

Anton DONCHEV

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OF DONATIONS TO THE EASTERN RUMELIAN MILITIA

<https://doi.org/10.52603/rec.2023.33.06>**Rezumat****Dovezi documentare despre donațiile către armata populară din Rumelia de Est**

Importanța donației ruse pe care a primit-o miliția din Rumelia de Est a avut impact asupra dezvoltării forțelor armate din Bulgaria. Prezentul studiu își propune să arate adevăratul sens pe care îl are acest ajutor. Importanța acestei donații ar trebui privită și ca parte a perioadei în care a avut loc. În sec. al XIX-lea, armele de foc erau elementul de bază al oricărei armate. Rumelia de Est nu își putea permite să cumpere cantitatea necesară de arme.

Ceea ce s-a spus până acum aruncă o nouă lumină asupra donației rusești. Fără arme, dezvoltarea forțelor armate ar fi fost extrem de lentă. Este adevărat că Rumelia de Est a cumpărat mai târziu puști mai moderne din Rusia, însă erau puține la număr, iar acest lucru s-a întâmplat în 1882 sau la trei ani de la crearea armatei populare. Unul dintre pilonii principali ai construcției armatei Rumelia de Est s-a dovedit a fi donația Rusiei, prin care bulgarii din Rumelia și-au început pregătirea militară încă de la începutul existenței regiunii autonome în cadrul Imperiului Otoman. Începutul de succes al dezvoltării armatei populare nu este doar începutul pentru formarea unităților militare din Rumelia de Est. Privită în profunzime, donația stă la baza construcției armatei bulgare. Acest lucru se datorează faptului că armata din Principatul Bulgariei a fost completată cu succes în 1885–1886 de armata populară din Rumelia de Est care s-a alăturat acesteia. Pozitivele acestei fuziuni depășesc cu mult Uniunea din 1885.

Cuvinte-cheie: donație, armata populară est-rumeliană, Rusia, forțe armate, Rumelia de Est.

Резюме**Документальные свидетельства о пожертвованиях в пользу Восточнорумелийского ополчения**

Важность российских пожертвований для Восточнорумелийского ополчения состояла в том, что они оказали влияние на развитие вооруженных сил Болгарии. Настоящая статья посвящена подробному рассмотрению этого процесса и направлена на то, чтобы показать истинное значение, которое эта помощь имела. Важность этих пожертвований можно оценить лишь исходя из особенностей того периода, в котором они были выделены. В XIX в. огнестрельное оружие было основным оружием любой армии. Восточная Румелия не могла позволить себе приобрести необходимое количество оружия. То, что было сказано до сих пор, проливает новый свет на российские пожертвования. Без оружия развитие вооруженных сил шло бы крайне медленно. Правда, позже Восточная Румелия закупила в России более современные винтовки, но их было мало, и это произошло в 1882 г., или через три года после создания ополчения. Одним из основных столпов построения армии Восточной Румелии оказались пожертвования России, благодаря которым болгары в Румелии начали свою военную подготовку с самого начала существования автономной области в составе Османской

империи. Успешное начало развития ополчения – это не только начало формирования воинских частей Восточной Румелии. При более глубоком анализе данного вопроса мы убедимся, что эти пожертвования являются основой для создания болгарской армии. Это связано с тем, что армия Княжества Болгария была успешно дополнена в 1885–1886 гг. ополчением Восточной Румелии, которое присоединилось к ней. Важность положительных сторон этого слияния намного превосходят значимость объединения Болгарии в 1885 г.

Ключевые слова: пожертвования, Восточнорумелийское ополчение, Россия, вооруженные силы, Восточная Румелия.

Summary**Documentary evidence of donations to the Eastern Rumelian militia**

The importance of the Russian donations to the Eastern Rumelian militia had an impact on the development of the armed forces of Bulgaria. Its detailed presentation aims to show the true meaning it has had. The importance of this donation should also be seen as part of the period in which it occurs. In the 19th century, firearms were a staple of any army. Eastern Rumelia could not afford to buy the necessary amount of weapons. What has been said so far sheds new light on the Russian donation. Without weapons, the development of the armed forces would have been extremely slow. It is true that Eastern Rumelia later bought more modern rifles from Russia, but they were fewer in number and this happened in 1882 or three years after the creation of the militia. One of the main pillars of the setting up of the East Rumelian army turned out to be the donations of Russia, due to which the Bulgarians in Rumelia began their military training from the very beginning of the existence of the autonomous region within the Ottoman Empire. The successful beginning of the development of the militia is not only the beginning for the military units of Eastern Rumelia. Viewed in depth, this donation is the basis for the creation of the Bulgarian Army. This is because the army of the Principality of Bulgaria was successfully supplemented in 1885–1886 by the East Rumelian militia that joined it. The positives of this merger far exceed the Union of 1885.

Key words: Donation, Eastern Rumelian militia, Russia, armed forces, Eastern Rumelia.

Eastern Rumelian militia was founded as a result of the congress, held in Berlin in June – July of 1878. It was supposed to perform as a military unit of Rumelia. Russia supported the militia's foundation with officers and weapons, as the weapons are the most important basis of any army (Statelova 1983: 15). Often times, it is also the main expenditure of its maintaining. In this situation the new military is dismissed and could transfer its fund to cover

other expenses. The militia received cannons for its artillery battery, which were originally provided to the Bulgarian land force (equipment for two artillery batteries), as the equipment was not initially left for the Eastern Rumelian militia in 1878, the Ottoman sultan could not confiscate it (Valkov 1975: 93). As for the “Krnka” rifle muskets, there is no exact data, but it is certain that their number was enough for arming 40,000 men during the war between Serbia and Bulgaria in 1885–1886. They were also the only weapon of the Gymnastic societies. Although they existed for a short period of time, the Gymnastic societies had an important role for the military education in Eastern Rumelia. It is namely about them the statement of general Stolipin, related to the current topic: „...I don’t hide that we supply them with weapons... we’re not going to let down the ones, we freed“ (Valkov 1975: 95). Although receiving a solid foundation with this donation, the militia does not find a definitive solution to its weapons problem and in the following years would try to solve it through its commanders.

The first commander of the militia, Colonel Victor Vitalis, could be characterized by two of his orders. The first one was issued with his inauguration, and the latter – with him leaving the Eastern Rumelian militia. The time he spent as a commander of the militia was just three months. He had received a number of medals from different foreign legions. Vitalis’s main characteristics were his ignorance and the lack of talent to lead the establishment and the proper functioning of the militia (Zapoved na voyskite na vastochnata rumeliyska militsia № 5, May 28, 1879, gr. Plovdiv). His name is also linked with the threat of confiscating the rifle muskets, given to the Bulgarians in the Province by Russia (Genov 1958: 28). Fortunately, he didn’t stay in office long enough and the newly amended commander, colonel Schtreker, began the establishment of the armed forces of the province. One of the logical steps, he had to take, was protecting the huge donation from Russia. It was clear for everybody that the weapons were old and sometime in the future had to be replaced with new, but in the first months this future problem was set aside, as the Militia had nothing else but rifle muskets. However, in the annual budget there is a planned sum for buying new weapons (Valkov 1975: 95).

On December 13, 1880, the Provincial council in Plovdiv voted the new budget for the years 1881–1882 (Oblasten 1881: 1). It sets a larger portion for the Headquarter of the militia, the

amount is of 463 669 grosh or in other words few tens of thousands more than the previous period. For salaries and accommodation of the officers are set 411 437 grosh from the whole budget, the rest was for training, fodder, renovations and mobility of the Headquarters (Oblasten 1881: 1).

For the Training battalion, were planned 2 469 023 grosh – approximately the same as the previous year, a fact which indicates the beginning of the highly needed training of the members of the militia, and the attitude of the Province in regard to that. 667 200 grosh are planned for salaries for the battalion officers, 1 350 651 grosh for provisions and salaries of the lower staff members, and another great sum is for fodder and for the forces (Oblasten 1881: 1). The rest of the budget is set for food, material costs, etc.

For the forces of the militia, were planned 6 841 300 grosh, or around 600 000 less (Oblasten 1881: 14). The main sum of nearly 4.5 million was planned for salaries and food of the lower ranks. 2 449 200 grosh were for salaries and accommodation of the officers, and the rest of the money was for fodder, training of the officers, etc.; the payment of the higher officers was increased by almost 800,000 grosh, at the expense of the salaries and food costs of the lower rank members (Oblasten 1881: 14). The new budget provides 155 000 grosh for buying horses for the militia and the officers, 1 550 000 for buying rifles and other weapons, a necessity, given the old models, owned by the military; 1 600 000 for providing clothing for the soldiers, 507 000 grosh for tents, caldrons etc., 850 000 grosh for manoeuvres, 700 000 for expenditures, related to the new recruits and others. The total sum, given to the Militia was 17 131 672 grosh or in other words, 400 000 less from the previous year (Oblasten 1881: 14). The total planned budget was 84 565 82 grosh or with nearly 6 million grosh more than the previous year; the percentage, planned for the militia, was reduced, but not drastically; given that Eastern Rumelia still provides more for the militia, compared to other expenditure (Oblasten 1881: 14). There are two documents from 1881 concerning the two secret agents, working for the Prefect of Plovdiv. They continue to work with a 1200 grosh monthly salary until December of 1881 and provide information to the prefect, whose signature and stamp are at the end of every payment document (NBIV-BIA – Plovdiv, f. 20, op.1, a. e. 12, l. 53-54).

Voted on December 12, 1881, the province budget for the financial years 1882–1883 (Oblasten

1881: 1) is lowered by approximately 4 million, grosh and was 81 525 253 grosh in total. For the Headquarter, were provided approximately 30 000 grosh more compared to the previous year, or 491 869 grosh in total, as 448 432 grosh were the salaries and the accommodation of the officers, and the rest of the money were dedicated to expenditures like fodder, mobilization, etc. For the Training battalion were planned 2 452 545 grosh, a little less than the previous year. For food and salaries of the lower ranks were provided 1 314 245 grosh, 687 000 were for salaries and accommodation of the officers, and the rest were for other expenditures (Oblasten 1881: 1). For the forces of the militia were provided 5 818 700 grosh, from which 2 149 200 grosh are for salaries and accommodation of the officers and 3 460 340 grosh are for food and salaries of the lower ranks. The rest of the budget is set for fodder, training, etc. (Oblasten 1881: 1). The supply with horses continues in that year, as for that expenditure were provided 160 000 grosh, 700 000 are planned for buying rifles and sabres, 1 179 200 grosh are for clothes for the members of the militia and for parts of the reserve, 300 000 grosh – for food for the unlisted soldiers, enrolled for the two-month training, 280 000 grosh – for heating, lighting and maintenance of the quarters, 230 000 grosh – for the hospitals, medicine, etc., 620 000 grosh – for expenditures for the new soldiers, 600 000 grosh – for the annual maneuvers, 25 000 grosh for buying musical instruments and books, 5 000 grosh for starting a library for the Training battalion (Oblasten 1881: 1). The rest of the expenditures are for mail, telegraph and also for clothing and weapon repair, rent of the Headquarter, etc. (Oblasten 1881: 14). The Eastern Rumelian militia has a total of 13 565 114 grosh, or approximately 4 million grosh less than the previous year. Taking into consideration the reduction in the budget for the whole Province, the percentage dedicated to the militia does not change. The militia and the gendarmerie received 20 271 125 grosh in total, which compared to the budget of the province, equals to a nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the whole budget or in other words there isn't a change in the percentage, provided for the armed force in the last two budgets (Oblasten 1881: 16).

In the same year, the rearmament of the East Rumelian militia is conducted. The process starts in 1882, but until the October 14, 1883 a large portion of the Eastern Rumelian militia is still armed with the “Krnka” rifles muskets left from the Provisional Russian administration and which

were long outdated. The Provincial council lands a loan for new rifles, but for unknown reasons the purchase was delayed for a long time. Half a year earlier, a decision was made to purchase new “Berdan” rifles at the government orders, after an agreement with Russia; it was a delivery from the Russian manufacturers. Their transportation through the Burgas port gives a reason to the newspapers in Tsarigrad to print mysterious rumors for the rearmament. It comes as no surprise that a week after that, some European newspapers repeat these rumors as the main theme is that the Russian government is shipping to Eastern Rumelia 100 000 rifles, 5 military batteries with full equipment and a numerous other additions or “fabrications“, as described by a local newspaper in Plovdiv (Maritsa 1883: 2). The true facts are that the East Rumelian government spends great sums dedicated to the militia and the gendarmerie for years, but lets them be armed with rifles with lesser qualities than the rifles of the outlaws.

Another concerning fact is the bad condition of the supply process of the armed forces of Eastern Rumelia. As an example, for years there was a lack of uniforms for the members of the militia, and it's a known fact that the lack of uniforms affects 10 000 soldiers. The bought “Berdan 2” rifles are barely enough for the regular army, but the bullets, delivered from Russia, are in great quantities.

The new 1882 year started with the traditional parades on the day of St. Jordan. In the 11th and 12th forces there were no such celebrations. In every other, according to the documents from the Headquarters, the tradition was observed. That year of course will stay in the history of the Bulgarian armed forces with other events.

As stated above, during this year, it was set to start the rearmament of the militia. Planed in 1882 until the late 1883, a large portion of the Eastern Rumelian militia is still armed with the outdated “Krnka” rifles, left from the Provisional Russian administration (Maritsa 1883: 2). One of the hypothesis for the long delay is the need for spending the assets on more urgent needs such as building quarters, supplying uniforms¹, building training facilities, food, etc. The existing problem with the uniforms proves the lack of financial funds in the militia, which gives even greater weight to the Russian donation.

The delivery of the purchased Russian rifles in the port of Burgas gives a reason for interesting rumors in the Ottoman and European newspapers, creating

out of proportion “fabrications” according to a local newspaper in Plovdiv (Maritsa 1883: 2). The tendencies of focusing on the discrepancy between the money, provided by the local government to the militia, and the lower quality of the weapons, with which the soldiers were armed, could be found in every study dedicated even remotely to the current topic (Madzharov 1968: 256; Statelova 1983: 15). It is unclear if the reason is searching negative characteristics of the commander Schtreker, who is a German, or other motives, but these statements are not quite true. Yes, the militia was armed with technically old weapons, but the lack of expenses for rearmament gives the opportunity for transferring funds for building quarters and, to a degree, providing a normal functioning of the militia.

The bought “Berdan 2” rifles are barely enough for the regular army, but the bullets, delivered by Russia, are in enormous quantities. The supply holes were filled with the outdated, but still usable “Krnka” rifles, which were part of the training of the enlisted soldiers and the reserves in the East Rumelian militia. The semi battery was also developing and continued with the training, thanks to the cannons “left” by general Stolipin.

The donation, made by Russia for the Bulgarians in Eastern Rumelia, could be studied from different angles. It is a fact, that the Russian Empire is getting rid of unneeded and outdated weapons, but more important is to be noted what it is that donation in regard to the Bulgarians. The arms are the most expensive part of maintaining an army. As it was stated above, the militia in Eastern Rumelia had struggled with funding for the majority of its existence. Without the Russian rifles, the Province might support far less soldiers in the first years of its functioning. And more – the militia existed for nearly seven years before becoming a part of the Bulgarian army. In the first four years it used the outdated, but free Russian rifles.

Note

¹ Until the end of its existence (March of 1886) the Eastern Rumelian militia could not provide uniforms for all its soldiers. Oftentimes, soldiers, dressed in civil clothes or a rugs during the colder times of the year could be seen.

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Anton Doncev Marinov (Veliko Târnovo, Bulgaria). Doctor în istorie, Universitatea din Veliko Târnovo „Sf. Sf. Chiril și Metodi”.

Антон Дончев Маринов (Велико Търново, България). Доктор истории, Великотърновский университет им. Св. Св. Кирилла и Мефодия.

Anton Donchev Marinov (Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria). PhD in History, “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Tarnovo.

E-mail: a_mr@mail.bg

ORCID: 0000-0002-3452-8140