



THE CONCEPTION OF THE ARMED FORCES GENERAL STAFF REGARDING THE DEFENCE OF DOBROGEA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Romanian General Staff was busy constructing Romania's defence doctrine. They were focused on the most probable situations, in which Romania would be forced to defend itself.

The officers of the General Staff used reports from the military attachés in Petersburg and Sofia and identified that Dobrogea was targeted by two potential aggressors – Russia and Bulgaria.

This is why the planners made detailed drafts to those defence plans, focusing on the different defence lines from the Danube Delta to the Black Sea Coast, in the case of a Russian aggression. For southern Dobrogea, a delicate area after the signing of Peace of Bucharest in 1913, when Romania received the counties of Durostor and Caliacra (or Quadrilateral, as it appears on Romanian military maps), new alignments were viewed as essential for the defence of the area against the Bulgarians.

Keywords: World War I, Romanian Army, military doctrine, military attachés, defence line.

THE FIRST MILITARY MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE ROMANIAN ARMY FOR THE DEFENCE OF DOBROGEA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

From the study of the specialised literature, it can be concluded that the *doctrine consists in deducing a certain number of principles, corroborated with the development on the map or on the field of a significant number of concrete cases and, thereafter, by making these principles enter into the blood of everybody. Thus, all officers will work in the same way, because they will be guided by the same principles*¹. By extension, the military doctrine was appreciated as a *science, erudition, learning [...] principle, conduct rule*², actually being *the life of an army, its moral force*³.

Studies during 1878-1913 have shown that, from a military point of view, Dobrogea, without Silistra and its fortified positions, represented a burden for the defensive system of modern Romania which needed engineering works and concentrations of forces that would have weakened the defence excentered to multi-area concept⁴. Still, even in these conditions, the General Staff of the Romanian Army was conceiving the organisation of the defence of the country's territorial integrity in a unitary system in which Dobrogea played the role of a strategic outpost that would be tested within a large-scale military confrontation, the military potential of the army and the Romanian state⁵.

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¹ *Revista Armatei*, year XII, October, 1895, p. 782.

² *Revista Infanteriei*, year XVIII, July-August 1914, p. 56.

³ *România Militară*, year XIII, December 1896, p. 355.

⁴ Locotenent-colonel Ioan Munteanu, *Cadrilaterul – istoria unei controverse*, in “*Anuarul de studii de politică de apărare și istorie militară*”, Editura Pro Transilvania, București, 1997, p. 185.

⁵ Romanian Military Archives/Arhivele Militare Române (AMR), *Microfilms Collection*, P.II 1922, c. 418.



Field organisation at the end of the 20th century, with regard to the defence of the Southern border of Dobrogea, was assigned to eight permanent and non-permanent infantry companies unevenly spread over a distance of 131 km.

area of concentration of the Bulgarian army and as an alignment of departure to its offensive in case of an aggression on the land between the Danube and the Black Sea⁶.

The defence of Dobrogea was conceived by the Romanian General Staff, by arranging in covering the border, besides the existing Great Units, the guards, infantry and cavalry troops, with missions of surveillance and reconnaissance. A first defence position, with relatively insular character, included the fortified alignments Turtucaia, Silistra and Bazargic, located in space at appreciable distances, measuring in a straight line 113 km, along the front. The second position passed on the alignment located towards the central part of the South Dobrogea plateau towards Canlia (immediately in the North-West of the Bugeac lake) and Mangalia, while the third position followed the alignment Rasova, Cobadin, Topraisar. Finally, the second position included *the bridgehead* from Cernavoda, then it continued on Medgidia-Agigea alignment.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in the opinion of some military researchers, such as Colonel Marin Ionescu-Dobrogeanu, the defence of Dobrogea, at least in front of an attack that would have come from the South or from the sea, had major deficiencies. Therefore, a good connoisseur of the realities in the field, the famous military historian proposed a more economical and effective border guard system. Field organisation at the end of the 20th century, with regard to the defence of the Southern border of Dobrogea, was assigned to eight permanent and non-permanent infantry companies unevenly spread over a distance of 131 km. These were positioned at certain pickets that scrutinised the border line irregularly, the distances between them being quite large, without means of connection. Moreover, the rugged landscape in the area was an appropriate factor that further limited the effectiveness of the defence. Thus, a permanent battalion was placed at Ostrov, with three deployed companies in this locality, and one in Asarlîc, at no less than 69 km distance from the border. If the border guard in the immediate neighbourhood of the above-mentioned city up to picket 14 was rarely carried out by the soldiers of the three companies recalled, from picket 28 to Asarlîc, the disposition

⁶ Romanian National Archives/Arhivele Naționale Române (ANR), *Royal Family* Collection, vol. I, file no. 2/1913, ff. 2-12.

was insured by the 4th Company of the battalion. Intercalary, the pickets 22-28 were insured by another company of the 34th Infantry Regiment.

Summing up this sector, it turns out the 68,4 km were occupied by five companies, the biggest problem being that, apart from those of the 34th Infantry Regiment, the rest were non-permanent, the soldiers being mostly conscripted from the neighbouring villages, the majority being of Bulgarian ethnicity. The supply was poor, the valleys crossing the border were fallen, then, towards Danube, forcing the means of transport to make large detours. At the East of Asarlíc, towards Mangalia, the guard was carried out by other three companies, including the one from the seaside city. Again, a company of 34th Infantry Regiment interlaced with a company from the border during pickets 29-40, i.e. on a 37 km stretch. In Mangalia, the guard service was carried out by a permanent company which provided five pickets, from 41 to 45, covering a distance of 27 km to the sea⁷.

As Colonel Ionescu-Dobrogeanu noticed in his study, the disadvantages of this system were the difficulties arisen in communication and supply among pickets that were due to adverse relief, the border being furrowed by valleys without arranged roads, this causing difficulties in changing people within the troop. It was also noted that, behind this picket line, there was no other establishment or concentration of forces to meet an enemy group or a small group that would have succeeded to pass by one of the border surveillance points. In this regard, it proposed a radial system for the deployment of the troops near the border, from which to reach easier to any point of surveillance on the Southern border, given that the two companies of the 34th Infantry Regiment should have been brought to Cuzgun and Enghez for training.

Also here should have been located the concentration centres for the two battalions in the composition of which the other companies deployed on the border entered. They would have surveyed the border divided almost equally, from Cuzgun on a radius of 67 km and from Enghez to the Black Sea on a radius of 64 km. The battalion from Cuzgun should have sent a company to Ostrov, deployed on a distance of 14 km, another to Cuiugiuk guarding the border on 12 km, the third at Parachioi on a length of another 19 km, the last having the sector of action also inside, at Asarlíc, having allocated 15 km of border.



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⁷ Marin Ionescu Dobrogeanu, *Dobrogea în pragul veacului al XX-lea*, Atelierele Grafice "I.V. Socecu", București, 1904, p. 913.



The importance of morphological formations present in Dobrogea, the fortress character impregnated by the province bordered by the Danube River were elements to be taken into account when conducting a strategic analysis of the importance of territory in question.

The second battalion, from Enghez, had a company at Bairam-Dede to supervise an area of 16 km, the second at Caraormer on 21 km of border, the third at Sarighiol having to guard the border on 21 km, which the company deployed at Mangalia being assigned with the remaining 10 km to the seaside. Compared to the settlement in the field, a company was not assigned with more than 18 km compared to 36, as it was at that time. Moreover, thanks to the radial concentration system, the connection between the companies would have been achieved easier. In addition, the two centres could constitute a second line of defence behind the border.

It was also proposed the creation of a telephone line connecting the pickets and, in the future, it was necessary to conceive a plan to connect these points from the border with a modern and practical road.

DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE DANUBE LINE IN FRONT OF AN ATTACK FROM THE NORTH

In the opening of the analysis of the defence system and tactical plans of positioning and action in Dobrogea, depending on the attacks that could have come from the North, South and from the seaside, Colonel Marin Ionescu-Dobrogeanu performed an interesting metaphorical-anthropological resemblance of Dobrogea, describing it as a *trunk on which the body of our whole Country is resting*⁸. From the observations on the Russian-Turkish wars that took place in the 19th century, following the analysis of manoeuvres carried out by the great military formations of the two empires on the territory of Dobrogea, the author draws the general lines from which the value of this land arises when designing a strategic plan of operation in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic area. The importance of morphological formations present in Dobrogea, the fortress character impregnated by the province bordered by the Danube River were elements to be taken into account when conducting a strategic analysis of the importance of territory in question.

As it can be seen from the same plastic comparison afore mentioned, *...the defence line Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați is like a steel*

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 915.

*belt with which Major Schumann endowed our Country, this belt being useless, as long as we do not seek to keep the pillar trunk, Dobrogea, untouched...*⁹. The tendency of the countries to transform the Black Sea into a Russian lake in their march to Constantinople gave the Trans-Danubian province an increased importance in the wars they had against the Turks and their allies until 1877.

Because of this, the Russians crossed the Danube with the bulk of the troops in Dobrogea, not in Muntenia or Oltenia. Indeed, the 1854-1855 war was planned to take place in Dobrogea, where the Tsar's army had concentrated its bulk of troops and, most certainly, it would have happened if cholera had not intervened. The Russians direction of attack, in order to stop the important Romanian ally in a potential war with the Western Europe, would have been the elimination of Focșani-Nămoloasa line by a rear attack from Hârșova, but this would have not been possible without crossing the Danube from Gura Prutului to the Black Sea. Another observation of the illustrious Romanian strategist and historian was that, once arrived in Dobrogea, at the Danube mouths, the Russians would have cancelled the European Commission of Danube, so that, in these conditions, the defence of this province became a mission that was not only Romania's task, but the task of the entire Europe¹⁰.

At the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Danube was the border of Dobrogea with Russia, on a length of 29,5 km, from Gura Prutului to Ceatal-Ismail. From here, the border followed the course of Chilia horn and the mouth Stari-Stambul to the Black Sea. Indeed, due to the width of the river up to 1,500 meters, on the first segment mentioned, it represented a serious obstacle that could hardly be overcome without careful engineering preparations. Moreover, the nature of Dobrogea shore is rocky, and behind the shores, the land, on a wide area, is marshy, leaving no firm ground to approach the riverbed¹¹. In front of the passage that Russians would have tried at Reni there were the marshy lands of Cotul Pisica, an area with many large lakes. An attempt on Bugeacul hill would have been hampered by the heights on the Romanian shore, which are ideal points for positioning heavy artillery batteries. In front of the most possible crossing of Danube



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⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 916.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 917.



If the Russians were able to cross the Danube, the Romanian front being moved behind the river, the Romanian strategists considered that the main attack direction of the bulk of enemy troops would have been Babadag city, the old Turkish fortress-capital, while four batteries located on the heights around the city would have focused on the North road and Toprak-Kiopu bridge.

at Cartal and Teraponti, there was the important position of Isaccea, but here the river has a width of 1,000-1,250 m. From the heights between Isaccea and Rachel, the Russian troops would have been greeted by a rain of shells and bullets from the Romanian positions placed in this sector¹².

In this regard, Colonel Marin Ionescu-Dobrogeanu proposed to focus the attention of the military forces on the fortification in this point of the position from Eski-Kale. Another observation to be taken into account, made following the Russian campaign in Dobrogea in 1828, was the careful supervision of Russian population in the Delta.

Downstream of Isaccea, the river shores were not favourable to a mass crossing. The promontory on which the old city Tulcea was located, destroyed in 1828, was constituted in an ideal position for placing some Romanian powerful coastal artillery batteries to greet the Russian fleet that would attempt to go across the Danube. Lakes and marshes from the opposite shore made it even more difficult for the enemy. In order to defend the river against the enemy ships, at Ceatal it was proposed the building of a mine dam.

Although it was unlikely, an enemy landing on the territory of Dobrogea through the mouth of Sfântu-Gheorghe was taken into consideration. In this regard, for the swap of the troops, the road making the connection between Mahmudia and Acaclău had to be protected and maintained. If the Russians were able to cross the Danube, the Romanian front being moved behind the river, the Romanian strategists considered that the main attack direction of the bulk of enemy troops would have been Babadag city, the old Turkish fortress-capital, while four batteries located on the heights around the city would have focused on the North road and Toprak-Kiopu bridge. However, the main objectives of Russians in Dobrogea would have been the two crossing points to the positions behind the line Focșani-Nămoloasa, namely Hârșova and Cernavodă¹³.

ROMANIAN PLANS FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE DANUBE LINE BETWEEN OSTROV AND AZACLĂU POINTS

If the Russians had succeeded to force the line of Danube, after the fall of Babadag city, the enemy troops would have concentrated on Hârșova and Cernavodă, leaving Constanța city on the left flank.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 919.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 921.

Due to the fact that the river makes a right turn in Brăila-Galați area, the left shore dominates the right shore. Moreover, because of the marshy terrain around Măcin, a passage of troops through this sector would have been very difficult. In the North, upstream, there is Hârșova fortress, an important passing point very used in the previous centuries. In order to prevent the arrival of the Russian fleet to support the ground troops which were already on Dobrogea land, it was proposed the positioning of a coastal battery on the hills around Brăila, as well as a torpedo dam at Azalcău.

The crossing point of the river there was recognised as favourable in both ways even since the wars in the 18th and 19th centuries, Marshal Helmut von Moltke the Elder appreciating, in this regard, that *Hârșova was a stable bridgehead against the Turks*¹⁴.

In the 1806-1812 campaign, the Russians established at Vadul Oii, near Hârșova, a bridge at the end of which they built fortifications and other engineering works for defence. This fact attracted from the Turks the decision to strengthen the position of Hârșova fortress with separate works outside the wall that surrounded the fort. That's the reason why, the same great German strategist and military leader appreciated that Hârșova was a strong fortress *that could not resist against an attack from Dobrogea, here being able to oppose a vigorous resistance*¹⁵.

Taking into consideration the composition of the land, namely the branches of Ciobanu hill that descended towards the fortress, reaching to Băroiul brook at the height of 84 m, there was the possibility to build some similar, additional works, meant to increase the defense ability of the fort against an attack coming from East and South-East. The engineering works would have continued with the construction of a bridge on Vadul Oii or through Gâsca Mare islet to refuel the troops that formed the defensive system of Hârșova¹⁶.

In these conditions, the position of Cernavodă would no longer be the object of the Romanian defensive in the case of an attack executed from North or East. Once Hârșova had fallen, the Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați line, the main target of the Russian troops, would have been easy to reach.

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¹⁴ Marechal Helmut von Moltke, *Campagnes des Russes dans la Turquie d'Europe en 1828 et 1829*, Paris, 1854, I-er volume, p. 76.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Marin Ionescu-Dobrogeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 922.



MEASURES TAKEN BY THE ROMANIAN AUTHORITIES FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE MARITIME COAST

Colonel Marin Ionescu-Dobrogeanu also considered that, due to low bathymetric quota, the only ports that could be used by the warships would be Sulina and Constanța. But still, due to its position, but also to the lake that could have sheltered smaller boats, in the defense plans of the coast of the Romanian Navy could also have entered the position of Mangalia from the South of Dobrogea. But this was impossible, in the case of an attack executed from the sea by the Russian naval forces. Sulina, protected by the provisions of the European Commission of Danube, could have guaranteed the free passage of the Russian ships which, as recalled above, would hit the fortifications around Tulcea. In discussion remained the defense of Constanța city, which was an objective of first importance, both strategic and tactical one, on the Romanian coast of the Black Sea.

Sulina, protected by the provisions of the European Commission of Danube, could have guaranteed the free passage of the Russian ships which, as recalled above, would hit the fortifications around Tulcea.

Following the works that were executed since the beginning of the 20th century, the capacities of the port basin being extended to approx. 1.5 km towards the sea, the vulnerability of the city and the port increased in front of an offshore attack. The general appreciations were that the city could not resist more than a few hours against of a powerful attack of a cruising and destroying fleet, a 2/3 of its perimeter being discovered. Thus, in order to increase the defence capacity, the author of the study proposed the building of a coast battery formed of heavy cannons located in the area of Carol hotel and Vii point, the city's higher promoters.

It is worth mentioning that at this point of the discussion appears for the first, in fact, the only time, the proposal to build, after a Danish and French model, a defense line offshore, at more than 2,5 km from the coast, formed by a dam measuring 1,377 m, where the depth of the water would not be greater than 20 m, with a shape of a line broken at 140°, provided in the centre with a strong fort, flanked on the sides by two other secondary forts, to form a system with the mentioned coastal batteries¹⁷. Moreover, for the internal defence of the port, on the heights near the Military Hospital, according to the proposals of General Henri Alexis Brialmont¹⁸, it would have been indicated

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 922-923.

¹⁸ General Henri Alexis Brialmont, *Progreses de la defences des etats*, Bruxelles, 1898, pp. 189-190.

to build a fort after the model of Spithead fortresses from the defensive of Portsmouth port or Constadt for Petersburg¹⁹.

THE ROMANIAN DOCTRINE FOR THE DEFENCE OF DOBROGEA AGAINST AN ATTACK CARRIED OUT FROM THE SOUTH

In the first decades after Dobrogea returned to Romania, no serious study to debate the Romanian defense at the South border of the province between Danube and Black Sea was carried out²⁰. This represented a lack in the Romanian defence system, all the more since the border line, the way it was traced, was very difficult to cross.

Between the main points where troops stationed, namely Arab-Tabia, Asarlâc, Cafalchioi and Mangalia, there were several tens of kilometres away, and the valleys crossed the border, and were pretty steep and abrupt, making the communication less efficient in case of a Bulgarian attack.

According to another study at the end of 19th century, signed by young Lieutenant Athanasie Napoleon, under the guidance of military geographer Lieutenant-Colonel Iannescu, namely *Dobrogea și Gurile Dunării*, published in Bucharest in 1896²¹, even a second line of defence of the above-mentioned border *would have been pretty difficult*, stretching over more than 100 km, between Rasova-Cocargea-Cobadin-Musurat. Also, this crossed the Diordumgi-Orman valley and, according to Colonel Ionescu-Dobrogeanu, the execution of such a defence line would have been a serious strategic mistake, on the same above mentioned considerations. He also considered that the angle of the border in the Asarlâc point was not favourable to the Romanian defensive, the region included in the triangle Asarlâc-Cuzgun-Ostrov being redundant from this point of view.

Of course, the direction of movement of the Bulgarian troops would not have been along this road for the same considerations.

Eliminating the hypothesis of a puerile tactical approach to attack the target²² directly, and moreover leaving the right flank



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¹⁹ Marin Ionescu-Dobrogeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 923.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Locotenent Ath. Napoleon, *Dobrogea și Gurile Dunării*, București, Tipografiile "I.V. Socecu", 1896, pp. 69-70.

²² It is about the position of Cernavodă, which, once conquered, would have allowed the insulation of Constanța and a large part of Dobrogea from Romania, as well as the advance of the enemy troops towards the capital.



The Black Sea coast, between Balcic and Chilia Veche, was assigned to the Sea Division to which, in addition to its own forces, some units of the ground troops were also subordinated (rangers, sedentary parts of some regiments, gendarmes, territorial troops etc.).

of the Bulgarian army uncovered, the best hypothesis to consider in this case would have been an enemy offensive from Hagi-Oglu-Bazargic direction, that crosses the border in the less rugged area, in the Bairamdede-Cobadin-Medgidia area, facilitating avant-garde actions on the right flank that also threatened the position of Constanța port.

In this case, the Romanian defense should have relied on the landforms. Taking also into account that the Bulgarians could have placed some detachments in the difficult zone of the western part of the province, namely at Asarlâc, the target to defend, respectively the position of Cernavodă, would have been threatened from two directions, coming from South and East. Therefore, the centre of the Romanian defense should not be positioned as close to the target as the Danube River. According to the Romanian author mentioned so far²³, this had to be in front of Carasu valley, benefiting from the natural obstacles represented by Urluia and Borungea valleys, somewhere in the Enigea area, from where the Romanian troops could counterattack towards South to Chioseler, to cope with the bulk of the Bulgarian troops that were moving forward to Bairamdede-Cobadin. The Cuzgun could easily be defended due to the heights in the area, the Southern detachments not posing a threat.

If this first defence line was lost, the new defensive system had the city of Medgidia on the Peștera-Ikingi-Dere alignment in the centre, from where it could extend to the sea, using the traces of the Roman earth wave, known as *Valul lui Traian (Traian's Wave)*, to Murfatlar city.

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²³ Marin Ionescu-Dobrogeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 924.

²⁴ On 26 February 1896, the *Law for the organisation of the War Fleet* was approved, published in the *Official Gazette* no. 279 on 13 March 1896, according to which the Sea Division and the Danube Division, which were newly established great units, were subordinated to the War Fleet Command. In the initial composition of the Sea Division entered the Crew Depot with the School of Officers, the School of Torpedoes (Mobile Defence), the Defence of Maritime Ports, "Elisabeta" cruiser, the "Mircea" school-ship, "Grivița" gunboat, "Sborul" and "Năluca" torpedoes. See Anton Bejan (coord.), *Dicționar enciclopedic de marină*, Editura Societății Scriitorilor Militari, București, 2006, p. 173 and Olimpiu-Manuel Glodarencu, Andreea Atanasiu-Croitoru, Tanța Mândilă, Ion Rîșnoveanu, Florin Stan, Andrei Vochițu, *Istoria Statului Major al Forțelor Navale. 1860-2010. Monografie*, Centrul Tehnic-Editorial al Armatei, București, p. 56.

In 1903, when, for the first time, a training march was carried out on Prut and then on the Danube, to Turnu Severin²⁵, one of the objectives was to seriously bring into discussion, followed by debates, war issues necessary for the coordination of ideological aspects and establishment of an official naval doctrine.

It is worth mentioning that the military theorists understood the historical character of the principles of a doctrine that *must be kept updated in order to be the true expression of current military science, because it is not a religious dogma, which is unchanged and must be applied ad-literam in all parts and always*²⁶.

ROMANIAN NAVAL DOCTRINE AT THE END OF THE 19TH AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURIES

The ideal naval doctrinal framework was able to truly fall into place by a legal support²⁷. Thus, starting with May 1879 until the end of the 19th century, *The Police Regulation of the Danube ports and shores of Romania, the Regulation of the personnel of the navigation and ports service, the Law for the organisation of the Fleet and the Service of ports, with the Special regulation of this law*, appeared. Also, as in any beginning, new related institutions were set up²⁸.

Nevertheless, General Constantin Hârjeu criticised, in 1907, the fact that the General Staff *could not build up an [official n.n.] doctrine, either in the form of regulations or in the form of instructional methods, nor to give a better orientation to the organisation of the army*²⁹.

Related to the maritime domain, in Romania, the term *doctrine* was perceived as a system of fundamental principles with which the naval forces carried out their missions³⁰. In this context, the War Navy, generally, had to provide effective support for the protection



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²⁵ AMR, 2568 Collection, file 345, *Memoriu rezumativ asupra pregătirii de război, ipotezelor de război, și principiilor de doctrină între anii 1900-1916*, f. 139.

²⁶ *Revista infanteriei*, year XXX, March 1913, p. 275.

²⁷ Colonel G. Iannescu, *Studii de organizațiune militară. Armata română. Ce a fost, ce este, ce ar putea să fie*, București, 1906, pp. 416, 418; see *Istoria militară a poporului român*, vol. V, București, Editura Militară, pp. 305-306.

²⁸ Dr. Carmen Atanasiu, *Problema suveranității României la Dunăre și "Navigația Fluvială Română" (1919-1945)*, București, Executată la S.C. "Nelmaco" S.R.L., 2003, pp. 39-40.

²⁹ General C.N. Hârjeu, *Rostul cuvintelor: Disciplină, Doctrină, Inițiativă*, București, 1907, p. 162.

³⁰ Ion Ionescu, *Primele elemente și principii ale doctrinei navale românești (1878-1916)*, in *Anuarul Muzeului Marinei Române*, vol. VIII/2005, Editura Compania Națională Administrația Porturilor Maritime, Constanța, 2005, p. 154.



Naturally, the naval doctrines should have appeared where there were expansionist interests, big fleets, diversity of ships and naval tradition, but the great Maritime Powers did not feel, in the pre-modern era, the need of excessive conceptual theorising, regarding their interests and the consolidation of defence capacity of national or economic spaces in the immediate vicinity or overseas territories.

and defence of territorial integrity. The doctrine was the one that determined the most efficient ways of practising the use of naval forces under the existing conditions³¹.

Naturally, the naval doctrines should have appeared where there were expansionist interests, big fleets, diversity of ships and naval tradition, but the great Maritime Powers did not feel, in the pre-modern era, the need of excessive conceptual theorising, regarding their interests and the consolidation of defence capacity of national or economic spaces in the immediate vicinity or overseas territories, because they were acting discretely based on the law of force, not having to justify in front of any organism, much less off the planetary ocean.

The necessary regulations, when they appeared, were made by the great powers through conventions and treaties, more or less transparent in which, usually, the little ones were not even taken into consideration, without the chance to become a legal part, subject of law of those respective regulatory acts³².

The need to find the best way of action for asserting interests on the water, as state reasons, by ordering ideas *according to time and circumstances for their smart employment*³³, was felt by the small countries, later named secondary naval powers, dependent on protectors and allies.

With the evolution of thinking, in general, and the evolution of legal thinking, in particular, law enforcement became a consequence of the new relations between the states.

Almost in parallel, the naval doctrines became closed systems of thinking and, as a consequence of education, especially the one practiced in the Higher War Schools, which became, in time, centres of development of science and doctrine, of spreading the general military culture³⁴ in an historical stage that coincided with the last three decades of the 19th century.

In Romania, as a result of the experience gained following the sharp Independence War, opinions, ideas and concepts appeared regarding the actions of fighting on the water.

³¹ Traian Atanasiu (coord.), *Puterea maritimă și diplomația navală*, Editura Militară, București, 1998, p. 59.

³² Ion Ionescu, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³³ *România militară*, year XXX, March 1913, p. 275.

³⁴ Locotenent-colonel Ioan Popovici, *Organizarea armatei române*, Roman, 1900, pp. 116-119.

Thus, the 1877-1878 moment really represented a turning point in the Romanian thinking, military and naval-wise, because:

- there was no longer any military or diplomatic tool to intervene in Romania's favour, by the disappearance of the suzerainty of the protective power, at least theoretically;
- independence required the creation of new entities and state political-military organisms with forces and specific means, the resizing of the existing ones and which, in their entirety, had to become functional and systemic;
- the situation changed with the appearance of a coastline of approx. 240 km whose defence task fell, in the first place, under the responsibility of the Romanian naval forces;
- the access to the free sea created a new perspective and led, somehow, to rethinking the concept on the new maritime-fluvial dimension of Romania's defence.

Thus, concerns for the formation of naval doctrinal principles increased, with some positive results³⁵.

For starters, naturally, the main naval doctrinal idea proved to be insufficiently developed, here and there confusing, tending to simplistically adopt some foreign solutions. In time, the approach manner changed, the problem being treated and concluded gradually, adapted to meet the requirements of a Romanian conception demanded by the specific national needs of defence on the sea and river, facts that occurred, more significantly, starting with the last decade of the 19th century.

As a result of these realities, at governmental level, following the debates and pertinent analyses, imposed by the fundamental idea of keeping the hard-won statehood, the first naval modernisation program of the Navy appeared in 1881³⁶. Then the first theoretical models were created, depending on the situations that had to be solved based on the diversity of conceptions, but also on the unity



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³⁵ *Istoria gândirii militare românești*, Editura Militară, București, 1974, p. 193.

³⁶ Ion Ionescu, *Politica navală a României între anii 1919 și 1941*, Editura Companiei Naționale Administrația Porturilor Maritime Constanța, 2002, p. 64.



Taking into consideration both the geographic configuration of the Western area of the Black Sea, and the Danube River with its mouths and delta, these important water areas, in the conditions of an armed conflict, would have been transformed into theaters of operations, reason for which the actions of the Romanian naval forces against some presumed enemies or adversaries would naturally have been oriented towards East and South.

of views in their application³⁷, so that all elements work in the same direction³⁸, of coexistence with the war issues³⁹.

The insufficient number of ships necessary for the organisation of a military fleet, the inexistence of a commercial, maritime and fluvial fleet, the lack of long-distance navigation traditions, during 1860 and 1890, were essential impediments to the development of the maritime-fluvial component of the Romanian economy and, implicitly, the poor stimulation of the higher development of naval thinking.

In these conditions, it is more difficult from the documents in the archive or from the specialised literature of the period 1878-1914 to establish a Romanian doctrinal navy framework because the action manner and the actions, by themselves, of Flotilla and, from 1898, of the Military navy, did not rely on an articulated, *ab initio*, specific and essential idea but, usually, on the needs demanded by the moment. In a careful analysis, only a few elements and relative principles, sometimes minimal, of Romanian naval doctrine can be exemplified⁴⁰.

Taking into consideration both the geographic configuration of the Western area⁴¹ of the Black Sea, and the Danube River with its mouths and delta, these important water areas, in the conditions of an armed conflict, would have been transformed into theaters of operations, reason for which the actions of the Romanian naval forces against some presumed enemies or adversaries would naturally have been oriented towards East and South.

In the event of a war to the East, it would have been with the Russian Empire. Our flotilla should have played, equally, both the defensive and the offensive versions.

Compared to the potential adversary, it was inferior in forces and means and, in this case, Romania should have not focused on direct

³⁷ Capitaine de vaisseau Gabriel Darrieus, *La guerre sur mer La doctrine*, Augustin Challamel Editeur, Paris, 1907, pp. 358-361.

³⁸ *Revista armatei*, year XIII, September 1895, p. 642.

³⁹ Ion Ionescu, *Primele elemente și principii...*, p. 156. In this respect, the military decision-makers from Bucharest concluded that *Romania's Central European position, the fact that it obtain a Black Sea coastline exit only in 1878, the inability to become an economic, military or colonial power, the hesitant-selective politics for choosing the right moments to favourable allies are some of the causes that did not allow our country to gain the mentality of winner, but, history has shown that such attitudes have proven to be at hand solutions, compatible, as a rule, with the geopolitical situation, the structure of Romanian mentality, the type of country, demography and historical heritage.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 158.

⁴¹ From Gura Musura to Vama Veche. After 1913, to Ecrene, the southernmost point of the Quadrilateral.

commitment, being put in the position to give up in extreme situations to defending the Gurile Dunării, its delta, the coast and the ports, forcing it to a passive defence under the protection of mine dams and coast batteries on the flank of the fortified line Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați. In other words, the Romanian Navy could accept the commitment of its forces only in cooperation with the ground forces, in the subsidiary being able to observe that there was a tactical error by keeping, in reserve, the cruiser “*Elisabeta*”⁴², considered the most powerful force, with the support of which to carry out the withdrawal of ships that were defending Cotul Pisicii⁴³, if they were rejected.

In this idea, from a tactical point of view, the use of a river flotilla, on the flank of ground forces, that would have relied on the Danube to prevent the return of this flank satisfied one of the first needs of such an army through the best use that could be granted to the Romanian Flotilla as a distinct naval force.

An easy cover should also be taken into account, towards the southern front, against a neighbour whose attitude was not specified, nor the possibility of intervention, on one front or the other, by the connection of an internal river line, because these meant nothing else but meeting an elementary strategic principle⁴⁴.

In the event of a war towards the south, with Bulgaria, the Military Navy, probably in the middle of the action of ground forces, operating against a weaker enemy, had to adopt a more offensive attitude. Therefore, strategists and tacticians claimed that, in practice, the principles and elements of the Romanian naval doctrine could be applied if it was considered as valid the fact that at the seaside, where with the help of *Elisabeta* cruiser and the two armed auxiliary cruisers,



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⁴² The light cruiser *Elisabeta*, which bore, symbolically, according to the tradition of the time, the name of the sovereign of the country, was built in 1888 at *Armstrong* shipyards in Newcastle, entering the active service of the War Fleet on 15th of November of the same year. It had a displacement of 1,320 t, the length of 72 m, the width of 10.25 m and the total height of 6.68 m. The average speed of 18.1 Nd was provided by two machines with simple coal expansion with a maximum power of 4700 hp. The firepower of the ship was provided by six 150 mm Krupp cannons arranged sideways, four Nordenfeld guns with rapid fire, two Hotchkiss 37 mm cannons, two 11.43 mm machine guns and four 381 mm Whitehead bullet tubes. See also Anton Bejan (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 195 and Ion Ionescu, Georgeta Borandă, Marian Moșneagu, *Noi contribuții la istoria Marinei Militare române*, Editura Muntenia & Leda, Constanța, 2001, p. 160.

⁴³ Strategic point, through its configuration; the place where the Danube passes from Muntenia to Dobrogea.

⁴⁴ A.M.R., 2568 Collection, 345 file, *Memorii rezumativ asupra programelor de război, ipotezelor de război și principiilor de doctrină între anii 1900 -1916*, p. 146.



The divisions of ships on segments of responsibilities established the principle of Danube sectoral organisation, which proved to be very useful in the river war, a form which is still used even today.

the lines of communication could have been under control, and at the Danube, where by distributing the groups of ships, on sectors, it was anticipated the crossing of the waterway and preventing the enemy to use it.

In applying this offensive principle, a tactical organisational error was made in placing a mine dam before the bridge of Cernavodă and the concentration of all means of defence of this main target in its immediate vicinity; it is easy to understand why the easiest variation in the game of forces could get the enemy close to the bridge, before the defender recovered or received help. The basic defence of the bridge had to be made at the border, and a defence against diversions was necessary around it.

Regarding the applicability of the naval problem of the time, from a critical point of view, it can be said that it was exaggerated in the appraisal of the means and it was not recognised that a river flotilla could not master (a term used in the mobilization works) the Danube when the enemy would have had under control one of the shores, and the groups of ships distributed on the sectors of the watercourse could only hamper the use of the waterway, without being allowed full control .

A great lesson resulted, namely that the divisions of ships on segments of responsibilities established the principle of Danube sectoral organisation, which proved to be very useful in the river war⁴⁵, a form which is still used even today.

At the beginning of the 20th century, great attention was given to the idea of resistance at the strategic point Cotul Pisicii, under the protection of dams and coastal batteries, in the possibility of abandoning the Delta's defence. Neither the establishment of a Danube fleet would not have brought any change in the naval doctrine, regarding the conduct of the war on the river in an armed conflict towards East, because the implementation of this idea would imply too much dependence upon the actions of land forces whose doctrine did not include Military Navy action, which could have been others, after the establishment of the Danube Squadron. It can be assumed that this state of affairs represented an asynchrony due to incomplete reasoning, by not studying the realities enough.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 147.



After the Second Balkan War, in 1913, our relations with the Russian Empire made a relative and short relaxation possible taking into account the interests of both states regarding the perspective policy of alliances. For this reason, the possibilities of a war with this neighbour were not studied anymore. If up to this date *Hypothesis A* represented the variant of a conflict with the East, in 1914, *Hypothesis A* referred to the south front, and no other hypothesis could be seen in the mobilisation preparations of the Military Navy.

Some other major conclusions could be drawn from the military action in 1913, which allow the coagulation of the naval doctrine regarding the conduct of hostilities on the water.

Thus, this war has proven the importance and necessity of increase of the number of commercial, transport ships, which greatly facilitated the mobilisation movements, the concentration of forces and the passage of the river. It also revealed the beneficial role regarding the usefulness of the flat boat bridges (of ships, as they were called at the time)⁴⁶.

In practice, as a general rule, it was clear that the flat boat bridges could only be built in the points where the land and naval forces owned the control of the river communication line, which involved, permanently, the mastering of both shores of that communication.

Thus, it was examined the possibility of building such bridges in points located in the Middle Danube, even if Romania had not controlled communication lines, up to those points. In such case, the materials necessary for the construction of communication bridges had to be concentrated, before the declaration of war, in districts close to these points, that had to meet certain safety conditions and which, in the same time, demanded the deployment of a part from Danube Squadron to guard the water, with all the inconveniences resulted from the fact that the squadron fraction remained unavailable for use on other battle fronts.

Also, it appeared as very necessary to build a special ship for the transport of cavalry and artillery, which were completely absent. Immediately after the Second Balkan War, this was an unresolved fact for multiple reasons.

The Second Balkan War has proven the importance and necessity of increase of the number of commercial, transport ships, which greatly facilitated the mobilisation movements, the concentration of forces and the passage of the river.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 167.



It was considered mandatory to organise a position of resistance, on the river, with mined field, with coastal batteries and light artillery, in order to defend that field, with ships able to capitalise on the contribution of some extra-mobile batteries, torpedo preparation and launch stations and of the current mines, which could represent the most suitable defence when a flotilla or a lower river fleet had to resist against a similar, but higher, force.

The actions of the Austro-German fleet during the War of Integration, 1916-1918, confirm this principle and, if it tried to have an offensive attitude, no doubt it would have had so many losses⁴⁷ that a more solid balance would have been established between both naval forces.

The dynamics of a river fleet in offensive missions involved, in the first two decades of the 20th century, two phases: artillery actions in stationary (at anchor), rendered with barrage fires, through indirect firing over long distances and close actions executed with the moving ships, by using direct firings (direct shooting)⁴⁸.

There is the possibility of the enemy to use light ships to oppose the ships from defensive and the destruction of the mined field, a manoeuvre that would have resulted in big sacrifices from the attacker. This variant, however, required the existence of a fleet consisting of light ships that were prepared for this kind of attack.

It was insisted on the rapid adaptation of the human factor to the concrete situations in the theatre of operations, by moving from defensive to offensive. The coastal batteries fixed on the concrete sites, located on the shore that would have handled the troops of both belligerent parts, remained exposed to the human and material losses, either to the slightest changes of the front, which is why mobile artillery was chosen. Instead, the artillery on the opposite shore had the possibility of withdrawal, but also of firing until the last moment, and it was considered necessary to be installed in solid works, because the quota of the emplacement was low and uncovered.

It was accredited with the idea that a well-organised minefield, even if the land front had fallen, was capable of providing sufficient opportunities for ships and allied naval material to take relative shelter in this field.

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⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 168.

⁴⁸ Ion Ionescu, *Primele elemente și principii...*, p. 159.



Complementarily, the need for a remote information and surveillance service, by small patrol ships, without major military value and observation posts, on the friendly shore, was considered important and should never be neglected during the period of preparation and political tightening, prior to the war.

Isolated stations for the preparation and launching of torpedoes and current mines, which were not part of a defensive organisation, could be set up and used under conditions of non-discovery by the enemy, any other situation making them vulnerable.

It was envisaged that a river flotilla that would operate to the support of the flank of some ground forces should always be provided with a fleet of transport ships⁴⁹ to be able to board, but also to withdraw, the land troops which would eventually have been pushed to the Danube or would have been cut. From the practice of conducting the war on the water it was proven that an organisation of a bridgehead similar to that of Turtucaia, which was a disaster, had to have an easy bridge of pontoons for the safe withdrawal.

The installation of a mine dam on the Danube intended for a longer stay in the water was considered very difficult and, that is precisely why this problem remained unsolved, in the first place, for technical reasons⁵⁰. The proposal of visible dams, with mines with reduced buoyancy, supported by floats, was not considered practical by most specialists for the simple reason that they were easily destroyed by remote shooting. More efficient was the combination of mines with negative buoyancy sustained with elements from the stockade. The most operative system was the installation of dams by mines, concurrently with the objective that had to be protected, provided the fast anchoring of each mine and the dismantling of the dam, without danger.

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CONCLUSIONS

The period of neutrality, 21 July/3 August 1914-14/27 August 1916, prior to the participation in World War I, stimulated the preparation of the Romanian naval forces. This stage, for about two years, did not change the ideal naval doctrinal framework and led, at the same time, to the development of its content, constituting, for the most part,

⁴⁹ AMR, 2568 Collection, file 345, p. 169.

⁵⁰ At the time, no type of mine, no matter how special, could remain active for a long time.



The existence of naval doctrinal elements and principles, coagulated over decades, made it possible to deploy forces and means, on the hypothesis (variant) of the enemy in the south, prepared for a long time, still in peacetime, through countless training exercises with troops.

the foundation and reason of the principles of strategy and tactics that would have applied, no doubt.

It should be specified that the existence of naval doctrinal elements and principles, coagulated over decades, made it possible to deploy forces and means, on the hypothesis (variant) of the enemy in the south, prepared for a long time, still in peacetime, through countless training exercises with troops. If there had not been a unitary conception, the strategic and tactical principles would have been hastily applied, demanded in a hurry and imposed by the current situations in the river operations theatre.

It can be appreciated that the Romanian naval forces, supplemented with various floating material, requisitioned from the state's commercial or private companies, had to act independently, with independent missions and actions, but complementary to the land forces, within the national defence system.

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