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## ROMANIAN MILITARY THINKING FOLLOWING THE GREAT UNIFICATION

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*The paper presents the evolution of Romanian military thinking following the Great Unification and the relations between Romanian and European strategic thinking schools. The Romanian military thinking in the interwar period is symptomatic for the Romanian school of military sciences, suggesting the alignment with the ideas of the French school, declining as a model for the official projects of the European armed forces at that particular time. Moreover, the increasing interest in the particular at the expense of the general, the focus on the tactical aspects, the lack of a unitary project as well as a doctrinal cohesion resulted in the works having the potential to coagulate the Romanian military thinking (such as those of Mircea Tomescu) failing to produce the expected effect. Under such circumstances, the Romanian military thinking remained, in some aspects even acutely, counter-current. The present paper also calls attention to the counterfactual perspective of the possible evolution of the Romanian military thinking school, considering it would not have been disbanded immediately after the Second World War by the Soviet school.*

*Keywords: interwar period, Romanian military thinking, French school, Clausewitzianism, Soviet school.*

## The Romanian Armed Forces Reorganisation in 1917 and the French School

The transformation of *Hypothesis Z* in a campaign plan, on 14/27 August 1916, resulted in implementing a war scenario resulting from the Romanian military thinking<sup>1</sup>. The years of war entailed, to a great extent, putting the doctrinal project into practice and, to a less extent, continuing the theoretical approaches. Moreover, considering the development of the events on the front in Transylvania and on the southern front, namely the withdrawal of the government and the royal court in Iași, the Romanian Armed Forces had to be reorganised. The reorganisation was conducted unitarily, grounded on the Great General Headquarters conception, based on Order 1014 on 22 December 1916, *Secret Instructions regarding the Armed Forces Reorganisation*. The reorganisation of the Romanian Armed Forces was not only structural but also normative; the immediate necessity for certain regulations and instructions also entailed their translation, in some cases especially from French, and their implementation: *“To meet the set goals new regulations and instructions (some of them translated from French) were issued in the first half of 1917”*<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In an article analysing the Romanian military thinking previous to the Great Unification (Adrian Lesenciuc, *Gândirea militară românească înainte de Marea Unire. Proiecția oficială prusacă vs dezideratul școlii franceze*, in *Revista Academiei de Științe ale Securității Naționale*, vol. 3, no. 2(5), 2018, p. 162), I noted the following: *“During the period of Romania’s neutrality in the First World War, military studies were developed in a new direction: that of projecting defence or action scenarios (hypotheses). Variant A (suggested by General Averescu), meaning the concentration of the armed forces towards the east, and Variant C (suggested by General Christescu), meaning the concentration towards the south were the best-known ones”*. Practically, the mentioned hypotheses were simple theoretical models and exercises, not benefiting from the economic support for the war effort. In August 1916, it was chosen *Hypothesis Z, The project of operation in a war against the Central Powers and Bulgaria. Romania allied with the Quadruple Entente*. Many military historians consider that the subsequent modification of the campaign plan was the greatest mistake made by the Great General Headquarters. Immediately after the Great Unification, against the background of the discussions relating to correction in terms of geographical position, the area that was the object of the Romanian military action in Transylvania was included in the so-called National Defence Orographic Centre, considering the *“Romanian strategic issue”* became the possible simultaneous attack from the east, west and south.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel Dr Ion Giurcă, *1917. Reorganizarea Armatei Române*, Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, București, 1999, p. 237.



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The reorganisation, accomplished to a great extent with the support of the French Military Mission that came to Romania in 1916, was the natural response to counter the Russian tendencies to impose strategic directions. The mission, encouraged and supported by General Constantin Prezan, provided immediate benefits in terms of reorganisation; however, entailing equality between the French and Romanian officers, the mission also resulted in weakening the Romanian authority, overshadowing the unity of command principle and allowing for the possibility to acknowledge the fact that the “*absolute tutelage*” lay with the French officers (as considered by General Alexandru Averescu). The short-term effects, preponderantly positive, were followed by long-term effects. The French geometric school of military thinking<sup>3</sup>, whose last outstanding representative was Marshal Ferdinand Foch, therefore being in the interwar period in decline in relation to the Prussian school, became a frame of reference for the Romanian interwar military thinking.

The Romanian military school started to be tailored according to Foch principles, meaning to adapt Napoleonic thought to the reality proper to the period a century after. In *Les Principes de la guerre. De la conduite de la guerre (Principiile războiului. Conducerea războiului)*<sup>4</sup>, the French Marshal could not detach from Napoleonic strategic thinking, projecting his knowledge in relation to the positivist foundation of military sciences (considered to be exact sciences) and to the maintenance of the meaning of mastery associated with military art<sup>5</sup> (both important characteristics of the French school):

Therefore, there is a theory of war; first and foremost, it includes principles as follows:

- economy of force;
- freedom of action;
- free disposition of forces;
- safety etc.

<sup>3</sup> The mentioned school of military sciences, acknowledged as such starting with Jacques Antoine Hyppolite, Comte de Guibert, made mathematics likely to offering instruments to study tactics. By the influence exercised in shaping Napoleon military personality, due to the papers appeared up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or due to the influence of Antoine Henri de Jomini, Clausewitz contemporary and opponent, over the French Emperor way of thinking, it became known throughout Europe, outrunning the Prussian school in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> Ferdinand Foch (Marshal), *Principiile războiului. Conducerea războiului*. Translated from French by Nicolae T. Popescu. Foreword by Major General (r.) Dr I. Cupșa, Editura Militară, București, 1975. Marshal Foch works were published in French, in 1903: *Les Principes de la guerre*, respectively in 1904: *De la conduite de la guerre*.

<sup>5</sup> According to which the only school of military art is the battlefield.

The existence of the mentioned principles as well as their justification has been largely discussed; however, Napoleon is the one who wrote: *“The principles of war led the great captains whose glorious deeds have been transmitted to us throughout history”*. Therefore, for Napoleon, there are principles of war. Studying the important deeds of the great captains, we can find these principles<sup>6</sup>.

Marshal Foch projection was subsequently translated in a doctrine and, implicitly, in directly applicable regulations and norms, not only in the French but also in the Romanian armed forces. While Europe of those years, characterised by exaggerated militarism, doubled or doubling national ideologies, suggested strategic concepts related to large-scale and long-term wars (Clausewitz projection, thus Prussian, adopted by the first main vector, V.I. Lenin, and translated in the Red Army, Soviet, doctrine) or to *Blitzkrieg*, meaning employing simultaneously, with great cumulative effects, the bombing aviation and the tanks (Clausewitz projection adopted by the other vector, Adolf Hitler), France and Great Britain remained focused on defensive strategies. Moreover, France projected a 100-year old strategy, specific to cabinet wars, extolling the virtues of the *“main battle”* in a Europe of national wars, characterised by *“mass rising”* and attrition.

### First Signs of Inadequacy

Under such circumstances, although the Romanian school had the chance to be in the avant-garde of Europe by aligning itself with the Prussian school of military thinking, it was, through the Romanian theorists, continuators of the French military thinking (some of them graduates from the Fontainebleau school, like Marshal Foch, for example), counter current. The formal alignment with the French school was achieved starting in 1924, with the implementation of the *Law on the Armed Forces Organisation* as well as of the regulations stemming from the law. Encouraging the alignment with the French school of thought became, in a certain way, an element of the *România Militară* programme, the journal announcing, in issue no. 7/1927, on page 129, that the officially accepted doctrine was the French one: *“‹România Militară› Journal, besides its role of spreading general military knowledge has also, through its publications, the one of clarifying and disseminating, among the officer corps, the doctrine*

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<sup>6</sup> Ferdinand Foch, *op. cit.*, p. 34.



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*The adoption of the French doctrinal apparatus, exponent of a strategy that was inappropriate to the time, was characterised by terminological confusions, resulted from the lack of a value grid in adopting the strategic concept, from the appeal to the concepts and the Napoleonic projection of the “unchanging” principles of war, while the entire framework of confrontation (including the elements of the recent technological revolution: the emergence and employment in battle of the aviation, and implicitly the anti-aircraft artillery, the replacement of cavalry troops with tank units etc.)*

*officially adopted in our armed forces, namely the French armed forces doctrine<sup>7</sup> expressed in the Large Units Regulation and its annexes)<sup>8</sup>.*

The adoption of the French doctrinal apparatus, exponent of a strategy that was inappropriate to the time, was characterised by terminological confusions, resulted from the lack of a value grid in adopting the strategic concept, from the appeal to the concepts and the Napoleonic projection of the “unchanging” principles of war, while the entire framework of confrontation (including the elements of the recent technological revolution: the emergence and employment in battle of the aviation, and implicitly the anti-aircraft artillery, the replacement of cavalry troops with tank units etc.) changed. The Romanian school of strategic thinking became confused itself, proposing works lacking in a unitary projection, in the absence of doctrinal cohesion and of adequacy to the realities of the battlefield in the mentioned period. Moreover, although the Romanian school presented numerous works, they were focused on specialised aspects treating, at best, elements having a tactical (not strategic) nature. In the interwar period there were published works useful for the troop training process, excellent books on memoirs, but few volumes related to the strategic perspective<sup>9</sup>. Among the important books published following the Great Unification, the following can be mentioned: General N. Alevra (1916), *Stabilirea răspunderilor asupra pregătirii armatei pentru războiu (Responsibilities for the Armed Forces Preparation for the War)*, Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, Bucureşti; Colonel Fl. Ţenescu (1919), *Rezumatul cursului de cunoştinţe generale asupra războiului şi studiul lui (numai strategia) – Summary of the Course on General Knowledge related to the War and Its Study (Strategy Only)*, Autografia Şcoalelor Militare de Artilerie şi Marină, Bucureşti; General C.N. Herjeu (1921), *Studii şi critice militare. Din învăţămintele războaielor din 1913 şi 1916-1918 (Military Studies*

<sup>7</sup> Practically, there was not an officially adopted French doctrine but a natural propensity, resulting from the influence exercised by the French Military Mission, to such school of thought. The Large Units Regulation was inspired by the French one. However, it was not a doctrine as such. There were Romanian military thinkers of that time who suggested the separation from the French direction and there were also translations from the works of German Generals Erich F.W. Ludendorff or Erich G.S.A. von Falkenheyn, of the Italian General Ettore Bastico or even from the Soviet doctrine, see Ioan SichiŃiu, Alexandru IoaniŃiu, *Elemente de strategie*, Atelierele “Cartea Românească”, Bucureşti, 1936, pp. 140-165.

<sup>8</sup> Division General (r.) Professor Dr Valentin Arsene, Brigadier General Dr Petre Botezatu (coord.), *Strategia militară românească în epoca modernă*. Foreword by Army Corps General Dr Constantin Degeratu, Editura Nummus, Bucureşti, 1999, p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> For guidance, see the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of *Bibliografia militară românească (1914-1944)*, Central Library of the Ministry of National Defence.

and Criticism. *The Lessons Learned from the Wars in 1913 and 1916-1918*), 2 volumes, Editura Librăriei "Stănciulescu", București; General I. Manolescu (n.y.), *Napoleon, Clausewitz, Foch*, Tipografia "Răsăritul", București; Captain Aviator Marin T. Anton (1927), *Bombardamentul aerian. Tehnica bombardamentului și materialul de bombardament (Air Bombing. Bombardment Technique and Bombing Material)*, Course for the Military Schools for the Aeronautics Education and Training, Tipografia Școlilor militare pregătitoare și speciale ale Aeronauticei, București; Major Radu Miculescu (1929), *Studiu cu privire la apărarea națională (Study on National Defence)*, "Cartea Românească", București; Captain Mircea Tomescu (1932), *Conducerea războiului de coalițiuni (Conduct of Coalition War)*, Tipografia "Ortensia", București; Colonel G. Vizanti, Major Scarlat Urlățianu (1932), *Strategia Românească în viitorul război (The Romanian Strategy in the Future War)*, with a Foreword by Professor Nicolae Iorga, Tipografia Curții Regale F. Göbl, București; Major (A.F.) Ioan D. Drăgan (1933), *Aviația și viitorul război. Progresul aviației și întrebuintarea sa în viitor, în operațiunile de pe uscat și de pe apă (Aviation and the Future War. Aviation Progress and Its Use in the Future, in the Land and Sea Operations)*, Tipografia "Bucovina", București; Colonel D. Vrăjitoru (1935), *Principii și adevăruri în arta războiului (Principles and Truths in the Art of War)*, Tipografia Ministerului Apărării Naționale, București; Division General Ioan Sichițiu, Colonel Al. Ioanițiu (1936), *Elemente de strategie (Elements of Strategy)*, Atelierele "Cartea Românească", București; Captain Mircea Tomescu (1937), *Știința militară și doctrina românească (Romanian Military Science and Doctrine)*, Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă "Regele Carol II", București; Captain Mircea Tomescu (1939), *Manevra strategică în trecut și astăzi (Strategic Manoeuvre in the Past and Now)*, Atelierele "Cartea Românească", București (book receiving the Great General Staff award).

### Towards a Romanian School of Military Thinking?

Benefiting from the experience of war, Romanian officers could analyse and generalise it, to understand and explain the tactical projection of different schools of military thinking, especially the French one, and they could also succeed in integrating in the war discourse aspects of novelty, developed in line with the school of Clausewitz, such as air bombing, only six years after the concept was introduced



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by Italian General Giulio Douhet (1921)<sup>10</sup>. Apparently completely aligned with the “officially adopted doctrine”, as *România Militară* projected it in 1927, the Romanian school of military thinking considered the national character of the doctrine. The publication assumed the theme and transformed it in a debate on the doctrine universal or national character. Among the supporters of the French doctrine, Colonel Țenescu distinguished, having as arguments the immutable character of war, the fact that the future war, regardless the military technology development, will be conducted following the same coordinates: “According to Florea Țenescu, the most logical conclusion was that the French military doctrine should be adopted”<sup>11</sup>. As for the mobility of the troops, not even Colonel Țenescu referred to the French doctrine, suggesting German principles. With regard to the “national military doctrine affirmation”<sup>12</sup>, General Hârjeu distinguished, providing as argument for his position the fact that “the Romanian army has its personality and traditions” (the statement, dating back in 1905, subsequently coagulating a Romanian national doctrine school), as well as Captain Tomescu, who considered that military science needed to be studied in national frame, focusing on patriotism (as spiritual factor in the military education) and on the terrain (material factor). For the promotion of a national doctrine the most categorical ones were Colonel G. Vizanti and Major S. Urlățianu, who proposed a *Romanian Strategy in the Future War*, acknowledged as a lesson of “*Romaniology*” by the one who wrote the foreword, the renowned historian and politician Nicolae Iorga. In fact, Vizanti and Urlățianu took over, in their strategy, elements of Napoleonic conception (therefore of the French school), even though they argued that, for Romanians, the war could have but the “character of a national war”<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately, the allegedly Romanian school of military sciences provided only one argument, a non-scientific one, emotionally substantiated, to promote that direction: the spirit of sacrifice, the “soul superiority” of the Romanians in the defence war.

<sup>10</sup> Douhet principle was based on the extreme violence of Clausewitz studies, on the total war concept: in his book in 1921, *Il dominio dell'aria*, Giulio Douhet argued that the targets to be bombarded should be large so that the expected effect could be achieved. The purpose of bombings was to bomb the civilians in large urban areas, translated in punishing the “accomplices” to the policy conducted by the enemy governments.

<sup>11</sup> Iulian Patca, “Gândirea militară românească după Marea Unire”, in Teodor Pavel, Nicolae Ciobanu (coord.), *Armata Română și Marea Unire. Contribuții la realizarea Unirii și la consolidarea statului național*, Editura Daco-Press, Cluj-Napoca, 1993, p. 253.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 249.

<sup>13</sup> Colonel G. Vizanti, Major Scarlat Urlățianu, *Strategia românească în viitorul război*, with a Foreword by Professor Nicolae Iorga, Tipografia Curții Regale F. Göbl & Fiii, București, 1932, p. 117.

In a way, the defensive lessons in the summer of 1917 proved those military thinkers right. What emerged from the mentioned orientation was the understanding and promotion of the concept of legitimate war, of defence against aggression towards the national state, its unity, independence, or sovereignty – namely the desiderata of the great strategy (or of the political strategy). The preparation of the country, the discipline of the nation, the economic effort for defence were the pillars of the “*war of the entire people*”, a concept reflected, about one hundred years before, in the well-known book of Clausewitz, *On War* (*Despre război* – the Romanian edition in 1982). The preparation of the country to face the great changes related to confrontation in Europe entailed using the Clausewitzian concept, reinterpreted mainly by General Ion Manolescu, who insisted on the preparation of the entire war for national defence. This projection, resulting from focusing on the national dimension of doctrinal projection, was reflected in the *Law on the Organisation of the Nation and the Territory for the War Time* on 27 April 1933, which clearly defined the role of the state in the organisation of national defence.

Even though, theoretically, the dispute between the school of thought influenced by the French geometric view and the autochthonous one – not explicitly defined, by mentioning the specific differences from other schools of military thinking, with the exception of the “*soul superiority*” in engaging in battle – continued, starting with the *Law on the Armed Forces Organisation* on 23 June 1924, based on French theoretical foundations, and the armed forces organisation became tributary to the ideas of Napoleonic origin. The compulsory military service was introduced, the army corps were established, the number of troops was increased, infantry becoming very important, oversizing resulting in deficient training, conducted partially, with less troops and without covering all training stages. Neither the laws on 30 April 1930 and on 28 April 1932 succeeded in balancing the armed forces size and the need for training. In 1934, the new Chief of the Great General Staff, General Ion Antonescu, noticed that the armed forces were too numerous (having a too large structural basis), bureaucratic, having officers who were not properly trained. “*The great shortcoming in the preparation of the Romanian armed forces corps of cadres in the interwar period was the rupture between theory and practice*”, underlined Generals Arsene and Botezatu in the book *Strategia*



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*militară românească în epoca modernă (Romanian Military Strategy in the Modern Age)<sup>14</sup>.*

Around the outbreak of the Second World War, the German school started to regain its influence. The particularities of the German school of thought became obvious especially in the military actions of the Romanian Armed Forces entering the war and less in the theoretical plane, where there were not the necessary conditions to implement the mentioned ideas. The appropriate acknowledgement of the role of aviation and mechanised troops in war and the employment of the particular means of war represented the most important elements adopted from the German doctrine. However, once the war ended, the military thinkers of the interwar period could not accomplish their own projects inspired by the French, Romanian or German ideas, as they were imprisoned or marginalised.

### Conclusions

The Romanian military thinking proved, throughout time, to be counter current. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the French school was dominant in Europe, King Carol I imposed a Prussian type organisation of the armed forces and, implicitly, the Prussian thought lines of force. Following the Great Unification, when the French school ceased to be a reference point in projecting strategic thinking in most Western countries, and when the Prussian school (Clausewitz thinking) was revived through two important vectors: VI.I. Lenin and A. Hitler, the Romanian orientation focused on the French school. The attempt to project a Romanian school of military thinking did not produce the expected results because of the outbreak of the Second World War and especially because of the fact that most Romanian military thinkers were imprisoned or marginalised by the recently installed communist authorities. There followed the years of orientation towards the Leninist Clausewitzianism, in a period when Europe and especially the United States of America renounced the ideas of the illustrious Prussian General, and then, under the political circumstances favourable to a revival of the autochthonous military thinking, it was an alignment with the Clausewitzian thinking previous to the action of the vector Lenin.

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<sup>14</sup> Division General (r.) Professor Dr Valentin Arsene, Brigadier General Dr Petre Botezatu (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 115.

The counter-current position, in the years of United Romania as well as before, starting from the Small Unification, seems to have been put an end to. Doctrinairely – where there is certain resistance to change –, the changes in the nuances in the doctrines of NATO member states entail effects in today Romania in a time horizon of several years. It is enough to mention the projection of information operations, which generated effects in military thinking in synchronicity with the Western world, and in doctrinal plane, in a time horizon of only eight years.

Liberated from political strains, the Romanian military thinking has now a great chance of being synchronous with the Western world and of affirming itself *per se*.

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