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PhD thesis
The Transylvanian and Bukovinian volunteers in
Russian Civil War
(1918-1920)
(Summary)

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Keywords: Transylvania, union, World War I, Russian Civil War, Bolsheviks, Romanian National Committee of Russia, Russia.

The relevance of the subject of the PhD thesis is due to the fact that Romanian historiography has little information about the Russian Civil War in which the Romanians troops from the former Austro-Hungarian army took part and their role in the Allied armies in Siberia.

The study and understanding of the events of 1918-1920 is one of the priorities of our historiography, because the Romanian military unit on the territory of Russia, militated for the unification of Transylvania, Bukovina and all territories inhabited by Romanians in the Kingdom of Romania and contributed to facilitating peace negotiations in Paris, after the end of the First World War.

In literature, this Romanian military unit is found under the name of the second corps of Transylvanian-Bukovinian volunteers, the Corps of Romanian Volunteers from Siberia or the Romanian Legion of Transylvanian-Bukovinian Hunters.

We consider that names such as the Romanian Volunteer Corps from Siberia and the Romanian Legion are equivalent. The first designation refers to the second volunteer corps that began to be established in early 1918, and the second designation refers to the reform of the volunteer corps in Siberia in early 1919.

In Romanian literature, the press and the memoirs of the participants, the Transylvanian and Bukovinian soldiers from Russia were not called legionnaires, but are met with the name of volunteers. The name of legion and legionary was taken from the modern French foreign legion, not from the legions of Ancient Rome¹. It was associated with the quality of mercenary and for these reasons this name was avoided for the Romanian military corps on the territory of Russia, even if in the official documents they appear, after 1919, with the name of legion. They did not consider themselves mercenaries, but volunteers for the national cause, the name of legionnaire being used by foreign literature for these corps of volunteers, they being associated with the troops of the French legion.

The participation of Romanians together with the other nationalities from Austria-Hungary in the events in Russia remains a unique subject in the history of the union of

¹ Ваха Далибор, „Досуг чехословацких легионеров в России и на пути домой в 1919–1920 гг.” în *Изв. Лаборатории древних технологий*, Иркутск, 2016, Т. 12, Nr. 3 (20), p. 89.

Transylvania with Romania, which is, unfortunately, lacking a national historiographical interpretation.

At the international level, the subject is intensely approached, with different opinions about the involvement of these national armies in the affairs of the Russian Civil War. The most recent interpretation of the events is that of a Russian historian who saw Austro-Hungarian prisoners as victims because they were involved in a war against the Soviet regime because of the political intrigues of the Bolshevik leadership and the Entente².

This phenomenon in Russia came to the attention of historians, due to the conflict between the national armies and the Soviet power in May-June 1918, which affected the Volga region, the Urals, Siberia and the Far East. The armed intervention of prisoners of war from Austria-Hungary had as a direct consequence of foreign intervention, because the Czechs and Slovaks were under French jurisdiction, and the Romanians were in negotiations with the Czech contingents and French government. With the entry of Japanese, US and British military forces into the Far East in the spring of 1918, the Russian Civil War turned into an international civil war, as several foreign governments (German, English, French, American, Japanese, Czechoslovak, Polish, Romanian, Greek and Italian), were involved in the events and Hungarians, Chinese, Germans and Koreans fought on the side of the Red Army³.

Consequently, it can be said that the armed intervention of Austro-Hungarian nationalities had a particular importance which changed the distribution of local conflict at the international level and led to the creation of European nation-states.

The works dedicated to the processes that took place inside these armies have not been sufficiently studied by researchers, and if we refer to the Romanian corps, they are completely missing. A hundred years after the events, Romanian historiography has not addressed to the participation of Transylvanians and Bukovinians in the Russian Civil War. It can be said that this subject lacks coherent and systematic studies, it being approached only indirectly.

The Transylvanian-Bukovinian Volunteer Corps of Siberia consisted of three distinct military groups that appeared in three cities: Samara, Chelyabinsk and Vladivostok. Each of these groups had the same purpose, but the basis for constitution was different. The former collaborated with the Czechs, the latter with the French, and those in Chelyabinsk wanted to become independent. The merging of these centers and the organization in several stages of a strong Romanian military body reveals the unstudied parts of this event and produces a

²Д. В. Салдугеев, „Чехословацкий легион в России” in *Вестник Челябинского государственного университета*, Сер. 1, История, 2005, №. 2, pp. 88-89.

³Jean-Jacques Marie, *Histoire de la guerre civile russe 1917-1922*, Editions Tallandier, 2015, p. 10.

comprehensive and qualitative study, taking into account the specific interests of the military and political elites of Transylvania and Bukovina in Siberia in that period.

The chronology of the research mainly covers the period from January 1918 to April 1920, but in order to understand their causes and reasons it was necessary to refer to previous events and time processes.

The stage of knowledge of the subject of the PhD thesis. Recent changes in the declassification of archival documents indicate the formation of a new research tradition based on new discoveries, to which is added the organic synthesis of the best achievements of foreign historiography and a focus on special issues previously ignored.

The internal historiography of the problem can be divided into three main periods. Such a division has its own laws, first of all due to the changes in the internal political situation of Romania that it has gone through over time. It is advisable to identify the following stages of the development of the problem: the first period of the years 1918-1945, the second period of the years 1945-1989, and the third period from 1990 to the present.

Historiography of 1918-1945. The study of the history of the second volunteer corps begins after the end of the world war in Europe, but not in Russia, with several articles dedicated to the events appearing in the press of the time. In the initial phase of the study, the first researchers in the history of the Romanian body were the direct participants in events (Elie Bufnea, Voicu Nițescu, Simion Ghișe, etc.). Many of the works were intended for the general public, as they were only partially to provide a real picture of Romanians' participation in events in Siberia. Influenced by the international and domestic context against the new regime in Russia, these works accentuate the struggle of Romanians in Siberia against the Bolsheviks, thus avoiding whole passages in the history of the corps regarding internal conflicts during the two years, relations with other foreign armies or when the Romanians were confronted with the new ideas of Bolshevism. Stereotypes were formed, which were then transferred to subsequent publications that directly or indirectly affected the indicated problem.

Of great importance for the Romanian historiography was the publication of the periodical "Gazeta Voluntarilor", in which appeared pages with materials about the history of the second volunteer corps. During the periodical, the former volunteers tried to reconstruct the history of the Romanian Volunteer Corps by asking a series of questions about the events that remained unexplained, asking for explanations from the participants. Unfortunately, this initiative did not lead to the proposed results, as there was reluctance among volunteers. The Romanian corps in Russia faced many internal problems, for this reason it probably did not want to be recalled: the killing of the corps commander, Major Ioan Dâmbu, the reform of the

approximately 5,000 soldiers in the Romanian Legion and the abolition of the Romanian National Committee in Russia.

This was not the only reason, it should also be mentioned that many of the documents related to these events were lost or destroyed during the confrontations in Russia in order not to fall into the possession of the enemy. Those few documents that were left were distributed through different localities from Romania, remaining in the possession of the volunteers, they were no longer sent to the newspaper's editorial office, for the reasons mentioned above. The second stage of the study, between 1945-1989, is characterized by a change in Romanian historiography, associated primarily with the installation of the communist regime. The new ideology led to the impossibility of addressing the issue of Romanians who fought against the Bolsheviks. Only the subjects of the Romanian prisoners who adhered to the ideas of Bolshevism, fought in the Red Guards or in the internationalist troops were admitted. Even so, this subject has remained little discovered, when compared to the extent to which it has been researched in the West or in Russia. In the large libraries in Russia you can still consult works published in the 60s and 70s dedicated to the participation of Romanians in the Bolshevik revolution, which unfortunately were not translated into Romanian or may not even be found in our libraries.

The third period, the one after 1990, had a double influence on the Romanian historiography. On the one hand, the elimination of censorship, the rebirth of pluralism, the expansion of scientific contacts contributed to the process of integration in historiography. There was an opportunity to study subjects that could not be studied before and therefore to make the idea of one's own history more complete and coherent. The collapse of the communist regime and the subsequent opening of the archives contributed to this.

For the first time, the issue of the second volunteer corps in Siberia is being raised. Chapters and studies dedicated to the topic are beginning to appear. The most extensive work to date dedicated to the theme was made by the historian Ioan I. Șerban, who dedicated much of his research to the second volunteer corps, based on original sources in the Union Museum in Alba Iulia.

Also, a series of studies after 2000 approach the subject itself or involuntarily and try to develop it. All these studies faced the lack of national and international documentary material to complete a comprehensive research. The 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War has led to exhibitions in museums, among the topics presented are volunteers from Siberia, so it can be considered that contemporary researchers are interested in this issue. The purpose of the Phd thesis is to study the process of formation of the new Romanian military

corps and its participation in the Russian Civil War of 1918-1920 and its consequences of participation. Based on the above stated objective, the main research directions have been formulated:

- 1) the investigation of the establishment of the Romanian military corps in Russia in 1918;
- 2) analyzing the system of relations had by the Romanians from Siberia with the Czechs, the French and the white Russians;
- 3) identification of internal problems in the Romanian Corps;
- 4) identification of the main military operations of the Romanians against the Bolsheviks in Siberia and the consequences of this intervention for the Romanian corps;

The sources used to write the thesis can be divided into several groups:

1. Archive materials;
2. Periodicals;
3. General and special works;
4. Memories, of the participants in the events.

A significant part of the thesis sources were the archive documents. These are taken from the funds of the French Military Archives, which contain various reports on the mission of French General Maurice Janin in Siberia. On the national territory, numerous documents that address the subject can be found at the Central Archives in Bucharest, or at the County Directorate of Archives in Iași and Cluj. Also, the most relevant documents regarding the volunteers from Siberia can be found at the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia. These funds contain military reports, declarations, resolutions, instructions, members' reports, troop orders, telegrams, circular orders and other documents on the activities of the Allied armies or the Romanian corps, on the situation in Siberia.

These data provide the most valuable information about the training, the activity of the military corps, about the recruitment difficulties and about the material and technical support problems.

The second type of source involves periodic materials. In particular, the author addressed the periodical „Gazeta Voluntarilor”, published in Cluj in 1922 and other periodicals written in Romania or Russia or about the activity of Romanian representatives in the volunteer corps.

The third type of source consists of memories, which can be divided into two parts. The memoirs of the participants in events that were published in the interwar period (Elie Bufnea, Voicu Nițescu, Petre Nemoianu, Simion Ghișa) and the memoirs of the participants

who still remained unpublished in archival funds. These sources, although they complete our understanding, are a subjective material and must be analyzed from this perspective. They contain useful information about the conditions of the Romanian soldiers, the problems they faced daily and about the way of thinking that predominated inside the corps.

The methodology of the PhD thesis consists in the fundamental principles of historical knowledge, historicism and scientific objectivity. The principle of historicism, which involves the establishment of general laws of development and the interdependence of processes and phenomena, made it possible to examine the research topic, the conditions of appearance and organization of the Romanian corps in Siberia and its interaction with other military corps against Bolshevism. The author tried to contribute to the knowledge not only of historical events, but also of their inclusion in the general historical context. The principle of objectivity was implemented by comparing sources, based on reliable and confirmed facts. To solve the research problems, scientific methods of analysis and synthesis were used.

The scientific novelty of the PhD thesis is that for the first time in Romanian historiography, a broad vision is brought on the actions of the second volunteer corps in Siberia. An integrated approach to the study of the problem of Romanian intervention in the Russian Civil War was possible due to a wide range of sources, which reconstructed the daily activity of the Romanian corps soldiers.

Also, for the first time, a comprehensive analysis of the internal processes that took place inside the Romanian military formations was made. The examination of the trials that took place inside the Romanian military units between 1918-1920 allowed an explanation of the logic of the soldiers' behavior on the internal Bolshevik front. The practical significance of the paper. The PhD thesis can be used in the preparation of general and specialized works on the history of Romania, the union of Transylvania and Bukovina with Romania, the history of the First World War, the history of Russia, the history of the Russian Civil War, the history of the Czechoslovak Corps, foreign intervention in Siberia.

The structure of the paper is determined by the purpose and objectives of the study.

The PhD thesis includes an introduction, four chapters, conclusions, bibliography and annexes.

The first chapter of the PhD thesis highlights the motivational composition of volunteer troops that led to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the

formation of nation states, and the formation and transition of small Siberian armies from a position of neutrality to active participation in the civil war in the Siberian region.

The Romanian Volunteer Corps played an important role for the Czechoslovak Corps during the Russian Civil War. He took part in the first conflicts of the Czechs with the Bolsheviks, because small groups of Romanians concentrated in the Czech echelons on the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, and then provided all the necessary support to the Czechs in the security campaigns of the Russian railway.

The Romanian corps initially wanted to organize, together with the Czechoslovak corps as an integral part, but then due to political considerations it broke away from the Czech side and formed as an independent national military unit, with national interests, which distinguished by other subjects of the Russian Civil War. Through these considerations, an equally strong recognition of the position of the Romanians together with the other nationalities to leave the composition of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was desired.

The second chapter emphasizes the organization of the Romanian Volunteer Corps and the activity of its members who have thought for a long time about the organization and use of Romanians in Russia for the benefit of the Entente and then of Greater Romania. This autonomy was achieved with great sacrifices trying to distance themselves from the problems of the Czechs and the Russians as a whole. Autonomy was facilitated by the process of forming other national armies on Russian territory, but without an adequate material and technical-military base, there were problems in supplying and training troops. This issue was largely covered by Czechoslovak funds and Russian aid. The genesis of the formation of a separate Romanian military unit depended not only on the activity of the Transylvanian public in Russia and Paris but also on the support of the Kingdom of Romania and the Allies.

The third chapter focuses on the internal problems of the Romanian Volunteer Corps. The movement of Romanians from Transylvania and Bukovina to form volunteer troops on Russian territory led to the formation of new military units in a relatively short time. This can be considered a negative factor, as the emergence of an extensive military formation of former Transylvanian and Bukovinian prisoners in the Austro-Hungarian Army, to whom unrealistic promises were made and who were not initially associated with the ideas of a fight in Russia, led to numerous consequences with repercussions in the organization of the body.

The purpose of the Second Corps was to continue the war against the Central Powers in

France. The refusal to take an active part in the war in Russia with the allies led to the restructuring of the Romanian Volunteer Corps, which became an integral part of the French army. Following this restructuring, almost half of the members of the corps became prisoners of war again, for the simple reason of refusing to engage in a new war with unknown effects. With the consent of the Romanian government, the Siberian military corps joined the Russian Civil War on the internal Bolshevik front. The military successes they registered became the best indicator of their activity which showed the desire to unite all Romanians in one state. They became the troops that were called in the most dangerous sectors of the Russian taiga. They also demonstrated the most skillful military cooperation with the other allied armies, mostly with the Czechs and white Russians.

The fourth chapter continues the description of the Romanians' involvement in the Russian Civil War. Taking control of some key settlements, railway stations, and important economic and political centers has led to an improvement in the moral and social situation of Romanian soldiers. However, this aspect transformed the Romanian army into an open military organization, formed on a national basis, but with responsibility for international orders, not having its own objectives. The chapter also includes the episode of withdrawing troops from the internal context of Russia and heading to the Pacific Ocean.

With this last episode mentioned above, the activity of the Romanians in Siberia ended. Based on the materials used in the realization of this work, it can be concluded that the Romanian military corps in Russia brought a contribution to the realization of Greater Romania. Also, all this course of the formation of the Romanian military corps was achieved through the harmonious connections between it and the Czechoslovak forces. The Czechoslovak units made a significant contribution to the formation of the Romanian corps in the whirlwind of the civil war. They contributed greatly to the consolidation and strengthening of the Romanian body in the initial phase of its activity, and then they acted together as distinct units, but with the same purpose. This cooperation led to the autonomy of the Romanian military body over the other armed elements in Siberia and gave it national unity.