



CHAPTER 13

**WAR AND CAPTIVITY: ROMANIAN POWS IN
OTTOMAN POW CAMPS AND
OTTOMAN (TURKISH) POWS IN
ROMANIAN POW CAMPS DURING WWI**

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Abstract

The paper examines a particular and lesser known dimension of Romania's participation to First World War, namely the issue of captivity, focusing on the issue of the Romanian prisoners of war held in captivity by the authorities of the Ottoman Empire, and also, examining the situation of the Ottoman POWs, held in Romanian prison camps, during the same period of the Great War. The research is mainly based on archival sources, as well as on various studies, papers, and also memoirs or war journals (some of them re-edited in the context of the Centennial of the WWI) of the former combatants that had survived WWI captivity; the research sheds new light on an omitted issue of the Romanian involvement into WWI, by examining, on a comparison approach, the situation of the Romanian prisoners held in Ottoman prisoner of war camps, and the situation of Ottoman (Turkish) prisoners of war held in various Romanian prisoner of war camps. The comparison will be based on several indicators and factors, starting from the international legislation (at that time) on the rights and duties regarding the POWs status, as perceived, interpreted and applied by the authorities of the two belligerents, and continuing with the context of falling into captivity; the treatment associated with the *per se* captivity, across the prisoner of war camps, in both countries; the mutual official initiatives and efforts conducted by the two state actors, in order to improve the status of the POWs, including the issue of the appropriate sum of the military payment for the officers, according to their rank; the involvement of international humanitarian and relief organizations such as the International Red Cross (and the International Prisoners of War Agency); the process of repatriation of the former prisoners of war. The rather poor and harsh conditions existing in the POWs camps, particularly at the beginning of the captivity, which were experienced by both sides, hav improved, to some extent, mainly due to the bilateral negotiations (with the help of third party, such as the Royal Legation of Spain in Constantinople), but also due to the involvement of International relief entities, which helped the POWs by offering support (especially regarding their correspondence) and providing food supplies, in order to ameliorate their medical (health) condition.

Keywords

WWI, Prisoners of War, Romania, Ottoman Empire, Repatriation

Introduction

After two years of neutrality, Romania entered the First World War in the summer of 1916, on the Entente side, based on Treaty of Alliance signed with the Entente Powers and according to the decision taken by the Crown Council of August 14/27, 1916. Despite some efforts made by the Romanian Government during the years of neutrality, in order to improve the combat capacity of the Romanian Army, by acquiring modern military technology, the Army was rather poorly endowed with heavy artillery, machine guns and ammunition and that situation was very soon reflected on the battlefields. On the night of August 14-15/27-28, 1916, the Romanian Army launched the assault against the Austrian-Hungarian positions, on the Transylvanian front, by crossing the Carpathians mountains. Soon after, on August 17, Germany declared war to Romania, being followed after two days, by Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Romania found itself in a difficult situation, being engaged on two fronts, against military forces of four states, namely Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire and, moreover, had to tackle a military situation worsened by the fact that her Entente allies did not keep their promises regarding the support offered to Romania (namely, to launch a Russian offensive in Galicia, and another offensive on the front in Thessaloniki).

Thus, after some initial military successes, Romanian Army had to withdraw from Transylvania and during the next months, suffered significant defeats and losses, both on the Northern front and on South. On the South, a first major defeat was the one against the Bulgarian forces (backed by German forces) at Turtucaia (Turtukaia/Tutrakan), in September 1916, a battle that generated very large Romanian losses in terms of strategic positions, but also in terms of weaponry, military personnel (dead and wounded soldiers, but also loss of troops in captivity). Later on, the defeat of the Romanian forces during the battle for Bucharest and the retreat of Romanian authorities to Moldova, generated another wave of losses, particularly in terms of war prisoners. Most Romanian POWs fell into German hands, but a significant number of Romanian soldiers and officers fell into Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and Ottoman captivity.

This paper will refer mainly to those Romanian POW's held in captivity by the Ottoman Empire, and less on Ottoman POWs held in captivity by Romania, during the years of the First World War (due to scarcity of the data).

The Legal Status of the Pows, Origin and Number

Given the topic, it is important to refer to the international legislation on the status of POWs, at that time. After the Hague Conference of 1899, a Convention on the laws of War was adopted, a new conference, organized in the same city of Hague, in 1907, established a *per se* international status of the POWs, although it had a major drawback, namely the fact that many states did not ratify the document until the outbreak of the First World War. According to the article 4 of the Convention, the POWs were entrusted to the care of the state that captured them, which was obliged to treat them with humanity and respect; moreover, according to article 6, the state that captured the POWs was obliged not to engage the officers POWs in work activities (in fact, officers were excepted from any kind of work, during their captivity (Morton, 1992, p. 9-10), while soldiers were allowed to be used in work activities, depending on their skills, but only if the above mentioned activities had nothing to do with the war operations (Brown, 1909).

It is worth mentioning that, while in the case of the Hague Convention of 1899, Germany and Great Britain have ratified the final document within a year, as well as the majority of the future belligerents of First World War), the situation was different when it comes to the Hague Convention of 1907; thus, by November 27, 1909, the Convention was signed and ratified only by 25 states, including Germany, Great Britain and the US, but not by other future belligerents, such as Serbia, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire (Morton, 1992 p. 10). Romania had signed the 1907 Hague Convention on October 1907 and ratified the document in March 1912, while the Ottoman Empire had signed the Convention on October 1907, but it did not ratify the document. Due to the fact that Hague Convention of 1907 might have produced its effects only if all the belligerents signed and ratified the document, during the IWW, the POWs could only rely on the provisions of the Hague Convention of 1899, although the majority of the states have accepted *de facto* the provisions of the 1907 Hague Convention.

When it comes to the origin of the Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity, it is worth mentioning that the majority of them became prisoners as a result of the Turtukaia/ Tutarkan battle, but also at the end of the confrontations that took place in Dobroudja, while only few of them were captured during the Neajlov and Siret confrontations. In terms of categories, there were 2 distinct groups, namely those captured by the Ottoman troops, which were later sent to Ottoman Empire, and those Romanian prisoners which were captured by Germany, registered in various camps in Germany (particularly Tuchel) and then sent, at a certain moment, to Ottoman Empire in order to work in several coal and lead mines, or in agricultural farms and road construction.

As for the number of the Romanian POW's held in Ottoman captivity, data vary depending on the sources and the time moment. Thus, the number vary from a few thousands (the lowest number, 2330 Romanian POWs (Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - AMAE), 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 281/ 233, p.190) to over 12000 (more precisely, 12793 Romanian POWs), as mentioned on a Romanian centralized report issued by the Statistical Service of the Romanian Ministry of Defense, during the interwar period, in December 1929, although that number might include the Romanian POW's sent to the Ottoman Empire by Germany, during the years of war. At the end of the war, in the context of the repatriation process, Romanian Ministry of Defense was mentioning, on a *Memorandum*, the existence of 6000 Romanian POW's in the Ottoman Empire, out of which 3806 Romanian prisoners from Ottoman Empire have been repatriated (Negoi, 2009, p. 199-201). On the other hand, Turkish authors have mentioned lower numbers, around 2000 Romanian POWs; for instance, Mesut Çapa is mentioning only around 2000 Romanian POWs held in captivity by the Ottoman Empire (Çapa, 2010, p. 120). In this context, it should be mentioned that the number of the Turkish POWs held in Romanian captivity was much lower, raising to less than 1000 POWs (more precisely, around 600). Among the entire phenomenon of captivity experienced by Romanian troops during the First World War, the Ottoman captivity was the lowest in terms of numbers, when compared to other sections of captivity (around 125000 Romanian POWs in German captivity, 59 000 Romanian POWs in Austro-Hungarian captivity and over 20 000 Romanian POWs in Bulgarian captivity).

Spain - Protector of Romanian Rights and Interests Across Ottoman Empire

Once Romania entered the IWW, in August 1916, Spain - as a neutral state, was entrusted with the task of protecting Romanian rights and interests in the Ottoman Empire, since November 1916. As a consequence, the diplomats and officials of the Spain Legation in Constantinople conducted various official proceedings, concerning Romanian subjects in the Ottoman territory, their relations with the Ottoman Government. The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania is hosting several Spanish diplomatic reports regarding the period 1916 - 1917, thus offering data and information on Romanian POWs brought in the Ottoman Empire. Among these, probably the most important are the reports following several visits and inspection conducted in various camps, particularly the visit of the Psamatya/ Samatya Prisoners' Camp, the existing living conditions of the prisoners and the actions of humanitarian support conducted across Ottoman Empire.

During the WWI, various neutral states took on the role of "protecting power" for the belligerent states (for instance, United States of America accepted the responsibility to act as a protecting power for the Romanian prisoners of war in Germany, while Spain took on the same role for the Romanian POWs in the Ottoman Empire). Usually, the main role of a protecting power was to send its diplomats to inspect and observe POW camps (Morton, pp. 19-20), but also to investigate complaints by prisoners of war from the belligerent nationality whose interests it represented.

The monitoring of the status of the POWs during First World War was also conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross particularly once with the genesis of a Prisoner of War Agency, whose initiatives and actions focused mainly on trying to locate the POWs and the men reported missing. During the years of war, the ICRC made arrangements and organized various prisoner of war camp inspections in numerous countries (Jones, 2011, p. 13-14) particularly in Europe, but not only. The inspection reports, written by the ICRC officials, after the camp visits, were designed to observe the real situation on the ground, as well as the camp administration compliance

with the prewar international legislation regarding the protection (and rights) of the prisoners (on the issue of the international conventions concerning captivity, see Speed, 1990), to generate an improvement of the prisoner treatment standards, but also to facilitate correspondence between the POWs and their families or relief organizations. Food and care parcels were also being sent to POWs by the Prisoner of War Agency, activating under the umbrella of the ICRC, and the support actions included another dimension, namely that of establishing a huge catalogue containing the cards of POWs (data on their captivity, camp) in order to sustain the difficult endeavour of tracing the prisoners of war.

When it comes to the situation of the Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity, most of the monitoring was conducted by the Spanish Legation in Istanbul, whose diplomats were entrusted to inspect and deliver information concerning the fate of the Romanian prisoners in Ottoman camps. Moreover, it should be mentioned that in order to facilitate the co-operation between Romanian and Spain relating to the fate of the Romanian POWs, the Romanian Government has designated a Special Delegate of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, namely Epaminonda Papacosta, which previously, before the outbreak of the First World War, served as translator for the Romanian Legation in Constantinople (*Relații politice și militare Româno-Otomano-Turce 1878-1989*, 2023, p. 373).

As for the studies and work-papers dealing with the topic of Romanian POWs held in the Ottoman Empire during IWW, the research is rather at the beginning, as no consistent study has yet been published. Among the existing sources, the most reliable are the archival documents, namely the reports elaborated by the foreign and Romanian officials, after their visits in Ottoman POW camps that hosted Romanian prisoners. The majority of the documents, pertaining to the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, refer to the *per se* situation of the Romanian POWs in various Ottoman camps, most of them being sent to Romanian officials by the diplomats of the Spain Legation in Constantinople. Some other documents are hosted by the Archive of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), while various significant information was provided by the bulletins and periodicals of the same entity (ICRC), which published several reports written by ICRC delegates, following their visits conducted in various POWs camps on Ottoman territory.

For instance, such a report, concerning the POW camp visits conducted between October 1916 - January 1917, is referring to the general conditions existing in Ottoman camps, describing the treatment of the prisoners and the relation with the commandants of the camps and other Ottoman officials: “[...] the soldiers are interned in public buildings, most of them pertaining to the Armenian community. When the state buildings were not enough, the necessary spaces were obtained by constructing special barracks. The ordinary POWs (soldiers) did not pay any kind of money for rent, and the commander of the garrison often permitted the prisoners to go to the town once a week, in order to buy the necessary products and supplies, for the camp. The Red Crescent was entrusted with the task of responding to letters coming from abroad, while every camp had at least a translator for the necessary translation from foreign languages [...]” (CICR, 1917, p. 12-45).

When referring to Ottoman camps, we should mainly mention the camp of Psamatia (Samatya), situated in the Armenian area of Constantinople, which was organized since 1915. Although the camp hosted mainly English and Russian POWs, it soon started to receive Romanian prisoners as well, which were being sent almost daily to work to the San Stefano railway station, for the unloading of merchandises and products from the trains and transportation of the supplies towards the port and the ships (Grecu, 2019, p. 425). Smaller camps, mainly transit camps, existed also at Tuzla (situated near Izmit), Yedikule (which functioned as a sorting camp) where in March 1917 Romanian POWs have been signaled,) while other captives have been sent to agricultural farms such as the one from Beikos (12 prisoners), Hadim-Keuy (where four Romanian POWs have died), Tepefjik și Eskihisar.

According to existing documents, on June 30th, 1917, 2292 Romanian POWs were already registered in Ottoman camps, while on August 23rd, 1917, the number raised to 2330, (across 6 different camps), out of which 38 prisoners already died (Grecu, 2019, p. 424).

Visiting the POW Camps

The monitoring of the situation of the Romanian POWs existing in Ottoman camps faced significant difficulties, at the beginning, due to the fact that Ottoman authorities have prevented the access of the Spanish diplomats to the camps, for quite a period of time. Thus, although the first Romanian POWs have arrived on Ottoman territory since the autumn of 1916, the open access to the camps for foreign diplomats and Red Cross inspectors has been prevented by the Ottoman High Command to both Spanish diplomats and to Epaminonda Papacosta (the Special Delegate of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), until the summer of 1917. The Ottoman authorities have allowed the foreign diplomats (Spanish and Romanian) to first visit the camp of Psamatia (Constantinople) (AMAE, E 2, 71/1914, Vol. 261/Dos. 213). The visit itself, as well as the interaction with the Ottoman officials, was described by the Romanian diplomat Epaminonda Papacosta, in a report sent to Bucharest which detailed the situation of the Romanian POWs. Papacosta reported to the Romanian authorities about the critical situation of the first hours and days of captivity, as reflected in the information offered by some Romanian POWs of muslim confession, who witnessed episodes in which other Romanian POWs were killed by the Bulgarian troops (after the battle of Turtukaia/Tutrakan), for no other reason than “a cruel satisfaction of killing Romanian prisoners”(AMAE, E 2, 71/1914, Vol. 261/Dos. 213). It is known that after the defeat of Romanian forces during the Tutrakan battle, Bulgarian forces have transferred some of the Romanian prisoners (those who were of muslim confession) to Ottoman Empire (as an ally of Bulgaria, member of Central Powers) and that was how the POWs have arrived in Ottoman camps.

According to the report, the visit took place on June 19th, 1917, and Papacosta had assisted a diplomat from the Spain Legation (Rafael Mitjana); the two diplomats have been received by the Ottoman commander of the garrison of Psamatia, major Ihsan Bey and some other officers (AMAE, E 2, 71/1914, Vol. 261/Dos. 213 p. 64). The dialogue with the camp commander revealed the fact that out of all the POWs held in camp, the Romanian POWs were in the worst situation, according to the Ottoman commander, mainly because they were the only prisoners who did not receive food parcels or clothes from their Government, nor the money for providing the necessary supplies: „[...] among the first words that the Ottoman commander told us were that every state whose POWs were held in the camp managed to send to their nationals money, which were used by the POWs in order to buy clothes, boots, soap, tobacco, and other supplies, and apart from that, almost all Western POWs also received parcels and gifts containing food, tea, chocolate, coffee and canned meat, the only exception being the Romanian POWs, which did not receive that kind of support from their Government” (AMAE, E 2, 71/1914, Vol. 261/Dos. 213.). The same Ottoman commander emphasized that Romanian POWs were in fact the victims of the numerous abuses exerted by the „our Bulgarian allies”, arriving in Ottoman captivity in a terrible situation, without appropriate clothes and shoes, after being dispossessed of goods, while in Bulgarian hands, on Bulgarian territory (AMAE, E 2, 71/1914, Vol. 261/Dos. 213).

Of course, the information given by the Ottoman commander must be taken with reservation, although at least some of them were based, more or less, on reality. For instance, it is true that Romanian POWs have been subjected to maltreatment and abuses by the Bulgarian troops, before they arrived in Ottoman captivity and that could explain, to certain extent, their health state, but on the other hand, once they arrived in Ottoman camps, the responsibility for their treatment and living conditions in the camps was transferred to Ottoman authorities, according to international Laws. It is also true that Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity have rarely been provided with food parcels or financial support from Romanian state, mainly due to the difficulties experienced at the moment by Romania, after the retreat of the administration and army to Moldova, caused by the advance of the Central Powers forces. Put in other words, at the moment, the very existing of the Romanian state was under menace, and the limited resources of the state were primarily directed to the reconstruction of Romanian military forces and their combat power.

As for the Ottoman authorities, they have underlined that treatment provided to Romanian POWs was similar to other foreign POWs, while the food ratios were equivalent to those given to ordinary Ottoman soldiers, namely 700 gr of bread per day, soup and vegetables, and twice a week - fruits such as raisins and figs; the delegates were permitted to interaction with the prisoners, but only under strict supervision of the Ottoman camp officials (AMAE, E 2, 71/1914, Vol. 261/Dos. 213, p. 64-65).

The rather dramatic situation of the Romanian POWs was reflected on a significant number of deaths occurring in the camps. The official documents certifying the deaths were sent to Spain Legation, and then to Romanian Delegate Epaminonda Papacosta, which was entrusted with the translation of the papers from Turkish language to Romanian, before sending the documents to Romanian authorities, through the Spain Legation in Romania. For instance, that was the case of a death certificate registered on September 16/29 1917, of the Romanian POW Ioan Planar, soldier of the 51 Regiment, 32 years old, who died of pleurisy, in the military hospital of Maltepe, in Constantinople (AMAE, 71/1914, E 2, Vol. 228/ 276, pp. 71-72). Given the diagnostic, established by the doctor of the military hospital of Maltepe, most likely the disease and eventually the death of the Romanian POW were caused by the severe camp treatment and due to lack of appropriate conditions in the camp.

Later on, as the number of the deaths among the POWs grew up, so Epaminonda Papacosta had renounced sending to Romanian authorities the individual documents of the deceased, and started to send collective lists of the deceased Romanian POWs which contained short general information regarding the living condition in camps, the full names of the deceased, data referring to their units, origin, age, place of birth, place of death and cause of death, with appendixes containing the individual certificates, in Romanian translation from Turkish language. There were numerous such reports containing lists of the deceased POWs, which were sent via the Spain Legation in Constantinople, by the above mentioned Romanian diplomat. For instance, a diplomatic note coming from the Spanish Royal Legation in Iași, dated September 2ND, 1918, forwarded to the Romanian authorities, in legalized translation, a list of 13 names of Romanian POWs who died during captivity; the list was elaborated by E. Papacosta, former dragoman of the former Romanian Legation in Constantinople and the initial document was elaborated in mid June, the same year, but it arrived only in September (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 276 /Dos. 228 p. 95). When examining the document, it seems that the deaths were caused by various diseases, which were specific to a severe captivity regime, due to poor hygiene, lack of food and precarious captivity conditions. In most of the cases, the causes of death were dysentery, enteritis, bronchitis, pneumonia and typhus (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 276 /Dos. 228 p. 95).

Another report of the Spanish Legation in Constantinople, sent to Romanian authorities, arrived to Direction of Statistics of the Romanian War Ministry at the end of October 1918. The document contains a list of 11 Romanian POWs who died in Ottoman camps (AMAE, Fund 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 276/Dos. 228, Note no. 6789, of October 29, 1918, p.130), as well the information regarding cause of death and the place of their burial: the deceased were buried according to their religion, most of them in the orthodox cemetery of Balikli (in text the term „Balukli”, although most likely it is about the orthodox cemetery Balikli, one of the oldest cemeteries in Istanbul), while others were buried in a Muslim cemetery or in the Israelite cemetery (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 276/Dos. 228, p. 130).

The mortality suggests that despite some efforts made by the Romanian Government, through the Spanish Legation in Constantinople, the situation of the Romanian POWs was still difficult. In order to improve it, Romanian government decided to allocate 130 000 francs for the benefit of the Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity, and up to June 30, 1917, 32000 francs were already distributed to some 2330 Romanian POWs (located in 6 camps), with the help of International Red Cross; in the document it is mentioned that out of the 1900 Romanian POWs from the Tavschanly camp, 900 were already deceased (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 281/Dos. 233, p. 190).

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that diplomats of the US Legation in Constantinople, entrusted with the distribution of money and clothes to English, French and Russian POWs held in Ottoman captivity, noticing the difficult situation of the Romanian POWs, had expressed their offer to support the Spanish Legation during the logistical efforts of food and clothes distribution, according to the financial allocated by the Romanian authorities for the Romanian POWs (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 281/Dos. 233, p. 31).

Another issue pertaining to the treatment of the POWs held in Ottoman and Romanian captivity was related to the payment of the appropriate sum of money for the officers. A solution was reached only in 1917, when the Ottoman authorities have notified the Romanian government, via Spanish Legation in Constantinople, about their decision to pay to the Romanian officers (POWs) the same amount of money corresponding to officers of the similar rank in the Ottoman Army, but it conditioned the application

depending on the treatment of the Ottoman officers (POWs) held in Romanian captivity (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 209/257, f. 106). Romania had agreed to the conditions forwarded by the Ottoman authorities, underlying that Romanian government already complied with the provisions of the Hague Convention, offering to the Ottoman officers (POWs) held in Romania equal payments corresponding to the officers with the same rank of the Romanian Army (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 209/257, p. 112).

As a consequence, Ottoman authorities have notified the Romanian Government through the Spanish Legation in Constantinople about the decision to pay to the Romanian officers the sums corresponding to the amount of payments of the Ottoman officers with the same rank, in peace time, namely 800 piastris for the lieutenants, 1050 piastris for captains, 2000 piastris for majors, 3000 for colonels, 4500 for brigade generals and 7000 for division generals (AMAE, 71/1914 E 2, Vol. 209/257, p. 158). It was more that Romanian authorities managed to obtain from the German Government, for the Romanian POWs held in German captivity (Germany decided to pay a fixed amount, inferior to those offered to corresponding ranks of German officers).

Romanian continued to increase the support offered to the POWs held in Ottoman captivity; thus, according to data referring to the year of 1917, 100 000 francs have been directed to Romanian POWs from the Ottoman Empire, other 20 000 francs were sent through the War Ministry and other 10 000 francs were sent through the Red Cross. The number of the Romanian POWs in Ottoman captivity was rather small, when compared to Romanian captivity in other Central Powers states, but even so, the amount of resources allocated by Romanian authorities was inconsistent and it could not (and did not) improve the real situation of the Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity. It is also true that fate of the prisoners was primarily influenced by the treatment applied to the POWs by the Ottoman authorities, who held them captive. Moreover, Ottoman authorities often shown themselves rather reluctant regarding the improvement of the camp conditions or the inspection of the POWs camps, even after the signing of the Mudros armistice (October 1918) and the archival documents reflect the difficulties. For instance, in September 1919, being concerned over the lack of information regarding the fate of Romanian POWs in Ottoman camps, the Romanian authorities have forwarded a note to the Ottoman Ministry of War, asking for official and accurate information concerning the situation of the Romanian POWs, alive or deceased, held in Ottoman captivity. More exactly, the Romanian authorities were asking data about the nominal lists of the Romanian POWs, their camps of captivity, as well as the lists of Romanian escapees or considered so by the Ottoman authorities (*Relații politice și militare Româno-Turce 1878-1989*, 2023, pp. 371-372). One month later, in October 1919, other actions were initiated by Romanian officials, in order to obtain the death certificates of the Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity, as mentioned on the 4 nominal lists obtained by the Legation of Spain in Constantinople, which was entrusted with the protection of the Romanian interests in the Ottoman Empire. The document, issued by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requested the Romanian Special Delegate Epaminonda Papacosta to approach the Ottoman authorities in order to obtain the original death certificates issued by the Ottoman camps and lazarettes of Constantinople, Eskisehir, Bursa, Afion-Karahisar, Psamatia, Bor, Iarbași, Baghtaș, Sehir-dere, Hadem, Keni, Konia, Derindje, Mardin, Bilan, Adrianopol, Karamursal, Bozanti, Kirkilse, Derbezie, Rodosto, Ismidt, Alexandreta and Maltepe (*Relații politice și militare Româno-Turce.....pp. 372-373*). The 24 locations mentioned in the document practically refer to all Ottoman camps and lazarettes that hosted, at a certain moment, Romanian POWs, during WWI.

The (Difficult) Repatriation Process

Some other significant information concerning the Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity are provided in the context of the repatriation of the survivor POWs. The process, that took place at the end of the war, extended for quite a while, due to various reasons, but mainly because of the lack of transportation or diseases. A first wave of repatriation was linked to the signing, on January 4/17 1918, of the Convention on the exchange of wounded and invalid prisoners, between Romania and the Central Powers, following the Focșani armistice (December 1917). However, the document that regulated a significant repatriation was the Convention regarding the exchange of POWs signed on March 1918, which stipulated the granting of a reciprocity concerning the exchange of prisoners, more precisely the release of all Romanian POWs held by the Central Powers in exchange of all the German, Bulgarian and Turkish prisoners held by Romania in Moldova (Negoi, 2009, p. 141).

When referring to the time schedule, it is worth mentioning that in the case of the Ottoman Empire it was stipulated a term for repatriation of 3 weeks from the signing of the protocols, which was the shortest, when compared to the terms established in the case of Germany (7 weeks), or Bulgaria (9 weeks), although in the case of the Ottoman Empire, it involved the lowest number of POWs for repatriation (See Negoï, 2009, p. 145).

However, in practice, the *per se* repatriation process, that included all the POWs, proved to be a much longer and sinous process. According to Romanian centralized data, as written on document issued in the fall of 1920, by the Statistical Service of the Ministry of War, the entire repatriation process came to an end in 1920, following two years of efforts. The above mentioned document included an appendix entitled *Memoriu privind chestiunea prizonierilor români (Memorandum on the issue of the Romanian POWs)* which tackles, in four sections, the most important aspects related to POWs, namely the issue of the total number of the POWs, the real number of the repatriated POWs, the data referring to the deceased POWs, and finally, the number of the missing POWs (Negoï, 2009, pp. 199-203). Although it admits the possibility of a certain inaccuracy, the document is the first to provide centralized data on the final number of Romanian POWs held, throughout the war, in each state of the Central Powers, thus mentioning 147891 Romanian POWs in Germany, 51000 in Austria-Hungary, 25000 in Bulgaria and 6000 in the Ottoman Empire, resulting a total of 229891 POWs (Negoï, 2009, p. 200).

A later document, issued during the interior period, in 1929, by the same entity of the Romanian Ministry of War, provides a higher number of POWs and different data concerning the deceased, in almost every category. For instance, in the particular case of Romanian POWs in Ottoman captivity, the provided number is much higher, namely 12796 (Negoï, 2009, p. 223), although the data may include the POWs transferred to Ottoman Empire by Germany, at a certain point. The same document mentioned a number of 3363 Romanian POWs who died in Ottoman captivity.

As for the situation of the Ottoman POWs held in Romanian captivity, one should mention that the numbers were significantly lower when compared to the size of Romanian captivity in Ottoman camps. Thus, existing data refer to only around 600 Ottoman POWs held in Romanian captivity - more precisely, 605 Ottoman POWs (See Yanikdağ, 2013, p. 19; Taşkıran, 2001, p. 51), during the years of WWI, which represent only one tenth of the Romanian POWs held in Ottoman captivity, judging by the lowest data in Romania's case. According to foreign data, the number of Ottoman POWs in Romania was even lower, as reflected in book dating from 1931, that mentioned only 350 Ottoman POWs in Romania, and also some other 3000 civil internees (Grecu, 2019, p. 105). The number of the Ottoman POWs in Romanian captivity was so small that, for instance, in an official Romanian statistic referring to the total number of POWs originated from the Central Powers, held in Romanian captivity, there were mentioned 31875 prisoners, out of which 6546 were Germans, 25114 were Austro-Hungarians and 215 were Bulgarians, but the number of the Ottoman POWs was not even mentioned (Negoï, 2011, p. 292).

Some information is provided by a workpaper elaborated in 2003, which refers to the number of the foreign POWs held by Romania, as reflected in the reports written by the Swiss delegates, after visiting Romanian camps. Thus, in April 1918, the foreign delegates have mentioned the existence of 12672 prisoners, among which 9788 were Austro-Hungarians, 2452 were Germans, 313 were Turks and 129 were Bulgarians POWs (Şiperco, 2003). Information regarding the presence of the Ottoman POWs in Romanian camps is also provided when referring to the size (capacity) of Romanian camps and the existing POWs of various origin, at a certain moment; for instance, in the POW camp of Bârlad, there were 68 Turkish POWs, out of a total number of 3063 prisoners existing in the camp, while in Dobrovăţ camp there were only 8 Turks and in Galaţi POW camp there were registered 17 Turks (Grecu, 2019, pp. 151-156). One of the biggest Romanian POW camps, the Şipote camp (which had a capacity of 17.000 POWs), hosted (on October 18th, 1917), only 75 Turks, and a total of 1700 prisoners (out of which 318 prisoners were ill) as witnessed by a Swiss delegation that visited the camp (Grecu, 2019, pp. 159).

The Romanian archival data regarding the presence of the Ottoman POWs in Romanian captivity are rather scarce, as well as the existing scientific contributions referring to the topic.

Conclusions

The present study has revealed various aspects of WWI captivity, focusing on the experience of the Romanian POWs in Ottoman camps and Ottoman (Turkish) POWs in Romania camps. First of all, we should emphasize the sharp contrast in terms of numbers between the two groups. Thus, according to existing data, at least 6000 Romanian POWs (going up to 12000, depending on the sources) experienced captivity in Ottoman camps, while only up to 600 Ottoman POWs have been held in Romanian captivity.

As seen throughout the paper, at the beginning there were some difficulties regarding the monitoring of the status of the POWs, particularly on the Ottoman side, as the Spanish diplomats entrusted with representing and defending the rights of Romanian POWs, were not allowed to visit the Ottoman camps, for quite a period. However, starting from the summer of 1917, as the foreign diplomats have been granted permission and managed to visit the Ottoman camps that hosted Romanian POWs, things have changed gradually, especially after Romanian authorities, concerned over the situation of the POWs, have directed resources and food parcels for improving the living and health conditions of the POWs. After bilateral negotiations (via Spanish Legation in Constantinople) Ottoman authorities have provided equal terms of treatment and payment of stipends for the Romanian POWs officers, as the Romanian provided for the Ottoman POWs held in Romanian captivity. Moreover, despite the difficult captivity conditions existing in the camps, leading to illness and sometimes to death, there were no cases of abuses or inhuman treatment, as those existing in German or Austro-Hungarian captivity. However, the cases of death among the captives only diminished, throughout the years of war. Thus, towards the end of captivity, before repatriation, more than 3000 Romanian POWs have died in Ottoman captivity, due to various causes, from inanition to poor hygiene and specific diseases (pneumonia, bronchitis, typhus and so on). However, in terms of mortality rate, the worst situation for Romanian POWs in Central Powers captivity proved to be the one existing in Austro-Hungarian captivity, seconded by the German and Bulgarian captivity.

As for the issue of the Ottoman POWs, those held in Romanian captivity were a small number and with very few exceptions (officers) they were only soldiers. Usually, in Romanian camps, the Ottoman POWs have been visited by Red Cross delegations and Swiss diplomats, which reflected their situation and complaints, mainly regarding the food rations. The two sides have exchanged their POWs during the repatriation process, which proved to be sinous and difficult.

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