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The Town of Turnu Măgurele and its Role in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878

Summary: Turnu Măgurele played a significant role in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, which resulted in Romania becoming an independent state. The city's importance stemmed primarily from its location as a Danube port and its infrastructure. Consequently, Turnu Măgurele served as a staging ground where not only Russian and Romanian troops concentrated before crossing the river but also where essential war resources were amassed. Depots for weaponry, food, and fodder were established in the city to collect local donations and requisitioned supplies for distribution to the soldiers. Romanian forces launched artillery strikes from the town against the Ottoman bank of the Danube, securing the river crossing and facilitating the Russian army's capture of Nikopol. Turnu Măgurele also hosted high-ranking Romanian and foreign civil and military officials, alongside newspaper correspondents, artists and writers eager to witness the war firsthand. Additionally, a major medical hub was established in the city, comprising several hospitals where thousands of soldiers received treatment.
Keywords: Turnu Măgurele, independence, Russo-Turkish War, soldier, hospital

Introduction

As the title suggests, this analysis aims to highlight the connection between the city of Turnu Măgurele and the military conflict of 1877–1878, an event of particular significance for Romanians, as it resulted in the attainment of state independence from

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the Ottoman Empire.[1] As a result of this war, not only Romania's political status changed but also its territory, with the peace treaties of San Stefano and Berlin stipulating the acquisition of Dobruja and the loss of the southern part of Bessarabia.[2] The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 led to Serbia and Montenegro gaining independence and the emergence of the Principality of Bulgaria, while also marking a moment of reaffirmed Russian authority in Southeast Europe, coinciding with the deepening crisis of the Ottoman Empire.

This study does not aim to reconstruct the course of the war in question, although reference to the broader context of events is unavoidable.

The aim was to highlight the role played by Turnu Măgurele in this military conflict. While this approach might seem narrow, the analysis proved its validity given that the town was involved in the war in several respects. As a Danube port, the town served as a crossing point for troops moving into Ottoman territory. Furthermore, the city possessed the necessary infrastructure to serve as a hub for the food and munitions supplies required by Russian and Romanian soldiers in their fight against the Turks. Hospitals were also established there to provide medical care. Turnu Măgurele also served as a temporary base for the military commanders involved in the war, as well as for correspondents from major domestic and international newspapers. These factors, along with other aspects covered in the article, prompted this analysis.

Brief Overview of the City of Turnu Măgurele

Before outlining Turnu Măgurele's role in that war, it is necessary to provide some background on the city, originally known as Turnu Romulus. In the 15th century, the settlement was conquered by the Turks and became a district of Nicopolis. This status remained unchanged until 1829, when, following the Treaty of Adrianople, the city was returned to Wallachia. The historian Nicolae Iorga listed the various powers that held Turnu Măgurele over time, noting that the city "was an ancient military outpost for the Latin Romans, the Greek Romans, the barbarians and the Turks."[3] In other words, the town served as a gateway and a checkpoint for Romanian territory, functioning as a port on the Danube, the river that separated the Romanians from the Turks.

1 At the same time, Serbia and Montenegro became independent, and Bulgaria became an autonomous principality. Ciachir N. 1970, 82–83.

2 Darras É. 1900, 66.

3 Iorga N. 1972, 156.

The settlement was granted town status in 1829 and became the seat of Teleorman County[4] in 1846, enjoying economic prosperity driven by the grain trade. Located in the country's southwest, near the confluence of the Olt[5] and the Danube, the town had a small population; in 1865, it numbered 2,975 inhabitants.[6] It is worth noting that the city possessed institutions and infrastructure that proved valuable during the war. Regarding infrastructure, the Costești–Turnu Măgurele railway line terminated here; furthermore, there was a road following the railway's route, complemented by several other roads (Alexandria–Turnu Măgurele and Turnu Măgurele–Elisabeta[7]) and a bridge connecting the two banks of the Danube.[8]

Romania's Political Status and the Preliminaries to the Russo-Turkish War

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 marked the culmination of events related to the Eastern Question. Events in the Balkan Peninsula began in 1875 with the uprising of the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina against the Turks. The following year, Serbs and Bulgarians joined them[9] but the uprisings went beyond mere internal conflicts between Balkan peoples and Ottoman authorities. The situation became complicated, and the conflict escalated due to Russian intervention, officially undertaken to protect the interests of Christian populations in the Balkan Peninsula.[10]

The Romanians were under Ottoman suzerainty at the time, paying tribute in exchange for protection, but the Ottoman Empire did not recognise the Romanian state's right to have its own foreign policy. Nevertheless, after 1866, Romanians intensified their efforts to achieve independence through diplomatic means. The rejection of their petitions and the Ottoman insistence on regarding Romania as an autonomous province of the empire drove the Romanians to fight for their objective. They initially sought to ally themselves with the Christian peoples of the Balkan Peninsula and launch an anti-Ottoman offensive;[11] however, the plan failed, as only the Serbs proved receptive to the Romanian proposals, leading to the conclusion of a military

4 Teleorman County — county of Romania on the border with Bulgaria, in the historical region Muntenia, with its capital city at Alexandria.

5 The Olt — river in Romania, originating in the Giurgeu Mountains, in the Eastern Carpathians. The river traverses the counties of Harghita, Covasna, Brașov, Sibiu, Vâlcea, and Olt.

6 Polihroniade M., Tell A.C. 1937, 55.

7 At the end of the 19th century, it was a commune in Călmățui (Teleorman County), comprising the villages of Plopi and Slăvitești. Subsequently, it was incorporated into Turnu-Măgurele and ceased to exist during the second half of the 20th century.

8 Buzoianu G.T. 1894, 135.

9 Berstein S., Milza P. 1889, 182.

10 Berindei D. 1997, 122.

11 Stofella E. 1888, 191.

cooperation treaty with the Serbs in 1869. This was not enough for the Romanians to hope for liberation from Turkish rule without the support of a major European power.

Consequently, the prospect of a Russo-Turkish war fuelled Romanian hopes that fighting alongside the Russians could lead to independence but their proposal for military cooperation with the Tsar's army was initially rejected, with the Russians preferring instead to conclude a convention on 4 April 1877, that allowed for the transit of troops through Romania. The terms of the convention favoured Russia, granting it access to the country's railway network (at rates 40% lower than standard), river transport, postal and telegraph services and material resources.[12] Although no explicit military obligations were imposed on Romania, they were implied. This situation complicated relations with the Ottoman Empire, which viewed the signing of the convention as a hostile act, given the strategic advantages it offered the Russian armies.

Relations with Russia were also a source of frustration for Romanians; however, the Tsar's attitude towards Romania changed radically following the failure at Pleven, at which point the active participation of Romanian troops in the fighting was accepted. This paved the way for Romania to secure its independence on the battlefield.

It is worth noting that a link existed between the locality analysed and events in the Balkans even before Romania officially entered the war. Several Bulgarians, such as Sava Mladenov and Vasil Levski, who were involved in organising the 1876 uprising, lived there. With the support of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee in Bucharest and the tacit consent of the Romanian authorities, the two men helped several hundred Bulgarians enter Romania between 1869 and 1873 to arm and train for combat, preparations that later enabled them to launch the struggle against the Turks, under the leadership of Hristo Botev.[13] Another link to the events in the region was the fact that one-third of the 300 Bulgarian volunteers who returned to the Ottoman Empire in 1876 crossed the Danube near the town of Turnu Măgurele.[14]

Before the war, the town attracted particular attention not only from Balkan volunteers but also from the Romanian authorities, who anticipated that the locality would play a significant role in the conflict. This is evidenced by the decree of 26 November 1876, which doubled local military forces through the establishment of eight additional infantry regiments. The decree also noted the existence of a battalion belonging to the 5th Infantry Regiment.[15] The battalion comprised eight companies, the first of which was the Turnu Măgurele company, which was also garrisoned in that town.[16]

12 Focșeneanu I. 1957, 175.

13 Perry D. 1993, 23.

14 Mardale A. et al. 1977, 30.

15 The 5th Infantry Regiment was stationed at Giurgiu and covered the counties of Teleorman and Vlașca.

16 DPIR. RI 1(2). 1954a, 481.

The presence of these military units proved useful, given that Turnu Măgurele — along with other towns on the left bank of the Danube (Bechet, Corabia, Giurgiu) — had become a target for Turkish attacks.[17] This situation arose following Russia's declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire on 12/24 April 1877, and the fact that Romanian authorities took no action to prevent the advance of Russian troops across the country's territory. Consequently, the Ottoman Empire deemed it legitimate to penalise Romania for collaborating with the enemy;[18] however, the Turkish decision to occupy Calafat, Turnu Măgurele and Oltenița[19] did not surprise the Romanian government as it had already been informed of such a possibility on 3 April by Ion Bălăceanu, the diplomatic agent in Vienna.[20]

The Initial Effects of the War and the Reaction of the Authorities

Tensions between the Romanians and the Ottoman Empire were further exacerbated by a demand that ships anchored at Turnu Măgurele proceed to Turkish ports, under threat of having their cargo confiscated. Predictably, this measure alarmed the merchants; eager to recover the goods loaded onto those vessels, they asked the Prefect of Teleorman County to have the products transported to the town's warehouses and to use force if the captains refused to surrender the cargo.[21] The situation worsened when the Turks began shelling along the Danube, endangering the grain ships; two barges were sunk on 23 May 1877, near the natural harbour of Cătina, close to Turnu Măgurele.[22] At the same time, irregular bands of Bashi-bazouks[23] repeatedly crossed the Danube by boat, with the ensuing looting, abductions and military clashes affecting both the town and its surrounding areas.[24] These incursions alarmed the inhabitants, who anticipated a possible Ottoman invasion and a significant number of citizens deserted the town for safer locations within the county.[25] Gheorghe Kirițescu, the prefect of Teleorman County, took measures to bolster security in the town; on 9 April 1877, he requested troops from the Ministry of the Interior to reinforce outposts, as well as an infantry garrison to be stationed at Turnu Măgurele.[26] A decision was made to

17 Gheorghiu Al.A. 1932, 86.

18 Potel A. 1889, 139.

19 Romanian towns on the left bank of the Danube.

20 Olteanu C. et al. 1977, 66.

21 DPIR. RI 2. 1952, 218.

22 Mardale A. et al. 1977, 141.

23 Turkish volunteers who lived off looting and war spoils.

24 Vintilă P., Vintilă P. jr. 1977, 16.

25 Rosetti R. 1928a, 134.

26 DPIR. RI 2. 1952, 159.

strengthen the garrisons at Calafat and Giurgiu and to establish a reserve force of 20,000 soldiers in Oltenia, near Craiova.[27]

Civilian anxiety also led to a proposal in April 1877, to ban the entry into Romania of individuals arriving from the Ottoman Empire due to suspicions of espionage. To illustrate the atmosphere of mistrust among the population, six Bulgarians were arrested in Turnu Măgurele on this charge. They were released only after being interrogated and proving that they were not spies, but gardeners who, fearing the Turks, had fled across the river in search of a safer place.[28]

In a further effort to reassure the townspeople, the prefect decided that administrative institutions would continue their operations in Turnu Măgurele, with only the archives of the Town Hall and the Prefecture being transferred to Alexandria.[29] For their part, the town's residents took action by forming citizens' militias to intervene against raiders from across the Danube.[30] A sense of security was provided between 15 and 26 April 1877, when the 8th Line Regiment was stationed in the town, conducting tactical exercises and undergoing inspection by Prince Carol I.[31]

Romanians in Military Operations during the Russo-Turkish War

Provocations by the Turks concerned not only local authorities but the entire political class; Parliament called upon the government to clarify its position regarding the Ottoman Constitution of 16 December 1876,[32] Turkey's diplomatic hostility and military operations along the Danube.[33] These discussions culminated in a statement by Foreign Minister Mihail Kogălniceanu, who, on 9 May 1877, proclaimed the end of the state of subordination to the Ottoman Empire ("We are a free and independent nation!"[34]). At the same time, upon the proposal of deputy Nicolae Fleva, the tribute (914,000 lei) was reallocated to the Ministry of War to fund the struggle against the Turks.

War between Romania and the Ottoman Empire was officially declared on 30 April / 12 May 1877; mobilisation was ordered simultaneously and lists were compiled of the conscripted peasants whose families were to receive assistance with agricultural work.[35]

27 Popi G. 1977, 1247.

28 DPIR. RI 3. 1953a, 41.

29 DPIR. RI 2. 1952, 484.

30 Rosetti R. 1928b, 11.

31 DPIR. RI 3. 1953a, 452.

32 This indicates that Romania was a privileged province of the empire, and that Romanians were subjects of the Sultan with representatives in a future multinational parliament.

33 ANR MI 5177. 1877, 106.

34 Kogălniceanu M. 1978, 479.

35 SJTAN PTM 1. 1877, 2.

With Romania's entry into the war, the strategic importance of the town grew significantly due to the bridge connecting the banks of the Danube and the concentration of reserve troops in the area. These troops were prepared to intervene along the axes of Lom–Palanca–Vidin, Veliko Tarnovo–Sofia (via Pleven), or towards Shumen (via the Shipka Pass), thereby securing the rear of the Romanian and Russian forces engaged at the front.

At the same time, the headquarters of the 3rd Division was established and the town became a key hub for supplying the front with soldiers and provisions. It is worth noting that on 19 April 1877, significant quantities of produce were located here: 200 kg of wheat, 600 kg of barley, 500 kg of corn, 400 cartloads of hay and 800 cartloads of straw.[36]

The town's role in the transmission of information during these events cannot be overlooked. Measures were taken to improve postal and telegraphic communications, including the establishment of a telegraph line between Măgurele and Poradim[37] and an increase in the frequency of the stagecoach runs that transported the mail.[38]

The town faced additional challenges when it hosted the Russian Army's General Headquarters, Tsar Alexander II, and his brother, Grand Duke Nicholas, between 14 and 16 June 1877. The same town was required to provide logistical and military support to the Russian troops crossing the Danube on the night of 14–15 June 1877, at the Zimnicea[39] — Svishtov crossing point; during this operation, the artillery of the Romanian 4th Division joined Russian batteries at Flămânda and Turnu Măgurele to stage a diversion (specifically, the bombardment of the Nicopolis fortress), intended to mislead the enemy regarding the location where the Russians would cross the river.[40]

The operation succeeded and was complemented by further actions. Consequently, the 7th Line Regiment, commanded by Colonel Grigore Cantilli, crossed the Olt River at Turnu Măgurele, a manoeuvre that expanded the Romanian army's capacity to provide cover for the Russian forces from Corabia, Turnu Măgurele and Flămânda. General George Manu's Romanian 4th Division occupied positions east of Turnu Măgurele, in the area previously held by the Russian 9th Army Corps.[41]

As expected, troop movements affected this town, which had to provide accommodation and food for thousands of soldiers so depots for meat and bread were established.[42]

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36 DPIR. RI 2. 1952, 286.

37 Poradim or Pordim — town in Pleven Province in central northern Bulgaria and the administrative centre of Pordim Municipality.

38 Vintilă P., Vintilă P. 1977, 209.

39 Zimnicea — southernmost city in Romania, located in Teleorman County on the left bank of the Danube, opposite the Bulgarian city of Svishtov.

40 Mardale A. et al. 1977, 146.

41 Olteanu C. et al. 1977, 151.

42 SJTAN PTM 2. 1877, 5; SJTAN PTM 675. 1877, 122.

The first clash between the Romanian army and Turkish monitors took place on 4 June 1877, near Islaz (a commune located close to the town). It was during this engagement that the first soldier from Teleorman County lost his life, Sergeant Florea Blejan, whose post was struck by a bomb fired from the Turkish ships *Scadra* and *Podgoritza*.[43]

Romanian artillery proved its effectiveness both during the Russian crossing of the Danube and actively supporting the assault on Nicopolis. Starting on 13 June 1877, Romanian artillery kept a continuous barrage against the fortress, preventing the Turks from sending reinforcements to their compatriots. Significant bombardments of Nicopolis included those on 30 June and 3–4 July involving the following Romanian units: the 5th and 7th Line Infantry Regiments, the 5th Battery of the 3rd Artillery Regiment, the 4th Battery of the 4th Regiment, and the Teleorman Cavalry Squadron.[44] This intense activity significantly depleted the Romanian army's ammunition stocks, necessitating rationing measures.[45] At the same time, under the cover of heavy fire from Romanian batteries at Islaz,[46] Turnu Măgurele and Flămânda,[47] it was possible to transport the rafts and pontoons required to build the bridge at Zimnicea.[48]

Romanian artillery bombarded not only Nicopolis but also the fortifications at Osam and Cherkovitsa which enabled the Russians to advance with greater safety towards the Ottoman Empire, where they launched an attack on Nicopolis.[49] For several days, troops along the Danube line exchanged artillery fire, causing damage on both sides. At Turnu Măgurele, Mayor Mihail Elefterescu recorded on 19 June that twelve shells had landed in the town, partially destroying the public girls' school, a warehouse and the private home of Zaharia Mavromati. Otherwise, the other shells, which fell in the streets and gardens, caused no further damage; there were no fatalities or injuries.[50] The limited damage was due to the town's location, situated at a greater distance from Nicopolis and more sheltered.[51] The situation was different at Giurgiu, where buildings, streets and gardens were reduced to rubble[52] by bombshells fired by the Turks from Ruse (Ruschuk).

43 Coșbuc G. 1899, 206.

44 DPIR. RI 4. 1953b, 391.

45 DPIR. RI 4. 1953b, 114, 273.

46 Islaz — commune in Teleorman County, located in the Oltenia region at the confluence of the Olt River and the Danube.

47 Locality in Teleorman County.

48 The Romanian artillery here was commanded by Major Alexandru Fălcoianu, who was supported by the 7th Line Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ioan Grigore, and the 5th Line Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ioan Petrovici.

49 Vintilă P., Vintilă P. jr. 1977, 110.

50 DPIR. RI 4. 1953b, 114.

51 Drăghicescu M. 1943, 193.

52 Popescu N.D. 1889, 61.

The efficiency of the Romanian artillery was praised by General Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin on 29 June 1877, during his visit to the outposts along the Turnu Măgurele line. Thanks to the continuous and precise fire from Romanian batteries directed at Turkish troops stationed north of Nicopolis, the Russian 9th Corps was able to attack the fortress from the south on 3 July 1877, with General Nikolai Krüdner's soldiers succeeding in encircling it. Romanian-Russian cooperation thus ensured the success at Nicopolis, which followed two days of clashes between forces of unequal size, with the attackers outnumbering the defenders three to one. The capitulation took place on July 4, when Hasan Pasha and Ahmet Pasha realised that the fortress was "ablaze, with gunpowder and ammunition depots exploding" and that the officers "no longer had authority over the demoralized troops, who were left without combat ammunition or food."[53]

The establishment of Russian control over the fortress enabled the construction of a second bridge across the river, linking Nicopolis and Turnu Măgurele, a project essential for easing the flow of traffic.[54] The contribution of Romanian artillery to this military success was acknowledged and to mark the occasion, a banquet was held on 5 July 1877, at a restaurant in Turnu Măgurele, during which several Romanian officers were decorated.[55]

Major Moise Groza, a correspondent for Transylvania Gazette, noted that the authorities were striving to maintain a sense of normalcy, attending to the upkeep of parks and organising public concerts every other day to reassure the residents.[56] Nevertheless, the war influenced the rhythm of life in this city; Colonel C.V. Căplescu noted that the town was in a state of "ceaseless agitation", as "Russian and domestic troops swarmed like bees in an apiary; regiments arrived and departed constantly, accompanied by their supply convoys." Moreover, officers had replaced the usual clientele at the town's leisure spots although there were few attractions in this "rather shabby" town which was characterised by "small, low houses, sprawling courtyards and gardens, and many vacant lots." According to Jean Lahovary, the town centre was notable for a "small public garden and a few hotels, the best of which was nothing to write home about", though it still offered more comfort than field barracks.[57]

On 8 July the Russians attacked Pleven, an operation that failed due to insufficient forces committed to the fight, as a portion of the Tsar's troops had remained

53 Văcărescu T.C. 1886, 125–127.

54 Coșbuc G. 1907, 15.

55 The victory at Nicopolis resulted in: 1,000 Turks and 1,200 Russians killed or wounded; 6,000 Turkish prisoners; and the capture of 100 pieces of artillery, 10,000 rifles, and two warships, along with their crews.

56 Vintilă P., Vintilă P. jr. 1977, 132.

57 Râpeanu V. 1977, 81.

at Nicopolis to maintain control over the captured fortress.[58] The Russian failure to capture Pleven fundamentally altered the Russian Empire's perspective regarding Romania's role in the war. While the Romanians were initially expected to provide logistical support and conduct operations from a distance (specifically, from the left bank of the Danube), the situation changed, leading to a request to cross into the Ottoman Empire.[59] Against this backdrop, it is therefore understandable why Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu and General G. Manu arrived at Turnu Măgurele, the point where the Romanian units preparing to cross the Danube were concentrated.

The mere occupation of the city of Nicopolis offered the Romanians no guarantee that they would place the Russians in their debt or compel them to recognise the state's independence; yet, they had no other alternative, for: "The war is now approaching our borders, and should the Turks emerge victorious, they would descend upon the country en masse, leaving slaughter, plunder and devastation in their wake. To spare the country the cruelty of the invaders, it is our duty to go and fight against them on their own soil."[60] The Romanians therefore "rendered the Russians a great service",[61] while simultaneously ensuring that the war would not spread beyond the territory of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, the 4th Division occupied the Russian garrison at Nikopol, thereby releasing between 3,000 and 4,000 of the Tsar's soldiers for the second assault on Pleven on 18 July 1877.[62] Nevertheless, the Russians failed to breach the system of fortifications constructed by Osman Pasha.[63]

On 19/31 July Grand Duke Nicholas requested the support of Romanian troops[64] and agreed that Russian and Romanian soldiers would operate at Pleven under the command of Prince Carol I, assisted by General Zotov.[65] The Romanian army deployed to the Bulgarian front was divided into General Alexandru Cernat's Operational Army (tasked with crossing the Danube and comprising the 3rd and 4th Divisions, as well as the reserve) and General George Lupu's Observation Army (stationed on the left bank of the river opposite the city of Vidin and consisting of the 1st and 2nd Divisions).[66] In response to the Tsar's brother's request, 38,000 Romanian soldiers arrived on Turkish soil, representing 50% of the allied troops at Plevna, a figure that dropped to approximately 30% only in the autumn, following the arrival of Russian army reinforcements.[67]

58 Bourde P. 1878, 1002.
59 Choublier M. 1897, 23.
60 Giurescu C.C. 1939, 257.
61 RRPN 2. 1908, 28.
62 Ciachir N. 1996, 89.
63 Focșeneanu I. 1957, 179.
64 Maiorescu T. 1994, 90.
65 Isar N. 2007, 313.
66 Goubard P. 1920, 14.
67 Adăniloaie N. 1978, 363.

On 20 August the crossing of the Danube began at Turnu Măgurele via a pontoon bridge, under the watchful eye of Carol I, who observed the "ranks of brave, stalwart young men marching spiritedly into the heat of battle",[68] and on 30 August three Romanian divisions participated in the Third Battle of Pleven. During this engagement, the Grivița 1 and Grivița 2 redoubts were attacked but only the first was captured, at the cost of 1,300 casualties (killed and wounded) among Romanian troops and 1,012 among the Russians.[69] Throughout September and October, Romanian forces led by General Alexandru Cernat contributed to the complete encirclement and siege of Plevna (1 September — 28 November 1877), and on 9 November 1877, they captured the fortress of Rahova. As a consequence, the Turks' capacity to counterattack was weakened, as their lines of communication with Sofia and Vidin — sources of potential reinforcements — had been severed.[70] As a result, Pleven capitulated on 28 November an objective achieved with the support of the Romanian army, which demonstrated that its intervention was not merely useful, but indispensable.[71]

In recognition of their service during the operations at Plevna, several soldiers received the Cross of the Danube Crossing and the Defenders of Romania's Independence medal in December 1877; in January 1878, the 13th Infantry Regiment was awarded the Order of the Star of Romania, with Prince Carol I emphasising that "in the face of the enemy, this regiment demonstrated devotion and courage, participating in almost all the attacks launched against the fortifications at Plevna."[72]

Moving accounts describe the soldiers' return home; Turnu Măgurele was one of the towns where residents acclaimed their heroism and welcomed the victorious troops with cheers, flags and a shower of flowers.[73]

It is worth noting that Turnu Măgurele hosted not only military personnel but also Romanian and foreign journalists keen to report from a location that was safe yet close to the conflict zone. Among the contingent were correspondents for the newspapers "L'Estafette" and "Il Diritto", who wrote about the "military valour of the Latin brothers."[74] Furthermore, several painters (Nicolae Grigorescu, Sava Henția, G.D. Mirea, Carol Popp de Szatmary) and writers (Vasile Alecsandri, George Coșbuc) stayed there temporarily, immortalising wartime scenes in their works.

High-ranking Romanian state officials also resided in the town for several weeks, including Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu, who stayed at the Teleorman County Prefecture

68 Stern A. 1915, 198.

69 Hitchins K. 1996, 59.

70 Focșeneanu I. 1957, 181, 187.

71 Filitti I.C. 1935, 75.

72 Giurescu C.C. 1939, 271, 277–278.

73 SJTAN PTM 7. 1877, 31.

74 "Românul" 3 August 1877, 692.

headquarters while overseeing troop supplies.[75] As previously mentioned, Turnu Măgurele served for several months as the primary link to the front; supplies and war materiel destined for Allied troops passed through the town, traversing a route of approximately 50 kilometres, a journey that grew increasingly difficult with the onset of winter, as "wagons laden with supplies would get lost in the snow, while the oxen and the soldiers driving them perished from the cold."[76] Furthermore, this locality provided the necessary resources for Carol I's headquarters at Poradim; the town supplied not only the furnishings for the Prince's residence but also the builders and painters who constructed the church in Poradim.[77]

The Role of the Town of Turnu Măgurele in Supporting the War Effort

Another aspect of the town's contribution to the war effort was the activity of civilians, coordinated by the requisition commission established in April 1877 by order of the Minister of the Interior. Acting in accordance with the regulations on military requisitions, the Commission had to secure accommodation, food, fodder and means of transport for Tsarist and Romanian troops in transit, as well as for combatants and soldiers stationed in the area. To this end, a consolidated list was compiled of individuals, merchants and property owners who held the goods subject to requisition, ensuring that sources of supply were known in advance should the need arise. Bread ovens and mills were also requisitioned, and the population was encouraged to make donations. The civilians showed genuine empathy, and patriotism triumphed over poverty; documents record their sacrifices and their desire to make life easier for the soldiers. For instance, on 2 June 1877, the 2,450 *ocale*[78] of requisitioned beans were supplemented by another 250 donated by the public; on another occasion, six town residents donated 3,450 *ocale* of beans and 21 kg of oats, while several landowners donated their horses.[79]

The documents highlighted the discrepancy between the authorities' requests and the capacity to meet the troops' needs regarding food, transport and accommodation. One such instance occurred in June 1877, when General Manu, anticipating the arrival of 3,600 soldiers and 600 horses, asked Prefect Gh. Kirițescu to secure the necessary food and fodder supplies; this undertaking entailed establishing a bread and meat depot at Turnu Măgurele, as well as constructing two bread ovens. Due to the

75 Rosetti R. 1928c, 23.

76 Coșbuc G 1899, 37–38, 72.

77 Locality near Pleven.

78 *Oca*, *ocale* — old unit of measurement for capacity and weight, equal to approximately 1.25 litres (or kilograms).

79 SJTAN PTM 675. 1877, 90; SJTAN PTM 3. 1877, 71; SJTAN PTM 5. 1877, 44.

tight deadline and a lack of personnel to undertake the requisitions, the request could not be fulfilled.[80] Correspondence between the authorities reveals the Requisition Commission's efforts to gather the requested supplies and make them available to the army as quickly as possible. These efforts can be exemplified by the following: on 14 June 1877, 70 carts (each drawn by four oxen) and 330 carts (each drawn by two oxen) were requisitioned from the town; meanwhile, by 15 July 1877, the authorities had successfully collected 47,865 kg of hay, 26,630 kg of corn (of which 25,000 kg were donations from residents), 13,977 kg of straw, 41,906 kg of cornmeal, 4,276 bread rations, 185 *oca* of beans and 35 beds with their accompanying tables.[81] Added to this were hundreds of heads of cattle, as well as timber and barley. Quotas for supplies varied throughout the different stages of the war but showed an upward trend as the number of soldiers and prisoners increased. For instance, on 10 August 1877 — as the number of troops quartered in the town rose — the Military Intendance requested 3,000 loaves of bread per day. On 1 December, an order was issued for the urgent requisitioning of one-third of the hay held by the residents of Turnu Măgurele.[82]

It is worth noting that those responsible for logistics did not limit themselves to managing supplies that had been requisitioned or donated by the population of Turnu Măgurele; they also handled the centralisation of resources arriving from other counties. As a result, several depots were established in the town, including one designated for ammunition and weapons.

However, the demands of the war exceeded the population's capacity and there were times, such as in September 1877, when "soldiers lacked both food and clothing."[83]

Such difficult situations were also caused by deteriorating weather conditions and poor infrastructure. As a result, the route to the front became increasingly arduous, leading to longer transport times, vehicle damage and the exhaustion of both draft animals and the carters compelled to ceaselessly transport supplies and the wounded along the Pleven–Turnu Măgurele route.

Economic pressure on the town intensified with the arrival, in several waves, of thousands of Turkish prisoners captured at Nicopolis and Pleven. The town served as a transit point for these troops, and the pressure exerted by the waves of prisoners cannot be ignored. Specifically, during the first half of December, four columns arrived, comprising 4,000, 3,500, 6,562 and 8,162 Turkish soldiers, respectively, along with 183 officers, meaning that over 20,000 men passed through the city en route to Alexandria in the span of just four days.[84] When the thousands of Romanian soldiers escorting the captives are also taken into account, it is therefore unsurprising that

80 DPIR. RI 4. 1953b, 263.

81 SJTAN PTM. 3. 1877, 68.

82 SJTAN PT 4. 1877, 53; SJTAN PT 7. 1877, 27.

83 Vlad R.D. 1987, 1028.

84 DPIR. RI 8. 1954b, 52.

the town's logistical resources were overwhelmed and that prisoners had to be distributed to neighbouring communes.

Accounts regarding the prisoners are numerous and help shed light on their desperate plight. The thousands of captives marched for days on end "barefoot, through frozen snow and biting cold", wearing inadequate gear ("They had no winter clothing... The soldiers were half-naked, in a worse state than beggars"). The prisoner convoys were "images of the most wretched suffering", and many of the Turks, victims of hunger and disease, failed to reach the Danube; they were abandoned on snow-covered fields, where they met their end.[85] Most, however, survived the journey, yet it was only upon arriving in Romanian territory that they received care, as was the case in Turnu Măgurele.

Turnu Măgurele and its Medical Importance during the War of Independence

It is necessary to clarify the medical assistance provided to those involved in the conflict, regardless of nationality, especially given that the town served as the terminus for the lines evacuating the wounded from the front. It is worth noting that during the war of 1877–1878, several buildings were requisitioned and repurposed. This was the case for hotels (such as the Belford, Raymond, Grand Hotel and Zottu), school buildings (including Boys' School No. 1), and private homes (such as the residence of Domnica Marinescu). Certain public spaces, for example the garden of the city, were also used to establish hospitals. Starting on 20 August 1877, a field hospital with four large tents and forty beds operated in the public garden.[86] Through the combined efforts of the Ministry of War, the Red Cross Society, the Ladies' Committee of Iassy and the Independence and Israelite societies, a major medical centre with a capacity of 2,500 beds was established in the town. Its scale prompted a correspondent for the newspaper L'Orient to write an article titled *Turnu Măgurele Is a Hospital!*, in which he noted: "before entering the town, you pass by Red Cross ambulances (...); in the town centre lies the Independence hospital (...) and further on, in the public garden, you encounter tents filled with the wounded (...). Finally, there is the military hospital, surrounded by tents and packed with the wounded. I had almost forgotten about the ambulances of the Israelite Society of Iassy."[87]

Caring for the sick and wounded required the cooperation of qualified medical personnel, the authorities and the local population. Consequently, it is not surprising that pharmacists supplied medicines at a 40% discount,[88] while civilians responded

85 Coșbuc G. 1907, 189, 231.

86 DPIR. RI 6. 1953c, 441.

87 Mardale A. et. al. 1977, 115.

88 DPIR. RI 6. 1953c, 441.

to appeals such as the one published in the newspaper "Românul" (The Romanian): "A contribution, be it money, new or used linen, flannel, socks, handkerchiefs, or anything else, however small, will be of great value and bring a blessing with it."[89] Such messages appeared frequently in the press, signalling that wartime needs were mounting and the Romanian state was unable to meet them fully. As a result, monetary donations were prioritised, and merchants were encouraged to part with, for the benefit of the soldiers, clothing items that were "outdated or stained, and could otherwise only be sold at a significant loss."[90]

Thanks to donors, considerable sums were raised by the end of 1877, with over 110,000 lei directed solely to the Independence Hospice hospital[91] in Turnu Măgurele. Furthermore, demonstrating patriotism and generosity, residents provided beds, bandages, compresses, linens, firewood, food, cigarettes and tobacco, as well as funds for medicines and specialised medical instruments. Subscription lists published in the "Monitorul Oficial" (Official Gazette) or the newspaper Românul recorded daily contributions ranging from 3,000 to 10,000 lei. Even more significant were the donations received directly by the government, totalling 9,247,000 lei, an impressive sum sufficient to "supply our entire field army for over 300 days, that is, for the duration of the war", and equivalent to more than "two-thirds of the budget allocated to the Ministry of War for the year 1877."[92]

Civilians, especially those with medical experience, were encouraged to dedicate themselves to the "cause of the wounded", as doing so meant they could "save the lives of hundreds of human beings."[93] Turnu Măgurele was explicitly mentioned in these appeals as a primary arrival point for soldiers evacuated from the front, who awaited specialised care with "understandable eagerness."[94] Several ladies from high society became involved in hospital operations and the alleviation of the soldiers' suffering, including Maria Rosetti, Maria Bâlcescu, Elena Dumitrescu-Severeanu, Lucreţia Lecca, Elisa Djuvara, Elena Câmpineanu, Natalia Suțu, Elena Cantacuzino, Zoe Sturdza and Eliza Vârnav-Liteanu. Their work involved preparing and serving food, bandaging the wounded, distributing medication, reading correspondence received from relatives and writing letters on behalf of those wounded soldiers unable to write replies to their loved ones themselves.[95]

89 Marinescu B. et. al. 1978, 111.

90 "Românul" 28 September 1877, 863.

91 The hospital was led by Maria Rosetti, who, in recognition of her tireless efforts, was made an honorary member of the Belgian National Red Cross Society. Ioniță E. 1977, 2220–2221.

92 Adăniloaie N. 1967, 446, 452.

93 "Românul" 31 August 1877, 780.

94 "Românul" 1 September 1877, 773.

95 Coșbuc G. 1899, 241–242.

The wartime hospital workload was intense, with operations conducted almost continuously, which accentuated the physical and mental exhaustion of the medical staff and required staff rotations. Consequently, staff were replaced and supplemented by reservists and volunteers, including 15 nuns from the Horezu monastery, who volunteered at the military hospital.[96]

Problems did not bypass the hospitals, especially at the beginning of their operation or when they were faced with an influx of wounded. According to Dr. Ludovic Fialla, on 2 September, when due to poor coordination ("there were a few hours of unforgivable confusion"), the soldiers were initially stored in the public garden and, after more than a day of waiting, took their place in the beds.[97] Furthermore, cases of medical malpractice were reported, such as the application of a concentrated sesquichloride solution to gunshot wounds, causing necrosis, or the application of plaster casts to fresh, complex wounds, thereby intensifying the patient's pain.[98]

In addition, maintaining the necessary level of cleanliness in hospitals "required an enormous effort",[99] while the approach of winter necessitated adequate preparations, including installing stoves, procuring firewood, plastering walls for better insulation and training medical staff to replace broken windows.

These were isolated cases, for in general, "the medical staff demonstrated dedication", working "with great skill and goodwill.[100] Consequently, it is not surprising that positive impressions prevail among the medical staff, and among those who benefited from satisfactory treatment conditions. An account exists of an officer treated in the ambulance tent of the Ladies' Benevolent Society of Iași; he noted the presence of "well-appointed beds with very clean linens" and stated: "We received excellent care from both the doctors and the ladies of the benevolent society, such that neither officers nor soldiers lacked anything."[101] The same source highlights the attention given to the wounded from Pleven, who were visited by civilians and journalists alike, as well as by the Tsar's sons and foreign officers. Romanian authorities also made sure they were not neglected; the county prefect "visited us twice a day", while Ion C. Brătianu "asked each of us individually about our health, whether we were well cared for, or if we needed anything... He spent hours talking with us and recounting various events that had taken place on the battlefield behind us, and these conversations seemed to soothe our suffering."[102]

96 Rosetti R. 1928c, 25.
97 Mardale A. et al. 1977, 116.
98 Râpeanu V. 1977, 183–184.
99 Fialla L. 1892, 58–60.
100 Fialla L. 1892, 82.
101 Dimitrescu M. 1897, 69.
102 Dimitrescu M. 1897, 74–75.

Doctors from abroad, sent by their governments or by philanthropic societies, were also working in the hospitals of Turnu Măgurele. For instance, in September 1877, Dr. Kalinderu, the director of hospital services on the left bank of the Danube, gratefully welcomed five French surgeons (Plateau, Mauvais, Henriet, Miot and Golas), whose "expenses were covered by funds raised through a French subscription campaign organised in Bucharest." At the same time, the arrival of a special mission from the French government, consisting of surgeons Peyrot and Bonilly, was also arranged.[103] They were joined by George McNalty and E.S. Pattison, two surgeons sent by the National Aid Society in London, who began operating at the Independence Hospital in October 1877, bringing with them 77 boxes of medical supplies, medicines, condensed milk, cocoa, chicken and mutton.[104]

All of them contributed to the care of the soldiers, many of whom had gunshot wounds, as McNalty observed on 18 October 1877, while examining some of the 300 combatants. In December, the English physician D.A. Campbell Fraser arrived; he also became involved in delivering supplies from England and organising hospitals in Turnu Măgurele and Bucharest.[105]

Romanian and foreign doctors collaborated, pooling their medical instruments and consulting one another on treatments and procedures; consequently, surgical interventions generally went very well, and hospital services met the necessary standards, though it was noted that "nothing more could have been desired, had it not been for the lack of competent nurses."[106]

Regarding hospital operations in the town, an analysis of reports from the Directorate of Military Hospitals[107] reveals that, between the outbreak of the war and 1 November 7,483 soldiers received care there (5,186 sick or 69%, and 2,297 wounded or 31%). Their distribution among the medical facilities operating in the city was as follows: 6,535 soldiers (87%) in Ministry of War hospitals, 474 (7%) in Red Cross hospitals, 233 (3%) at the Independence Hospital, 101 (1%) at the Iassy Ladies´ Society Hospital, and 140 (3%) at the Israelite Hospital.[108] A graphic representation illustrates the distribution of military personnel across these hospitals, helping to highlight the relative importance of each facility (Chart 1). Information is also available regarding the medical condition at the time of admission for the same period (Table 1).

103 "Românul" 22 September 1877, 843.

104 Hope T.J. 1977, 300.

105 Hope T.J. 1977, 303.

106 "Românul" 22 September 1877, 843.

107 Led by Dr. Iacob Felix.

108 "Românul" 30 November 1877, 1067.

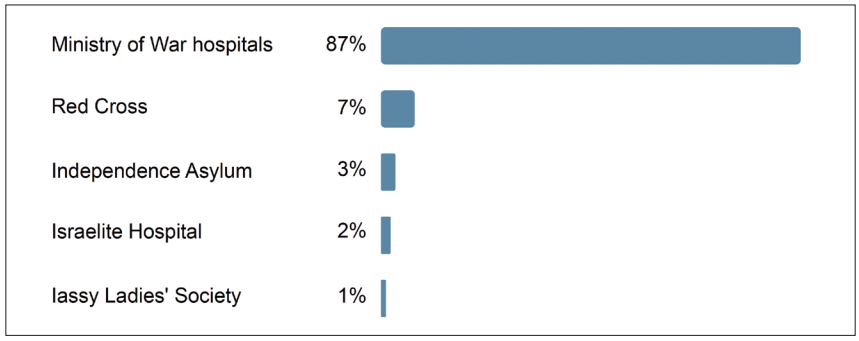

Chart 1. Soldiers treated in Turnu Măgurele from begining of the war until 1 November 1877, by hospitals (Source: Author's own calculations)

Table 1. Distribution of sick and wounded soldiers to the hospitals in Turnu Măgurele up to 1 November 1877 (Source: Author's own calculations)

Name	Sick	Wounded	Total
Ministry of War hospitals	4,918	1,617	6,535 (87%)
Red Cross Hospital	139	335	474 (7%)
Independence Asylum Hospital	47	186	233 (3%)
Iassy Ladies´ Society Hospital	101	0	101 (1%)
Israelite Hospital	82	58	140 (2%)

These data help estimate each hospital's capacity to treat soldiers and provide indications regarding available medical staff, as a larger number of personnel and beds supports a higher patient volume.

Information exists on the soldiers' health outcomes during that period; among those hospitalised at Turnu Măgurele:

- 759 (11%) fully recovered (656 sick and 103 wounded)
- 5,559 (82%) were evacuated to other hospitals while still recovering (3,760 soldiers with minor ailments and 1,799 wounded)
- 167 (2%) were granted leave to complete their recovery (108 sick and 59 wounded)
- 325 (5%) died (Chart 2)[109]

109 "Românul" 30 November 1877, 1067.

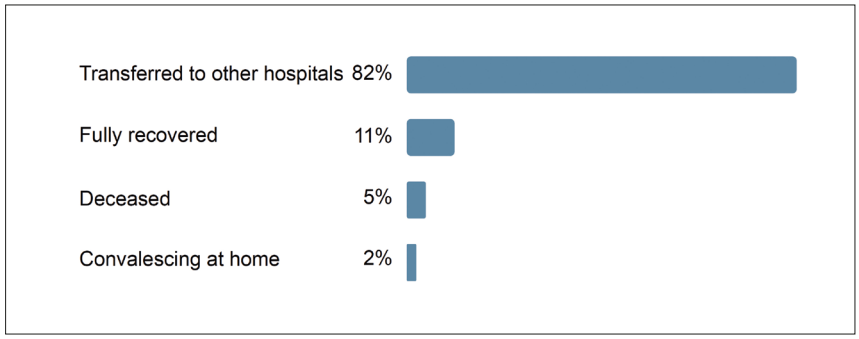

Chart 2. Status of soldiers from Turnu Măgurela according to medical progress up to 1 November 1877 (Source: Author's own calculations)

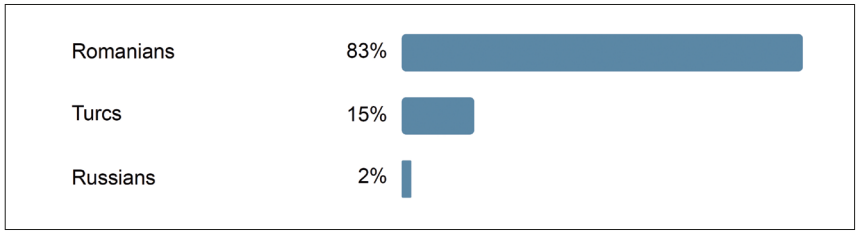

Chart 3. Soldiers hospitalized in in Turnu Măgurele by nationality (Source: Author's own calculations)

Reports from the General Directorate of Hospitals in Turnu Măgurele also reveal that by 15 December 1877, the city's hospitals had treated 10,574 soldiers, comprising 3,502 wounded (33%) and 7,072 sick (67%). Hospital mortality stood at nearly 3%; medical statistics indicate that, in the cases of 467 soldiers, effective intervention to save their lives was not possible.

Also of interest is the information regarding the ethnic background of patients hospitalised in Turnu Măgurele, which shows that medical care was provided regardless of the patients' religion or nationality. Consequently, in addition to the Romanian military personnel, who constituted the majority at 8,815 (83%), treatment was also provided to Turks — 1,602 (15%) and Russians — 209 (2%) (Chart 3).

The available data allow for an even more detailed analysis of the patient cohort, based on both nationality and medical condition. Specifically, of the 3,502 wounded treated in Turnu Măgurele, 2,605 were Romanian (74%), 64 were Russian (2%) and 927 were Turkish prisoners (26%); among the 7,072 sick soldiers, 6,210 were Romanian (88%), 145 were Russian (2%) and 675 were Turkish (10%).[110]

110 "Românul" 22 December 1877, 1135.

The intensification of the war led to a rise in casualties, placing increased strain on medical services; nevertheless, the importance of the hospitals in Turnu Măgurele and their role in treating the wounded and sick cannot be overlooked, given that patients' lives and subsequent recovery often depend on initial medical care. This town paid a heavy price in blood for Romania's state independence: eleven men residing in the town (one sergeant and ten soldiers) lost their lives on the battlefield. They served in the 2nd Artillery Regiment, the 8th Line Regiment, and, notably, the 5th Infantry Regiment.[111]

Conclusions

In conclusion, Turnu Măgurele played a significant role in Romania's war effort, distinguishing itself as a vital logistical hub for the allied armies and, given its location on the Danube, as one of the primary links between the country and the front. It was here that not only the Russian and Romanian armies massed before crossing the river, but also the resources essential for waging the war such as depots for weaponry, food and fodder were established in the town.

Romanian and Russian soldiers marched across the bridge connecting Turnu Măgurele and Nikopol, under the cover of Romanian artillery fire, on their way to the front, and it was via this same route that they returned victorious, greeted warmly by the town's inhabitants. The town also served as a destination for wounded and sick soldiers, as well as Turkish prisoners of war, all of whom received life-saving medical care in hospitals that operated until the spring of 1878.

The dedication of local authorities cannot be ignored, represented by figures such as Prefect Gh. Kirițescu and Mayor Mihail Elefterescu, who made constant efforts to meet the army's needs, whether regarding accommodation, food, or transport, and who ensured suitable conditions for prominent figures (the Tsar and his brother, the Prime Minister of Romania, high-ranking Romanian and foreign officers and cultural and artistic personalities). Likewise, the town's residents joined the authorities and contributed to the cause of independence as donors, transport providers, hospital volunteers and more.

The town's involvement in the 1877–1878 war did not go unnoticed; it was honoured by subsequent generations through the placement of two monuments in Turnu Măgurele, namely: the Infantry Soldier Monument (Fig. 1), created in 1907 by sculptor Raffaello Romanelli, and the Independence Monument (Fig. 2), the work of a group of Romanian artists, dating from 1985. The latter, arranged in a semicircle, offers a synthesis of the event: the statuary group which comprised of a sailor, a border guard and an infantryman, illustrates the three branches of the armed forces involved in the war, while the bas-reliefs depict key moments of the conflict, which were the crossing of the Danube, the Siege of Pleven and the care of wounded soldiers.

111 *Evidența morților*.



Fig. 1. Infantry Soldier Monument in Turnu Măgurele. R. Romanelli, 1907 (Source: Wikipedia)



Fig. 2. Independence Monument in Turnu Măgurele erected in 1985 (Source: Wikipedia)

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