, with Romanian forces seeking a decisive battle between the Dniester and the Prut. Yet if this effort failed, they too would be forced to retreat and establish defensive positions on the Prut or even along the Carpathian–Lower Siret line. Dinulescu therefore concluded that "even on the Eastern Front, circumstances may arise in which positional warfare will be imposed upon us" and that "it is highly probable that periods of manoeuvre will alternate with periods of stabilisation". Consequently, the Romanian Army had to be trained and equipped for both manoeuvre warfare and positional warfare rather than relying exclusively on either model. Finally, he pointed out that "both of these forms of warfare will evolve in their execution in relation to the improvement and introduction of modern means of combat"[26].

In 1936, Captain Petru Pretula published a comparative survey of Romanian tactics and

those of the country's potential adversaries – the USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria. He noted that both Hungary and Bulgaria had adopted a German-inspired doctrine centred on envelopment and penetration, while Soviet doctrine likewise emphasised concentrated striking forces supported by striking (*izbire*), fixing (*fixare*), reserve and fire groups. As a result, he argued that Romania's defensive operations, unfolding across wide operational spaces, would likely assume "the character of manoeuvre warfare with inevitable gaps and exposed flanks", requiring Romanian large units to operate on fronts "much more extended than the French ones" and often without immediate support from higher-level artillery or reserves. Consequently, Pretula called for a more autonomous and flexible organisation of Romanian divisions, capable of manoeuvring and fighting independently across dispersed battlefields[27].

In 1937, Major Alexandru Țenescu predicted that any coming war would open without a formal declaration and begin with a sudden combined aerial and chemical assault on railway hubs, oil plants, depots and big cities, aimed at paralysing mobilisation and demoralising the population. Simultaneously, mechanised spearheads, massed cavalry and airborne detachments would try to break through the covering forces, while enemy propaganda and armed partisans would seek to spark internal revolt; only after this "shock phase" would the main armies clash, and the conflict would last until one side's national resources and morale were exhausted. To survive such a war, Romania – like any other state – would have to prepare in peacetime by adopting a set of measures such as: (1) suppressing subversive propaganda that could provide the enemy with partisan networks; (2) developing a strong active air-defence system capable of protecting the national territory from enemy bombardment; (3) maintaining well-equipped covering forces on threatened frontiers, trained to resist sudden offensives by cavalry, motorised formations, and aviation; (4) preparing the strongest possible army in order to secure superiority over the enemy; (5) developing communications networks; and (6) organising both the nation and the territory for war on a comprehensive basis[28].

Are Fortifications Still Useful in Modern Warfare?

Are fortifications still useful in modern warfare? In 1930, two authors offered a positive answer. Major Ștefan Bardan argued that Romania had to erect continuous, echeloned belts of permanent works on easily penetrated fronts – especially in Bessarabia (against the USSR) – since the meandering Dniester did not offer enough natural obstacles and enemy armies there would greatly outnumber Romanian forces. He advocated a modern system of defensive "curtains" (*perdele*) – successive lines of small reinforced-concrete strongpoints, along the enemy's likely axes of advance, linked by trenches and obstacles, flanked by mobile reserves and backed by second-line positions – rather than a costly ring of large fortresses[29].

Major Ion S. Gheorghe contended that Romania, unable to match the manpower and matériel of its likely Eastern adversary, had to offset this imbalance by organising its territory with fortified zones that would strengthen an active rather than passive defence. These zones were to be located well behind the frontier, where they could shield mobilisation areas, anchor mobile counterattacks and force an attacker to commit substantial resources over time, while buying the time needed for the main army to concentrate and strike. Also, railways and other rapid transport links had to be developed in parallel, because fortifications and mobility were "equally indispensable parts of the same strategic problem: that of organising the national territory for military operations"[30].

Technological Progress and the Shape of the Future War

How would technological progress and new technologies shape the future war? In 1937, Major Traian Ghenoiu argued that "the aspects of war would change", as modern technologies had made warfare faster and more unpredictable. He nevertheless rejected any single-arm solution: "not tanks, aviation, infantry, cavalry, artillery, specialised units and personnel, considered individually, will win the battle"; rather, in modern war, "each of the arms mentioned above will have to make every effort and the supreme sacrifice in order to bring about the enemy's defeat"[31].

Adapting the Traditional Arms to the New Type of Warfare

How should each branch of the armed forces adapt its role, tactics and methods of combat to the technological and doctrinal transformations that followed the First World War? After the First World War, weaponry had evolved from being "simple and uniform" to comprising "a complex and varied arsenal", while its "rate of fire, precision and range" had been developed to their maximum levels. According to Colonel Ștefan Corciu, each branch of the armed forces had consequently acquired new capabilities: infantry had acquired "greatly increased firepower", artillery, an indispensable role "in both offence and defence", cavalry, greater resistance, "bringing it closer in function to infantry", and aviation, the status of "a formidable combat arm"[32].

"No one can assure us that the war of tomorrow will be fought in the same way as the war of yesterday. What is certain, however, is that war has always been, and will continue to be, determined by the means available to the belligerents", argued Colonel Ioan Pătroianu[33] in 1932, illustrating this principle through a technical and tactical study of cooperation between infantry and artillery. Pătroianu – an artillery officer – suggested that effective coordination between these two arms required an integrated tactical doctrine, shared training, and the peacetime establishment of close-escort artillery units that would operate directly with infantry troops to ensure timely and instinctive cooperation on the battlefield[34]. Similar ideas were promoted in 1930 by Lieutenant-Colonel Petre Jinga, an infantry officer[35]. The issue had also been tackled previously, in 1923, by Captain Constantin Trestioreanu[36].

Particular attention was devoted to the future of cavalry in the face of mechanisation and increasing air power. As in many other countries, many Romanian cavalry officers strongly resisted the decline in importance of their arm in the face of technological progress[37], arguing that cavalry still retained certain distinctive advantages in terms of mobility. As General Romulus Scărișoreanu argued in 1923, tanks and aircraft could complement but not replace cavalry: while he acknowledged the usefulness of modern weapons – tanks as instruments for breaking through specific points of resistance and aircraft for long-range reconnaissance – he emphasised their inherent limitations. Tanks, he stressed, remained dependent on favourable terrain, while aircraft could not provide reliable, detailed information in certain areas. Cavalry therefore remained indispensable for missions requiring mobility, provided that its training continued to be centred on horsemanship and was not reduced to a mere form of "mounted infantry"[38]. Other authors made similar points[39].

In 1926, Lieutenant-Colonel Mihail Racoviță, adopting a markedly different tone from that of Scărișoreanu, argued that "the progress achieved in the armament of troops had caused infantry tactics to evolve, but for cavalry tactics it had meant a genuine revolution, for it had forced cavalry to abandon altogether the medieval methods of combat which it had so faithfully preserved, convinced it that it had to adopt new methods in order to fulfil the multiple missions assigned to it, and, above all, forced it to adopt new firearms with which to oppose the enemy's destructive fire". He therefore argued that, in manoeuvre warfare, armoured cars (*autoblindate*) and motorcycle machine-gun units (*motomitraliere*) should form an organic part of large cavalry formations in sufficient numbers, serving as valuable auxiliaries[40].

Motor-mechanisation and the Evolution of Military Technology

How should motor-mechanisation be integrated into the Romanian Army's doctrine in light of the rapid advancement of military technology? In 1923, Artillery Major Sergiu Dumitrescu argued that artillery had to move by motor power rather than by horse traction. He therefore warned that nations with a substantial industrial base would motorise their artillery, whereas Romania, lacking such an industry, risked being left behind[41]. In 1927, Lieutenant-Colonel Dumitru Vrăjitoru stressed the importance of military mobility in modern warfare[42].

In a lecture delivered to senior officers in Timișoara in December 1929, Artillery Colonel Gheorghe Buicliu argued that technological progress enhanced, but did not replace, the traditional principles of manoeuvre and firepower. Given Romania's economic and infrastructural limitations, he rejected the idea

of "total mechanisation" advocated by military thinkers such as J.F.C. Fuller in Great Britain. Distinguishing between motorisation as a means of mobility and motorisation as a means of combat, he argued, on the one hand, that Romania should organise truck transport groups for each army corps, in order to compensate for the limitations of its railway network, and, on the other hand, that it should make measured use of tanks, without exaggerating their role. Referring also to new warfare technologies, such as air power and gas warfare, Buicliu stressed in particular the danger posed by radio as an instrument of propaganda, warning that "against this weapon there is no defence other than civic education" (an insight that, in contemporary terms, anticipated the idea of cognitive resilience against hybrid warfare)[43].

In July 1936, *România Militară* devoted an entire issue to motor-mechanisation, bringing together "authoritative opinions from foreign armies". In his own article, published in 1937, General Gheorghe E. Popescu commended the General Staff's decision to circulate this issue among commands and units, instructing all officers to study it carefully. As commander of an artillery brigade, he presented motor-mechanisation as a vital strategic transformation for the Romanian Army. He refuted two common objections, the first being that Romania lacked adequate roads: indeed, he argued, the country had to invest in repairing and expanding its communications network, but mechanised forces could still operate in difficult terrain. The second objection was that Romania had to conserve fuel, to which he replied that the country's domestic oil resources made fuel a manageable constraint. The real threat, he argued, lay in failing to adapt and modernise in time. He therefore proposed a concrete, phased programme: the creation of a central Motor-Mechanisation Bureau within the General Technical Inspectorate (*Inspectoratul General Tehnic*); the formation of fully equipped motor-mechanised units; the creation of close-support artillery for infantry; the provision of anti-tank guns across all units; and the reorganisation and modernisation of the Tank Regiment created in 1921. In parallel, he called for the development of a national industry capable of producing the specialised matériel required for motor-mechanisation[44].

Captain and later Lieutenant-Colonel Ioan Rudeanu viewed tanks as essential shock weapons, but argued in 1929 and again in 1938 that a country with limited resources, such as Romania, could not provide its army with tanks on the same scale as wealthier states. Accordingly, Romania had to treat tanks as scarce, high-value assets to be used economically – massed in well-defined roles and always employed under the cover of, and in coordination with, artillery and infantry to achieve decisive local superiority[45].

A month after the publication of Rudeanu's 1938 article, Captain Radu Bărbăcioru (not surprisingly, a cavalry officer) published an article in which he presented mechanisation as unavoidable but inherently limited for Romania, given its cramped strategic depth, fragile road network, scant industrial base and exposure to air attack. Analysing these factors, he argued that Romania did not require the creation of independent motorised large units and that the motor should therefore be incorporated into existing large units. He criticised what he saw as the psychological error of succumbing to a "motor neurosis" (*nevroza motorului*), which, he argued, worshipped the engine as an all-conquering substitute for the traditional arms. He was particularly scathing about British theories of an all-tank army, which envisaged "large tank units operating independently, breaking through the enemy's organised positions and destroying everything they encountered in their path"[46].

The debate over motor-mechanisation was not limited to how such means should be incorporated into the Romanian Army; it also raised the equally urgent question of how Romania should defend itself against the enemy's own mechanised capabilities. In 1934, General Iosif Iacobici contended that defeating massed Soviet-style tank assaults required special preparation. In his view, each infantry battalion had to be equipped with dedicated anti-tank weapons, while troops had to be trained to overcome fear, build confidence and make anti-tank action second nature, thereby creating *a culture of confidence in anti-tank defence*. In the event of an enemy invasion, natural and artificial obstacles were to be combined in order to slow and channel enemy armour into prepared kill zones, while

all elements in the rear – infantry, artillery, reserves, and command posts – had to be ready for all-round defence[47]. The problem was also tackled by Lieutenant-Colonel Olimp Curta[48] in 1935, by Colonel Costin Ionașcu[49] and Captain Dumitru Sorescu[50] in 1937, and by Lieutenant-Colonel Niculae Ionescu[51] in 1938.

The Role of Air Power

How did Romanian military theorists understand the role of air power in future warfare? In 1927, Lieutenant-Colonel Constantin Telemac valued the offensive purposes of the air forces, arguing that even an army planning a defensive ground campaign had to launch immediate, deep-penetration air strikes to secure air supremacy and paralyse the enemy's mobilisation, thereby giving the defender time to complete its own deployment[52].

In 1935, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexandru Sahini saw Romania's air force chiefly as the infantry's aerial partner[53]. In 1938, he argued that the development of each state's air force reflected its broader national policy, with the initiative in this field lying chiefly with the imperialist powers, while other states merely followed their example and adapted their developments for defensive purposes[54]. Later, in 1940, he advocated a national air force strategy or at least a strategic mindset that would "elevate the importance of the air force" to its rightful place[55].

Besides land-based aviation, Romanian military studies devoted limited attention to maritime aviation. In 1935, Captain Eugeniu Săvulescu argued that, given that the Black Sea's limited dimensions placed neighbouring coasts within reach of the air force of any littoral state, maritime aviation should not be confined to its conventional mission of ensuring the freedom of external communications and the defence of the maritime frontier. Rather, it had to be treated as a strategic necessity: a "long arm" capable of scouting beyond the horizon and projecting Romanian military reach across the compact Black Sea basin[56].

The rise of air power likewise made anti-aircraft defence an urgent doctrinal and organisational concern. In 1937, Constantin Telemac, now a brigadier-general, stressed that Romania's anti-aircraft defence had to be developed urgently, warning that, if it failed to do so, "all our war industry", once struck catastrophically at the outset by the formidable destructive power of enemy air attacks, would leave the country "in the disastrous situation of no longer being able to repair these painful losses throughout the course of this hypothetical campaign"[57]. A few months later, Captain Ioan Negrescu stressed that Romania had to treat air attack as the opening – and potentially decisive – phase of the next war and invest "without limit" in proactive, nationwide anti-air defence to deny the enemy the quick psychological and logistical victory sought through air power[58]. As part of efforts to establish an effective anti-air defence, Colonel Emanoil Leoveanu emphasised in 1930 that the army had to outfit each division with dedicated anti-aircraft units and prioritise the use of purpose-built AA weapons over adapted field guns[59].

In light of the experience of the First World War, another major concern in Romania, as in many other European countries, was defence against chemical warfare. In 1930, Colonel Gheorghe E. Popescu called for the creation of a nationwide civil defence system for organised protection[60]. Over time, sustained efforts were made in this direction. In 1933, the *Regulation of Passive Defence against Air Attacks* institutionalised a system designed to limit the effects of aerial bombardment on the population and the resources of the territory, including protection against toxic gases[61].

The "Armed Nation": Preparing the Country and Population for War

How should a country prepare for war? Military theorists' answers focused on the relationship between military power, demographic resources and economic capacity. Under the principle of the "armed nation", war was no longer seen as the responsibility of the army alone but as a national effort requiring the mobilisation of the state, the economy and society as a whole.

In 1924, Colonel Dumitru B. Popescu stressed that preparing for a future war was one of the state's foremost responsibilities, encompassing both foreign and domestic policy. As he argued, "we do not desire war, but we would be criminally negligent if we failed to

foresee it and prepare for it in advance, for history teaches us that only well-prepared wars have been victorious. True preparation, however, is very complex, as it encompasses a multitude of issues, requires foresight, a great deal of effort, financial sacrifices, and takes a long time – after which it must be continuously kept up to date". In the international arena, Romania was expected to cultivate "an atmosphere of sympathy" around the country in peacetime in order to secure military alliances and goodwill from other states, while simultaneously isolating potential adversaries by preventing or counterbalancing their alliances. Domestically, preparation aimed at strengthening national cohesion and ensuring public support for a future conflict by fostering political consensus, cultivating awareness of external threats, and preparing the population morally and psychologically for the sacrifices and hardships of war. Finally, the preparation of the national territory involved administrative organisation, economic and industrial mobilisation, the development of communications infrastructure, and territorial measures designed to support national defence[62].

In 1929, Lieutenant-Colonel Marin Manafu argued in a four-part study[63] that national defence must be systematically prepared during peacetime by coordinating all sectors – industrial, agricultural, financial, political, administrative, and social – as essential components of the war apparatus, with each measure supported by enforceable legislation. As such, industry must be ready to shift to military production, and finance must ensure a dedicated war fund; public morale and national spirit should be cultivated through education, sports, and premilitary training, while a central economic staff should coordinate resource use under a national war plan; all efforts, including those relating to territorial infrastructure and legal frameworks, must be synchronised to ensure the entire state functions as a unified war machine when needed. In subsequent parts of his study, Manafu proposed a detailed and actionable framework for Romania's economic and financial war planning[64], as well as for industrial mobilisation planning[65].

In 1931, General Nicolae Alevra argued that, according to the principle of the "armed nation", Romania had to prepare for a future war by integrating all its economic, financial, industrial, political and social systems into a unified peacetime effort, ensuring national self-sufficiency, strategic realism and full mobilisation capacity before conflict began[66].

In 1938, General Alexandru Anastasiu defined the principle of the "armed nation" as the full mobilisation of national potential for defence, arguing that every element had to be ready to make the maximum possible contribution. This comprehensive preparation of the country's war potential comprised three dimensions: the army, all material resources and the territory, and the population, including non-mobilisable citizens. National preparation of the population rested on both physical and moral training, the latter being instilled through education and sustained by the influence of the press on public opinion[67].

In an article published that same year, 1938, Major Ioan Rudeanu argued that national security (*siguranța*), understood as the set of measures ensuring freedom of action, had evolved since the First World War into a far more complex and demanding concept: no longer limited to tactical precautions, it now encompassed a permanent, multidimensional effort involving military and political leadership, local command and troops, aimed at protecting both the front and the home front from surprise, panic and disruption across all phases of conflict[68].

Military Training and Conscription

Military training and conscription were essential parts of the "armed nation" concept. Various ideas were advanced to improve Romania's conscription system. In 1934, General Alevra observed that Romania's conscription system wasted a large share of its potential fighting strength: although roughly 15% of the population reached draft age annually, only about half were actually incorporated – well below the 75% norm in most European armies – because of medical unfitness, deferments, and other exemptions from service. To address this, he advocated early, school-based recruitment measures, drawing on experience in Western states (especially the United States of America during the First World War), beginning with physical and intellectual assessments in primary school, recorded in individual files and used by

psychotechnical and vocational-guidance offices to direct each youth towards the military branch best suited to his abilities, thereby ensuring a more efficient, tailored use of national manpower before the age of 21[69]. In 1936, Colonel-Doctor Gheorghe Preda and S. Cupcea took up and expanded Alevra's idea through an experimental study in military psychology[70].

In 1925, as an application of the nation-in-arms concept, General Constantin Dragu advanced a markedly social-reformist vision of an "army of democracy", founded on two principles of fairness: defence should be financed in proportion to wealth through a graduated National Defence Tax, while the length of military service should be reduced according to educational attainment, both to reward more rapid progress in training and to encourage the eradication of illiteracy[71].

In 1930, Colonel Dumitru B. Popescu emphasised that national education was crucial for effective military service, contending that "we can only reduce the length of service when the young men entering the barracks are already developed physically, intellectually, and morally, so that the army's sole task will be their technical training and preparation for war". In this framework, the army should act as the final link in an integrated educational chain that begins in the family and continues through school, church and society[72]. He later expanded on these ideas[73].

That same year, following similar ideas[74], General Virgil Economu, deputy chief of the General Staff, argued that Romania had to implement a compulsory, state-directed, territorially organised preregimental training system coordinated by the Ministry of Defence. This structure would enable the army to reduce the length of active service while improving the physical, moral and technical readiness of future conscripts, thus building a trained national reserve without straining economic resources. Managed by territorial commands, the programme would use existing facilities and be financed through shared contributions from the state, local authorities and individuals. The programme would engage all youths aged between 19 and 21 in two annual stages: an initial year of weekend instruction focused on physical culture, civic and patriotic education and basic drill, followed by a second year of intensive training. Given Romania's predominantly agrarian character, with nearly 80% of the population engaged in rural activities, Economu stressed that preregimental training should be conducted during the agricultural off-season – after the harvest and before the start of spring fieldwork – in order to avoid disrupting the rural labour force[75].

Ideas complementary to those of General Economu were presented by Captain Radu Dinulescu. Expanding on his previous ideas[76], he contended that Romania's existing "one-size-fits-all" conscription system produced vast numbers of undertrained soldiers who could not master the increasingly technical weapons of modern warfare. Instead, the country needed a sequential, three-tier system of military preparation, beginning with compulsory preregimental training before incorporation, followed by a shortened but more specialised period of instruction within troop units and completed by advanced training in specialist schools for selected recruits destined to serve as small-unit specialists[77].

For the purpose of preregimental training, the National Office for Physical Education and its associated institute were created in 1923, reflecting a wider interwar concern with the relationship between physical education, youth formation, and national defence[78]. Among those addressing this issue was Captain Mihail Corbuleanu. He argued that physical education was a cornerstone of national war-readiness and a vital component of national defence policy. Highlighting that many Romanian soldiers were lost "solely due to physical exhaustion" during the Romanian Army's 1916 retreat into Moldavia, after the occupation of Southern Romania, he contended that the First World War "showed that the physical and moral preparation of the nation is the true preparation for war". Better physical training would have meant fewer dead. Physical weakness also undermined morale, making courage and swift action impossible under stress. Drawing on the example of the United States of America, which transformed its National Guard into a modern fighting force in just 15 months during the war, owing to a culture of widespread physical preparation, he insisted that war was now waged by entire nations, not merely by professional armies. Schools, families and civic

institutions therefore had to build physical stamina from an early age, because the army alone could not compensate for what they had failed to provide[79]. Similar ideas concerning the importance of physical education for military training were also emphasised by Colonel Ioan Filip[80] and Lieutenant Alexandru Simionescu[81].

In 1935, a series of authors advanced proposals for applying experimental psychology (psychotechnics) to improve the selection and assignment of military personnel. "The real difficulty in preparing future officers does not lie in a lack of knowledge (...) but in the absence of physical, physiological and psychological (intellectual and moral) aptitudes (...) [that] must therefore be assessed during the entrance examination with the help of psychotechnics", contended General Ioan Bengliu and Major Ioan Stoka.

As such, they proposed the use of psychotechnical tests – assessing intelligence, sensory perception, motor skills, temperament, and character – in entrance examinations for military schools in order to assign each cadet to the branch best suited to his abilities and to the precise physical, mental, and moral requirements of each arm, thereby avoiding costly later reassignments[82]. Along similar lines, in a lengthy five-part article, drawing extensively on the work of the Romanian psychologist Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, foreign authors, and examples of similar initiatives in Western countries, Captain Constantin M. Rădulescu argued that "the introduction of a scientific framework for personnel selection and of scientific methodology within the armed forces would constitute the decisive initiative that would extend this movement throughout all branches of the state", with particularly significant economic effects[83].

National Resources and Industry

"Victory in future wars will belong to the belligerent that has more food and supplies", argued Intendant Major Nicolae Teodorescu in 1923. Studying the lessons of the First World War from the experience of the French and German armies, he emphasised that, in modern warfare, the continuous flow of supplies – especially food, water, and ammunition – became critical, and that victory would belong to "the belligerent that possesses sufficient food supplies and matériel for one month longer than its opponent". Without a well-organised logistical system rooted in national infrastructure and supported by domestic production, military operations risked grinding to a halt. As such, he argued that Romania had to organise its national territory thoroughly as the sole reliable supply reservoir, with the proper infrastructure[84].

A similar argument was made in 1936 by Colonel Gheorghe Gheorghiu: logistics could determine strategic outcomes, and Romania's ability to conduct modern, mobile warfare depended critically on the organisation of its rear services. He warned that even the most skilful front-line manoeuvres would fail without a continuous, well-coordinated flow of supplies, ammunition, medical care, and communications from the rear[85].

Industrial production, stressed General Gabriel Negrei in 1924, mattered because modern war consumed weapons and ammunition far faster than they could be bought abroad: the nation that controlled its own factories could replace losses, introduce improved designs, and maintain firepower, while one that relied on imports quickly slipped into material inferiority[86].

In 1924, Captain Eremia Victor argued that "to organise our industry for wartime needs, the primary responsibility of those charged with this mission is to ensure that it is prepared in advance, during peacetime". Despite budgetary constraints, he insisted that defence had to remain the top national investment priority: "The army should be given every available resource, even the last penny, for it alone safeguards the existence of the state, and only under its protection can the prosperity of tomorrow be securely built."[87] In truth, during the interwar years, Romania allocated an average of around 14% of its state budget to defence between 1923 and 1931 (a lower share than in neighbouring countries), rising to an average of around 23% between 1933 and 1939[88].

Conclusions

Was Romania prepared for a future war when the Second World War finally broke out in September 1939? One can hardly say so. Still, it remains worth asking how far the interwar debates on military doctrine actually

influenced Romania's subsequent involvement in the conflict. Many of the authors who published in the *România Militară* review displayed a lucid understanding of the new military problems posed by mechanisation and aviation; yet their insights repeatedly came up against the structural limits of Romania's economy, industry, infrastructure, and political decision-making. For example, while many officers understood the tanks' shock value and advocated their concentrated use, as well as measures of defence against them, Romania entered the war with only two under-equipped tank regiments and improvised anti-tank guns. The air force was similarly underdeveloped.

The debates contrasted the rigidity of imported French doctrine with efforts to develop a more flexible Romanian approach, adapted to local terrain, limited resources, and the need for mobile, elastic defence. Several authors warned against overreliance on alliances, arguing that Romania's defence policy needed to be grounded in national capabilities rather than assumptions about external support. Their warnings carried a tragic sense of foresight, as the collapse of allied states left Romania isolated and forced it, in 1940, to cede territory without a fight – precisely the very scenario they had feared[89].

The interwar articles published in *România Militară* offer a nuanced case study of how, within a medium-sized state, a handful of military theorists could identify national vulnerabilities with remarkable precision, while ideas alone could not compensate for the absence of firepower, an adequate industrial base, and sustained fiscal commitment. When military thought, national industry, and political will do not mature together, a country may still falter because visionary insight is never fully matched by implementation.

NOTES

[1] First published in 1864-1866, *România Militară* was later revived in 1891 as a private initiative of a group of officers of the General Staff Corps and became an official organ of the General Staff between 1898 and 1907. It then returned to private hands between 1907 and 1916, before ceasing publication after Romania entered the war in August 1916. Revived by Ministerial Order no. 605 of 8 October 1920, issued by the Minister of War, Brigadier General Ioan Răşcanu (*Monitorul Oficial al României*, no. 178, 14 November 1920, p. 6555), it reappeared in 1921 as an official General Staff journal. See ***, *Din trecutul "României militare": cu prilejul comemorării a şaptezeci şi cinci de ani dela apariţia ei în viaţa Armatei: 1864-1939*, Tipografia Statului Major, Bucharest, 1939.

[2] ***, *Din trecutul "României militare"...*, pp. 373-380.

[3] Some of the ideas developed in this study build upon my earlier article: Tudor Vişan-Miu, *Romania after the Territorial Unification: Planning for the Next War, between Expectations and Realities (1920-1940)*, in Cristina Brăgea, George-Alin Oprea, Andreea-Loredana Tudor (eds), *Challenges of Adapting the Military in Times of Conflict. National Experiences and Case Studies (Proceedings of the 1st Balkan Conference, 5-7 November 2024, Bucharest, Romania)*, Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History, Fatih Institute of Military History, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2025, pp. 39-79 (see especially pp. 47-51, *The Quest for a Romanian Military Doctrine: A Road Fraught with Hardship*).

[4] Vasile Pricop, Petre Otu, *Dimensiuni şi caracteristici ale strategiei militare româneşti (1919-1940)* (chapter III), in Valentin Arsenie, Petre Botezatu (eds), *Strategia militară românească în epoca modernă (1859-1999)*, Nummus Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, pp. 91-95.

[5] Gheorghe Ion, *Cauzele influenţei militare franceze în armata noastră*, in *România Militară*, no. 11 (November 1930), pp. 66-75; no. 12 (December 1930), pp. 46-65.

[6] Ion Cernăianu, *Actul bătăliei în doctrina operativă românească*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1927), pp. 3-17.

[7] Notably, Polihron Dumitrescu studied at the École supérieure de guerre in Paris from 1922 to 1924, where he was a classmate of Charles de Gaulle.

[8] Polihron Dumitrescu, *Ideia de manevră şi determinarea obiectivelor în atac*, in *România Militară*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1932), pp. 47-77; Gheorghe Berdan, *Aspectul luptei pe fronturi întinse, în lumina doctrinei româneşti*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1935), pp. 77-95.

[9] Ion Cernăianu, *Consideraţiuni asupra bătăliei defensive în doctrina românească*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1929), pp. 62-71; no. 11 (November 1929), pp. 54-68.

[10] See the author's polemic against an anonymous critic ("D.P."), who, echoing French regulations, maintained that the sole purpose of a defensive battle was to retain possession of terrain. Ion Cernăianu, *Posesiunea terenului sau distrugerea inamicului?*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1932), pp. 3-16; no. 7-8 (July-August 1932), pp. 23-35; no. 9 (September 1932), pp. 21-31.

[11] Ion Cernăianu, *Armata în defensivă în doctrina românească*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1930), pp. 12-25; no. 6-7 (June-July 1930), pp. 3-25; no. 8-9 (August-September 1930), pp. 83-104.

[12] The Cavalry Officer Ioan Codreanu, who graduated from the Higher War School in 1924, Romania's highest military educational institution, recalled that, although the school remained broadly aligned with French doctrine, some of its instructors sought to draw doctrinal lessons from Romania's own military experience. Mircea Agapie, Aurel Pentelescu, Ion Emil (eds), *Cartea amintirilor absolvenților: o sută de promoții (1889-1995). De la Școala Superioară de Război la Academia de Înalte Studii Militare. Texte selectate*, Publishing House of the Academy of Advanced Military Studies, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 97-98.

[13] Aurelian Moldoveanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul doctrinelor de război*, in *România Militară*, no. 4 (April 1935), pp. 52-69; no. 5 (May 1935), pp. 50-77.

[14] Mircea Tomescu, *Știința militară și doctrina românească*, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă "Regele Carol II", Bucharest, 1937, pp. 68-98. Tomescu's theory was later criticised in the 1970s for lacking a "systematic approach to the factors that determine military strength and the outcome of war", as well as for overestimating the importance of terrain, which "is not in itself a source of strength; rather it lies in the capacity of military commands and troops to make use of its advantages". Colonel Corneliu Soare (ed.), *Istoria gândirii militare românești: culegere de texte din lucrări apărute între cele două războaie mondiale*, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974, pp. 340-342.

[15] Gheorghe C. Ștefănescu, *Doctrina și Regulamentul*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1931), pp. 73-86.

[16] Ioan Petroianu, *În jurul chestiunei unei "doctrine românești"*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1931), pp. 18-43. In his article, Petroianu drew on the British *Field Service Regulations* of 1924, made available in Romanian translation by Major Alexandru Orășeanu in 1925, and on the German *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* (1921), translated into Romanian as *Conducerea și lupta armelor combinate* by Colonel Dumitru Grozeanu in 1922.

[17] Lieutenant-Colonel Mihail Andronescu, Major C. Ștefănescu, *Tactica artileriei*, Bucharest, 1935.

[18] Iosif Iacobici, *Câteva probleme de detaliu ale doctrinei noastre de luptă*, in *România Militară*, no. 2 (February 1936), pp. 3-25; no. 3 (March 1936), pp. 3-19.

[19] *Idem*, *Manevra pe linii interioare văzută ca problemă de transport într-un război modern*, in *România Militară*, no. 12 (December 1934), pp. 11-27; no. 1 (January 1935), pp. 13-28.

[20] Aurelian Moldoveanu quotes, in Romanian translation, the article by Halacev, *Păreri asupra luptei defensive în condițiunile noastre* (*Views on Defensive Warfare in Our Conditions*), in *Voenen Jurnal (Military Journal)*, no. 39 (1932), p. 49.

[21] Aurelian Moldoveanu, *Apărarea pe fronturi mari*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1937), pp. 26-48.

[22] Ioan G. Florescu, *Considerațiuni asupra unei doctrine naționale de organizare și de luptă*, in *România Militară*, no. 11 (November 1924), pp. 16-22; no. 12 (December 1924), pp. 34-56.

[23] The author may have been either Infantry Colonel Petre Dobriceanu or Artillery Colonel Petre Dumitrescu (1879-?), the latter not to be confused with the better-known Petre I. Dumitrescu (1882-1950), commander of the 3rd Army on the Eastern Front during the Second World War.

[24] P.D., *Ne trebuie o armată puternică*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1927), pp. 18-26.

[25] Christea Vasilescu, *Doctrina mijloacelor de acțiune ale infanteriei*, in *România Militară*, no. 3 (March 1923), pp. 198-212.

[26] Radu Dinulescu, *Forma războiului viitor*, in *România Militară*, no. 1 (January 1927), pp. 50-57.

[27] Petru Pretula, *Studiu comparativ între tactica română și tacticile țărilor vecine (Rusia, Ungaria, Bulgaria)*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1936), pp. 33-51.

[28] Alexandru Țenescu, *Câteva considerațiuni asupra războiului și în special asupra războiului viitor*, in *România Militară*, no. 3 (March 1937), pp. 38-47.

[29] Ștefan Bardan, *Studiul utilității fortificației permanente și a unui sistem de fortificație*, in *România Militară*, no. 2 (February 1930), pp. 52-65.

[30] Ion S. Gheorghe, *Problema fortificației permanente. Cum trebuie privită din punctul nostru de vedere*, in *România Militară*, no. 6-7 (June-July 1930), pp. 132-150.

[31] Traian Ghenoiu, *Probleme noui față de mijloacele moderne de luptă*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1937), pp. 27-40.

[32] Ștefan Corciu, *Influența progresului armamentului asupra câmpului strategic și tactic*, in *România Militară*, no. 1 (January 1930), pp. 24-41.

[33] Ioan Pătroianu, born in 1878, was a different officer from Ioan Petroianu, born in 1889 and quoted earlier; both served in the artillery.

[34] Ioan Pătroianu, *Contribuțiuni la realizarea legăturii infanterie-artilerie*, in *România Militară*, no.

7-8 (July-August 1932), pp. 101-108; no. 9 (September 1932), pp. 96-104; no. 10 (October 1932), pp. 3-23.

[35] Petre Jinga, *Contribuțiuni la problema legăturii dintre infanterie și artilerie*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1930), pp. 113-122.

[36] Constantin Trestioreanu, *Sprijinul atacului de către artilerie*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1923), pp. 475-483.

[37] Ioan Talpeș, *Preocupări pe linia înzestrării armatei române cu tancuri în anii 1935-1939*, in Ilie Ceaușescu (ed.), *File din istoria militară a poporului român*, vol. 1, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 1973, pp. 164-165.

[38] Romulus Scărișoreanu, *Considerațiuni sumare asupra întrebuințării cavaleriei în războiul trecut și în cel viitor*, in *România Militară*, no. 4 (April 1923), pp. 307-324.

[39] Petre Georgescu, *Viitorul Cavaleriei*, in *România Militară*, no. 9 (September 1923), pp. 103-116.

[40] Mihail Racoviță, *Ceva asupra cooperării autoblindatelor și motomitralierelor cu cavaleria*, in *România Militară*, no. 9 (September 1926), pp. 66-75.

[41] Sergiu Dumitrescu, *Rolul și importanța artileriei automobile (Tracțiunea mecanică)*, in *România Militară*, no. 9 (September 1923), pp. 840-847.

[42] Dumitru Vrăjitoru, *Importanța vitezei în operațiunile militare strategice și tactice. Calea ferată în serviciul strategic. Autotracțiunea în serviciul tacticei*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1927), pp. 34-44.

[43] Gheorghe Buicliu, *Scurtă privire asupra progreselor tehnice, realizate pe terenul militar, de la războiul mondial și până astăzi. Influența asupra procedeelor de luptă*, in *România Militară*, no. 3-4 (March-April 1930), pp. 104-122.

[44] Gheorghe E. Popescu, *Moto-mecanizarea la noi*, in *România Militară*, no. 3 (March 1937), pp. 3-11.

[45] Ioan Rudeanu, *Motorizarea armatei: cum este văzută în apus; oportunitate și posibilități la noi*, in *România Militară*, nr. 12 (December 1929), pp. 56-72; *idem*, *Contribuțiuni cu privire la întrebuințarea carelor de luptă la o armată slab dotată*, in *România Militară*, no. 9 (September 1938), pp. 36-54.

[46] Radu Bărbăcioru, *Nevroza motorului*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1938), pp. 81-99.

[47] Iosif Iacobici, *Apărarea contra carelor de luptă și auto-blindatelor din punct de vedere tehnico-tactic și ca problem de instrucție*, in *România Militară*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1934), pp. 91-112; no. 10 (October 1934), pp. 3-25; no. 11 (November 1934), pp. 3-28.

[48] Olimp Curta, *Lupta antitanc cu mijloacele actuale*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1935), pp. 43-60.

[49] Costin Ionașcu, *Artileria și carele de luptă*, in *România Militară*, no. 3 (March 1937), p. 83.

[50] Dumitru Sorescu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul apărării în contra atacurilor unităților motomecanizate*, in *România Militară*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1937), pp. 31-39. In a later article, he demonstrated, step by step, how his concept could be translated into an actual divisional defensive plan on a detailed Sibiu–Alba Iulia map. *Idem*, *Studiul apărării în contra unităților mecanizate. Aplicațiune pe hartă*, in *România Militară*, no. 12 (December 1937), pp. 61-75.

[51] Niculae Ionescu, *Apărarea contra carelor de luptă (Mijloace de apărare)*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1938), pp. 3-18.

[52] Constantin Telemac, *Ideile moderne pentru întrebuințarea aviației ca mijloc de acțiune al armei chimice în faza mobilizării și a concentrării*, in *România Militară*, no. 1 (January 1927), pp. 28-35.

[53] Alexandru Sahini, *Acțiunea directă a aviației în lupta infanteriei*, in *România Militară*, no. 2 (February 1935), pp. 42-66; no. 3 (March 1935), pp. 3-17.

[54] *Idem*, *Politica dominantă și aeronautica militară a unui stat*, in *România Militară*, no. 2 (February 1938), pp. 29-35.

[55] *Idem*, *Noțiuni de strategie aeriană*, in *Revista Aeronauticei și Marinei*, no. 3 (1940), pp. 365-383; no. 4 (1940), pp. 407-442.

[56] Eugeniu Săvulescu, *Aeronautica maritimă*, in *România Militară*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1935), pp. 68-87.

[57] Constantin Telemac, *Problema apărării antiaeriene active a teritoriului național*, in *România Militară*, no. 3 (March 1937), pp. 12-31.

[58] Ioan Negrescu, *Eficacitatea transportului de trupe și bombardamentului aerian în spatele frontului inamic*, in *România Militară*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1937), pp. 40-44.

[59] Emanoil Leoveanu, *Dotarea trupelor combatante și convoiurilor cu armament pentru apărarea contra aviației*, in *România Militară*, no. 3-4 (March-April 1930), pp. 49-55.

[60] Gheorghe E. Popescu, *Arma chimică. Problema protecției populației civile*, in *România Militară*, no. 3-4 (March-April 1930), pp. 71-79.

[61] *Regulamentul de funcționare a Apărării Pasive contra atacurilor aeriene* (*The Regulation of Passive Defence against Air Attacks*), approved by Royal Decree no. 468 of 28 February 1933, published in *Monitorul Oficial al României*, no. 69, 23 March 1933, pp. 1874-1914.

[62] Dumitru B. Popescu, *Pregătirea națiunei pentru războiu*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1924), pp. 17-31.

[63] Marin Manafu, *Pregătirea apărării naționale*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1929), pp. 17-28; no. 7-8 (July-August 1929), pp. 17-32; no. 9 (September 1929), pp. 43-57; no. 10 (October 1929), pp. 47-61.

[64] *Idem*, *Pregătirea economică și financiară a războiului*, in *România Militară*, no. 1 (January 1931), pp. 77-88; no. 2 (February 1931), pp. 54-61.

[65] *Idem*, *Pregătirea industriei de război*, in *România Militară*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1931), pp. 77-89; no. 9 (September 1931), pp. 44-57.

[66] Nicolae Alevra, *Oamenii politici și apărarea națională*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1931), pp. 3-24.

[67] Alexandru Anastasiu, *Pregătirea națiunei pentru apărarea ei în caz de războiu*, in *România Militară*, no. 4 (April 1938), pp. 13-25.

[68] Ioan Rudeanu, *Siguranța în concepția ei actuală*, in *România Militară*, no. 4 (April 1938), pp. 26-39.

[69] Nicolae Alevra, *Problema efectivelor armatei*, in *România Militară*, no. 3-4 (March-April 1934), pp. 3-14.

[70] Gheorghe Preda, S. Cupcea, *Contribuțiuni experimentale la psihologia militară*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1936), pp. 64-82.

[71] Constantin Dragu, *Națiunea armată trebuie înfăptuită prin "armata democrației". Reducerea serviciului militar*, in *România Militară*, no. 1 (January 1925), pp. 17-24; *idem*, *Readucerea serviciului militar activ. Aplicarea principiilor democratice*, in *România Militară*, no. 3 (March 1925), pp. 17-26, a continuation of the same article under a different title.

[72] Dumitru B. Popescu, *Comandamentele teritoriale ca organe de educație națională*, in *România Militară*, no. 8 (August 1923), pp. 784-789.

[73] *Idem*, *Din programul instrucției preregimentare. Un metod pentru formarea sufletului ostașului de mâine*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1930), pp. 84-99; *idem*, *Din programul instrucției preregimentare. Formarea sufletului ostașului de mâine*, in *România Militară*, no. 1 (January 1933), pp. 19-30.

[74] A.B.C., *Nevoia introducerii pregătirii preregimentare la noi*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1929), pp. 43-46. It remains unclear why the author chose to remain anonymous, but his ideas seem very similar to those later presented by General Virgil Economu.

[75] Virgil Economu, *Pregătirea preregimentară*, in *România Militară*, no. 1 (1930), pp. 3-12; no. 5 (1930), pp. 3-11.

[76] Radu Dinulescu, *Masele în războiul viitor*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1927), pp. 32-39.

[77] *Idem*, *Problemul instrucției într-o armată modernă*, in *România Militară*, no. 3-4 (March-April 1930), pp. 140-154.

[78] Bogdan Popa, *Educație fizică, sport și societate în România interbelică*, Eikon Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, p. 74.

[79] Mihail Corbuleanu, *Educația fizică în legătură cu războiul*, in *România Militară*, no. 7 (July 1923), pp. 700-707.

[80] Ioan Filip, *Sporturile și instrucția preregimentară*, in *România Militară*, no. 9 (September 1926), pp. 3-20.

[81] Alexandru Simionescu, *Educația fizică în armată*, in *România Militară*, no. 10 (October 1935), pp. 96-106.

[82] Ioan Bengliu, Ioan Stoka, *Probleme de actualitate. Îndrumarea profesională și selecțiunea, aplicate în învățământul militar*, in *România Militară*, no. 9 (September 1935), pp. 11-32.

[83] Constantin M. Rădulescu, *Realizările psihologiei experimentale și armata*, in *România Militară*, no. 6 (June 1935), pp. 62-76; no. 7-8 (July-August 1935), pp. 46-67; no. 9 (September 1935), pp. 82-105; no. 10 (October 1935), pp. 3-28; no. 11 (November 1935), pp. 45-55.

[84] Nicolae Teodorescu, *Învățăminte trase din războiul mondial cu privire la aprovizionarea trupelor*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1923), pp. 452-474.

[85] Gheorghe Gheorghiu, *Consecințele neorganizării spatelui asupra operațiunilor*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1936), pp. 19-45.

[86] Gabriel Negrei, *Armament și muniții de război*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1924), pp. 22-27.

[87] Eremia Victor, *Organizarea industrială în timp de pace și război pentru aprovizionarea armatei cu armament și muniții*, in *România Militară*, no. 5 (May 1924), pp. 28-32.

[88] Petre Otu, *Evoluția reformei de la un război la altul (1919-1939)*, in Petre Otu (ed.), *Reforma militară și societatea în România (1878-2008). Relaționări externe și determinări naționale*, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, pp. 181, 285.

[89] *Idem*, *Îmbrățișarea anacondei. Politica militară a României în perioada 1 septembrie 1939 - 22 iunie 1941*, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006.

THE LAND WAR OF THE FUTURE IN GERMAN MILITARY JOURNALISM DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD, 1919-1939

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Abstract

From the second half of the nineteenth century into the interwar period, contemporary military journalism in Germany developed into an important medium of military knowledge management and thus into a significant component of a learning organisation. Despite certain constraints, such as the need to protect official secrets, officer-authors discussed issues related to tactics, strategy, technology and the history of war relatively openly and controversially in a variety of military journals. In the years between the two world wars, these authors also engaged in lively debates on the land war of the future. Against the background of experience gained between 1914 and 1918 concerning the totalisation of war and the development of combined-arms warfare, the idea of rapid offensive manoeuvre warfare including modern mechanised or motorised forces became increasingly prevalent in German military thought.

Keywords: *military journalism, learning organisation, land war of the future*

Contemporary military publications, ranging from books to specialist journals, in addition to archival records, have been an indispensable body of sources for research in military history and remain so today. Furthermore, military journalism can also be regarded as a substantial medium of knowledge management and organisational learning within a learning organisation.[1] This topic is part of my book, *Knowledge and War. Tactical Learning of the German Army between 1888 and 1926*. The book examines the German Army as a form of contemporary knowledge manager and as a learning organisation. It investigates the process of organisational learning in terms of the analysis, transfer or distribution, and application of tactical knowledge to warfare. Since this process is also connected with certain patterns of thought and various forms and methods of learning, the study refers to it generally as a culture of learning.[2]

According to my observations, two media played a central role in written intra-military knowledge transfer and exchange within the learning organisation: on the one hand, military reporting, especially after-action reports[3], and, on the other hand, military journalism as an open source, particularly in peacetime. The harsh restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, which basically reduced the Weimar Republic's

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new professional army of 100,000 troops to a lightly armed police force for border protection and domestic operations, with no general staff and no war academy, considerably increased the value of military journalism.[4] Access to international military literature could not be prohibited *per se*. Thus, military journalism allowed German military elites to observe current technological and tactical developments beyond Germany's borders, to discuss them and, ultimately, to analyse them in relation to future warfare with a "modern" army without restrictions.[5] Before outlining the key discussions concerning the land warfare of the future in German military journalism during the interwar period, it seems reasonable to provide a brief overview of military journalism as a contemporary specialist medium in Germany from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards and, in the process, to take a look at the essential requirements that authors had to meet.

Military Journalism and the Essential Requirements for Authorship

"Since the eighteenth century, there has hardly been any social estate or professional group in Germany that has reflected on its own professional activities in writing as consistently and intensively as the Prussian-German officer corps", as the German military historian Markus Pöhlmann rightly emphasises with reference to the community of officer-authors, thereby distancing the officer from the topos of the military elite's alleged educational alienation.[6] Between 1700 and 1945, there were approximately 3,000 periodical publications dealing with military affairs and warfare.[7] From the 1880s onwards, military journalism experienced a real boom in the course of the development of a mass media market in the German Empire.[8] More and more generals published their memoirs. A large number of military reference works, such as officers' handbooks, supplemented the usual regulations of the armed forces and served as training aids into the Weimar Republic. In the course of this expansion, military policy was increasingly discussed publicly in military journals, while the individual service branches established their own periodicals. During the First World War, however, the importance of specialist journals declined considerably. They increasingly functioned as official journals or army reports.[9] Within the armed forces, journals and specialist books were made available through garrison libraries with reading rooms, special officers' libraries or even officers' messes.[10]

As with political journals, the circle of those interested in military journals was relatively small, as were the circulation figures. In the mid-1920s, the circulation of individual journals ranged from 500 to 5,000 copies, for an estimated readership between 20,000 and 50,000. This readership consisted primarily of the officer corps, which comprised around 230,000 members: active officers of the Reichswehr and former officers of the contingent army of the German Empire, who were often organised in associations (former regiments of the Empire). From 1935 onwards, there was a noticeable increase in the number of titles and in circulation figures, which were equal to those before 1914. The semi-official *Militär-Wochenblatt* (*Military Weekly*) was one of the best-known military journals in Germany, even before 1914. In this case, the publisher and the military authorities worked closely together. There was an interdependent relationship between the Ministry of the Reichswehr and the private and semi-official editorial offices of the journals. Thus, the Ministry of the Reichswehr was able to specifically convey its own ideas through military journalism, for example, in order to strengthen the concept of national defence. In the case of analyses of international military publications, it could also rely on the help of the editorial offices. In return, these editorial offices and their journals were able to draw on official sources, such as personnel notices or general army regulations. Especially during the Weimar Republic, journals dealing with military topics were not merely a matter of the officer corps and the army. Political parties such as the Communists and National Socialists also used military publications as instruments of propaganda.[11]

The leading military authorities, such as the Great General Staff and the Prussian Ministry of War during the German Empire, followed by the Ministry of the Reichswehr and, after 1935, the Reich Ministry of War, used these periodicals not only to disseminate their own views within the army but also deliberately as forums for exchanging information and discussing a

wide range of domestic and international experiences. Before 1914, the *Vierteljahreshefte für Truppenführung und Heereskunde* (*Quarterly Journal for the Command and Control of Land Forces and Army Studies*), issued by the Great General Staff, fulfilled an important function in this context. Following the re-establishment of the Army General Staff in 1935, the publication was resumed in 1936 under the title *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau* (*Military Science Review*). Its contents comprised topics related to strategy, military affairs and the history of war.[12] Like the numerous military textbooks, war historiography was, alongside service regulations, an important means of training officers and officer candidates.[13] Officer candidates and officers practised the military decision-making process through an application-oriented study of the history of warfare as a branch of military science in the form of an estimate of the situation that included the formulation of a decision and the issuing of orders.[14]

At the end of the nineteenth century, in the context of increasing military technologisation, a qualitatively new officer corps willing to engage in debate emerged.[15] For officers, it was, of course, impossible to express themselves entirely openly in military publications, not least because of the need to protect official secrets. Censorship was, of course, exercised. In this respect, restrictions were also imposed on publications. Political and, in particular, party-political matters were taboo. Emperor Wilhelm II and his Military Cabinet countered openly expressed criticism with reference to officers' professional duties, which often prevented active officers from participating in such discussions. As in nineteenth-century political journalism, it was therefore customary to use pseudonyms or abbreviations to conceal authorship. By 1902, regulations concerning service law had come into force and remained in effect until 1945. As a rule, active officers were required to indicate their names, ranks and units in their articles. This requirement could be waived if the journal undertook to disclose the author's identity to the Ministry of War upon request. From 1902 onwards, the officer's immediate superior had to be informed; the use of abbreviated names was expressly permitted provided that the author's full name was filed with the editorial office. From 1897 onwards, at the instigation of the Ministry of War and the Great General Staff, certain relaxations were introduced to encourage debate in the journals. According to an All-Highest Cabinet Order, restrictions were henceforth limited to the protection of official secrets, the requirement to obtain the Ministry of War's approval for the use of official material and the Great General Staff's right to censor contributions on military history.[16]

The *Heeresverordnungsblatt* (*Army Ordinance Gazette)* of 1921 further specified particular authorisation requirements, for example, for the use of unpublished official material, the discussion of classified military or official matters and, not least, cases involving financial remuneration. Authorisation was also required for exchanges with representatives of the foreign press and for passing information and articles to domestic correspondents. Political statements were generally prohibited.[17] Despite these restrictions, military journalism was by no means merely a medium for official announcements.[18] It had always remained a medium of controversial domestic military discourse and an important pillar of the learning organisation into the interwar period.

The Image of the Future Land War

The image of war encompasses the concept of war, its manifestations, effects and impact in both the present and the future.[19] A key point of reference is, first and foremost, the experience of past wars – in this context, of course, that of the previous world war. By the mid-1920s, more than 500 German experts on land warfare with extensive wartime experience – active and former General Staff and front-line officers, as well as individual weapons specialists from all ranks and levels of command – had been involved in an evaluation of war experiences conducted by the Troop Office, the covert General Staff within the Ministry of the Reichswehr.[20]

At the same time, military journalism developed into an extremely important medium for the exchange of views on wartime experience and the lessons learned from the war, both at home and abroad. At its core, the First World War had confirmed, in both positional and mobile warfare and within the tactical and operational framework, the central importance

of coordinated, mechanised combined-arms combat, involving tanks, aircraft and poison gas. This highly complex battle required qualified and, at the same time, highly motivated commanders and enlisted personnel (shock group fighters/rangers). It was therefore no coincidence that the new guiding regulation of the German Army was entitled *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* (FuG – *Command and Control and Combined-Arms Combat*).[21] The essential experience of the totalisation of war – that is the involvement of society and the economy in warfare – became apparent at the strategic and political levels. In this context, the term "socialisation of violence", coined by the German historian Michael Geyer, has also become established in international research.[22] In this respect, other authors also speak of the "bellification" of civil society.[23] In short, military affairs were no longer solely a matter for the military but had also become a field of activity for civilian actors.

These experiences of the First World War, combined with concurrent developments abroad, became the focus of discussions among military writers about the war of the future. In the following, however, I will confine myself to ideas concerning land warfare. In general, there was a very strong tendency to regard the war of the future as inevitable and, in particular, as a totalised war.[24] The concepts of totality and total war found their way into military journalism only in the 1930s; until then, the common term was "people's war" (*Volkskrieg*), or the phenomenon was paraphrased as a "struggle for life and death" or a "struggle for existence". The term became more popular, even beyond military circles, after the publication of Erich Ludendorff's eponymous paper, *Der totale Krieg* (*The Total War*) in 1935. This paper, however, was controversial. His plea for the renunciation of Clausewitz's principle of the primacy of politics, in particular, proved to be "a rather inopportune idea" under Hitler's dictatorship. After the First World War, many military writers had called for a strong personality at the head of the state, often in the form of a field commander who was also a political leader. In this context, the primacy of politics was quite a controversial subject. After 1933, however, the discussion noticeably subsided.[25]

The central question was how a totalised war against the principal opponents, France and Poland, could be waged, as this was regarded as the most likely scenario. Ultimately, it was clear that the real army of 100,000 troops – basically a police force without modern weapons systems, established in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles – would be unable to sustain such a war. All ideas concerning a future war were essentially based on plans for a future German Army that would contravene the provisions of the Treaty. Well-known authors, such as the former officer George Soldan and the second head of the Army Command, General of Infantry Hans von Seeckt, who was later promoted to colonel general, anticipated operational manoeuvre warfare by land forces on the basis of highly qualified smaller mechanised professional armies supported by air forces, in order to bring the war to a rapid decision through battles of annihilation and to avoid protracted positional warfare.[26] A reviewer of Soldan's well-known book *Der Mensch und die Schlacht der Zukunft* (1925) came to the following conclusion in the military weekly *Militär-Wochenblatt*:

"The active armies on both sides will open the fighting. They will be small, with longer periods of service, similar to the British Army in 1914. Only such armies will be able to meet the demands of modern manoeuvre warfare. This will be a miracle of mobility. Railways and engines will move this army, air wings will accompany it, while air divisions will carry the war deep into the hinterland. [...] In so far, we are not facing an age of positional warfare but an age of the strategy of annihilation. Those who do not destroy the enemy army in the first weeks of the campaign and do not strike the other's army of millions at its hour of birth will lose the war."[27]

In his writings in favour of such mobile warfare, Seeckt envisaged a professional army of approximately 200,000 troops, which was to be supplemented by a militia in the event of war.[28] However, numerous authors – basically the majority – opposed the preference for smaller professional armies and were sceptical about the operational capabilities of mass conscript armies. Advocates of conscription referred to its evolved political tradition dating from the nineteenth century and to the army

as the "school of the nation". They considered mercenary armies to be historical exceptions that were unsuitable for future wars between entire peoples, especially as, without conscription, there was also a threat of the "demilitarisation of the Germans", as Colonel (ret.) Friedrich Freiherr von der Goltz cautioned in 1931. This controversy ended with the reintroduction of conscription in 1935.[29]

At the official level, mobile warfare based on mechanised combined-arms combat was incorporated into the above-mentioned most important Reich Army regulation, *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* (*Command and Control and Combined-Arms Combat*), issued by Seeckt between 1921 and 1924. In 1933-34, it was adapted to reflect the latest military developments in the regulation *Truppenführung* (*Troop Command*). These regulations were not based solely on the real and legal capabilities of the Reich Army, but explicitly described the conduct of combat operations by an army with "contemporary" equipment, which Germany was, however, forbidden to have.[30] In connection with these central regulations, authors discussed the possibilities of individual forms of combat, such as breaching positions or delaying battle. In this context, particularly in view of developments in France, static warfare based on rigid fortifications and on the methodical and schematic conduct of operations was regarded as out of the question.[31] This was due in no small part to the continued importance of mission-type command and control in Germany, a leadership principle under which subordinate commanders acted largely on their own initiative within the framework of a predetermined intent established by higher command echelons.[32]

While the future of cavalry was the subject of highly controversial discussion, the emergence of engines (lorries, tanks, aircraft) greatly strengthened the position of those who advocated a return to mobility, particularly in an offensive form. It was generally believed that the conduct of offensive operations was the only way to make up for Germany's strategic disadvantages arising from its position in Central Europe. Seeckt continued to adhere to this conviction even during the development phase of the Reichswehr. In his January 1921 memorandum *Grundlegende Gedanken für den Wiederaufbau unserer Wehrmacht* (*Fundamental Thoughts on the Reconstruction of our Wehrmacht*), he stated unequivocally that "less than ever does the salvation of the inferior lie in rigid defence; rather, it lies in mobile attack."[33] Furthermore, motorisation and mechanisation promised to bring wars to a rapid decision, which was also deemed of great importance in the future.[34] Seeckt had already given an order to study international military publications, particularly with regard to combat-vehicle training, in order to make the latest foreign experience quickly available to the army.[35]

From the mid-1920s onwards, German authors followed and discussed debates on tanks abroad with great interest; translations of works by the British authors J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart were published in the magazine *Heerestechnik* (*Army Technology*) in 1925-26. The British concept of independent units consisting of light and medium tanks received particular attention. In a subsequent paper published in *Militär-Wochenblatt* in 1931, Major Heinz Guderian developed the idea of an independent combat vehicle unit with mobile command and control, based on modern communications and supported by motorised artillery and air force. By the outbreak of the Second World War, this view had finally gained acceptance among leading German military experts.[36]

Conclusion

Under the strict requirements of the Treaty of Versailles, the highly diverse field of German military journalism was both an important medium and an indispensable pillar for military learning processes concerning the war of the future. From the late nineteenth century onwards, active and former German officers were able to debate openly all kinds of military issues, subject to the restrictions imposed by official secrecy. This was true not only for the German armed forces but also for the developments abroad, which were closely followed and discussed. The concept of future land warfare was based on the experience of the First World War in connection with the observation and discussion of concurrent developments abroad. War was generally considered inevitable and, according to the prevailing expectation, would develop in a totalised form, i.e. involving society as a whole. Not least because of Germa-

ny's expected continuing strategic disadvantages, German authors preferred a rapid decision in land warfare. This was to be achieved through mobile and offensive warfare based on modern mechanised combined-arms combat – an unrealistic option for the German Army as it then existed. The emergence of motorisation and mechanisation in the conduct of operations from the mid-1920s onwards provided important arguments in support of this view. Heinz Guderian's demand for tank units capable of conducting independent combat operations in combination with motorised artillery and air support proved particularly forward-looking. This principle ultimately prevailed against the backdrop of the revanchist and aggressive foreign policy of National Socialist Germany. It shaped the tactical and operational conduct of warfare by the Wehrmacht during the Second World War. The idea of *blitzkrieg* was the military basis for Adolf Hitler's political intention to conduct the war by means of rapid attack operations.[37]

NOTES

[1] Knowledge management, the learning organisation and organisational learning may be regarded, not least when considered together, as products of the modern knowledge society. There are many theories in this respect. See, for example, Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 2006); Chris Argyris, Donald A. Schön, *Organizational Learning II: Theory, Method, and Practice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996); Helmut Willke, *Einführung in das systemische Wissensmanagement*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed. (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer, 2011). On the knowledge society, see: Marian Füssel, *Wissen: Konzepte – Praktiken – Prozesse*, Historische Einführungen, vol. 19 (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 2021), 12. Contemporary armed forces also draw on scholarly findings and seek to integrate them into their organisational cultures. For the German Bundeswehr, see, for example, Bundesministerium der Verteidigung (Managemententwicklung), *Wissensmanagement*, Fachkonzept K-3101/3 (Berlin, 2019).

[2] Christian Stachelbeck, *Wissen und Krieg. Taktisches Lernen des deutschen Heeres 1888-1926*, Zeitalter der Weltkriege, vol. 27 (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2026). In Anglophone scholarship, military learning and adaptation have received considerably greater historiographical attention than in German scholarship. See, for example, Michael A. Hunzeker, *Dying to Learn: Wartime Lessons from the Western Front* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2021), and Frank G. Hoffman, *Mars Adapting: Military Change During War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2021). On the general importance of culture within military organisations, see Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray (eds.), *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[3] For a recent study of lessons-learned reports, see Christian Stachelbeck, *Erfahrungsberichte: Ein Medium des formalen Wissenstransfers und Wissensaustausches im deutschen Heer zwischen 1890 und 1918*, in Christian Kehrt, Markus Pöhlmann, Frank Reichherzer (eds.), *Technikwissen und Wissenstechniken: Konstellationen von Militär, Wissen und Technik seit der Hochmoderne*, Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte, vol. 85 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2026), pp. 107-134. Such reports were also used in peacetime in various forms, both in army training and in the evaluation of military operations in the colonies.

[4] *Treaty of Versailles*, Part V, *Military, Naval and Air Clauses*, Section I, Chapters I-III, including Tables I-III, and Section III, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles/Part_5, last accessed on 8 January 2026.

[5] See Markus Pöhlmann, *Wie und was lernte das Militär in Deutschland aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg?*, in Rudolf Jaun, Michael M. Olsansky, Sandrine Picaud-Monnerat, Adrian Wettstein (eds.), *An der Front und hinter der Front: Der Erste Weltkrieg und seine Gefechtsfelder / Au front et à l'arrière: La Première Guerre mondiale et ses champs de bataille* (Baden: Hier und Jetzt, 2015), pp. 157-174. See also Markus Pöhlmann, *Anonyme und pseudonyme Militärliteratur im deutschsprachigen Raum 1848-2000: Zum mediengeschichtlichen Phänomen und zur Forschungsproblematik*, Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift, vol. 69, no. 1 (2010), pp. 80-95, at p. 90.

[6] Markus Pöhlmann, *Die Militärfachzeitschrift in Deutschland – eine Einführung*, in Markus Pöhlmann (ed.), *Deutsche Militärfachzeitschriften im 20. Jahrhundert*, Potsdamer Schriften zur Militärgeschichte, vol. 17 (Potsdam: Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 2012), pp. 7-12, at p. 7. On the alleged remoteness of German officers from education and intellectual culture, see, for example, Detlef Bald, *Einführende Bemerkungen*, in Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (eds.), *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999), pp. 349-358. On the development of military journalism in Germany see also the earlier study by Helmut Schnitter, that is, however, rooted in Marxist-Leninist historiography: *Militärwesen und Militärpublizistik: Die*

militärische Zeitschriftenpublizistik in der Geschichte des bürgerlichen Militärwesens in Deutschland, Militärhistorische Studien, vol. 9 (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1967).

[7] Christian Haller, *Die deutschen Militärfachzeitschriften 1918-1933: Ein medienhistorischer Überblick*, in Markus Pöhlmann (ed.), *Deutsche Militärfachzeitschriften im 20. Jahrhundert*, Potsdamer Schriften zur Militärgeschichte, vol. 17 (Potsdam: Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 2012), pp. 25-35, at p. 25.

[8] Wilhelm Müller-Loebnitz, *Kriegsgeschichte und Kriegsgeschichtsschreibung*, in Georg Wetzell (ed.), *Die Deutsche Wehrmacht 1914-1939: Rückblick und Ausblick* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1939), pp. 647-680, at pp. 670-674. See also Waldemar Erfurth, *Der Oberquartiermeister für Kriegsgeschichte: Das Entstehen seiner Organisation und seine Aufgaben*, paper of November 1947, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau (BArch), N 257/5, fols. 3-5.

[9] Markus Pöhlmann, *Die Militärfachzeitschrift in Deutschland*, p. 10. See also Christian Th. Müller, *Militärfachzeitschriften im Deutschen Kaiserreich und das Lernen aus zeitgenössischen Kriegen*, in Markus Pöhlmann (ed.), *Deutsche Militärfachzeitschriften*, pp. 13-24. For a recent discussion, see Markus Pöhlmann, *Wehr und Waffen, Militärzeitschriften im Prozess der Verwissenschaftlichung und der Technisierung des Militärs in Deutschland zwischen 1871 und 1945*, in Christian Kehrt, Markus Pöhlmann, Frank Reichherzer (eds.), *Technikwissen und Wissenstechniken*, pp. 73-92, at p. 82.

[10] Christian Haller, *Militärzeitschriften in der Weimarer Republik und ihr soziokultureller Hintergrund: Kriegsverarbeitung und Milieubildung im Offizierkorps der Reichswehr in publizistischer Dimension*, Geschichte & Kultur: Saarbrücker Reihe, vol. 1 (Trier: Kliomedia, 2012), pp. 147-148.

[11] Haller, *Die deutschen Militärfachzeitschriften*, pp. 26-27; Haller, *Militärzeitschriften*, pp. 84-89, 199; Markus Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon: Totalisierungserfahrung und Kriegserwartung in deutschen Militärzeitschriften'*, in: Stig Förster (ed.), *An der Schwelle zum Totalen Krieg: Die militärische Debatte über den Krieg der Zukunft 1919-1939*, Krieg in der Geschichte, vol. 13 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), pp. 323-391, at pp. 327-329; Wilhelm Velten, *Das deutsche Reichsheer und die Grundlagen seiner Truppenführung: Entwicklung, Hauptprobleme und Aspekte: Untersuchungen zur deutschen Militärgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit* (PhD diss., Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 1982), pp. 291-298.

[12] See Müller, *Militärfachzeitschriften*, pp. 13-17; Markus Pöhlmann, *Between Manchuria and the Marne: The German Army and its Perception of the Military Conflicts of 1911-1914*, in Dominik Geppert, William Mulligan and Andreas Rose (eds.), *The Wars before the Great War: Conflict and International Politics before the Outbreak of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 204-229, at pp. 207-208; Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon*, pp. 328-329, 334, 363-364. See also Haller, *Militärzeitschriften*, p. 247.

[13] For lessons at the war schools of the German Empire see *Leitfaden für den Unterricht in der Taktik auf den Königlichen Kriegsschulen*, 17th ed. (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1912), section *Angeführte Werke*; Müller, *Militärfachzeitschriften,* pp. 13-17. Research has not yet determined whether the officers read military expert literature in their spare time. Christian T. Müller suspects that they might have done so sporadically. Wilhelm Groener confirms this. According to Groener, young officers in particular initially wanted none of the "book stuff from school" during troop assignments and were more concerned with their daily military duties. It was only after they had become more familiar with the routine of line service that they once again felt an increasing need for further education through reading. See Wilhelm Groener, *Lebenserinnerungen: Jugend, Generalstab, Weltkrieg*, ed. by Friedrich Hiller von Gaertringen, Deutsche Geschichtsquellen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, vol. 41 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), pp. 46-47.

[14] See, for example, General der Panzertruppe Erich Brandenberger, *Der Deutsche Generalstab* (1949), extracts published in Othmar Hackl (ed.), *Generalstab, Generalstabsdienst und Generalstabsausbildung in der Reichswehr und Wehrmacht 1919-1945: Studien deutscher Generale und Generalstabsoffiziere in der Historical Division der US Army in Europa 1946-1961* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1999), pp. 200-226, at. pp. 214-215, 218. The original manuscript is held at Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau, BArch, ZA 1/1879.

[15] Pöhlmann, *Wehr und Waffen*, p. 81.

[16] Müller, *Militärfachzeitschriften*, pp. 13-17. See also Markus Pöhlmann, *Anonyme und pseudonyme Militärliteratur im deutschsprachigen Raum 1848-2000: Zum mediengeschichtlichen Phänomen und zur Forschungsproblematik*, Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift, vol. 69, no. 1 (2010), pp. 80-95, at pp. 85-88; Karl Demeter, *Das deutsche Offizierkorps in Gesellschaft und Staat 1650-1945,* 2nd rev. and substantially expanded ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1962), pp. 153-155.

[17] *Heeres-Verordnungsblatt*, 3rd year, no. 43, item 480 (Berlin, 25 July 1921).

[18] Markus Pöhlmann, *Die gläsernen Bienen verstehen: Militär und Technik im Weltkrieg 1914-18*, in Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Rheinland-Pfalz (Rhineland-Palatinate Agency for Civic Education) (ed.), *Zeitenwende: 100 Jahre Erster Weltkrieg*

(Mainz: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Rheinland-Pfalz, 2014), pp. 47-71, at p. 53.

[19] See Florian Reichenberger, *Der gedachte Krieg: Vom Wandel der Kriegsbilder in der Bundeswehr*, Sicherheitspolitik und Streitkräfte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, vol. 13 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), pp. 33-66.

[20] James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and the German Military Reform*, Modern War Studies (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), pp. 38-39; for the development of the use of air forces, in particular, see pp. 144-168.

[21] See Reichswehrministerium, *H.Dv. 487: Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen (F.u.G.): Neudruck der Ausgabe 1921 bis 1924 in 3 Teilen*, with an introduction by Karl-Volker Neugebauer, Bibliotheca Rerum Militarium, vol. 53 (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1994). The regulation was originally issued in instalments. Part 1, published in 1921, was entitled *Druckvorschriftenplan* (D.V.Pl.). Parts 2 and 3 followed in 1923-1924, entitled *Heeresdruckvorschrift H.Dv.* Reprints of the regulation were published in 1926, 1927 and 1930. See also Matthias Strohn, *The German Army and the Defence of the Reich: Military Doctrine and the Conduct of the Defensive Battle, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 111. *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen (F.u.G.)* remained in force unchanged until 1933 and was subsequently replaced by *H.Dv. 300/1, Truppenführung (T.F.) (Army Regulation 300/1 Command and Control of Land Forces).* On the development of German military regulations, see Marco Sigg, *Der Unterführer als Feldherr im Taschenformat: Theorie und Praxis der Auftragstaktik im deutschen Heer 1869 bis 1945*, Zeitalter der Weltkriege, vol. 12 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), pp. 54-67.

[22] Michael Geyer, *Der zur Organisation erhobene Burgfrieden: Heeresrüstung und das Problem des Militarismus in der Weimarer Republik*, in Klaus-Jürgen Müller and Eckardt Opitz (eds.), *Militär und Militarismus in der Weimarer Republik: Beiträge eines internationalen Symposiums an der Hochschule der Bundeswehr Hamburg am 5. Und 6. Mai 1977* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1978), pp. 15-100.

[23] Frank Reichherzer, *"Alles ist Front!". Wehrwissenschaften in Deutschland und die Bellifizierung der Gesellschaft vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis in den Kalten Krieg*, Krieg in der Geschichte, vol. 68 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012).

[24] Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon*, pp. 351-352. An essential work in this context remains Wilhelm Deist, *Die Reichswehr und der Krieg der Zukunft*, Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen, vol. 45, no. 1 (1989), pp. 81-92.

[25] Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon*, pp. 346-351; Erich Ludendorff, *Der totale Krieg* (Munich: Ludendorffs Verlag, 1935). On Ludendorff, see Manfred Nebelin, *Ludendorff: Diktator im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Siedler, 2010).

[26] For a recent discussion of Hans von Seeckt, see Stachelbeck, *Wissen und Krieg*. See also Karen Schaefer, *German Military and the Weimar Republic: General Hans von Seekt, General Erich Ludendorff and the Rise of Hitler* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2020); and Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare: Operational Thinking from Moltke the Elder to Heusinger*, ed. by David T. Zabecki, Foreign Military Studies (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

[27] *Der Mensch und die Schlacht der Zukunft*, Militär-Wochenblatt, vol. 110, no. 30 (11 February 1926), pp. 1066-1067, at p. 1067.

[28] *Denkschrift von Seeckts zur Heeresorganisation (Seeckt's Memorandum on Army Organisation)*, 17 February 1919, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau, BArch, N 247/77, fols. 9-10. See also Strohn, *The German Army*, pp. 93, 102-106.

[29] Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon*, pp. 355-358.

[30] Stachelbeck, *Wissen und Krieg*.

[31] Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon*, pp. 358-361.

[32] For a recent study, see Stachelbeck, *Wissen und Krieg*. See also Sigg, *Der Unterführer,* and Gerhard P. Groß, *Myth and Reality: The history of Auftragstaktik in the German Army*, in Palle Ydstebø and Tommy Jeppsson (eds.), *Mission Command – Wishful Thinking?* (Stockholm: Kungl. Krigsvetenskapsakademien, 2018).

[33] Hans von Seeckt, *Grundlegende Gedanken für den Wiederaufbau unserer Wehrmacht* (*Fundamental Thoughts on the Reconstruction of our Wehrmacht)*, 14 January 1921, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau, BArch, N 247/139, fol. 5.

[34] Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon*, pp. 359-363. On the general role of tanks in the considerations of the Army Command during the interwar period, see Markus Pöhlmann, *Der Panzer und die Mechanisierung des Krieges: Eine deutsche Geschichte 1890 bis 1945*, Zeitalter der Weltkriege, vol. 14 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), pp. 131-275.

[35] Chef der Heeresleitung, O2 No. 1264/24 geh., in 6 (6), Leutnant Volckheim, Betr.: *Kampfwagenausbildung im Heere* (Subject: *Combat Vehicle Training in the Army*), August 1924, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau, BArch, RH 12-2/51; Pöhlmann, *Der Panzer*, p. 157.

[36] Pöhlmann, *Von Versailles nach Armageddon*, pp. 361-366; for detailed discussions of the individual debates on the use of tanks, see Pöhlmann, *Der Panzer*, pp. 157-170, 185-206, 244-251.

[37] See Karl-Heinz Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012).

ASPECTS REGARDING ROMANIAN-GERMAN COOPERATION DURING THE OPERATION FOR THE CONQUEST OF ODESSA, AUGUST-OCTOBER 1941*

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Abstract

The study examines Romanian-German military cooperation during the siege of Odessa (August-October 1941), highlighting the difficulties of collaboration between the two allies on the Eastern Front. The documents analysed demonstrate that the initial refusal of German military support, followed by its limited acceptance, generated tensions within the military and political leadership. Despite these divergences, cooperation between the two armies was strengthened in the final phase of the operation, with the involvement of German aviation, artillery and engineer units, contributing to the success of the offensive and the occupation of Odessa. The author concludes that the battle for Odessa represented the first major test of the Romanian-German alliance and a defining moment for the evolution of relations between the two partners in the war against the Soviet Union.

Keywords: *German – Romanian relations during World War II, Romania in World War II, Romanian Army on the Eastern Front (1941-1944)*

Former Enemy, Current Ally

All the wars in which Romania participated, since the creation of the modern Romanian state in 1859, were coalition wars. Each time, Romania entered a conflict on the side of great powers against other great powers. In a coalition war, the image of the ally or allies is very important, for obvious reasons. For Romania, in all the wars in which it participated, the most difficult thing was to build, between 1941 and 1944, an image of Germany as the main

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ally and supporter of the existence of the Romanian state.

This difficulty came from the still vivid memory of World War I, with the Germans as the main enemy, the adversary in the battles of Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz. Only two decades had passed since the publication of Virgiliu Drăghiceanu's book, *707 Days Under the Culture of the German Fist*, which had depicted in unflattering colours the occupation of the Central Powers in Romania between 1916 and 1918[1]. The Romanian military authorities recognised in the spring of 1941 that feelings regarding Germany were divided. For the Germans, things were just as complicated. Throughout the interwar period, Romania had been regarded as a beneficiary of the Treaty of Versailles. To make things even more complicated, the loss of a significant part of Transylvania in the summer of 1940 had been the result of an arbitration, which Romanian public opinion considered a real diktat, in which Germany had played a decisive role.

The German perception of the Romanians emerges very clearly from a memorandum of the First Counterintelligence Section of the Special Intelligence Service (SSI), dated 29 November 1940 and suggestively entitled "What is Romania and what can it become?": "The Carpathians divide Romania into two fundamentally different regions," the preamble of the report stated. "Transylvania and Banat are marked by Central European influence, Muntenia, Moldova and the Danube Delta region are, on the contrary, Oriental-Asian. Up to the Arc of the Carpathians, for ten centuries, the civilisation of the empire penetrates. On the other side of the Carpathians, it was not possible to evolve in the same way, here begins a space with confused forms of existence, without specific features, depending on the colonial manner exercised from the outside. Wallachia and Moldavia were the no man's land" of the German, Turkish and Russian empires, becoming autonomous temporarily, only at the discretion of these powers. The Romanian nation, even today, is nothing more than a legend of historical records. Until the nineteenth century there was in Wallachia no more than a vegetative life, of peasants and shepherds, the population barely exceeding one million people, not individualising in its social strata and, even less, no leaders emerging within society, this patriarchal way of living being destined to fulfil the strict needs of the individual. The way of life of this people was influenced, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, by the emergence of the European industrial system that transformed the steppe into arable land. The economic leap recorded, as in all primitive societies, was due to population growth. The result was a substantial number of large landowners, an oppressive class with no connection with the land or with the working masses, and one could not speak in these conditions of a people, therefore not even of a nation. Beyond the analysis itself, such a vision dramatically influenced an alliance in which, obviously, according to Bismarck's metaphor, there was a horse and a rider[2].

In the spring of 1941, when the preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union were advanced and the Romanian Army was expected to participate, in one form or another, in this war, there were rather unfavourable perceptions in Berlin regarding the Romanian Army and its operational (in)capabilities. All these gloomy reports made Adolf Hitler declare on 30 March 1941: "Nothing can be done with the Romanians. Perhaps, behind a very strong obstacle (river) they could provide defence where there is no attack. Antonescu increased his army, instead of reducing and improving it. The fate of large German units must not be dependent on the resistance of Romanian units."[3]

The victory obtained at the beginning of the war, when Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were liberated after the territorial concessions in the summer of 1940, strengthened the Romanian-German cooperation, especially at the command level. Antonescu was aware, however, that this victory was due to a large extent to the German troops and less to the Romanian Army, which, however, had suffered quite heavy losses during the operation. When, on

27 July, Adolf Hitler asked him to continue military operations beyond the Dniester, Ion Antonescu did not refuse him, declaring that "he will go to the end", that "he would not impose any conditions and would not discuss this military cooperation in a new territory at all", that he had "full confidence in the justice that Führer and Chancellor Adolf Hitler would do to the Romanian people".[4]

Accepting this request, Ion Antonescu said that he was doing so in order to secure Germany's support for the restoration of the country's western border. Apart from the strategic arguments, he invoked reasons of loyalty to the German ally, which had contributed to the liberation of the territories occupied by the Soviet Union a year earlier, confessing that "it would have been a dishonour for us to have gone to the Dniester and then say to the Germans: goodbye!"[5]



Colonel General Eugen Ritter von Schobert, commander of the German 11th Army (5 October 1940 - 12 September 1941), part of Army Group South, under whose command Romanian troops also fought during the initial phase of Operation Barbarossa

Source: Ottmar Trașcă, Valentin Orga, Adrian Boda, József Benkő (editors), *Armata română pe Frontul de Est în imagini (1941-1944)*, (Romanian Army on the Eastern Front in Photographs, 1941-1944), Argonaut Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2021

A Prolonged Siege

Although it is generally known that Romanian-German relations steadily deteriorated after the defeats at the Don Bend and the Kalmyk Steppe, during the battle for Stalingrad, the protracted campaign in Odessa gave rise to the first tensions between Germany and its main ally on the Eastern Front. The decision to occupy Odessa exclusively through the effort of the Romanian troops belonged to General Antonescu, and the military leaders in Berlin did not raise any objections, in the light of the encirclement operations in the Kyiv area that they were carrying out in August 1941.

Although the Wehrmacht's communiqués of 15 August triumphantly announced the encirclement of the cities of Nikolaev and Odessa[6], the Germans were beginning to realise that the Romanian armed forces were not capable of carrying out the siege without help. On 20 August, General Eugen von Schobert[7], commander of the German 11th Army, which at that time was operating between the Bug and the Dniester, asked General Arthur Hauffe[8], the head of the German Military Mission, which was tactically subordinated to him, to discuss with the Romanian side some issues regarding the situation in Odessa. As the command of the 11th Army was supposed to function as the "operational staff" of Ion Antonescu, the supreme commander of the Romanian-German armies, Hauffe was the liaison officer with the Romanian Army, being present in the "Patria" command train. Von Schobert specified that, given the passage of the Bug by the German 11th Army, he wanted "to know very precisely what the prospects of the attack were". Consequently, he was interested in finding out when the Romanian General Headquarters

expected the city to be conquered, whether the Romanian forces were sufficient, whether German help would be desirable, and whether it was not advisable for the artillery in the main breakthrough sector to be entrusted to a German officer.

The head of the German Military Mission discussed on the same day with Antonescu and the chief of the Romanian General Staff, General Alexandru Ioanițiu[9], the problems raised by von Schobert, communicating to his superiors in the evening: "The conquest of Odessa will be hastened by all means. It is assumed that its occupation will take place *at the latest* [emphasis in original] at the beginning of September". Marshal Antonescu thanked for the proposal for help from the German forces, which he refused, considering that the Romanian Army was sufficient. However, he would have wanted support from the German air force to neutralise the Soviet fleet. He did not even accept the appointment of a German artillery commander[10]. He was still optimistic about the Romanian Army's ability to quickly conquer Odessa. The next day, on 21 August, Marshal Antonescu informed Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt that "later, after the occupation of Odessa, I will be able to organise an ammunition and fuel supply base on the Bug, in the Vosniesjensk region".[11]

Dissatisfied with the answer received, on the evening of 21 August, the General Staff of the OKH asked the head of the military mission a direct question, to which it requested an immediate answer: were the Romanians in a position to conquer Odessa on their own and, if not, what would have been the necessary support from the Germans, the telegram specifying that "the hasty occupation of Odessa is of decisive significance for the supply of the 11th Army". Hauffe talked to Antonescu. The marshal, probably out of a desire not to refuse help too categorically again, agreed to bring in German troops. On 22 August, Hauffe communicated that the Romanian Army was capable of carrying out its mission with its own forces until 2 September; to hasten the occupation of Odessa, the following German forces would have been needed: an artillery regimental staff and two heavy artillery sections, a pioneer battalion with two companies, a fighter aircraft group, a bomber aircraft group and two anti-aircraft heavy artillery sections[12].

The Romanian Army resumed the attack on 23 August. Antonescu hoped to put his ally in front of the *fait accompli*, without the need for the German units that he had requested more as a matter of courtesy. But the operations did not achieve the expected success. On 27 August 1941, General Hauffe telegraphed in an indignant tone to the Chief of the Romanian General Staff, General Ioanițiu: "In the interest of supplying the 11th Army, it is necessary to quickly conquer Odessa. I ask you to act so that the attack and conquest of the city will certainly begin today at 28.VIII, in the morning. Please allow me to point out, based on the experience of the war, that attacking troops should be assigned objectives extending far away and intermediate objectives, that the artillery fire of the attacking units should be used to support their impetuous advance, and that air power should be employed at points of main effort. It is appropriate to throw even more leaflets at Odessa and to instruct the attacking troops on the need to carry out a breakthrough attack as soon as possible, in the interest of overall (joint) operations."[13] It is difficult to specify how much and how the Romanian side took into account this advice that was based on the "experience of the war"; it is possible that, feeling offended, in his capacity as head of the Romanian General Headquarters and senior in rank, Ioanițiu overlooked these "indications".

The Germans Insist: the City Must Fall

On 3 and 5 September 1941, General Hauffe presented an assessment on the situation in Odessa at the Romanian General Headquarters, and General Ioanițiu informed the Ministry of War and General Antonescu about the details. "Despite the initial signs of disorganisation and demoralisation observed recently, the Russian infantry is still fighting fiercely,"[14] said the Head of the German Military Mission, who assessed the offensive value of the Soviet troops as low, but the defensive value still high,

supported by "improvised defensive positions, skilfully organised, and the area conducive to a long defence.

At the end of his presentation, with a slight accent of reproach, General Hauffe concluded: "The Romanian command declined the help of a German division that had been offered to it, in the desire to carry out the operations for the conquest of Odessa alone and not to immobilise German forces in this part, as long as they were necessary for the continuation of operations in the East. We are not abandoning our determination to carry out the operations through to their conclusion, nor are we considering sparing our forces or reducing the sacrifices, just as we did not hesitate for a moment to provide everything that has been requested since the beginning of the campaign as a Romanian contribution to the ongoing war. But we must not hide the risk we have that the operations around Odessa will go slower and slower and maybe even stagnate, which would be to the disadvantage of the general situation of the Southern German front and the supply of this front."[15]

On the evening of 4 September, General Hauffe sent the Land Army Command a detailed telegram regarding the "situation in Odessa", in which he tried to explain the failure. He stated that Marshal Antonescu had intended to conquer Odessa only with Romanian forces, at most with a limited participation of German forces, "not so much for reasons of prestige as in the interest of the common cause". Given the enemy's situation (landings of reinforcements and matériel, construction of barricades, the deployment of naval artillery, air forces operating, including from Crimea), Hauffe was of the opinion that a quick conquest of Odessa was no longer possible, and the intervention of the German air force, possibly also of the five requested pioneer battalions, was absolutely necessary. Regarding the way the Romanian allies fought, Hauffe remarked: "The command corps was not up to the task; the Romanian soldiers lived up to expectations[16]."



Bucharest, 2 December 1940. King Michael I and the commander of the German Military Mission in Romania, General of the Cavalry Erik Hansen, attend the parade of German troops on the occasion of Romania's accession to the Tripartite Pact

Source: Ottmar Trașcă, Valentin Orga, Adrian Boda, József Benkő (editors), *Armata română pe Frontul de Est în imagini (1941-1944)*, (Romanian Army on the Eastern Front in Photographs, 1941-1944), Argonaut Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2021

On 9 September, after a conversation with the German ambassador in Bucharest, von Killinger[17], Mihai Antonescu stated: "he asked me whether we considered that he should provide us with armaments or special troops during the battle of Odessa, in order to reduce the losses, the Russian weapons and the strategic conditions being advantageous to Russia. I drew Minister Killinger's attention to the fact that an air action, well supported in the port of Odessa, which would have disrupted communications and prevented the arrival of new forces, could indeed have facilitated the action of the Romanian Army. The situation on the Odessa front is very favourable for us, and that only a pioneer unit and special troops necessary for the assault on Odessa are useful in today's conditions."[18] As Mihai Antonescu did not have authority regarding military operations, the response received by the German ambassador reflected the point of view of the Head of State.

The Marshal's somewhat ambiguous opinions are clearly revealed by this exchange of documents. Had German aid become "decisive" or not? Interestingly, both the Germans, through General Hauffe's statements, and Marshal Antonescu emphasised the military interest, "and especially the political one" in the conquest of Odessa. On 8 September, under the command of Lieutenant General L'Homme de Courbiere (directly subordinate to Marshal Antonescu) were the following German forces: an infantry regiment with two battalions, a pioneer regimental staff, four pioneer battalions, an artillery regimental staff, a heavy artillery section with four batteries, two coastal artillery sections (each with three batteries) and a reconnaissance[19] company. The effective Romanian-German cooperation began on 3 September, when the German 70th Pioneer Battalion acted alongside the Romanian troops at Vakarjani[20]. These troops were joined by a dive bomber squadron (which attacked Soviet troop carriers on several occasions) and part of a bomber squadron equipped with Heinkel 111 aircraft, which acted against the enemy landing on 22 September east of Kujalnik Lake[21]. These units belonged to the 4th Air Corps detached from Army Group South[22].

The successful Soviet landing on the night of 21-22 September led to a crisis in the Romanian command structure, Antonescu deciding to suspend the attack and place the Romanian 4th Army on the defensive. The decision displeased the Germans, who viewed the Odessa campaign from a much broader perspective, in connection with the 11th Army's offensive into Crimea. On 24 September, at noon, in the command train "Patria", stationed at Tighina, the situation was analysed and Marshal Antonescu, General Iacobici[23], General Pălăngeanu[24] (deputy chief of the General Headquarters), General Hauffe and Major General Zoeller (chief of the operations section of the General Staff of the German Military Mission) participated. Before the meeting, Antonescu decorated Hauffe with the Order "Mihai Viteazul" 2nd class, the latter expressing his "regret that this distinction was not connected with the fall of Odessa and stating that he was deeply moved". Then the Head of State presented the situation of the Romanian 5th Army Corps, showing that the Soviets, using troops brought from the Caucasus and new "English and American" combat matériel, demonstrated an "unwavering ability to attack", while the Romanian troops suffered heavy losses and also faced great difficulties due to shortages of ammunition. He then suggested that "a decisive impetus was required by engaging the German infantry on the front line", while the German troops under Courbiere were "being kept in reserve", although he himself had ordered, when the Allied troops entered the deployment area, that they should be used only in the second or even the final phase, especially against the enemy's reinforced points[25].

In reply, Hauffe wanted to emphasise the importance of Odessa in relation to the other operations of Army Group South. In order to "restore the confidence of the Romanians again", he specified that the German air force attacks would make it impossible for the Soviet fleet to maintain the existing volume of maritime traffic. In conclusion, "he expressed his regret that, despite all the preparations made, a final effort could not be undertaken.

Perhaps the 4th Army is about to abandon the fight just before victory is achieved. Instead, by suspending the attack, the situation of the Russians could suddenly change; if there were no further pressure on Odessa, they would fully regain freedom of movement." But Antonescu was not convinced. The attack was to be resumed only when "strong German aid" arrived[26]. The attitude of the Romanians created a state of disappointment within the German Military Mission. "It was suspected that, apart from the reasons given by Antonescu, there were others motives of a political nature."[27]

An important source on how the German High Command was tracking the evolution of the campaign for the Battle of Odessa is the daily entries of General Franz Halder, at that time Chief of Staff of the Land Army (OKH).

On 26 September, Halder received General Hauffe at East Prussian Headquarters, Antonescu's refusal to resume the offensive arousing discontent at the OKH. After the meeting, Halder noted: "General Hauffe reports on the situation in Odessa. Two days ago, Antonescu finally decided to request German assistance. Romanians cannot occupy Odessa alone. He wants: a) troops and b) air support. Hauffe estimates the required assistance at two infantry divisions, three or even four light artillery battalions, a reconnaissance battalion, a fully equipped corps headquarters, a battalion of rocket launchers and air support."[28]

General Hauffe also provided details of his discussion with Halder: "Around 6 p.m., I went to the operations department. There I met the head of the department in the corridor. He told me that the Chief of Staff is very upset because German forces were now needed to take Odessa. This should have been done a long time ago. Apparently, for reasons of prestige and internal politics, Marshal Antonescu did not want German troops to be placed at his disposal until now, although they had been offered to him (54th Army Corps, 50th and 170th Divisions); Antonescu had probably wanted to become a marshal by the end of August, convincing his people that he was able to do it [to conquer Odessa] alone with his army. And here, at the OKH headquarters, as at the OKW, this is believed"[331]. Hauffe opposed this view, arguing that Antonescu "was the only one who, without any conditions and without any restraint, placed his army at the disposal of the Führer. This is not a matter of prestige; he refused German support so as not to weaken their offensive power in the East."[29]

Prestige or Pride?

On 5 October 1941, Adolf Hitler addressed a letter to Marshal Antonescu, in which, after praising the actions of the Romanian 3rd Army as "valuable", he added: "The fact that you have not expressed any desire to be given German support for the attack on Odessa, when all the German forces were engaged in heavy fighting, I appreciate this very much. Now, however, after the huge victory in Kyiv, in order to ease the Romanian troops' attack on Odessa and to spare lives there, I think it is necessary to provide this front with additional heavy artillery depending on the situation and a (whole) infantry division after it becomes available. In connection with this, I believe that first of all it is necessary to advance from the northeast, therefore in the sector of your 5th Army Corps, so close to the gorge located near the sea and on this gorge, that the port facilities can be taken under the most concentrated artillery fire. The consequences of this approach will also have a profound effect on the situation of the north-western front as it will prevent any appreciable reinforcement and resupply of the enemy by sea. Also, the purely psychological effects of the destruction of the enemy's major logistical city should not be underestimated.

Based on these considerations, I propose that the German units currently deployed on the northwestern front be regrouped into the 5th Army Corps and that, after the arrival of the German artillery reinforcements, the attack should be resumed there until the port of Odessa can be brought under artillery fire. I have instructed Field Marshal von Rundstedt to liaise with you, Marshal Antonescu, in order to coordinate the orders to be given to the

Romanian and German forces in Odessa under your supreme command."[30]

In the end, it was not necessary to introduce other German units into the battle, as the Soviets put up only weak resistance on 15 October, when the Romanian troops resumed the offensive. The reports of the German High Command of 16 October began with this announcement[31], which demonstrates the importance of the event even for decision-makers in Berlin. The final communiqué of the day announced that "The 4th Romanian Army conquered Odessa today, 16.10.1941, at 3 p.m. after the Soviet troops withdrew from the city".[32] General Halder himself telegraphed to General Iacobici, declaring himself "delighted with the successful completion of the conquest of Odessa and conveying "the most sincere congratulations to your excellency and to the bravery of the Romanian Army".[33] In turn, Marshal Antonescu wrote to General Hauffe, in response to a congratulatory telegram: "Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the words you sent me on the occasion of the victory at Odessa. In these days of great joy and glory, all my thoughts of gratitude turn to the German troops, who have embarked on the holy struggle against slavery."[34]

The question remains as to why the German leadership decided not to get involved with forces in the siege of Odessa from the beginning, and the key to the answer lies in the role that the city played in the German operational plans. Initially, it was believed that the numerical superiority of the Romanian 4th Army would be sufficient for an easy victory. Some have suggested that the German ally's dissatisfaction was merely formal. The Romanian 4th Army had no role in the architecture of the front after Odessa fell. Thus, the German leadership considered that it would serve the useful task of tying down Soviet troops with great combat capability in this sector, the lack of which would be felt on other fronts. From this point of view, the more reinforcements the Soviets brought to Odessa, the better, provided that they were not so strong that they could launch a rear attack against the flank of Army Group South, a fear expressed by the Romanian command (probably to emphasise the need for more consistent air support), but not shared by the Germans[35].

Romanian-German relations during the campaign to conquer Odessa were characterised by Berlin's distrust of the Romanian Army's ability to conquer the city, a perception that deepened as the attacks failed. Antonescu saw the conquest of Odessa as a matter of prestige, and his behaviour was contradictory: on the one hand he refused, at one point, to continue the attack without German support, and on the other hand he hesitated to accept assistance that included infantry troops, precisely to preserve the glory of the conquest of the city for the Romanian Army and, naturally, for himself.

NOTES

[1] Virgiliu N. Drăghiceanu, *707 zile subt cultura pumnului german* (707 Days Under the Culture of the German Fist), Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1920.

[2] Manuel Stănescu, *O alianță sub semnul circumspecției. Percepții reciproce româno-germane în preajma declanșării operațiunii Barbarossa* (An Alliance Under the Sign of Circumspection. Romanian-German Reciprocal Perceptions Around the Outbreak of Operation Barbarossa*)*, Military History Journal no. 3-4/2021, p. 82.

[3] Alesandru Duțu, *Între Wehrmacht și Armata Roșie: relații de comandament româno-germane și româno-sovietice, 1941-1945* (Between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. Romanian-German and Romanian-Soviet Command Relations (1941-1945), Encyclopaedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 24.

[4] *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite, 1940-1944* (Antonescu-Hitler. Correspondence and unpublished meetings, 1940-1944), edition compiled by Vasile Arimia, Ion Ardeleanu, Ștefan Lache, Bucharest, Cozia Publishing House, 1991, p. 118.

[5] Alesandru Duțu, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[6] Instituts für Zeitgeschichte München (hereinafter cited as I.f.Z.), Archive, *Microfilm collection,* roll MA-271, cd. 6297053.

[7] Eugen Ritter von Schobert (13 March 1883 - 12 September 1941) was a German army general (Generaloberst) during World War II, best known for commanding the 11th Army on the Eastern Front. He joined the Bavarian Army in 1902 and fought in World War I and World War II. He led the 7th

Army Corps in the invasion of Poland (1939) and in the Battle of France (1940). For his achievements, he received the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross and was promoted to the rank of Generaloberst. During the early stages of Operation Barbarossa, in 1941, he received command of the German 11th Army, which operated in the south of the Eastern Front, acting in close coordination with the Romanian Army led by General Ion Antonescu. Eugen von Schobert died on 12 September 1941, near Nikolaev, Ukraine. His aircraft (a Fieseler Fi 156 Storch) accidentally landed in a Soviet minefield, causing the aircraft to explode and the death of the general and his pilot. His successor in command of the 11th Army was Erich von Manstein.

[8] General Arthur Hauffe (20 December 1892 - 22 July 1944) was an infantry general, head of the German Military Mission in Romania between June 1941 and January 1943. For his activity, he was decorated by the Romanian state with the Order of "Mihai Viteazul", 3rd class. After completing his mission in Bucharest in 1943, he was sent to the front, taking command of the 46th Infantry Division and, later, of the XIII Army Corps. On July 22, 1944, during the Soviet Lviv-Sandomierz Offensive, his army corps was surrounded in the pocket of Brody (near Lviv). Hauffe was captured and died after the vehicle in which he was being transported hit a mine.

[9] General Alexandru Ioanițiu (02.02.1890-17.09.1941), was Chief of the General Staff between 06.09.1940 and 17.09.1941, being one of Ion Antonescu's closest collaborators. He died on 17 September 1941 in a plane crash at the airport in Baden (Bessarabia).

[10] Friedrich Forstmeier, *Odessa 1941. Der Kampf um Stadt und Hafen und die räumung der Seefstung 15, August bis 16, October*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1967, pp. 39-40.

[11] Romanian National Military Archives (A.M.N.R. will be cited below), fond *Microfilme*, roll II. 1.2711, cd. 806.

[12] Friedrich Forstmeier, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41

[13] A.M.N.R., fond *Microfilme,* rola II. 1.2711, cd. 802.

[14] *Ibid.*, cd. 829.

[15] *Ibid*., cd. 833.

[16] Friedrich Forstmeier, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

[17] Manfred Freiherr von Killinger (July 14, 1886 - September 2, 1944) was a German naval officer and high-ranking Nazi diplomat who served as the German Minister to Romania from 1941 to 1944. Appointed by Adolf Hitler in January 1941, Killinger acted as a shadow ruler in Bucharest, tightly controlling the Romanian regime led by Marshal Ion Antonescu to secure the country's vital oil reserves and military alliance for the Axis powers. Following King Michael's Coup on August 23, 1944, when Romania abruptly switched sides to the Allies, Killinger's diplomatic mission collapsed. Trapped inside the German Legation and facing imminent capture by advancing Soviet forces, Killinger committed suicide by shooting himself in his office on September 2, 1944.

[18] Diplomatic Archives (A.D. will be cited below), file 71/Germany, vol. 84, f. 73.

[19] Friedrich Forstmeier, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[20] Alesandru Duțu*, op. cit.,* p. 65.

[21] A.M.N.R., Historical Service fonds, file no. 876, f. 8.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[23] General Iosif Iacobici (08.12.1884-11.03.1952), an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army in World War I and incorporated into the Romanian Army in 1918, held important positions during the Antonescu government (Minister of National Defence, commander of the 4th Army, Chief of the General Staff). At the beginning of 1942 he came into conflict with Marshal Antonescu regarding the number of Romanian Army major units that would participate in the 1942 campaign. He was convicted by the communist regime and died in the Aiud penitentiary.

[24] General Nicolae Pălăngeanu (18.03.1899-21.04.1950), deputy chief of the General Headquarters (the name of the General Staff in wartime) during the early stages of the war in the East. In January 1942 he was appointed prefect of the Capital Police, a position he held until March 1945.

[25] Friedrich Forstmeier, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

[26] *Ibid*., pp. 66-67.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 67.

[28] Franz Halder, *Jurnal (War Journal of Franz Halder)*, Iași, Editura Elit, 1998, p. 466.

[29] Friedrich Forstmeier, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[30] *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite, 1940-1944,* pp. 130-131.

[31] I.f.Z., Archive, *Microfilm collection*, MA-1040 roll, cd. 000003.

[32] *Ibid*., cd. 000006.

[33] *Ibid*., cd. 000014.

[34] *Ibid*., cd. 000010.

[35] Friedrich Forstmeier, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

PRIMUL RĂZBOI MONDIAL

PLANURILE RATATE ALE ANTANTEI PENTRU CUCERIREA ORAȘULUI MOSUL ÎN PRIMUL RĂZBOI MONDIAL (A DOUA PARTE A ANULUI 1916 – SFÂRȘITUL ANULUI 1917)

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Abstract

The participation of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War opened new battlefronts in both Europe and Asia. The main opponents of the Ottomans were the British (Egypt-Syria, Mesopotamia) and the Russians (the Caucasus). While the British fought to defend the communication routes with India, blocking the Ottomans' access to the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf, the Russians attacked the Ottomans in the Caucasus and maintained control over Persia. The situation changed considerably in 1915, as the Germans sought to draw Persia into the war on their side and subsequently to co-opt Afghanistan in a possible attack on India, the jewel in the British crown. These plans were thwarted by Russia and Britain, which occupied Persia and prevented the Germans from entering the country. After the British disaster at Kut al-Amara (April 1916), the Russians and the British concluded that a blow leading to the capture of the city of Mosul could cause the collapse of the entire Ottoman front from the Caucasus to Mesopotamia. The fall of Mosul to the Entente would have dealt a heavy blow to the Ottoman Empire and its German allies. The objective pursued by the Anglo-Russians was the rapid withdrawal of the Ottomans from the war. For certain reasons, discussed in this article, Mosul was not captured by the Entente in 1916 or 1917. The city remained under Ottoman control until the end of 1918, when it was occupied, after heavy fighting, by the British.

Keywords: *Mesopotamia, Persia, Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia, British Empire, Kurdistan*

1. Introducere

La sfârșitul lunii octombrie 1914, Imperiul Otoman a intrat în Primul Război Mondial de partea Puterilor Centrale[1], după ce flota sa de război, împreună cu câteva nave militare germane, a atacat mai multe porturi rusești de la Marea Neagră. După ce Antanta[2] a declarat oficial război Imperiului Otoman[3], sultanul

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Mehmed al V-lea Reshad a chemat toți musulmanii la luptă împotriva acesteia. *Războiul sfânt* (*jihad*), proclamat la Constantinopol, ar fi trebuit să deschidă drumul armatelor sultanului până în Persia, Egipt, Afganistan și chiar până în India.

La începutul lunii noiembrie 1914, Imperiul Otoman a deschis mai multe fronturi împotriva Antantei. În Caucaz, luptau împotriva rușilor, iar în Siria și Mesopotamia, împotriva englezilor. Pentru a-și apăra comunicațiile cu India, dar și investițiile deținute de APOC în sud-vestul Persiei[4], britanicii au trimis Expeditionary Force „D" în sudul Mesopotamiei. Această formațiune militară[5] a ocupat cu ușurință zona Shatt-al Arab, orașul Basra (22 noiembrie) și a învins singura forță otomană rămasă în zonă, Divizia a 38-a[6]. Enver Pașa, ministrul turc de război și comandant *de facto* al armatei otomane, a greșit atunci când a decis să acorde Mesopotamiei un rol marginal în campania sa împotriva Antantei. Acest lucru a favorizat înaintarea britanicilor în teatrul de război din Mesopotamia. În 1915, generalul englez Charles V.F. Townshend a preluat comanda Diviziei 6 Infanterie din Mesopotamia și a atacat, cu intenția de a ocupa Bagdad, capitala acestei provincii turcești. Însă intenția sa a fost dejucată de otomani, care au trimis în Mesopotamia diviziile 35, 51 și 52 infanterie de pe fronturile din Siria și Caucaz și pe feldmareșalul german Colmar von der Göltz. La sfatul lui von der Göltz, Înaltul Comandament otoman a trecut la reorganizarea trupelor de pe frontul mesopotamian. Enver Pașa l-a numit pe von der Göltz comandant al noii Armate a 6-a, care a inclus corpurile XIII (diviziile 35 și 38) și XVIII armată (diviziile 51 și 52). Armata a 6-a a blocat, la sfârșitul anului 1915, avansul spre Bagdad al trupelor britanice conduse de generalul Townshend. Mai mult, între decembrie 1915 și aprilie 1916, otomanii[7] au încercuit Divizia a 6-a anglo-indiană la Kut al-Amara. Capitularea acestei divizii[8], la 29 aprilie 1916, a reprezentat cea mai grea înfrângere a britanicilor din Primul Război Mondial. Conform lui F.W. Halsey, victoria turcilor de la Kut al-Amara „a dat o lovitură foarte grea prestigiului militar britanic"[9]. În timp ce von der Göltz era trimis în Mesopotamia, Germania și-a intensificat acțiunile de a atrage Persia în război de partea sa. Tânărul șah al Persiei, Ahmad Mârza, anunțase încă din 2/15 noiembrie 1914, la câteva zile după ce Imperiul Otoman a intrat în război, că țara sa rămâne neutră. Cu toate acestea, în vara și toamna anului 1915, folosind tema *războiului sfânt* declarat de sultanul Mehmed al V-lea Reshad împotriva Antantei, o serie de trimiși germani au încercat să convingă pe șahul Ahmad să angajeze Persia de partea Puterilor Centrale. Antanta a reacționat la aceste manevre, mai ales că o parte a Persiei era sub ocupația trupelor ruse[10]. „Reprezentanții Antantei la Teheran au transmis guvernului persan că, dacă va încheia vreun acord special cu Germania și Imperiul Otoman, integritatea și independența Persiei vor fi puse în discuție"[11] (tr. n.). Cu toate acestea, autoritățile persane, mituite generos de trimișii kaiserului Wilhelm al II-lea, erau pregătite să declare război Antantei. Potrivit istoricului rus A.I. Gotovțev, acest risc, care s-ar fi putut transforma într-o „amenințare directă la adresa Indiei din partea germanilor, care ar putea opera prin Persia și Afganistan, a forțat guvernul britanic să ceară guvernului rus să ocupe granițele nordice și estice ale Persiei"[12] (tr. n.). Șahul Ahmad a fost forțat de un corp expediționar rus[13], debarcat la Enzeli, la 30 octombrie/12 noiembrie 1915, să renunțe la orice intenții de a semna vreo înțelegere cu trimișii Germaniei. Detașamentul rus a ocupat rapid orașele Qazvin (11/24 noiembrie), Hamadan (3/16 decembrie) și Qom (9/22 decembrie 1915). Susținătorii germanilor s-au adunat în orașul Kermanshah, unde au format un guvern separat și au așteptat ajutorul otomanilor[14]. „După ce complotul lor de a-i lua pe șah și guvernul său cu ei a eșuat, germanii au continuat mișcarea revoluționară în districtul Kermanshah, recuperându-și puțin din prestigiu prin evacuarea britanică din Gallipoli (la sfârșitul anului 1915 și începutul anului 1916), precum și prin succesul turcilor în încercuirea orașului Kut al-Amara"[15] (tr. n.).

În vara anului 1916, Antanta a conștientizat că Imperiul Otoman poate fi învins destul de ușor. Planul aliat prevedea o colaborare a armatelor celor două imperii aflate în Mesopotamia și Persia. Acțiunea comună a acestora avea să

ducă la cucerirea orașului Mosul și la spargerea frontului otoman din Mesopotamia și Kurdistan.

2. Teatrul de operațiuni

Pentru realizarea acestui studiu am folosit cât mai multe materiale inedite. Am încercat, totodată, să redau cât mai fidel evenimentele care fac obiectul prezentului articol. În acest sens am verificat informațiile obținute în cât mai multe mărturii, articole, cărți sau documente de arhivă disponibile. Cele mai importante lucrări utilizate ca surse pentru documentare sunt citate în notele de subsol ale materialului.

Kurdistanul și Mesopotamia au fost principalele zone unde au avut loc operațiunile militare descrise în articolul de față. Hans-Joachim von Loeschebrand-Horn, un german care se afla în Mesopotamia și care lupta de partea turcilor, a descris cât se poate de fidel zona adiacentă graniței otomano-persane, care includea și Kurdistanul: „De la Djebel Hamrin spre nord-est se succed, mai întâi mai distanțate, apoi din ce în ce mai apropiate... lanțurile muntoase ridicate de scoarța terestră în retragere. Abrupte, adesea verticale, vârfurile munților, cruțate de apă și de intemperii, se înalță spre cer. Pe lângă lanțurile muntoase cu aspect virgin... apare adesea brusc un labirint de munți singuratici uriași. Satele rare se ascund în văi și pe versanți greu accesibili. Nimic nu indică prezența oamenilor. Totul se rezumă la o singurătate grandioasă. Drumurile erau aproape inexistente. Cele existente erau de o calitate foarte proastă. Abia la Saqqiz drumurile deveneau din nou practicabile. Între acest loc și linia Kifri-Kirkuk, la marginea vestică a munților, pe o distanță de peste 200 km în linie dreaptă existau doar poteci de munte pe care niciun vehicul cu roți nu trecuse vreodată. Aceasta este o parte din Kurdistan, locul de reședință al unui popor montan indo-european care nu recunoaște niciun stăpân. În sud-vest, Djebel Hamrin formează granița între kurzi și arabi”[16] (tr. n.).

Același autor menționează că „până în anii șaizeci ai secolului al XIX-lea, în Senne și Sulaymaniyah s-au păstrat state kurde independente. Apoi, turcii și persanii și-au extins treptat avanposturile, primii către Sulaymaniyah, ceilalți către Senne și pitorescul Saqqiz. Dominația lor, în măsura în care se poate vorbi de așa ceva, se limita la zona urbană a orașelor. În afara acesteia, pe partea persană, datorită puterii statale mai slabe a acestei țări, datorită culturii comune, religiei comune (kurzii sunt șiiți) și limbii similare, raporturile erau acceptabile și existau multiple legături între cele două părți, pe partea turcă însă se desfășura o luptă neîncetată și acerbă între populația rurală kurdă sedentară și jandarmii turci. Nici în timpul Primului Război Mondial această luptă nu a încetat, chiar dacă triburile kurde au apărat împreună cu turcii țara lor împotriva rușilor”[17] (tr. n.).

Potrivit aceluiași autor, în perioada Primului Război Mondial, Kurdistanul era foarte sărac și nu putea susține prezența și acțiunile unor armate de mari dimensiuni: „Agricultura se limita la orz, orez și puțin grâu. În această regiune, aprovizionarea trupelor capăta o importanță decisivă, mai ales că lipseau instalațiile de etapă propriu-zise. Acestea ar fi de puțin folos, deoarece baza din jurul Sulaymaniyah nu producea suficientă hrană nici pentru propriile nevoi și, în timpuri de pace, importa provizii din Persia. Munții înalți nu furnizează aproape nimic. Abia dincolo de aceștia, în zona fertilă din jurul Saqqiz, se găseau provizii suficiente”[18] (tr. n.).

Kurdistanul se continuă spre sud cu câmpia Mesopotamiei, care urmărește râurile Tigru și Eufrat: „La sud de Bagdad, zonele joase ale câmpiei sunt adesea mlăștinoase. Există drumuri de pământ. Râurile Tigru și Eufrat au o serie de afluenți și servesc ca rute de aprovizionare. Vara, râurile devin foarte puțin adânci. În câmpia Mesopotamiei, clima este umedă. Lacurile și mlaștinile aflate acolo au cauzat apariția unor boli care au afectat serios trupele anglo-indiene care au luptat cu cele otomane în Primul Război Mondial”[19] (tr. n.).

3. Încercările ratate ale Antantei de a cuceri orașul Mosul

După capitularea englezilor la Kut al-Amara, planurile făcute de Înaltul Comandament turc pentru Mesopotamia și Persia s-au modificat substanțial. Orașul Mosul a dobândit brusc o mare importanță atât pentru Antantă, cât și pentru turco-germani. Pentru ruși,

Mosul era important „deoarece un drum principal traversa valea râului Tigru și facilita un atac asupra spatelui a două armate otomane[20]. O eventuală cucerire a orașului Mosul ar fi pus sub presiune peste 100.000 de soldați otomani din armatele a 2-a și a 6-a. Pentru englezi, cucerirea acestui oraș ar fi deschis calea spre capitularea Imperiului Otoman. Pentru otomani era indispensabilă menținerea acestuia întrucât calea ferată Constantinopol-Bagdad (*Bagdadbahn*) era în construcție și cu ajutorul ei puteau asigura aprovizionarea trupelor din Mesopotamia, Caucaz și Persia.

Pentru a păstra regiunea Mosul–Bagdad, Enver Pașa a decis să trimită Corpul XIII Armată[21] din compunerea Armatei a 6-a împotriva detașamentului rus comandat de generalul N.N. Baratov, desfășurat în Persia vestică. În același timp, două grupuri[22] (Gruparea Sulaymaniyah și Gruparea Mosul) au fost concentrate lângă frontiera persană în Kurdistan. Enver Pașa l-a informat pe Ömer Naci Bey, comandantul unui detașament din Gruparea Sulaymaniyah, că „cea mai importantă datorie a grupării din care face parte este de a proteja flancul stâng și spatele Corpului XIII, care urma să meargă în Persia”[23] (tr. n.). De asemenea, aceeași sarcină a fost trasată și Grupării Mosul[24]. Istoricul A.I. Gotovțev notează: „Halil Pașa, comandantul Armatei a 6-a otomane, și-a propus să-i alunge pe ruși din Kurdistan, să recâștige teritoriul persan ocupat de ruși și să atragă Persia de partea Imperiului Otoman și Germaniei. Pentru a învinge principalele forțe ale lui Baratov, otomanii au ales ca lovitura principală să fie dată în direcția Kermanshah-Hamadan. Un atac auxiliar a fost programat de la Mosul spre lacul Urmia, prin Sulaymaniyah”[25] (tr. n.).

În esență, ofensiva Corpului XIII Armată otoman (aflat sub comanda lui Ali Ihsan Pașa Sâbis)[26] urma să fie sprijinită pe aripa dreaptă de Corpul XVIII Armată (comandant Kâzim Karabekir Pașa), iar pe stânga, de grupurile Sulaymaniyah și Mosul. Comandantul Armatei a 6-a otomane, Halil Pașa, „știa că Baratov nu putea să dispună de mai mult de 14.000 de oameni împotriva turcilor”[27] (tr. n.). Ali Ihsan Pașa a atacat și a învins mai multe unități ale Detașamentului Baratov[28] la Kerind (28 iunie 1916). Pe 15 iulie 1916, Ali Ihsan Pașa a intrat în Kermanshah. Avansul turcesc în Persia a fost slab, din cauza temperaturilor ridicate și a bolilor care devastau trupele otomane. Ali Ihsan Pașa a ajuns, totuși, la Hamadan, pe care l-a cucerit la 10 august 1916. În ciuda acestor succese, situația s-a schimbat destul de repede în defavoarea turcilor pe aripa stângă a Corpului XIII Armată otoman. Cele două grupări otomane din Kurdistan (Sulaymaniyah și Mosul) se confruntau cu un întreg corp de armată rus. Relieful muntos dificil și lungimea frontului (cca 400 km) au îngreunat operațiunile otomanilor. Trupele ruse din această parte a frontului caucazian făceau parte din Detașamentul Azerbaidjan-Van[29]. Generalul F. Cernozubov, comandantul acestui detașament, a primit misiunea să avanseze în regiunea muntoasă a Kurdistanului, cu scopul de a separa armata turcă din Mesopotamia de forțele din Anatolia și Caucaz, pentru a susține operațiunile forței expediționare britanice de la sud de Bagdad și pe cele ale detașamentului condus de Baratov în Persia. Cazacii din Detașamentul Azerbaidjan-Van au fost primii care au încercat o lovitură în Kurdistan pentru a ajunge în spatele Armatei a 6-a otomane. La 30 aprilie/13 mai 1916, aceștia au intrat în orașul Rawandiz, aflat la doar 100 km de Mosul. Acolo s-au oprit după ce au aflat de capitularea englezilor la Kut al-Amara.

La 9 iunie 1916, Gruparea Sulaymaniyah a lansat un atac împotriva trupelor ruse conduse de Cernozubov în direcția orașului Penjwin. Ömer Naci Bey, care conducea Detașamentul Penjwin din Gruparea Sulaymaniyah, avea la dispoziție „un batalion de 1.000 de oameni, 6 mitraliere grele, 6 tunuri de munte obișnuite și aproximativ 2.000 de cavaleriști kurzi”[30] (tr. n.), cu care i-a atacat pe ruși în direcția orașului Baneh, reușind să-i respingă. Planul otomanilor viza ocuparea orașului Senne și tăierea legăturii dintre Detașamentul Azerbaidjan-Van și trupele generalului Baratov din Persia. Între timp însă, trupele ruse din regiunea Rawandiz au învins Gruparea Mosul (comandant Haydar Bey) și au înaintat spre Savujbulak (în prezent, Mahabad în Iran). Drept urmare, atât Gruparea Mosul, cât și Gruparea Sulaymaniyah au fost nevoite să se retragă pe linia de plecare. Sincopele grupurilor otomane au fost cauzate de lipsa unei coordonări

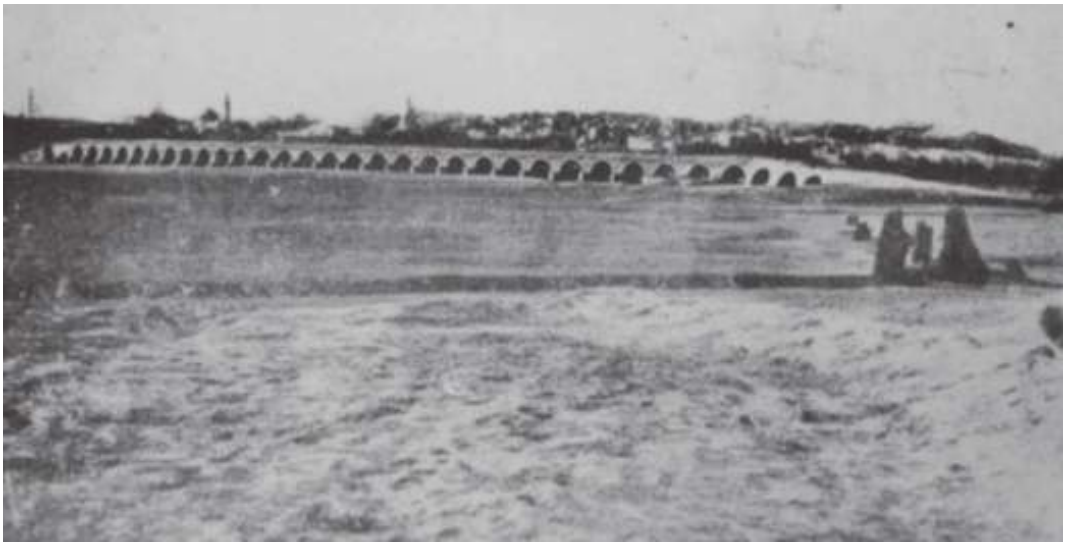


Orașul Penjwin din Kurdistan. Imaginea a fost preluată din cartea lui C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs. Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919-1925*, Oxford University Press, Londra, 1957, p. 115

eficiente a mișcărilor acestora. Gruparea Sulaymaniyah era plasată sub comanda Armatei a 6-a, iar Gruparea Mosul era arondată Armatei a 2-a.

După declanșarea acțiunilor în Persia, „protejarea flancurilor și spatelui Corpului XIII Armată turc a devenit foarte importantă pentru Armata a 6-a. În acest scop, Grupul Sulaymaniyah a fost dirijat spre orașul Senne, iar Grupul Mosul, care se afla la 10 kilometri vest de Rawandiz, trebuia să asigure frontul dintre Rayat și Savujbulak”[31] (tr. n.). La 30 iulie 1916, Gruparea Mosul a fost subordonată Armatei a 6-a tocmai pentru a se realiza unitatea de comandă necesară acțiunilor împotriva corpurilor I și II cavalerie caucaziene[32]. Însă acțiunile grupărilor otomane din Kurdistan au fost contracarate puternic de cavaleria cazacă. La 22 august, la Rayat, Gruparea Mosul a fost pur și simplu distrusă după o luptă cu rușii[33]. În lupta de lângă Rayat, „o mare parte din forțele Diviziei a 4-a otomane a fost capturată, doar Regimentul 22 Infanterie (comandant Haci Ibrahim Bey), întărit cu soldații supraviețuitori ai Regimentului 11 Infanterie (comandant Lütfü Bey), a rămas o forță serioasă. Pierderile Grupării Mosul pe 22 august 1916 au fost îngrozitoare. Comandantul Armatei a 6-a a subliniat clar acest fapt în raportul său către Biroul Comandantului Suprem, două zile mai târziu, declarând că «nu se mai poate aștepta rezistență din partea Grupării Mosul»” (tr. n.). Halil Pașa a menționat, în același raport, că situația era foarte complicată, că urma să meargă la Rawandiz în dimineața zilei de 25 august, accentuând faptul că, în cazul în care rușii ar acționa eficient, Grupării Mosul îi va fi imposibil să-i oprească pe ruși în situația actuală, ceea ce ar pune Mosulul în pericol; astfel, a solicitat Comandantului Suprem să trimită rapid ajutoare[34]. Turcii au abandonat orice inițiativă ofensivă în sectorul apărat de Gruparea Mosul. Mai mult, au contopit grupările Sulaymaniyah și Mosul (comandant Șevket Bey) într-un singur detașament, care a fost întărit cu regimentele 165 infanterie și 33 cavalerie retrase de pe alte fronturi (septembrie 1916). Detașamentul rezultat, care a păstrat numele de Gruparea Mosul, a fost dispus pe un front situat între Rawandiz și orașul Sulaymaniyah[35].

Înfrângerea otomanilor de la Rayat a determinat un reviriment al trupelor Antantei de pe



Orașul Mosul și marele pod peste fluviul Tigru, adaptare după *Osmanli Döneminde Irak* (*Irakul în perioada otomană*), Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului, Istanbul, 2006, p. 176

fronturile persan și mesopotamian. Pe cel din Mesopotamia, englezii, aflați acum sub comanda generalului Stanley Maude, erau pregătiți pentru o nouă înaintare spre Bagdad. „Britanicii și-au continuat pregătirile pe tot parcursul verii și toamnei anului 1916, au înființat o flotă fluvială pentru sprijin pe râul Tigru și au construit un doc în Basra, unde navele mari puteau ancora pentru a asigura logistica. Maude a respins cu tărie posibilitatea unui atac înainte de dezvoltarea comunicațiilor fluviale. În același timp, britanicii au mărit numărul trupelor aflate în Mesopotamia la 166.000 de oameni, dintre care 107.000 erau indieni”[36] (tr. n.). La finalizarea pregătirilor, generalul Maude s-a putut baza pe „Corpul I format din diviziile a 3-a (Lahore) și a 7-a (Meerut) infanterie, recent redistribuite din Franța, și pe Corpul III format din diviziile a 13-a și a 14-a infanterie. Divizia a 15-a era situată în Nasiriyah. Fiecare divizie avea două brigăzi de artilerie, plus detașamente de geniști și transport”[37] (tr. n.). Totalul forțelor britanice din Mesopotamia care urmau să participe la ofensivă era format din „o divizie engleză și cinci indiene, plus o brigadă de cavalerie indiană”[38] (tr. n.). Generalul Maude a dat startul ofensivei britanice la 9 ianuarie 1917. „Turcii și-au apărat cu încăpățânare pozițiile. Cele mai dificile lupte au avut loc de-a lungul râului Tigru. Au fost însoțite de lungi și puternice pregătiri de artilerie, descoperiri pe front și ocoliri ale flancurilor turcilor cu cavalerie. Lupta principală s-a dat pentru cucerirea Bagdadului”[39] (tr. n.). Conform istoricului rus A.I. Gotovțev, „cea mai crâncenă bătălie a avut loc între 9 și 10 martie 1917 pentru câteva poziții aflate lângă Bagdad, pe râul Diyala. Trupele otomane erau extrem de slăbite. În compunerea Corpului XVIII Armată otoman (format din diviziile 45, 51 și 52 infanterie) erau doar 6.200 de soldați cu 80 de mitraliere și 55 de tunuri. De asemenea, turcii aveau doar puțină muniție”[40] (tr. n.). Comandantul Armatei a 6-a otomane, Halil Pașa, a cerut permanent întăriri Înaltului Comandament otoman, condus de Enver Pașa. Cu toate că a primit Divizia 14 Infanterie de la Armata a 2-a, Halil Pașa nu a putut opri avansul britanicilor și a fost obligat să părăsească Bagdadul pe 10 martie 1917. A doua zi, unități ale armatei britanice au intrat în capitala Mesopotamiei turce.

Pentru a ajuta ofensiva engleză din Mesopotamia, trupele Corpului I Cavalerie caucazian din Persia, aflate sub comanda generalului rus Baratov, au început să atace Corpul XIII Armată otoman[41]. Dacă în septembrie 1916 Corpul I Cavalerie caucazian avea „13 batalioane de infanterie, 65 de escadroane de cavalerie și

sotnii[42] și 35 de tunuri (10.016 infanteriști, 7.392 de cavaleriști)"[43], la mijlocul lunii ianuarie 1917 în compunerea acestuia găsim „11 batalioane de infanterie, 64 de escadroane de cavalerie și sotnii, 2 drujini[44] grăniceri, o companie geniu, 35 de tunuri, 57 de mitraliere și o serie de unități auxiliare (cu un efectiv total de 22.419 ofițeri și soldați)"[45] (tr. n.).

Întrucât Armata a 6-a otomană era supusă unui atac puternic al britanicilor, la începutul lunii ianuarie 1917, Halil Pașa a fost nevoit să cheme înapoi Corpul XIII Armată din Persia. „Retragerea unităților acestuia a avut loc pe o vreme rea, pe drumuri pline de zăpadă. Regimentul 44 Infanterie din Divizia a 6-a a plecat din Kermanshah pe 21 ianuarie 1917 și a ajuns la Kut al-Amara abia pe 20 februarie. Divizia a 2-a din Corpul XIII a rămas în Persia până la sfârșitul lunii februarie 1917 și doar în luna martie primele unități au ajuns înapoi în Mesopotamia"[46] (tr. n.). Acest lucru a favorizat punerea în mișcare a Corpului I Cavalerie caucazian. Generalul Baratov, „în ciuda faptului că unitățile sale, din cauza lungimii mari a rutelor de aprovizionare, aveau provizii extrem de limitate de alimente și furaje, a decis să organizeze o urmărire a diviziilor Corpului XIII turc care se retrăgeau rapid. Drept urmare, pe 15/28 februarie 1917, unități din aripa dreaptă a corpului (Detașamentul Kurdistan al generalului Rafalovici, format din 16 sotnii, 2 batalioane de infanterie, 8 tunuri) au ocupat satul Bijar, iar pe 21 februarie/4 martie au intrat în localitatea Senne. În același timp, Detașamentul Hamadan (comandant generalul Radaț, format din 29 de sotnii, 7 batalioane de infanterie și 32 de tunuri), care opera în direcția principală (spre Bagdad), a devenit mai activ. Acest detașament a capturat Hamadan – pe 19 februarie/2 martie, Kangavar – pe 20 februarie/3 martie, iar pe 27 februarie/10 martie, după o luptă cu unitățile turcești de ariergardă, a intrat în Kermanshah. La rândul său, acest succes a permis flancului drept al corpului (Detașamentul Sultanabad) să intre în orașul Dauletabad pe 19 februarie/4 martie"[47] (tr. n.). La începutul lunii aprilie, trupele ruse ale generalului Baratov au ajuns la Kizil-Rabat, lângă râul Diyala, unde au făcut legătura cu britanicii. În același timp cu Corpul I Cavalerie caucazian s-au pus în mișcare și unitățile Corpului VII Armată caucazian[48]. Acesta a trecut la ofensivă în sudul lacului Urmia, pe direcția Saqqiz și Penjwin, în trei coloane: „Pe aripa dreaptă, la sud de lacul Urmia, au atacat 12 sotnii de cazaci, în centru, în direcția Savujbulak (Mahabad)-Rawandiz, alte 12 sotnii de cazaci, iar pe aripa stângă, în direcția Saqqiz-Baneh, 24 de sotnii de cazaci și batalioanele 4 și 6 armenești"[49] (tr. n.). La 4/17 martie 1917, Corpul VII Armată caucazian a ocupat orașul Baneh și a făcut joncțiunea în sectorul Sulaymaniyah cu Corpul I Cavalerie caucazian al generalului Baratov. Între timp, în Rusia a avut loc Revoluția din februarie care a dus la abdicarea țarului Nicolae al II-lea (2/15 martie 1917). În ciuda asigurărilor date de noul guvern provizoriu de la Petrograd[50] că Rusia „își va onora pe deplin angajamentele asumate față de aliații din Antantă"[51] (tr. n.), în luna mai 1917 toate ofensivele din Caucaz și Persia ale armatei ruse au fost oprite. Cauzele au fost multiple: lipsa aprovizionării trupelor ruse[52], haosul care a apărut odată cu revoluția din primăvara anului 1917, refuzul soldaților de a mai lupta etc. Cu toate acestea, planul unei noi operațiuni care ar duce la cucerirea Mosulului și scoaterea Turciei din război a fost discutat de ruși și britanici în primăvara anului 1917. Conform înțelegerii[53], la noua operațiune planificată urmau să participe pe Corpul VII Armată caucazian (direcția de atac Saqqiz) și Corpul I Cavalerie caucazian (direcția de atac Senne). „Ofensiva urma să fie condusă în direcțiile Penjwin-Sulaymaniyah și Kirkuk, adică în Kurdistanul irakian de astăzi. Conform planului, forțele ruse urmau să distragă atenția unui număr semnificativ de turci din nordul Mesopotamiei, oferind britanicilor o șansă bună de a avansa cu succes spre nord dinspre Bagdad, în direcția Mosulului"[54] (tr. n.). După perfectarea detaliilor, „ofensiva a fost lansată de detașamente separate în sectorul Corpului VII caucazian pe 10/23 iunie 1917, iar în sectorul Corpului I Cavalerie al lui Baratov, pe 13/26 iunie. Cu toate acestea, pe 22 iunie/5 iulie 1917, turcii au lansat o contraofensivă și i-au forțat pe ruși să revină la poziția inițială"[55] (tr. n.). Având mari lipsuri de provizii și muniție, trupele ruse au fost obligate să se oprească pe pozițiile atinse. În ciuda negocierilor prelungite și a promisiunilor oferite,

britanicii nu au putut aproviziona trupele celor două corpuri ruse care au participat la ofensivă. Acest lucru, asociat cu dezintegrarea tot mai puternică a unităților rusești și refuzul constant al soldaților de a mai participa la lupte, a dus la amânarea Operațiunii Mosul pe parcursul verii anului 1917. Într-un final, „pe 5 octombrie, guvernul provizoriu de la Petrograd, prin vocea lui A.F. Kerenski, a propus Londrei ca ofensiva de la Mosul să fie amânată până la începutul anului 1918”[56] (tr. n.). După cum se știe, la 25 octombrie/7 noiembrie 1917, partidul bolșevic a preluat puterea la Petrograd. Sub conducerea noului guvern, Rusia a încheiat un armistițiu cu Puterile Centrale și a rupt legăturile cu Antanta. O reluare a Operațiunii Mosul în prima parte a anului 1918 a devenit astfel imposibilă.

4. Concluzii

După căderea Bagdadului, otomanii au început să înțeleagă că nu mai pot rezista foarte mult pe fronturile din Mesopotamia, Caucaz și Persia. Înaltul Comandament otoman nu a reușit să pună în aplicare un plan eficient pentru a rezista atacurilor ruso-britanicilor. Lipsa rezervelor umane și materiale, slaba pregătire a ofițerilor, dar și resemnarea care cuprinsese majoritatea soldaților turci au condus la o diminuare vizibilă a rezistenței pe fronturile asiatice pe care lupta Imperiul Otoman. Ofensiva din Persia, pornită la sfârșitul lunii mai 1916, nu a dat roadele scontate. *Războiul sfânt* nu a fost îmbrățișat de cea mai mare parte a poporului persan, iar cele câteva unități de jandarmi persani care s-au alăturat turcilor nu au fost suficiente pentru a duce la bun sfârșit ideile fanteziste ale lui Enver Pașa, ministrul turc de război. Deciziile greșite luate de Înaltul Comandament otoman au favorizat pierderea Bagdadului și iminenta cădere a Mosulului. Turcii nu au fost salvați de o mare victorie pe câmpul de luptă, ci de izbucnirea revoluției ruse din primăvara anului 1917. Această mișcare revoluționară a reușit să răstoarne situația de pe frontul caucaziano-persan în favoarea otomanilor. În vara și toamna anului 1917, principalele unități rusești de pe acest front, aflate sub influența ideilor revoluționare, au părăsit câmpul de luptă. Otomanii au mai putut rezista astfel încă un an până când au fost înfrânți definitiv și au semnat armistițiul cu Antanta la Moudros (30 octombrie 1918).



Operațiunea Mosul în 1916 și în 1917, adaptare după N.G. Korsun, *Первая Мировая Война на Кавказском фронте* (*Primul Război Mondial pe frontul caucazian. Schiță strategică și operațională*), Editura Militară a URSS, 1946

NOTE

[1] Tripla Alianță – denumirea alianței care s-a format între Germania, Austro-Ungaria și Italia la 20 mai 1882 pentru izolarea Franței, pe o perioadă de 5 ani. Statele semnatare, denumite și Puterile Centrale, au luptat împotriva Antantei în timpul Primului Război Mondial.

[2] Antanta cordială de la 8 aprilie 1904 este o înțelegere franco-britanică. Cele două puteri își garantau reciproc atât frontierele, cât și coloniile. Înțelegerea dintre Anglia și Rusia de la 31 august 1907, la care a aderat și Franța, prin care se stabileau sferele de influență din Persia și Asia Centrală, a favorizat apariția Antantei, un bloc politico-militar îndreptat împotriva Triplei Alianțe (sau Puterilor Centrale).

[3] Rusia a notificat oficial Imperiul Otoman despre starea de război dintre cele două imperii la 2 noiembrie 1914, iar Anglia, pe 5 noiembrie.

[4] APOC (Anglo-Persian Oil Company) deținea în Persia rafinăria de la Abadan și exploatarea petrolieră aflată lângă Ahwaz. Producția rafinăriei devenise foarte importantă întrucât marina de război britanică a început să folosească derivați ai petrolului în locul cărbunilor pentru a pune în mișcare navele de luptă.

[5] Expeditionary Force „D" avea în compunere „Brigada 16 Infanterie a Diviziei 6 (Poona) indiene. Generalul de brigadă W.S. Delamain, comandantul Forței Expediționare «D», a condus un total de 4.731 de ofițeri și soldați" (tr. n.). (Matthew W. Williams, *The British Experience in Iraq from 1914-1926: What Wisdom Can The United States Draw from its Experience?*, teză de master, Faculty of the US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2004, p. 22)

[6] „Comandantul Diviziei a 38-a, Suphi Bey, împreună cu 45 de ofițeri și 989 de oameni, a căzut în mâinile britanicilor" (tr. n.). (Tarik Sarioğlu, *Birinci dünya savaşi'nda Irak cephesi'nde son kale: ikinci kutü'lamâre muharebeleri 12/13 aralik 1916 - 26* şubat *1917 (Ultima fortăreață de pe frontul din Irak în Primul Război Mondial: a doua bătălie de la Kut al-Amara 12/13 decembrie 1916 - 26 februarie 1917)*, în Davud Kapucu (editor), *Birinci Dünya Harbi – Farkli Konularla Yüzbeşyilin Ardindan (Primul Război Mondial – Diferite subiecte abordate după un secol și jumătate)*, Paradigma Akademi Yayınları, Çanakkale, 2023, p. 347)

[7] În aprilie 1916, Armata a 6-a otomană, după ce primise întăriri de la Constantinopol, era compusă din Corpul XIII Armată (diviziile 2 și 35 infanterie) și Corpul XVIII Armată (diviziile 45, 51 și 52 infanterie), cu un total de 19.536 de soldați, 43 de mitraliere și 86 de tunuri. (***, *Birinci Dünyâ Hârbi'nde Türk Harbi, Irak-İrân cephesi 1914-1918*, 3'üncü cilt 2'nci kısım (*Războiul turc în Primul Război Mondial, Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, vol. 3, partea a II-a), Tipografia Statului Major General al armatei turce, Ankara, 2002, p. 727, în continuare se va cita *Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*)

[8] La Kut al-Amara s-au predat „13.309 bărbați, dintre care 272 de ofițeri britanici și 204 ofițeri indieni, 2.592 de soldați britanici și 6.988 de soldați indieni, precum și 3.248 de soldați necombatanți" (tr. n.). (Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die. A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 151)

[9] Francis W. Halsey, *The Literary Digest. History of the World War*, vol. VIII, Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York, 1919, p. 166.

[10] La 30 august 1907, Rusia țaristă și Anglia au semnat o convenție prin care teritoriul Persiei era împărțit în sfere de influență: nordul era oferit Rusiei, iar partea sudică – Angliei. Prin această convenție, britanicii s-au asigurat că nicio mare putere nu putea folosi teritoriul persan pentru a pune în pericol India, cea mai importantă colonie a coroanei britanice la acel moment.

[11] Frank A. Mumby, *The Great World War: A History*, vol. V, The Gresham Publishing Company Ltd., Londra, 1917, p. 211.

[12] A.I. Gotovțev, *Борьба за Месопотамию и Персию в войне 1914-1918 гг.* (*Lupta pentru Mesopotamia și Persia în războiul din 1914-1918*), în *Военная мысль (Gândirea militară)* nr. 8, 1940, p. 93.

[13] Corpul expediționar era condus de generalul N.N. Baratov și era format din 39 de sotnii, 2 batalioane de infanterie, 2 drujini de grăniceri și 20 de tunuri (cca 14.000 de oameni, în principal cazaci).

[14] Principalii susținători ai germanilor erau jandarmii persani. Instituția jandarmeriei a fost creată imediat după Revoluția din Persia din 1905-1911. Jandarmii erau naționaliști (adică antiruși și antibritanici), fiind devotați Majlisului (Parlamentului) de la Teheran. „Jandarmeria persană, împrăștiată în detașamente separate în toată țara, era formată în vara anului 1915 din 7.224 de soldați și 75 de ofițeri. Din acest personal de comandă, 30 erau suedezi, alături de germani și turci" (tr. n.). (A.V. Șișov, *Персидекий фронт (1909-1918). Незаслуженно забытые победы (Frontul persan (1909-1918). Victorii uitate pe nedrept)*, Editura Vece, Moscova, 2010, p. 148) O altă forță care exista în Persia în 1915 era brigada cazacilor persani. Aceasta fusese creată pentru garantarea siguranței șahului și imita unitățile de cazaci din Imperiul Rus. Fiind condusă de un ofițer țarist, a devenit „garantul influenței ruseşti în această regiune" (tr. n.). (***, *Вооруженные Силы России в Первой Мировой Войне 1914-1917*

(*Forțele armate ruse în Primul Război Mondial 1914-1917*), vol. II, Editura Megapolis, Moscova, 2014, p. 10, în continuare se va cita *Forțele armate ruse în Primul Război Mondial 1914-1917*)

[15] Frank A. Mumby, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

[16] Hans-Joachim von Loeschebrand-Horn, *Der Feldzug der Suleimanije – Gruppe in Kurdistan im Sommer 1916 (Campania grupării Sulaymaniyah în Kurdistan în vara anului 1916)*, în *Zwischen Kaukasus und Sinai (Între Caucaz și Sinai), Jahrbuch des bundes der Asienkämpfer (Anuarul Ligii Luptătorilor Asiatici)*, vol. 2, Deutsche Orientbuchhandlung Mulzer & Cleemann, Berlin, 1922, p. 113-114.

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 116.

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 119.

[19] A.I. Gotovțev, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

[20] N.G. Korsun, *Первая Мировая Война на Кавказском фронте.* Оперативно-стратег-ический очерк *(Primul Război Mondial pe frontul caucazian 1914-1917. Schiță strategică și operațională)*, Editura Militară a URSS, 1946, p. 60.

[21] Reformat din diviziile 2 și 6 infanterie care au fost trimise din zona Constantinopol în februarie 1916.

[22] Ambele grupuri erau formate din unități ale Diviziei 4 Infanterie otomană.

[23] *Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 242.

[24] Formată din Divizia a 4-a Infanterie (care includea regimentele 10, 11 și 22), trimisă în zona Mosul în luna iunie 1916 de la Armata a 2-a.

[25] A.I. Gotovțev, *op. cit.*, p. 95. Enver Pașa menționa că de la acțiunea Corpului XIII Armată aștepta două beneficii: „Fie rușii trimit forțe mari împotriva noastră – în acest caz, ne vom ușura povara de pe oricare dintre fronturile unde luptăm, fie nu o vor face, iar în acest caz vom salva Iranul de ruși și îi separăm de britanici" (tr. n.). (*Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 255)

[26] Care avea în compunere peste 18.000 de infanteriști, peste 7.000 de cavaleriști și 38 de tunuri. Pe lângă diviziile 2 și 6 infanterie, Corpul XIII Armată includea și o brigadă de cavalerie (formată mai ales din călăreți kurzi) și câteva unități de voluntari persani.

[27] A.I. Gotovțev, *op. cit.*, p. 95. N.G. Korsun afirmă că Detașamentul Baratov avea în iulie 1916: „11 batalioane de infanterie, 2 drujini grăniceri, 64 de escadroane de cavalerie și sotnii, 44 de mitraliere, 24 de tunuri și 3 vehicule blindate (9.851 de infanteriști, 7.857 de cavaleriști)" (tr. n.). (N.G. Korsun, *op. cit.*, p. 69)

[28] Prin ordinul Stavkăi din 23 aprilie/6 mai 1916, Corpul de Cavalerie Expediționară introdus în Persia a fost redenumit Corpul de Cavalerie caucaziană, iar prin ordinul din 26 iunie/9 iulie a fost redenumit Corpul 1 de Cavalerie caucaziană. (*Forțele armate ruse în Primul Război Mondial*, nota 164, p. 223)

[29] Detașamentul Azerbaidjan-Van avea în compunere, în luna mai 1916, „11 ½ batalioane infanterie, 14 drujini grăniceri, 54 de sotnii, 60 de mitraliere, 42 de tunuri, 3 companii de muncitori, 6 vapoarașe ce formau flotila de pe lacul Urmia; în total: 17.750 de infanteriști și 6.991 de cavaleriști" (tr. n.). (N.G. Korsun, *op. cit.*, p. 69) La 4 iulie 1916, Detașamentul Azerbaidjan-Van a fost redenumit Corpul II Cavalerie caucazian, iar la 15 februarie 1917, acesta a devenit Corpul VII Armată caucazian.

[30] *Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 243.

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 254.

[32] În luna iulie 1916, Gruparea Sulaymaniyah era formată din: Regimentul 37 Infanterie (4 batalioane), comandat de locotenent-colonelul Abbas Hilmi, care a preluat și comanda Grupului Sulaymaniyah; Grupul Ömer Naci Bey (500 de oameni); compania de mitraliere grele (6 mitraliere); bateria de artilerie (6 tunuri). În plus, exista o unitate mobilă formată din membri ai unor triburi kurde, al căror număr varia între 500 și 3.000 de călăreți. (*Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 245) Din păcate, calitatea unităților otomane din compunerea Grupării Sulaymaniyah era inferioară celor rusești. O mărturie relevă faptul că doar infanteria turcă, cca 1.500 soldați, era complet echipată pentru război. De asemenea, tunurile turcilor aveau o rază de acțiune mult mai mică decât cele ale rușilor. (Hans-Joachim von Loeschebrand-Horn, *op. cit.*, p. 120)

[33] La 14 august 1916, Gruparea Mosul (formată din regimentele 10, 11 și 22 infanterie), „situată la vest de pârâul Laven, avea 172 de ofițeri și 8.644 de soldați cu 6.318 puști Mauser de calibru mic, 12 mitraliere și 8 tunuri de munte cu foc rapid". (*Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 257) În lupta de la Rayat, Corpul II Cavalerie caucazian a angajat „7 batalioane infanterie, 12 sotnii, o drujină grăniceri și 13 tunuri" (tr. n.). (N.G. Korsun, *op. cit.*, p. 74)

[34] *Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 264-265. În lupta din 22 august 1916, „Gruparea Mosul a avut 3.796 de victime, inclusiv 151 de morți (5 ofițeri și 146 de soldați), 514 răniți (10 ofițeri și 504 soldați), 3.044 de prizonieri și dispăruți (44 de ofițeri și 3.000 de soldați). Au fost pierdute 2.958 de arme: 2.355 de puști Mauser de calibru mic, 513 puști Mauser de calibru mare și 90 de puști de alte tipuri. În plus, s-au pierdut 2 mitraliere și 2 tunuri" (tr. n.). (*Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 265) Hans-Joachim von Loeschebrand-Horn, aflat în Gruparea Sulaymaniyah, a descris mai târziu dezastrul suferit de Gruparea Mosul: „În jurul prânzului, pe 23 august 1916, au sosit mai multe telegrame. Divizia a 4-a

otomană suferise o înfrângere foarte gravă și era în plină retragere. În același timp, Halil Pașa ne-a atras atenția că și grupul nostru se află în pericol, în special flancul nostru stâng, cauzat de retragerea Diviziei a 4-a, și ne-a ordonat să stăm pe loc și să așteptăm instrucțiuni suplimentare" (tr. n.). (Hans-Joachim von Loeschebrand-Horn, *op. cit.*, p. 148) În lupta de la Rayat, pierderile rușilor au fost de 83 de morți, 291 de răniți și 5 soldați dispăruți. (Vezi Raportul Detașamentului Savujbulak din cadrul Corpului II Cavalerie caucazian despre operațiunile desfășurate în perioada 6-9/19-22 august 1916 trimis comandamentului frontului caucazian, în RGVIA – Российский Государственный Военно-Исторический Архив (Arhiva Istorico-Militară de Stat a Rusiei), fond 2100, opis 1, delo 916)

[35] Comanda noii Grupări Mosul a fost păstrată de colonelul Şevket Bey. Ulterior, spre sfârșitul anului 1916, în Gruparea Mosul au mai intrat și părți ale Regimentului 132 Infanterie. În decembrie 1916, Gruparea Mosul (comandant locotenent-colonel Ibrahim Bey) era formată din regimentele 22 infanterie și 33 cavalerie, plus o serie de unități mai mici din Regimentul 132 Infanterie.

[36] Tarik Sarioğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

[37] Matthew W. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[38] A.V. Șișov, *op. cit.*, p. 297. În ofensiva din decembrie 1916, generalul Maude s-a putut baza pe „45.000 de infanteriști, 3.500 de cavaleriști și 174 de tunuri" (tr. n.). (*Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 90) În schimb, otomanii nu i-au putut opune decât Corpul XVIII Armată, care avea 10.500 de soldați și 50 de tunuri.

[39] A.I. Gotovțev, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[40] *Ibidem*, p. 97. „În faza finală a celei de-a doua bătălii de la Kut al-Amara (12 decembrie 1916 - 25 februarie 1917), dispoziția trupelor otomane a fost următoarea: Corpul XVIII Armată otoman avea Divizia a 45-a (regimentele 3, 141 și 142) în regiunea Garraf; Divizia a 51-a (regimentele 7 și 9) în poziția Felahiye; Divizia a 52-a (regimentele 40 și 43) în jurul orașului Kut al-Amara ca rezervă, iar Divizia 14 (regimentele 3, 64 și 142) lângă râul Diyala, care asigura legătura cu Gruparea Mosul. Divizia a 2-a a Corpului XIII Armată se afla la Khanakin, la granița cu Persia" (tr. n.). (Tarik Sarioğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 355) Poziția trupelor anglo-indiene a fost următoarea: „Divizia a 7-a a Corpului I, cu cele trei brigăzi ale sale, se afla pe malul stâng al Tigrului (Brigada a 21-a, vizavi de Sinaiyat; Brigada a 19-a, în spatele Brigăzii a 21-a, și Brigada a 28-a, mai în spate, la Arap Köy); Divizia a 3-a, pe malul drept al Tigrului (Brigada a 7-a, de la Felahiye la canalul Nazifiye; brigăzile 8 și 9, în deplasare spre nord). Brigăzile 35, 36 și 37 din Divizia a 14-a, atașată Corpului III, se aflau pe malul drept, între canalul Nazifiye și râul Tigru. Divizia a 13-a se afla în zona Imam Mansur" (tr. n.). (Tarik Sarioğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 354-355) Pe 23 februarie 1917, britanicii au început să amenințe rutele de retragere și liniile de aprovizionare ale Corpului al XVIII-lea otoman. Corpul nu a mai avut altă opțiune decât să evacueze orașele Felahiye și Kut al-Amara. (*Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 290)

[41] Corpul era format la 1 ianuarie 1917 din: diviziile de cavalerie caucaziană și una de cazaci caucazieni, Brigada 2 din Divizia 3 Cavalerie din Kuban, brigada persană (o sotnie cu 2 tunuri), Brigada 9 Pușcași din Turkestan și brigada separată de cazaci din Kuban. (E.V. Maslovski, *Великая война на Кавказском фронте. 1914-1917 гг.* (*Primul Război Mondial pe frontul caucazian. 1914-1917*), Editura Vece, Moscova, 2015, p. 488-489)

[42] Sotnie – veche unitate de cavalerie cazăcească compusă din o sută de soldați (escadron căzăcesc).

[43] N.G. Korsun, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[44] Drujină – forma de organizare a unităților de voluntari armeni și a trupelor din rezervă, inclusiv grăniceri, încadrate în armata caucaziană.

[45] D.G. Martirosyan, *Российско-Турецкий Фронт Первой Мировой Войны (Frontul ruso-turc din Primul Război Mondial)*, teză de doctorat, Universitatea din Saratov, 2006, p. 176.

[46] *Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 290. În aceeași lucrare s-a menționat că „aventura iraniană de nouă luni a costat Corpul XIII Armată otoman peste 1.000 de morți și aproape 2.000 de răniți" (tr. n.) (p. 290).

[47] D.G. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 177. În luna martie 1917, Divizia 4 Cavalerie cazacă din Kuban a întărit Corpul I Cavalerie caucazian din Persia.

[48] Corpul era format la 1 ianuarie 1917 din: diviziile combinată caucaziană și 4 cavalerie de cazaci caucazieni, brigăzile 2 și 3 cazaci de lângă Marea Caspică, regimentele georgian, 3 de frontieră și 2 Kars, 4 batalioane de pușcași armeni cu un total de 16 batalioane infanterie, 54 de sotnii, 5 companii de muncitori, 48 de tunuri și o grupă auto. (E.V. Maslovski, *op. cit.*, p. 487-488) În total, corpul dispunea de 13.000 de infanteriști și 8.000 de cavaleriști. (N.G. Korsun, *op. cit.*, p. 80)

[49] G. Korganoff, *La participation des Arméniens à la Guerre Mondiale sur le front du Caucase (1914-1918)*, Imprimerie Massis, Paris, 1927, p. 65.

[50] Numele purtat de orașul Sankt-Petersburg în timpul Primului Război Mondial.

[51] A.V. Șișov, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

[52] În primele șase luni ale anului 1917, pe frontul caucaziano-persan, „aprovizionarea trupelor ruse a scăzut cu 55%, numărul animalelor de povară, cu până la 24%, iar al cailor, cu până la 24%" (tr. n.). (*Ibidem*)

[53] Comandantul frontului caucazian, generalul N.N. Iudenici, care avea autoritate și peste trupele rusești din Persia, și-a exprimat dezacordul total pentru o nouă operațiune împotriva Mosulului. Ca urmare, la 31 mai/13 iunie 1917, guvernul provizoriu de la Petrograd l-a demis din funcție.

[54] A.V. Șișov, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

[55] ***, *История Первой Мировой Войны 1914-1918 гг. (Istoria Primului Război Mondial 1914-1918)*, vol. 2, Editura Nauka, Moscova, 1975, p. 365-366. Singura realizare notabilă a ofensivei ruse a fost cucerirea orașului Penjwin, la 30 iunie 1917. Rușii au fost nevoiți să părăsească Penjwin după 3 zile, fiind atacați de „4.000 de turci, 2.000 de kurzi călare și două batalioane de voluntari persani" (tr. n.). (A.V. Șișov, *op. cit.*, p. 300) În cursul operațiilor militare din vara anului 1917, Armata a 6-a otomană din Mesopotamia și Kurdistan a putut opune anglo-rușilor Corpul XIII Armată (diviziile 2, 6 și 46 infanterie) și Corpul XVIII Armată (diviziile 14, 51 și 52 infanterie), cu un total de 42.000 de soldați, 458 de mitraliere și 134 de tunuri. (*Frontul Irak-Iran 1914-1918*, p. 737)

[56] A.V. Șișov, *op. cit.*, p. 301. Vezi și Raportul colonelului Șatilov din Cartierul General al armatei caucaziene, datat 11 septembrie 1917, stocat în RGVIA – Российский Государственный Военно-Исторический Архив (Arhiva Istorico-Militară de Stat a Rusiei), fond 2100, opis 1, delo 321 p. 44-47, publicat de D.G. Martirosyan, *op. cit.*, p. 262-263.

POLITICAL CARICATURE AND THE VISUAL CULTURE OF WAR: REPRESENTING KAISER WILHELM II IN *FURNICA* (THE ANT) MAGAZINE IN 1914

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Abstract

This article analyses the representation of Kaiser Wilhelm II in the Romanian satirical magazine Furnica during the first months of the First World War. It explores how visual satire translated wartime violence and imperial authority into accessible symbolic forms for a Romanian audience during a period of national neutrality, functioning not merely as illustration but as a framework for interpreting and evaluating political events.

The study shows that the Kaiser is constructed as the central embodiment of Imperial Germany's role in the conflict. Through visual personification, abstract concepts such as militarism, political responsibility, and destruction are condensed into a single, recognisable figure, enabling a simplified yet powerful interpretation of the war.

At the same time, grotesque and satirical strategies – such as exaggeration, inversion, and animalisation – are used to undermine the symbolic prestige of imperial authority and construct a critical image of the German ruler. These representations combine a moralising register, which attributes responsibility for violence to political leadership, with a grotesque register that erodes its legitimacy.

Finally, the article situates these visual constructions within the context of Romania's neutrality, emphasising that Furnica *interpreted the war through a national lens shaped by debates on foreign policy and national unity. Caricature thus emerges as both a form of satire and a medium of political interpretation linking international conflict to domestic concerns.*

Keywords*: First World War, visual culture, political caricature, Kaiser Wilhelm II,* Furnica *magazine, Romania, neutrality*

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Introduction

The political, diplomatic, and military dynamics that characterised the First World War marked a turning point in the development of European visual culture, reflecting the growing need to translate the realities of modern warfare into visual forms that could be readily understood by the public. From 1914 onwards, illustrated newspapers, political posters, and satirical caricatures assumed an increasingly prominent role in representing and interpreting the conflict. Rather than simply documenting wartime events, these visual media actively participated in constructing and contesting the meanings of violence, political responsibility, and the legitimacy of military action[1].

Within this context, political caricature became a significant medium through which the complexities of international politics were expressed through a visual language accessible to a broad audience[2]. By personifying states and political leaders, caricatures transformed complex geopolitical processes into easily recognisable visual forms, enabling audiences to understand and morally evaluate the war. Rather than simply reflecting events or serving as instruments of propaganda, caricatures also contributed to political debate by presenting complex issues in a simple and memorable form, thereby encouraging public engagement with political affairs[3].

This paper examines the portrayal of Kaiser Wilhelm II as the main visual embodiment of Imperial Germany in the Romanian satirical magazine *Furnica* during the first months of the Great War. Although Romania remained neutral until August 1916, and despite the political sensitivity surrounding its German-born monarch, King Carol I, the magazine developed a coherent visual discourse that associated Germany with militarism and violence, thereby concentrating political responsibility for the dynamics of the war in the figure of the Kaiser.

Methodologically, the paper is based on a corpus of caricatures published in *Furnica* between the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914 and the end of the year. It focuses on the visual representation of the German emperor as a recurring symbolic figure, paying particular attention to the visual strategies through which satire conveyed political meaning, including repetition, exaggeration, and symbolic coding. Drawing on approaches from visual culture studies and the history of political imagery, the article analyses Kaiser Wilhelm II not as a historical actor but as a visual construct through which imperial authority, political responsibility, and wartime violence were represented and interpreted for Romanian audiences.

Romania's Neutrality and the Representation of War in *Furnica*

Following the outbreak of the First World War, the neutrality adopted by the Romanian government stimulated intense public debate regarding the country's foreign policy orientation and future geopolitical alignment[4]. In this context, the satirical press and political caricature functioned as important arenas for interpreting, framing, and communicating international developments to a broad public. Rather than merely reporting events, illustrated magazines provided visual frameworks through which readers could access and interpret the political and military developments in Europe.

The analysis of the caricatures appearing in *Furnica* magazine indicates that the representation of Germany was embedded within a broader vision of the European balance of power. Although the figure of the Kaiser occupies an important place in war-related imagery, he is frequently portrayed alongside other imperial actors, particularly those representing the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. This distribution of visual references suggests that the magazine interpreted the war primarily through the lens of Romania's political and territorial interests, rather than through a simple opposition between the Entente and the Central Powers. The magazine therefore situated the international conflict within a specifically Romanian framework of interpretation, one primarily concerned with the future of the national project.

A particularly relevant example is the allegorical representation of Bessarabia and Transylvania, in which the two regions appear as contested territories subject to different imperial powers. Bessarabia, annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812, symbolises Romanian communities living under Tsarist rule, while Transylvania, incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, represents Romanians living under the Habsburg administration[5]. The accompanying motto "Neither with the Tsar, but with the Country; Neither with the German, but with the Nation" articulates a perspective centred on national interest and underscores the subordination of international alignments to the question of national unity. From this perspective, the magazine's portrayal of Germany cannot be reduced to an expression of sympathy or hostility toward a particular alliance but must be understood within a wider discourse concerning Romania's political and strategic priorities.

The personalisation of responsibility for the war allowed the caricaturists to translate abstract political concepts into recognisable visual forms[6]. Through the recurring figure of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the caricatures transformed ideas such as imperial authority, militarism, and political responsibility into a single visual symbol that enabled readers to interpret Germany's role in the conflict and assign responsibility for the development of the war[7].

The magazine further reinforced this interpretative strategy by integrating symbols, allegories, and political motifs specific to the Romanian cultural and political space, indicating that the European war was interpreted through a national framework of meaning. Therefore, the war was continuously reframed in relation to Romania's strategic interests, while the representation of the Great Powers acquired significance according to their perceived relevance to the Romanian aspirations for national unity and territorial reconfiguration.

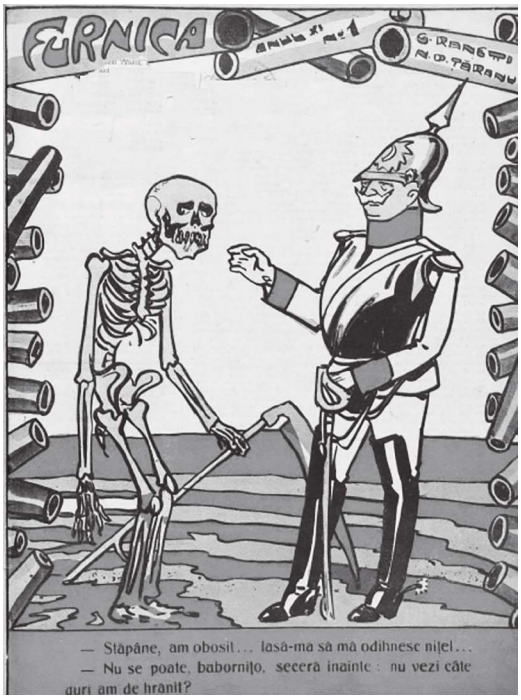
During the period of Romania's neutrality, this visual discourse should be understood within a broader public debate concerning the country's future foreign policy orientation[8].



"Visul Kaiserului" (The Kaiser's Dream), *Furnica*, no. 5/1914, p. 12

The decision of the Romanian leadership to remain neutral did not suspend political discourse, but rather created the conditions for competing interpretations of Romania's strategic interests and possible alignment. In this context, the satirical press offered a visual framework through which international developments were viewed in relation to Romanian political interests, strategic concerns, and national aspirations.

Alongside its portrayals of the belligerent powers, *Furnica* frequently satirised the personal ambitions, rivalries, and allegations of corruption surrounding Romanian political elites in debates over the country's eventual entry into the conflict[9]. Consequently, the satirical representations of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Imperial Germany should be understood alongside these domestic debates, as components of a broader visual discourse through which international events were interpreted in relation to Romania's political choices and national aspirations.



"Kaiserul şi Moartea" (The Kaiser and Death), *Furnica*, no. 6/1914, cover



"Mottoul Kaiserului în război" (The Kaiser's Motto in War), *Furnica*, no. 12/1914, cover

Kaiser Wilhelm II and the Personification of Wartime Violence

The representation of Kaiser Wilhelm II occupies a prominent position within *Furnica*'s visual interpretation of Imperial Germany's role in the First World War. Throughout 1914, the magazine repeatedly employed the emperor's image to address broader ideas about political authority, violence, and warfare, suggesting a sustained tendency to personalise the German role in the conflict through a single symbolic actor. This approach is articulated in one of the covers of 1914, where Kaiser Wilhelm II is depicted in dialogue with the personification of Death. The satirical exchange reads:

> *Death: Master, I am exhausted... let me rest for a little...*
>
> *Kaiser Wilhelm: Impossible, old hag! Keep reaping: can't you see how many mouths I must feed?*[10]

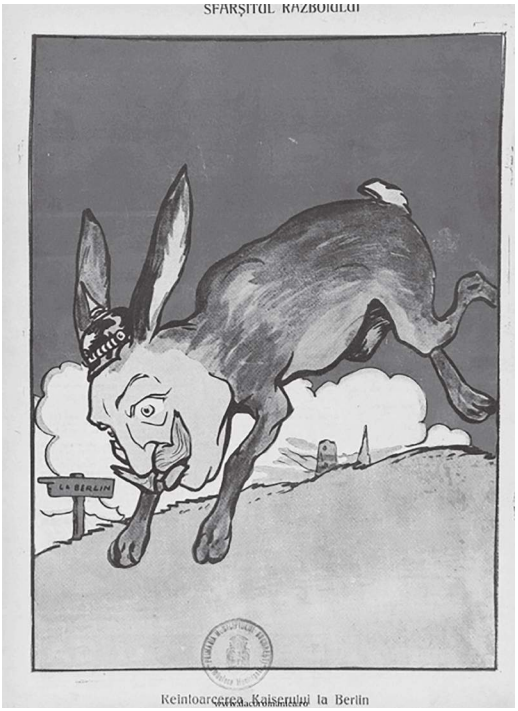
The significance of this dialogue lies in the way it structures the relationship between political authority and violence. Death is not portrayed as an autonomous force produced by war but as a subordinate figure acting under the Kaiser's command. By visually placing the emperor in a position of authority over the forces of destruction, the caricature attributes the responsibility for wartime destruction directly to political leadership[11]. Violence is therefore presented not as an external consequence of military conflict but as an instrument articulated through political authority itself. The image thus transforms the emperor into the symbolic administrator of death, establishing a visual association that recurs throughout *Furnica*'s wartime caricatures[12].

A similar process of moral inversion characterises the caricature entitled "The Kaiser's Motto in War", in which Wilhelm II advances across a field of corpses under the slogan "Forward with God!"[13]. God is represented in front of the Kaiser, bound and dressed in rags, reduced to a powerless and humiliated figure. This inversion is central to the meaning of the caricature. Rather than affirming a religious

justification of violence, the image stages the collapse of divine authority within the space of warfare. The Kaiser does not appear as a leader guided by moral legitimacy, but as a figure who advances across a landscape of death while subordinating even the divine itself. The presence of God in a degraded and immobilised position suggests the suspension of moral order, emphasising that war has displaced any higher normative framework. The image therefore reverses the conventional relationship between political and divine authority: instead of acting under God's protection, the emperor visually subordinates the sacred to his own military ambitions. The juxtaposition of sacred language and desecrated imagery produces a deliberate irony: the motto of divine guidance is contradicted by the visual representation of divine helplessness. As a result, the caricature reinforces a reading of the Kaiser as the central agent of destruction, positioned above both human and divine authority.

A different dimension of this visual discourse emerges in the caricature depicting the Kaiser in conversation with a butcher regarding the shortage of meat[14]. Here, the logic of war is translated into an economic and industrial register. The analogy between slaughter and commercial distribution reframes mass violence as a regulated process embedded in systems of production and consumption. Without depicting combat directly, the image relies on everyday economic language to render destruction both intelligible and part of a wider system, suggesting that death operated within a continuous supply chain.

Taken together, these caricatures reveal a coherent visual framework through which the satire personalises the cause and responsibility for modern warfare. Rather than depicting violence as an abstract characteristic of the conflict, they locate the origins of violence in the figure of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Across political, economic, and religious registers, the emperor functions as the central symbolic figure through whom militarism, violence, and destruction are communicated by means of "visual metaphor"[15]. Rather than constructing a



"Sfârșitul războiului. Reîntoarcerea Kaiserului la Berlin" (The End of the War. The Kaiser's Return to Berlin), ***Furnica*****, no. 9/1914, p. 12**



"Kaiserul în oglindă" (The Kaiser in the Mirror), ***Furnica*****, no. 7/1914, p. 12**



"Apoteoza Kaiserului" (The Apotheosis of the Kaiser), *Furnica*, no. 10/1914, p. 11

portrait of the emperor, these images employ his figure to interpret the causes, consequences, and moral implications of the war.

The Grotesque and the Visual Delegitimisation of Imperial Authority

Beyond portraying Kaiser Wilhelm II as a figure associated with the administration of violence, the caricatures published in *Furnica* during 1914 frequently employ the visual registers of the grotesque and satire to construct a delegitimising image of German imperial authority. These representations complement the moralising dimension analysed above and emphasise how caricature contributed to diminishing the symbolic prestige of the German ruler.

Wilhelm II is depicted in situations that contrast with the traditional iconography of the military sovereign[16]. A representative example is the caricature in which he appears as a hare retreating toward Berlin[17]. By associating the emperor with an animal traditionally linked to timidity, the image subverts the conventional attributes of authority and military success, suggesting vulnerability and a loss of control over the course of the conflict.

A similar approach is reflected in the representation of the Kaiser gazing into a mirror and seeing his reflection transformed into a skull[18]. The visual composition establishes a direct association between the emperor and the destructive consequences of war, implying that the exercise of political power is inseparable from the production of death. In this instance, the grotesque functions not merely as a satirical instrument but also as a form of political commentary[19].

In the caricature "The Apotheosis of the Kaiser"[20], the emperor is surrounded by wild animals in a composition that situates him within a symbolic universe defined by aggression and violence. The association between the ruler and the animal world contributes to the erosion of conventional attributes of imperial authority while constructing a critical representation of the political power he embodies.

The grotesque register is further emphasised in caricatures addressing the conduct of military operations. When depicting the German offensive towards Paris or the developments on the Western Front, the Kaiser is placed in situations that highlight the contrast between military ambitions and outcomes. Through irony and visual exaggeration, the caricatures comment on the dynamics of the war while undermining narratives of invincibility associated with the German imperial leadership.

These different forms of representation demonstrate that *Furnica* systematically employed visual instruments to delegitimise imperial authority. Whereas the first analytical register presented the Kaiser as the principal figure associated with responsibility for wartime violence, the second register shifts the emphasis toward the erosion of his symbolic prestige and authority. The grotesque and satire do not replace the moralising dimension of these images; rather, they reinforce it through visual strategies that enable a critical portrayal of the imperial figure.

At the same time, these strategies may be understood within the broader tradition of

European political caricature during the First World War, in which political leaders were frequently represented through grotesque exaggeration, animalisation, and symbolic degradation. Such representations interconnected the attribution of responsibility for the military conflict with the continuous erosion of political legitimacy.

Within the context of Romania's neutrality (1914-1916), these visual constructions were part of a broader discursive environment through which public perceptions of Germany and, implicitly, of the Central Powers were shaped. By consistently associating Kaiser Wilhelm II with defeat, violence, and symbolic erosion of imperial authority, *Furnica* contributed to the construction of an interpretive framework that encouraged a critical reading of German political and military leadership.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Furnica* magazine demonstrates the development of a visual narrative in which Kaiser Wilhelm II functioned as the main symbolic embodiment of Imperial Germany during the first months of the Great War. Rather than representing the emperor as a historical figure, the caricatures employed his image as a visual construct through which the political, moral, and military dimensions of German participation in the conflict were interpreted and explained to a broad public.

The two analytical registers examined in this article highlight complementary strategies of representation. On one hand, the Kaiser is consistently portrayed as embodying the symbolic responsibility of wartime violence, exercising authority over death, and subordinating divine authority to the political one. On the other hand, the grotesque undermines the symbolic prestige of imperial authority through animalisation, visual degradation, and irony. Together, these strategies construct a coherent political image in which German imperial power appears simultaneously responsible for the conduct of the war and deprived of the moral legitimacy.

At the same time, these representations should be understood within the specific context of Romania's neutrality, when *Furnica* interpreted the European conflict through visual references closely connected to Romanian political and strategic objectives. The representations of Kaiser Wilhelm II therefore functioned as a means of situating international events within a Romanian interpretative framework shaped by debates over foreign policy options in the projection of achieving national unity by joining one of the belligerent camps.

More broadly, the caricatures published in *Furnica* in the first months of the First World War illustrate the capacity of political satire to translate complex geopolitical developments into coherent visual narratives through which warfare could be understood and morally evaluated by a broad audience. In this context, caricatures functioned not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium of visual interpretation of the warfare. By personifying political responsibility and employing allegory, irony, and the grotesque, the caricature transformed the complexities of international conflict into accessible visual narratives.

NOTES

[1] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 6.

[2] Timothy David Smith, "Semiotics and the Grotesque in Political Cartoons: Antebellum Editorial Caricatures as Historical Evidence", in *Semiotic Review* 7, 2023, https://doi.org/10.71743/0jbd3h57.

[3] Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, Reaktion Books, London, 2001, pp. 9-10, 79.

[4] *Furnica*, no. 4/1914, cover, *Efectele neutralității*.

[5] *Furnica*, no. 6/1914, cover.

[6] Peter Burke, *Eyewithnessing,* pp. 60-61.

[7] *Furnica*, no. 5/1914, p. 12, *Visul Kaiserului*.

[8] Keith Hitchins, *România. 1866-1947*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, pp. 293-304.

[9] *Furnica*, no. 7/1914, p. 6, *Politica la cafenea*.

[10] *Furnica*, no. 1/1914, cover.

[11] *Furnica*, no. 12/1914, cover, *După patru luni de război*.

[12] *Furnica*, no. 2/1914, p. 6, *Cei doi măcelari*; no. 4/1914, p. 6, *Eri culesul viilor. Azi, culesul morților*; no. 7/1914, p. 12, *Caricaturi streine. Kai-*

zerul la oglindă; no. 12/1914, cover, *După patru luni de război*; no. 13/1914, p. 4, *Războiul european – Cei cari au rămas... pe drumuri*; no. 51/1914, p. 12, *Știri de pe câmpul de război – Ultima oră*.

[13] *Furnica*, no. 2/1914, cover.

[14] *Furnica*, no. 2/1914, p. 6, *Cei doi măcelari*.

[15] Dafina Genova, "Grasping Political Cartoons? Not an Easy Matter", in *European Journal of Humour Research* 6, 1/2018, pp. 88-89.

[16] *Furnica*, no. 10/1914, p. 11, *Scamatorul Europei*.

[17] *Furnica*, no. 9/1914, p. 12, *Sfârșitul războiului. Reîntoarcerea Kaiserului la Berlin.*

[18] *Furnica*, no. 7/1914, p. 12, *Kaizerul în oglindă*.

[19] Timothy David Smith, "Semiotics and the Grotesque…".

[20] *Furnica*, no. 11/1914, cover.

AL DOILEA RĂZBOI MONDIAL

COMPORTAREA ÎN LUPTĂ A UNOR OFIȚERI DE REZERVĂ ÎN TIMPUL CELUI DE AL DOILEA RĂZBOI MONDIAL. REZULTATE ALE PROCESULUI DE FORMARE PROFESIONALĂ DESFĂȘURAT ANTERIOR ANULUI 1941*

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Abstract

This paper can be considered a continuation of the article The Professional Training of Reserve Officers, 1938-1940. The Valorisation of Oral History Testimonies *in which we described how Constantin Năstase and Iosif Rus received their military training as reserve infantry officers of the Royal Romanian Army between 1938 and 1940.*

In this article, we aim to describe how the two officers mentioned above, along with Gheorghe Chioreanu, a brave mountain infantry officer (light infantry trained in mountain warfare), performed their duties during World War II, particularly while serving on the Eastern Front. A common thread among the three officers is that they were trained in the use of weapons before the arrival of the German Military Training Mission in Romania and, consequently, before the change in combat doctrine. The primary sources used for this article were the officers' personal files held at the Romanian National Military Archives in Pitești and oral history interviews conducted by the author in 2022 and 2024, as well as the 2016 interview with Gheorghe Chioreanu, that was included by Mr. Dan Ramf in the 3rd volume of Our Grandparents, Our Heroes.

All of them commanded subunits under exceptionally difficult conditions, particularly during the shift in the balance of power between 1942 and 1943. Gheorghe Chioreanu and Iosif Rus fought in the Kuban and the Caucasus Mountains until they were wounded and evacuated, while Constantin Năstase led his men through the encirclement of the Don Bend. The awards they received, both Romanian and German, stand as a recognition of their combat skills.

Keywords: *Royal Romanian Army, World War II, combat behaviour, infantry reserve officers, oral history, war veterans*

*Articolul valorifică o parte din cercetarea realizată pentru teza de doctorat a autorului, „Învățământul militar și specializarea ofițerilor Armatei Regale Române în perioada 1939-1945", susținută în cadrul Școlii de Studii Avansate a Academiei Române, Școala doctorală istorie și arheologie, sub îndrumarea domnului dr. Ioan Chiper, cercetător științific gradul I la Institutul de Istorie „Nicolae Iorga". Articolul este al cincilea studiu care va fi continuat prin publicarea unor materiale în care vor fi prezentate informații despre activitatea școlilor de ofițeri de rezervă în intervalul 1939-1945, raporturile dintre membrii corpului profesoral și elevii ofițeri etc.

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Prezentul material poate fi considerat o continuare a articolului *Formarea profesională a ofițerilor de rezervă, 1938-1940. Valorificarea unor mărturii de istorie orală*[1] în care am descris, într-o manieră concisă, modul în care Constantin Năstase și Iosif Rus[2] au urmat două programe distincte de pregătire în domeniul armelor ca ofițeri de infanterie de rezervă ai Armatei Române între anii 1938 și 1940.

În acest articol ne propunem să prezentăm felul în care cei doi ofițeri amintiți mai sus, împreună cu Gheorghe Chioreanu, un brav vânător de munte, și-au făcut datoria în anii celui de Al Doilea Război Mondial, mai ales în primele linii ale Frontului de Est. Ca numitor comun, cei trei comandanți au avut contact cu mediul cazon înainte de sosirea Misiunii Militare Germane de Instrucție în România și, implicit, înainte de schimbarea doctrinei de luptă. Pentru scrierea acestui articol s-au folosit ca surse principale dosarele personale ale ofițerilor păstrate la Arhivele Militare Naționale Române – Depozitul Central de Arhivă „General Grigore Costandache" din Pitești și interviuri de istorie orală realizate de autor în anii 2022 și 2024, precum și convorbirea înregistrată dintre Gheorghe Chioreanu și domnul Dan Ramf[3].

Cei trei ofițeri și-au exercitat autoritatea asupra unor subunități în condiții deosebit de dificile, mai ales în etapa de schimbare a raporturilor de forță dintre 1942 și 1943. Gheorghe Chioreanu și Iosif Rus au luptat în Kuban și munții Caucaz, până au fost răniți și evacuați, în timp ce Constantin Năstase și-a condus oamenii prin infernul de la Cotul Donului. Distincțiile pe care le-au primit – atât românești, cât și germane – reprezintă o recunoaștere a calităților combative și a modului în care aceștia s-au raportat la misiunile de luptă care le-au fost încredințate.

În continuare considerăm că este necesar să oferim și câteva date din biografia ofițerului Gheorghe Chioreanu, unul dintre ofițerii de rezervă ai armatei române care au participat la efortul de război încă din primele săptămâni ale desfășurării Operațiunii Barbarossa în 1941 și până la finalul conflictului, când a ajuns pe înălțimile Munților Tatra. Originar din mediul rural, dintr-un sat aflat în centrul Transilvaniei, Gheorghe Chioreanu a avut o situație materială care i-a permis să își completeze studiile primare, astfel încât să dobândească o calificare. La fel ca Iosif Rus și Constantin Năstase, tânărul din comuna Șpălnaca nu și-a dorit să urmeze o carieră militară prin înscrierea la o școală de ofițeri activi, ci a optat pentru o carieră didactică. După ce a absolvit cursurile Școlii Normale Greco-Catolice din Blaj și a lucrat pentru o scurtă perioadă la primăria din localitatea natală, acesta și-a efectuat stagiul militar ca militar în termen la Batalionul 8 Vânători de Munte din Bistrița. Timp de aproape un an de zile, între 1 noiembrie 1935 și 21 octombrie 1936, tânărul învățător a fost încadrat în plutonul 1 din Compania 4 Vânători de Munte fiind avansat fruntaș pe 1 aprilie 1936 și caporal cu câteva zile înainte de a fi lăsat la vatră[4].

Conform autobiografiei care a fost redactată pe 15 iulie 1951 și păstrată în memoriul original, Gheorghe Chioreanu a lucrat ca învățător în satele Ciugudul de Sus și Hiria până când a fost din nou concentrat la aceeași unitate, în două etape: între 23 martie și 19 mai 1939, respectiv între 8 septembrie 1939 și 1 aprilie 1940. În baza Ordinului de zi nr. 742 din 1940 dascălul a fost trimis la Centrul de Instrucție al Infanteriei din Sfântu Gheorghe pentru a urma cursuri timp de două luni, astfel încât să fie activat ca ofițer[5]. După încheierea stagiului de formare a primit gradul de plutonier T.R. și a revenit la batalionul său, înălțarea la gradul de sublocotenent de rezervă intrând în vigoare prin Înaltul Decret Regal nr. 2215 din 1 iulie 1940[6].

Având noile trese pe epoleți, Gheorghe Chioreanu a primit comanda unui pluton de pușcași din cadrul Companiei 1 Vânători de Munte, grija acestuia față de soldați fiind observată de ofițerii superiori. Pentru următoarele patru luni sublocotenentul a încercat să își completeze cunoștințele militare prin studierea regulamentelor și a lucrărilor de specialitate, dar mai ales prin participarea la activități practice, precum trageri și exerciții militare. La sfârșitul lunii octombrie 1940, Gheorghe Chioreanu și-a reluat activitatea la catedră, ca învățător în satul Podeni, până la finalul anului școlar[7].



Gheorghe Chioreanu alături de camarazii săi în timpul studiilor militare, 1940, fotografie, colecția familiei domnului colonel (rtr.) Gheorghe Chioreanu

Campania de eliberare a Basarabiei, a nordului Bucovinei și a ținutului Herța în vara anului 1941 a determinat alocarea unor efective semnificative și a unui număr corespunzător de cadre de conducere. Astfel, prin Ordinul de zi nr. 2112, dascălul Chioreanu a trebuit să părăsească din nou sala de clasă pentru a îmbrăca uniforma militară. Deși inițial a fost numit în funcția de ofițer de legătură între Batalionul 8 Vânători de Munte și eșaloanele superioare, ulterior a primit comanda unui pluton de transmisiuni de a cărui instrucție s-a ocupat cu multă responsabilitate. De asemenea, așa cum reiese din notația locotenent-colonelului Dumitru Cârlan, comandantul Grupului 4 Vânători de Munte, sublocotenentul Chioreanu s-a evidențiat și pe durata unor importante confruntări „foarte disciplinat și-a îndeplinit serviciul în mod foarte lăudabil. Are un spirit pronunțat de orientare în teren. Toate ordinele le aduce la timp datorită conștiinciozității în îndeplinirea serviciului precum și calmului pe câmpul de luptă. De multe ori a venit cu ordine, deși străbătea bombardamente de artilerie, iar altă dată cum a fost la Malaja-Belosjorka a trecut printre tancurile ruse ce erau în spate”[8]. Aceste prime acte de curaj i-au fost recunoscute fără nicio rezervă de ofițerii superiori care au hotărât acordarea ordinului *Coroana României* clasa a V-a cu spade și panglică de *Virtute Militară*.

După ce a revenit în țară, în garnizoana de reședință a unității, sublocotenentul de vânători de munte a fost numit instructor pentru un pluton format din tineri ai contingentului 1942/1943. Pentru o scurtă perioadă de timp, între 10 ianuarie și 15 februarie 1942, Gheorghe Chioreanu a urmat un curs de specializare organizat la Centrul de Instrucție din Deva, seriozitatea și competențele sale pedagogice recomandându-l ulterior pentru preluarea unei noi subunități de recruți care aparținea Companiei 2 Vânători de Munte. Militarii aflați sub autoritatea sa au fost beneficiarii unui program de instruire atent urmărit și coordonat, care a avut ca principal obiectiv trecerea de la o identitate solitară la o voință comună, la construirea unui set asemănător de valori și la dobândirea unor reale capacități de luptă.

La mijlocul lunii iulie a fost trimis din nou pe Frontul de Est unde, încă o dată, și-a arătat preocuparea constantă pentru sănătatea ostașilor, îngrijirea animalelor, întreținerea echipamentului și funcționarea armamentului, aspecte esențiale care influențau capacitatea ofensivă și posibilitatea de reacție defensivă a

subunității pe care o comanda. Împreună cu plutonul său a luat parte la acțiunile ofensive din vara anului 1942 pe direcția de înaintare spre Kuban și Caucaz[9], demonstrând inițiativă, curaj și devotament, așa cum s-a întâmplat pe 23 august la traversarea râului Staraya Krepost[10]. Contextul în care s-au desfășurat confruntările cu militarii Armatei Roșii a fost evocat chiar de supraviețuitorul ajuns la vârsta centenarului. „Căpitanul Negru conducea două plutoane la cota 1000 în munții Caucaz, eu trebuia să-i asigur spatele, să nu fie luați prin surprindere. De departe se auzeau niște bubuieli infernale, le-am zis băieților să-și pună baionetele la pușcă și să pregătească grenadele de mână. Se trăgea pe flancuri cu artileria, rușii erau și ei la pământ. Tranșeele au fost stricate de bombardament, a doua zi le-am reparat cu ostașii mei."[11]

În continuare, veteranul de război a descris momentul în care a fost rănit în timpul unui atac susținut de vânătorii de munte pentru cucerirea unei poziții aflate la înălțime „când am coborât în vale, s-a deschis focul de pe creastă. Un glonț m-a nimerit, a intrat de la stânga la dreapta pieptului, mi-a atins plămânul, a trecut pe sub inimă. Mare noroc am avut că nu a fost cu câțiva centimetri mai sus, acum eram mort. Cartușul m-a lovit de undeva din stânga, am căzut jos, eram pe marginea unei păduri, voiam să ajung la plutonul meu sus, pe deal. Am căzut și am amuțit, nu mai puteam vorbi. Am avut noroc că cineva de la noi a dat ordin să se ducă muniție la poziția aia de sus, soldații au luat fiecare câte o ladă, două, și așa m-au descoperit"[12].



Gheorghe Chioreanu îmbrăcat în uniforma militară, cu gradul de locotenent, 1945, fotografie, colecția familiei domnului colonel (rtr.) Gheorghe Chioreanu

Pentru a avea o imagine de ansamblu asupra calităților care îl caracterizau pe Gheorghe Chioreanu redăm un fragment mai amplu din foaia calificativă din perioada 1 noiembrie 1942-31 octombrie 1943 cu aprecierile comandantului de batalion. „În teren se prezintă foarte bine. Se orientează ușor și rezolvă cu multă îndemânare orice situație tactică. Cu hotărâre și mult sânge rece, voință puternică, concepție sănătoasă, o mare putere de muncă și perseverență în orice activitate. Caracter frumos, demn și încrezător în sine, cu mult curaj și îndrăzneală, ceea ce a dovedit pe câmpul de luptă... Foarte disciplinat cu superiorii, drept și bun cu subalternii. Foarte muncitor, lucrează cu mult devotament și spirit de sacrificiu. Modest și foarte manierat. Sincer și un prea bun camarad. Are o conduită ireproșabilă în orice ocaziune."[13] Locotenent-colonelul Cătălin Lucescu a continuat astfel descrierea ofițerului său: „pe câmpul de luptă a săvârșit frumoase acte de bravură, remarcându-se pe ziua de 9 septembrie 1942 în luptele de la Sajukowo, unde prin avântul și iureșul fără seamăn pătrunde cu plot. său în luptă corp la corp în poziția inamică și-l pune pe goană. Cade însă rănit în aceste lupte. Pentru aceste fapte a fost propus la ord. «Mihai Viteazul». Concluziuni: Este un ofițer de rezervă excepțional de bun, foarte bine pregătit și cu un mare suflet de român care face cinste instituției"[14]. O opinie similară a fost exprimată și de locotenent-colonelul Ciubotariu, comandantul Permanenței Diviziei 2 munte. „În luptă s-a comportat ca un brav. La comandă de pluton a dat rezultate prea bune. Valoarea plutonului său ca pregătire de război – Foarte bună – Grijă foarte multă de soldat,

armament și echipament. Concluzie: Foarte bun ofițer de rezervă."[15] Din motive încă neidentificate distincția nu i-a mai fost acordată sublocotenentului, însă simpla propunere venită din partea comandantului reprezenta o performanță notabilă.

Evacuat din prima linie, Gheorghe Chioreanu a fost mai întâi transportat la spitalul din Piatigorsk pentru acordarea ajutorului medical în regim de urgență, după care a fost transferat la Lemberg unde, pentru o perioadă de timp, s-a aflat în grija medicilor germani. După ce starea sa de sănătate a devenit stabilă sublocotenentul a fost adus în țară, la Arad, unde a rămas internat până în data de 14 noiembrie. După externare a avut un concediu medical de 90 de zile care i-a permis o refacere aproape completă.

Gheorghe Chioreanu a făcut parte din prima serie de ofițeri care între 1 și 24 iunie 1943 a urmat, la Centrul de Instrucție al Infanteriei din Făgăraș, cursul pentru aruncătoare românești de calibru 120 mm, armă a cărei producție începuse la Reșița în anul 1942. În perioada de timp amintită au fost parcurse următoarele cursuri: *Cunoașterea materialului*, *Instrucția tehnică*, *Instrucția de luptă* și *Instrucția tragerii*, iar în urma evaluărilor luptătorul din Caucaz a fost notat cu media generală 7 și cu următoarele aprecieri „a depus mult interes. Și-a însușit bine cunoștințele necesare. Poate să comande în condițiuni bune un ploton de aruncătoare de 120 mm"[16].

Cunoștințele dobândite au fost valorificate după revenirea sa la partea sedentară a batalionului, unde datorită numărului restrâns de ofițeri cu studii de specialitate, Gheorghe Chioreanu s-a ocupat de instruirea unui pluton dotat cu aruncătoare de calibru 81,4 mm, dar și a unei secții care folosea aruncătoare de calibru 120 mm. Încă o dată, formația sa profesională inițială, de dascăl, s-a dovedit deosebit de utilă și, de asemenea, interesul său permanent față de militarii alături de care lucra în cazarmă și în poligonul de trageri. Eforturile investite timp de mai multe luni au avut ca rezultat apariția unei legături strânse între ostași și comandant, un raport care avea să își demonstreze importanța în timpul bătăliei pentru apărarea Moldovei.

La sfârșitul lunii aprilie 1944 ofițerul din Șpălnaca a ajuns pe front la nord de Iași unde, alături de plutonul său, a organizat din punct de vedere defensiv sectorul alocat, prin amenajarea unor tranșee și a unor amplasamente pentru armamentul din înzestrare, astfel încât planul de foc să permită respingerea atacurilor sovietice. În paralel, a continuat, cu aceeași dedicare, să își instruiască militarii, astfel încât aceștia să fie capabili să opună rezistență folosind atât aruncătorul, cât și armamentul portativ, inclusiv pentru situațiile în care s-ar fi ajuns la cea mai brutală formă de interacțiune, lupta corp la corp. Însă raportul de forțe defavorabil apărătorilor și asalturile repetate susținute de tancurile Armatei Roșii au determinat replierea succesivă a unităților române. Chiar și în aceste situații extrem de dificile, Gheorghe Chioreanu a avut o atitudine demnă și, așa cum a menționat comandantul batalionului, locotenent-colonelul Cătălin Lucescu, „a condus cu pricepere, curaj și spirit de sacrificiu, plutonul său în luptele din zilele de 21-24 august 1944, scăpând din încercuire cu o parte de oameni"[17].

Schimbarea de alianță a României a influențat destinul ofițerului de vânători de munte care a continuat să își facă datoria și pe durata campaniei din Apus, participând activ cu Batalionul 8 Vânători de Munte la eliberarea nord-vestului Transilvaniei, la luptele din Ungaria și la cele purtate pe teritoriul cehoslovac. Prin Înaltul Decret Regal nr. 619 din 24 decembrie 1944 a fost avansat la gradul de locotenent de rezervă, în aceeași lună fiind numit comandant de companie și ofițer responsabil cu aprovizionarea[18]. La finalul războiului Gheorghe Chioreanu era în mijlocul oamenilor săi, cărora le câștigase nu doar respectul și încrederea, ci și o anumită formă de atașament care poate fi întâlnită doar în mediul cazon, în contextul luptei pentru supraviețuire colectivă care este invariabil influențată de calitatea actului de comandă. Întors în țară, locotenentul și-a îndeplinit atribuțiile până când a fost lăsat la vatră conform Ordinului de zi nr. 242 din 1 noiembrie 1945. Încheierea conflictului i-a permis ofițerului să revină la catedră, alături de elevii săi, având sentimentul datoriei împlinite în calitate de comandant, dar mai ales de om.



Constantin Năstase îmbrăcat în uniformă militară, cu gradul de sublocotenent, 1942, fotografie, colecția familiei domnului general-maior (rtr.) Constantin Năstase

În continuare o să îl evocăm pe Constantin Năstase care, în prima jumătate a anului 1941, lucra ca învățător în comuna Negru Vodă din județul Constanța. Asemeni multor dascăli a fost concentrat pe 8 iunie, în baza Ordinului de zi nr. 348, la cazarma Regimentului 19 Infanterie din Caracal și mobilizat, pe 22 iunie, la partea operativă a unității, la comanda plutonului 4 din Compania 8 Infanterie, odată cu intrarea în vigoare a Înaltului Decret nr. 1798[19]. Sublocotenentul nu a participat la trecerea Prutului pentru alungarea forțelor sovietice din Basarabia, fiind trimis la partea sedentară a regimentului și încadrat la Batalionul 1 Instrucție și Marș.

Dascălul originar din Mioveni a ajuns în zona de conflict în contextul desfășurării bătăliei pentru Odessa, un obiectiv strategic deosebit de valoros de la Marea Neagră, care, potrivit decidenților politico-militari de la București, trebuia să devină o mare victorie a armatei române. Ordinul de zi nr. 28 din 3 septembrie 1941 atestă mutarea lui Constantin Năstase la partea activă a unității, la comanda plutonului 2 din Compania 12 Infanterie, însă în mai puțin de o săptămână acesta a primit în responsabilitate plutonul 3 din structura organică a Companiei 8 Infanterie[20]. Colonelul Constantin Voiculescu, comandantul regimentului, a scris următoarele în foaia calificativă a ofițerului de rezervă în legătură cu participarea acestuia la acțiunile militare purtate dincolo de râul Nistru: „bun instructor. Autoritar în fața frontului. Muncitor și cu multă bunăvoință și perseverență… disciplinat, bun camarad. Sincer și cu spirit de sacrificiu. Bun executant al ordinelor… a comandat plot. 1 mitr. Compania a 8 luând parte la luptele de la Pelijova, Amestova, Odesa. În tot timpul luptelor a dat dovadă de curaj și hotărâre. A depus mult interes și suflet. Punctual la serviciu și conștiincios”[21]. După această primă experiență a frontului Constantin Năstase a fost deconcentrat pe 16 noiembrie conform Ordinului de zi nr. 940 și și-a reluat activitatea ca învățător, de această dată în comuna Coșernița din județul Orhei.

Declanșarea operațiunii Fall Blau a însemnat angajarea unor noi structuri ale armatei române care să lupte alături de diviziile Wehrmachtului pentru înaintarea în interiorul URSS. Având în vedere pierderile semnificative înregistrate în timpul campaniei din anul anterior, mai ales în rândurile ofițerilor subalterni[22], un număr semnificativ de ofițeri de rezervă au primit ordine de mobilizare. Constantin Năstase a fost concentrat pe 1 august 1942 și trecut în zona de operații pe 1 septembrie, prin aplicarea Ordinului de zi nr. 1114, la comanda unui pluton care avea în dotare piese de artilerie antitanc[23].

Pentru următoarele cinci luni sublocotenentul de rezervă a trăit o experiență care i-a marcat nu doar cariera militară, ci și întreaga existență. Bătălia de la Cotul Donului a reprezentat una dintre cele mai ample confruntări la care a participat armata română în decursul istoriei sale, o încleștare între oponenți cu forțe inegale în timpul căreia superioritatea tehnică, diferența de efective și condițiile meteorologice extreme au influențat în mod decisiv deznodământul. Ostașii români, în majoritate infanteriști, s-au regăsit în situația de a lupta într-un net raport de inferioritate, folosind armament cu un calibru subdimensionat și

uneori obiecte rudimentare (unelte), pentru a se opune blindatelor sovietice[24].

După aproape 80 de ani de la desfășurarea evenimentelor, Constantin Năstase, unul dintre ultimii supraviețuitori ai bătăliei de la Cotul Donului, a descris tensiunea și dramatismul pe care le-a trăit alături de oamenii săi în prima linie a frontului, unde au suportat duritatea ofensivei susținute de unitățile inamice: „seara pe la ora opt au început ei atacul. Deci, întâi a trecut infanteria. Ne-a atacat, am respins-o... asta în timpul zilei, iar spre seară un grup de tancuri rusești a trecut peste noi. Ne-au distrus și armele... și după aceea a venit grosu'. Tancuri, tancuri, artilerie și câte și mai câte și am avut noroc și n-a căzut niciun obuz pă mine… nu mai judecam. Nu mai judecam. Adică eram pierduți, eram pierduți… veneau mai multe (tancuri). Și unul dintre ele sigur că era pe direcția mea. Eram disperați"[25].

Crearea unor breșe în dispozitivul de apărare a permis pătrunderea în adâncime și realizarea unei manevre ample care avea ca scop încercuirea, izolarea și neutralizarea unităților române și germane. În contextul dominat de haos au existat exemple de curaj, de lideri care au preluat inițiativa pentru organizarea unor poziții defensive (în așteptarea unor forțe de sprijin care, din păcate, nu au mai ajuns), dar și cazuri în care solidaritatea anumitor comandanți cu propriii militari a fost relativă. În climatul de nesiguranță și incertitudine Constantin Năstase a avut o atitudine demnă, oferind contemporanilor săi o adevărată dovadă de verticalitate: „am ieșit din încercuire, am vrut să plec, că se vedea drumul, șoseaua principală pe unde nemții cărau către front și către casă și o dată am tresărit și am zis – Ce fac eu? Adică eu să mă salvez, să mă duc acasă și ostașii mei să rămână pradă la ruși? – și m-am întors și cu ordonanța am puricat… prin împrejurimi și atâta am mai găsit din ăștia (7) și cu ei am plecat către țară… cum om fi scăpat? La risc! La risc așa târâș și eu, și ostașii mei tot așa au procedat... era o noapte întunecoasă și ningea și un ger de trosneau pietrele"[26].

Întrebat dacă a simțit pentru un moment că era posibil să își piardă viața, veteranul de război a oferit un răspuns care a demonstrat tăria sa de caracter: „Nu. Nu am avut timp de așa ceva. Acolo când ești în atac, când ești pe front, când ești în război, nu mai ții cont de treburile astea și ești așa ca un model de om"[27]. Apreciem că exemplul său este unul demn de admirație în condițiile în care la Cotul Donului au fost ofițeri activi, oameni care făcuseră din purtarea uniformei o profesie, comandanți care, folosindu-se de grade și de accesul la anumite facilități (cai, autoturisme, camioane), au decis să își abandoneze oamenii pentru a se salva, lăsând responsabilitatea de conducere a subunităților în grija unor ofițeri inferiori sau a unor subofițeri.

Ieșirea din încercuire nu a însemnat încetarea calvarului, rămășițele forțelor de odinioară fiind în pericol să fie ajunse din urmă de avangărzile Armatei Roșii și să cadă într-un prizonierat pe care și până atunci îl evitaseră cu greu. Înaintând spre vest, multe grupuri de ostași români s-au întâlnit, formând treptat subunități de dimensiunile unor grupe, plutoane sau companii, care însă nu aveau mijloacele necesare pentru a opune o rezistență semnificativă în eventualitatea unui atac. Astfel, anumiți ofițeri, luând în considerație posibilitatea de a fi privați de libertate într-un viitor apropiat, au decis să renunțe la elementele specifice care îi diferențiau de trupă, fiindu-le teamă că vor primi un tratament diferit din partea sovieticilor.

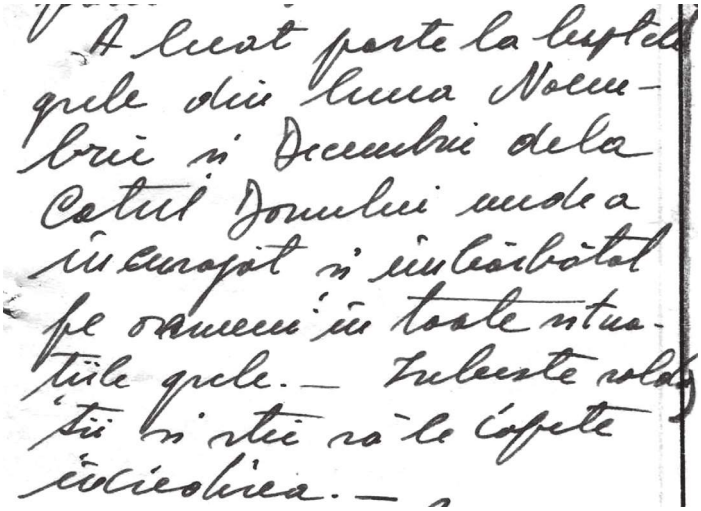
Pentru a evita o astfel de situație, alt ofițer i-a recomandat lui Constantin Năstase să își îndepărteze reciproc tresele de pe mantii și vestoane. Propunerea a fost inițial acceptată de sublocotenentul de rezervă, însă după tăierea primului rând de însemne acesta a avut o reacție care a evidențiat încă o dată setul său de valori și demnitatea de militar. „O tresărire m-a cuprins și-n sinea mea mi-am spus: Ce fac eu? De ce eu însumi să mă degradez? Ce am făcut eu rău? Cu ce-am greșit în acest război? Să uit consemnul și jurământul de ofițer, primul lucru învățat la școala de ofițeri din Ploiești?! Nu! Nu! Nu se poate! La veston nu mi le mai tai. Mi se rupea inima de supărare pentru că mi-a trecut prin minte să mă degradez! Le-aș pune la loc, dar nu am ac și nici ață. Pe parcursul drumului le-am pus la loc, prinzându-le cu bolduri. Sunt ofițer și de-o fi să mor, să mor ofițer și nu ca un laș!"[28]

După parcurgerea unui drum epuizant care a presupus numeroase obstacole, momente de epuizare și evenimente neprevăzute, Constantin Năstase și militarii din plutonul său au ajuns la începutul anului 1943 în siguranță, aproape de granița de odinioară a României Mari: „eu când am venit de acolo de la încercuire și am căzut în genunchi pe malul Nistrului ș-am zis – Astăzi m-am născut a doua oară – și aici am sărutat imediat când am căzut în genunchi, am sărutat pământul”[29]. Gestul cu o puternică valoare de simbol considerăm că este relevant pentru un patriot care credea cu tărie în valorile naționale și în justețea cauzei pentru care luptase. Dintr-o anumită perspectivă reușise să învingă moartea, iar revenirea în patrie după o lungă odisee echivala cu o a doua șansă de a trăi pentru a-și face în continuare datoria.

Comandantul regimentului, locotenent-colonelul Dumitru Ștefănescu, a făcut următoarele notații în foile calificative ale sublocotenentului de rezervă: „Trage bine cu armamentul infanteriei. În fața frontului se prezintă în general bine. Energic și bun instructor, cu voință și putere de muncă. Disciplinat și bun camarad. Devotat, leal, sincer și drept. Bun executant al ordinelor. A instruit și comandat pluton anticar din compania anticar însoțire cu rezultate mulțumitoare... A luat parte la luptele grele din luna Noiembrie și Decembrie de la Cotul Donului unde a încurajat și îmbărbătat pe oameni în toate situațiile grele. Iubește soldații și știe să le capete încrederea”[30]. Rândurile ofițerului superior pot fi considerate o veritabilă caracterizare a unui militar cu vocație de lider care a știut cum să se raporteze la realitățile din teren, înțelegând să acorde importanța cuvenită celor cu care împărțea același destin.

La 4 februarie 1943, Constantin Năstase s-a prezentat la partea sedentară a unității sale primind un concediu de odihnă de 14 zile în baza Ordinului de zi nr. 2308. Având o stare de sănătate precară, o consecință directă a stagiului pe front, s-a internat la Spitalul Militar din Craiova unde a fost diagnosticat cu debilitate pulmonară și ulcer la stomac[31]. Operat de apendicită și externat după aproape o lună, medicii i-au recomandat un concediu de 30 de zile pentru o refacere cât mai completă. Pe 13 aprilie sublocotenentul a venit la cazarma din Caracal și a fost desconcentrat, după cum atestă Ordinul nr. 72/1943. În perioada care a urmat și-a continuat activitatea didactică în comuna Coșernița, mai întâi ca învățător și ulterior ca director. Deținerea funcției de conducere a împiedicat trimiterea sa în zona de operații, deși au fost emise mai multe ordine de concentrare, care nu s-au mai aplicat datorită prevederilor Ordinului nr. 143.564/1943 al Marelui Stat Major care excepta directorii școlilor primare de la serviciul militar, așa cum prevedea și Ordinul Inspectoratului Școlar Orhei nr. 3684/1943[32].

Apropierea frontului în primăvara anului 1944 a determinat retragerea administrației


A luat parte la luptele grele din luna Noembrie și Decembrie dela Cotul Donului unde a încurajat și îmbărbătat pe oameni în toate situațiile grele. — Iubește soldații și știe să le capete încrederea. —

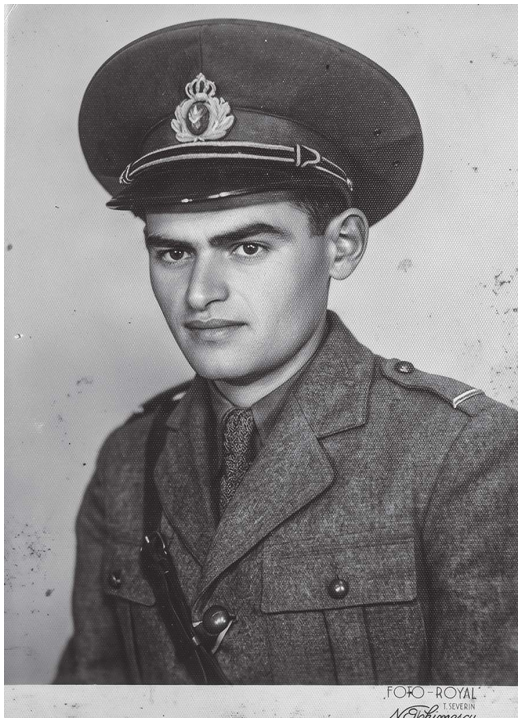
Extras din copia memoriului original al locotenentului Constantin Năstase, în care este menționată participarea sa la bătălia de la Cotul Donului

din Basarabia, Constantin Năstase fiind nevoit să își lase dincolo de Prut școala, elevii și persoanele apropiate. În acest context tensionat a fost avansat la gradul de locotenent, odată cu intrarea în vigoare a Înaltului Decret Regal nr. 619 din 20 martie 1944[33], și răsplătit cu Ordinul *Coroana României*, clasa a V-a cu spade și panglică de *Virtute Militară* în baza Ordinului de zi nr. 45 din 10 aprilie[34]. Revenit în țară, Constantin Năstase a primit un post de învățător în satul Clucereasa, aflat în apropierea localității sale natale din județul Muscel. Prin lecțiile predate, în doar câteva luni a dobândit, în egală măsură, simpatia cursanților săi, respectul părinților și aprecierea autorităților. Concentrat încă o dată pe 12 iulie a venit la Detașamentul 61 lucru C.F.R. unde a primit comanda unui pluton din cadrul Companiei 4. Comandantul structurii l-a apreciat astfel pe ofițerul de infanterie: „sănătos, rezistent, poate suporta greutățile unei campanii. Inteligent, cinstit, cu suficientă putere de muncă, lipsit de energie. Se îngrijește de oamenii de sub comanda sa”[35]. Menționăm faptul că „lipsa de energie” se datora problemelor de sănătate în curs de tratare, unei „scleroze progresive mușchiulară cu anemie și debilitate”[36] care nu a permis concentrarea la o unitate de infanterie.

În primăvara lui 1945, Constantin Năstase a fost chemat pentru ultima dată la cazarma Regimentului 19 Infanterie din Caracal cu scopul de a fi trimis pe Frontul de Vest, însă i-a fost desemnată comanda unui pluton de la Compania Marș. Comandantul părții sedentare a unității a consemnat astfel în foaia calificativă pentru intervalul 13 martie - 16 aprilie: „merită a fi avansat la gradul de căpitan în rezervă fiind apt a comanda o companie pe câmpul de luptă și în zona interioară”[37]. Această apreciere poate reprezenta o dovadă a faptului că ofițerul a demonstrat reale competențe de conducere și gestionare eficientă a resurselor, deși din punct de vedere medical nu era refăcut complet nici la momentul respectiv. Deși în aparență sfârșitul conflictului echivala cu revenirea la o viață normală, stabilită pe coordonate mai accesibile și ferită de pericole majore, Constantin Năstase a suportat, asemeni unor răni, consecințele participării sale la bătălia de la Cotul Donului până la finalul vieții.

În paginile următoare vom prezenta faptele de arme ale ofițerului Iosif Rus, ultimul veteran de război al armatei române, supraviețuitor al bătăliilor care s-au dat pentru înălțimile munților Caucaz. Din toamna anului 1940 și până în primăvara anului 1942 tânărul din Ghiolț a lucrat ca învățător în comuna Baciu din județul Brașov unde, datorită competențelor sale pedagogice, a reușit să îi atragă spre studiu pe elevii săi și totodată să se integreze în comunitatea locală, fiind văzut de tinerii din localitate ca un model demn de urmat.

Pe 20 mai în același an i s-a comunicat prin telegraf ordinul de concentrare la Regimentul 95 Infanterie din Turnu Severin, de unde, peste puțin timp, a fost trimis la Centrul de Instrucție al Infanteriei din Făgăraș, pentru a urma cursul dedicat ofițerilor de rezervă[38]. În intervalul 4 iulie - 5 august, Iosif Rus a făcut parte din a patra serie de cursanți care au participat la prelegeri și la exerciții demonstrative al căror principal obiectiv erau reactualizarea cunoștințelor de specialitate și însușirea unor noțiuni utile pentru viitoarea campanie. La



Iosif Rus îmbrăcat în uniformă militară, cu gradul de sublocotenent, 1943, fotografie, colecția familiei domnului general de brigadă (rtr.) Iosif Rus

încheierea ciclului de studii, sublocotenentul a fost notat cu 7 la cele patru categorii: *Instrucția tehnică*, *Instrucția de luptă*, *Cunoașterea și aplicarea regulamentelor* și *Aptitudini de luptă*[39]. În foaia calificativă semnată de colonelul Ștefan Bardan, comandatul centrului, și locotenent-colonelul Miltiade Stoenescu, directorul de studii, există următoarea mențiune: „a urmat cursul pregătitor depunând interes și pricepere. Și-a însușit în bune condițiuni pregătirea de război necesară. Este un bun comandant de pluton"[40]. Revenit în cazarma aflată în orașul de pe malul Dunării, Iosif Rus a fost trecut la armata de operații, așa cum reiese din Ordinul de zi nr. 432 din 13 august.

Partea activă a regimentului a fost trimisă mai întâi în Crimeea, de unde a fost transferată în Kuban după trecerea strâmtorii Kerci. La începutul lunii septembrie a fost numit la comanda unui pluton de pușcași din cadrul Companiei 6 Infanterie, pe care l-a condus în luptă pentru cucerirea localității Ieriwansky și a Cotei 1942. Debutul confruntărilor din Caucaz a reprezentat o primă ocazie pentru sublocotenent de a se face remarcat pentru calitățile sale militare[41] care au fost răsplătite prin acordarea Ordinului *Coroana României* clasa a V-a cu spade și panglică de *Virtute Militară,* așa cum reiese din Ordinul nr. 16.362 din 13 noiembrie 1942 al Diviziei 19 Infanterie și din Ordinul de zi nr. 68 al părții active a Regimentului 19 Infanterie[42].

În cadrul unui interviu de istorie orală, Iosif Rus a descris, după mai mult de opt decenii, condițiile în care a participat la luptele purtate de armata română în cel mai îndepărtat punct geografic de până atunci: „în linia întâi opt luni, de toamna până primăvara... noi din '42 am atacat din octombrie, dar n-am atacat mult, numai un pic. Am oprit fiindcă s-o făcut garduri de sârmă și o încetat luptele în Caucaz... am atacat într-o zonă împădurită. Acolo se urcau ăștia (sovieticii) prin copaci cu pistoalele lor, ei aveau pistoale atunci. Se urcau în pom... o parte din pădure pe care o stăpâneau ei nu puteai să te duci. Oricum am tras noi și am stat și am pus artileria pe ei"[43]. Totodată, acesta a făcut unele precizări în legătură cu originea militarilor care îndeplineau funcții de comandă la nivel de pluton și companie: „am avut un caz săracu', un bătrân comandant de pluton, aveam și tineri și mai în etate. Înțelegeți? Rezerviști, care nu erau activi, că erau și activi dar mai puțin recruți care făceau stagiul atuncea când am purtat războiul... numai un ofițer era activ. Toți erau rezerviști, învățători, avocați, doctori, toți erau rezerviști"[44].

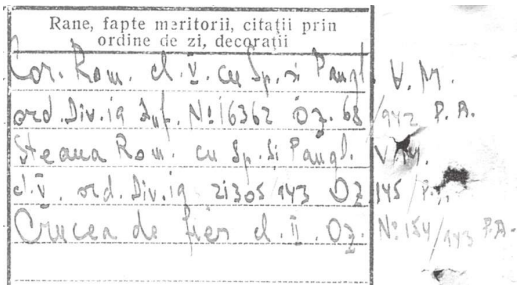
Amintim faptul că puțini membri ai promoției 1942 „Întregirea" au ajuns pe front după înălțarea la „gradul de sublocotenent, majoritatea fiind trimiși la părțile sedentare ale unităților la care au fost repartizați unde și-au desfășurat activitatea ca instructori. Totodată aceștia au ajuns în centrele de instrucție pentru a urma cursuri de specializare pentru diferite arme și specialități care începeau să fie folosite mai mult la nivelul armatei. În acest context factorii de decizie de la nivelul Ministerului Apărării Naționale au decis concentrarea unui număr apreciabil de ofițeri de rezervă cu o pregătire profesională cât se poate de variată și vârste cuprinse între 22 și peste 30 de ani. De asemenea, au existat situații în care din cauza lipsei unor cadre de conducere sau a indisponibilității acestora (cauzată de răni, boli contractate în timpul campaniei, căderea în luptă ori prizonierat) comanda unor plutoane a fost preluată de subofițerii care aveau o experiență îndelungată a frontului.

Veteranul de război a făcut referire și la condițiile dificile cu care s-a confruntat în timpul stagiului și resursele limitate pe care a contat pentru îndeplinirea misiunilor încredințate: „păduchi mulți, păduchi și șoareci în Caucaz. Nu erau lemne. Înțelegeți? Erau lemne rar, dar tu te chinuiai să faci adăpost pentru pușcamitralieră, să faci să nu te plouă, să stai. Nu? Să faci legătura comandantului să meargă de la un post la altul. Erau mai multe posturi. După vârful dealului până jos am rămas numai vreo 16 oameni dintr-un pluton și cu ăia trebuia să asigurăm toată paza. Înțelegeți?"[45]. Întrebat în timpul interviului când a trăit cel mai greu moment acesta a răspuns astfel: „când m-o rănit. În primăvara lui '43 atuncea într-o zi o trecut o femeie de la ei (sovietici) și o spus – Mâine aveți grijă că începe atacu' – și adevărat așa o fost. Dimineața, 57 de tunuri razant, adică razant plus și artileria grea... pe primăvară, pe 4 aprilie, atunci când au început ei

de dimineața și am văzut bătălia ca-n filme”[46]. Acțiunile ofensive ale Armatei Roșii s-au produs într-un context mai larg care viza replierea trupelor germane și române dintr-un areal geografic mai extins după încheierea bătăliei de la Stalingrad.

Pentru a avea o imagine cât mai fidelă asupra participării lui Iosif Rus la campania armatei române din Caucaz, precum și a modului în care acesta s-a raportat la situațiile din câmpul tactic redăm în continuare nota colonelului Moșteoru, comandantul Regimentului 95 Infanterie, din foaia calificativă întocmită pentru perioada cuprinsă între 1 septembrie 1942 și 31 octombrie 1943: „ofițerul a dat dovadă în luptele din Caucaz de mult curaj, destoinic și [cu] sânge rece în fața inamicului... A luat parte la toate luptele din Cuban: Eriwnaski, Abin, Schptalski, Moldowanskaja. În toate aceste lupte ofițerul a fost animatorul plutonului său, dând dovadă de mult curaj și spirit de jertfă, multă pricepere și deosebită tenacitate în luptă. S-a distins în luptele dintre 4 și 17 ianuarie 1943. Când inamicul a atacat cu forțe mult superioare și după o pregătire foarte puternică de artilerie și branduri. Cu toată această puternică pregătire atacul n’a reușit să străpungă poziția apărată de plotonul de sub comanda Sublt. Rusu care a rezistat eroic, oprind atacul inamic și pricinuindu-i pierderi f. mari. Aceeaș soartă au avut și celelalte încercări ale inamicului de a străpunge poziția. În acelaș mod s-a distins și în atacul și contraatacul de la 4 aprilie 1943 la pădurea Scherptaesky (Est Kurskaia) unde a contraatacat în flanc inamicul ce pătrunsese în sectorul vecin german; cade rănit și este evacuat… În concluzie slt. rez. Rusu Iosif este un luptător viteaz pe care se poate conta în situațiuni grele.”[47]

Suntem de părere că această opinie exprimată asupra valorilor și calităților lui Iosif Rus este elogioasă și întregește portretul unui luptător cu calități remarcabile. Astfel de aprecieri nu erau des întâlnite pentru ofițerii activi și cu atât mai puțin pentru cei de rezervă. De asemenea considerăm că este util să facem o precizare referitoare la Iosif Rus, pentru a înțelege mai bine valoarea cuvintelor consemnate în foaia calificativă. Acesta nu și-a propus niciodată să îmbrățișeze cariera militară, nu a avut o afinitate pentru mediul cazon și nu s-a aflat într-o competiție cu alți comandanți de subunități. Încă din copilărie Iosif Rus a fost un caracter introvertit, un om cu înclinații artistice, pasionat de muzica clasică și studiul viorii pentru care avea o fascinație aparte. O fire discretă care și-a găsit refugiul în lectură și pedagogie, un intelectual în devenire, Iosif Rus a dorit să fie un om care să împărtășească din cunoștințele sale celor care doreau să îl asculte. Această trecere de la statutul de învățător la cel de luptător demonstrează capacitatea de adaptare și profunda înțelegere a datoriei pe care o avea de îndeplinit, chiar cu prețul propriei vieți.


Rane, fapte meritorii, citații prin ordine de zi, decorații

Cor. Rom. cl. V. cu Sp. și Pang. V.M.
ord. Div. 19 Inf. Nr. 16362 03. 68 /942 P.A.
Steaua Rom. cu Sp. și Pang. V.M.
cl. V. ord. Div. 19 21305 943 03 145 /
Crucea de fier cl. II. 03. Nr. 154/1943 P.A.

Extras din memoriul calificativ original al locotenentului Iosif Rus, care atestă distincțiile primite pentru faptele sale de arme

Voința de a lupta pentru patria sa a fost afectată doar de rana căpătată în primele zile ale lunii aprilie, atunci când a fost lovit în șoldul drept de o schijă de proiectil de aruncător de mine. Ca o formă de apreciere pentru sprijinul oferit, camarazii săi din Wehrmacht l-au evacuat în regim de urgență cu ambulanța 97 germană, iar pe 12 aprilie a fost internat în spitalul de campanie nr. 454. După ce a fost evaluat din punct de vedere medical, pe 21 aprilie a fost evacuat cu trenul sanitar nr. 3 și transferat la spitalul din zona interioară nr. 352[48]. Exemplul său de vitejie, spiritul de solidaritate și dovezile de camaraderie nu au rămas neobservate, Iosif Rus fiind distins cu Ordinul *Steaua României* clasa a V-a cu spade și panglică de *Virtute Militară* prin Ordinul nr. 21.305 al Diviziei 19 Infanterie și Ordinul de zi nr. 145 din 19 aprilie al regimentului său. Totodată, autoritățile militare germane au hotărât acordarea distincției Crucea de Fier clasa

a II-a după cum atestă Ordinul de zi nr. 154 din 10 mai 1943 al unității de care aparținea[49].

Din fericire, rana s-a vindecat fără să necesite o intervenție chirurgicală complexă, ci doar o extracție minoră, fiind evitat pericolul ca Iosif Rus să dezvolte o infirmitate: „schija o mutat-o mușchii cum s-o întărit o mutat-o într-afară, dar tot pe locul pe unde o intrat. Înțelegi?... mușchiul s-o refăcut, organismul s-o refăcut. O mai stat și o împins schija în afară și o băgat (doctorul) un clește și o tras-o. Zice – Uite asta. Ai avut un noroc de unu la mie. Rămâneai șchiop. Nu putea să te opereze (chirurgul)"[50]. După ce a fost externat pe 22 septembrie și a beneficiat de un concediu de 45 de zile, ofițerul s-a prezentat la partea sedentară a regimentului, preluând responsabilitatea unui pluton la școala instructorilor pe ai cărui membri i-a pregătit temeinic, asigurând transferul cunoștințelor cu profil militar[51].

Pentru perioada cuprinsă între 1 noiembrie 1943 și 3 aprilie 1944, comandantul părții sedentare a Regimentului 95 Infanterie, locotenent-colonelul Puicea i-a realizat lui Iosif Rus o caracterizare întemeiată pe realitățile și faptele observate în interiorul cazărmii: „sănătos și rezistent, cu toate că a fost rănit în luptele din Caucaz, poate face încă o campanie… Inteligent, punctual și foarte conștiincios în serviciu. Foarte muncitor și zelos. În toată activitatea zilnică, la instrucție, pune mult interes și pasiune. Se orientează ușor și le aplică bine în teren [noțiunile – n.n.]… cunoaște bine regulamentele și le aplică judicios în teren. În câmpul tactic a dat dovadă de pricepere, bun simț și de hotărâri repezi și precise… foarte disciplinat, foarte bun camarad. Foarte manierat și cu o educație aleasă… Este foarte moral, modest, serios, drept și devotat. Are simțul onoarei și al demnității foarte desvoltat"[52].

Asemeni altor ofițeri din generația sa care au supraviețuit Frontului de Est, Iosif Rus a fost avansat la gradul de locotenent de rezervă în conformitate cu prevederile Înaltului Decret nr. 619 din 20 martie 1944[53]. Având în vedere firea sa calculată și meticulozitatea de care dădea dovadă pentru îndeplinirea misiunilor, superiorii săi l-au învestit cu o nouă responsabilitate. Astfel, începând cu luna octombrie, ofițerul s-a ocupat de identificarea, inventarierea și restituirea capturilor de război care fuseseră aduse din Uniunea Sovietică începând cu anul 1941, bunuri care se aflau în proprietatea mai multor unități militare din orașele Turnu Severin, Orșova și Târgu Jiu. Deși complexă, sarcina de serviciu a fost tratată cu multă seriozitate și cu rezultate foarte bune, așa cum reiese din nota de carnet semnată de colonelul Nicolae Olaru, comandantul Cercului Teritorial Mehedinți: „s-a ocupat în foarte de aproape de primirea, înregistrarea, repararea acestor capturi, cum și predarea lor la Galați, care din afirmațiile ofițerului delegat al Comisiei Române au fost cele mai bine ambalate și inventariate... muncitor și disciplinat. Este un ofițer foarte bun și de mare încredere."[54]

În vara anului următor, pe 6 iunie 1945, Iosif Rus a fost trecut în evidențele Cercului Militar Teritorial Brașov și înscris conform Ordinului nr. 53.800 al Marelui Stat Major. Peste puțin timp locotenentul de rezervă avea să revină în localitatea Baciu pentru a-și face datoria în continuare, nu ca un temerar ofițer de rezervă, ci ca un dascăl cu vocație care își dorea să formeze caracterele elevilor care urmau să intre în sala de clasă.

În încheiere dorim să menționăm că militarii evocați în acest articol nu au fost aleși în mod particular pentru meritele obținute pe câmpul de luptă, ci pentru faptul că sunt reprezentativi pentru o categorie distinctă de personal, cea a ofițerilor de rezervă care au luptat în anii celui de Al Doilea Război Mondial. Cei trei veterani au avut experiențe asemănătoare, care în timp au influențat conturarea unor valori comune. Originari din mediul rural, provenind din familii care și-au câștigat existența și din practicarea agriculturii, Gheorghe Chioreanu, Constantin Năstase și Iosif Rus au avut încă din copilărie o legătură specială, chiar afectivă cu pământul. Locuind printre oameni de condiție modestă, aceștia au ajuns să cunoască, să înțeleagă și să aprecieze țăranul român în simplitatea și spiritualitatea sa. Aceste elemente au influențat raportarea pozitivă a ofițerilor față de ostașii (în majoritate țărani) pe care i-au avut în grijă. Deși au fost formați în domeniul armelor, având la bază principiile doctrinei defensive, cei trei comandanți de plutoane s-au adaptat situațiilor întâlnite pe front.

În cazurile lui Gheorghe Chioreanu și Iosif Rus o contribuție la o mai bună cunoaștere a realităților militare au avut-o cursurile de specializare, însă deosebit de relevantă a fost experiența dobândită în linia întâi. Combativitatea celor trei ofițeri poate fi evaluată luând în considerație aprecierile comandanților și, de asemenea, ordinele și medaliile care le-au fost oferite. Dragostea de țară le-a fost dublată de credința în Dumnezeu, o credință care i-a însoțit cât timp au îmbrăcat uniforma armatei române, dar și ulterior, până au atins și depășit vârsta centenarului.

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nit funcția de comandant de pluton în cadrul Regimentului 95 Infanterie Turnu Severin (Divizia 19 Infanterie), participând la acțiunile de pe Frontul de Est în Kuban și munții Caucaz la Krimskaya, Moldovanskaia etc. După ce a fost rănit și s-a recuperat a fost transferat la partea sedentară a Regimentului 95 Infanterie Turnu Severin și avansat la gradul de locotenent. Distincții primite: Ordinul *Coroana României*, clasa a V-a cu spade și panglică de *Virtute Militară*; Ordinul *Steaua României*, clasa a V-a cu spade și panglică de *Virtute Militară,* și Crucea de Fier clasa a II-a.

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NOTE

[1] *Revista de Istorie Militară*, nr. 3-4 (209-210) /2025, p. 111-122.

[2] În momentul redactării acestui articol domnul general de brigadă (rtr.) Iosif Rus era cel mai în etate veteran de război al armatei române, având venerabila vârstă de 110 ani și jumătate.

[3] Dialogul a avut loc în data de 20 iunie 2016, în localitatea Ocna Mureș din județul Alba și a fost valorificat prin publicarea unui capitol în volumul 3 al cărții *Bunicii noștri, eroii noștri*, apărută la Editura Militară din București în anul 2022.

[4] A.M.N.R., fondul de arhivă creat de Centrul Militar Județean Cluj/1977, nr. inv. S191/8.09.1977, dosar nr. crt. 651/1935, memoriul original al locotenentului Chioreanu Gheorghe, f. 29.

[5] *Ibidem*, f. 11.

[6] *Monitorul Oficial*, Partea I, anul CVIII, nr. 151/ 3 iulie 1940, p. 3349.

[7] A.M.N.R., memoriul original al locotenentului Chioreanu Gheorghe, f. 29.

[8] A.M.N.R., memoriul original al locotenentului Chioreanu Gheorghe, f. 14.

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[10] A.M.N.R., memoriul original al locotenentului Chioreanu Gheorghe, f. 17.

[11] Dan Ramf, *Bunicii noștri, eroii noștri*, Editura Militară, București, 2022, p. 212.

[12] *Idem*.

[13] A.M.N.R., memoriul original al locotenentului Chioreanu Gheorghe, f. 19.

[14] *Ibidem*, f. 19-20.

[15] *Ibidem*, f. 19.

[16] *Ibidem*, f. 16.

[17] *Ibidem*, f. 21.

[18] *Ibidem*, f. 29.

[19] A.M.N.R., fondul de arhivă creat de Comisariatul Militar Regiunea Argeș, nr. inv. S8210 /26.04.1968, dosar nr. crt. 1517 copia memoriului original al locotenentului Constantin Năstase, f. 2.

[20] *Ibidem*, f. 2-3.

[21] *Ibidem*, f. 10.

[22] Ofițerii cu gradul de sublocotenent și locotenent. Mulți dintre cei care au căzut la datorie au fost membri ai Promoției 1941 „Regele Mihai I" care aveau doar câteva săptămâni de experiență în exercitarea comenzii.

[23] A.M.N.R., copia memoriului original al locotenentului Constantin Năstase, f. 2.

[24] Pentru o mai bună cunoaștere a contextului în care s-au produs și au evoluat acțiunile militare din a doua jumătate a lunii noiembrie 1942, precum și destinele unor participanți recomandăm următoarele cărți de specialitate: Mihail Vasile Ozunu, Petre Otu, *Înfrânți și uitați. Românii în bătălia de la Stalingrad*, Editura Ion Cristoiu, București, 1999; Marin Voicu, *Sacrificiu și supraviețuire. Armata Română în Cotul Donului și Stepa Calmucă 1942-1943*, Editura Mii de cărți, București, 2019; Ionuț-Mihăiță Ocoleanu, Marius-Daniel Bojor, *Noi am luptat în Cotul Donului. Mărturiile ofițerilor și subofițerilor scăpați din iad. Declarații, hărți, rapoarte, dări de seamă. Documente inedite integrale*, Editura Militară, București, 2023; Alexandre Thers, *Stalingrad. O odisee românească (iulie 1942 - februarie 1943)*, Editura Militară, București, 2023; Alin Spânu, *Bătălia de la Stalingrad (1942-1943). Studii, analize și memorii românești*, Editura Militară, București, 2023; Ion Pavelescu, Adrian Pandea, Eftimie Ardeleanu, *Românii la Stalingrad. Viziunea românească asupra tragediei din Cotul Donului și Stepa Calmucă*, Editura Paul Editions, București, 2025.

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[25] General-maior (rtr.) Constantin Năstase. Interviu realizat pe 11 iunie 2022 în Mioveni de Flavius Nicolae Roaită.

[26] *Ibidem*.

[27] *Ibidem*.

[28] Constantin Năstase, *Constantin I. Năstase. Un secol de viață*, Ed. Ordessos, Pitești, 2017, p. 80.

[29] General-maior (rtr.) Constantin Năstase. Interviu realizat pe 11 iunie 2022 în Mioveni de Flavius Nicolae Roaită.

[30] A.M.N.R., copia memoriului original al locotenentului Constantin Năstase, f. 11-12.

[31] *Ibidem*, f. 2.

[32] *Idem*, f. 23.

[33] *Monitorul Oficial*, Partea I, anul CXII, nr. 72/25 martie 1944, p. 2596.

[34] Constantin Năstase, *op. cit*., p. 74.

[35] A.M.N.R., copia memoriului original al locotenentului Constantin Năstase, f. 14.

[36] *Idem*, f. 23.

[37] *Ibidem*, f. 15.

[38] A.M.N.R., fondul de arhivă creat de Centrul Militar Județean Cluj/1977, nr. inv. S191/8.09.1977, dosar nr. crt. 2774, memoriul calificativ al locotenentului Rusu Iosif, f. 61.

[39] *Ibidem*, f. 66.

[40] *Idem*.

[41] *Ibidem*, f. 67.

[42] *Ibidem*, f. 61.

[43] General de brigadă (rtr.) Iosif Rus. Interviu realizat pe 23 decembrie 2024 în Gherla de Flavius Nicolae Roaită.

[44] *Ibidem*.

[45] *Ibidem*.

[46] *Ibidem*.

[47] A.M.N.R., memoriul calificativ al locotenentului Rusu Iosif, f. 68. Menționăm că în documentul original o parte din rânduri sunt subliniate cu un creion de culoare albastră pentru o mai bună evidențiere.

[48] *Ibidem*, f. 59.

[49] *Ibidem*, f. 61.

[50] General de brigadă (rtr.) Iosif Rus. Interviu realizat pe 23 decembrie 2024 în Gherla de Flavius Nicolae Roaită.

[51] *Ibidem*, f. 70.

[52] *Ibidem*, f. 73.

[53] *Ibidem*, f. 20.

[54] *Ibidem*, f. 56.

ISTORIE COMPARATĂ

COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: GERMANY AND RUSSIA

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Abstract

The present study examines the complex relationship between collective memory and political identity in the European space, by highlighting the way in which historical violence shapes contemporary political behaviour as well as exploring the contrasting trajectories of Germany and Russia. Drawing on the case studies of post-war Germany and post-Soviet Russia, the essay argues that societies which address past acts of atrocity are able to establish durable frameworks for creating institutions governed by legal norms and democratic cultures that prevent the resurgence of political authoritarianism. Germany's post-1945 trajectory, characterised by Vergangenheitsbewältigung, denazification and significant educational reforms, demonstrates how deliberate immersion in memory can foster democratic resilience. In contrast, Russia's selective memory and failure to hold itself publicly accountable for historical violence have facilitated the persistence of imperial narratives and ongoing territorial ambitions. The research incorporates the collective memory theories of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann along with the civilisational thinking of Nikolai Danilevskii and Oswald Spengler, illustrating ways in which memory can either constrain or legitimise political power. The study concludes that memory becomes politically constructive only when it is acknowledged, contextualised and translated into ethical and institutional accountability, drawing lessons for contemporary European security and identity formation.

Keywords: *collective memory, historical memory, comparative history, identity*

1. Introduction

In Europe, memory and identity are deeply intertwined and inseparable from the legacy of decades of atrocities. The main theatres of military operations were situated on the European continent, along with concentration camps, imperial expansions and acts of genocide, all of which have left deep traces in states' narratives. National identity is directly influenced by history; the latter represents an essential component of the sense of belonging. However, it is crucial that present-day political interactions are not dictated by it. When uncritically internalised, history anchors unresolved or outdated narratives in contemporary actions, influencing both international

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and domestic dynamics in a destructive way. Russia, for example, represents the perfect candidate for explaining this phenomenon, by avoiding confronting the truth about its past, the state continues to act based on a self-constructed imperial image developed from earlier periods of dominance rooted in historical expansion, mostly during the Cold War and preserved through a process of selective memory.[1] In contrast, Germany illustrates an alternative path. Its post-World-War II trajectory demonstrates how confronting the past represents in fact a positive transformation. According to contemporary global freedom indexes, by reinterpreting its traumatic experiences, Germany succeeded in institutionalising a lasting democratic reform and stands today among the states with the strongest democratic institutions, having a 40/40 score on political rights.[2]

2. Theoretical Approaches to Collective Memory and Power

In the years following the Second World War, many influential political leaders, including Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, argued for grounding European identity in international cooperation as a rejection of political violence.[3] Consequently, collective memory became an explicit concern within European politics, used as a tool for greater understanding and statecraft, in order to prevent dangerous rhetoric from recrystallising.[4]

The concept of collective memory is associated mostly with the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, but it was expanded by many other scholars, such as Tzvetan Todorov, who analysed the political function of memory and warned about the abuse of memory or its absence, emphasising that societies that fail to confront their past are doomed to relive the past through nostalgia or denial.[5] This dynamic is particularly visible in states where historical crimes were never fully acknowledged, like Russia, whose Soviet-era repression illustrates a clear case of selective memory that contributes to the persistence of imperial narratives.

3. Vergangenheitsbewältigung and the Foundations of German Democracy

After 1945, Germany's image had been irrevocably tarnished, and the country faced an unprecedented rupture within the system, due to Nazi crimes, genocide and war crimes. The Nuremberg trials (1945-1946), the first of their kind, played an immense role in the democratic transformation of the state by establishing individual criminal responsibility for crimes against humanity and for the other charges included in the indictment.[6] Holding Germany accountable was one of the most significant actions undertaken by the international community, a change that contributed to a lasting transformation in German society, leading later generations to increasingly demand accountability and transparency.[7] For example, the adoption of the Grundgesetz (Basic Law) in 1949 explicitly reflected lessons drawn from the failure of the Weimar Republic and the abuses of the Nazi state. More precisely, Article 1 functions as a direct normative response to Nazi practices of dehumanisation and establishes human dignity (Menschenwürde) as inviolable.[8]

Another fundamental change in Germany's post-war narrative was the process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with the past), a mechanism that implied denazification policies (Entnazifizierung), outlined in documents such as the Potsdam Agreement (1945), which aimed to completely erase Nazi ideology from all aspects of life.[9] Educational reforms were the most extensive; through the "Neulehrer" programme the Allies replaced teachers influenced by the vicious doctrine, changing the curricula as well, ensuring that subjects related to Nazism and the Holocaust became mandatory. Assisted by memorial institutions such as the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, the moral perception of Germany's actions throughout WW2 was significantly reassessed.[10] Furthermore, Germany criminalised Holocaust denial and the use of Nazi symbols, thereby embedding historical responsibility, a concept that

Norbert Frei described as a form of "democratic self-restraint", ensuring that the past remained a constant reference point in political decision-making.[11]

The measures in question represented a success, noticeable in the cautious approach to the use of force shown by German society and its representatives. The accession to NATO in 1955 came a bit too early for a society that still had the horrors of war fresh in its mind; hence the hesitation and even the resistance to the decision within West German society, with strong opposition from trade unions, intellectuals, and segments of the Social Democratic Party.[12] Even with reassurance provided by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer who framed NATO membership as a mechanism of external constraint and democratic embedding and argued that reconciliation with former enemies, especially France, should be viewed as a moral obligation derived from Germany's historical responsibility for the destruction wrought in Europe; the legitimacy of NATO membership was challenging to build in a period of "anti-militarist strategic culture" as Thomas Berger described.[13]

Along with the norms already mentioned, the state offered support, through legal recognition, for the re-establishment of Jewish communities, although these policies generated internal debate, with the encouragement of scholars like Aleida Assmann, who emphasise the importance of reintegration, these were possible and took shape, symbolising the refusal to define national identity through exclusion.[14] From the admission of *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) in the 1960s to the acceptance of refugees from the Balkans, Syria and Ukraine, Germany has increasingly opened itself to integration as part of a post-national identity, according to political theorist Jürgen Habermas.[15] Today, Germany hosts one of the fastest-growing Jewish communities in Europe. Alongside the integration of diverse communities, public commemoration, Holocaust education and legal protections against antisemitism, Germany has ensured that historical violence remains a negative moral reference.[16]

4. From Soviet Silence to Imperial Nostalgia

Unlike post-war Germany, Russia never experienced a comprehensive process of political or moral reckoning with its own history of state violence. Although Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956 acknowledged certain abuses like the crimes of Stalinism, none of them were ever judicially addressed or institutionally acknowledged.[17] Unlike the process of denazification, Soviet and later Russian memory remained selective, oscillating between partial acknowledgment and deliberate silence.[18]

Russia represents a case that demonstrates deeply rooted selective memory, continuing to emphasise Soviet victory in the Second World War, producing a "warped mourning", as scholar Alexander Etkind stated.[19] Such a transformation was impossible even when the events were recent, during the Nuremberg trials, figures like Alfred Rosenberg explicitly pointed to Soviet actions, including mass deportations and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, as evidence that responsibility for the war and its crimes did not belong exclusively to the Germans.[20] Although later historians, including Norman Davies and Timothy Snyder, have analysed in depth the positions of the Soviet Union and concluded it was far from being a victim or liberato, but more of an imperial power pursuing territorial expansion, no argument proved convincing.[21] Ultimately, the state continues to resist despite the efforts of organisations, such as Memorial, to document political terror and preserve the memory of victims.[22]

Timothy Snyder, for example, has highlighted how unresolved imperial narratives enable the normalisation of coercion, particularly toward neighbouring states, historically situated within Russia's sphere of influence.[23] Russia, weakened economically and politically throughout the 1990s, appeared less threatening as a global power and so the West did not treat it as a potential long-term security threat. The failure of Western actors allowed narratives that preserved elements of Soviet and Tsarist geopolitical thinking, particularly

the notion of a privileged sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, to continue and to spread. This pattern resurfaced once Russia regained economic and military capacity in the 2000s, culminating in policies aimed at reasserting control over independent and sovereign states formerly incorporated into the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. Russia's claims over Ukraine, Georgia or the Baltic region reflect the delayed manifestation of imperial ambitions that were insufficiently confronted during the formative years of the post-Soviet order.[24]

5. Two Contrasting Models of Politics in Europe

The contrast between Germany and Russia becomes particularly visible when examined through the perspectives of their intellectual founders: Nikolai Danilevskii, in *Russia and Europe* (1869), introduced an alternative to Enlightenment universalism by creating the Pan-Slavist theory and framing history as a struggle between distinct civilisations.[25] This conception profoundly influenced later thinkers, including Oswald Spengler, whose vision of inevitable civilisational decline represented the backbone of the Nazi system.[26] Oswald Spengler openly acknowledged Danilevskii's influence when developing *The Decline of the West* (1918-1922), adopting the idea of cyclical civilisations governed by destiny and without moral agency.[27] Nazi ideology selectively appropriated such ideas, combining them with racial biology and Social Darwinism to construct a mythic vision of destiny.[28] Yet, even firmly committed, in interwar Europe, post-war Germany ultimately rejected civilisational determinism, moving away from its past. In contrast, encouraged by an entire history based on pseudo-scientific notions, namely Leo Gumilev's theory of *passionarity* (which defines periods of expansion and conquest as natural expressions of a civilisation's vitality), Russia, being rooted in these narratives, has no choice but to continue on the same path, allowing imperial ambition to persist as a legitimate expression of national identity.[29]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparison between Germany and Russia reveals that history does not determine outcomes. Germany represents a notable exception to the rule. Under the Third Reich, every aspect of life was systematically subordinated to Nazi doctrine, with independent journalism dismissed as *Lügenpresse* and legal norms redefined according to racial ideology.[30] Despite this level of ideological saturation, post-war Germany succeeded in constructing a stable democratic identity and sustained memory work. Although the legacy of Soviet occupation in East Germany still manifests in certain political and social attitudes, Germany as a whole has undeniably overcome its authoritarian past.[31] Russia, by contrast, was never the subject of an equivalent process of de-imperialisation, thereby preserving imperial narratives easily observed in the way it conducts its contemporary politics. In the end, Germany represents a rare example of a society that managed to dismantle a totalising ideology embedded across all spheres of existence. Without a conscious rupture similar to Germany's post-war transformation, Russia risks reliving those cycles.[32] Memory becomes a prison of identity only when it remains static and unquestioned. When actively engaged, however, it functions as a dynamic resource for political learning.[33]

NOTES

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MEMORIALISTICĂ

TREI ANI CARE AU MODELAT CARACTERE. O PROMOȚIE, UN LEGĂMÂNT, PATRU DECENII DE CONTINUITATE (1983-1986)*

Motto
„Unicul dor al vieții mele
este să-mi văd națiunea fericită."
Avram Iancu

În anul 1983, în cadrul Școlii Militare Superioare de Ofițeri „Nicolae Bălcescu" din Sibiu, a început școlarizarea prima promoție feminină de ofițeri activi, iar studiile au durat trei ani. Pentru instituție, acest moment a reprezentat un pas important în evoluția procesului de pregătire militară, iar pentru noi a fost începutul unui drum care avea să ne modeleze nu doar cariera, ci și caracterul.

Așa a apărut o mare provocare și tot astfel a început aventura promoției 1986, într-o lume considerată până atunci preponderent masculină.

Decizia Ministerului Apărării Naționale de a introduce o formă de școlarizare egală ca durată și exigență pentru femei și bărbați a marcat o schimbare semnificativă în sistemul militar al vremii. Până atunci, femeile care optau pentru o carieră militară urmau programe de pregătire mult mai scurte. Începând cu acel moment, standardele au devenit identice pentru bărbați și femei, deopotrivă: aceeași programă, aceleași cerințe și aceeași responsabilitate profesională.

În acest context, pentru fete au fost înființate trei plutoane în cadrul Școlii Militare Superioare de Ofițeri „Nicolae Bălcescu" din Sibiu: două plutoane de intendență și un pluton de finanțe. Această organizare a stat la baza formării primei promoții feminine pregătite după aceleași standarde și cu aceeași durată de școlarizare ca promoțiile masculine.

Admiterea – prima încercare

Admiterea a fost o adevărată provocare. Concurența a fost impresionantă – 32 de candidate pe un loc, fapt care i-a surprins pe mulți la acea vreme. După probele eliminatorii – probele sportive, limba română și vizita medicală – au rămas 16 candidate pe un loc.

Pentru fiecare dintre noi, intrarea în școală a însemnat începutul unei perioade intense de formare, trăită cu emoție, cu idealuri și cu dorința de a demonstra că putem onora responsabilitatea pe care urma să ne-o asumăm.

Anii formării

Pe 12 septembrie 1983 ne-am întâlnit pentru prima dată. Eram 90 de eleve într-o instituție în care studiau aproape două mii de bărbați. Alegerea unei asemenea cariere pentru o tânără de 18 ani părea, pentru mulți, o îndrăzneală. Pentru noi era însă o vocație.



Colegii și profesorii ne-au privit cu atenție și curiozitate, întrebându-se dacă vom rezista provocărilor care ne așteptau. Și am rezistat. Astfel, școala militară a devenit pentru noi, începând cu anul 1983, locul care avea să ne fie casă timp de trei ani.

Primul an de pregătire a fost unul dintre cei mai solicitanți. Instrucția de front, instrucția tragerii, topografia militară, aplicațiile în teren și marșurile ne-au pus la încercare rezistența și voința. La finalul primului an am constatat că, deplasându-ne către câmpurile de instrucție și poligoane, parcurseserăm aproximativ 800 de kilometri pe jos. Am învățat atunci că disciplina înseamnă asumare, că rigoarea construiește încredere și că statutul de ofițer presupune echilibru, fermitate și integritate. Am fost formate în spiritul respectului față de lege, instituție și Țară.

Ceremonia depunerii jurământului militar a reprezentat pentru fiecare dintre noi un moment definitoriu – un legământ care ne-a însoțit întreaga viață profesională. În acea zi am rostit cu emoție cuvintele care ne-au legat pentru totdeauna de uniforma militară și de datoria față de patrie: „Jur să-mi apăr țara chiar cu prețul vieții!"

Pentru noi, aceste cuvinte nu au reprezentat doar o formulă ceremonială, ci un angajament profund, asumat cu demnitate în toți anii care au urmat.

Camaraderia unei generații

Camaraderia a fost unul dintre pilonii generației noastre. În anii de școală s-au legat prietenii trainice, bazate pe încredere, respect și sprijin reciproc.

După absolvire, am fost repartizate în unități din întreaga țară, fiecare dintre noi ducând mai departe valorile însușite în perioada de formare și responsabilitatea față de comunitățile pe care le-am slujit. Privind astăzi în urmă, la patru decenii de la absolvire, putem afirma cu obiectivitate că promoția 1983-1986 a însemnat mai mult decât o schimbare a duratei școlarizării. A fost o generație care a demonstrat că profesionalismul, competența și devotamentul nu țin de gen, ci de caracter.

A fost, totodată, promoția care a deschis drumul tuturor generațiilor de femei ofițer care au urmat. În anul 1984, a fost constituită pentru prima dată în istoria militară Garda de Onoare eleve, sub comanda lt.-col. Rita-Maria Constantin.

Ne exprimăm recunoștința și respectul față de cadrele didactice, comandanții și comandantele care au contribuit la formarea noastră profesională și umană. Cu deosebită prețuire le amintim pe comandantele noastre de pluton: Petrov Margareta, Delcea Veronica și Rita-Maria Constantin, precum și pe comandanta companiei, Nicolicea Mariana.

Prin exigență, disciplină și exemplul personal, ne-au format în spiritul responsabilității, al onoarei militare și al devotamentului față de Armata Română și față de Țară. Valorile insuflate atunci au rămas repere pentru fiecare dintre noi, de-a lungul întregii cariere și al vieții.

Patru decenii mai târziu, în data de 30.05.2026, am intrat din nou pe porțile Academiei Forțelor Terestre. Revederea noastră, la 40 de ani de la absolvire, nu a fost doar un moment aniversar. A fost confirmarea faptului că valorile primite atunci au rămas vii și că timpul nu a șters ceea ce s-a construit în anii formării. Dincolo de funcții, grade sau distanțe, rămân apartenența la aceeași promoție și respectul reciproc care ne-a unit.

Promoția noastră nu a fost doar prima promoție feminină formată în trei ani de școlarizare. A fost generația care a demonstrat că uniforma nu se poartă doar pe umeri, ci mai ales în conștiință. Iar ceea ce s-a construit în acei ani continuă să trăiască prin fiecare dintre noi, ca dovadă că adevărata forță a unei generații nu stă doar în începutul ei, ci în valorile pe care le duce mai departe.

Revederea noastră a fost mult mai mult decât o simplă întâlnire aniversară. A fost o întoarcere în timp, pe coridoarele școlii în care ne-am format ca oameni și ca ofițeri. Fiecare pas făcut prin instituția care ne-a fost casă timp de trei ani a readus la viață amintiri, emoții și chipuri pe care timpul nu le-a șters din suflet. Ne-am privit cu bucurie și curiozitate, încercând să o regăsim în fiecare dintre noi pe tânăra de odinioară, cea care, în septembrie 1983, pășea cu emoție în curtea școlii. Poate că fiecare și-a pus aceleași întrebări înaintea întâlnirii: Cum va fi? Ce vom simți? Ne vom regăsi după atâția ani? Răspunsul l-am aflat împreună. Emoțiile au fost autentice, îmbrățișările sincere, iar timpul parcă s-a comprimat între trecut și prezent.



Momentul prezentărilor din sala de festivități a fost unul aparte. Am fost onorate să îl avem alături de noi pe rectorul Academiei, domnul colonel Dumitru Todosiuc. Fiecare a încercat să cuprindă în câteva cuvinte o viață întreagă: cariera, familia, împlinirile, încercările și anii care au trecut de la absolvire. Au fost momente în care vocea a tremurat, emoția a învins cuvintele, iar lacrimile au vorbit mai mult decât orice discurs.

La final, ne-am despărțit cu sufletele pline de bucuria revederii și cu sentimentul că legătura creată în anii formării a rămas la fel de puternică. După patru decenii, am înțeles încă o dată că adevărata valoare a unei promoții nu stă doar în anii petrecuți împreună, ci în legăturile care dăinuie peste timp.

Promoția 1983-1986 rămâne pentru noi nu doar o filă de istorie, ci o parte vie din sufletul fiecăreia.

Din nou împreună, o promoție, un legământ!



Lt.-col. (rtr.) Rita-Maria Constantin – un nume care rămâne în istoria primei promoții de femei ofițer, comandanta Plutonului 3 Finanțe din Compania Eleve, din păcate, decedată.

La revederea noastră, prilejuită de împlinirea a 40 de ani de la absolvirea Școlii Militare de Ofițeri Activi „Nicolae Bălcescu" din Sibiu, gândurile ni se îndreaptă cu emoție către colegele care nu mai sunt astăzi printre noi, dar care continuă să trăiască în memoria și sufletele noastre.

Dintre acestea, un loc aparte îl ocupă colega noastră, locotenent-colonel (rtr.) Maria-Rita Constantin, una dintre femeile care au contribuit la afirmarea și consolidarea statutului militar al primei generații de femei ofițer din Armata României.

La întâlnirea organizată la 25 de ani după absolvire, doamna Maria-Rita Constantin ne-a transmis un mesaj care avea să rămână peste timp o adevărată lecție de demnitate militară. Vorbea cu dragoste despre generația alături de care s-a format, despre anii de muncă, despre sacrificii și împliniri profesionale, despre camaraderie și despre responsabilitatea purtării uniformei militare. Cuvintele sale exprimau respectul profund pentru profesia armelor și convingerea că viața de militar presupune onoare, disciplină, vigilență și devotament față de țară. Ne îndemna să nu uităm niciodată că am avut privilegiul și datoria de a deschide un drum nou pentru generațiile care au urmat.

Pentru Maria-Rita Constantin, uniforma militară nu a reprezentat doar o profesie, ci o misiune. Ea credea cu tărie că faptele și valorile unei generații trebuie păstrate vii, iar memoria celor care au slujit cu credință România nu trebuie lăsată să se piardă în uitare.

Mesajul său de atunci pare astăzi un testament moral adresat tuturor:

„Să nu lăsăm să se aștearnă praful peste amintirile noastre. Am fost și vom rămâne oștenii acestei țări, legați prin aceeași credință, aceeași onoare și aceeași datorie."

La fiecare revedere înțelegem mai bine că timpul trece peste oameni, dar nu poate șterge valorile care ne-au unit. Colega noastră rămâne parte din istoria promoției noastre și din istoria începuturilor femeilor ofițer în Armata României.

Astăzi îi aducem un pios omagiu și ne înclinăm cu respect în fața memoriei sale.

Dumnezeu să o odihnească în pace!

Cuvânt-înainte, sau cârcotașilor mei!!!

Azi mă vedeți, sunt printre voi...
Și tot la fel de vie...
Deși mulți bagă mâna-n foc...
Că m-au văzut sub... glie!!
Ei, iată că mai sunt minuni,
Fac parte dintre ele,
Vă jur că n-am abandonat...
Că-s bune, ori sunt rele!!
Destinul te provoac-ades,
Dar eu chiar am riscat,
El m-a lovit, eu am căzut...
Însă m-am ridicat!
Și pân-acuma l-am fentat,
N-am fost de-acord defel...
Și-am să mă joc la cacialma
De-mi va permite el!!
Iar dacă Domnul va voi,
Cuvântul să-mi mai ție,

E semn că încă trebuiesc,
Aicea... nu sub glie!!!
Să consemnez în file vechi,
Dar pline de candoare,
Viața noastră de oșteni,
Cu farmec și onoare.

Ecoul pașilor de defilare cu FARMEC și ONOARE

Trecut-au 25 de ani…
Ani tineri, nebunie,
Ce multe s-au mai întâmplat…
Ce va mai fi să fie??
Timpul s-a scurs…
Un val de fum la fel ca o părere…
Și iată, azi ne întâlnim…
Un pic schimbați de vreme.
Voi, tinere și făr' de griji,
Noi… mai bunici… ce falnici!…
Voi, mândre, verzi, ca niște flori,
Noi… pensionari nostalgici.
Mă-ncearcă-n acest ceas din nou aducerile-aminte…
De comandantul de pluton, ce-am fost… nu prea „cuminte"!!!
La fel de șugubeață-atunci, ca și acum, se pare,
Nu-mi era greu, dar ce dor mi-e de-un pas de defilare!!!
Când din visare mă trezea fanfara militară,
Eram doar o ființă-atunci, cu-al meu pluton… ce fală!!!
Căci defila aliniat și mândru, pas întins…
La-ntrecere cu ostropel… și totul înadins…
Platoul lat la pas îl luam, în pas de defilare,
Să ne întrecem deci… colegi… Care va fi mai tare?
Un mușchi pe față nu clintea, când ne cânta fanfara,
Atunci când toate defilam… de ne trecea sudoarea!!
Nu mai părea ranița grea și nici mitraliera,
Atunci când Rita vă cânta de răsuna liziera!!
Pădurea toată fremăta, când mă urma plutonul…
Oh, Doamne-ntoarce-mă din drum… să-mi văd din nou odorul!!!
De la Poplaca la Sibiu, pe jos mergând agale,
Vedeam și soare răsărind… și luna când apare.
Călite-n ploaie ori în ger, toate-ncercări pe „punte"…
Ați strâns din dinți… și ați răbdat
C-ați vrut să fiți de frunte.
Adesea, Daia o găseam în zori cu gene-n rouă,
Și tăiați Dealul Dăii-n sus și poligonu-n două.
Nu doar Valea Săpunului păstrează și azi, jur!!!
Stângacele comenzi dintâi… „Drepți și stânga-mprejur!!!"
Îmi amintesc, cu-n dor nebun… de garda de onoare
Cu cei mai falnici camarazi și fete diafane...
De Mitroescu – general, brav comandant de oști,
Ce doar un ordin scurt a dat spunând că „nu vrea... proști!"...

În două zile și ceva... Totul sclipește soare
și uite-așa s-a înființat „frumoasa gardă de onoare”!
Cu fetele – mândre păpuși, frumoase și cochete,
Cu gene fluturând în vânt și pas de majorete.
Ministrul chiar le-a remarcat la trecerea-n revistă,
și-a exclamat extaziat... „Măi Tache, nu există...
Eu mă uitam ca omul, deh, și-am luat-o de la ghete...
Dar frate... Tu m-ai făcut praf, văzând că-aici sunt... fete!!!
Mă și miram... Așa flăcăi... Cu talie subțire,
Și cu zulufii fluturând... Tu ți-ai ieșit din fire???”
Obrajii roși, mușcați de ger, dar toate-nverșunate,
de-a defila ca niște zmei... Copile minunate!!!
Așa a fost... Am înghețat... Dar n-am cedat un pas,
Cu-ai noști colegi ne-am întrecut... Și asta a rămas...
Botezul focului a fost... Nu dansul de salon...
Și-așa intrarea v-ați făcut ca-ntr-un cotilion...
În lumea aspră de oștean, cu alarmă și rezbel,
unde nu-i loc de șuguit, nici timp pentru greșeli!!!
De-aceea, astăzi și nicicând, n-o să permit vreodat’,
Să se bârfească despre noi și haina ce-am purtat.
Am fost oștenii-acestei țări, și-o spunem cu mândrie,
Am câștigat grad după grad, muncind cu strășnicie.
Așa a fost destinul nost’... Și noi am deschis vraful...
De-aceea vreau să v-amintesc, să nu se-aștearnă praful!!!
Da, eram mândre, ce frumos, s-ai douăzeci de ani...
Eu am făcut nici nu știu câți, și mulți au fost amari!!!
Soldatul credincios ce sunt, mereu pe metereze,
vă spune astăzi „La mulți ani” și Domnul să vegheze...
Parte s-aveți de ce-i frumos și bun în lumea asta,
Să n-aveți parte de dușmani, să nu știți ce-i năpasta...
Prieteni buni și credincioși să adunați cu carul,
De sănătate și noroc, să nu știți ce-i amarul!!!
Și-n drumul vost’, de veți găsi un loc de rugăciune,
Puneți genunchiul la pământ, gândind și-un pic la mine,
Aprindeți lumânare-apoi, și-n semn de pietate,
Rugați pe Domnul să ne dea un strop de sănătate!!!
Acum pun punct, iertare cer că v-am pus la-ncercare,
dar nu-i nimic întâmplător în lumea asta mare!!!
Doresc să ne-ntâlnim din nou, pân’ la suta de ani,
Să fim cu toții sănătoși și tineri veterani!!!
Atâtea ar mai fi de spus, dar timpul se grăbește,
Duc mâna a salut la toți, și toate ostășește!!!
Un ordin am îndeplinit... Căci mă-ndemna ispita...
Vă spun la toți că vă iubesc, și vă sărută Rita!!!

Lt.-col. (rez.) ***Maria-Rita Constantin***

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