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**The Activity of Mercenaries in the State of Mali – a Negative Factor on
Regional and International Security**

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Abstract: The activity of mercenaries is an illegal act that most states of the world have known with regret. In recent times, military clashes on the continent of Africa have not been an exception in the sense of not knowing what they represent and how mercenaries are involved in the interests of other states. Therefore, the basic content of the ensuing approach is largely focused on the analysis of the role of the “mercenary” military in Mali as a factor generating conflict in the international arena, and the direct threat to regional security.

Keywords: Mali; mercenary; armed conflict; state security; international sanctions

JEL Classification: K14

1. Introduction

According to Article 47 of the Additional Protocol No. 1 of 10 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 *on the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts*, mercenaries are persons:

- who are specially recruited in the country or abroad to fight in an armed conflict;
- who take part directly in hostilities in order to obtain a personal advantage and who is actually promised by a party to the conflict or on its behalf, a higher remuneration than that promised or paid to combatants, having a rank and an analogous function in the armed forces of this part;
- who are not members of the military forces of a party to the conflict (Bulgac & Sîrbu, 2019).

1.1. The Degree of Investigation of the Problem at Present, the Purpose of the Research

At present, the importance and purpose of this scientific approach are based on the author’s intention to investigate in detail and in many ways the landmarks of the role of mercenaries in Mali, as well as to inform the general public about the impact of this scourge on regional and international security.

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2. Materials Used and Methods Applied

In the process of elaborating the scientific article we were guided by several and various methods of scientific research that made possible the proper investigation of the subject, among which we can list: method of analysis, method of synthesis, method of deduction, systemic method, historical method, and comparative method.

The theoretical-legal basis of the scientific approach largely includes online reference addresses and literature – which directly or indirectly addresses the essence and generic content of the term “mercenary”.

3. Basic Content

The controversial Wagner Group (sometimes called the “Russian Mercenary Factory”) is considered to be the largest private military company in the world, but was said to be V.P.’s private army. It includes thousands of Russian citizens or former Soviet republics.

Many experts believe that the Wagner Group is a front-line unit of the Russian Ministry of Defense and / or Military Intelligence, GRU.

The company is said to be owned by Ev.P., a businessman from V.P. And the training of the mercenaries would be done right in the bases of the Russian army.

In recent years, the Wagner group seems to be gaining more and more influence in Africa (The Wagner group of mercenaries, suspected of intervening in the crisis in Mali. P.’s “shadow army” receives a new warning), and at the moment it is expected to be mainly in Mali.

In mid-November 2021, US Secretary of State *Antony Blinken* expressed his total dissatisfaction with such an intervention (the presence of Russian mercenaries in Mali) and called for a swift transition to civilian power in this violent country.

Visiting Senegal, the last leg of his African tour, *Antony Blinken* said the United States, along with Mali and other partners, was contributing to “stability” efforts in the country, which is the scene of frequent jihadist attacks amid inter-communal clashes. In this regard, the American official stated the following: *I would just like to add that it would be unfortunate if foreign actors get hired in this country by making things even more difficult and complicated, I am thinking especially of the Wagner group.*

The West African states (ECOWAS) imposed individual sanctions on members of the Mali junta on November 7, 2021 due to delays in holding elections that should mark the return of civilians to power after the double coup in August 2020 and May 2021. *Antony Blinken* stated that agreed with the Senegalese authorities on a transition to democracy in Mali: *As soon as a democratically elected government takes office, the international community will be ready to support Mali.*

Thus, the United States suspects the Russian group of Wagner mercenaries that it is interfering in the conflict in Mali, further complicating matters, and the US official sent, in mid-November 2021, a warning in this regard.

For their part, French Foreign and Defense Ministers *Jean-Yves Le Drian* and *Florence Parly* met on November 12, 2021, in Paris, with their Russian counterparts, S.L. and S.S., who were told that the deployment of Wagner’s mercenaries in the Sahelo-Saharan area would be unacceptable, according to a French diplomatic statement.

The Wagner Group is considered a true “shadow army” of F.R. The presence of Wagner mercenaries has so far been reported in Ukraine, Syria and some African countries. According to some journalists and non-governmental organizations, Russia is using the Wagner group and its mercenaries to pursue certain interests abroad, although the Kremlin denies any connection between the state and this military organization. The ruling junta in Bamako, Mali, is threatening to use the services of this Russian private company, suspected of being close to Russian President V.P., to help fight jihadists (The Wagner group of mercenaries, suspected of intervening in the crisis in Mali. P.’s “shadow army” receives a new warning).

Under the conditions described above, some countries on the European continent, such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom, have accused the Mali government of bringing mercenaries from the Russian group Wagner to its country, thus undermining the peace process.

The Berlin Foreign Ministry says in a public statement that “international partners committed to supporting Mali and the people in their efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability and to fight terrorism” strongly condemns “the deployment of mercenary soldiers on the territory Malian”: *We deeply regret the choice of the transitional authorities to use the already reduced public funds to pay foreign mercenaries, instead of supporting the Malian armed forces and public services for the benefit of the Malian people*, according to the document signed by 16 parties.

The partners say they are aware of the involvement of the F.R. in providing material support for the deployment of the Wagner Group in Mali. They called on Moscow to “return to responsible and constructive behavior in the region”.

In September 2021, indications that Russian mercenaries were operating in this country (Mali) in northwest Africa caused concern among European leaders. Several of them called for a review or cessation of missions in Mali, where some 1,350 German troops are deployed as part of the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA, as well as the EU EUTM training mission (The Mali government is accused of hiring Russian mercenaries. Who are the paramilitaries in the Wagner group?).

At the same time, the European Union has suspended its mission to train soldiers in the Central African Republic (CAR) due to fears that it may be linked to violations of international law by Russian mercenaries, including the Wagner Group (Mali denies deployment of Russian mercenaries, says only “trainers” present).

German Defense Minister *Christine Lambrecht* has expressed her *view that Mali’s decision to bring mercenaries into the country is a wrong one and we explicitly regret it*. The German official added that this would not help improve security and promised that the Berlin government would work closely with partners on future actions and commitments in Mali: *The safety of our military is a top priority*.

France, the former colonial power in Mali, is fighting Islamist terrorist groups in the Sahel region through Operation Barkhane, in which about 5,100 French troops are deployed. The political situation in Mali remains unstable, after three coups since 2012. In May 2021, power was taken over by a transitional military government, while militant attacks, often linked to extremist Islamist groups, take place frequently. The Wagner paramilitary group participated in the invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and in the ensuing conflict that erupted in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian troops and Moscow-backed separatists. Since then, the paramilitary group has been involved in conflicts in Syria, Libya, Mozambique, Sudan and the Central African Republic, acting in accordance with official Russian foreign policy objectives, and human rights activists have sounded the alarm over alleged abuses. was committed by Wagner fighters in the Central African Republic (The Mali government is accused of hiring Russian mercenaries. Who are the paramilitaries in the Wagner group?).

A European source targeting West Africa and a security source in the region said at least 1,000 mercenaries could be involved. Two other sources said the number was lower, but did not provide figures.

Four sources said the Wagner Group would be paid about 6 billion CFA francs (\$ 10.8 million) a month for its services. A security source working in the region said the mercenaries would train Malian soldiers and provide protection to senior officials.

France is worried that the arrival of Russian mercenaries would undermine the decade-long counterterrorism operation against al Qaeda and Islamic State insurgents in the West African Sahel region as it tries to withdraw its 5,000-strong Barkhane mission. People, to reshape it with several European partners, diplomatic sources said.

The presence of mercenaries would jeopardize Mali's funding from international partners and Allied training missions that helped rebuild Mali's army, four diplomatic and security sources said.

Having Russian mercenaries in Mali would strengthen Russia's strength for global prestige and influence and be part of a larger campaign to shake up the long-running power dynamic in Africa, diplomatic sources said (Deal allowing Russian mercenaries into Mali is close – sources).

France intervened in 2013 and now has about 5,000 troops in the region, but plans to reduce that number to 2,500-3,000 by 2023.

Paris said any deployment of the Wagner militia would be incompatible with the presence of French troops (West Condemns 'Deployment' of Russian Mercenaries in Mali).

For its part, the Mali government denies the existence of Russian mercenaries in the country (Mercenaries of Russia | The response of the Mali government and what Romania thinks about the Wagner group).

The Bamako government *has officially denied the allegations*, citing “alleged involvement of a private security company in Mali”. The government “demands that evidence be provided to it from independent sources” and “wants to state that, like the European Training Mission (EUTM), Russian instructors are present in Mali as part of strengthening the operational capabilities of the national defense and security forces”. Mali also called for “trial on the basis of facts rather than rumors, and wishes to recall that it is engaged only in a state-to-state partnership with the Russian Federation – *its historical partner*”, the official said. Government spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga, also Minister of Territorial Administration (Romania and 14 other states condemn Russia for sending mercenaries to Mali. The story behind the radical Wagner group).

Earlier, several states, including Romania, had signed a letter condemning the involvement of the F.R. in providing material support for the deployment of the Wagner Group in Mali. Thus, some states such as Germany, France, Great Britain, Canada, Italy, Romania – have publicly stated that: *We call on Russia to behave responsibly and constructively in the region (Mali)*. For his part, Mali's government spokesman *Abdoulaye Maiga denied that elements of a private security company* were operating in the West African country (Mercenaries of Russia | The response of the Mali government and what Romania thinks about the Wagner group).

Therefore, about fifteen countries (including: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Romania and Sweden) announced in mid-November 2021 in a statement, the deployment in Mali, with the help of Moscow, the Russian paramilitary company Wagner, while denouncing “the involvement of the FR government in providing material support for

the deployment of the Wagner Group in Mali” (Romania and 14 other states condemn Russia for sending mercenaries to Mali. The story behind the radical Wagner group).

The message of the booked states was that these actions could only further worsen the security situation in West Africa, worsen the human rights situation in Mali, threaten the Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. At the same time, the signatories regret the choice of the Malian authorities to use “scarce public funds” to pay foreign mercenaries instead of paying their own armed forces (West condemns ‘deployment’ of Russian mercenaries in Mali).

The above-mentioned states are enlisted with France in the new European Takuba Special Forces Group, to accompany Malian soldiers in battle. The deployment of Russian mercenaries has so far been a red line for Paris. However, the 15 signatory countries reaffirmed their “determination to continue their efforts to protect civilians, to support the fight against terrorism in the Sahel and to contribute to long-term stability”. Since 2012, Mali has been the scene of operations by jihadist groups linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State organization, as well as violence by “self-defense militias” and bandits. Regular forces are also accused of abuses. The violence that began in the North in 2012 spread to the Center, then to neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. It has claimed thousands of civilian and military dead, as well as hundreds of thousands of displaced people, despite the deployment of UN, French and African forces. The army’s takeover of Bamako in favor of a coup in 2020 has not stopped the spiral of violence (Romania and 14 other states condemn Russia for sending mercenaries to Mali. The story behind the radical Wagner group).

In an online post, *Cable News Network* (CNN) sources reported that in early 2021, a Russian plane flew to Mali from Libya, a country where the Wagner group was operating in support of renegade general *Khalifa Haftar*. According to the quoted source, the plane belonged to the F.R. Air Force. and was allegedly rented by a company of Russian oligarch Ev.P., a close relative of V.P. Ev.P., known as “V.P.’s cook”, is believed to be behind the Wagner group of mercenaries and the so-called Russian troll factories that acted to influence the elections in various states. Ev.P. is on the list of criminals wanted by the FBI, and on the list of Russian citizens under the sanction’s regime ordered by the European Union in the case of Al.N. In early November 2021, the EU decided to sanction the Wagner Group, eight people and three associated entities. The group is accused of *serious human rights abuses, including torture and executions*. In a statement issued on December 13, 2021, Romanian Foreign Minister *Bogdan Aurescu* welcomed “the adoption of sanctions against the Wagner group, which have in view both its destabilizing actions in Africa and in connection with Ukraine”.

Earlier, on December 1, 2021, Romanian official *Bogdan Aurescu* had expressed concern about the deterioration of the political situation with implications for the EU training mission (*EUTM Mali*) and for regional security.

Romanian Foreign Minister *Bogdan Aurescu* considered it opportune to increase the pressure on the Mali authorities, so that they do not “conclude an agreement with the Russian Wagner group and respect the established electoral calendar”. Thus, the Romanian official also reiterated *Romania’s support for the adoption of EU sanctions to combat the malignant influence of the Wagner Group in Africa in general or in the EU’s Eastern Neighborhood* (Mercenaries of Russia | The response of the Mali government and what Romania thinks about the Wagner group).

In December 2021, flight tracking data showed that an Air Force Tu-154 (Soviet passenger plane designed to carry 152-180 people) flew to the Malian capital, Bamako, in Benghazi, Libya, where Wagner he had a presence in support of the forces led by Khalifa Haftar, a renegade general who leads the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army.

The aircraft belonged to Russian Air Force Flight 223. The Russian Ministry of Defense had previously signed a contract, the details of which were seen by CNN, with a company owned by Ev.P. for the use of flight transport aircraft 223.

European states have stated that the actions taken in Mali “can only further damage the security situation in West Africa” (Arrival of Russian Wagner mercenaries in Mali condemned by European governments).

4. Conclusion

In the conditions described in the present scientific approach, we conclude that the presence of mercenaries from various categories in the territorial-administrative space of the Malian state, represents in the general sense a negative factor on regional and international security. This is evidenced both by the arguments and positions set out in the descriptive part of this research and by the official position of the states of the month (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Romania and Sweden). Who expressed their total disagreement with the mercenary actions on the territory of the state of Mali.

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