

AN EPISODE OF THE ROMANIAN-POLISH RELATIONS IN THE INTER-WAR PERIOD: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ROMANIAN ARMY TO THE LIBERATION OF POCUTIA

DANIEL HRENCIUC

In the inter-war period, the Kingdom of Greater Romania and the Second Polish Republic developed a very close relationship, mainly motivated by strategic interests, but also by political, diplomatic, military, and cultural aspects. The main target was the two states' increasing interests in defending their eastern borders, Bessarabia and Eastern Galicia, respectively, against an unforeseen attack from the Soviet Union.

Under the circumstances, the geopolitical modifications taking place in the Central and Eastern European area immediately after the Great Conflagration (1914–1918) were defined by an accent laid on the nationality and self-governing principles, in the context of the dissolution of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The remaking of Greater Romania and Poland were events with special significance, which followed Woodrow Wilson's ideas regarding the re-mapping of the European inner borders according to his already mentioned nationality and self-governing principles. Poland had shown an interest in Romania even during the war, as reflected in the telegrams and reports of the National Polish Committee of Paris, led by Roman Dmowski, in which the events on the Romanian political scene held an important place. Contacts between the National Polish Committee and the National Committee of the Romanians of Transylvania and Bucovina and the Committee for the Unity of All Romanians had already been established in April 1918, during the proceedings of the Congress of all nationalities of Rome¹.

The cooperation between Poland and Romania started at the end of the war, in the context of the events preceding the remaking of the Polish independent state and of Greater Romania. Thus, on 5 July 1918, the National Committee of the Romanians of Transylvania and Bucovina congratulated the Polish National Committee on the acknowledgement by the Great Powers of the necessity for Poland to proclaim her independence². A meeting was held in Lucerne between Take Ionescu and the envoy of the Polish National Committee, during which specific issues related to the Romanians' and Poles' struggle for emancipation were tackled³.

¹ Georges Moresthe, *Le Maréchal Pilsudski et la Pologne Renaissance*, in "Revue bleue politique et littéraire", t. XV, 1921, p. 60; Władisław Stepniak, *Dyplomacja Polska na Balkanach (1918–1926)*, Warszawa, 2001, p. 38.

² National Central Historical Archives (hereafter: NCHA), Bucharest, Poland Microfilms Fund, r. 16, c. 10-11, Comité National des Roumains de Transylvanie et de la Bucovine résidant en France, à Roman Dmowski, président du Comité National Polonais, Paris, 5 July 1918, Take Ionescu; Nicolae Dascălu, *Relații româno-polone în perioada interbelică (1918–1939)*, București, 1991, p. 14.

³ NCHA, Poland Microfilms Fund, r. 16, cc. 5- 9, KNP Fund, Paris, 6 July 1918, undecipherable, a meeting with Take Ionescu; New Documents Archives of Warsaw (hereafter: AAN), Komitet Narodowy Polski Fund (hereafter, KNP), file 82, f. 14; Michal Keller, *Colaborarea româno-polonă în anii '20 ai sec. XX*, in "Polonus", 2002, no. 6 (96), p. 18.

On 3 October 1918, the National Polish Committee was notified of the creation of the Committee for the National Unity of All Romanians. The wish for cooperation between the two organizations was also expressed on the occasion⁴. Through the same semi-official channel, based on the Poles' approval, a common political program was developed, having essentially as a goal the accomplishing of national unity through joint efforts⁵. The Empire federalization plan, accused of demagoguery and hypocrisy, was rejected, the only reasonable solution being the founding of new independent states⁶. However, the parties refrained from adopting a common declaration that might have affected the interests of the two states at the oncoming Peace Conference.

The Romanian-Polish cooperation settled immediately after the end of the war materialized in the establishment of an official relationship between the Romanian Legation in Paris and the National Polish Committee led by Roman Dmowski. A special stress was laid on the joint interests of the two states⁷, and a schedule of joint activities to be undertaken after the Peace Conference was agreed upon. In addition, the Romanian official in Paris was informed that, "The Polish state needs Silesia and Danzig imperatively, and it will spare no efforts in obtaining an international acknowledgement of the imperative character of the issue."⁸ Romania was watching very closely the activity of the Polish delegation at the Peace Conference, through her diplomatic representative in Warsaw, Alexandru Florescu⁹. Thus, a confidential report sent to the Foreign Minister, Nicolae Mișu, by Alexandru Florescu was mentioning that Poland needed Danzig, and that this issue would be decisive for the future of the Polish-German relations¹⁰. At the same time, the Polish representative in London knew that Romania had as a priority the official recognition of Transylvania, Bucovina and Bessarabia¹¹.

Quite significant for the evolution of the Romanian-Polish relations was the fact that only a month after Poland had proclaimed her independence, Josef Piłsudski informed the Romanian Government, in a telegram, about the existence of the independent and sovereign state. He assured that, "the new Polish state, once and for all set free from the yoke of foreign domination, wants to establish friendly relations with Romania."¹²

⁴ NCHA, Poland Microfilms Fund, r. 16, c. 1618, Comité National pour l'unité des Roumains, Paris, 8 October 1918, Take Ionescu.

⁵ Ibidem, c. 15, KNP Fund, Paris, 15 October, undecipherable.

⁶ Ibidem, c. 1920, Comité national pour l'unité des Roumains, Paris, 10 October 1918, Take Ionescu.

⁷ Ibidem, c. 21, KNP Fund, Paris, 23 October 1918, undecipherable; Nicolae Dascălu, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

⁸ NCHA, Poland Microfilms Fund, r. 16, c. 42; KNP Fund, Paris, 27 November 1918, undecipherable; AAN, KNP Fund, file 82, p. 10.

⁹ Foreign Ministry Diplomatic Archives Bucharest (hereafter: FMDA), Fund 71/Poland. *Relații cu România 1920-1944*, vol. 52, f. 26. Confidential Report no. 464, the Romanian Legation in Warsaw, 31 October 1919, Alexandru Florescu to Nicolae Mișu.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 27.

¹¹ AAN, KNP Fund, file 82, p. 10.

¹² *Apud* Milică Moldoveanu, *Polonia*, in *Afirmarea statelor naționale independente din centrul și sud-estul Europei, 1821-1923*, București, 1979, p. 225.

Shortly after the aforementioned notification, Ignacy Paderewski sent a telegram to the Romanian Prime Minister, expressing hopes for the development of friendly relations between the two sides. The Romanian Government responded on 4 January 1919, noting that, “The Romanians saw with satisfaction Poland being restored to her legitimate rights and independence by Europe. A clear injustice of the past was thus repaired.”¹³

The further developments called for the involvement of the Romanian Army in the liberation of Pocuția (the southeastern corner of Galicia), a territory claimed both by the Ukrainians and the Poles. This military cooperation anticipated the mutual support the Romanian and Polish delegations gave one another at the Peace Conference in Paris.

The land of Pocuția, that is the southeastern corner of Galicia, held special significance in the Moldavian-Polish, and later on, Romanian-Polish relations. Pocuția was placed as collateral for a loan of 3,000 silver coins given by the Moldavian ruler Petru I Mușat to his Polish counterpart, Vladislav Jagello, in 1388¹⁴. According to the agreement, Poland was to pay back the loan within 3 years; in case she failed to do so, Pocuția and the Halici fortress were to become part of the Moldavian State. As Poland never paid back the entire sum, Pocuția became a source of disagreement in the Moldavian-Polish relations. After a series of military conflicts, Prince Stephen the Great succeeded in retrieving this territory, which the Moldavian ruler Iliăș yielded once and for all to the Polish State in 1546.

The political-military intricacies related to this territory, claimed both by Poles and the Ukrainians, became evident in May 1919, when the communist troops attacked Wolhynia and Podolia (Ukraine) and defeated the troops of *ataman* Simeon Petliura¹⁵. The evolution of these military-strategic events required, all of a sudden, the effective involvement of Romania in the conflict, on Poland's side, in order to defend the South front exposed to the Bolshevik attacks. As early as 15 May 1919, the 4th Mountain Troops Polish Division launched an attack against the Ukrainian troops that had occupied Galicia¹⁶. The Polish offensive was rapidly stopped by Ukrainian troops, the danger of a junction between the Bolshevik Hungarian troops and the Lenin ones being thus more than ever present, with consequences hard to estimate for the entire Central European area. On this background, and taking into account the direct threats to Romanian national security, the Bucharest Government decided to respond favorably to the pressing Polish requests, and approve the intervention of Romanian troops dislocated in Bukovina (the 8th Division led by General Iacob Zadik)¹⁷.

¹³ *Ibidem*; Michal Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁴ Ștefan Ștefănescu, *Istoria medie a României. Partea a II-a. Principatele Române, secolele XIV-XVI*, București, 1992, p. 95.

¹⁵ “Patria”, no. 34, 26 March 1919, p. 1.

¹⁶ Marin C. Stănescu, *Mai-August 1919. Operațiunea Pocuția*, in “Magazin istoric”, XXIX, 1995, no. 1 (334), p. 10.

¹⁷ Romanian Military Archives (hereafter, RMA), General Headquarters Fund (hereafter: MStM), History Department, file 477, p. 25.

At that particular time, Romania was herself caught in a conflict with the Hungarians on the western front, and under threat by the Bolshevik troops on the eastern one, with the allied troops led by General Anselme defeated at Odessa and having withdrawn into Bessarabia. Nevertheless, the Romanian Government offered Poland the support she was requiring¹⁸.

On 22 May, the commander-in-chief of the 8th Romanian Division of the 4th Romanian Army was ordered by the Romanian Prime-Minister Constantin Coandă to march into Pocutia¹⁹. The same order also contained the supplementary instructions given by the commander-in-chief of the Romanian Headquarters, General Constantin Prezan. The latter was stating that the ordered military action had also been motivated by the fact that Romania was interested in taking control over the Colomeea–Cernăuți–Horodenka–Korosmoya–Sighetu Marmăției railway²⁰ linking Bucovina to Transylvania.

On 24 May 1919, the Romanian troops entered Pocutia²¹, and reached a line south of Stanislawow and Halicz²². Their mission was to make the liaison with the Polish Army in order to prevent a junction between the Bolshevik Hungarian and Soviet troops²³. At the same time, according to the instructions given by their Headquarters, the Romanian troops were to avoid a conflict with the Ukrainian Army, this being the reason why the Ukrainian commanders of Mielnița and Colomea were informed about the Romanian military intervention²⁴. When the Romanian troops entered Pocutia, the Ukrainian troops self-dissolved and peacefully surrendered to the Romanian Army. On the occasion, a first contact was made between the 4th Polish Division, namely general Kraliszek, and the 8th Romanian Division led by general Iacob Zadik, during which the foundations were laid for future cooperation²⁵.

The Romanian military authorities, settled in Pocutia, edited on 23 May a *Proclamation* in Romanian, Polish, and Ukrainian languages, letting the locals know that the only goal of Romania had been to take control over the above-mentioned railway, and that no military actions would take place against the population, no matter its ethnicity. However, the population was required to hand over their weapons²⁶.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem, Operation Order no. 1195/22 May 1919.

²⁰ AAN, KNP Fund, file 81, p. 3; file 87, pp. 53-56; MRA, General Headquarters Fund, file 2645, pp. 1-2.

²¹ Marin C. Stănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²² RMA, MStM Fund, History Department, file 477, p. 25.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ AAN, KNP Fund, file 86, pp. 56-58, report no. 10 of 30 May 1919.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 51; RMA, MStM Fund, History Department, file 477, p. 25. The proclamation text was edited based on the Order 1176, signed by General Nicolae Petala, and also of the 1,2,3 Injunctions of the 8th Division Headquarters. To fulfil the mission, the Romanian troops were divided, on the basis of Order 21, into 3 detachments. The Central detachment commanded by Colonel Petre Cănciulescu (including 4 infantry battalions, 3 artillery batteries, a chivalry squadron, and a motorized machine-gun group) had the mission to advance on the Nepolocăuți–Snyatin–Colomea line. The North Detachment commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Răuțoiu, later by Colonel Al. Odobescu,

On 27 May, at Kalusz and Ottyinia, near Stanisławów, a Romanian Army squadron led by Lieutenant Radu Galin reached the most advanced positions of the Polish division led by general Alexandrowicz²⁷. The military units occupied the Nadvorno–Ottyinia–Newiska line, taking control over some important strategic points, including the railway linking Central Poland to Ruthenia²⁸. In reply, the Polish troops occupied one by one the localities of Stanisławów, Holyn, Gliniany, Przemislany, Brody, and Radzimilow²⁹.

On 28 May, a meeting took place between General Iacob Zadik and the Polish general Kraliczek, with the object to found a joint military Command in Pocutia, with its headquarters in Colomeea. The partitioning of the Dnester into sectors, with the appointment of a military commander for every district, and the details of the Romanian Army's retreat from Pocutia were also discussed³⁰. At the same time, the Romanian authorities agreed to the sending of Polish civil clerks under General Iacob Zadik, even before the Allies took a final decision regarding this territory³¹.

On 5 June 1919, the 8th Division Headquarters were moved from Colomeea to Czernowitz. As stated in the records of the 8th Division, "The 8th Division's mission is to maintain Bucovina within its historical borders, and Pocutia as well, to keep the order on the internal level, and to resist against any possible attacks from our enemy."³²

The Romanian military authorities took measures to avoid the outbursts of conflicts between the Poles, the Ukrainians, and the Jews, namely the nationalities composing the ethnic spectrum of the area. To this respect, they appointed Polish prefects and Ukrainian sub-prefects, whereas in other three districts the appointment was made the other way round. A similar process was undertaken in villages³³.

The measures taken by the Romanian troops so as to protect the Jewish population in the area did not suit the Polish Authorities, but one should note that the Romanians were administrating a territory which did not yet belong to Poland. At the same time, the Romanians tried to temper the Polish excesses towards the Jewish population³⁴. During the meetings on top level between the two armies, the

including 2 infantry battalions, an artillery battery, and a chivalry squadron, had the mission to advance on the Kisselev–Horodenka–Niezwiszka line. Finally, the South Detachment, led by Colonel Nicolae Daşchievici, including an infantry battalion, a *roşiori* (part of chivalry) regiment, a machine-gun group, and a pioneer battalion, had the mission to advance on the Zaluszcza–Vâjniţa–Kuty–Kosow line; *ibidem*, pp. 32-71. As a reserve of these troops, there were the 8th Mountain Troops Regiment commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Serota, 2 infantry battalions, a frontier guard battalion to organize the territory, and 2 artillery batteries. Colonel Gheorghe Liciu was appointed commander-in-chief of the operative troops.

²⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁸ FMDA, Fund 71/1914, file 190, pp. 7-46.

²⁹ AAN, KNP Fund, file 87, pp. 9-11; FMDA, Fund 71/1914, file 190, p. 21.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Florin Anghel, *op. cit.*, p. 767.

³² RMA, MStM Fund, History Department, file 477, p. 42.

³³ Marin C. Stănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁴ "Glasul Bucovinei", II, no. 153, 27 May 1919, p. 1.

Romanian and the Poles agreed on a number of measures against the Bolshevik troops. To this effect, they divided the Dneestr line into sub-sectors, and founded the Territorial Command of Pocutia, placed in Colomeea and assisted by a Military Commission organized at every District level. A civil and administrative organization functioned under every district commission³⁵.

During the two months of Romanian military administration in Pocutia, there were some critical points between the Polish and Romanian troops, due especially to the attitude of the Polish troops towards the Jewish population and Ukrainian administration³⁶. They were overcome owing to the firm position of the 8th Division, and of the 4th Army Headquarters (on 7 July 1919 General Constantin Prezan was replaced by General Alexandru Lupescu)³⁷, of not allowing the 4th Polish Division to cross the border into Pocutia³⁸.

As the Polish troops launched the offensive³⁹ against the Ukrainian ones, the 8th Romanian Division moved from Cernăuți to Iași, and on 16 July, General Alexandru Lupescu decided to evacuate the Romanian troops from Pocutia⁴⁰.

The operation was undertaken based on a signed Convention between General Iacob Zadik and Count General Lamezan Salins on 20 July. Article 2 of the said document was raising for the first time the issue of a common border: "after the evacuation of Pocutia, the line that separates the Romanian Army from the Polish Army will be the historical border of Bucovina, stretching from the village of Babin, on the Dneestr, to Iablonița, on the Ceremușul Alb. Serafince (Serafinești) is part of the territory which is to be occupied by the Polish Army."⁴¹ According to the Convention, "the border started from Dneestr's thalweg 2 kilometers downstream of the confluence with the Siret, continued letting railway from Zastavna, south of Dniester in Romanian holding, reached the line of the Lake Verenceanca (the strict delineation of this water was to be established by the future Mixed Commission), and continued upstream, along the road Coțmani–Drăcineț, in the basin of the Ceremuș and the Siret, reaching the old border

³⁵ RMA, MStM Fund, History Department, file 477, p. 42. On 19 June 1919, the Polish troops were repelled from the line Potok-Zlaty-Buczaz by the Ukrainian Bolshevik troops. Under the circumstances, a modification was operated in the combat disposition of the 8th Division battlefield, the troops led by Colonel Petre Cănculescu receiving the mission to defend the Northern borders of Bucovina on the Dneestr, beyond the border with Pocutia, in order to:

- 1) avoid a conflict with the Polish troops;
- 2) avoid a conflict with the Ukrainian Bolshevik troops.

It was also decided that the Polish 4th Division would be denied access to Pocutia. The troops commanded by General Haller intervened in the meantime.

³⁶ Ibidem, the 8th Division Headquarters also made the inventory of weaponry, food and rolling stock formerly held by the Austrian-Hungarian and German troops. The inventory was performed by commissions specialized in cataloguing and evaluating, founded at Cernăuți, Ottynia and Colomeea. These materials were eventually requisitioned and sent to Romania, and most of the food was handed to the population; "Glasul Bucovinei", II, no. 156 of 31 May 1919, p. 1. The newspaper reported that "the population (of Pocutia) warmly welcomes the Romanians".

³⁷ RMA, MStM Fund, History Department, file 477, p. 45.

³⁸ AAN, KNP Fund, file 87, pp. 65-69. Report of 14 June 1919, MSZ for KNP.

³⁹ "Glasul Bucovinei", II, no. 217, 15 August 1919, p. 3.

⁴⁰ RMA, MStM Fund, History Department, file 477, p. 42.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

between Bucovina and Hungary⁴². On 2 August 1919, a meeting took place at Lemberg between Colonel Gheorghe Liciu and the Polish representatives, with the object to clear the existing mutual litigation⁴³.

After only 2 months of Romanian military administration, in agreement with the Polish Headquarters and according to the protocol signed by General Iacob Zadik and Count General Lamezan Salins, on 17 August 1919, at 00:00 hours, the Romanian troops started to withdraw from Pocutia⁴⁴. The withdrawal was carried through on 25 September.

The behavior of the Romanian Army was appreciated by the local population, a fact evidenced in the spontaneous demonstrations of sympathy⁴⁵. Impressed by these demonstrations, General Iacob Zadik⁴⁶ would declare: "The thanks received from all the local authorities in Pocutia prove, beyond doubt, that our troops, as always, walked on the side of law, justice and humanness, in this part of the world inhabited by so many people"⁴⁷.

The intervention of the Romanian troops in Pocutia caused the vigorous protests of the Ukrainian diplomatic representative in Bucharest, Georges de Gassenko, and eventually the withdrawal of the Ukrainian diplomatic mission from Romania⁴⁸.

It is worth mentioning that the military actions of Romanian troops had the support of the political leaders from both countries. Thus, on 25 April 1919 Brătianu declared that he was committed to coordinate a common military action to occupy Ruthenia (Ukraine) and the South of Galicia, together with Polish Army, in order to prevent "a junction between the Hungarian and Russian communist armies."⁴⁹

The Romanian Army also ensured the back of the Polish front, while avoiding any further involvement in the Polish military operations in the East. In addition, Romania supported the enlisting of Polish refugees from Bessarabia in the 4th Polish Division, and subsequently the call up of these troops in the region of Văslăuți–Dobrinăuți⁵⁰.

⁴² FMDA, Fund 71/1914, vol. 54, pp. 84-85, Dutasta to Ionel Brătianu, 2 July 1918.

⁴³ Daniel Hrenciuc, *România și Polonia 1918–1931. Relații politice, diplomatice și militare*, Botoșani, 2002, p. 40. The Polish side claimed a share of the rolling stock, which had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian troops and was requisitioned by the Romanian Army. The Polish claims were dropped at the intervention of General Iacob Zadik. Another controversy between the two sides was Romania's wish to keep the Snyatin–Colomeea–Korosmeza railway in exchange for the Horodenka–Stefanowka–Zalescik railway.

⁴⁴ RMA, 8th Division Infantry Fund, file 3, f. 107.

⁴⁵ "Glasul Bucovinei", Cernăuți, II, no. 177, 26 June 1919, p. 1. At Colomeea, flowers were given to the Romanian soldiers by the population.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, no. 208, of 5 August 1919, p. 1. General Iacob Zadik was warmly welcomed by the Polish side at the meeting in Lemberg.

⁴⁷ RMA, 8th Division Infantry Fund, file 3, f. 107.

⁴⁸ AAN, KNP Fund, file 87, pp. 32-34.

⁴⁹ Keith Hitchins, *România 1866–1944*, București, 1997, p. 286.

⁵⁰ Marian Chiriac Popescu, *Relațiile militare româno-polone în perioada interbelică (1919–1939)*, București, 2001, p. 16.

The military operations leading to the liberation of Pocutia preceded the resuming of diplomatic relations between Poland and Romania. Thus, in June 1919, the extraordinary and plenipotentiary envoy, Count Alexander Skrzyński,⁵¹ came to Bucharest, and on 16 July, according to a decree signed by King Ferdinand, Alexandru Florescu (former diplomatic representative in Athens) was sent to Warsaw, as head of the Romanian Legation there⁵².

Analyzed by several Romanian and Polish historians (Marin C. Stănescu, Florin Anghel, Henryk Bułhak, Al. Zelinski, Wł. Stepniak, etc.), the episode of the Romanian Army's involvement in the liberation of Pocutia also included some unpleasant aspects, a number of complaints (some of which rather amusing) being subsequently filed by the locals against the requisitioning undertaken by the Romanian troops.

The documents consulted at the Diplomatic Archives of Bucharest (Fund 71/1914, folder 190), at the Romanian Military Archives (General Headquarters Fund, Historical Department, folder 477) and at the Polish Archives (KNP Fund, Folders 83-87) include such declarations or reports, which I consider isolated and controversial, the authors of the incriminated acts not being necessarily identified as Romanian military men.

In our opinion, the intervention of the Romanian Army in Pocutia, justified by the request of the Polish side⁵³, beyond its strategic aspect, was characterized by a decent and civilized behavior (in this respect, the support given to the Jewish population is noteworthy, and insufficiently addressed until now). Isolated acts (and one should take in account here only those acts certified with documents) were unavoidable under the circumstances. The document presenting the contribution of the Romanian Army to the liberation of Pocutia, sent to the Peace Conference by the Polish delegation, is, beyond doubt, the strongest piece of evidence as to the outcome of the operation in Pocutia, and a landmark in the history of the Romanian-Polish relations.

⁵¹ Mihaela Oanea, *Relații româno-polone în perioada 1919–1931. Aspecte diplomatice*, in *Relații româno-polone de-a lungul timpului*, Suceava, 2001, p. 106.

⁵² AAN, KNP Fund, file 86, pp. 5-38; Viorica Moisuc, *Varșovia*, in *Reprezentanțele diplomatice ale României (1911–1939)*, II, București, 1971, p. 14. The resuming of the Romanian-Polish diplomatic relations, as reflected in the Polish Archives, was stalled by the Great Powers' attitude towards the remaking of the Polish State, on the one hand, and by the ambiguity of the double representation of Poland in Bucharest by the physician Mariusz de Lindé and by Stanisław Koźmiński, on the other hand (Michał Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 19). The Romanian Legation in Warsaw was raised to the rank of Embassy.

⁵³ AAN, KNP Fund, file 87, p. 76.