

LANDMARKS ON THE SUPPLY SITUATION OF THE ROMANIAN ARMY WITH QUIPMENT FROM ABROAD DURING 1917

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Abstract: The present study is primarily based on documents in the French military and diplomatic archives. We attempted at following the evolution of the Romanian army supply during 1917, specifically in the first months from Romania's entering the World War. Nonetheless, the information in the archives regarding this stage of Romania's participation is somewhat contradictory. The reason is, though sometimes the supply was satisfactory, there were times when the allies did not follow the minimum quota of 300 tones of war materials per day, as the Military Convention in 4/17 August 1916 stipulated. The Romanian army was entitled to receive weapons and ammunition from more countries like, for example, France, England, United States, Portugal, Spain, Brazil and even Japan.

Unfortunately, after the Russian revolution on 25 October / 7 November and the concluding of the truce with the Central Powers, in December at Brest Litovsk, the new order in Petrograd decided to put an end to any delivery intended for Romania. Thus, the Romanian kingdom found impossible to fight the Central Powers.

Keywords: France, Russia, war materials, Arkhangelsk, Vasile Rudeanu, general Henri-Mathias Berthelot, Paul Painlevé.

Preliminaries

The possibility encouraged us in our endeavour to offer new details and data on a topic less discussed in the Romanian historiography¹ regarding the

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¹ Regarding the works, which, to a greater or less extent, on Romania's supply with war materials, we can mention some memorialistic ones, such as : Vasile Rudeanu, *Memorii din timp de pace și război*, Editura Militară, București, 1989, ediție îngrijită de Dumitru Preda; René Chambe, *Route sans horizon*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1981; Ferdinand Foch, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre 1914-1918*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1931; Joseph Joffre, *Mémoires (1910 – 1917)*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1932, Victor Pétin, *Le drame roumain*, Payot, Paris, 1932. Then, we mention especially the following works, which deeply analyze the matter Dumitru Preda, „1916 - colonelului Rudeanu's mission in Paris (equipping the Romanian army with ammunition and war material)”, in *Magazin istoric*, 1983, 17, nr. 8-9; Gheorghe Niculescu, „Contribuția misiunii militare franceze la asigurarea dotării și aprovizionării armatei române (1916-1917)”, in *Omagiu istoricului Florin Constantiniu*, Focșani, 2003; Eugen Ichim, „Armament francez pentru România”, in *Revista de istorie militară*, 1992, nr. 2; Ion Foșeneanu, „Une mission militaire française en Roumanie [1916-1918]”, in *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, 1967, 6, nr. 3; Viorel Cărămizaru, „Instrucțiuni referitoare la recepționarea și repartiția materialelor ruse, aflate în România, în timpul primului război mondial”, in *Argessis*,

present research, although the subject matter remains open for other new and numerous investigations.

Interestingly, Romania constantly postponed entering the World War from late 1914 until August 1916. During all this time, it was the subject of systematic diplomatic pressures both Entente and the Central Powers. Nonetheless, there were more reasons which prevented the Bucharest government, led by Ion I. C. Brătianu to adopt Romania's military intervention on one of the belligerent sides. The officialities inclined towards Entente, because the countries of the convention promised the Unification of the Romanian Kingdom with the provinces in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, inhabited mainly by Romanians, i.e., Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina.

One of the main reasons, which prevented Romania to enter the war along the Triple Entente and thus becoming one of the belligerents was the inadequate arming of the Romanian troops. Therefore, the Romanian army was inferior to the Austrian-Hungarian and especially German armies from this point of view. The lack of performant weapons and ammunitions made rightly the belligerent attitude of Romania a true adventure. The risks would have been immense if it had entered the war as unprepared as it was. An uneven fight with the enemies would have been extremely dangerous for Romania as a state.

In these given objective circumstances, Romania's supply of modern materials was one of the *sine qua non* conditions for participation in the war. In view of the issues highlighted, the responsible decision-makers refrained for about two years from an action rightly considered hasty and ill-considered. On meetings with French, Russian and British diplomats, the President of the Council of Ministers, Ion I.C. Brătianu, systematically called for an efficient supply of

2002, 11; Cezar Ardeleanu, „Activitatea misiunii militare franceze de aviație în România în perioada 1916-1917”, in *Studii și materiale de muzeografie și istorie militară*, 1980, 13; Glenn E. Torrey, „Russia, Romania and France: The Reorganisation of The Romanian Front 1916-1917”, in *Revue Roumaine Histoire*, 1992, 31, nr. 1-2. Also, some of the data include general or special works, as it is the case of Ion Bulei, *1916-zile de vară. Reportaj istoric despre intrarea României în primul război mondial*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1978; *** *General Henri Berthelot and Romania. Mémoires et correspondance 1916-1919*, Edited by Glenn E. Torrey, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987; Constantin Kirilescu, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României (1916-1918)*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1989; Idem, *Preludiile diplomatice ale războiului de reîntregire*, Imprimeria Centrală, București, 1940; Albert Pingaud, *Histoire diplomatique de la France pendant la Grande Guerre*, Editions „Alsatia”, Paris; Dumitru Preda, *România și Antanta. Avatarurile unei mici puteri într-un război de coaliție 1916-1917*, Institutul European, Iași, 1998; D. Preda et al (coord.), *România în timpul primului război mondial. Mărturii documentare*, Editura Militară, București, 1996. Similarly, we find information regarding Romania's supply with weapons and war materials in Hadrian Gorun, „Demersuri ale statului român în direcția aprovizionării cu materiale de război (1915)”, in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu”* din Cluj-Napoca, Series Historica, XLVI, 2007. See Hadrian Gorun, *Evoluția aprovizionării armatei române cu materiale de război în cursul anului 1917. Mărturii documentare franceze*, in vol. *În amintirea unui istoric român. Nicolae Ciachir*, coord. Nicoleta Ciachir, Sorin Marcel Colesniuc, Editura Etnologică, București, 2016. We have reviewed only a part of the bibliography related to the issue at hand, but as the title of this article suggests, the research is mostly based on archival sources.

supplies to the Romanian army, enabling it to reveal its competitiveness. Romania's diplomatic missions abroad also insisted on achieving the same goal.

Article IV of the Military Convention, signed by Romania with the Entente on 4/17 August 1916, mentioned the obligation assumed by the Allies to supply Romania with munitions and war material. Their delivery was to be as regular as possible, i.e. a minimum of 300 tonnes per day². Romania's entry into the war on the side of the Quadruple Entente on 15/28 August 1916 was both the result of extensive diplomatic activity and of some progress in military supplies to Romania.

However, even if immediately after the accession to Entente and the military intervention, it seemed that the Romanian army was well equipped - easily achieving some successes - the subsequent evolution of events would prove the contrary. The defeats suffered are an undeniable indication of the precariousness of the war materials.

During the 1916 campaign, there were heavy and painful losses in men and material. Some authors blame the failures of 1916 on the fact that some of the equipment was old-fashioned, the aircraft arriving during 1915 from France being modelled on those of 1914³. These aircraft were underperforming compared to the aircraft that would arrive later, towards the end of 1916. The relatively late modernisation of Romanian aviation placed it in a position of marked inferiority to the Central Powers' aviation.

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The efforts at the end of 1916, aimed at improving the Romanian army's equipment, continued, and increased at the beginning of the following year. Romania was seeking to acquire high-performance armaments, and France was often willing to accept its supply proposals. In January 1917, orders were given for 1000 machine guns to be shipped to Romania. A further 500 rifles, which were not yet delivered, would be shipped within 8 days⁴. In fact, among the states of the

² D. Preda, *România și Antanta...*, p. 34. We find the text of the Triple Entente in more works, of which we can mention Vasile Vesa, *România și Franța la începutul secolului al XX-lea*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1975; Eliza Campus, *Din politica externă a României (1913 – 1947)*, Editura Politică, București, 1980; I.G. Duca, *Memorii*, Editura Machiaveli, București, 1994; Glenn E. Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies*, Center for Romanian Studies, Iași, Oxford, Portland, 1999. The articles of the Military Convention are reproduced in full in *1918 la români. Desăvârșirea unității național-statale a poporului român*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1983. Documents of the French diplomatic archives also deal with the Military Convention and its content.

³ C. Ardeleanu, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁴ Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre (thereinafter, S.H.A.T.), Ministère de l'Armement, Carton 10N100, telegram nr. 4219, January 1917.

Alliance, the French Republic has often shown the greatest solicitude towards Romania's wishes and needs.

On 7 January 1917, General Henri-Mathias Berthelot, commander of the French military mission in Romania, had a discussion with Colonel Vasile Rudeanu, who headed the Romanian Commission for the supply of war materials from abroad. Berthelot stated that it was in Romania's interest that all orders for war material should be presented to him for examination with the Romanian General Staff and then forwarded to Paris⁵.

It is worth mentioning the Romanian efforts to supply artillery materials in Portugal. From a telegram from the French Minister in Lisbon, we learn that Vasile Rudeanu made efforts to purchase 12,000 Belgian type howitzers. The French plenipotentiary in the Portuguese capital oversaw sending the shells to Le Havre on the ship *Prince Charles de Belgique*⁶. The Romanian commissions were then to deal only with packing, shipping and transporting the shells by land and water to Arkhangelsk. The Russian port of Arkhangelsk served as one of the most important transit points for war materials and munitions intended for Romania, where a special commission oversaw their management. Obviously, the pace of supplies was also strongly influenced by the course of military operations. For all other supplies requested by the Romanian Ministry of War, the duties of the missions in Paris, London, Switzerland, and the United States remained as previously established⁷.

A vital issue was the transport of arms and ammunition for the Romanian army. Thus, the problem of the transit of Romanian material through Russian territory was studied by a tripartite Russian-French-Romanian commission, which ordered that material unloaded in Russian ports should be stored at Poltava, Karlov and Kremenciug for artillery; at Kourk, Poltava, Elizabetgrad and Odessa for engineers; at Kremenciug and Darmitza for quartermasters and at Bryansk for air force⁸. There were also war material depots in Vologda, Petrograd and Jaroslav. It was envisaged that all expenses arising from the shipment and storage of materials for the Romanian cabinet would be regulated by an agreement between the Russian and Romanian governments. The Romanian Legation in Petrograd was the only body authorised by the Romanian government and recognised by the Tsarist government to discuss with the latter all aspects of Romanian war material arriving in Russia. The Romanian legation, headed by Constantin Diamandi, had the additional task of settling any disputes that might arise between the parties⁹. In the common interest, the Imperial Russian Government will treat orders and supplies

⁵ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères Français (thereinafter, A.M.A.E.fr.), Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 363, f. 139-140.

⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 141.

⁷ S.H.A.T., Ministère de l'Armement, Carton 10N100, telegram nr. 9847, in 23 January 1917.

⁸ A.M.A.E. fr., Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 363, f. 160; S.H.A.T., Cabinet du Ministre, Carton 5N200, telegram no.10003, in 25 January 1917.

⁹ S.H.A.T., Attachés Militaires en Roumanie, Carton 7N1457, dossier 1.

for Romanian troops as its own orders and supplies, offering its full support to the Romanian Council of Ministers¹⁰.

The issue of equipping the Romanian front was the subject of the Entente conferences during the First World War, which shows the high importance that the Allies attached to the military contribution of the Kingdom of Romania. For example, the inter-allied conference in London in November 1916 established the programme of deliveries allocated to Romania and Russia during the winter of 1916/1917 and the spring of 1917. Romania was to receive 60,000 tonnes of war material at the port of Romanov between December 1916 and May 1917 inclusive. From 1 December 1916, France shipped 20,000 tonnes to Romanov, with Romania as destination. There remained 40,000 tons to be shipped between March and May 1917, but the difficulties of transport by rail and the cold winter made it impossible to ship this quantity of material from Romanov before the resumption of shipments via the port of Arkhangelsk¹¹. It is known that the latter port was unusable several months of the year during the cold season because of the ice that formed and made navigation impossible.

In the first months of 1917, in a critical period for Romania, whose national territory had already been considerably reduced, the supply of war materials and ammunition was not going well. This reality, combined with military failures and the deplorable state of the civilian population, ravaged by exanthematous typhus, brought Romania to the brink of political and military catastrophe. The very existence of the state could have been called into question.

We note differences of attitude between the powers of the Entente, Great Britain, France, and Russia, on the question of equipping the Romanian army with arms and ammunition. Another transit point for Romanian war materials, along with Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Alexandrovsk, was the Romanov port. At the initiative of Great Britain, from 9 February 1917, the steamer "Bucharest" remained the only Romanian vessel making regular shipments to Romanov¹².

Aristide Briand, President of the French Council of Ministers, was informed of this defective state of war material shipments destined for Romania. In a telegram of 14 February 1917 to Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, Briand pointed out the serious inconveniences that could result from the restrictions imposed by the British on the shipment of munitions and war materials. On the other hand, the French Minister of Armaments, Albert Thomas, considered that this decision would prevent Romania from participating in the general offensive¹³. In fact, France insisted the most in favour of an adequate supply to the Romanian army and tried to mediate it.

On the other hand, adopting a completely different attitude towards France, Russia was rather circumspect and even unresponsive to shipments of war materials destined for Romania. France sent arms and ammunition via Arkhangelsk

¹⁰ A.M.A.E. fr. , Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 363, dossier 363, f. 160

¹¹ *Ibidem*, f. 171-172.

¹² *Ibidem*, f. 168.

¹³ *Ibidem*, f. 176.

in March 1917, which transited through Russian territory, despite the ill-will not infrequently shown by the Petrograd authorities. There were 120 trench mortars, 216 machine guns, hundreds of machine guns, thousands of rifles, several hundred thousand howitzers, millions of infantry shells, and millions of grenades¹⁴. For the air force, the number of aircraft coming from France enabled the equipping of 6 Farman squadrons of 8 aircraft, 3 Nieuport fighter squadrons of 10 aircraft, a Caudron squadron of 6 aircraft and a Bréguet-Morane long-range bombing squadron of 8 aircrafts¹⁵. From the above data, we can infer that France endeavoured to provide Romania with the widest possible range of war material, from various weapons, to ammunition, aircraft, and heavy artillery.

In March 1917, French military missions tried to obtain military supplies from countries such as Great Britain, the USA, Spain, Brazil, and Japan. On 13 March 1917, General Berthelot telegraphed the French Minister of War, Hubert Lyautey: "*On the grounds of uncertainty as to the quality and quantity of possible supplies from Japan, I request you at once to reserve for Romania 200 scopes.*"¹⁶.

More alarming was the fact that in April 1917, Romania's supply of war material and ammunition was reduced to about a third of the amount stipulated in the text of the military convention of August 1916. In this context, Berthelot emphasised the need to maintain in full the programme established by France. The Allied Powers were obliged to persuade the Russian government to send Romania all the materials and supplies it lacked. The French officer, one of the most ardent supporters of Romania's cause, concluded acidly, after an analysis of the Russian position, that Petrograd was pursuing a personal policy contrary to the interests of the Entente regarding Romania¹⁷. The commander of the French military mission was implicitly referring to Russia's procrastination and delays in the delivery of arms and ammunition. As a result of General Berthelot's persistent work, a slight improvement in the Russian attitude was noted in April 1917¹⁸.

According to the new supply program for the Romanian army, established at the end of April 1917, it was to receive as additional equipment 3,000 machine-gun rifles and 40,000 1907 rifles. To these were added, as a monthly supply from 1 May, 12,000 1907 rifles, 15,000,000 86 D cartridges, of which half in cartridges, 100,000 grenades, 80,000 revolver cartridges. However, according to the opinion expressed by Berthelot, shipments of grenades and bombs would be suspended until further orders. In the same context, the French War Committee decided to suspend for the whole of the second half of the year the shipment to Romania of artillery ammunition which could be used on the French front¹⁹. Naturally, the French military authorities were primarily concerned with ensuring that their troops were sufficiently equipped. It was precisely for this reason that Paul Painlevé,

¹⁴ René Chambe, *op. cit.*, p.147.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ S.H.A.T., Cabinet du Ministre, Carton 5N200, telegram no. 10089, in 13 March 1917.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, telegram no.10135, in 3 April 1917.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, telegram no. 931, in 5 April 1917.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, Carton 10N103, Note nr.1632, in 30 April 1917.

Hubert Lyautey's replacement as French Minister of War, telegraphed Berthelot that during the second quarter of 1917 the quantity sent from France would be limited for the time being to 10,000 tons²⁰.

As reported by the French Ministry of Armaments, on 3/16 May 1917, 64,134 tons of material intended for Romania arrived in Russia. By the end of April, 26,524 tons had already arrived in Iași, but 3,300 tons were destroyed at Arkhangelsk, and 2,178 tons of raw material were to remain in Russia. Some 32,000 tonnes remained in Russian ports, warehouses and on Russian railways. They were to be shipped to Romania, and two-thirds, or around 2,000 wagons, could be used immediately by the army. To achieve a regular rate of transport on the railway, Albert Thomas recommended to Paul Painlevé the creation of a large stock of material at Arkhangelsk. The 10,000 tonnes planned for the second quarter of 1917 were due to arrive in Romania by 15 August²¹. Thus, Romania managed to take possession of less than half of the total amount of more than 64,000 tonnes, mainly due to the sluggishness of shipments on the Russian railways.

Subsequently, according to other data, by 25 May 1917, the following war materials, armaments, and ammunition would have arrived in Romania: anti-asphyxiating masks - 495,189; specific 75 mm shells - 41,855; incendiary 120 mm shells - 1,170; Tissot oxygen apparatus - 1. 040; machine guns - 2,752; machine gun cartridges - 65,149,665; Model 1907 rifles - 156,086; D cartridges in magazines - 44,445,190; approximately 6.5 mm cartridges in elements - approximately 40 million; revolver cartridges - 5. 437,200; rifles - machine gun - 1,500; 58 trench mortars - 160; 58 mortar bombs - 50,554; grenades - 1,370,000; 75 mm guns - 63; 120 mm short guns - 12; 120 mm long guns - 72; 75 mm mountain howitzers - 10. 000; 75 mm cartridges for French guns - 17,160; 75 mm cartridges for Romanian guns - 507,217; 24/31 shells - 2,302,919; 75 mm cartridges for anti-aircraft fire - 8,000 and others²².

In May 1917, General Ferdinand Foch was appointed Chief of the French General Staff. In a discussion with him, Colonel Vasile Rudeanu expressed the request that the number of Romanian divisions armed and maintained by the Entente powers be increased to 15, with the aim of strengthening the solidarity of the Russian-Romanian front and of achieving the junction between the Russian-Romanian armies and the allied armies at Salonika. Following the difficulties that France was experiencing in delivering fast fighter aircraft to Romania, General Berthelot asked his Minister of War to make sustained efforts in London to obtain a fighter squadron from England, together with its personnel, as well as spare parts, means of transport and complete accessories²³.

The commander of the French military mission in Romania continued to be actively involved in supplying the Romanian army. In his report of 13 June 1917, Berthelot reported to the Minister of War that supplies of war material from Russia

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Idem*, Ministère de l'Armement, Carton 10N101, telegrams nr.158-163, in 3/16 May 1917.

²² *Ibidem*, 25 May 1917 (new style).

²³ S.H.A.T., Cabinet du Ministre, Carton 5N200, telegram no. 421, in 19 June 1917.

had fallen sharply. However, artillery material was sufficient for the 10 divisions of the reorganised army. This included for each of the 4 divisions belonging to the 1st Army: 9 batteries of 75 gauge, model 1901; 2 batteries of 105 howitzers; 1 battery of 53; 1 battery of 58 mortars. The 6 divisions of the 2nd Army had the following artillery equipment: 9 batteries of 75, 1 battery of 105 howitzers, 1 battery of 120 howitzers, 1 battery of 53, 1 battery of 58 mortars. Machine guns were sufficient in both armies. The immediate reconstitution of another 5 Romanian divisions was also to be considered (a wish in this direction had been expressed earlier by the Romanian authorities). These new divisions would also be ready for action within a month and a half if they were to receive the necessary material. They were to be armed with French guns of 75 gauge. Supplies of such armaments were still insufficient to equip the divisions. In fact, of the 98 75-calibre guns sent from France to Russia, only 63 arrived in Romania. General Berthelot made representations to the Russian army to have this heavy artillery equipment sent out more quickly. In his report, the head of the French military mission in Romania also pointed to the persistent shortage of machine guns. Following his representations to the French Minister of Armaments, General Berthelot obtained his intervention to have the rest of the machine-guns intended for Romania shipped immediately by the first ship. However, no signal was received in Iași regarding the landing of these materials at Arkhangelsk²⁴. Fortunately, a positive point was that twenty trains of heavy artillery material had already been unloaded without problems, and similar shipments were to be completed within 10 days²⁵.

By the end of June 1917, the operation of the Romanian railways had improved considerably, and further progress was in sight. On the contrary, the situation was different for the Russian railways going to Romania. A study by the French Colonel Champin, attached to the Romanian Railways Directorate, concluded that an optimal throughput for deliveries on the existing lines was not possible because of the inadequate operation of the movement service and insufficient means of transport. Remedies to boost transport, were proposed: 1) maximum effort to restore most locomotives to good working order; 2) to grant a technical competition to the Russian railways, a competition likely to improve the service; 3) to devote efforts to the resumption of deliveries on the existing lines²⁶.

The War Committee meeting of 7 June 1917 examined the possibilities of transporting Romanian war materials by sea to Arkhangelsk. Shipments to Romania could not exceed 5,000 tons per month²⁷, which was only slightly more than half the amount set by the Military Convention about a year earlier.

In the first half of 1917, the supply of war materials and ammunition to Romania was very difficult to achieve, the main reason being the stoppage of shipping through the ports of Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. Vessels carrying war

²⁴ *Idem*, Attachés militaires en Roumanie, Carton 7N1457, dossier 1.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Idem*, Cabinet du Ministre, Carton 5N200, telegrams 597-598, in 23 June 1917.

²⁷ *Idem*, Ministère de l'Armement, Carton 10N101, July 1, 1917.

materials and ammunition had to take a long and arduous detour and land in Vladivostok.

Finally, the French Minister of Armaments, Albert Thomas, approved the programme for the supply of the 10 divisions of the reorganised Romanian army, subject to several reservations: the discontinuation of the dispatch of special howitzers; the immediate dispatch of 64,000 120 L rounds and 120 C ammunition, which had just been suspended shortly before; the maintenance of the monthly dispatch of 4 120 L guns; the continued dispatch of 658 T guns per month; the resumption of the supply of ammunition in accordance with the new amounts fixed from 1 July²⁸.

On 5 July 1917, Vasile Rudeanu, who also acted as representative of the Romanian Ministry of War to the French Grand Headquarters, wrote that France and England, having as their mission the transport of Romanian munitions and armaments, had decided that a quantity of about 10,000 tons per month should be shipped to Arkhangelsk or another Russian port: *"Thanks to France's great solicitude for Romania, we have always been prepared to ship to French ports the quantity of munitions and armaments representing this tonnage. Unfortunately, since February shipments have completely ceased"*²⁹. In the meantime, Paul Painlevé, the Minister of War, declared that for the second quarter of 1917, namely April, May, and June, only 10,000 tons would be shipped, because of the poor communication routes between Russia and Romania, which did not allow for the timely transport of all munitions and armaments shipped from France to Russia. By the end of June, Rudeanu continued in his telegram to Albert Thomas, only 5500 tons had been shipped. Due to delays in deliveries, aviation and heavy artillery materials have not yet come into the possession of the government in Iași. In the absence of these two categories of material, in the event of an offensive, there was a risk of compromising any chance of success for the Romanian army. In these circumstances, Rudeanu urged Thomas to intervene in favour of the immediate departure of the ships loaded with the necessary materials and ammunition, at the promised tonnage³⁰.

At the end of July 1917, the state of infantry ammunition supplies was considered quite satisfactory. Orders were given for the 20,000 rounds of 8mm ammunition still in Russia to be sent without delay. Also with regard to ammunition supply projects in July 1917, the supply of 8mm cartridges was to be carried out with great regularity. In the event of a crisis in the supply of infantry cartridges, France was to proceed with the urgent dispatch of an advance of projected supplies from its own stocks. On the other hand, the shipment of grenades was to be resumed immediately³¹.

On 1 August 1917, the Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Transport informed the President of the French Council of Ministers, Alexandre-

²⁸ A.M.A.E. fr., Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 364, f. 27.

²⁹ S.H.A.T., Ministère de l'Armement, Carton 10N101, telegram no. 5387 in 5 July 1917.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*, Carton 10N103, encoded telegrams nr.232-235, in 27 July 1917.

Félix Ribot, that he had granted the necessary authorisation to the railways to transport war material to be stored in the *Généraux* depots. Toulouse, Grenoble, Albi and Montereau stations were used as transit points for the material destined for Romania, before it was shipped via the French ports of Brest and Lorient³².

Partially successful action has also been taken with the Spanish government. Most of the material which the competent Spanish authorities had agreed to hand over in the spring of 1917 had already arrived. However, the efforts made by the representative of the *Etablissements Industriels Franco-Roumains* in Barcelona to obtain the necessary wagons were to no avail. In these circumstances, the director of the company's general controller, Guignard, approached Ribot to obtain the necessary authorisation to supply the material³³.

In August 1917, the French authorities tried to set up a project to supply Romania with armaments and war material during the third quarter of the year. Under this project, the ships *Melbourne*, *Jiul*, *King Indwal* and *Wisly-Andree* were scheduled to sail before 20 August, carrying a quantity of about 18,800 tons. In total, 43,000 tons of ammunition, armaments and various war materials were sent to Arkhangelsk from the beginning of 1917 to September³⁴. This represented a rather modest quantity given that according to the Military Convention of 4/17 August 300 tonnes had to be delivered daily, which meant 9,000 tonnes to be shipped monthly. Therefore, in the first 8 months of 1917 alone, the Romanian army should have received 72,000 tons of war material and ammunition. But if 43,000 tons had arrived at Arkhangelsk, what Romania finally received was certainly much less.

The efforts of the Romanian government and diplomacy to improve supplies intensified in the summer of 1917. On 26 August, Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu appealed for help from the Allies in general and the USA in particular to transport a new consignment of war material through Vladivostok. General Berthelot was to use his influence to avoid disorder or waste. In this context, the French Minister of Armaments wrote to the commander of the military mission in Romania that France was able to provide an additional, faster contribution than any other Allied country by increasing supplies. Under this policy, 30 guns were just about to be delivered. Given these realities, Albert Thomas believed that Romania's appeal to the other powers of the Entente should be limited to real needs, which the French government alone was unable to meet. In his final telegram to Berthelot, the Minister of Armaments recommended a complementary effort to increase the number of shipping means for loading and transporting stocks from the West to Russian ports³⁵.

In early September 1917, new stocks of ammunition and armaments, ceded by the French government, as well as large quantities of war material, purchased from Switzerland and the USA, had accumulated in warehouses in western France

³² A.M.A.E. fr. , Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 364, f.68.

³³ *Ibidem*, f.69.

³⁴ V. Rudeanu, *op. cit.* , p. 376.

³⁵ A.M.A.E. fr. , Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 364, f. 93.

and were also waiting to be shipped to Arhanghelsk. In total, on 1 October 1917, Romania had about 40,000 tonnes of armaments, ammunition and material in French warehouses, which Vasile Rudeanu intended to ship home by the end of the year. He asked the French General Staff to provide the necessary ships so that he could deliver the remaining 28,000 tonnes before the end of the year. The French General Staff wrote a note to the Ministry of War asking for Rudeanu's request to be met, especially in the light of the political and military crisis Russia was in³⁶.

Romania was unable to reap the fruits of the military successes of July-August 1917 at Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz, for reasons beyond its control. On the Eastern Front, the autumn of 1917 brought far-reaching military and later political changes. In early August 1917, the Russian army lost Cernăuți and Câmpulung in Bukovina and was retreating without fighting. The Russian commander, General Dmitry Shcherbachev, considered transferring the headquarters to Odessa, and advised Ion I. C. Brătianu, President of the Romanian Council of Ministers, to evacuate military personnel and war materials to southern Russia³⁷. The worrying situation led to the convening of a war council on 4 August 1917. The Council decided to continue the fight to defend the territory still under Romanian control and, at the same time, to transfer, if necessary, recruits and war material that was not indispensable to Southern Russia³⁸.

The autumn of 1917 marked the collapse of the Russian front. The Russian army was gradually falling apart as Bolshevik soldiers, rebels or deserters, poured from the front, unwilling to fight. The Romanian army was forced to replace the Russians in the trenches and resist with their own forces, while the retreating Russian troops, contaminated by the Bolshevik morass and pacifism, engaged in acts of brigandage³⁹.

Until the autumn of 1917, Romania's supply of war material fluctuated, either at a somewhat faster or slower pace. At the beginning of October, Vasile Rudeanu asked Romania's Minister of War, General Constantin Iancovescu, to inform him whether the arms, ammunition and various materials, which he had been personally responsible for shipping up to that point, had arrived in Romania. According to a telegram from the French military attaché in Petrograd, Albert Niessel, the contents of which were brought to Rudeanu's attention, the number of wagons loaded with war material that crossed the Romanian border was: in April - 438, in May - 538, in June - 363, in the first 20 days; in July - 462 wagons; in August, in the first 10 days, 90 wagons, and after another 10 days, 157. However, at the beginning of August, due to misunderstandings, supplies to Romania almost completely stopped. In the first part of October 1917, the telegram continues,

³⁶ V. Rudeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 370-376.

³⁷ George Cipăianu, *La răscruce (Toamna anului 1917-primăvara lui 1918). Marea Britanie și încheierea de către România a unei păci separate*, Editura Cogito, Oradea, 1993, p. 60.

³⁸ See *General Berthelot and Romania. Mémoires et correspondance*, ed. Glenn E. Torrey, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987.

³⁹ G. Cipăianu, *op.cit.*, p. 58, p. 60.

shipments were delayed because of the difficulty of transport on the Russian railways⁴⁰.

As the Russian anarchy became more and more acute and Romania's supply of military material was suffering, General Constantin Iancovescu proposed, on October 3, 1917, the following: The French and British governments to increase the number of transports to the port of Arkhangelsk; the Russian authorities to transport this additional tonnage by rail to Romania; the Russian government to undertake to transport 350 tons per day on the Murmansk-Petrograd line, at least during the period when the port of Arkhangelsk is closed; the American government to undertake to procure 12,000 tons of miscellaneous products per month to be sent to Romania. Russia was to load this quantity and transport it from Vladivostok to Romania at Iași. If the throughput of the Trans-Siberian was insufficient, the plan was to send these 12,000 tonnes to Arkhangelsk or Murmansk⁴¹.

The Entente Powers (especially France) sought to use other channels to ensure continuity of supply to Romania. On 5 October 1917, the French ambassador to Russia, Joseph Noulens, reported on his meeting with Nicolae Xenopol, who was to take up the post of minister plenipotentiary at the newly created Romanian legation in Tokyo. The latter stated that the main purpose of his mission was to negotiate with the Japanese government the delivery of heavy artillery materials, as well as airplanes and automobiles, responding to some extent to the most pressing needs of the Romanian army. Ambassador Noulens promised Nicolae Xenopol that he would support his efforts to obtain the speedy passage of these materials through Siberia and Russia⁴².

At the beginning of October 1917, an inter-allied commission was planned to meet in Petrograd, headed by the Russian General Aleksandr Michelson, in charge of the supply of Russia and Romania. General Berthelot feared that this would cause Romania's supplies to fall into Russian hands⁴³. We note the reiteration of France's old distrust in Russia, a distrust that is mainly noticeable in the commander of the French military mission in Romania. In this context, it was intended to set up an inter-allied committee to prevent the Russians from gaining absolute control over Romania's supplies by regulating transit throughout their territory. This body was to be assisted by a committee of studies, charged with the transport of materials destined for Romania on Russian territory, with the execution of the Russian-Romanian convention of March 1917 on the supply of materials and with overcoming the difficulties raised by this subject. This commission was also responsible for orders for supplies sent directly to Russia by Romania⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ V. Rudeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

⁴¹ A.M.A.E. fr., Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 364, f. 123.

⁴² *Ibidem*, f. 130.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, f. 132, S.H.A.T., Cabinet cu ministre, Carton 5N201, telegrams no .88-90, in 5 October 1917.

⁴⁴ A.M.A.E. fr., Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 364, f.136; dossier 348, f. 10.

On 18 October 1917, another inter-allied conference met in London to deal with the question of supplies for the winter of 1917/1918. The conference came to the following conclusions: the minimum throughput on the Murmansk line was estimated for 6 months at 270,000 tons, and with the inherent difficulties of transport, at 180,000 tons. Of the 270,000 tonnes, 67,000 tonnes, i.e. only a quarter, were allocated to Romania and 62,000 tonnes came from France⁴⁵. The same conference decided that to transport the materials destined for Romania, Romanian ships would be used first, and then Russian ships if possible. The *Shipping Department* will make representations to the British War Office to obtain the necessary tonnage⁴⁶.

The supply situation to Romania became alarming at the end of October 1917. A telegram of 29 October 1917 from the French Minister of War, Georges Clemenceau, to the military attaché in Russia, General Niessel, drawing attention to the fact that supplies to Romania had not improved and that there was therefore a risk that the Romanian government might conclude a separate agreement⁴⁷. In fact, on 30 October 1917, none of the 16 Saint-Chamond howitzers at Arkhangelsk had yet arrived in Romania⁴⁸, demonstrating the existence of an extremely serious transport crisis on the Russian railways.

Conclusions

Romanian diplomacy and military authorities have made sustained efforts to ensure that the army is adequately equipped with ammunition and war material, both in terms of quantity and quality. Colonel Vasile Rudeanu played a fundamental role. The documents show that the war materials ordered, some of which came into Romania's possession, were characterised by a certain diversity, with heavy artillery pieces such as cannons and howitzers arriving in the country, as well as rifles, machine guns, aircraft, grenades, cartridges, thus including both artillery products and ammunition and aviation material. However, the contradictory information provided by the archival documents does not allow us to give any firm data on the total quantity of war material that finally arrived in Romania and was used by the troops. Although some progress was made in supply, there were also periods when the minimum amount stipulated by the Military Convention was not respected. Also, not infrequently the materials received were morally and/or even physically worn out.

A key issue, which often caused serious delays in supplying the Romanian army, was transport. At an early stage, before the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria entered the war with the Central Powers (November 1914 and October 1915 respectively), the materials that were to reach Romania were transported via Thessaloniki. Later, however, with the blockade of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, it became impossible to use this southern route to deliver materials. Due to

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 151.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 178.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, dossier 348, f. 132.

⁴⁸ S.H.A.T., Cabinet du ministre, Carton 5N201, encoded telegram nr.183, in 30 October 1917.

the objective and complex circumstances, another, more complicated route had to be chosen. As a result, Romanian war materials had to transit first through the northern Russian ports of Arkhangelsk, Romanov, Alexandrovsk, Murmansk and even Vladivostok, causing several inconveniences and mainly long delays.

The war materiel procurement was carried out in the countries of the Entente, France, the United States, Portugal, Japan, Brazil, as well as in neutral countries such as Spain and Switzerland. Among the Allies, the French authorities, and particularly the commander of the military mission in Romania, General Henri-Mathias Berthelot, were most receptive to the thorny issue of supplying the Romanian army. France's attitude contrasted on several occasions with that adopted by Russia, which was in no hurry to send Romania the arms, materials and ammunition that arrived in ports and warehouses on Russian territory. Serious impediments also arose from the poor movement of trains and congestion on the Russian railways.

Since the seizure of power by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's Bolsheviks in Petrograd on 25 October/7 November 1917, Romania's war supplies have completely ceased. Because of the Russian breakdown, the Romanian army found itself unable to receive the arms and ammunition it needed to continue operations. The Council of People's Commissars regarded the Royal Romanian Government with open and undisguised hostility. The Russian authorities resorted to obstructing military shipments to Romania, intercepting materials along the Russian railways, unscrupulously seizing them and blocking all deliveries to Romania. Diplomatic correspondence in early December 1917 unmistakably reflected the grim new realities facing the Romanian Kingdom. In a note of 6 December 1917, the suspension of supplies to Romania was explicitly stipulated. The British Cabinet decided that deliveries of munitions, armaments and other war supplies would be excluded until further notice. All deliveries of material were to be confined to articles of clothing and provisions⁴⁹. Georges Clemenceau, President of the French Council of Ministers, made recommendations for the use of materials and ammunition previously allocated to Romania: use to supply the armies of the north-east; allocation of Manlicher cartridges for the Greek army and placing the ammunition of 105 and 150 calibers at the disposal of the Belgian government⁵⁰. France proposed to involve other states in the fight against the Central Powers. Romania was no longer able to continue the war effort because of the political situation in Russia. It received no further military support or material aid, consisting of arms and ammunition. Romanian troops were completely deprived of Russia's material and military input and, at the same time, surrounded by the armies of the Central Powers. The combination of hostile circumstances led the Romanian government to decree a temporary halt to military operations by signing the armistice of Focșani on 9 December 1917.

Translation into English: **Cristian-Constantin Rădoescu**

⁴⁹ A.M.A.E. fr., Guerre 1914-1918, Roumanie, dossier 364, f. 197.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 200.