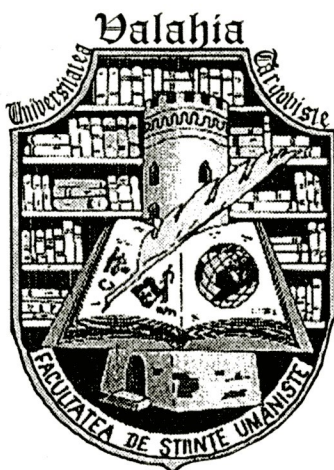


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POLISH-ROMANIAN MILITARY RELATIONSHIP IN THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

*Alexandru Ștefănescu**

After the Great War, the Eastern anti-revisionist states joined each other in several military defensive alliances to protect the Congress of Peace status-quo. Romania had initiated a large defensive alliance with Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland.

Although Poland could not be attracted in the system of the other alliances that Romania was part of, a Defensive Alliance Convention was signed in Bucharest (on March the 3rd, 1921), through which the two countries agreed to provide each other armed support, should one of them be at war with Russia. At the same time, the parties pledged to coordinate their efforts in order to maintain the status-quo at Versailles and not to sign alliances with other states until after they will have obtained the acceptance from the other party. The issues of the Romanian-Polish military cooperation were discussed in the military conventions from March the 3rd, 1921 and September, the 16th, 1922. The text of the conventions contained the quantum of the forces allotted to the East front (14 infantry divisions and the equivalent of 2 cavalry divisions) and the time necessary for its putting into practice, and also provided for creating an allied General Headquarters, to facilitate the cooperation between the two countries, remaining under national command. During the first years of alliance, the military delegations of the two countries elaborated a series of special studies regarding the Polish-Romanian operations projects, in case of a conflict with the USSR.

The Study nr.1, elaborated between September the 19th and September the 21st, 1922, set the areas for concentrating the forces meant to work together in order to reject the Russian aggression. For Poland, due to the river Pripet, this created a swamp right in the middle of the Polish-Russian border, concentration areas were created, North and South of this area. Romania had a natural border with the Soviet Russia, on the river Nistru, followed by other natural barriers, parallel to it, and, therefore, it set its concentration area in the North of the country, between Cernăuți and Botoșani, with a secondary area in Huși. The separation line between the allied armies was also set: from Svaniec on the Nistru, to Straja, on Suceava. The study contained 4 hypotheses, which considered various places where a Russian attack could take place: South of the Pripet swamps, in the North of Basarabia, North of the Pripet river, or simultaneously, against the two states (A.M.R., fond Microfilme, rola 1.P.II.935, cadrulul 377). All of these hypotheses, analyzed in the study, will be taken over and developed by the two Headquarters in the next studies. The main feature of these studies was the fact that the army of the state which had not been initially attacked had to attack from the flank the forth going Russian army, regardless of their hitting direction or, if the distance did not allow it, they were supposed to enter the Soviet territory and immobilize the Russian forces which had remained outside combat.

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In parallel to elaborating study nr.1, the two General Headquarters elaborated study nr.2, different from those that followed, and by this, setting the connections system between the two armies (sending missions or connecting officers), transiting certain railways, and also the mutual setting up of navy quarters (Popescu, 2001:51). In the following period, at Headquarters level an information exchange took place, as proven by the correspondence between the leaders of the two armies' Headquarters, General Cristescu, on behalf of the Romanian army, and General Sikorski (Marshal Pilsudski, from the end of 1922) on behalf of the Polish army.

Study nr.3 was elaborated during the conference of the two Headquarters on April, the 23rd, and established, in two hypotheses the Romanian-Polish cooperation in the case of a Russian attack against Romania. One month later, Marshal Pilsudski had already given orders regarding "the preparation of the study concerning the cooperation of the Polish and Romanian armies, in case the Russian forces do not attack Poland North of the Pripet swamps (A.M.A.E., fond 71, Polonia, dosar 65, fila 74). The concentration of the Russian troops at the Eastern Polish border, in October, 1923, in connection to the communist and separatist movements in Germany, rushed the elaboration of study nr.4.

Achieved within the Warsaw Conference of April, 1924, the study established the cooperation of the Romanian and Polish forces, should an attack of the main Russian forces occur, against Poland: a) South of the Pripet swamps; b) North of the Pripet swamps (A.M.R., fond M.St.M., Secția 3 Operații, dosar 1116, fila 239). The study proved to be particularly complex, the expected responses having an increased mobility and a deeper involvement from the air forces.

At the end of 1924, Poland would promote the idea of studying some hypotheses which surpassed the strict frame of the East front. The proposal of the Polish Headquarters considered exploring the Polish-Romanian cooperation in case Poland was at war with Germany, or Romania with Hungary or Bulgaria and one of them or even both were attacked by Russia, as well (A.M.A.E., fond 71, Polonia, dosar 65, fila 90). This hypothesis could not have been seen through in a special study, although it anticipated accurately the events in September, 1939.

The conference of the two Headquarters in 192, which took place in Bucharest, made study nr.5. Just as complex as the one before it, this one analyzed the Russian intention in various hypothetical action courses, starting from the possibility that Russia could attack, with the main forces, Romania (A.M.R., fond M.St.M., Secția 3 Operații, dosar 1238, fila 37).

The warranty treaty signed between Romania and Poland on May, the 20th, 1926, was written following the model provided by the Treaty of Locarno, including a general engagement, conditioned by the application of some articles from the Pact of the Nations Society. Part of it was, also, the Technical Arrangement, which included changes concerning the number and the nature of the forces which were to be engaged in the East front by the two strong allies, also specifying the timeframe of the mobilization. The arrangement brought out the obvious defensive characteristic, aiming at the common reaction only in the case of an aggression coming from the East.

The first conference of the Romanian and Polish Headquarters, after signing the Technical Arrangement in May, 1926 took place one month later, in Warsaw, its works being finalized with the elaboration of the Study nr.6. The new study established the Romanian-Polish cooperation, in case Russia would want to attack, almost simultaneously, with all of its forces, divided in two even groups, Poland North of Pripet and Romania

South of Basarabia. The concentration areas and the timeframe for the allied concentration were kept as set in Study nr.1. The minutes attached to the study established how would each of the allies distribute 27-30 air squadrons for the East front and, for the first time, the cooperation between the two air forces was aimed at.

Study nr.7, prepared at the beginning of 1927 in Bucharest, was the last operative shared study, which analyzed the conditions and principles for the cooperation of the two armies, should a demonstrative attack occur in the North of Pripet, followed by a main Russian attack South of Pripet, either against Poland, or against Romania North of Basarabia (A.M.R., fond M.St.M., Secția 3 Operații, dosar 1116, fila 199).

During the following years, there were talks about the issues raised by the junction area of the two armies, by the possibility of a German attack against Poland, the rebuilding of the old German-Austrian-Hungarian fortification, on the upper Nistru and their part in stopping a Russian offensive. For this period cavalry remains Poland elite force (Manstein, 2000:36). Poland possessed a huge number of cavalymen considered to be the best in the world (Stokesbury, 1993:60). Despite the critics made by the most important military annalist of the period, Basil Liddell Hart, Polish leaders put their hopes in this men-on-horses army (Liddell Hart, 1998: 33).

The Romanian-Polish Warranty Treaty, signed in 1926 had some alterations in 1931, when the new Romanian-Polish Warranty Treaty was signed, also with five year validity. In 1936, when it was due, its term would be extended for another five years. In June, 1931 the new Technical Arrangement would be signed, through which the two states pledged to help each other with armament and information regarding the technical-military discoveries and upgrades. Should one of the parties be in conflict with another country, the other party pledged to cease all exports of materials with military importance toward the country its ally was in conflict with. Moreover, the Polish party pledged that, in case of a common military action, it would yield to the Romanian army of its air force plus artillery and combat wagons, so that the Romanian troops are just as well equipped as the Polish ones (Popescu, 2001:44). In case of a shared action, the Romanian army and fleet would go under Polish supreme command, had the supreme command of the armed forces belonging to the two countries not been granted, due to the circumstances, to a French army general, which was new in the Romanian-Polish Convention.

The cooling of the political relations between the two countries due to the non-aggression treaties signed by Poland with Russia (July, the 25th, 1932) and Germany (January, the 26th, 1934), treaties which asserted its part as a great regional power, and due to the policy lead by Titulescu, aimed at normalizing the relations with the USSR (a policy to which Warsaw did not agree) was followed by a stagnation, in what the military cooperation was concerned.

In 1936, the works of the two Headquarters were re-opened, aiming at the improvement of the previous studies. The attempts made by Romania to extend the Romanian-Polish treaty, under the circumstances of the Hungarian troops being concentrated at the Western border (July, 1939) did not pay.

The Polish Foreign Affairs Minister, J. Beck, concerning this issue, showed that Romania, as Hungary's ally, did not need Poland's support in the case of a Hungarian attack, and Romania could not provide military support to Poland should this country be attacked by Germany, being forced to keep its troops at the Hungarian and Bulgarian borders.

The studies made by the two General Headquarters did not contain any hypothesis of action against the Soviets, although the events will prove its necessity, under the circumstances of a German attack against Poland.

Thus, on September, the 17th, 1939, when the USSR attacked Poland, even the shared defense plans would have failed, the two countries not being able to concentrate the forces established in the conventions in order to reject the Soviets. Poland understood Romania's difficult situation, as it was surrounded by hostile neighbors (Hungary, Bulgaria, and the USSR), and triggering a conflict with Germany by granting military assistance; therefore, it did not ask for compliance with the obligations specified in the alliance treaty.

By the time the USSR entered the war, the Polish army had already been defeated and a Romanian military intervention would have been useless to Poland, endangering the Romanian state.

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