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# State of Siege in South Dobrogea. Action plan and instructions against attacks by Bulgarian komitadjis developed by the 9th Romanian Division command

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## Abstract

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On December 10, 1864, at the proposal of the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, was voted by the Romanian parliamentarians, the Law on Siege, a basic normative act for future regulations in the field. The first article stated that the state of siege could only be declared in the event of imminent danger to public safety and order. In the context of domestic political events that took place in 1864, regulation of the agrarian problem and electoral rights, legislative initiatives that determined the coup of May 2, 1864, the phrase safety and public order unseen in the first article of the law, it was primarily aimed at ensuring the exercise of public authority in implementing the reforms undertaken by the government led by Mihail Kogalniceanu and implicitly protecting the population and the territory. Like an arch in time, in 1926, in peacetime, after 62 years since the vote on the Siege Law of 1864, the attacks of the Bulgarian comitages threatening the population, territory, and the exercise of state authority at the southern border imposed the extension of the provisions on the state of siege and their application by the War Council of the 9th Division.

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## Keywords:

South Dobrogea; state of siege; komitadjis; 9th Romanian Division; terrorism.

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## **Considerations regarding the history of the siege state in South Dobrogea (Cadrilater) and the presence of border guards, gendarmes units, and 9th Romanian Division troops**

On August 14, 1916, after 2 years of neutrality, Romania entered World War I after the signing of the Treaty of Alliance and the Military Convention with Entente. On the same day was published Royal Decree no.2798 for the declaration of the state of siege in the 34 counties of Romania in which the jurisdiction of the civil authority on the field of safety and public order was transferred to the military authority that was exercised by the ministry of war, army or division corps and prefects of counties who were militarized and assimilated to the ranks of the military hierarchy. All crimes committed against state security were tried by military courts. On June 30, 1918, the Royal Decree no.1626 was issued, which provided for the continuation of the state of siege on the territory of Romania, implicitly in South Dobrogea (Cadrilater) and Old Dobrogea, was issued, territories occupied by the troops of the Central Powers, from 1 July 1918, under the direct coordination of the military authority.

This was the legal framework at the time of the signing of the Thessaloniki Armistice on 29 September 1918 between Bulgaria and the Allied Powers, following requests made by the Bulgarian government on 24 September 1918, whose effect was the immediate cessation of all Bulgarian military operations. According to the articles of this document, in addition to leaving the German and Austro-Hungarian troops within 4 weeks of the Bulgarian territory, allied forces had the right to temporarily occupy certain strategic points and move and station within Bulgaria, with the mission to ensure compliance with the armistice clauses and to ensure peace and public order, but this last goal was very difficult to achieve, which is why, The Interallied Command in Sofia expressly requested support from the Romanian troops, which, according to the provisions of the Royal Decree no.1626/June 30, 1918, had the obligation to maintain public order on the Romanian territory of which both the South Dobrogea (Cadrilater) was part, territory incorporated into the Romanian state on 10 August 1913 by the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest and Old Dobrogea, a province united with Romania under the Treaty of Berlin of 1878. It should be noted that the two mentioned provinces were occupied and administered by the Central Powers troops following the signing by Romania of the Peace (Treaty) in Bucharest on April 7, 1918, an act that was not promulgated by King Ferdinand I of Romania.

In this legislative context, the presence of the Romanian troops in the two provinces could generate a state of conflict in a period in which it was intended to settle any dissensions for the preparation of peace, which is why, the first armed troops reported in the two Romanian provinces were the detachments of gendarmes who joined the civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

In April 1919, General Henri Mathias Berthelot, the commander of the Danube Army, ordered the 5th Army Corps jurisdiction over South Dobrogea and Old

Dobrogea. According to the received provisions, the 5th Army Corps had the order to enforce the provisions of the Law on the state of siege, which was why 3 border guard companies were sent to South Dobrogea (Cadrilater), ordered in Silistra, Bazargic, and Turtucaia. Against the background of the withdrawal of French troops from South Dobrogea, the attacks and plundering of Bulgarian komitadjis on the Romanian population intensified, with the need for additional forces. In the first days of December 1919, the presence of the 2nd Battalion of the 23rd Romanian Infantry Regiment was reported in Silistra and the Bazargic forces of a battalion of the 33rd Romanian Infantry Regiment were reported. At the same time, gradually, the units of the 9th Romanian Division, such as those of the 35th Romanian Infantry Regiment, the 36th Romanian Infantry Regiment, and the 40th Romanian Infantry Regiment received plans for transport in the peace garrisons they occupied in 1920.

Tactically, the troops of the 9th Division occupied the area to the right of the Danube River, situated southwest between the border from Bulgaria, east of the Black Sea, and north of the old border of Dobrogea and the Danube. The mission of the division was to defend the border of South Dobrogea against the aggressions of gangs or armed detachments, to cover the mobilization and concentration of the 5th Army Corps in order to prevent an organized attack with strong means, preventing Bulgarian propaganda and the penetration of propaganda agents and maintaining public order (Romanian National Military Archives, General Staff Fund, 429).

The troops of the 9th Division carried out patrol missions behind the border to break any type of connection between Bulgarians on both sides of the border and to intervene in support of the Romanian border guards when the operative situation imposed it (Romanian National Military Archives, General Staff Fund, 397).

On 14 January 1920, it was published in „Monitorul Oficial” no. 212, Royal Decree no. 113/13 January 1920 ordering the suspension of the state of siege, the censorship of the press and any other publications in the old kingdom except Dobrogea (Romanian National Military Archives, Grand Staff Fund, 136). Shortly after, in March 1920, the 5th Army Corps specified by „Order no.1 regarding the maintenance of the state of siege in Dobrogea”, as within 10 days of its publication, all those who would have weapons and for whom they did not have the special permit to carry weapons issued by the army corps, to hand them over to the urban communes at the Garrison Command, and in the rural ones at the gendarmes’ stations that released receipts from a specific notebook drawn up for each weapon. At the same time, he ordered the search of the inhabitants and the gathering of weapons from those who, after the fulfilment of the term stipulated by the ordinance, asked for a permit for carrying a gun (Romanian National Military Archives, the Grand Staff Fund, 135)

On 31 March 1921 it was published in the Official Gazette no. 286, the Royal Decree no. 853/March 14, 1921, which provided for the application of the state of siege on the 30 km area, with the possibility of extending up to 50 km along the borders of the country from the junction point of the border of Yugoslavia with the

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Hungarian border to the White Fortress, following the Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Polish, Russian border, then the border of the South Dobrogea (Cadrilater), being the establishment of new military areas administered by the military authorities ([Pantelimonescu 1939, 39](#)).

On May 17, 1922, it was published in the Official Gazette no. 33, Royal Decree no. 2162 whereby the state of siege in the South Dobrogea (Cadrilater) was reduced to an area of 15 kilometres bounded by an imaginary line south of Turtucaia, Bazargic and Balchik along the border with Bulgaria ([Pantelimonescu 1939, 41](#)).

On 24 August 1926, the Council of Ministers Journal no. 2807 of 24 August 1926 was issued, referring to the extension of the state of siege in the South Dobrogea (Cadrilater), according to which the crimes committed on the demarcation line of the area between the towns of Carvan – Cavarna were tried by the War Council of the 9th Division. Therefore, on September 9, 1926, the division commander issued Ordinance no.1, which stipulated the offences and offences that were part of the military authority according to the articles of the Criminal Code, Law on the organization of South Dobrogea and the Law on the suppression of new crimes against public silence. In order to fulfil the mission received, the division command developed the action plan for fighting the Bulgarian comitajis, dissidence and nationalization of the South Dobrogea (Cadrilater) for 1926.

### **Instructions and Action Plan for guarding the border of Dobrogea against attacks of komitadjis**

According to these instructions, the troops of the border guards, the gendarmes, and those of the 9th Division had as mission the surveillance and guarding of the Dobrogea border against the attacks of the komitadjis under the direct coordination of the 9th Division command. The action plan provided for two assumptions and implicitly two border guard devices depending on the magnitude of the events that could take place. The first phase provided for the execution of customs guard missions against komitadjis and the second phase, for, the possibility of confronting strong and well-organized attacks of Bulgarian komitadjis in the context of bilateral political tensions ([Romanian National Military Archives, General Staff Fund, 137](#)).

For the first hypothesis or phase, the security measures provided for the situation in which the border guards needed support, with units from the Bazargic and Silistra infantry regiments being provided for intervention. These forces were constantly in a state of alert to be able to respond to a request within 6 hours ([Romanian National Military Archives, General Staff Fund](#)).

For the second hypothesis, phase or device, numerous and well-organized attacks of Bulgarian komitadjis, the action plan provided for the establishment of strong detachments made up of 2 or 3 weapons in order to be able to capture or reject

over the border the komitadjis gangs that managed to penetrate the Romanian territory detachments shall be made according to the action plan drawn up by the commander of the respective division. The transition to device no. 2 was ordered by the Ministry of War, the General Staff, and the Commander of the 2nd Army Corps which, however, was allowed to switch to this device and on its own initiative of the local command when the situation imposed it, in which case the measures ordered to the General Staff were immediately reported ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), The Grand Staff Fund).

In order to carry out the action plan in good condition, the troops of border guards and gendarmes were operatively subordinated to the command of the areas according to the provisions of the 9th Division Command, which obligation to specify in the action plan to be imposed based on events, mission, sector of each unit, the means made available and the directives for subordinated units and training exercises. Based on this plan, the subordinated units also drew up a detailed action plan in the various assumptions. For urgent cases and so that the intervention of the troops from the front line, the ones in the state of alarm deployed near the border, is not late, it could be intervened at the direct request of the border guards with the express order that this type of situation be immediately reported to the higher authorities. For good communication, telephone connections were made between the various cover forces and the commandments ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), General Staff Fund).

The border guards' troops through the border guard provisions had the mission to stop individual crossings or small groups of komitadjis. In case groups/bands of komitadjis were difficult to capture, the border guards asked for support from the Silistra and Bazargic alarm battalions, during which time the two groups of forces assembled were carrying out the orders of the Alarm Battalion Command, which appreciated the situation and had the means and plan of action to capture, destroy or reject the komitadjis gangs. As long as the gangs were not made up of regular troops, their goal was to spread panic, loot, and propaganda, therefore, it is recommended to participate in the attack of limited forces in order to attract komitadjis in certain directions from where the thick of the detachment can more easily manoeuvre and capture them by enveloping. The opening of fire from great distances was not recommended because, besides alerting komitadjis about the presence of Romanian troops, it allowed them to change direction. If the komitadjis were heading to a locality, the instructions provided for the occupation of the liziers and the barricade near them with few forces, in order to allow the thick of the detachment to envelop the flanks and capture them. If the komitadjis managed to enter a locality, it is recommended to control the exits with a minimum of armed forces with automatic weapons to allow the bulk of the troops to capture them ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), The Grand Staff Fund).

Concerning the collection and processing of information, the instructions provided for the organization of the intelligence service by the 9th Division Command to

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be able to move easily and effectively to the execution of the action plan and the transition from one device to another depending on the situation that was imposed. The execution of the action plans also depended on the readiness of the commanders and the forces involved, for which reason, the units that guarded the Dobrogea border needed to become familiar with the land and the manoeuvres that were to be executed in concrete cases. In the composition of the action plan, the support that the civilian population could give where it can certainly count on its loyalty was also envisaged. Based on these instructions, the 9th Division Command drew up an action plan that was approved by the 2nd Army Corps, a copy being submitted to the General Staff ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), The Grand Staff Fund).

According to this Action Plan, komitadji was defined as the one who carried a gun and used it. The one who was disarmed or the one who submitted to the summons had the right to legal treatment and protection. For the execution of the plan, the division command did not intend to act in the siege area under the conditions of military occupation or military dictatorships that would remove the civil administration and prevent the smooth running of social and economic relations, on the contrary, desiring the most discreet presence of the military forces as possible, he proposed an open and sincere collaboration with the administrative civil institutions, because they together with the gendarmes, border guards, and the loyal population, to develop an effective defence and reaction system against the attacks and incursions of Bulgarian komitadjis in the Romanian territory ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), Grand Staff Fund).

Therefore, the Action Plan provided, in addition to warning that excesses of zeal were not tolerated and recommended to apply it with severity but with justice and legality, against komitadjis attacks a fixed and mobile defence, and against Bulgarian dissidence, the organization, and operation of a select intelligence and counterintelligence service. The fixed defence envisaged a border/guard zone prohibition zone, an organized resistance system/villages/endowed with a fixed and mobile garrison, and, a complex system of observations and information and a sophisticated system of links and transmissions. The mobile defence consisted of footbridges and horseback riding ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), Grand Staff Fund).

According to the Action Plan, the perimeter of the state of siege was divided into the operative area under strict military command, where the border guards whose record was komitadjis death and the arrest of criminals, and the cooperative area, acted, under mixed command, in which all the institutions involved in the defence strategy had the mission of ensuring public order ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), General Staff Fund).

In the operative area of the border guards, the device of the troops was positioned in depth about 8-10 kilometres with 4 echelons, with a considerable density in

vulnerable regions and previously confirmed observers and border guards, indoor battle stations, subsector reserves, mobile units/cavalry/support and control. In the amplitude of the sectors, it was minimal and variable depending on the configuration of the land, and in Caliacra it was directly proportional to the regions where the komitadjis were acting. The repainted forces in this area consisted of 3 border guards, 23 infantry groups, 12 infantry platoons, 2 red squadrons and 2 telegraph sections. The mission received by these troops had 3 dimensions, namely military – territory security, fiscal - according to the instructions of the Ministry of Finance, and technical and administrative - according to the orders and directives of the Border Guard Corps. In order to better carry out the missions received, the commander of the guard battalion had to draw up the plan of organizing the command, of the connections and transmissions, of the information and observations, of the mission and the record as well as the reports and reports ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), Grand Staff Fund).

Regarding the cooperative zone, the gendarmes and administration area or the internal defence system, the Action Plan had special measures such as knowledge of village psychology, their administrative-military organization, nominal identification/identity cards with photos of the male part, classification of the population of the villages into reliable, doubtful or bad locals. The former were treated as allies, the wicked in pursuit and the others were kept under observation by the gendarmes who had to understand a good knowledge of the villages was a point won against the komitadjis. It was known by the 9th Division command that Bulgarian villages were for intelligence and espionage offices, supply centres and hosting sites. Therefore, the gendarmes had to take measures on interception of links; prohibition of supply and exclusion of the possibility of hosting. In order to achieve these objectives, the administrative authority of the localities entering the siege zone was preserved, and groups of villages/relating to distances, number of inhabitants, geographical situation and spirit of population were organized. Each group of villages had a military commander and each had a joint command/military and the respective praetor. Each locality had a force made up of gendarmes - effectively between 5-7 people, a citizen guard/relating to the number of villages/ alarm units and night caroules with the mission to defend the respective localities. The mobile formation, whose number was a maximum of 5 riders, was formed daily from the fixed garrison and had village horses/made available by the commune. The mission of this mobile force was to research the space between villages and the ways of communication. The core of the garrison is ad hoc represented by the rural gendarmes' patrols or horsemen, and the village group command had a small garrison/gendarmes and citizens on horseback and foot, and the Plaza Commands had a reserve of rural gendarmes, an information service and a service to supply units residing on the territory of the plate ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), The Grand Staff Fund).

Regarding the division of the siege area into sectors that were the responsibility of the regiments of the 9th Division, the Action Plan included 2 sectors, namely the

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Mircea Sector, where the 38th Romanian Infantry Regiment and the Vlad Sector were operating, the 40th Romanian Infantry Regiment. The mixed command of the sectors is exercised in depth by the regiment commanders in close cooperation with prefects. The 9th Division went into cover with 16 platoons from the 38th Romanian Infantry Regiment and the 40th Romanian Infantry Regiment (8 each regiment). The herds of a platoon, only from the 1925 contingent, selected and perfectly framed, had a commander with 2 helpers, 25 troop soldiers of which 18 were combatants and 7 for patrols, observers and information. The armament consisted of 1 machine gun, 2 machine guns with servants, the rifles from the endowment of the 10 riflemen and the ammunition provided 10 grenades, 5 missiles, 100 weapon cartridges, 500 machine guns, and 250 Machine guns ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), Grand Staff Fund).

As regards the means of communication and liaison, the Action Plan provided for one truck and telegraph station per sector. The trucks were distributed for the service use of the sector commanders and the transport of operative troops. On request and under certain conditions they were put into use by the commander of the guard battalion in the sector of each regiment ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), Grand Staff Fund).

On detached posts and patrols at points too isolated and configurations too wild or wooded, it was stipulated that those in the border guard's area were decided by the commander of the border battalion in the interior area by the commanders of the sectors in collaboration and according to the indications of the mixed platbands. The patrols were ordered by the local chiefs, each in his command, by field, circumstances and daily information ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), Grand Staff Fund).

The intelligence service consisting of observers and informers was organized in each sector, subsector, district grouping, unit and weapon and was run exclusively by the respective command after a well-thought-out plan. In the border guard's area were organized 4 centres and an office, established by the commander of the battalion of border guards. In the inner area, there were centres for each net. In the cavalry area – the centre for each squadron. To the sectors of the regiment – existing information offices. As regards reporting and reporting hours, it was stipulated that in sectors and subsectors, it should be carried out according to the provisions of the respective heads, with Division 9 from sectors by phone every day at 18 o'clock, newsletters, reports or reports every Sunday with weekly events; for urgent cases and by any means ([Romanian National Military Archives](#), Grand Staff Fund).

As regards the supply of the troops, it was envisaged that it would be done with respect for the rights of the person and of the person, and the military units were not allowed to appeal to the local resources in the event of impossibilities of securing raw materials by direct source. It was expressly stipulated, under severe sanctions,



that for no reason was the personal supply or supply of the band directly from the inhabitants, but only through the local administration. Payment was made by the administration by issuing – vouchers signed exclusively by the commanders of the units, whose name was communicated in advance to the prefectures. The receipts were paid every 15 or 30 days with the legal forms certified by the administrative authorities. The commanders of the units sent advance Payment Reministration tables of monthly necessities with the indication of the lifting days. The border guards were supplied according to the administrative provisions of the Corps but remained under the same sanctions if they committed violations of rights or violated the administrative provisions of the Command (Romanian National Military Archives, General Staff Fund).

The action plan also had final provisions requiring detainees to be accompanied by a protective detachment. If there were more arrested, they were tied to each other and if the detainees tried to flee, it was forbidden to fire on them if they were not tried and convicted.

Although the action plan looked perfect on paper, in the field the reality was different. Romanian border guards and authorities were attacked by komitadjis, with daily reports of looting, robberies, injuries or killing of Romanian soldiers and gendarmes. However, the conception of the commander of the 9th Division, General Ioan Vladescu, regarding the rejection of the terrorist attacks of the Bulgarian komitadjis, was revolutionary, given that the military doctrine of 1926 did not provide for characteristic measures against asymmetric actions.

## Conclusion

The establishment of a state of siege in South Dobrogea in 1926 was an exceptional measure ordered as a result of the attacks of Bulgarian komitadjis threatening the safety of the Romanian state. Against the background of the revisionist policy of the Bulgarian government which maintained a tense state on the border with Romania by supporting terrorist actions of komitadjis, political and military decision-makers in Bucharest, Romania, loyal to the principles of the Treaties concluded at the end of World War I, they managed the conflicting state on the southern border in a less addressed manner in the historiography of asymmetric conflicts. By investing military authority and by ordering measures, the commanders of the units arranged in the residence garrisons of South Dobrogea (Cadrilater), wrote a less-known page of military history. This article is a tribute to the gendarmes, the infantry troops and the Romanian civil authorities who contributed to promoting the values of the European principles assumed by Romania in the XX century.

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