

THE ARMY IN THE FIRST YEARS OF COMMUNIZATION IN THE ROMANIAN SOCIETY*

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Abstract: The author of this presentation states that despite the efforts the Communists made to seize power in 1945, the military cadres were not “a silent sea”, even though the psychological strain was very great. But over the next three years the resistance of the command corps weakened. Because of abuses and material deprivation there were changes in attitude and mentality, without this meaning that Romanian generals and officers agreed with communist ideas. The technique and scheme of the army’s transition to communism were outlined, with the help of many unpublished documents, but it must be stressed that this cynical aggression against the military will bear fruit after the monarchy’s ambition.

Keywords: army, divisions, communism, monarchy, strategies.

August 23, 1944 was an attempt by socio-political opposition forces to save the country from imminent disaster. It is known that Romania’s separation from Germany was, through its strategic, political and logistical consequences, one of the important events of World War II. Moreover, with the occupation of the country by the Red Army and the inclusion of Romania, with the consent of Great Britain and the USA, in the sphere of influence of the USSR, conditions were created for the establishment of the communist regime¹. From this perspective, for

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¹ Florin Constantiniu, Alesandru Duțu, Mihai Retegan, *România în război, 1941–1945, Un destin în istorie*, Militară Publishing, Bucharest, 1995, p. 311; Cezar Avram, Mihaela Bărbieru, *România în imperiul guvernat de opiul terorii și frenezia ideologiei totalitare*, in “Arhivele Olteniei”, no. 30/2016, pp. 155–156; Mihaela Bărbieru, *Relații militare româno-iugoslave în perioada*

Romania, the day of the 9th of May 1945 must be evaluated under the double aspect of victory and defeat of freedom and democracy².

After August 23, 1944, gradually, all state institutions came under the full control of the Soviet occupation troops, through the Allied Control Commission (Soviet). To begin with, the direct or indirect subordination and control of state institutions whose mission was to defend independence, sovereignty and order in society, namely the army, police, gendarmerie, administration³.

The process of destructuring the Romanian army included two main stages: the first carried out between August 1944 and March 6, 1945, and, the second between March 1945 and 1948. The first stage was characterized by a “galloping” process of disarmament of Romania and Soviet military occupation⁴. Immediately after August 23, 1944, tens of thousands of Romanian officers and soldiers with extensive war experience were taken prisoner and imprisoned in the camps of Bacău, Vaslui, Roman and Iași, while the strength of the units inside, made up of recruits (without battlefield experience) were sent to the front, against a superior enemy. As a result, in the first months of the war, thousands of Romanian military casualties were recorded on the Western Front⁵. Furthermore, during this period, the internal armies were reduced to symbolic troops, disbanding seven large unit commands and 12 divisions. However, on March 10, 1945, 5 infantry divisions organized by the war were stationed in Romania, plus 6 battalions that were deployed in Bucharest⁶. Starting with the autumn of 1944, the Communist Party of Romania, at Moscow’s instructions, launched a strong attack on the command corps, aiming at the moral destabilization of the Romanian army, of its command unit. In the communist press (“Scânteia” and “România Liberă”) articles were frequently published that “exposed the activity” of senior officers accused of serving the Antonescu regime, and were also labelled as legionnaires⁷. If on August 23, 1944, Romania had a powerful military body not politically regimented, gradually, under the pressure of the Soviets, whose instrument was the Allied Control Commission, the Communist Party of Romania and various opportunists, the Romanian army registered a continuous degradation. despite resistance from patriotic military cadres⁸. The Soviet Union, through its interference and abuses,

interbelică (1919–1939), Craiova, Aius Publishing, 2011, passim; Șerban Pătrașcu, *The military occupation of Craiova by the Red Army*, in “Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor»”, no. XVII/2016, p. 136.

² Florin Constantiniu, Alesandru Dușu, Mihai Retegan, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

³ Constantin Hibor, *Armata Roșie în România-advorsar, aliat-ocupant 1940–1948*, Press of the Academy of High Military Studies, Bucharest, 1996, pp. 53, 56.

⁴ Alesandru Dușu, *Destructurarea Armatei*, in “Revista de Istorie Militară”, no. 3–4/1996, p. 37.

⁵ Constantin Hibor, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁶ Alesandru Dușu, *Sub povara armistițiului 1944–1948*, Tritonic Press, Bucharest, 2003, p. 9.

⁷ Constantin Hibor, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁸ Alesandru Dușu, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

aimed to strike at the organization of the large units having remained in the country, which, according to the conception of the superior forums of the army, were to constitute the strategic reserve of supporting the front and the main force for ensuring national sovereignty and independence. But the results were swift and catastrophic for the Romanian army and its command corps. Until the conclusion and ratification of the Peace Treaty in 1947, the number of Romanian divisions was reduced from 50 (operational and training) on August 23, 1944, to 17 in May 1945 and only to seven in August 1947. The number of personnel was fixed by the Peace Treaty at 138,009⁹. At the same time with the rapid reduction of the organizational framework, the process of changing the senior management staff took place. It was carried out through apparently legal measures, namely reductions in personnel imposed by the disbandment of units and large units, by creating the “available background” and the subsequent transfer to reserve and retirement, especially of senior officers, as well as through illegal measures – arrests and imprisonments, many without respecting constitutional rights, including among those who were at the front and did their duty to the country (the case of generals Gheorghe Avrănescu and Nicolae Dragomir, commander of the Romanian 4th Army and its chief of staff)¹⁰.

Another direction by which the unity of the military body was eroded was its gradual involvement in politics. It should be noted that the process of politicization of the Romanian army took place parallel to the purge¹¹. The wave of purges and arrests that began in October 1944 demonstrates that the army was one of the first fundamental state institutions to be subjected to Soviet interference and abuse at all levels¹². Stalin aimed to deprive the Romanian government of a force that could be used to stop interference in the country’s internal politics and impose the political regime desired by the Soviet Union¹³.

The second stage took place between March 1945 and 1948 and was characterized by a process of destructuration and the “revolutionary” transformation of the Romanian army. The aim was to eliminate career officers, those who had led units and large units on the Eastern Front, as well as those with an overtly anti-communist attitude. Thus, during the analysed period, about 25,000 active military personnel were placed in reserve. During the committed abuses, a simple denunciation was enough for an officer or NCOs to be placed in reserve, arrested, investigated or even physically liquidated. The process of “revolutionary transformation of the Romanian army” was considered by the Soviets to be of decisive importance for Romania’s new political leadership, established in March

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 144

¹¹ Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în Al Doilea Război Mondial 1939-1945*, All Educational Press, Bucharest, 1999, p. 268.

¹² Alesandru Duțu, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

1945. Towards the end of 1947 and the beginning of the following year, resistance and negative reactions from cadres and troops decreased to an insignificant level, as in the entire Soviet-occupied Romanian society led by a “puppet” party of Moscow, the Communist Party of Romania. In the army, this was possible due to the massive purge of the corps of military personnel, the drastic decrease in personnel based on the provisions of the Paris Peace Treaty February 1947, the modification of the criteria for selecting candidates for military schools, by introducing the socio-political component¹⁴.

It should be noted that to these actions, the attitude of the army manifested itself, most of the time, in the form of passive resistance. Certainly, there were also open actions, in an attempt to put up active resistance, especially at the level of the military corps. Despite the fact that the constitutional principle “the army does not do politics” had to be respected, almost immediately after the imposition of the so-called “democratic” government led by Petru Groza, PhD., the Communist Party imposed, following the Soviet model, political commissars to military units. They slowly began to have full powers, adopting measures to change commanders who directly or indirectly opposed the directives of the Communist Party¹⁵. “The Democratization” meant control of the army by this constantly offensive party. In the same context, the “healthy elements” were represented by those recruited from the workers or peasantry¹⁶.

The organizational framework for the politicization of the army was established on May 8, 1945, by General Order no. 29 of the Minister of War when the Higher Directorate of Culture, Education and Propaganda was established. This political apparatus, since this is the reality, was directly subordinate to the War Ministry. The education, culture and propaganda apparatus were initially introduced only to units and commands at the front¹⁷. Based on this order, in addition to the commanders of the two armies, commanders of army corps, divisions and regiments, the function of “assistant to the commander for education, culture and propaganda” was established. The activity of these “educators” at that time was focused on developing Romanian-Soviet friendship, highlighting the deeds of arms and bravery of the Soviet soldiers on the battlefield. At the same time, the ideas of socialism, democratization of social life, democratization of the army were introduced among the military¹⁸. The Romanian army suffered greatly from the work carried out by these “educators” who would later become “second commanders” and then “political deputies” and party activists. The personnel of the Education, Culture and Propaganda apparatus were received in military units with

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

¹⁵ Dinu C. Giurescu, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Ion Țuța, *România la cumpăna istoriei*, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991, p. 362.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

great coldness, because the officers and NCOs of this political apparatus did not come from among the active cadres of the army, they proved arrogance and lacks in general and military culture. Due to the pro-Soviet and pro-communist manifestations, they were viewed with suspicion by the other military personnel, which distanced them from the graduated personnel¹⁹. A conclusive example in this regard is the case of Major Vasile Cutoiu, reserve officer, former prisoner in the Soviet Union, invested on May 8, 1945 as an “aid for education, culture and propaganda” at the command of the Romanian 4th Army on the front. General Nicolae Dăscălescu refused to receive him, stating that the soldiers under his command do not need “educators”, the deeds of bravery committed by them on a glorious road of over 1,700 km, represent the best proof that they are the ones who can and must be the educators of others. The incident ended with the intervention of the Minister of War, General Constantin Vasiliu Rășcanu (considered the man of the communists), who obtained the resignation of General Nicolae Dăscălescu. On October 2, 1945, by General Order 1 13 of the Minister of War, the political apparatus of Education, Culture and Propaganda was extended to the entire 21st army, taking the name of the General Inspectorate of the Army for Culture, Education and Propaganda²⁰.

It should be emphasized that with the establishment of the political apparatus in the army, called the Higher Directorate of Education, Culture and Propaganda, it also took over the purge of active armed personnel²¹.

Despite psychological pressure, purges, and numerous arrests, the army command corps did not accept without reply the political realities after the coup d'état of August 23, 1944. The same major Vasile Cutoiu, head of the Education, Culture and Propaganda Service of the 4th Army, in the autumn of 1945, reported that from the analysis made, the officers were divided into three categories: “a small part are open supporters of the government of democratic concentration headed by Petru Groza, PhD, another part are indifferent (about half), and the rest are completely contrary to the government, being for changing the works in a reactionary sense in our country”²². He further concluded: “Only a small fraction of officers with determined men can be counted on. You can count on most of the troop”²³. Soon after, the Higher Directorate for Education, Culture and Propaganda drew up a list of officers considered reactionary, which was sent to the War Ministry to be placed in reserve. The decision had been taken in the meetings of the military resort of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Romania in the

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 363.

²⁰ Depozitul Central de Arhivă Pitești al Arhivelor Militare Naționale Române (Pitești Central Archive Repository of the Romanian Național Military Archives, hereinafter: Central Repository AMNR), Direcția Superioară Politică a Armatei Fund, file 24, f. 57.

²¹ Alexandru Dușu, *Sub povara...*, p. 123.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 117.

²³ *Ibidem*.

summer of 1945²⁴. In order to eliminate the “resistance” of the command corps, which opposed the destructuring of the army, the Minister of War, General Constantin Vasiliu Rășcanu issued, on November 15, 1945, the General Order no. 136 announcing that “no worthy and fair soldier should fear that the Country might deprive itself of his services...”²⁵. At the same time, the order continued with a clear warning to those who had not yet come to terms with the idea that the army would be transformed into a democratic institution: “Instead, all those who will maintain an equivocal line, without insisting on understanding the meaning of the times of our current orientation, indulging in sterile and harmful criticism of the State will be eliminated, as normally a stream throws out all foreign bodies”²⁶. On the same line was General Victor Precup, head of the General Inspectorate of the Army for the E.C.P., who, on November 19, 1945, through a report addressed to the Ministry of War, informed that there were unit commanders who did not approve the soldiers of the units they commanded to participate in political rallies organized by the “democratic forces”, thereby violating the instructions for the operation of the educational apparatus²⁷. A number of commanders at various levels of the army were named in the report. For example, the commander of the First Army was criticized for forcing Colonel Cerbulescu, commander of the Mountain Hunters Group, a participant in a rally organized in Cluj, to report “why he spoke and who allowed him”. In the same situation was Colonel Cherărescu, commander of the Bacău Territorial Centre, who, although he had received an invitation to participate, did not approve that his subordinate personnel participate in a rally organized on November 12 by the “democratic forces”, in order to “condemn the hooligan acts that took place in Bucharest on November 8, 1945”. The report called for the old orders prohibiting soldiers from participating in rallies of “mass organizations” to be annulled, to prevent actions “that would intimidate those who seek to get closer to the people”²⁸. The Minister of War, General Constantin Vasiliu Rășcanu, returned, in December 1945, with a new order, obliging unit commanders to give all their assistance to the personnel employed with education, while being warned to stop the “wilful action” against them. The order stated that there are a number of unit commanders who collect statements from subordinate personnel against personnel who frame the education apparatus, some of whom have even been prosecuted. This action was a blow to the military authorities loyal to the communists. The order further specified that those who questioned the relations existing at that time between the king and the government led by Petru Groza were considered to be related to anti-democratic elements in the army. In the perception of the Minister of War, these actions were aimed at

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Central Repository AMNR, Colecții Fund, Biblioteca documentară, file no. 23/3/1945, f. 44.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Central Repository AMNR, Direcția Superioară Politică a Armatei Fund, file no. 4, ff. 2, 3.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 3.

compromising the education apparatus. It was known that the people in the E.C.P. apparatus “are not perfect or maybe some are wrong, but some must be helped not to make mistakes, not with drive or brutality, but with special understanding, and those who continuously make mistakes to be reported to the General Inspectorate of the Army for E.C.P. and even to me personally”²⁹. Enlightening regarding the attitude of some unit commanders, despite the pressures made by the leadership in Bucharest (loyal to the “democratic” regime), is that of the commander of the 5th Pioneer Regiment, colonel Mandramiu Petre. Following repeated misconduct by the unit’s E.C.P. personnel, on January 19, 1946, he issued Order of the Day no. 46,049, which stated that, since “the duty of this apparatus is purely educational”, no officer or non-commissioned officer of the E.C.P. apparatus has powers to give any order or instruction to any department of the regiment. They had to be permanently “in the middle of the subunit” during the program. An officer from the regimental command was assigned to control how E.C.P. personnel performed their functional duties. It was specified in the order that in order to maintain discipline, which had not been observed lately, it was forbidden for any officer, non-commissioned officer or conscripted military to address the personnel of the E.C.P. to “state their needs”, but must address first of all to their commander directly and hierarchically, as provided by the military regulations. The regimental commander gave a very clear order: “all those who are to be proved, as well as the E.C.P. officer and non-commissioned officer who hear the complaint, will be prosecuted for indiscipline”. As for the relations between the command personnel of the unit and those of the educational apparatus, they had to be “cooperative and do not give the right of command over each other, whatever degree they may be, apart from the relations fixing the discipline in which case the Internal Service Regulations apply”³⁰. On addressing the professional training of those who worked in the political apparatus “Education, Culture and Propaganda”, it is edifying the note 536,731 of February 6, 1946 of the Second Section of the General Staff to the General Inspectorate for “Education, Culture and Propaganda”, which presented a collective letter signed by a group of military personnel from the 10th Infantry Regiment, entitled “On the current apparatus of education, culture and propaganda in the Army”³¹. The letter stated that “the majority of personnel are chosen from those with a mediocre culture and who were favoured by the good fortune of having been prisoners in the U.S.S.R.”. It was also insisted that a person who promoted faster than his colleagues is not respected, because he is known in the unit “as being a sergeant or sergeant and, the next day, he is a second lieutenant” or lieutenant, promoted due to circumstances they knew and whose behaviour is known to the rest of his comrades (former prisoner, moved during disciplinary

²⁹ *Idem*, Armata 4 Fund, file no. 2321, f. 5.

³⁰ *Idem*, Direcția Superioară Politică a Armatei Fund, file no. 4, f. 159.

³¹ *Ibidem*, file no. 6, f. 59.

career for serious misconduct, etc.)³². It is further shown that the “educators” performed only office work but were very good at “intrigues, diverse and with airs of great educators. At the end of the letter, the group of cadres, who had drafted it, asked a series of questions to the army leadership regarding the personnel, who at that time were doing education in the army, such as: “why this honour of educating people in the army through former prisoners? We believe that true respect must be given to those who have done their duty on both the Eastern and Western fronts. Have we not been taught that it is not an honour to fall into captivity? Would there still be an army if we all said, I am not fighting East or West?” Furthermore, the authors of the letter stated that since the Education, Culture and Propaganda apparatus was introduced in the army, education has weakened greatly, edifying being the statistics showing the increase in the number of acts of indiscipline, desertions, lack of appeal etc.³³. The Chief of General Staff, General of Division, Costin Ionaşcu, put a resolution on the letter of the staff of the 10th Infantry Regiment to the effect that the persons designated to work in Education, Culture and Propaganda, not to be from the same garrison and also to avoid being assigned to units where there were classmates with lower ranks³⁴. Unlike the Chief of the General Staff, the General Inspector for Education, Culture and Propaganda, General Victor Precup aimed only to identify the military personnel who had drafted the letter, labelling them as “conspirators”³⁵. At the same time, he explained that the former prisoners belong to the organs of “Education, Culture and Propaganda” not because “they were lucky to have fallen into captivity, but because they had the opportunity to train themselves precisely for the functions they perform today, through what they saw, heard and in a friendly, democratic country, steeling their character and will. developing their spiritual qualities and were imbued with the highest sense of patriotism.”³⁶ It is a fact that it was not the professional training that was the basis for the classification of the positions of “educators in units”, but the fact that these people accepted to become “tools” of the Soviet occupier, for various reasons. As mentioned before, the process of destructuring the Romanian army was permanently supervised by the Minister of War and, of course, by the General Inspectorate for E.C.P. headed by General Victor Precup. On a monthly basis, they issued orders outlining the relationships that existed between educators and commanders, making them responsible for the state created in the units they commanded³⁹. A special case is that of a group of officers from an infantry regiment who were labelled as “reactionary” because they opposed “the persistence of reorganizing the army on a democratic basis, lacking the elementary sense of understanding the situation created for Romania by the act

³² *Ibidem*, f. 60.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 61.

of August 23, 1944, systematically sabotaged the work done by the E.C.P. bodies". In fact, one of the officers destroyed two paintings displayed at the officers' mess, which represented the portrait of Stalin and Petru Groza, a fact also found by two Soviet officers on mission in the unit. Faced with these facts, the Minister of War, General Constantin Vasiliu Rășcanu criticized all commanders who accepted that such deeds should happen in the units they commanded.

In a document drafted on May 25, 1946, by the Counterintelligence Bureau of the II Intelligence Section of the General Staff, it was pointed out that 75% of senior officers continued to be reactionary because they did not understand "the new currents of democratization of the army"³⁷. It was proposed that they should be placed within the available framework because, "under the guise of military uniform they maintain ties with historical parties, fuelling their reactionary spirit, and transmit various alarming and damaging news from English and American circles". It was also stated in the report that some officers were part of the "Resistance Movement". In the resolution of this document, the head of the Second Information Section emphasized, in red pencil, that the information bulletin should not include: "The available framework comes until July 15, 1946, but it must be accomplished. Then, all those reported, or even suspected, will leave". Regarding the organization specified above, it was ordered that it be "watched in silence, because it is not good to make it too well-known, because it has pretty much done the last arrests"³⁸. Very eloquent, if we consider what had happened to many military personnel, removed from the army only because they were suspected of disagreeing with the new regime installed, and others thrown into communist "prisons", where a small number managed to survive. All the reactions considered negative by the "educators" were also signaled in the monthly reports prepared at the level of all military units. Thus, on May 26, 1946, in the report drawn up at the level of "Tudor Vladimirescu" Division by the E.C.P. bodies, military personnel were nominated who did not want to sign the motion requesting the execution of war criminals led by Marshal Antonescu. Thus, Sub-Lieutenant Bratu Nicolae of the 2nd Infantry Regiment stated that "... He is not called to be a judge and therefore cannot ask for the sentence... Antonescu's trial is only an electoral means to remove Maniu and Brătianu. The F.N.D. platform is electoral propaganda. Nothing has been achieved... The current regime is a reign of terror in which the communists have the final say". Sub-Lieutenant Poplanschi Oscar, from the same regiment, was said to have stated the following: "I cannot ask for the death of a former commander of mine. We fought in the East and in the West. I cannot sign a motion proposed by an officer of the E.C.P., nor did I accept the proposals of those who, when they were prisoners in Germany, proposed me to join Horea Sima's army"³⁹.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Idem*, Armata 4 Fund, file no. 2.321, f. 92.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

In August 1946, the “available framework” was created, which would bring much suffering to those who had to leave the army, despite the fact that some had fought in both East and West. Regarding this aspect, in the informative synthesis of August 1946 prepared by the General Staff – the Counterintelligence Section in the chapter “Concrete cases of discontent and unfavourable comments” it was shown that all those who found themselves in this situation considered themselves wronged and victims of the E.C.P. bodies. It was concluded that “the removal from the army of valuable officers caused perplexity, all the more so that weak elements remained, being recognized as people lacking character”⁴⁰.

During 1946 and until early 1948, resistance and negative reactions from cadres and troops diminished to a very low level, due to measures taken by the army leadership loyal to Moscow.

It ought to be emphasized that the process of destructuring the Romanian army was not rectilinear, and was not received and accepted by the military corps. The diversity of techniques and methods approached shows that it manifested itself in various forms. Despite the principle that the army does not do politics, the new “commissars” infiltrated into the Romanian army did everything possible to ensure that the old cadres who had fought on the Eastern Front lost their performance and even their positions, in order to manoeuvre more easily the mass of young soldiers lacking deep convictions of their own. The methods and means used were different, being adapted to each institution. Thus, as far as the institution of the army is concerned, the internal enemy (here called the Communist Party and the Red Army) focused its “attack”, on one hand on the mass of soldiers (executioners), on the other hand on the command corps, for each category using specific methods. Psychological aggression did not stop only at commanders. The dichotomy and the strife inoculated into the corps of military personnel was another technique used by the Soviets, the result of which was not long in coming: the fractionation and division of this social group was counted as a great achievement. In this way, the corps of military personnel was easy to handle and use in all actions ordered by the political factor, without any question of legality. In fact, a very important idea that must be emphasized is that the Soviets knew how to manipulate lexicologically, so that they managed to overturn the ideas and the values within the society, so that, at that time, little was realized what was legal and what illegal.

As a conclusion, it can be stated that, despite the efforts of the communists to take power, in 1945, the military personnel were not a “silent mass”, even if the psychological tension was very high and they could be arrested and placed in reserve at any time. But, over the next three years, the strength of the frame body decreased in intensity. Due to abuses and material deprivation, changes occurred in the attitude and mentality of the command corps, without this meaning that Romanian generals and officers agreed with communist ideas, being forced to

⁴⁰ Idem, Marele Stat Major Fund, Secția 2 Informații, file no. 1.586, f. 13.

accept the realities imposed by the new Soviet ally⁴¹. As the technique and scheme of communization of the army have been sketched above, we can only emphasize that this cynical aggression against the army cadres would yield results, especially after the abolition of the monarchy, the last moral bastion of resistance, the last hope.

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⁴¹ *Ibidem*, f. 14.