

*Through Russia, for the Romanian Cause: Vicar Iacob Popa and the
Recruitment of Volunteers among Romanian prisoners*

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Abstract: The subject regarding the participation of Romanian prisoner soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Army in theaters of operations of the Romanian Kingdom's Army is very extensive and of great interest. General and specialty literature, memoirs, studies, articles, collections of documents, etc. issued during the war and, above all, in the post-war period, as well as rich archive sources allow a relatively original approach on this phenomenon. Starting from the contact with various archives, memoirs, and secondary sources, the present paper is an attempt to retrace the setup stages of the first Transylvanian and Bukovinian Romanian Volunteer Corps in Russia and the activity of Vicar Iacob Popa in enlisting and enrolling volunteers. Iacob Popa is an almost unknown and equally unstudied figure of historical Blaj. He lived and worked in a time of great national and political unrest for the Romanians in Transylvania in the first half of the 20th century. We attempted to outline several stages of his activity, starting with the moment he volunteered for the enlistment commissions in Russia and continuing with his propaganda work for enlisting prisoners from Transylvania, Bukovina and Banat in the Romanian Army, as well as with the records of his successes and failures in the mission he was entrusted with. The last part of the study is dedicated to the events that marked the end of the volunteer enlistment activity.

Keywords: captivity, volunteer work, military chaplain, propaganda, Russia.

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The issue of training detachments of volunteers, former Romanian combatants in the Austro-Hungarian Army during the First World War, was a topic that has been extensively studied in the last decades (see the excellent papers signed by historians Ioan I. Șerban, Vasile Dudaș and Cornel Țucă).¹ However, the continuous research of archival documents provides us with a new approach on this phenomenon in the context of volunteer recruitment activity. We have chosen this research topic because Vicar Iacob Popa's recruitment activity is almost unknown and also not researched so far,² although the bibliography dedicated to this phenomenon includes an impressive number of titles; some of them are mentioned in the present study.

Iacob Popa lived and worked in a period of great political and national turmoil of the Transylvanian Romanians, during the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.³ For clarifying the importance of the aspects discussed here, we will briefly outline the biography of Vicar Iacob Popa. He was born on December 11, 1878, in the town of Teiuș, Lower Alba County. Regarding his intellectual formation, it is known that he pursued theological studies in Blaj and graduated from Budapest Law School. In the period 1901-1904, he became known in the ecclesiastical and political-administrative life of Transylvania, in Blaj and Făgăraș, but also in

¹ See Ioan I. Șerban, *Voluntarii transilvăneni și bucovineni din Rusia în războiul pentru întregirea neamului. 1916-1919* (Alba Iulia: Aeternitas, 2003); Vasile Dudaș, *Voluntarii Marii Uniri* (Timișoara: Augusta, 1996); Cornel Țucă, *Prizonierii români din armata austro-ungară internată în Rusia. Problema repatrierii* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2011).

² The Romanian version of this study was published in 2013, in the journal "Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis". Since then, researchers as Ioana Bonda and Diana Covaci published a few studies about Iacob Popa's mission in Russia: Diana Covaci, "Popa Iacob (1872-1937), vicar foraneu al Făgărașului, prepozit al Capitlului metropolitan din Blaj, vicar general arhiepiscopesc", in *Canonici, profesori și vicari foranei din Biserica Română Unită (1853-1918). Dicționar* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2013), 337-339; Ioana Bonda, "Aspects of 1918 from the Journal of a Theologian", *Transylvanian Review*, volume XXVII, Supplement no. 2 (2018): 203-213.

³ Ioana Botezan, *Iacob Popa: catalog* (Cluj-Napoca, 1978), 1-2.

Bucharest and Iași.⁴ Of the positions he has held, we think that the following ones should be mentioned here: practitioner at the Archdiocesan Office of Blaj (1900-1901), vice-notary and archivist of the Consistory (1901-1904), proto-notary of the Consistory (1904-1910), secretary of the Metropolitan and director of the Metropolitan Chancellery (1910-1912), vicar of the Archbishop and Parish Priest of Făgăraș (1912-1920), consistory advisor in Blaj and rector of the Boarding School of Boys, scholastic canon, cantor canon, and lecturer canon.⁵ During the First World War, as vicar of Făgăraș, he offered his services to the Romanian Army by following it in its retreat to Bucharest, and later to Iași. Here he published a call in the Romanian newspaper entitled “*Neamul Românesc*”/“*The Romanian Nation*”, in which he urged the Transylvanian refugees to ask for: “[...] Romanian citizenship, then those destined to offer their services to the Army should join the Army, while those unsuitable for the Army, as well as women and children, should be looked after by the Romanian state”.⁶ Through a letter dating from January 4, 1917, addressed to Minister of War, Vintilă Brătianu, Vicar Iacob Popa requested his enrollment in the Romanian Army, more precisely, in the commissions that were going to travel to Russia with the mission of recruiting volunteers among the Romanian prisoners from Transylvania, motivating that: “It has been almost four months since I left Făgăraș, following the withdrawal of the Romanian armies. As soon as I arrived in Bucharest, I sought to acquire a tool by means which I could earn my livelihood, because I do not wish to receive help without any struggle. In the midst of the serious events, this attempt failed. Therefore, for the

⁴ Elena Ioana Ignat, *Viața cotidiană în Făgăraș în anul 1916. Însemnările vicarului Iacob Popa* (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2011), 8.

⁵ Cluj County Branch of the National Archives, *Iacob Popa Personal Fund*, inventory no. 536, document 86, 1 /further CJCBA/.

⁶ Iacob Popa, “Apel către românii transilvăneni, refugiați pe urma retragerii armatelor române”, *Neamul Românesc*, January 14, 1917, 1.

same reason, I respectfully ask to be accepted in the Army".⁷ In the month of May of the same year, he left for Russia as a member of the commission for recruiting volunteers among the Transylvanian Romanian prisoners. Following his return from Russia, in Iași, from November 1, until December 18, 1918, he served as a military priest with the rank of captain in the "Avram Iancu" Volunteer Units. In 1920 he returned to Făgăraș, where he found his wealth wasted, because the Austro-Hungarian authorities had declared him a traitor and had confiscated all his properties. He died on September 10, 1937, regretted by all those who knew and appreciated him.⁸

According to the existing statistics, the number of Romanian prisoners in Russia, who had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Army, reached at the end of 1917 about 120,000 people from Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina.⁹ During the early years of the war, more precisely in the period in which Romania was neutral, those who were kept prisoners in Russia could express their national feelings only through letters sent to the Romanian authorities. On the one hand, this restrained attitude of the Romanian prisoners can be explained through their relative isolation within the Russian Empire, which means that due to the fact that most of them were peasants, they were scattered throughout the farm regions. On the other hand, the neutrality adopted by the Romanian state between 1914 and 1916 determined the government in Bucharest to formally declare that the issue of the Transylvanian prisoners was an internal matter of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At the same time, the closure of the border between

⁷ CJCBN, *Iacob Popa Personal Fund*, inventory no. 536, document 155, 1.

⁸ Ioana Botezan, *Iacob Popa: catalog*, 2; see also Mihai-Octavian Groza, "Preoții români transilvăneni pe fronturile Marelui Război", *Scrieri pe alete... Lucrările Conferinței Naționale "O filă de istorie: om, societate, cultură în secolele XVII-XXI"* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012), 380-381.

⁹ Petru Nemoianu, *Prima Alba Iulie. Voluntarii români din războiul pentru întregirea neamului* (Timișoara: Institutul de Arte Grafice Poporul, 1922), 55.

Romania and Russia during the period of neutrality prevented the immigrated Transylvanian Romanians, led by Vasile Lucaciu and Octavian Goga, to inquire on the Romanians taken prisoners in Russia.¹⁰ This reserved attitude disappeared when Romania entered the war against the Central Powers and when about 40,000 Transylvanian Romanians turned to the Russian authorities asking them to be allowed to join the Romanian army as volunteers with the purpose of fighting against their true enemies.¹¹

In the month of October 1916, the General Staff of the Russian Army sent a first order to the commandants of the prisoner camps, which mentioned the details of a military exchange between Russia and Romania, about 15,000 people coming from the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Another order, issued in November 1916, stipulated that they would be sent to fight on the Moldavian front as part of the Romanian Army, but only those who wished to do so. The meeting place of the volunteers was set in Darnița, near Kiev.¹² Until the end of December 1916, based on this order, in Darnița were concentrated 220 officers and 1,200 non-commissioned officers, to whom were added at the beginning of 1917 about 300 volunteers arriving from Siberia. Lawyer Victor Deleu, a sub-lieutenant, was designated to be their leader.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., 3-6; Ioan Popescu-Puțuri, *1918: Unirea Transilvaniei cu România* (București: Editura Politică, 1978), 430.

¹¹ Aurel Ganea, "Contribuția voluntarilor români ardeleni la Marea Unire", *Douăzeci de ani de la Unire*, ed. Tiron Albani, vol. I, (Oradea: Institutul de Arte Grafice „Grafica”, 1938), 323.

¹² Ioana Botezan, "Documente privind aspecte ale activității de recrutare a voluntarilor dintre prizonierii români transilvăneni și bucovineni din Rusia pentru a lupta pe frontul din Moldova în anul 1918", *Mehedinți-istorie și cultură*, year I, no. 1 (1978): 276-277; Ioan I. Șerban, "Primul corp al voluntarilor transilvăneni și bucovineni din Rusia", *Apulum*, no. XXVII (1989): 433.

¹³ CJCBA, *Victor Deleu Personal Fund*, inventory no. 161, document 40, 5. In Darnița, on April 13/26, 1917, the Volunteer Proclamation (or the Declaration of Darnița) was elaborated, in which the right to self-determination was invoked, the volunteers expressing their intention to detach themselves from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to achieve the national

The outbreak of the “bourgeois-democratic” revolution in Russia, in February 1917,¹⁴ radicalized the state of mind of the Romanian prisoners. They were, in Darnița, and in order to be enrolled as volunteers, they took the oath to fight alongside the Romanian Army for the unification of Transylvania with Romania. They signed a commitment according to which they were going to become officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Romanian Army: “[...] Since the moment of this commitment, we consider ourselves as officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of Romania. In this quality, we will have all the rights and all the benefits enjoyed by the officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Romanian Army [...] However, anyone of us who would not answer the call, shall be considered a deserter, and for any violation of law, we will be judged according to the Romanian laws. May God help us to liberate the lands inhabited by Romanians through our struggle and to establish forever the great, glorious, powerful and happy Romania”.¹⁵ The volunteers concentrated in Darnița and then moved to Kiev, formed the first battalion, which left for Iași on June 3, 1917.¹⁶

state based on “universal democracy”. See: Nicolae Bocșan, *Ideea de națiune la românii din Transilvania și Banat* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1997), 227-228.

¹⁴ We would like to emphasize that 1917 is regarded as the year of the “fatigue of the fighting people”, who faced an endless war. This exhaustion comprised soldiers, who endured the hardships and difficulties of the battlefield for a result that no one could see. All the states involved in this conflict experienced profound crises (explained by the survival reflexes of the soldiers tested in the killing offensive and who had the feeling that they were sacrificed). The most serious of these crises was the one that touched Russia, where the Tsarist regime was removed. Romania’s fate was directly related to the Tsarist Empire with regard to the continuation of hostilities. When the new government in Petrograd addressed the belligerent states asking them to cease military operations and sign the peace, it became quite evident that sooner or later Russia was going to leave the war. Later, Romania was forced to sign the peace treaty with the Central Powers. See: Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza, *Istoria secolului XX*, vol. I (Bucharest: Bic All, 1998), 76-77; Zorin Zamfir, Jean Baci, *Primul Război Mondial* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1995), 273.

¹⁵ CJCANA, *Iacob Popa Personal Fund*, inventory no. 536, document 168, 1.

¹⁶ A special moment was the arrival in Iași, on June 7, 1917, of this first detachment of volunteers, led by Victor Deleu. In his speech, Victor Deleu stated the following: “We came

At the beginning of the volunteer recruitment action, the officers showed the difficulties encountered, as the Russian great landowners and the other Russian owners did not want to lose profitable labor force since the Russian people and the soldiers were increasingly displaying their disobedience and revolt against their masters. The benevolent attitude of the authorities and of the General Staff of the Russian Army culminated with the order of August 22, 1918, which admitted the recruitment of 30,000 Romanian volunteers and the extension of the recruitment area to entire Russia. This measure opened the prospect of a wide-ranging action concerning the reorganization and redistribution of the recruitment commissions whose number highly increased. Thus, each member of the commission became a propagandist and a recruiter, with the right to be supported by capable prisoners, especially officers, with a certain intellectual level. They were provided with brochures, posters, and newspapers, in particular with "România Mare"/ "Great Romania" (this title had a major significance for the collective consciousness) that appeared in Kiev, with 23 issues during the period July-December 1917.¹⁷

Following territorial redistribution, in the Moscow region, the Third Commission developed its activity, the other entities operating in the

here because first of all, we were called by the blood and by the nation. Secondly, the love for this free country to which our dreams were flying daily [...] And going forward, we will overcome because I believe that the Carpathians are not as high as our spirits". On June 8, the oath took place in the Union Square, in the presence of King Ferdinand, Prime Minister Ionel I. C. Brătianu and a large crowd of Romanians, whose enthusiasm could not be described. When describing this moment, Victor Deleu said: "Under the tricolor flag, with our right hand outstretched to God, with a strong and determined voice, we, the volunteers, entered the holy covenant for defending our country and our sovereign" (CJCBNA, *Victor Deleu Personal Fund*, inventory no. 161, document 17, 10). The enthusiastic welcome organized for the first group of volunteers resulted in the stimulation of actions regarding the organization of the recruiting commissions that were going to leave for Russia.

¹⁷ Șerban, "Primul corp al voluntarilor transilvăneni și bucovineni", 434; Ioan I. Șerban, "Gazeta România Mare, organ de presă al Corpului Voluntarilor Români din Rusia (iulie-decembrie 1918)", *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, no. 8 (2004): 175-185.

regions of Kiev, Kazan, and Omsk. It consisted of Major Gheorghe Plesnilă, Sub-lieutenant Ilie Cucu, and Vicar Iacob Popa. Data and information regarding the propaganda activity of the recruitment commissions are contained in the notes of the above-mentioned Vicar. They provide us with a plastic description of the events, the cleric entering history as a participant in the First World War. The successes of the Commission were registered by the Vicar in periodic reports, in which, he mentioned the extensive actions carried out in the military districts of Moscow through a propaganda campaign with positive results in most of the concentration centers of the Romanian prisoners. The tables prepared by Vicar Iacob Popa, in which were registered the future volunteers with the communes and counties they came from reveal the fact that most of the recruits came from Transylvania, Banat, and the Western counties, and to a lesser extent from Bukovina.¹⁸

The Third Commission has recruited volunteers especially in the Orel and Kursk prefectures, and established its headquarters in Borisoglebsk.¹⁹ The propaganda activity among the Romanian prisoners consisted in meetings and speeches. In the meetings organized for convincing them that it was necessary for them to enroll as volunteers, Iacob Popa spoke about the fact that the oath given to the Emperor in Vienna did not oblige the Russian prisoners at all, emphasizing their important, fundamental role that they could play in “this holy war”, the purpose of the fight being a noble one, namely the union of Transylvania with Romania. In the first months of activity, until September, there were some successes, but after that, fewer and fewer Transylvanian prisoners registered as volunteers, because the Bolshevik propaganda and the pacifist ideas made them believe that the

¹⁸ CJCBA, *Iacob Popa Personal Fund*, inventory no. 536, document 160, 161, 171, 176, 178, 186, 195, 201, 223 (documents that contain the tables elaborated by vicar Iacob Popa).

¹⁹ In the Voronej region.

war would end and that they would soon return home.²⁰ For example, in the camp in the city of Borisoglebsk, out of the 82 prisoners, who attended the speech of Vicar Iacob Popa not even one of them registered as volunteer, which determined the Vicar to state that: “[...] after all, I had a very bitter disappointment because no one was registered as volunteer. They were rogue elements [...] people lacking any culture and any ideal”.²¹

As we have already stated in the lines above, the propaganda activity among the prisoners consisted in meetings and speeches. Eugenia Bârlea considers that a very important element for the success of these meetings was the speech itself and especially the manner in which political ideas were expressed, so as to make them accessible to the level of understanding of the soldiers, most of them peasants. As far as accounts about them have reached us, the speeches abounded with religious connotations. An example for this aspect is the speech of Vicar Iacob Popa, whose form and content resembled the sermons, and proved that these statements belong to a politically engaged cleric, an action that had begun in Transylvania a century ago.²² In addition, the Vicar’s speeches were strongly imbued with historical content. For example, in the speech held on August 11, 1917, Iacob Popa presented the history of Romanians as a succession of human ages: childhood, youth, and maturity/old age. The childhood was marked by the

²⁰ Minerva Lovin, “Câteva aspecte privind voluntariatul românilor ardeleni în Rusia, reflectate în memoriile vicarului Iacob Popa (1917-1918)”, *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Series Historica*, year XLIII, no. 1-2 (1998): 126.

²¹ CJCBA, *Blaj Central Library Fund*, inventory no. 1166, file Iacob Popa, Note Books from the First World War, book V, note of September 17, 1917.

²² Eugenia Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra Primului Război Mondial*, PhD. Thesis (Cluj-Napoca, 2000), 172; Eugenia Bârlea, “Atitudinea prizonierilor ardeleni din Primul Război Mondial față de corpurile de voluntari”, *Acta Musei Porolissensis*, no. XXIII/II (2000): 167-176. See also Camelia Vulea, “Conduita preotului greco-catolic din Hațeg în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea, între teorie și practică”, *Identitate și alteritate. Studii de istorie politică și culturală*, vol. 4, Constantin. Bărbulescu, Luminița Dumănescu, Sorin Mitu, Vlad Popovici (eds.) (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2007), 91-106.

personalities of the great rulers, such as Mircea cel Bătrân, Ștefan cel Mare and Mihai Viteazul. He also spoke to them about the Huniads, Nicolaus Olahus, as well as about the Hungarian noble families who rose among the Romanians, thus trying to awaken their pride as descendants who should be worthy of such predecessors. The youth culminated with the moment 1877/1878, after which the age of maturity began, in which political unity had to be accomplished. His comparisons are not often inspired ones. In the same speech, the Vicar claimed that the importance of the moment in which Romania entered the war can be compared to that of the descent of the Holy Spirit over the apostles. However, Vicar Iacob Popa sensed that he was addressing an audience whose horizon did not go beyond the borders of the village, for which the essential values were the traditional ones and the transcendent reality was closer than history. It was a world that had not yet totally abandoned the attitude of boycotting history.²³

Of a particular historical value are also the annotations about the failures registered by the propaganda commissions. According to the aspects recorded by Vicar Iacob Popa, during his meetings with the volunteers, the first speaker was the head of the Commission, Major Plesnilă, an officer who often distorted the message sent to the prisoners, so Iacob Popa was often forced to interfere in order to “repair” his speeches, outlining the true goals of the mission.²⁴ We can-not stop from asking ourselves: What determined the distortion of Major Plesnilă’s messages?²⁵

²³ Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra Primului Război Mondial*, 172-174.

²⁴ CJCBA, *Blaj Central Library Fund*, inventory no. 1166, file Iacob Popa, Note Books from the First World War, book V, 20, 39.

²⁵ In his memoirs, Vicar Iacob Popa recorded the following words of Major Plesnilă: “Mr. Major Plesneală spoke to them about everything. I was not pleased because it seemed like he intended to leave us with nothing else to say, and he used my tone and ideas so far. Then he would also say imbecilities, for example, that Romania would give Russia a number of German and Hungarian prisoners equal to the Romanian prisoners that Russia would give Romania, as if they were talking only about an exchange of prisoners and not about

What exactly caused the failure of this delegate's speeches? Of course, we can only formulate an assumption for answering this question, that this Romanian delegate probably lacked, the ability to communicate with the peasant soldiers and, at the same time, he was somewhat politically ignorant, as he was not well informed about the Transylvanian issue.

The numerous reports prepared by Iacob Popa and his memoirs, also reveal the difficulties of the recruitment mission, with the first reactions coming from those who had sworn to be faithful to the Emperor. In addition, most of the prisoners were not aware of the cause they were called to defend, and they considered that if they participated in the meetings organized by the recruitment commissions, they would be recruited by force. Excepting the causes described above, we could also mention the comfortable situation of the prisoners living in peasant households: "The Russian peasant does not care that the prisoner lives with his wife or daughter; the main goal was to have as many people as possible working in the village at present and in the future. And there was also a disposition of the Russian government that war widows should receive one peasant prisoner for the field work; he received all the rights of the deceased master".²⁶

To all these aspects we could also add the risks of enrolling as volunteers, which many prisoners were no longer willing to take. We should keep in mind that recruitment activity took place in parallel with the disturbances of the Bolshevik revolution and with the spread of the pacifist

volunteers; then that it was discovered that Franz Ferdinand was killed by a Hungarian, etc. [...]". See: *Ibid.*, 20. He once told them that: "700,000 enemy corpses remained in Romania, that the Russians promised us Bessarabia, that in Romania there is equality and ideal freedom". See: *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra Primului Război Mondial*, 170.

ideas, so prisoners hoped that peace would be signed and they would soon return home.

Vicar Iacob Popa's remarks revealed not only the prisoners' hesitation, but also the joy and enthusiasm with which some of them welcome the recruitment commission. For example, in the report dated November 8, 1917, the following aspects were recorded: "There was an event that day, which gave me a lot of soul comfort I had not known so far in the excursion through Russia. One day at noon, I was passing with Sergeant Pop through a kind of park in the city of Putivl, when suddenly, three young people ran to us between the bushes: Good thing that God has brought you here, we've been waiting for you for a long time. Now, please don't leave us here and relieve us from this bitter bondage. As we fought together with our enemies, we want to fight voluntarily for our language".²⁷

In his frequent reports, Iacob Popa also pointed out the insufficient propaganda work due to the small number of sub-commissions and their instability, as well as the fact that some propagandists had left, accompanying the first groups of volunteers to their country. Furthermore, the same reports suggest a large range of measures meant to improve the recruitment actions, motivating that: "[...] propaganda is definitely missing and this is the only field of activity of the commissions".²⁸ In spite of all proposed measures, the events taking place in Russia in the autumn of 1917 made the continuation of this action impossible, so the commissions and sub-commissions stopped working until the end of January 1918. The temporary cessation of recruitment did not mean the interruption of propaganda activity, which continued within the possible limits, volunteers temporarily remaining in place and not being sent to Kiev anymore. By a

²⁷ CJCBA, *Iacob Popa Personal Fund*, inventory no. 536, document 161, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, document 188, 1.

circular order, the military headquarters of this Ukrainian city urged that, if the new Bolshevik authorities prohibited their actions, the commissions should not start the disarmament, but continue their activity under the Romanian Red Cross, helping with money and medicines the Romanian prisoners who were sick and unable to work.²⁹

Through his speeches, Vicar Iacob Popa managed to recruit a considerable number of volunteers, succeeding in setting up recruitment sub-commissions consisting of volunteers. Sergeant Alexandru Sachi (82nd Infantry Regiment, made prisoner on July 7, 1915) and Sergeant George Munteanu (302nd Regiment, made prisoner on May 22, 1916) formed such a sub-commission that was subordinated to the Vicar.³⁰ Subsequently, they were sent to Kiev for equipment and training, after which they were active in the Third Commission.³¹

After the Bolsheviks came to power, the volunteer recruitment activity decreased. In his memoirs, Iacob Popa said that Romanian prisoners who had arrived with the latest transports from Russia were increasingly attracted to the pacifist ideas and fraternities on the front, while they were more reserved towards the recruitment commissions. Following the announcement of peace by Romania and after the way to Chişinău has been opened through Ukraine, Iacob Popa returned home, like many other prisoners who had remained in Russia until the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire became obvious. He arrived in Iaşi on June 20, and he was relieved of the task assigned by the Third Commission on July 22.³²

In conclusion, we can state that the Romanian groups of volunteers were a powerful force, gathering around them the Romanians from

²⁹ Ibid., document 215, 1.

³⁰ Ibid., document 119, 1.

³¹ Ibid., document 184, 1.

³² Lovin, "Câteva aspecte privind voluntariatul românilor ardeleni în Rusia", 128-130.

Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina, who have expressed their desire to fight against their true enemies. According to historian Cornel Țucă, the importance of the struggle of the Romanian volunteers had a triple dimension: political, moral, and military. Although appearing and developing in a period that was unfavorable to the Romanians (in general) and to Romania (in particular) because of the well-known hostile military and political forces, the phenomenon of volunteerism played an important part in the foundation of Great Romania.³³ This approach, based mainly on Vicar Iacob Popa's memoirs and correspondence, is far from being complete. Nevertheless, it suggests a perspective and a point of view on the volunteer recruitment action, leaving room for future research.

³³ Țucă, *Prizonierii români din armata austro-ungară internăți în Rusia*, 13.