

**POWER STRUCTURES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS.  
THE GENDARMERIE IN BUKOVINA BETWEEN 1938 AND 1949<sup>1</sup>**

Among the important functions of the contemporary state are those related to the assurance of public order, control and prevention of antisocial phenomena, and the safeguard of rights and freedoms of the individuals. The state is the only institution in the international society that has the legitimate right to appeal to force, to hold, control and coordinate instruments / power structures in order to the support its functions. A special role among the democratic institutions meant to help ensure law and order is held by the gendarmerie. With a centuries-old tradition in Western Europe, with an experience of over a century in Romania, the gendarmerie – as contemporary state organism – develops not only nationally, through better regulation and normative laws and experience in exercising duties, but also internationally, through cooperation with similar bodies in other countries of the world and by participating in multinational organizations, such as the European Gendarmerie Force, to which it belongs with full rights since 2009, and the Romanian Gendarmerie.

However, at different times and under different regimes, the gendarmerie has not always been put to serve the interests of society, the nation, but – particularly during authoritarian or totalitarian political systems – to watch and to act in order to impose the will of rulers, including through repression, to protect and maintain social order in the face of the attempts of population to overthrow injustice, to eliminate arbitrariness and establish the rule of law and people's control over the authorities. Thus, we can not separate the evolution of an institution from the history of the society it was, or still is, part of, with all its positive and negative forms.

The elaboration of a study focused on the analysis of a turbulent period of time in the evolution of the Romanian Gendarmerie, with a special focus on the activities carried out in a region located at the north-eastern borders of the country - administrative borders and political system both in a continuous metamorphosis, with all the inherent implications of the fluctuations in domestic policy under the impact of the international context, subject to constant external pressure from the Soviets and undermined by subversive actions of the Bolshevik supporters and of the nationalists of various ethno-political orientations, is, therefore, a complex attempt that must be carried out on a minefield of conflicting information and interpretations not always

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<sup>1</sup> Eugen Șalar, *Organizarea și activitățile Jandarmeriei în Bucovina în perioada 1938 – 1949*, Suceava, Editura Lidana, 2013, 668 p.

grounded, but also, simultaneously covered in layers of documents, memoirs and studies that make this an epic time-consuming labor.

Given the role of the Gendarmerie in Romanian contemporary society, its place in the process of strengthening the rule of law and also the need to clarify how the Gendarmerie acted and reacted during a none too favorable decade for national consolidation and creativity, the study prepared by Eugen Șalar is up-to-date and relevant to the historical knowledge. The subject in the center of the author's analysis exhibits particular interest in deciphering attitudes of the decision-makers and performers during troubled situations by highlighting some reactions that place them within or outside the borders of legality, by providing to the interested the experience of earlier generations.

The first chronological limit of his research is 1938, when King Charles II has annulled the democratic constitutional regime and established an authoritarian regime; the second one marks the dissolution of the gendarmerie by the authorities of the new totalitarian state.

The paper is based on the author's doctoral thesis and numerous documentary sources identified in the National Archives of Romania, the Romanian Military Archives, Central Archives of the Romanian Intelligence Service, Suceava County National Archives Botosani County National Archives, the State Archives in the Chernivtsi region (Ukraine) as well as in various volumes of documents, media, official bulletins, memoirs of contemporaries etc.

Following the logic of academic discourse, Eugen Șalar establishes the chronological limits in *The Introduction*, motivates his choice, presents the sources used, mentions researchers who directly or indirectly covered different issues also analyzed in this review, explains the architecture of his endeavor and highlights the ideas later discussed in the four chapters of his work. Unfortunately, this chapter lacks critical perspective on the achievements of predecessors and the aspects unattended by contemporary historiography, which would have better emphasized the author's contribution to a better understanding of the past.

Chapter I is a picture of Bukovina gendarmerie during the regime of Carol II, preceded by a history of the Romanian gendarmerie in the Romanian principalities, in the Austrian Bukovina and after the Great Union. Relevant to mention are the author's remarks on the threats and risk factors that occurred during the administration of Carol which offer a view of the 1938-1940 background that the gendarmerie had to face. Coherent, logical and detailed, the study presents the law changes, the functions and powers of gendarmerie that occurred after the new undemocratic legislation had been enforced, the administrative-territorial reorganization of the country's provinces and its implications on the national and regional structures of the gendarmerie.

Based on the data collected in various archives and using specialized literature, the author analyzes the legal actions and those that exceeded the legal framework undertaken by bodies of the Bukovina gendarmerie against the far left, the far right, the religious sects, the Jews, and also presenting the routine activities carried out by the gendarmerie troops. An interesting chapter in the history of the gendarmerie in the north part of the country is the one that refers to the organization of the process of

reception, supervision and management of the flow of military and civilian Polish refugees in the fall of 1939, when the collaboration between the local administrations, the military and police authorities and population created favorable conditions that allowed the transit of thousands of Poles who did not wish to remain in the territories occupied by the Germans and the Soviets. The narrow outlook of the political factor caused the dramatic evacuation of Romanian territories annexed by the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1940, when the gendarmerie had to simultaneously ensure order and withdraw to the rapid advance of the Red Army, which resulted in casualties on the part of Bukovina gendarmerie, with numerous attacks against its honor and integrity, both from the Soviet military, as well as from the communists and their partisans among the locals.

The second chapter analyzes the process of adapting to the new political (military and legionary regime) and geopolitical (territorial losses in the summer of 1940) context. Complex relationships between Ion Antonescu and the legionnaires influenced the organization and good functioning of the Romanian Gendarmerie which thus had to manage the controversial issue of the legionary police as the Legion attempted to force the Gendarmerie to give up competent personnel and hire instead people from the supporters of the far right. From September 1940 to January 1941, as indications of the author show, was a confusing time for the gendarmerie, as it had to simultaneously cooperate with the legionnaires and combat their illegalities, accept Legionary ideology and remain outside the political propaganda. Meanwhile, the events arising in Europe made the work of law enforcement increasingly difficult and complex near the USSR borders. Interesting information here refers to the Legionary rebellion in Bukovina and Gendarmerie actions against the legionnaires, and the reinstatement of 'normality' after the removal of the legionnaires from the government.

The third and most extensive chapter approaches the evolution of Bukovina gendarmerie during the war against the Soviet Union (June 1941 - August 1944). In order to outline the context, Eugen Șalar highlights the Ukrainian irredentist activity in Bukovina (the author's statement on page 205 that the Ukrainian nationalist movement in northern Bukovina appeared in 1921 must be corrected. In fact, this movement appeared in the 1870s-1880s). The author underlines the attempts and terrorist acts of Soviet paratroopers, the undisguised horthyst claims to acquire new Romanian territories, and also the complex relationship between the German minority in Bukovina and the Third Reich. From the point of view of logical and chronological organization of information on the destiny of the Romanian gendarmes took prisoners in June 1940 or arrested later by the Soviets, this part should have been included in the second chapter.

The participation of gendarmerie troops in replacing Soviet administration and the restoration of the Romanian gendarmerie and administration in the territories liberated in 1941 are extensively approached. The new regulations on the functions and duties of the gendarmerie in the context of Romania's participation in the anti-Soviet war, the reorganization of the gendarmerie by means of a clearer delimitation of responsibilities, and the involvement in social activities have not been left out of

the pertinent analysis by the PHD student. The study also addressed issues related to the status and disciplinary practice, the training forms, the organization of the gendarmerie formations etc.

Given the status of orthodoxy as state religion, the gendarmerie had the mission to oppose the activities of the numerous religious sects from Bukovina in the decades before the World War II. Yet the most difficult missions were related to supervising and annihilating the activity of extremist political movements (communist and legionary). However, from the point of view of the human drama, mention should be made on the involvement of the gendarmerie in executing the orders to deport the Jews and gypsies from Bukovina. Even though they were assigned orders, it is clear that some responsibilities involved special efforts and, often, huge toils in persuading the inhabitants to comply with the law under the current state of belligerence. Forced, for the second time, to evacuate northern Bukovina, the gendarmerie – with all its unexplainable and justifiable excesses – was a factor of relative order and stability in the territories liberated from the Soviet domination.

The evolution and dissolution of the gendarmerie in the early postwar years, marked by the communist regime brought by Soviet tanks, are the main subjects of the fourth chapter. The author discusses the international and domestic context that led to the overthrow of Antonescu's regime, and approaches, based on documents and testimonies of contemporaries, the seized control of gendarmerie by the communists, who removed people resisting politicization and Sovietization by employing faithful supporters and resorting to ideological perversion etc. The new social and political framework led to reorganizing the gendarmerie by redefining its duties and restricting its powers; it allowed the government to use this weapon to impose a totalitarian system, which all culminated in the dissolution of the gendarmerie and the restructure of law enforcement bodies based on Soviet model. To highlight revitalization of tradition through the reinstatement of gendarmerie after the fall of the communism, the author makes a survey of all security troops that replaced the gendarmerie troops in 1949, and later reinstated in 1990.

The synthetic conclusions, too succinct for such a large amount of information brought together in the study, and the numerous interpretations suggested by the author, are complemented by several dozen annexes, including documents, charts, sketches, drawings, photographs extremely useful for understanding the subject under investigation.

The volume prepared by Eugene Șalar is a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the past historical province of Bukovina and an important piece in the architecture of studies dedicated to power structures of modern Romania, providing readers and practitioners a clear, documented and fairly objective view on a controversial historical period.

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