



THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE GENERAL STAFF IN THE PERIOD 1944-1948 – A NECESSARY ELEMENT IN THE CREATION OF THE NEW “ROMANIAN PEOPLE’S ARMY”

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The change of a political regime can occur only as the result of a convergence of multiple factors. The end of World War II found Romania under Soviet military occupation. This situation, combined with the lack of interest shown by the Western powers regarding Romania’s fate, sealed the destiny of our country for nearly 50 years. The most challenging task for the Soviet occupiers, supported by opportunists who quickly emerged, was to establish a climate of public order that would make any mass uprising impossible. To this end, the communists who had seized power devised a comprehensive plan to take control of the most important institution capable of maintaining order within the state – the Romanian Army.

Keywords: *communism; Romanian Army; USSR; reform; political purges.*

Introduction

After the fall of the Antonescu regime, Romania’s political landscape underwent a radical transformation. Numerous political groups, representing various ideologies, advanced their own solutions for the reform of the state. The traditional political parties, which had gone through a process of reorganization,

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placed their hopes in the Western Allies believing they would allow the organization of free elections by means of which they could regain power. Despite the optimism expressed by their leaders, the communists were seen as having the greatest chances of taking over the main positions within the state apparatus. Their major advantage came from the direct and firm support of Soviet representatives, who had been appointed as advisers throughout Romanian state decision-making structures. With the Red Army stationed on Romanian territory, the Soviets could exert pressure on both political leaders and voters, thus enforcing a specific line of conduct. In this manner, the communists rapidly gained not only popularity but also a large number of new members (Dobre 2004, 21)¹, some of whom had prior experience in public administration. This allowed the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), later renamed the Romanian Workers' Party/PMR (Congresul Partidului Muncitoresc Român 1948)², to create the necessary conditions to move into the next phase of consolidating its political power.

The absorption of new members took place at a rapid pace, with their number increasing during 1945 from only 1,150 people before August 23, 1944, to more than 140,000 individuals (A.N.I.C. 1959, File No. 40). Among the party members, two major categories of personnel can be easily distinguished. The first and most important from the perspective of Soviet occupiers consisted of the Comintern members, trained in Moscow to be dispatched to the occupied states for the purpose of facilitating the takeover of control over the administration and the most important state institutions. The second category, commonly referred to as the “insiders”, was composed of opportunists who came both from the group of former members of the Romanian administration and from the lower strata of society, most of them being in a precarious economic circumstances. Members of the former administration possessed the necessary knowledge to enable the communists to seize control of the main state structures. One of the main objectives that could ensure a smooth transition of political power was co-opting of the Romanian Army into the circle of power that was intended to be created. The “insiders”, most of whom were opportunists, had all the necessary knowledge to help the communists take control of the key structures of the state. One of the main objectives that could ensure a smooth transition of political power was the integration of the Romanian Army into the new power structure that was being established. This important force structure

¹ Miron Constantinescu, one of the key members of the Political Bureau of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), stated that on January 1, 1946, the Romanian Communist Party had over 325,000 members registered (see A.N.I.C., fond CC al PCR – Cancelarie, file no. 37/1946, f. 3). Other estimates also point to this sudden increase in party membership. In the volume *Membrii CC ai PCR 1945–1989*, coordinated by Florica Dobre, it is noted that between October 1945 and February 1948, the number of party members grew to 1,057,428.

² Starting in February 1948, the Romanian Communist Party formed a political alliance with the Social Democratic Party under the name of the Romanian Workers' Party.



– a true bastion of stability – had successfully resisted, four years earlier, an attempt to be subordinated to another political group supported externally by a state with its own strategic interests regarding Romania’s fate. The attempt to impose loyal figures in key military leadership positions, orchestrated by leaders of the fascist movement *Legion of the Archangel Michael* (at the time under the protection of Nazi Germany), had been successfully dismantled by military officers loyal to the Romanian state (Buzatu et al 1998-1999, 185).

1. The Communist Takeover of Political Power

Beginning on November 19, 1946, when the first elections were held in Romania after the end of World War II, a new political regime was installed in the country. Through the so-called “national unity” government formed by Dr. Petru Groza, the first in a long series of political transformations took place, which ultimately led to the complete takeover of political power by the Romanian Communist Party. Although this government was officially presented as a national unity government, it was composed of representatives from the program platform of the Bloc of Democratic Parties (Scurtu 1996, 196-206), a political formation that included members from all Romanian political parties. Alongside the communists, the bloc included their allies – the Social Democrats, members of the Ploughmen’ Front, the Patriotic Union, the Hungarian Popular Union – as well as members from traditionally significant parties such as the National Peasants Party – Anton Alexandrescu wing–, and the National Liberal Party – Tătărescu wing (Țurlea 2007, 22-26).

Despite an initial agreement regarding the allocation of a different number of seats in the future parliament based on the position of each party on the bloc’s list, the organization of the elections proved to be the final blow to the credibility of Romania’s traditional parties. The group of communists trained in Moscow – soon joined by numerous opportunists – successfully rigged the elections, securing a significant number of parliamentary seats. According to the signed protocol, the seat distribution was supposed to be as follows: Social Democratic Party – 81 seats; National Liberal Party (Gh. Tătărescu) – 75 seats; Ploughmen Front – 70 seats; Romanian Communist Party – 68 seats; Patriotic Union – 26 seats; and National Peasant Party (Anton Alexandrescu) – 21 seats (Cioroianu 2005). However, the initial agreement was violated, thereby paving the way for the consolidation of a deeply anti-national political regime.

Unfortunately for Romanian democracy, in the process of reconstruction after 1944, Moscow could not tolerate any deviation and sought, through various methods, to undermine the credibility of the traditional parties and to ensure the hegemony of the Romanian Communist Party within the new political order. There are several records of negotiations held between the Romanian Communist Party



leaders and Soviet representatives in Romania, in which the former requested not only permission to create moments of internal political tensions but also significant material support to influence Romanian voters. During a conversation at the Soviet Embassy in Romania, Emil Bodnăraș told Ambassador Iakovlev that, despite all their efforts, the communists and their allies would not be able to secure more than 55–65% of the vote, adding that “we hope to obtain 55–65% of the vote by securing real votes during the election, but we need to get 90%, and this will be achieved with the help of the possibilities offered by the electoral law and a certain ‘technique’” (Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste în România 2006, 130). This testimony reveals not only the decision-making dependence of the PCR leadership on Moscow but also the deeply manipulative nature of the postwar electoral process in Romania. The elections were thus transformed into an instrument for legitimizing the communist regime, in a context where democratic structures became mere façades intended to confer a semblance of legality on Soviet domination.

These political maneuvers resulted in the complete seizure of political power by the Communist Party on November 23, 1946. Through Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the traditional parties were allocated only a symbolic number of leadership positions. For example, the National Peasant Party was given only one ministerial post – the Ministry of Religious Affairs – and two deputy secretary positions in the Ministries of Communications and National Education (Proces-verbal nr. 2 al Ședinței Biroului Politic din 23 noiembrie 1946, 498-499).

Shortly thereafter, in order to gain total control over the Romanian state, Gheorghiu-Dej accused members of these political formations of involvement in subversive activities and actions aimed at challenging public order, charges that served as a pretext for their arrest and political neutralization.

2. “The Democratization of the Army” – The Key Element in the Romanian Workers’ Party’s Full Seizure of State Power

None of these developments would have been possible without the direct support of the state’s coercive institutions. As a result, subordinating the decision-making structures within the armed forces became a primary objective of the Romanian communists. In this regard, the new political leadership of Romania declared that the army must become “an instrument of the single party”. The new Prime Minister, Dr. Petru Groza, noted that “one of the great tasks of the Romanian people and of the current government is the democratization of the army” (Groza 1973, 233), and this process was to be carried out with the support of Soviet advisers, whose main objective was to minimize the military power of the Romanian state.



All these developments had been anticipated by General Mihail Racoviță, who became the new Minister of War immediately after the arrest of General Antonescu. Realizing the danger that could arise from the army's involvement in supporting any political group, on August 30, 1944, he issued General Order No. 50, which strictly prohibited military personnel from expressing any political sympathies: "I strictly order all officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers that they are forbidden from participating in any political party activities" (Chiriac 2018, 220).

Unfortunately, in the new political context, the army – previously the sole guarantor of public order – could not remain outside the political games and the diversions orchestrated by the communists for long. Control over the army allowed the political actors who influenced its actions to safeguard the privileges they would acquire, regardless of the methods employed. This goal became the main objective of political figures, irrespective of whether their rise to power came through free elections or by acting as proxies for a foreign power. The events that followed clearly demonstrate that the Soviets sought to eliminate any sources of resistance within the upper echelons of the Romanian military leadership. In this regard, on October 6, 1944, the Soviet Command in Romania ordered the removal of General Gheorghe Mihail from his position as Chief of the General Staff after he voiced his disapproval of the measures taken to disarm the Romanian army (Duțu 1995, 56). The restructuring of the Romanian Army's leadership continued at a rapid pace, so that by March 6, 1945, General Racoviță's fears had come true. Political groups supported by Moscow began pressuring military decision-makers to fulfill their demands in creating a favorable climate for the complete takeover of power in Romania.

Contrary to the provisions issued by General Racoviță, who had forbidden military personnel from showing support for any political parties or party affiliation, the new political leadership in Bucharest held the exact opposite view. Members of the Communist Party supported the need for the political training of military personnel and openly spoke about the necessity for officers to become members of the Romanian Workers' Party (PMR), presenting this measure as an essential stage in the process of "democratizing" the armed forces and subordinating them to the new political power: "Educating officers in the democratic spirit is the first step that must be taken. In addition to their role as instructors, officers also serve as educators of the youth, and the officer of the democratic army must adopt for himself and instill in the soldiers – not only the many military virtues but also civic ones, namely the high democratic ideals" (Chiriac 2018, 226). The most important provision imposed by the new political leadership regarding the functioning of the army was the so-called "democratization movement" of the military. According to Petru Groza's vision, "one of the major tasks of the Romanian people and the current government is the democratization of the army" (Chiriac 2018, 228). Furthermore,



they proposed the mandatory establishment of party cells within military units and the creation, following the Soviet model, of the positions of political commissars. These initiatives aimed to ensure the ideological leadership of the units, thereby effectively duplicating the command structure of major military units. Additionally, military personnel had to demonstrate loyalty to the PMR rather than to the Romanian state, as they had pledged through their oath of allegiance. The first decision regarding the transformation of the army was taken on May 8, 1945, when, through General Order no. 29, the Directorate for Education, Culture, and Propaganda was established. This structure had the clearly defined role of “re-educating the army’s active personnel” in accordance with the principles of the new political leadership.

The end of the war and the imminent return of Romanian troops from the front prompted the leadership of this directorate to send a group of propagandists, called “Team 1005”, to the front in Czechoslovakia on May 11 – just three days later. Their mission was to begin the “education” of soldiers from the 1st and 4th Armies stationed there, who at that time were preparing to return to the country. In doing so, the authorities aimed to prepare the ground so that this large group of returning soldiers would not pose a threat to the party activists already installed in various administrative positions throughout the country. On the contrary, part of the plan was to have some of these soldiers join the new political system. The main targets were soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and junior officers who were willing to make compromises in terms of conduct and thereby provide the support that party members needed. Eager to prepare in advance the new generation of cadres for the people’s army, between 1945 and 1947, the communists ordered the introduction of political training courses for teachers in military high schools, military academies, training centers, and even for personnel from the Higher War School (Chiriac 2018, 228).

Between May and August 1945, following the conclusion of military operations on the Western Front³, the Allied Control Commission (in Romania’s case, decisions were made almost exclusively by Soviet representatives) ordered the disbanding of many of the large units that had been formed to participate in these operations. The General Staff was required to revise the military policy of the Romanian state, aligning it with national legislation and the recommendations of Soviet military advisors. These changes were to be implemented in accordance with Decree-Law No. 1909 (Giurcă 2012, 277) on the organization and functioning of the Ministry of War, which had been approved by King Michael I on June 15, 1945.

Subsequently, through Law No. 452 of June 15, 1946, upon the proposal of the Ministry of War, it was established that the General Staff would prioritize actions aimed at increasing operational readiness and preparedness for war. Among its assigned responsibilities, particular emphasis was placed on matters such as army

³ The major units of the Romanian army had successfully contributed to the liberation of Northwestern Transylvania, Hungary, a significant part of Czechoslovakia, and Austria.



equipment, recruitment, training, and mobilization of human resources, preparation of war plans, organization of intelligence and counterintelligence activities, drafting of general regulations, ensuring consistency among regulations issued for various branches of the armed forces, organizing military transport and communications, management of funds allocated through the state budget or credit lines, and organizing a historical service responsible for documenting the actions carried out by the Romanian army in the various campaigns it had participated in (Giurcă 2012, 277). Unfortunately, the responsibilities set for 1946 could be altered at any time based on the “advice” received from Soviet advisors.

The next stage in the politicization of the army was carried out with great haste and caution so as not to provoke unrest among military personnel. With the assistance of Emil Bodnăraș, the new head of the Communist Party’s military section, several measures were implemented, aimed at eliminating from the ranks of active officers those loyal to the monarchy and the former political leadership. Thus, on October 2, 1945, through General Order No. 113, the Ministry of War ordered the creation of the General Army Inspectorate for Education, Culture, and Propaganda (E.C.P.), which was later renamed the Army’s Higher Political Directorate (Centrul de Studii și Păstrare a Arhivelor Militare Istorice Centrale „General Radu Rosetti”). This structure, composed mainly of soldiers who had served in the divisions Tudor Vladimirescu and Horea, Cloșca și Crișan, was tasked with identifying those officers who were to be removed within all units of the Romanian army. These measures were implemented by obedient and ambitious party members. During the Central Committee Plenary of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), held between January 25 and 28, 1946, Dumitru Coliu, head of the Military Affairs Section of the Central Committee, justified the need to purge hostile elements from the ranks of the army’s active personnel, citing the potential threat they posed to the stability of the system to be implemented: “the need to isolate and neutralize the reactionary elements within the army’s ranks and then strike with a purge” (Pleșa 2006, 732).

Between 1945 and 1948, all military personnel who had participated in the campaign against the USSR, as well as those who had expressed opinions contrary to the communist political regime or were suspected of harboring anti-Soviet sentiments, were removed from the ranks of active duty. It is estimated that during this period, approximately 32,000 active members of the Romanian army were eliminated from its structure through various methods (Ștefănescu 2013, 732). The legislative framework necessary for this endeavor was implemented very quickly through Laws No. 128 and 186 of 1945, 433 of 1946, and 293 of 1947, which permitted to formulate accusations such as “anti-democratic behavior” and “connections with reactionary circles” (Ștefănescu 2013, 732). A truly dramatic situation was found among the senior officers who held leadership positions within the structures of the Royal Army. By decree issued on August 8, 1946, approximately 8,000 officers



were dismissed from their positions – 5,404 from the land forces, 1,996 from the air forces, and 200 from the navy – (Legea privind trecerea în cadrul disponibil a 40% dintre ofițeri publicată în Monitorul Oficial” 1946), many of whose service records had been filled with negative evaluations downplaying their activity, along with a significant number of soldiers who had been wounded on the front. Additionally, another 1,543 officers submitted resignation requests to avoid being dismissed based on suspicions that, through their proven or alleged behavior inferred from denunciations, they were reactionaries (Legea privind trecerea în cadrul disponibil a 40% dintre ofițeri publicată în Monitorul Oficial” 1946).

On November 5, 1946, the political leadership of Romania – at that time composed mostly of members of the Romanian Workers’ Party (PMR) – moved to the next phase of the “democratization of the army” process. Through General Ordinance No. 18, they outlined four key points that needed to be met in order to achieve the proposed objective. The authorities, installed in Bucharest with Soviet support, sought to bring the Romanian army under their control and to fundamentally transform the way it operated. They demanded that the army’s operational standards align with the concept of people’s democracy, which required the army’s solidarity with the “current democratic regime”. Additionally, they aimed to provide political and social education to all military personnel and to increase focus on “the many and the low-ranking” (Chiriac 2018, 221). The “democratization” movement of the army initiated at this time continued without interruption over the following three years, until the proclamation of the republic and the establishment of the new people’s army.

3. The Reform of the General Staff of Defense – an “Ideological Necessity”

In the hope of obtaining a favorable opinion from the United Nations (UN), on October 20, 1946, the Operations Section of the General Staff drafted a document proposing the transformation of the Romanian army into a modern force organized in accordance with the principles underlying the functioning of Western armies. According to the directives issued by the General Staff on August 10, 1945, the future Romanian army was expected to ensure the “maintenance of sufficiently strong, well-structured and, well-equipped forces capable of meeting national defense requirements and fulfilling any operational missions that may arise” (Istoria Statului Major General 1994, 537). Many experienced officers within the departments of the General Staff believed that Romania should have its own military doctrine, adapted to the national context. The head of the Operations Section actively supported the idea of drafting a doctrine based on the “armed nation concept”, which, in his view, would have allowed for the preservation of Romania’s sovereignty and independence.



He firmly rejected the notion of adopting another nation's doctrine, specifically the Soviet one, arguing that: "it would be entirely wrong to apply the old method of creating a Romanian military doctrine by copying or adapting the regulations of another army" (Istoria Statului Major General 1994, 55).

However, this transformation could only be possible with the approval of the Allied Control Commission, which in Romania was represented by the Soviets. In anticipation of the signing of the Peace Treaty with the USSR⁴, the Soviets undertook "necessary measures" to limit any potential threats that might lead to political destabilization in Romania. As early as the autumn of 1946, they ordered the restriction of the General Staff's prerogatives. On January 15, 1947, shortly before the signing of the Peace Treaty, the Chief of the General Staff drafted the document titled "Planning the Activities of the General Staff," which officially established the future organizational model of the Romanian army based on the structure and doctrine of the Red Army (Giurcă 2012, 279). An important step toward the implementation of this project was taken on March 10, 1947, when the Studies and Doctrine Section was established, with the purpose of eliminating from the Romanian Army's doctrine and regulations any "provocative" ideas that might contradict the model of organization and operation promoted by Moscow.

One of the provisions of the Peace Treaty stipulated that the Romanian state would adopt a new doctrine for the organization and functioning of the Ministry of National Defense. This was formalized through Law No. 205 of June 21, 1947, which stipulated that the General Staff would become the supreme leadership body, responsible for organizing studies, formulating concepts, and planning the organization and training of the armed forces. Regarding the determination of the scale of the new army after the reorganization was complete, several factors were taken into account: the characteristics of the national terrain, the size and specific features of the front that might need to be defended, the country's industrial potential, the army personnel's capacity to operate modern weapon systems, and last but not least, the lessons learned from participation in the war. Although these principles were sound and could have created an efficient army, all efforts made by the General Staff to maintain a higher level of preparedness met firm opposition from Soviet advisors, who advocated the disarmament and dissolution of the large Romanian units that had participated in the two military campaigns and enjoyed a superior level of training. An example of this was the disarmament of the General Staff's

⁴ On February 10, 1947, in the Clock Hall at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, Romania was forced to sign the Peace Treaty with the Allied Powers. Despite the efforts made by our country and the human sacrifices during the anti-Hitler campaign, the Romanian state was declared a defeated nation, condemned to pay an enormous war debt, to lose significant territories, and to accept a military occupation regime. The Romanian delegation—which consisted of Gheorghe Tătărescu, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Ștefan Voitec, and Dumitru Dămăceanu - was forced to accept oppressive provisions that foreshadowed the establishment of a long dictatorship. See (Agrigoroaie 2013, 100).



guard battalion (Giurcă 2012, 280), a clear demonstration that the Romanian state and army were undergoing a major crisis.

Preparing for the complete change of the political regime required the adoption of radical measures that would allow the abolition of the monarchy without encountering any resistance. In this regard, through Order of the Day No. 250 dated December 27, 1947, Army Corps General Costin Ionașcu was relieved from his position as Chief of the General Staff and replaced by Division General Septimiu Pretorian. However, Pretorian proved useful to the new regime only for a very short period. On February 1, 1948, General Pretorian fell victim to chance and political intrigues aimed at the total decapitation of the Romanian army's leadership. The official and total change of the political regime occurred on December 30, 1947, with the abdication of King Michael I, an act that was signed under the pressure of Soviet-appointed proxies leading Romania. According to the new constitution officially adopted on April 13, 1948, Romania became a People's Republic, thus sealing its fate for the following forty years. The role of the new People's Army was regulated by Law No. 114 of 1948, which explicitly stated the leading role of the Romanian Workers' Party (PMR). In accordance with the new organization of the General Staff established on April 1, 1948, the head of this structure was appointed directly by the PMR leadership. Under these circumstances, the Romanian Army and its command had to comply with the new political directives, and the transformation that followed almost entirely erased its institutional individuality.

Conclusion

The subsequent period was marked by a multitude of transformations that infiltrated the military system with political activists and opportunists, of both Romanian and foreign origin, whose sole purpose was to gain petty political and economic advantages. The army came under the direct control of the Political Directorate, a structure subordinated to the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party, which, through its political activists, carried out a large-scale transformation of the military institution, distorting the original purpose for which it was created. The new People's Army had to adopt the organizational, planning, and especially ideological model of the Soviet Army, which served as its model during the early postwar years.

A second transformation of the Romanian Army took place in the mid-1960s, following the publication of the famous "April 1964 Declaration" (Băncilă 2015, 250), and especially after the Romanian state's refusal to participate with troops in the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. At that moment, the Romanian Communist Party and, implicitly, the Romanian state distanced themselves from the policies imposed by Moscow and ordered military leaders to organize the Romanian Army



according to the principle of the “armed nation”, ready at any moment to defend the state – even against an attack from the USSR and other members of the Warsaw Pact, which Romania was a part of. The absence of any form of political affiliation, and the Romanian state’s inability to join the group of non-aligned states between the two politico-military blocs isolated Romania and, implicitly, its army – a fact that became evident by the late 1980s.

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