

The backstage of the Russian espionage activities on the Romanian territory, at the beginning of the XXth century

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Abstract

Unlike the successor Soviet regime, imperial Russia's expansionist ambitions were not global, as the Empire's only aim was to occupy the Balkans and the nearby Straits. Since 1878, Romania represented a serious obstacle in achieving these goals, which is why Russian authorities „sought to cause domestic problems” through influence, espionage and corruption of Romanian citizens.

At the beginning of the XXth century, foreign espionage represented a great challenge for the Romanian military and civilian intelligence organizations. In an attempt to implement preventive security measures in Romania, in 1908, the Department for General State Security is established within the Ministry of Interior. During Romania's neutrality period (1914-1916), this secret police force counteracted various espionage and betrayal cases.

Although most of the cases were focused on the activity of German and Austro-Hungarian intelligence services, the Department for General State Security also pursued and annihilated Czarist espionage networks.

Keywords: espionage, Russian Empire, Department for General State Security, intelligence cooperation, Ministry of Interior, Romanian Army.

Introduction

The old Kingdom becomes, through the neutrality adopted in the fall of 1914, a turning point of all the belligerents' espionage. Radu Rosetti suggestively conveys the atmosphere of an apparent eye of the storm, in the midst of a global torment, as Bucharest was perceived at the time „...the air of corruption and scheming maintained by both groups of adversaries in Bucharest, where the so called social life followed its course and the nightlife had a huge development. Beside the interlopers and usual low lives

of the capitals, as well as the more or less honest businessmen, Bucharest, and especially its hotels, cafes, restaurants was overwhelmed by an utter invasion of news correspondents, commissioners, actresses and others of the kind, some in service of one or the other power groups, others adventurers in search of financial gain”¹.

The German and Austro-Hungarian intelligence services were spending, during those years, huge amounts of money to influence the public opinion in favour of the Central Powers, having on their payrolls Romanian citizens belonging to all social strata.

While there are numerous accounts and studies regarding the economic and military espionage as well as the propaganda carried out by the Germans and Austrians, this is not the case for the espionage activity carried out on the national territory by our future ally in the first world conflagration, Czarist Russia.

The Romanian state, independent after 1878 and undertaking a strong process of modernization in the following decades represented a major impediment both in ensuring a terrestrial corridor linking the Russian Empire and the „Slav brothers” from the Balkans, and in reaching the main objective of the Empire’s foreign policy – the occupation and control of the Straits. Since an open military conflict against our country was out of the question, various entities tried, through a multitude of means (the greatest majority of them coming from the arsenal of the espionage services), to create trouble for the country’s governments. That happened in the context in which the Czarist Empire had superior capabilities and resources and undertook, contrary to the largely circulated opinion in the epoch, an ample process of modernization and development.

Even from its very beginnings, the Russian secret police had paid undivided attention to the espionage activities conducted in the states which presented interest for the Czarist Empire. Nevertheless, for various reasons, the results didn’t live up to the expectations, the mistaken informative notes from the time of the Russian-Japanese war (1904-1905) being an edifying example in that sense. However, the intelligence and counterintelligence structures of the Russian imperial army achieved remarkable results in the first decade of the XXth century (a notable exception being the defeat in front of Japan).

¹ Radu R. Rosetti, *Mărturisiri (1914-1919)*, Editura Modelism, București, 1997, p. 62.

The military attachés accredited with the diplomatic missions, whose attributions included informative activities, proved to be extremely efficient. The Russian military attaché in Vienna, colonel Matschenko, took advantage of favourable circumstances, and was able to use to his advantage, at the beginning of the XXth century, the atmosphere and general state amongst the Austrian officers to recruit agents. Amidst many armies there are elements who will betray for any number of advantages, but the Austro-Hungarian army „excelled” in this. The list of agents recruited by the Russian officer contained intelligence officers, from the military justice, or detached in different military branches both in Vienna and the imperial provinces².

These, as well as others recruited by the Russian military espionage (a structure which was extremely active in Romania, too), have offered the decision makers at Petrograd the complete picture of the Austro-Hungarian adversary’s capabilities, with direct effects on the unfolding of the military operations in the first year of war.

According to general Gheorghe Dabija, Romania’s military attaché in Sofia during 1910-1913³, the Russian military espionage was coordinated from Sankt Petersburg by general-major Yuri N. Danilov⁴ around the onset of the world conflagration. The Empire was divided into 13 military districts, each disposing of its own agents network; the most powerful district espionage centres were, taking into account the „objectives” they had in sight, Warsaw (lead by colonel Nikolai Batiushin, the one who had managed to recruit the head of the Austro-Hungarian military counterespionage, colonel Alfred Redl), Odessa (from where, as we will see along the study, the espionage directed against Romania was conducted) and Kiev.

From his official stance, general Dabija wrote, referring to the collaboration he had in Sofia with the Russian military attaché: „colonel Romanowski, intelligent, with a moderate and sensible spirit, with very distinguished manners, a gentleman. An excellent Major State officer, I have had the best rapport with him, working close together, which was notable, *since he had extensive informative means and possibilities, which I completely lacked*. Nevertheless, thanks to the friendship that bound us, both I and my country have benefited.”⁵

² Alexandru Popescu, *Agenții mărturisiți. Diplomații și spionajul*, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, București, 2009, p. 72.

³ Gheorghe Dabija, *Amintirile unui atașat militar român în Bulgaria. 1910-1913*, Editura Ziarului „Universul”, București, 1936.

⁴ Leonard Raymond, *Secret Soldiers of the Revolution*, Greenwoodpress, 1999.

⁵ Gheorghe Dabija, *op. cit.*, p.54.

Although it is still not a fully elucidated subject, we can also talk about a certain foreign involvement where the onset and unfolding of the peasant revolt from 1907 is concerned, an event with major reverberations on the national public opinion.

In connection with this issue, the first report addressed to the state leadership at the beginning of the uprising by Jules Văsescu, the prefect of Botosani county, demands, on the 10th of March 1907, that the troops sent as reinforcement be cavalry, as the instigators do not come from the revolted villages, but are rapidly moving from village to village: „*they are emissaries who roam the villages and promise, in the name of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia, to distribute the land to peasants, and encourages them to revolt, so that Russia will come to power in this country, since only they will be able to distribute the land*”⁶.

In the second report of the prefect, dated 11 March 1907, the army's help request is renewed, because the situation was rapidly worsening: „The revolution phase has changed, the inhabitants, thanks to the instigators – *believed to be Russians by nationality* – who roam the villages, seeing that they were able to determine the landlords to fulfil their demands, ask for more: to divide the lands among themselves... There is an absolute necessity for cavalry, in order to successfully pursue the gangs that roam the villages in order to determine the uprising of the peasants. The infantry cannot carry out this mission.”⁷

Although during the following decades the existence of these Russian, or paid by the Russians, instigators was denied, it is obvious that Petrograd was trying to take full advantage of any internal problem Romania might have had, fact which was all too well known by the Romanian governors. This is why, starting with the 7th of March, the Romanian authorities ordered that the borders close „from Suceava to Mihăileni” so as to prevent the infiltration of agents dressed up as peasants from Bucovina and not to provide a pretext for military intervention on the part of Czarist Russia and Austro-Hungary⁸.

⁶ *Răscoala din 1907*, vol. I, Editura de Stat, București, 1948, p. 49, apud Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Istoria loviturilor de stat în România*, vol. 2, Editura RAO, București, 2001, p. 134.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54 (Raportul nr.1933 din 11 martie 1907), apud Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

⁸ Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

Unfortunately, the files of the Police Department and the Department of General State Security that can be found at the Romanian National Archives (RNA) do not shed any light with regard to this matter, so that a definite conclusion might be reached. The researchers have yet to complete, in different archives from Bucharest or the rest of the territory, a laborious work of clarification concerning several aspects of Romania's modern history.

Nevertheless, the documentary basis at the RNA allows us to reconstitute one of the Russian espionage networks from Romania, at the beginning of the XXth century, painstakingly structured over many years. Since many of the files belonging to the huge operative archive of the State Security have disappeared, or have been destroyed during the past century, we don't have a complete image of the phenomenon, but "pieces of the puzzle". Because of this, we cannot make a definite statement in connection with the undoubted and obvious guilt of all the persons mentioned in the documents which were written by the agents and informants of the Police and State Security.

The espionage of the Czarist Empire on the national territory up to Romania's entrance in the First World War

The law reorganizing the Ministry of Interior adopted during the mandate of Secretary Vasile Lascăr, April 1903, was intended to be the answer to the evolution of society at the beginning of that century; but the events that followed showed that this was appropriate for the institution of Police only as „administrative police”, lacking the intelligence component, the one which meant collecting the information⁹.

The peasant uprising from March 1907 played the role of a real „cold shower” for the Romanian political elite, who were totally taken aback because they lacked pertinent information on the explosive situation registered at that point in the rural world. This is why, in March 1908 a law is adopted, by which the Department of Police and General Security (DPGS) is established, consisting of two sections: the General State Security and the Police. To ensure an increased efficiency, all the structures having state security attributions were organized and functioned separately from the General State Police, being much less exposed to the pressures coming on the part of the local authorities, like the prefect or the political parties¹⁰.

⁹ Adrian Pohrib, *Din istoria Poliției Române. Poliția orașului Galați între anii 1832 și 1949. Istoric și documente*, Editura AGATON, Galați, 2013, p. 63.

¹⁰ Alin Spănu, *Serviciul de informații al României în războiul de întregire națională (1916-1920)*, Editura Militară, București, 2012, p. 27.

Looking to create a strong state institution with special assignments, the leadership of the state saw in the General State Security the „nerve of Police which is duly tensed by the environment, conducting to the general measures in matters of public order and state security, registering at the same time all the seismic activity occurring in domestic population as well as in the neighbouring countries, so that it may prevent, in due time, those subversive moves against the security of the state”¹¹.

A significant amount of attention was also paid to the Police from the border crossing points and harbours, which was under the direct leadership of the Secretary of Interior and was exercised by the director of DPGS, who had the right of complete control over the entire activity¹².

In conclusion, the State Security, as the main institution with attributions in collecting information both internally and externally, had the duty to ensure constitutional order, the country’s internal security and to counter the actions carried out by hostile states, which would have attempted to endanger Romania’s independence and territorial integrity.

Due to the close collaboration between the different structures of the power institutions belonging to the state (especially the Ministry of Interior and the Army) many of the attempts by different foreign powers to find out about Romania’s strengths and vulnerabilities were discovered and annihilated. Some successful examples are presented in the following lines.

One of the intensely mediated espionage cases in the epoch, in which the Czarist espionage was definitely involved, is that of the artillery captain Rodrig Goliescu. A talented inventor in the field of aviation at the beginning of the XXth century, as well as a person with doubtful morals, eager to become rich and living over the means offered by his military condition, he enters a dangerous game of national treason¹³.

Sent with substantial financing from the Romanian state to Paris, in order to perfect his invention (the „avioplane” – a hybrid airplane), he returns in the autumn of 1910 with unpaid debts. In Bucharest, taking advantage of the fictitious company that he had registered in France – „The society of aviation Goliescu et comp”, he tries, without too much success, to scam people who were willing to invest in a flourishing business. On the occasion of his visit to Russia, made in order to get the approval for his avioplane inventor’s certificate, from the Ministry of Industry, he enters

¹¹ Vasile Bobocescu, *Istoria Poliției Române*, Editura Ministerului de Interne, București, 2000, p. 141.

¹² Adrian Pohrib, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹³ See C. Neagu, D. Marinescu, R. Georgescu, *Fapte din umbră*, vol. II, Editura Politică, București, 1977, pp. 49-57.

the attention of the Russian espionage. In June 1912 he is contacted by the Russian agent Piotr Altinovici, interpreter at the Russian Legation, who recruits him as informer.

In a note discovered when searching his house, Rodrig Goliescu assumed, in writing, the obligation to transmit the Russian intelligence service a number of documents with regard to the national security: the mobilization plan of an infantry regiment, with all the necessary data; the last edition of the Mobilization regulation and the concentration plan of the Romanian army in case of war with the Czarist Empire or Austro-Hungary; the Major State's plan of military transports on the railroads in case of mobilization, etc.¹⁴.

The need to procure the necessary military information makes him look for help, which is fatal. His former subordinate, M. Predescu, whom he had contacted in order to steal the documents from the Great Major State, presented the case to his superiors, which meant that Goliescu was taken over by the General State Security, which had the required competencies and resources to monitor him. He will be arrested on the 13th of February 1913, with the news spreading like wildfire all over the capital.

Because of the given situation, Piotr Altinovici clandestinely leaves the country, avoiding the monitoring performed by the Romanian agents; in the document issued as a consequence of searching his house, the police officer appointed to execute the mandate of bringing him states that „he is out of the country and there is no information related to his whereabouts”¹⁵.

In the spring of 1913, the War Council of the II Army Echelon started the instrumentation of the process. The sentence from the 22nd of June 1913 condemned captain Goliescu to twenty years of hard labour and military degradation for „high treason and forgery of signatures and seals”¹⁶. He outlives the war, being set free in 1925, but all his latter attempts to officially rehabilitate himself were doomed (he dies in 1942).

The Russian-Bulgarian collaboration aimed at spying the Romanian military apparatus

In a very important Report dated November 12th 1907, submitted to the Home Secretary and to the War Secretary also, the DPGS Director draws attention upon a dangerous case of espionage in which Bulgaria was involved and most likely Czarist Russia, too. Thanks to the efficient collaboration between institutions in matters concerning national security, the Postal Office

¹⁴ Paul Ștefănescu, *Istoria serviciilor secrete române*, Editura ANTET, Prahova, 2007, p. 36.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

from Odobesti sends the Department of Post and Telegraph a parcel considered suspicious, which is then sent to the General State Security. Here it is opened and closely examined, only to conclude that it is a case which can seriously affect Romania's security. The parcel was addressed to a Bulgarian artillery officer who lived in Sofia, lieutenant G. Hesapcieff and contained maps and detailed military plans of a part of Moldova.

Director Panaitescu highlights, among other things, the existing cooperation between the Russian and Bulgarian institutions, having as a joint objective the espionage of our country. This was vital for the Czarist army and espionage service because any arrival in our country of a Russian employee, civilian or military, was rigorously registered and monitored both by the Police and Security or County Police. However, the movement freedom of the Bulgarian citizens was much greater on Romanian territory.

„The logical conclusion would be that this espionage was carried out in the best interest of the Bulgarian army. Nevertheless, since the area represented by the afore mentioned maps is situated beyond the fortified line Focșani Nămolosa, (Putna-Bacău), a region which falls outside the Bulgarian interest zone, it is not excluded that this espionage activity is performed by the Bulgarians to serve Russian interests. It is possible that Russians use Bulgarian undercover officers, since it is much easier for them to enter the country without being noticed, mingling with Bulgarian workers and merchants who can be found at the gates of all our military establishments.

There is not one troop who starts its march without being followed by the Bulgarian merchants everywhere, only God knows how many of them are undercover officers. It would have been very difficult for Russian officers to enter the country and mix with the population, they would have been immediately discovered, since they could have only dressed up as icon painters, which are always suspects for the authorities and even if they had not been discovered, they would still not have been able to do a very good job, not having the possibility to stay around military units and travel along with the troops in marches, exercises and manoeuvres...¹⁷.

In conclusion, the report of the General Director of DPGS draws attention on the necessity that „The Grand Major State of the Army establishes a counter-espionage service, which should be well organized in order to easily reveal the spies who roam the country”. All the more since „the Bulgarians are up to date with everything that our marine and army do and plan, and they arrive on time to spy on them and get information on the matters that are of interest to them”¹⁸.

¹⁷ Romanian National Archives (RNA), The *General Police Department* Fund, File no. 94/1907, sheets 19-20.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, sheet 21.

Due to this we must also show the ability of the DPGS to carry out external espionage actions. Due to the special importance given to the case, an experimented agent of the General Security, Grigore Radulescu, is sent to Sofia, in Bulgaria, in order to obtain more details related to the receiver of the parcel, the Bulgarian artillery lieutenant Hesapcieff. On this occasion Iancu Panaitescu assigns Radulescu to also obtain information on „a certain Mincoff, merchant and cards player, who sometimes comes to Romania and carries out espionage missions, as far as I am informed”¹⁹. In order not to look suspicious to the Bulgarian counter-espionage, he will be accompanied by his wife, who will contribute to the informative monitoring of the Bulgarian officer.

The Romanian agent-couple permanently monitors the lieutenant, establishing that he works at the „Army arsenal in Sofia, in the chemistry laboratory which prepared the explosive material for cannonballs”. They characterized him as being an especially scrupulous person, serious and very well seen by the Bulgarian officers with whom he had interacted, on different occasions, in town”²⁰.

Of great importance for the prevention of actions which could have affected the national security and internal order proved to be, on the 31st of March 1904, the adoption of the Regulation of the police and frontier, railways and harbours activities, through which the Frontier, Railways and Harbours Police is organized. It had the main mission of preventing the entrance of anarchist activists on national territory and annihilating the foreign services’ actions against Romania, by signalling to the General Security any possibly dangerous foreigner.

Mention must be made of the fact that the document made an exception for the arrivals/departures of the Romanian citizens from Austro-Hungarian and Czarist Russia. With this action Romanian refugees, who were pursued by the repressive Austro-Hungarian and Russian organs for participating in the national emancipation movement, were protected²¹.

From the notes and reports of the security or police agents up to the onset of the First World War, found in the archives, it can be seen that there was good collaboration between this frontier police with large prerogatives and the Department of Police and General State Security, a structure which officially came to life in March 1908.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, sheet 30.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, sheets 22-24.

²¹ Vasile Bobocescu, *Momente din istoria Ministerului de Interne*, Editura MI, București, 2000, vol. I, pp. 82-84.

**Actions of the Czarist military espionage on the national territory
Case study – Vladimir Nicolaevici**

A unique document, found in the Central National History Archives, shows an important part of the Russian military espionage network in Romania, presented by the very person who was considered a trustworthy spy, the lawyer Vasile Alexandrescu, from Iași. He had denounced to the General State Security the Czarist service's secret operation, presenting the Romanian citizens who were willing to procure, in exchange of particular amount of money, the information solicited by the Russian party.

With regard to this subject, the central „character” is the Russian citizen Vladimir Nicolaevici, considered a well-versed spy by the security, a specialist in the east European space, who often travelled to Bulgaria and Serbia. Practically, during 1914, due to the onset of the world war, the intelligence necessities grow exponentially, for all the belligerents who need information related to their declared enemies as well as neuter states like Italy or Romania.

In the Paper written by the deputy director Stan N. Emanuel and presented to the board of the DPGS on March the 2nd 1914²², it is shown that: „A part of the Russian military espionage in Romania is the espionage service organized especially for Moldova, with its central headquarters in Odessa, at the Russian Major Sate, the Odessa military circumscription ...The connection between Odessa and Iași is made by a certain Vladimir Nicolaevici, of Russian origin, a fake merchant, who travelling to Romania very often and has been suspected of espionage for a long time.

From the examination of File no. 227, from the secret archive of the Department, it appears that this Vladimir Nicolaevici addressed lawyer Alexandrescu from Iași, suggesting that in exchange of a sum of money which he will receive monthly, he should take interest in the activity of these agents, and their Reports should be sent to Odessa.

Lawyer Alexandrescu denounced everything to the Department and since we were interested in knowing the military interest points of the Russians, as well as knowing who the persons doing this type of services to the Russians were, we requested that lawyer Alexandrescu accept the proposition.

²² Romanian National Archives (RNA), The *General Police Department* Fund, File no. 1/1914, sheets 30-33.

Accepting he was immediately acquainted with the agents from all over the country, respectively: Vasile Gavrilescu, belt-maker established in Roman; Mihai Pălimaru, singer, retired sergeant in Bat. 8 Hunters, established in Husi; Mihail Christescu, the representative of the village federal cooperatives from Bucharest, living in Brăila.

The correspondence which is circulated between the recruited agents with lawyer Alexandrescu and between the latter and Vladimir Nicolaevici from Odessa is written by the known Russian procedure, namely by using chemical substances and revealing the writing with other substances."

The urgency of the military information required by the imperial army and the (premeditated or contextual) delays with which Alexandrescu answered the requests of the Odessa headquarters, determine Vladimir Nicolaevici to enter the national territory on July 3rd 1913, accompanied by another „Russian subject”, Zeilich Champanier. Nicolaevici started a tour through Romania, starting in Iași, followed by Galați, Bucharest, Constanța, heading back to Russia on the 2nd of August 1913.

Important information for the DPGS board is transmitted by the same lawyer, who became a very valuable agent for the Romanian counterintelligence structures and was, ironically enough, appreciated by our adversaries as well. As a proof of confidence which he had gained with the Russian spy, Nicolaevici presents him with all the novelties, after returning from Iași and before going back to Russia: in Galați he had „four civilian informants with good material situations and extended military knowledge”, in Constanța he had hired yet another agent (from which we deduce that here he had already established an active espionage network). Although he did not communicate the name of these new „acquisitions” to the Romanian lawyer, he drops a very important detail for the Security, particularly that „the transmission of the written information from the counties neighboring Russia is made through some of our customs officers (Romanians)”²³.

Here is the type of information requested by the Russian military espionage, as it appears from the letters sent throughout September 1913 by Vladimir Nicolaevici to Alexandrescu:

„1. How the infantry, artillery, reserve units were organized during the mobilization.

²³ *Ibidem*, sheet 31. It could not be precisely established if this information transfer was possible due to our officers' corruption or the inventiveness of the Russian couriers.

2. How the troops transport was made on the railroads: in how many trains an infantry, artillery, cavalry regiment was transported.

3. How many reserve regiments were mobilized and their registration number.

4. Idem for artillery.

5. If it was possible for the Division no. 11 to be created at Dobrici and Division no. 12 at Mangalia”²⁴.

The urgency to collect military information determines Nicolaevici to return to Romania on the 25th of November 1913 (he will stay until the 23rd of December 1913) and then on the 12th of January 1914; practically, during 1914 he stays on our national territory for long periods of time, being constantly monitored by Security agents. The surveillance is carried out constantly, being registered on hundreds of report pages, each meeting, each move of the Russian citizen being supervised, to its most minute details.

One aspect becomes obvious from the surveillance of Nicolaevici, as well as the other „Russian subjects” suspected of being spies, and that is, the complex network created on Romanian territory throughout the past decades. In the capital, the Russian Consulate and the Russian Church were headquarters of these activities, for the Romanian agents mention that Nicolaevici frequently visited the Russian Consulate, and the Bailiff of this Consulate, Petre Terzici, had the mission of sending to Nicolaevici the correspondence sent by the Russian Major State from Odessa (according to a note that entered the Security’s possession).

„He almost permanently contacted many of those who were suspected by the Department for espionage, namely: Alexe Drosdov and Vorocilov from the Russian Chapel, priest Politoff from the Russian Church, merchant Teodor Godezlinski, Russian captain Anatol Troitzki, the Russian military attaché etc...”²⁵.

Security’s agents register each of his journeys, including the states of mind through which the Russian spy goes through, as follows: „mention should be made of him awaiting with nervous gestures in different parts of the capital, as well as his stationing twice in front of the Artillery school, where he seemed to have been waiting for someone.

Among meetings which take place in the street and particular places, involving women of Russian nationality, a certain Nadia could be identified, who is also under surveillance and on which information is received.”²⁶. His activity is prolific, taking part almost daily in diverse meetings which are more or less conspired.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, sheets 31-31v.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, sheet 35v.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, sheet 32.

The thoroughness with which he promotes his legal status denotes a character with experience in espionage activities, the Security having observed that he is very careful that his official cover of Russian businessman remains credible. Therefore, he makes sure that he is always in possession of some catalogues with the industrial products of several Russian companies, as well as „papers with the visa of the Romanian consulate from Odessa, according to which he is a voyaging interpreter”.

In the end, as a conclusion, the Paper suggests that „this dangerous Russian military spy” be banished from Romania through a decision taken by DPGS. However, because of the interest shown by the intelligence structures in knowing about his connections in Romania, the decision was to be postponed indefinitely. Therefore his stay is allowed, but only under careful surveillance. His meeting with the already mentioned characters continue in Bucharest, especially with the Russian captain Anatol Troitzky and the priest Politoff from the Russian church (whom he also visits at home).

The importance given by the State Security to this espionage network also derives from the order given by the DPGS Director, Iancu Panaitescu, to receive personal reports containing the information resulting from Mihail Christescu’s surveillance, the representative of the village cooperatives’ federal from Bucharest.

A very interesting aspect, known by the national intelligence structures, was the exchange of secret letters between the Russian spy and lawyer Alexandrescu from Iasi, in May 1914. The Russian soldiers from Odessa were very upset by the lack of valuable information delivered by the Romanians (these were elaborated under the supervision of the General State Security); Nicolaevici was very explicit on this aspect:” Your latest letters only contain general political information...which we cannot make use of.....What we do need is military intelligence...You have to urgently make the acquaintance of soldiers from troops established in Iasi, so that you can find out about the regiment’s lifestyle and write all about it to us.....You must provide us with all the information on the Romanian army...on the change of the army’s organization and on the formation of new units.....on the navy, cannons’ orders, clothing, guns, projectiles²⁷.

It was asked of him that this information be as detailed as possible, the Russian espionage being interested even by the possible financial offences registered at Romanian units, names of the officers who had received disciplinary penalties, incidents among officers, etc. It should be reminded that this type of „sensitive” information (focused on the officer’s daily life) lead to the recruitment of the Austrian colonel Alfred Redl in the

²⁷ *Ibidem*, sheets 97-97v.

beginning of the XX (a particular success of the Russian intelligence officers) with catastrophic aftermaths for the Austro-Hungarian monarchy during the world conflagration.

In the second letter sent during the same month, lawyer Alexandrescu receives an ultimatum from the Russian military espionage: „You communicated to us that there is nothing new with regard to the army. That is a lie, now there is talk in Romania of establishing new units, orders have been made for the navy. A new 11th division will be established and you haven't written anything about it. Very bad. If you intend to write in invisible ink, write on the new address instead of the old one: Russia – Odessa – Piskenovskaia No.19 loc. 4 Palaghee Dumitrieve Volodinoi.....If you should sent information without military content, we shall spare your services”²⁸.

It is obvious that the Russian spies disposed of functional networks in Romania, since they knew about the changes which had come up in the national military apparatus and they could not be fooled too easily. We can get an image of the relations the Russian „businessmen” in the Romanian society by tracking Vladimir Nicolaevici's acquaintances in Bucharest, which contained militaries and civilians with particular social statuses.

He is seen in the company of many Romanian citizens, on some of whom there is further information. The surveillance team reports that on the 25th of May 1914, Nicolaevici meets two Romanian citizens at Café Bristol, one of them was an artillery lieutenant, identified as Vintilă Popescu, belonging to the Pitești garrison.

The supervision of Vladimir Nicolaevici's activity in Bucharest between May and August 1914 meant an important logistical effort on the part of the institution's employees, because of the fact that the persons he interacted with, had to be, in turn, supervised.

We will take, for example, Ludvig Copici, the hairdresser and administrator of a hair salon on Calea Victoriei, who was already suspected by the General Security of carrying out espionage actions for Petersburg. His behaviour had attracted the attention of the agents because „in the morning, at 7, when he exits the courtyard he takes a few minutes to observe the street, and only then does he leave for work, then at every crossroad he stops and checks whether he is being followed....”²⁹.

Agent no. 8 from the 1st Brigade of the State Security, which had the building (where the salon was) under surveillance, reports on the 10th of July 1914 that during the previous day, around 18 o'clock, Copici's wife went out of the beauty parlor and entered the Russian Imperial Consulate on Calea Victoriei, going up the stairs „to the right side apartment, where the Consul's

²⁸ *Ibidem*, sheets 105-105v.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, sheets 166-166v.

Chancellery was, as I found out, and she remained there until 7 o'clock when her husband also went up, only to come back to the parlour fifteen minutes later.....

From the conversations I had with Mr. Costescu, a hatter who lives next to the Russian Legation, I found out by indirect and discrete questions that the Copicis were at the reception organized on the occasion of Mr. Fasanov's visit (the Russian Secretary), in June, this year. *The couple are known as devotees of the Russian Consul, often visiting him in his very apartments, not only in the Chancellery*³⁰.

Taking into account the social and diplomatic status of the Consul his friendship to a hairdresser and his wife is suspicious (even if they manage the respective location). This aspect was also suggested by the Security's agents during the monitoring. Unfortunately, the notes and reports presented in the pages of the files from the Central Historical National Archives do not shed further light on this issue.

His „work” relations also extend to the army, as he frequently contacted an artillery officer during July 1914. The officer is lieutenant Ionescu, the son of a Romanian general in the army, according to an informant of the Security. The information will be transmitted to the leadership of the army, in particular general Dumitru Iliescu, the actual leader of the Great Major State.

The meetings take place at café Boulevard, in the centre of the capital, in the evenings, where the lieutenant goes to the table which is already occupied by the Russian. After having a couple of beers, the Romanian officer would accompany him home, where he would stay for at most an hour, heading back to his house afterwards. The close supervision of the Russian citizen was not able to provide details based on which we could draw a conclusion referring to a possible delivery of the Romanian army's secret documents or information to the Czarist espionage³¹.

Where Vladimir Nicolaevici is concerned, by the Galați Security Brigade's note, from the 6th of August 1914, the DPGS board is informed that he had left the country: „.....Today, the 6th of August, 8 a.m. he left the hotel, went to the Russian Agency and embarked on the Russian ship to Odessa. He was accompanied by the Russian journalist Ilios Gorelik....Nothing suspicious could be noticed as a result of V. Nicolaevici's monitoring”³².

Although the name of the Russian spy is not found in the reports of other GSS agents, there are many Russian citizens suspected of collecting both civilian and military information, which was necessary to the Czarist military to create a realistic picture of what Romania represented at that time, especially in the perspective of our engagement in the world war.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, sheets 171-171 v.

³¹ *Ibidem*, sheets 172-198v.

³² *Ibidem*, sheet 199.

Conclusions

After being close to fulfilling their geopolitical goal of controlling the Straits³³, in 1878, Czarist Russia's politics towards Romania was constant and categorical during the next few decades; its objectives were to undermine and create, as much as possible, social and political unrest, to show „the civilized world” that the Romanian state was not viable and, consequently, did not deserve to exist inside the borders which the European powers had acknowledged.

Czarist Russia's espionage activity on Romanian territory was complex and focused on obtaining detailed knowledge concerning key political and economical aspects, as well as on the „informative control” of important political figures, organizing attempts on the lives of those who were uncomfortable for the imperial politics in the region.

A notable fact is that the secret agents' network was heavily supported by elements belonging to the strong Slav minority, which had already been established on our territory for generations. Moreover, after Romania was consolidated as a state, a large number of „Russian subjects” were registered in our country, looking for a better life.

As an example of direct intervention on the part of the Empire's representatives in the Romanian socio-political life during the latter decades of the XIXth century, we shall present the United Opposition's moment, which intended to overthrow, after violent upheaval, the liberal government lead by Ion C. Bratianu (March 1888).

The reputed journalist and politician, Constantin Bacalbasa, an eyewitness to the events, has left an eloquent testimony to this effect: „The Russians were not even worried about being discovered; the Russian legation's agents were present everywhere on the occasion of the street protests of the past few days. On the 15th of March the entire Russian legation, except the Secretary, was on Dealul Mitropoliei. The legation secretary, Lermontoff, stood so close to the fighters that he felt cartridge dust on his cheek”³⁴.

Beyond the expected confrontation between the Romanian and Czarist intelligence structures, we should take into account the existence of a certain degree of cooperation, during 1915-1916, given the public

³³ The Russian troops had reached the capital of the Ottoman Empire, it was only the categorical opposition of England and the new European power, Germany, that prevented the Czarist Empire from breaking the balance of power at a continental level.

³⁴ Constantin Bacalbaşa, *Bucureştii de altădată*, vol. III, Editura Albatros, Bucureşti, 2000, p. 124.

opinion's preference for Antanta. Subsequently, certain German-Austrian attempts to disrupt, on Romania's territory, the Serbian ammunition supply from its ally, Russia are annihilated³⁵.

Romania's entrance into the World War, in August 1916, transformed the Czarist Empire into an official ally, with whom we were supposed to have, at least officially, a close military and political cooperation. Nevertheless, this was not put into practice as it should have been, being one of the causes of the military disasters suffered by the Romanian army in the 1916 campaign. The modernization and transformation process undergone by the Romanian army in the winter of 1916/1917 materialized in a solid collaboration with the equivalent Russian intelligence structures.

The onset of the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 is followed by a period of restlessness which puts the relationships between the two allies on strain. Russia's exit from the war in December 1917 and the attempts to implement communism in Moldova, which was left under the control of the Romanian government (the winter of 1917) culminate with the breach of the diplomatic relations (January 1918) and the establishment of a very dangerous conflict for the new Romanian state, as Basarabia represented the great inter-state issue in the period between the two World Wars.

During the next few years the espionage structures of the Soviets (CEKA and later NKVD, as well as the military espionage – GRU) will try, using all the available means, to create social unrest and convulsions in Romania, which was considered an „imperialist state”. The confrontation will become a bloody and brutal one, the Secret Intelligence Service – SIS and 2nd Department of the Great Major State of the Romanian Army will stand out through their professionalism and the sacrifice spirit of the agents, civilians and militaries involved, many of whom paid with their lives for the intelligence collected from the Soviet Union. Moreover, after 1945 a heinous repression commanded by Kremlin unleashes over all of those who had handled the „communist issue” as functionaries of the intelligence structures.

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