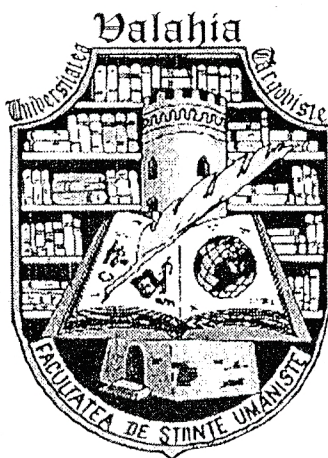


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AN EPISODE FROM THE ROMANIAN-POLISH RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS: THE ROMANIAN ARMY CONTRIBUTION TO SETTING POCUTIA FREE

Daniel Hrenciuc*

In the period between the two World Wars, the Kingdom of Great Romania and the 2nd Polish Republic developed very close relationships, motivated, mainly, by strategic interests, but also by political, diplomatic, military, cultural aspects. The main target was the two states' increasing interests to defend their Eastern borders, Bassarabia and Eastern Galicia, respectively, against an unforeseen attack from the Soviet Union.

In this context, the geopolitical modifications undergone in the Central and Eastern European area, immediately after the Great Conflagration (1914 – 1918) were defined by the accent put on nationality and self-governing principle, in the context of Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires dissolution. The remaking-up of Great Romania and Poland represented events with special significance, which followed the ideas emanated by Woodrow Wilson, regarding the remapping out of the European inner borders, according to his already mentioned principles of nationality and self-governing. Poland's interest towards Romania had been shown even during the war, being reflected in the telegrams and reports' contents of the National Polish Committee from Paris, led by Roman Dmowski, the events on the Romanian political scene occupying an important place. The contacts between the National Polish Committee and the National Committee of Romanians from Transylvania and Bukovina and the Committee for the Unity of all Romanians had already been established from April 1918, during the proceedings of the Congress of all nationalities from Rome (Moresthe 1921: 60).

The cooperation between Poland and Romania started even from the end of the war, in the context of the events preceding the remaking up of the Polish independent state and of the Great Romania. Thus, on July 5, 1918, the National Committee of Romanians from Transylvania and Bukovina congratulated the Polish National Committee on the occasion of the Great Powers acknowledgement of proclaiming Poland's independence necessity (N.C.H.A. Fund Microfilme Polonia, rola 16, c.10-11, Comité National des Roumains de Transylvanie et de la Bucovine resident en France, a Roman Dmowski, président du Comité National Polonais, Paris, le 5 juillet 1918, Take Ionescu). In the view to cooperating between the two sides, it took place in Lucerne a meeting between Take Ionescu and the Polish National Committee envoy. On that occasion, there were tackled the specific problems of Romanians and Poles fight for emancipation (AAN fund KNP, folder 82, files 14)

On 3 October 1918, it was let the National Polish Committee know about the founding of the Committee for the National unity of all Romanians. At the same time it was expressed the wish for cooperating between the two organizations (NCHA, fund Microfilme Polonia, rola 16, c.1618, Comité National pour l'unité des roumains, Paris, le 8 octobre 1918, Take Ionescu). On the same semi-official channel, it was settled, based on Poles' approval, the common political program of the two sides, which, in essence, had in view the accomplishing of national unity through common efforts (NCHA, fund Microfilme Polonia, rola 16, c.1618, Comité National pour l'unité des roumains, Paris, le 8 octobre 1918, Take Ionescu). The Empire federalization plan, accused of demagogy and hypocrisy, was rejected, the only reasonable solution on that occasion being that of founding new independent states (*Ibid.*, c. 20). At the same time it was avoided the solution of a common declaration for not affecting both states interests, with the Peace Conference coming soon.

The Romanian-Polish cooperation settled immediately after the war ending materialized in establishing an official relationship between the Romanian Legation in Paris and the National Polish Committee, led by Roman Dmowski. On the occasion, they laid stress on the two states' common interests (*Ibid.*, c.21). In addition, after they agreed on the schedule for the following common activities starting from the Peace Conference, it was let the Romanian official in Paris know about "The Polish state needs urgently Silesia and Danzig and that it will spare no efforts to obtain the international acknowledgement of this necessity" (NCHA fund *Microfilme Polonia*, rola 16, c.42, KNP, Paris, le 27 novembre 1918, indescifrabil. AAN fund KNP folder 82, files 10). Romania was watching very closely the activity of the Polish delegation at the Peace Conference, through its diplomatic representative in Warsaw, Alexandru Florescu (F.M.D.A, fund 71/*Polonia.Relatii cu România 1920 – 1944*, vol. 52, files 26). (Thus, a confidential report send to the Foreign Minister, Nicolae Mișu by Alexandru Florescu was mentioning that Danzig was necessary for Poland and this

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question would be decisive for the future of the Polish-German relationships(*Ibid.*, files 27). At the same time, the Polish representative in London knew about the Romanian priorities that would be the official recognition of Transylvania, Bukovina and Bassarabia (AAN fund *KNP* folder 82, files 10).

For the later evolution of the Romanian-Polish relationships, it was symptomatic the fact that, only a month after Poland had proclaimed independent, Josef Pilsudski informed, in a telegram, the Romanian Government about the existence of the independent and sovereign Poland. He assured that "the new Polish state, once and for all set free from foreign domination yoke wanted to establish friendly relationships with Romania" (Moldoveanu 1979: 225).

A little bit later Ignacy Paderewski also sent a telegram to the Romanian Prime Minister, in which he expressed his hope for developing friendly relationships between the two sides. The Romanian government responded on 4 January 1919, specifying also: „Romanians gladly saw Europe resetting Poland in its legitimate rights and independence. That made up for a clear injustice of the past" (Keller 2002 :10).

The later evolution of the events required Romanian Army involvement in setting Pocutia (the southeastern corner of Galicia) free, territory claimed by both Ukrainians and Poles. The military cooperation anticipated the mutual backing of Romanian and Polish delegations at the Peace Conference proceedings from Paris.

The land of Pocutia that is the southeastern corner of Galicia has its special significance, in the context of Moldavian-Polish relationships and later in the Romanian-Polish ones. Pocutia stood for a guarantee within the framework of a loan of 3.000 silver coins given by Moldavian ruler Petru I Mușat to his Polish counterpart, Vladislav Jagello in 1388 (Ștefănescu 1992: 95). The deal was that Poland must pay back the loan in 3 years; otherwise, it must have ceased Pocutia together with Halici fortress to the Moldavian state. In reality, as Poland had never paid back the entire sum, Pocutia became the cause of disagreement in the Moldavian-Polish relationships. After a series of military conflicts, the Saint Ruler Stephen the Great succeeded in retrieving this territory, which the ruler Iliăș yielded for good to the Polish state in 1546.

The political-military complications implied by this territory claimed both by Poles and by Ukrainians came into sight during May 1919, when the communist troops attacked Wolhynia and Podolia (Ukraine), defeating the troops of the *ataman* Simeon Petliura. The evolution of these military-strategic events required, all of a sudden, the effective involvement of Romania in the conflict on the Poland side, in order to defend the South front exposed to the Bolshevik attacks. Even from the 15th of May 1919, the 4th Mountain Troops Polish Division had launched an attack against the Ukrainian troops, which had occupied Galicia (Ștănescu 1995:10) The Polish offensive was but rapidly stopped by Ukrainian troops, thus the danger of a junction between the Bolshevik Hungarian troops and the Lenin ones being more than ever present, with consequences hard to estimate for the whole Central Europe area. On this background, and taking into account the direct threats towards Romanian national security, the Bucharest Government decided to respond favorable to the Polish pressing requests, the was to approve the intervention of Romanian troops dislocated in Bukovina, (the 8th Division led by general Iacob Zadik) (R.M.A. fund *M. St. M. Serviciul istoric*, folder 477, files 25).

On that particular moment, Romania was itself in the middle of a conflict against the Hungarians on the western front and under the threat of the Bolshevik troops, on the eastern one, because the allied troops led by general Anselme defeated at Odessa had retired in Bassarabia. Nevertheless, the Romanian government offered to Poland the support required.

On May 22, the commander-in-chief of the 8th Romanian division of the fourth Romanian Army was ordered by the Romanian Prime-Minister Constantin Coandă to step in Pocutia (*Ibid.*). The same order also contained the supplementary instructions given by commander-in-chief of Romanian Headquarters, General Constantin Prezan. He was stating that the military action ordered was motivated also by the fact that Romania was interested in taking control over the railway Colomeea-Cernăuți-Horodenka-Korosmoya-Sighetu Marmăției that was linking Bukovina with Transylvania AAN, fund K.N.P. folder 87, files 53 -56)

On 24 May 1919, Romanian troops entered Pocutia, reaching a line south of Stanislawow and Halicz. Their mission was to make the liaison with the Polish Army in order to prevent a junction between Bolshevik Hungarian and Soviet Union troops. At the same time the Romanian troops, following the instructions given by their Headquarters, had to avoid a conflict with Ukrainian Army, this being the reason why they let the Ukrainian commanders from Mielnița and Colomea know about the Romanian military intervention. When Romanian troops entered Pocutia Ukrainian troops self dissolved and surrendered without fight to the Romanian Army. On that occasion, it took place the first contacts between the 4th Polish division, namely general Kraliszek and the 8th Romanian division led by general Iacob Zadik in which were laid the foundations of the future cooperation (AAN fund *KNP* folder 86, f. 56-58).

The Romanian military authorities, settled in Pocutia, edited on 23 May a *Proclamation* in Romanian, Polish, and Ukrainian languages letting the locals know about the fact that Romania just wanted to take control over the above-mentioned railway and that would be no military actions launched against the population, no

matter its ethnicity (Stănescu 1995:10) It underlined though that it was necessary for the population to hand over their weapons (RMA fund *M StM, Serviciul istoric*, folder 477, files 25).

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 Alexandrowicz. The military units occupied the line Nadvorno-Ottyinia-Newiska, taking control over some important strategic points as the railway which was linking Central Poland and Rutenia (FMDA fund 71/1914, folder 190, files 7-46). In reply, the Polish troops occupied one by one the localities Stanisławów, Holyn, Gliniany, Przemislany, Brody and Radzimilow (AAN, fund KNP folder 87, files 9-11).

On May 28, it took place a meeting between General Iacob Zadik and Polish general Kraliczek, dedicated to founding a mixed military Command Pocutia, placed in Colomeea. It was also had in view the division of Dniester River in sectors, the settling, on every district level, of a military commander, discussing also the details of the Romanian Army retreat from Pocutia. At the same time, the Romanian authorities accepted the sending of Polish civil clerks under General Iacob Zadik, even before the Allies took a final decision regarding this territory.

On June 5, 1919, the eighth division Headquarters moved from Colomeea to Czernowitz. The book of eighth division stated: „The 8th division mission is to ensure holding of Bukovina in its historical borders, and also that of Pocutia, preserving the order on the inside, and resisting against the attacks which might come from our enemy” (RMA, fund *MStM, Serviciul istoric* folder 477, files 42).

The Romanian military authorities took measures to avoid the outbursts of conflicts between Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews that were the nationalities composing the ethnic spectrum of this area. In the view to this, they appointed Polish prefects and Ukrainian sub prefects, while in other three districts they did the reverse, extending this initiative also to the villages' level.

The measures taken by Romanian troops, meant to protect the Jewish population from the area did not suit the Polish Authorities, but we must say that Romanians administrated a territory, which did not belong yet to Poland. At the same time, the Romanians tried to temper the Polish excesses towards the Jewish population. During the meetings, on top level, between the two armies, the Romanian and the Poles agreed on the contents of some common measures against the Bolshevik troops. In the view to this, they divided the Dniester River line into sub sectors, and founded the Territorial Command of Pocutia, placed in Colomeea, helped by a Military Commission organized at every District level. Under every district' commission functioned a civil and administrative Organization (RMA fund *MStM, Serviciul istoric*, folder 477, files 42)

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 Polish troops' attitude towards Jewish population and Ukrainian administration. They surpassed those moments with the firm position of the eighth division and even of the fourth Army Headquarters (from the 7 July 1919 General Alexandru Lupescu replaced at command General Constantin Prezan), of not permitting the 4th Polish division to trespass the Pocutia border (AAN, fund KNP, folder 87, files 65-69).

As the Polish troops launched the offensive against the Ukrainian ones, the eighth Romanian division moved from Cernăuți to Iași and on 16 July, General Alexandru Lupescu decided to evacuate the Romanian troops from Pocutia (RMA, fund *MStM, Serviciul istoric*, folder 477, files 42).

The operation was done based on a signed Convention between General Iacob Zadik and Count General Lamezan Salins on 20 July. In the 2nd article of the document it was for the first time put into discussion the problem 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 Bukovina, starting from Babin village upon Nistru, till Iablonoita upon Ceremușul Alb. The Serafince (Serafinești) is part of the land which is to be occupied by the Polish Army”. According to the Convention, „the border started from Dniester's talweg 2 kilometers downstream Siret confluence, continued letting railway from Zastavna, south of Dniester in Romanian holding, reached the line of the Lake Verenceanca (the strict delineation of this water lustre was to be established by the future Mixed Commission), and continued upstream, on the road Coțmani-drăcineț, in the basin of Ceremuș and Siret, reaching the old border between Bukovina and Hungary”(FMDA fund 71/1914, vol.54, f. 84-85. Dutasta to Ionel Brătianu, 2 July 1918). On 2 August 1919 at Lemberg, it took place a meeting between Colonel Gheorghe Liciu and Polish representatives looking for the clearance of existing mutual litigation (Hrenciuc 2002 : 40)

After only 2 months of Romanian military administration, with one accord with Polish Headquarters, according to the protocol signed by general Iacob Zadik and Count General Lamezan Salins, on 17 August 1919, at 0 hours, Romanian troops started to evacuate Pocutia, operation that would last until 25th of September.

The local population appreciated in a special way the Romanian Army behaviour, fact proved by spontaneous demonstrations of sympathy. Impressed by these demonstrations, General Iacob Zadik would declare: “The thanks received from all local authorities of Pocutia prove, beyond doubt, that our troops,

as always, walked on the side of law, justice and humanness also in this part of the world inhabited by so many a peoples”(RMA fund *Divizia 8 Infanterie*, folder 3, files 107).

The Romanian troops' intervention in Pocutia provoked the vigorous protest of the Ukrainian diplomatic representative in Bucharest, Georges de Gassenko, and action ended with his diplomatic mission retreat from Romania.

It is necessary, in our opinion, to mention that the military actions of Romanian troops had the backing of Romanian political leaders from both countries. For example, Brătianu declared, still from 25 April 1919, that he was committed to coordinate a common military action to occupying Rutenia (Ukraine) and the South of Galicia, together with Polish Army, in order to prevent „a junction between the Hungarian and Russian communist armies”(Hitchins 1997: 286).

At last, the Romanian Army insured, on that occasion, the back of the Polish front, but avoiding a further involvement in the Polish military operations in the East. In addition, Romania supported the enlisting of Polish refugees from Bassarabia in the fourth Polish division and later the call up of these troops in the region Văslăuți-Dobrinăuți (Popescu 2001:16).

The military operations, which led to the setting Pocutia free preceded the resuming of diplomatic relationships between Poland and Romania. Thus, in June 1919, came in Bucharest the extraordinary and plenipotentiary envoy, namely count Alexander Skrzyński, As in Warszawa, according to a decree signed by King Ferdinand, was sent from 16th of July, Alexandru Florescu (former diplomatic representative in Athens) as head of Romanian Legation from the Polish capital (Moisuc 1971:14).

Analyzed by some Romanian and Polish historians (Marin C. Stănescu, Florin Anghel, Henryk Bułhak, Al. Zelinski, Wł. Stepniak etc) the episode of Romanian Army involvement in setting Pocutia free, couldn't avoid some unpleasant aspects, being later registered some complaints (even very amusing ones, some of them) made by the locals against the requisitions made, on that occasion by Romanian troops.

The documents that we researched within the framework of Diplomatic Archives from Bucharest (Fund 71/1914, folder 190), Romanian Military Archives (fund Headquarters *Historical Department*, folder 477) and also in the Polish Archives (fund *KNP*, folder 83-87) contain such declarations or reports which we consider as isolated and controversial, their authors not being identified as necessarily Romanian military men.

In our opinion, the Romanian Army intervention in Pocutia, justified by the request come from Poland side (AAN, fund *KNP*, folder 87, files 76), beyond its strategic aspect, was characterized by a decent civilized behavior (the support given to the Jewish population stand for an important point and maybe not enough known). We cannot take into consideration the isolated acts (and only those certified with documents); they were immanent with this kind of operation. The document of content for the Romanian Army support in setting Pocutia free send to the Peace Conference by the Polish delegation remains, beyond doubt, the strongest piece in the Romanian outcome of the operation Pocutia, but also as a reference point in the history of Romanian-Polish relationships.

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