

# The Problem of establishing the Military Border in Bukovina (1774–1786)

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MIHAI-ȘTEFAN CEAUȘU

**T**HE ANNEXATION of the north-west part of the Principality of Moldavia by the Habsburg Empire in the autumn of 1774, of the Chernivtsi county and two-thirds of the Suceava county, respectively, named Bucovina, was a consequence of the international political and diplomatic situations generated by the Russo-Ottoman War between 1768-1774. By the new territorial acquisition, the Austrians sought to gain a strategic advantage, making an easier connection between Transylvania and the southern Kingdom of Poland annexed in 1773 with the name of Galicia.

The new territory called Bukovina, which was located at the eastern outskirts of the empire, on the border with the Ottoman Empire, with an area of 10,440 km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of over 70,000 inhabitants, living in three towns and 260 villages, was placed from the beginning under a military administration, subordinated to the Aulic War Council in Vienna.<sup>1</sup> The Bukovina District was equipped by nature with a varied terrain (mountains and forested hills, valleys and good plains for farming), being crossed by three large water courses (Dniester, Prut and Siret) as well as roads that connected with Transylvania, Galicia, the Hotin Raya and the Principality of Moldavia. The population of the new province was fairly heterogeneous from an ethnical point of view and according to the topographic description made by Major Miede in 1776, consisted of “Orthodox Vlachs, some few Hungarians, Ruthenians, of which a large part immigrants from Poland, people from Maramures and Transylvania, as well as Gypsies, who are mostly bondsmen of the Orthodox monasteries here, . . . and Jews”.<sup>2</sup>

The imperial authorities noted that the new territorial acquisition was an underdeveloped area with a predominantly agrarian economy, dominated by economic and social structures and relations of medieval origin, with all the specific implications derived from this. On a provincial scale, the land ownership was mostly in possession of the boyars and monasteries. The predominance of villages and poor development of Chernivtsi, Siret and Suceava towns was mirrored in the social structure, dominated at the top by the land nobility and at the base by the preponderance of the peasant element.

Shortly after the zone's occupation by the Austrian troops, the question of the constitutional-administrative status of the new Habsburg possession was raised. In this respect, the commander of the imperial occupation troops, General Gabriel Baron von Spleny, reported to the Viennese authorities in December 1774, about the need to introduce a military regime in the management of the annexed part from the Principality of Moldavia. In his view, it was a matter much more easily achieved than introducing a form of civil government, taking into account the border position of this new acquisition, which did not possess fortresses and natural fortified places. Furthermore, in support of the proposal, the Turks neighborhood from the Hotin Raya was invoked, the border with Moldavia, considered a province of the Ottoman Empire, the quite simple government manner until then, and the spirit of the nation from the new imperial province. In addition, the price of establishing the military administration would have been much lower, whereas the introduction of a civil administration would have cost much more, which would have increased the contribution paid by the inhabitants, hence creating the danger of their emigration.<sup>3</sup>

The military regime was to take the form of a Military Council (Generalatconseil), composed of military and few nationals, which depended only on the Aulic War Council in Vienna, and to receive orders from it through the medium of the Commander General of Galicia. The nationals were elected from the local nobility, in order to be employed in the administration according to the system used by Moldavian regime until then. This Military Council, whose residence was set in the city of Chernivtsi, consisted of a commanding general as president, two staff officers, an auditor, two landowners, two senior officers as assessors, one German and one Romanian secretary, to which a few petty officers were added, which served as court servants. The Council had to meet in session twice a week, so as to receive the orders coming from the central bodies, as well as to establish certain police and commercial regulations, required by the circumstances, or to investigate in sections the current processes.<sup>4</sup> The project did not receive the approval of the Court of Vienna, since the Porte had not consented to the annexation of the new Moldavian possession by the Habsburgs, the uncertainty of the international acceptance reigning on it. As a result, the co-regent Joseph II decided that things in Bucovina should remain in the existing state since the annexation, accepting the Aulic War Council's opinion not to establish here a military zone, but only an Interim Military Administration that would depend directly on the Council in Vienna.<sup>5</sup>

The Bukovina Interim Military Administration consisted largely of an administrator, assisted by an adviser, an auditor, to which a secretary and a registrar were added. General Gabriel von Spleny, the commanding general of the Austrian troops in the area at the time, was at the head of the government of the new province, as administrator and commissioner of the emperor. The military administration's primary task was to collect taxes, to ensure the smooth running of administration and justice, even taking measures to improve the situation, to establish the sanitary belt on the border and to ensure the defense of the province. The old politico-administrative structure of medieval type, inherited from the time when the territory was integral part of Moldavia, was directly subordinated to this administration.<sup>6</sup>

Following the request made in late 1777, by General Spleny, to be moved to a post in the army deployed in the west of the monarchy, central authorities in Vienna called Major General Baron Karl von Enzenberg in his place, which had led the second Wallachian border regiment of Näsäud since 1764. He was a good connoisseur of Romanian realities from Transylvania, having also knowledge of Romanian language. With the installation of General Enzenberg in April 1778, as head of the Interim Military Administration of Bukovina,<sup>7</sup> the new province was gaining a good administrator and an ardent promoter of reformist Josephinist policy, under the conditions particular to this province.

In accordance with instructions received from Vienna, on the measures of definitive organization of the new territorial Habsburg acquisition, the new head of the military administration proposed in late 1779, a series of concrete measures to transform Bukovina in a militarized border area.<sup>8</sup> The reports on this occasion suggested the renewal of the Provincial Administration, the establishment of five district directorates with legal-administrative competences, which were to be led by officers with knowledge of Romanian language.<sup>9</sup> Since the majority of land in the new province was owned by boyars and monasteries, in order to reach the setting up of the wanted border military zone, General Enzenberg considered it necessary that land masters be compelled to surrender their property rights to the state, for some compensation.<sup>10</sup>

Applying these measures, unprecedented until then, would have sparked large protests and discontent not only in Bukovina, but also in neighboring Moldavia, given that many boyars there owned land in the new province. This would have further complicated things both domestically and internationally, removing any possibility of influence for the Imperials in the Principalities, which Vienna could not accept. As a result, Enzenberg's proposals were not accepted for the time being by the Court of Vienna, who briefly held the existing situation since the annexation.<sup>11</sup> These will be taken into consideration of the central imperial circles only the following year.

The issue of the new Habsburg acquisition's final status, under provisional administration of the military, was laid after the clarification and confirmation at the international political and legal relations' level of Bukovina's annexation by the Austrians. In light of the preliminary approach between the Austrian and the Russian Empires, up to the signing of an alliance, with well specified military and territorial aims against the Ottoman Empire, the House of Habsburg could not afford to leave things in a provisional state, precisely in this strategically important province, on the eastern border of the empire. As a result, the Court of Vienna, given the international political reasons, as well as other domestic policy grounds, acted since 1780, over many years to establish a permanent administrative constitutional status for this province. In this respect, the Emperor Joseph II asked the Aulic War Council in Vienna in early 1780, to take measures to reorganize Bukovina. In order to discuss ways of future organization of this province, which until then were kept on political, administrative, social and ecclesiastical matters, the status had at the moment of the annexation to the empire, the Council's Chairman, Count Hadik, required the approval of the emperor for the calling of Major General Enzenberg in Vienna, as head of the Interim Military Administration of Bukovina, to give the necessary clarifications regarding how to transition from the

Interim Military Administration regime to that of border military area, similar to those existing in Transylvania.<sup>12</sup>

The joint committee gathered on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1780, under the chairmanship of Count Hadik, to decide the future organization of the Bukovina district, outlined several problems,<sup>13</sup> resulting in the answers to the 35 questions on constitutional and administrative organization of Bukovina, the population recruitment, the organization of the Orthodox clergy, the establishment of public schools, etc. Regarding the administrative constitutional status of the new territory included in the Habsburg Empire, several views were outlined. Thus, the question about which organization method would be more useful to the state, the political (civil) or the military one, arguments were presented both for one and for the other form of organization, without reaching a decision.

For a civilian or political organization of the province, the fact that a desired trade, agriculture and industry development in Bucovina could be better done under a civilian administration was invoked, and also that this district is connected with Transylvania, Maramures and Galicia, which have civilian regimes etc.<sup>14</sup> Establishing a border military zone, required by some representatives of the central government was seen as an extension of the border military confines to Poland and a continuation of the military administration on another level, but its implementation would have encountered more obstacles, stemming mainly from the fact that the state had too little land for the equipment of future border guards and the expropriation of private owners against compensation would have been very difficult to realize.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, also in the way of the future employment of this acquisition in the Habsburg Empire, the opinions were divided. Some opinions were considering a union of the whole district, either with Galicia or with Transylvania. Others aimed a division of Bukovina's territory, where the north-east up to Moldova River would return to Galicia and the western, mountainous part, be incorporated to the military border of Transylvania. General Enzenberg's opinion was to maintain the integrity of the province, either under the existing administration, or under a boundary military regime.<sup>16</sup>

Opinions were so divided, that there was no common solution. As a result, the protocol was submitted to the emperor, to make a decision. But Joseph II, consistent with his view to inform himself and to know directly the realities on the ground, in each province, in order to take a decision, decided on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1780, that the future organization of Bucovina to remain yet suspended until he would personally go in this province.<sup>17</sup>

In the spring of 1780, the coregent planned to take a trip through Bucovina, occasioned by the meeting which was to take place in June, at Moghilău, with Empress Catherine II, in order to achieve a possible alliance with Russia, a goal achieved during next year. However, due to various factors, the trip through Bucovina could not be included into the imperial route.<sup>18</sup>

However, based on proposals made and the discussions conducted with the leadership factors of the Galicia's Administration, during his visit to this province, as well as from the need for better defense of the eastern flank of the empire, in the case of establishing an Austrian-Russian alliance with offensive purpose against the Ottoman Empire, Joseph II tilted in August 1780 towards the decision to divide Bukovina between Galicia

and the region of the second Wallachian border regiment from Transylvania.<sup>19</sup> The decision was not yet final, as appears from a letter to the Empress Maria Theresa, the co-regent show that this sharing will be done only in case of necessity.<sup>20</sup>

This plan of dissolution and division of the country could not remain hidden for long. The privileged estates gathered in the capital of Bukovina, headed by the Orthodox Bishop of Rădăuți Dosoftei Herescul, on behalf of the entire population of the country, worried by the awaiting disaster of dismembering the province, delegated the young boyar Basil Baș to submit the Emperor their grievances about these plans.<sup>21</sup> A great landlord, part of one of the most prominent aristocratic families in Moldavia, with an accomplished cultural formation through the studies at Vienna, follower of the Enlightenment and of Josephinist reformism Basil Baș was the most important political representative of the Romanians in the new province, that dominated with authority the political life of Bukovina in the first decades of Austrian rule.<sup>22</sup>

As a representative of Bukovina, representing the interests of all provincial estates, Baș remitted in November 1780, to the Count Hadik, Chairman of Aulic War Council, two important memoirs prepared by him personally, in which he presented the wishes of the country to the central authorities in Vienna.<sup>23</sup> The text of these documents, warmly recommended by Count Hadik to the imperial benevolence,<sup>24</sup> which constitutes *the first major political manifestation of the Romanians in Bucovina* after 1775, is significant for the attempt to define, based on historical and natural law, the political status of the Romanian nation here, in relation to the dominant power in the empire.

In his memoir, Basil Baș rejected in the name of the estates the idea of territorial dismemberment of Bukovina and its incorporation to Galicia, of Transylvania, demanding the preservation of the territorial integrity of the province, under the jurisdiction of the Military Administration, with a degree of autonomy, according to its historical past and its distinct ethnical character. In order to maintain the military jurisdiction in Bukovina, “our primary request”, the Turkish military neighborhood was invoked (the Hotin Raya), but also the fact that “the people” had more respect for the military than for the civil servants. Added to this was the example that the fate of Bukovina could offer Moldavia, in which many Moldavian boyars had their estates and where they found a pleasant and safe place of refuge, if necessary. The changing of the administrative constitutional status of the province, by division or by joining Galicia, could displease these boyars, driving them away from the House of Habsburg. This would have narrowly restricted the Habsburg Empire’s possibility of exercising any influence in Moldavia in the future, through the medium of the boyars, as it actually happened later, after the annexation of Bukovina to Galicia.

Before finally deciding the fate of Bukovina, Joseph II decided to also ask the opinion of the Combined Bohemian-Austrian Chancellery’s chief, Count Blümegen, sending him the statement in question on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1780. In the reply note of the head of the Aulic Chancellery in March 1781, after reading the memoir of Baș, it was stated that “in any case, Bukovina should not be united with another province, but to be treated as a separate province”, and thus gain the sympathy and confidence of the Moldavian inhabitants,<sup>25</sup> that was so necessary in the accomplishment of the Habsburg Empire’s future expansion plans in the direction of the Lower Danube and the Black Sea.

Following these insistences, on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1781, Joseph II ordered the Bukovina district to remain under the leadership of the Aulic War Council. Based on General Enzenberg's and boyar Basil Balș's proposals, it was to sketch a constitution draft for Bukovina, to improve the internal situation of this province, providing a light and righteous administration, but profitable for the imperial treasury.<sup>26</sup>

In the summer of 1783, Emperor Joseph II was able to effect his older intention of visiting Bukovina, in order to inform himself and to know directly the realities of the new imperial province. The emperor's travels in the years 1783 and 1786 were particularly important for the future development of this province inside the Habsburg Empire, given the decisions that were taken on these occasions by the monarch, in the spirit of his political ideas and goals. Although he ascertained that this territory, by its connection position between Transylvania and Galicia, of strategic coverage area of Maramures, as well as border province towards the possessions of the of the Ottoman Empire, recommended by itself to the establishment of a military border, in the constitutional and administrative field, Emperor Joseph II considered that it was inappropriate, given the circumstances at the time, to introduce a border military regime here, because the national spirit of the population here would be averse.<sup>27</sup> However, Bukovina was still left a few years under the Interim Military Administration's regime, with measures being taken to improve the administrative, economic, school or ecclesiastical level.

During his second visit to Bukovina, in summer 1786, Emperor Joseph II finally gave up the plan of transforming Bukovina into a military border, on August 6<sup>th</sup>, unexpectedly taking the decision to abolish the Military Administration of Bukovina and to introduce a civil form of administration instead, in the form of County Administration. The measure taken by the emperor was particularly serious on the constitutional and administrative level, as it results from the decree announced at the same time to the president of the Aulic War Council and head of Combined Bohemian-Austrian Aulic Chancery: Bukovina was to be united with the great Slav province, Galicia, becoming the 19<sup>th</sup> administrative region of the province, depending directly on Lemberg, and not Vienna.<sup>28</sup>

In this way, an end was put to all projects of organizing a military border in Bukovina, which had preoccupied the Habsburg authorities since acquiring the new territorial acquisition, but also to the period of relative provincial autonomy, under the military administration, which the province had enjoyed since its annexation by the Austrians. On the military level, its consequences were disastrous for the Austrians, which during the Russo-Austrian-Ottoman War that broke out the following year, saw their flank threatened by the Turkish armies of the Hotin fortress.

A first consequence of the Josephinist policy of abolishing the military administration and incorporating the province of Bukovina into Galicia, as a simple administrative county, was precisely the loss of its political individuality which this province had enjoyed under the military regime, since the moment of its annexation to the Habsburg Empire and before. This measure of the emperor, which took into account neither the previous historical evolution of Bukovina, nor its national, religious, Orthodox, Romanian character, quite apart from the province of Galicia which was dominated, under the national aspect by Poles and Ukrainians, and under the religious one, by Catholic and Greek-



Catholic Church, created, from a demographic perspective, the possibility of tearing the Romanian national status quo, with dramatic implications in the future historic becoming of this province. The decision to dissolve the provincial autonomy provoked the opposition of the Romanian elite from Bukovina, regaining the autonomy becoming the main requirement of the national programme, until its attainment in 1849.

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## Notes

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### **Abstract**

#### The Problem of establishing the Military Border in Bukovina (1774–1786)

In 1774, the annexation of Bukovina by the Habsburgs raised the question of the introduction of a military regime into the new province. General Spleny's proposal was not accepted and it was decided to introduce an interim military Administration subordinated to the Aulic War Council in Vienna. Emperor Joseph II oscillated between the idea of establishing a military border, the division of territory between Transylvania and Galicia, or that of the introduction of a civilian rule. In 1780, the Romanian elite reacted, with the Enlightenment boyar Vasile Balș demanding from Vienna the preservation of the province's integrity under the existing military Administration. Joseph II finally gave up the idea of military border and decided, in 1786, to introduce the civil administration and to include Bukovina in the great Slav province of Galicia, abolishing the provincial autonomy held since the annexation.

### **Keywords**

Bukovina, military border, military Administration, Joseph II, Romanian elite, Galicia