

STEPS TAKEN TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOVIET DOMINATION OVER ROMANIA AFTER AUGUST 23, 1944. A RETROSPECTIVE AFTER 80 YEARS (MARCH 1945)

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Abstract: The coup of August 23, 1944, which overthrew Antonescu's dictatorship, spared Romania from immediate Soviet takeover but soon brought the country under Red Army occupation. With the entry of Soviet troops into Bucharest on August 31, Romania lost autonomy, and the small Communist Party, supported by Moscow, became the main tool for dismantling existing institutions and preventing a democratic restoration. The army, police, and judiciary were systematically weakened, while propaganda, often framed in inclusive terms for minorities, sought to create a mass base. Churchill's "percentage agreement" of October 1944 tacitly acknowledged Soviet dominance, and subsequent Western inaction left Romania vulnerable. Soviet pressure drastically reduced the Romanian armed forces, while the Groza government consolidated communist control, placing key ministries under loyal cadres. King Michael's appeals to Britain and the United States gained little support, and the democratic opposition was silenced through show trials and repression. Despite his symbolic resistance, the king faced mounting isolation as communist influence expanded. In December 1947, under threat of civil war, Michael was forced to abdicate, and the People's Republic of Romania was proclaimed. This marked the definitive end of Romania's independence and exposed the failure of Western powers to uphold the principles of the Yalta Declaration, leaving force and distortion as the foundations of the postwar order in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Romania; communism; Red Army; Churchill; King Michael; Soviet Union;

It is one of the many tragedies of Romanian history that the main architects of the coup d'état of August 23, 1944, King Michael and the democratic leaders, overthrew a military dictatorship only to be removed from

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power by another incipient totalitarian order, six months after the event. In the Soviet zone of Germany and Poland, where the ravages of war had swept away all political structures, bringing communist client parties to power was a relatively simple matter for Stalin, but in Romania, imposing the new order meant destroying the surviving structures. King Michael's coup had prevented the possibility of the Soviets taking power immediately. When their troops entered Bucharest eight days later, they found a Romanian government without significant communist representation ready to negotiate an armistice and call elections.

With the entry of the Red Army, whose vanguard units arrived in Bucharest on August 31, the country came under Russian control. King Michael had retreated to a mountain refuge in the Carpathians, abandoning the capital for fear that he might fall into German hands in the early hours of August 24. With or without the king's presence, from the moment Antonescu and those close to him were handed over to the Soviet authorities, they were in a position to impose their will unhindered. Romania was now an occupied country, and it is hard to imagine how the king could have intervened against the new ally to prevent it from capturing a leader who had led the hostilities against them for three years. Those who argue that the king should have done this do not understand the particularities of the time.

What emerges from the description of the preparations leading to the coup and the steps taken to carry it out is that the Romanian communists were only one of several players involved. Their role was defined by a series of considerations. As a party with very little popular support in Romania, the communists' impact on the future of their own country depended on the influence that their patron, Stalin, was able to exert on Romania's internal affairs. As the war progressed, this impact was to be maximized by the advance of the Red Army. The inclusion of representatives of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) in the National Democratic Bloc was therefore a rational political decision, viewed by the king and the prominent opposition leaders as a show of tact, given the imminent entry of the Red Army onto Romanian soil and the likelihood that the Soviet Union would determine the terms of the armistice. Based on these premises, the communists were able to play a more important role in the coup itself due to the shortcomings of the other parties, which were outweighed by the better organization of the communists on the evening of the coup. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was the first representative of a party to appear at the palace on August 23, 1944. Iuliu Maniu and Gheorghe Brătianu, the respective leaders of the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party, could not be contacted, while Emil Bodnăraș and the communist "Patriotic Guards" he had commanded were the only civilian militia that appeared to take Antonescu into custody. All these aspects were used by the communists to

accredit an exaggerated version of the events, according to which they were the ones who had played the leading role in the coup.

This had a crucial impact on the role that Stalin had intended for the Romanian Communist Party. It was the coup that brought Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej to the forefront of the unfolding political events, thus launching him on the path to power. Because Gheorghiu-Dej first established himself as the leader of the wing of the party that was most involved in the coup, and afterwards, secured his dominance over the entire party, the coup was awarded a sacred place in the party's history. Even before Gheorghiu-Dej achieved the supreme place in the party and could control its historiography, his communist colleagues sought to take full responsibility for the events and tried to deny the king and the major democratic parties of having had any merit in the overthrow of the Antonescu regime. This act was meant to imbue their regime with legitimacy. To this end, the role of the Romanian communists in the coup was deliberately exaggerated by the party while King Michael was relegated to the position of a mere spectator. In this context, the apologists of communism were aided by the authorities who played a key role in the suppression of any accounts of the coup that did not fit their own script. As a result, the versions of the main participants in the events, namely the king and members of his entourage who later fled to the West, which described the king's essential role in ordering the arrest of Marshal Antonescu on August 23, 1944, remained almost unknown in Romania prior to the overthrow of the communist regime.¹

Stalin used the Armistice Convention signed in Moscow on 12 September 1944², between Romania, on the one hand, and Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union, on the other, to counteract those consequences of the coup d'état of August 23 that risked depriving him of the initiative regarding the political course of Romania. To regain the initiative, the Soviet leader laid the foundations of a legal framework in the signed agreement that would ensure that the Soviet Union had a dominant economic and political position in the country. Given that the Soviet Union had a monopoly on the interpretation of the Armistice Convention, the Convention became a mechanism for the political seizure of Romania.³ The Soviet decision to retain

¹ These include: A.G. Lee, *Crown against Sickle* (Hutchinson, London, 1950); R.H. Markham, *Romania under the Soviet Yoke* (Meador Publishing, Boston, 1949); R. Bishop and E.S. Crayfield, *Russia astride the Balkans* (Evans, London, 1949). In historiography, the coup is presented in R.R. King, *A History of the Romanian Communist Party* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1980), pp. 40-43, and in M. Shafir, *Romania. Politics, Economics and Society* (Frances Pinter, London, 1985), pp. 30-37.

² *Conditions of an Armistice with Roumania*, Miscellaneous No. 1 (1945) (HMSO, London, 1945, Cmd. 6585).

³ Maurice Pearton and Dennis Deletant, "The Soviet Takeover in Romania, 1944-1948", in Dennis Deletant and Maurice Pearton (eds.), *Romania Observed* (Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1998), p. 145.

control was reflected in the draft agreement of August 31, which stipulated that the terms would be implemented "under the control of the Soviet High Command, hereinafter referred to as the Allied (Soviet) High Command, acting on behalf of the Allied Powers". Stalin's policy in Romania was designed to obtain compensation for the Romanian invasion of the Soviet Union and to create conditions of permanent military security – the policy was aimed not only at disarmament and the guarantees presented in the treaty, but also sought to abrogate the political power of those who had launched the invasion.⁴ Articles 13 and 14 stipulated war criminals would be arrested and the "fascist-type" organizations would be dissolved. In practice, the Control Commission operated under statutes devised by the Russians, under which, until Potsdam (July 17 – August 2, 1945), American and British officers were treated as delegates of the Commission, and not as a structural part of it. Consequently, the rights formally guaranteed to the Allies by the Armistice Convention were defined and implemented by the Russians. As a result, Stalin had two effective tools to pursue his objectives in Romania: a communist party that was a recognized part of the country's political structure, and an agreement with his allies that gave the Red Army a free hand in Romanian affairs.

The way Romania was taken over was the result of the interaction between the two. While the fighting continued, the Red Army needed, like any army, order behind the front, but in Romania, the only organization accepted by the Russians that could ensure this order was the Romanian Communist Party. In August 1944, the party had fewer than 1,000 members, although this figure must be put in context, given that the party could not operate legally, having been previously outlawed.⁵ The party's role was to prevent the post-coup regime from restoring order in any other form than the one preferred by the Soviet Union. To ensure that the Soviet preference became reality, first of all, the existing means of maintaining social order needed to be neutralized, especially the army, the judiciary, and the police, by redefining them in accordance with the Soviet model. Second of all, there was a need to create mass support, which the PCR completely lacked, but which, theoretically, would ensure legitimation. Achieving these two goals required the creation of an atmosphere of fear, and both were sure to destroy any vestiges of support

⁴ Maurice Pearton, *Oil and the Romanian State* (Oxford University Press, London, 1971), pp 265-267.

⁵ According to Iosif Rangheț, a member of the PCR political bureau, at the end of April 1945: "[...] on August 23, 1944, our party had, in Bucharest, 80 party members, no more, no less. And in the territory, our party had less than 1,000 party members, including our comrades in prisons and labor camps." (Radu Colț, "Și creștea într-o zi cât alții într-un an. Evoluția numărului membrilor PCR în 1944-1945", *Magazin istoric*, nr. 6 (iunie 1999), p.18). The figures correspond to those given by Grigore Răceanu, close to Foriș during 1941-1944, who was responsible for party members (from the author's conversation with Mircea Răceanu, April 22, 2017).

for the monarchy and “Western” democracy. In terms of tactics, PCR embarked on an intense propaganda odyssey among the working class. In Transylvania, this type of propaganda was found in bilingual newspapers, in Romanian and Hungarian, therefore, having an attractive inclusive character and a multi-ethnic dimension. Meanwhile, the major democratic parties, the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party, displayed their purely Romanian character, as reflected in monolingual electoral documents, which from the point of view of minorities, reflected implicitly exclusionary attitudes. PCR’s inclusive approach seems to have attracted many sympathizers from among the minorities, although this observation should not make the reader forget the coercive aspect of the PCR’s recruitment campaign and the role played by opportunism in attracting many of its new adherents.

The British and American diplomats did not consider the terms of the armistice to be excessively harsh. However, Averell Harimann, the US ambassador to Moscow, had serious doubts about the Soviet intentions and predicted that the terms of the agreement would “give the Soviet Command unlimited control over the economic life of Romania” and, ominously still, “police powers during the armistice”.⁶ Both the British and American governments endorsed the agreement without hesitation, and their acceptance of Moscow as the place of signing meant a tacit admission that their eastern partner, the main belligerent in Eastern Europe, had earned the right, as the victor, to dictate the terms of negotiations to the Romanians. Churchill accepted as *fait accompli* that the Soviet Union would hold this position in a speech to the House of Commons on September 26, 1944. The Prime Minister admitted that:

The terms of the armistice agreed upon with regard to Finland and Romania naturally bear the imprint of the Soviet will – and here I must draw attention to the restraint that characterized the way the Soviets treated these two countries, both of which marched nonchalantly behind Hitler in his attempt to destroy Russia and both of which contributed to the immense amount of suffering that the Russian people endured, survived, and emerged triumphant from.⁷

Contrary to Churchill's statement, made while the Red Army was still fighting in Eastern Europe, as it advanced towards Berlin, it is worth noting that King Michael and his ministers were convinced that the coup against

⁶ Paul D. Quinlan, *Clash over Romania. British and American Policies Towards Romania: 1938-1947* (American-Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, 1977), p. 109.

⁷ Hansard, 5th series, vol. 403, col. 488.

Antonescu and the turning of arms against the Germans had earned Romania the right to be treated as a recent co-belligerent, rather than as a defeated enemy. This position was rejected by Stalin, who was unwilling to forgive Romania for participating in Operation Barbarossa. Ironically, it was King Michael's actions that enabled the Red Army's advance into the Balkans and sealed his country's inclusion in the Soviet sphere of influence and under Stalin's domination. As Soviet troops poured into Romania and Bulgaria, Churchill was determined to save Greece and, possibly, Italy from a communist takeover, and this vision was to haunt his policy towards Romania.

When Churchill decided to share responsibility over the Balkans with Stalin in a personal discussion with him, Britain had few cards left to play. The Russians had already occupied much of Romania and Bulgaria, so by the time he flew to Moscow in early October 1944, Churchill got down to business immediately and proposed the now well-known "percentage agreement", which was agreed on the evening of October 9.⁸ Although he claims in his memoirs that these were only "immediate wartime arrangements", Churchill knew that Stalin could not be dislodged by force from the position of influence he had gained. In proposing the agreement, Churchill was being pragmatic; he was acknowledging Soviet superiority in the Balkans, limited only by the Red Army's operational problems.⁹ Stalin interpreted the "percentage agreement" as he saw fit, and the absence of any Western forces not only from Romania but from all of Eastern Europe meant that the exercise of Soviet authority in the area was unfettered.

On October 2, the Soviet High Command demanded a reduction in the police force from 18,000 to 12,000. On October 6, it forced General Gheorghe Mihail, Chief of the Army General Staff, to resign for opposing the order to disarm all Romanian units except for 12 divisions fighting alongside the Russians. Mihail's successor, General Nicolae Rădescu, protested, but eventually acquiesced to the Soviet request of October 26 that the Romanian army inside the territory of the country be reduced from 13 full divisions to three skeleton divisions, with a total of 10,000 men, and that the border guard force also be reduced from 74,086 to 58,018. The process continued over the next three years, leading to a reduction in the armed forces from 419,000 men in May 1945 to 136,000 in December 1947.¹⁰

⁸ Winston. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol VI: *Triumph and Tragedy* (Penguin, London, 1985), p. 202.

⁹ Pearton, *Oil and the Romanian State*, p. 265. For the pressures on Churchill at the time in general, see Maurice Pearton, "Puzzles about Percentages", in Dennis Deletant and Maurice Pearton (ed.), *Romania Observed* (Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998), pp. 119-128.

¹⁰ A. Duțu, "Comisia Aliată de Control destructurează armata română (3)", *Revista de istorie militară*, nr. 5 (1992), p. 221.

In implementing these actions, the Soviet authorities created a free path for the Communist Party. The first objective of PCR was to expand its foothold in the government. In itself, this meant admission to key ministries – Interior, Defense, and Justice – and the creation of a critical mass that would be used to demand radical political change. On October 2, the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party joined forces to form the National Democratic Front (FND). Members of the Front threatened workers from the large factories of Bucharest and other cities that the Soviet army would arrest them if they refused to vote out the old work committees and elect FND representatives in their place. The new committees then were in charge of the workers' canteens and the rationing criteria, and soon, the FND had most of the industry under its control, forcing workers to submit to it under threat of withdrawing their rations and rationing cards.

In the industry sector, though not limited to it, the threats gained weight through the “Patriotic Defense Guards”, created by expanding the core of armed workers who had taken over Antonescu after his arrest. The expansion began in September 1944 and was supervised by the NKGB, the Soviet security service, so that the formation could be placed under the command of Emil Bodnăraș. The Patriotic Defense Guards provided the ideal cover for training agents and thugs who were to be infiltrated into the police and security forces once the communists gained access to the Ministry of the Interior. The “Guards” were also used to exclude “fascists” and encourage the recalcitrants willing to find flaws in the opposition. If necessary, the Soviet command would provide them with logistical support. The recruits included recidivists and former members of the Iron Guard, who had practiced their methods of intimidation in the late 1930s.¹¹ On January 15, 1945, the Prime Minister, General Rădescu, ordered the Guards to be disbanded, but Teohari Georgescu, the Deputy Minister of the Interior, and Bodnăraș ignored the order. With a crippled or absent Romanian army, the government lacked the power to impose its will.

The liquidation of fascism was left in the hands of the Russians and their local acolytes. At this point, we should recall that the ongoing war against

¹¹ One of the advantages of a class theory in politics is that it legitimizes crimes committed without methods. The victims of the Guards, killed or died from injuries, have not been accounted, not even to this day. Beyond their role as “shock troops”, the Guards (also known in Romania as the “Patriotic Fighting Formations”) also played an intelligence role, infiltrating the SSI and the Romanian military intelligence services (the Second Section of the General Staff). Their agents later occupied positions in the Security and the communist Militia: see Claudiu Șecasiu, “Serviciul de informații al PCR; Secția a II-a Informații și Contrainformații din cadrul Comandamentului Formațiunilor de Luptă Patriotice (FLP) – Penetrarea serviciilor oficiale de informații (23 august 1944 - 6 martie 1945)”, in *6 martie 1945. Începuturile comunizării României* (Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1995), pp. 146-157.

the Axis was still widely accepted as an “anti-fascist crusade.” Furthermore, many people in Romania fit the definition, in one way or another, of “fascists,” and this, coupled with the fact that the governments that followed the coup seemed to stall in bringing them to justice, led to a state of heightened tension. As a result, the situation around the issue of needing to deal with the fascists could therefore count on a degree of popular support. Events soon showed that, in practice, “fascist” could mean anything the communists wanted. And they could express their wishes through “spontaneous” demonstrations and a press that was being rapidly brought under their control.¹²

On 8 October, the FND held its first mass rally in Bucharest. Some 60,000 demonstrators demanded the resignation of the Sănătescu government, accusing it of having failed to remove the “fascists” from public life. The next day, General Vladislav Vinogradov, deputy head of the Russian Military Mission¹³, demanded that the government arrest 47 Romanians accused of war crimes, including two cabinet ministers: General Gheorghe Potopeanu, Minister of Economy who had briefly served as governor of Transnistria, and General Ion Boiteanu, Minister of Education. Sănătescu was slow to acting against Antonescu's officials which only served to embolden the Communist Party and the Soviet authorities. Both accused the Romanians of not respecting Articles 14 and 15 of the Armistice Convention. In their defense, Romanian officials argued that the bureaucracy would not be able to function if large-scale purges of the kind demanded by the Soviets were carried out.¹⁴ The accusations made by the communists were confirmed by a US OSS (Office of Strategic Services) report from February 1945, which stated that in the first six weeks after the

¹² Pearton and Deletant, “The Soviet Takeover in Romania, 1944-1948,” pp. 142-163. The fate of the newspaper *Viitorul*, the paper of the National Liberal Party, is instructive. Between the armistice and February 1945, the publication was frequently suspended, on orders from the Control Commission, following revelations regarding communiqués claiming that certain localities had been liberated by Russian troops when in reality they had been liberated by Romanian units, and for publishing editorials attacking communist leaders. At the printing press, starting in November, a self-appointed communist committee began to prevent the publication of articles critical of the FND. The typographers eventually capitulated, threatened with the withdrawal of ration cards and possible deportation. The newspaper's editor received death threats. Finally, on February 15, the Control Commission ordered the suppression of the newspaper. On the same day, the closure of all non-communist publications took place. One of the charges was that the newspaper was printing suspicious acronyms. These turned out to be the decorations of Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson, the head of the British military delegation: “CBE, DSO, MC” were interpreted as coded messages.

¹³ The head of the Soviet Military Mission was General Rodion Malinovsky.

¹⁴ The same argument was invoked 45 years later by former Romanian communists to justify preserving Ceaușescu's bureaucracy after the 1989 Revolution.

August coup, the Sănătescu government had dismissed only eight Romanian officials.¹⁵

The demonstrations also focused on certain political figures, whom the communists wanted to remove. At the end of November, the FND used an urban brawl as a pretext to demand the resignation of Nicolae Penescu, the Minister of the Interior.¹⁶ A group of drunken Romanian soldiers had shot two trade unionists, for whom the FND would organize a lavish funeral. The communist press fumed about the "Hitlerite-fascist bullets fired from the automatic rifles of the Fifth Column supported by the leaders of the National Peasant Party". The National Peasant Party ministers and their national liberal colleagues would withdraw from the Sănătescu cabinet, which they felt was too tolerant of the communist harassment. Then, on December 2, the king asked Nicolae Rădescu, Chief of the Army General Staff and a non-partisan figure, to form a cabinet.¹⁷

The communist-dominated FND had hoped to secure the Ministry of the Interior, but Rădescu kept the post for himself. As a result, the party leaders, Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca, refused to discuss FND's participation in the new government. However, on the instructions of Andrei Vișinski, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, they changed their

¹⁵ Quinlan, *Clash Over Romania*, p. 116, reference 58.

¹⁶ James Marjoribanks, assistant to the British political representative on the Allied Control Commission, sent a minute to the Foreign Office on December 2, 1944, describing a conversation with Penescu: "Penescu stated that he had accepted the position of Minister for two purposes: a) to ensure order in the country; b) to hold local elections. The Communists accepted his appointment because they considered him an agrarian member of the left wing of the National Peasant Party. Mr. Penescu obtained clear evidence: a) that the shooting incident which was used to discredit the Ministry involved a man who was not a simple worker, but a well-off ex-legionnaire who had been shot because he had an affair with someone else's wife; b) that ex-legionnaires were encouraged to join the Communist Party (he stated that he would send me a photocopy of the order certifying this); c) that a considerable quantity of arms – machine guns, rifles, grenades, etc., having knowledge of their location and type – was provided to the Communist Guards by the Soviet Army (The National Archives, FO 371/48547. R/95/28/37).

¹⁷ Rădescu (1874–1953) had been awarded the Order Mihai Viteazul, Romania's highest military decoration, in World War I. From April 1926 to July 1928, he served as Romania's military attaché in London. Upon his return, he became a member of the Military House of the Royal Palace. In 1930, he was demobilized from the army on account of his age. In November 1941, he was interned in a camp, on Antonescu's orders, for writing a defiant letter addressed to Baron Killinger, Hitler's envoy, in response to the baron's disparaging remarks about Romania. On October 15, 1944, he was appointed Chief of the General Staff, a position he held until early December. On December 6, he was appointed Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior.

minds.¹⁸ Rădescu awarded the position of Deputy Minister of the Interior to the communists, appointing Teohari Georgescu, a member of the party's Central Committee. His communist cabinet colleagues were Pătrășcanu, Minister of Justice, and Gheorghiu-Dej, Minister of Communications and Public Works.

Vyshinsky's decision sheds some light on the Soviets' intentions at the time. The short-term goal was to end the war with Germany as soon as possible. Instability in Romania would have compromised this goal. Moreover, the Romanian Communist Party was not yet strong enough to take over the administration of a country where the bulk of the population was hostile to communism. Consequently, if the king would abdicate, the Russians would have to assume some of the administration of the country themselves. Such a move would have raised questions about their intentions in Britain and the United States. Consequently, Vyshinsky acted to lower tensions in Romania. He would leave the country as he had come, without informing anyone, on December 8.¹⁹

On January 4, 1945, Stalin received Ana Pauker, Gheorghiu-Dej and Gheorghe Apostol at his *dacha* near Moscow. Stalin advised the Romanian delegation to focus on the agrarian reform and to use Tudor Vladimirescu's division to support FND in Romania.²⁰ The communist press accused Rădescu

¹⁸ Dinu C. Giurescu, *Romania's Communist Takeover: The Rădescu Government* (East European Monographs, Boulder, Colorado, 1994), p. 135. In a conversation with the Tass correspondent at the end of December 1944, Pătrășcanu considered that the Communist Party had made a mistake in causing the fall of the Sănătescu government, because the latter had been replaced by a more pro-active Rădescu. "If before we had a prime minister who was in the pocket of FND, now we have a prime minister who is in someone else's pocket." When asked to clarify, Pătrășcanu declared that behind Rădescu were internal and external hostile forces. "He was referring to the British," the Tass correspondent told Moscow (F. Constantiniu, A. Duțu, and M. Retegan, *România în război, 1941-1945*, Editura Militară, București, 1995, p. 285).

¹⁹ Giurescu, *Romania's Communist Takeover*, p. 137.

²⁰ Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik (9 marta 1933-6 februarie 1949)* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", 1997), p. 458, quoted in Dan Cătănuș, Vasile Buga (ed.), *Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej la Stalin. Stenograme, note de convorbire, memorii, 1944-1952* (Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 2012), pp. 27-29. In a memorandum addressed to Nicolae Ceaușescu, written in the summer of 1979, when he was Romania's ambassador to Argentina, Apostol recalls the visit to Moscow. The delegation, he states, "departed in secret between December 20 and 25", on a Soviet plane, from Băneasa airport. The flight lasted eight hours, and, upon arrival, the Romanian delegates were taken to the Ararat Hotel. The urgency of a visit, he writes, arose because there were disagreements in the provisional leadership of PCR, concerning the line that the party should adopt regarding other political formations. One group led by Gheorghiu-Dej supported the strategy of reducing the influence of Maniu's National Peasant Party and Brătianu's National Liberals among the wealthier peasantry and the middle class, and cooperate, instead, with the liberal faction led by Gheorghe Tătărescu, which had broken away from Brătianu, as well as with a wing removed from Maniu's peasant party, led by Anton Alexandru. A second

of sabotaging the armistice, implying that he had not purged "fascism" from the Romanian public life, but omitted the fact that he had not cleaned up his own house, that is, the communist-run ministries. Teohari Georgescu sent an open letter to the press, accusing Rădescu of preventing the "decontamination" of the Ministry of the Interior. In a tensioned cabinet meeting on February 14, Rădescu demanded Georgescu's resignation on grounds of insubordination. Supported by his communist colleagues in the government, the latter refused to resign. The prime minister responded by publishing on February 16 three circulars, dated December 13 and 28, 1944, and January 20, 1945, which asked the commission tasked with compiling the list of officials to be dismissed to complete its task. Rădescu was thus able to show that the commission tasked with purging the Ministry of the Interior, of which Georgescu himself was a member, had needed three months to examine 75 cases out of 300 and that after the general's intervention, another 137 cases had been reviewed in 12 days. In the end, in Rădescu's government, 780 officers (employees of the Ministry of the Interior) would be purged from a total estimated of 14,000 people.²¹

FND staged demonstrations in several cities, including Brăila, Constanța, Craiova, Roman, and Târgu Mureș, demanding the resignation of the Rădescu government. Although many of the participants had come to the rallies on their own initiative, the FND would also use blackmail to mobilize others. Workers who did not join the unions were denied food rations. A police report from February 4 stated that in many factories, the work committees heeded the orders of the communist party and did not integrate into other non-communist parties or organizations.²²

Any hopes the Romanian people might have had that the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe would restore "the sovereign rights and self-government" to "those peoples who have been deprived of them by force" were soon shattered. The "Patriotic Guards" launched brutal actions dispensed methodically in support of the FND committees whose control of key factories

group of communists, represented by Ana Pauker, was in favor of establishing closer relations with Maniu and Brătianu. The delegation was received by Stalin in the Kremlin. According to Apostol, Stalin invited both Gheorghiu-Dej and Ana Pauker to present their views and, ultimately, decided in favor of the former, after hearing Gheorghiu-Dej describe Maniu and Brătianu, as "mortal enemies of the Soviet Union and therefore of the PCR". Stalin advised Gheorghiu-Dej to use Tătărescu "as a comrade, as long as he can be useful in the fight for the democratization of the country, for the establishment of the peasants' and workers' power in Romania" (Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Fostei Securități/ACNSAS, Dosar Gheorghe Apostol, Fond D 008936, vol. III, ff. 339-350).

²¹ *Cartea alba a Securității, vol. I*, pp. 12, 92. The number of police officers remained approximately the same until the reorganization of the police according to the Soviet model in August 1948.

²² N. Tampa, "Starea de spirit din România la începutul anului 1945", in *6 martie 1945. Începuturile comunizării României* (Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1995), pp. 312-318.

in Bucharest was threatened by non-FND workers. This campaign of communist-inspired violence began at the ASAM military plant in early February and spread to the *Monitorul Oficial* [Eng. trans.: Official Gazette] and the Stella factory²³, that had removed the FND committees. In the union elections at the ASAM factory, only 14 of the 600 workers voted for the communist candidates, while another 180 opted for a non-partisan list, with the rest abstaining. On February 6, 60 members of the "Patriotic Guards" and two NKGB soldiers drove to the factory, assaulted those who had voted for the independent list, and took 11 of them to the NKGB headquarters. On February 19, 3,600 of the 5,500 employees of the Malaxa steel and armaments factories in Bucharest signed a resolution demanding the resignation of the FND committee led by Vasile Mauriciu, a former legionnaire. The next day, the vote on the resolution was interrupted because the FND committee called on workers from the railways and tram company to come to the factory and defend them. Fighting erupt between the Malaxa workers and the outsiders, during which several people were killed and the communist leader Gheorghe Apostol was injured. After the scuffle came to an end, everyone's ID cards were checked, and the holders of those who indicated that they had voted were arrested and taken to the FND branches.²⁴

The violence was compounded by the propaganda papers' game of *qui pro quo*. *Scântea* accused Rădescu of trying to incite a civil war; its attacks were picked up by *Grainul nou*, the Red Army newspaper in Romania, and by *Pravda*. A. Pavlov, the Soviet political representative on the Allied Control Commission, also intervened, warning the American representative on the Commission that if Rădescu's government did not "get rid of [...] fascist elements, [...] the people

²³ ASAM was the Army Arsenal. The *Monitorul Oficial* was a large enterprise with many employees, which also included a printing house and a stamp factory. Stella was a famous soap factory at the time, founded in 1883.

²⁴ A newspaper published by the workers of Malaxa on 23 February read: "We protest resolutely against the terror tactics that irresponsible people from outside the factory are using at the Malaxa factories, in support of the committee of dishonest agitators, that was kept in office against the will of the workers. We protest against the violence of armed mercenaries who were sent by trucks under the leadership of Gheorghiu-Dej, who ended up imposing the will of a separate minority, a minority that even fired shots at their own supporters. We denounce the hooligans who want to use gunfire to stop the free expression of the will of the workers. We demand the arrest of the armed gangs of FND supporters, who were brought here from outside and have no place among us. We demand the arrest of Gheorghiu-Dej and other Trotskyist agitators. We want free elections and secret ballots. We want unions based on professions and not politically manipulated hordes. We demand that the government ensure the freedom and secrecy of elections and prevent the terror acts committed against us by irresponsible criminals. We want work and order. We want peace. Down with the terror in the unions!"

themselves might take action in this matter"²⁵. Things came to a head on February 24. At the end of a massive FND demonstration, the crowd headed towards Palace Square in front of the Ministry of the Interior, where Rădescu had his office. Shots were fired and several people were killed. On Rădescu's orders, the Romanian troops guarding the building fired into the air to disperse the crowd.

A joint Romanian-Russian commission of doctors, later determined that the bullets extracted from the victims were not of the caliber used by the Romanian army, but the discovery came too late for Rădescu. Unable to contain his anger at the provocation, the prime minister recorded a radio broadcast to the nation in which he denounced the communist leaders Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca as "hyenas" and "foreigners without God or country", a reference to their atheism and non-Romanian origins.²⁶ This prompted the Soviets to intervene. Vyshinsky arrived unannounced in Bucharest on February 27 and went straight to the palace to demand Rădescu's replacement. King Michael hesitated and told the Russian emissary that constitutional procedures must be respected. The following afternoon, Vyshinsky returned and demanded to know what the king had done. When Mihai again told him that he was in the process of consulting with political leaders, the Soviet deputy minister loudly expressed his dissatisfaction and gave the king a deadline to announce Rădescu's dismissal by six o'clock that very day. Intimidated, the king agreed to the demand.

On March 1, Vyshinsky informed the king that Petru Groza, Rădescu's deputy and a man the Russians believed they could trust, was "the choice of the Soviets". Mihai reluctantly gave Groza his approval to form a government, but the politicians from the liberal and peasant parties refused to be part of an executive controlled by the FND. Groza's first cabinet was rejected by the king. On March 5, Vyshinsky informed the king that if a Groza government was not accepted, "he could not be held responsible to ensure the continuation of Romania as an independent country".²⁷ Fearing a coup, the king complied the following afternoon. Thereafter, the communist takeover of Romania continued apace.²⁸

²⁵ *Cartea Albă a Securității*, vol. 1, p. 122.

²⁶ The text of the speech can be found in Ioan Scurtu et al. (ed.), *Viața politică în documente* (Arhivele Statului, București, 1994), pp. 149-150.

²⁷ Quinlan, *Clash Over Romania*, p. 128.

²⁸ After his dismissal, Rădescu was placed under British protection and lived in the building of the British legation for nine weeks (March 6 – May 7, 1945), until the British and Soviet governments reached an agreement in which the latter gave assurances that General Rădescu would not be harmed if he returned to his home. On November 11, he received an order from the Ministry of the Interior to stay at his house, which he would not leave until the spring of 1946, when the police provided him with a car, a driver, and a detective. An incident on May 13, 1946 convinced him to leave Romania as soon as possible. That day,

On February 28, Colonel-General Ivan Susaikov, deputy commander of Army Group South, who had replaced Lieutenant-General V. Vinogradov as vice-chairman of the Allied Control Commission,²⁹ later explained to the British and American representatives – Air Vice-Marshal Donald Stevenson and Brigadier-General Coltrand Van Rensselaer Schuyler – that the Groza government had indeed been imposed by force, on the orders of Marshal Malinovsky, who feared that a revolt behind the front might take place. Susaikov had been sent to Bucharest to prevent the Romanians from turning their weapons against the Soviets by disarming the native troops and bringing Groza to power.³⁰ The argument was not entirely without substance. The Soviet

while attending an event at the Ateneu, he was attacked by a group of men armed with clubs, and both he and the detective accompanying him were injured. His escape was arranged through his secretary, Barbu Niculescu. On June 15, Rădescu, along with his secretary and four others, including a Romanian aviator, took off from the Cotroceni airfield and flew to Cyprus. The former prime minister would settle in New York in 1947, from where he helped found the Romanian National Committee, an anti-communist organization sponsored by King Mihai. The Committee's operations were financed by several million dollars secretly taken out of Romania between 1945 and 1946. In February 1950, Rădescu demanded that the use of this money be made public, but other members of the Committee did not agree, which led to his resignation. He died in New York, on May 16, 1953. The committee, whose leadership had been taken over by Constantin Vișoianu, remained active until 1975 (Oana Ionel Demetriade and Alexandru Șerbănescu, *Generalul Nicolae Rădescu. Profilul unui om de stat în imagini și documente*, Editura Oscar Print, București, 2015, passim).

²⁹As commander of the Second Ukrainian Front, the nominal president, Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, was preoccupied with hostilities in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

³⁰Susaikov gave this explanation in late October 1945, having asked Stevenson and Schuyler what would they have done in his place. The two agreed that they would not have done things differently, but believed it was unfortunate that they had not been informed in advance (H. Hanak, "The Politics of Impotence: The British Observe Romania, 6 March 1945 to 30 December 1947", in I. Agrigoroaie, Gh. Buzatu and V. Cristian (eds.), *Românii în istoria universală*, vol. III/1, no publisher specified, Iași, 1988, p. 433). On the exchange between Pavlov and Schuyler, see: Giurescu, *Romania's Communist Takeover*, p. 67. Soviet anxieties about the possibility of a revolt in the Romanian ranks were fueled by the German spies and prisoners of war from Germany infiltrated into Romanian units for the purpose of inciting disobedience. Roland Gunne, an SD officer from Transylvania, had made his way to the headquarters of the Romanian Fourth Army, which was fighting in Hungary. Its commander was General Gheorghe Avramescu, who, before the coup of August 23, had fought against the Russians in Crimea and whose son-in-law, Ilie Vlad Sturza, was the son of the foreign minister of the Iron Guard government in exile, established in Vienna on December 10, 1944. Avramescu's anti-Russian sentiments made him an ideal candidate to be manipulated by the Germans. In this context, Gunne and a number of Iron Guard sympathizers convinced the general to defect, with his forces, and side with the Germans in the event of a successful German counter-offensive (P. Biddiscombe, "Prodding the Russian Bear: pro-German Resistance in Romania, 1944-5", *European History Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2 (April 1993), pp. 205-212, and G. Klein, "Începuturile rezistenței antisovietice în România (23 august 1944 - 6 martie 1945)", in *6 martie 1945*, pp. 295-311). On March 3, 1945, Avramescu and his chief of staff, General Nicolae Dragomir, were arrested at the

concern about possible upheavals behind their lines had been shared with Schuyler at the time by A. Pavlov, the Soviet political representative. At a meeting of the Allied Control Commission on February 14, 1945, Pavlov had told Schuyler that "neither disturbances behind the Soviet armies [...] nor the pursuit of fascist activities in the Romanian state could be permitted"³¹.

The sense of optimism falling over the British and American camps with the occasion of the agreement reached by the Allies at Yalta (February 4-11, 1945) would largely dissipate on account the Soviet behavior exhibited after the conference, especially in Romania. The forceful imposition of the Groza government led Clark Kerr, the British ambassador in Moscow, to experience a sense of hopelessness, reflected in an informative note dated March 27, 1945, where Kerr described the Soviet policy with regard to Romania as "the clearest form of power politics, completely at odds with the principles enshrined in the Crimean Declaration. The instauration of the Groza government handed the communists the complete subordination of the law enforcement." Citizen committees were assigned to assist the police, whose forces had been reduced by the Soviet dispositions of February 28 and purged; the committees claimed to have the right to check people's documents on the street, to search houses for goods that were supposed to have been taken from the Soviet Union during the war, or that had previously belonged to Germans and Hungarians, and to inspect houses that were to serve as accommodation for refugees or Soviet

command post of the Second Ukrainian Front, at Divin, Czechoslovakia, on the orders of Marshal Malinovsky, by Soviet counterintelligence officers. Avramescu's fate remained unclear. According to a report submitted to Stalin by Beria and his deputy, Abamukov, he was killed in a German attack on Budapest (Klein, "Începuturile rezistenței antisovietice în România (23 august 1944-6 martie 1945)", p. 309). This event is confirmed in a response sent by the Supreme Court of the USSR in the summer of 1963, responding to an inquiry from the Romanian Ministry of Justice regarding the fate of Avramescu. The letter states that the general had died near the town of Iasbereni, on March 3, 1945, after a German air raid, and was buried in Shoshalom, a district of Budapest (A. Duțu and F. Dobre, "S-a mai dezlegat o enigmă în cazul Avramescu?", *Magazin istoric*, vol. 31, nr. 5, mai 1997, pp. 7-8). The Soviet authorities never made any mention concerning the general's arrest, although his wife and daughter were arrested on the same day. The daughter committed suicide three days later, and Avramescu's wife would spend 11 years in the Soviet labor camps before being allowed to return to Romania (J. Urwich-Ferry, *Fără pașaport prin URSS*, Iskra, München, 1977, vol. II, pp. 51-57). Dragomir was taken directly to the Soviet Union, where he was tried and sentenced to eight years of hard labor. After serving his sentence, on 4 April 1953, he was sent to work as an assistant to a veterinarian on a state farm in the Kustanai region. He requested repatriation to Romania where he returned on January 10, 1956. On January 11, 1957, he was rearrested in Bucharest, without any clear motif. He appealed his arrest unsuccessfully numerous times and was held in various prisons until his release on July 24, 1964. He died in 1981, at the age of 83 (A. Duțu and F. Dobre, "Opt ani muncă silnică pentru un post de felcer veterinar", *Magazin istoric*, vol. 30, nr. 6, iunie 1996, pp. 47-52).

³¹ Giurescu, *Romania's Communist Takeover*, p. 67.

officers. No legal cover existed for this kind of intrusion into people's lives, and the speed with which the police, under Petru Groza, transformed into a force of repression, caused widespread fear of authority.

In order to ensure that courts issued the verdicts he wanted, Vyshinsky ordered Pătrășcanu, the Minister of Justice, to dismiss over 1,000 magistrates in April 1945 and replace them with docile zealots.³² These purges were not solely about revenge, they also held a practical side. The two aims were linked: the threat of becoming a target of revenge pressured people to become tools in the service of the communists. On May 23, 1945, Groza himself told the British journalist Archie Gibson that in the two months since he had taken power, 90,000 Romanians had been arrested³³, though there is no official document to confirm this figure. In some instances, there were good reasons to detain the respective people, as in the case of Nicolae Sturdza and Nelly Ostroveanu, two members of an Iron Guard group arrested in March, who were found to have sheltered 19 German soldiers living under assumed names in Bucharest. In others, the opposite was true: a total of 13 Polish citizens were interned in the Caracal camp without even being questioned. The Romanians convicted of atrocities during the Romanian administration of Transnistria were punished severely. Pătrășcanu introduced People's Tribunals to convict alleged war criminals, and on May 22, 29 officials, including Generals Nicolae Macici, Constantin Trestioreanu, and Cornel Calotescu, were sentenced to death while eight others were condemned to imprisonment of varying lengths.³⁴ The death

³² In April 1945, a number of communist activists were appointed as prosecutors in the Ministry of Justice. These were Stroe Botez, Avram Bunaciu, Alexandru Drăghici, H. Leibovici, M. Mayo, C. Mocanu, M. Popilian, I. Pora, I. Raiciu, Ștefan Ralescu, Dumitru Săracu, Alexandru Sidorovici, V. Stoican, Camil Suciu, C. Vicol. Drăghici, who became Minister of the Interior in 1952, served as prosecutor in the trial of Ion Antonescu in May 1946. For a biography of Drăghici, see Andrei Siperco (ed.), *Confesiunile elitei comuniste. România, 1944-1965. Arhiva Alexandru Siperco*, vol. 2 (Institutul Național pentru Studiu Totalitaristului, București, 2015), pp. 183-204.

³³ Unpublished manuscript of Archibald Gibson.

³⁴ Macici, Trestioreanu, and Calonescu were accused of conducting a campaign of repression against the Jewish population of Odessa in October 1941. On October 22, 1941, a huge explosion destroyed the Romanian military headquarters in Odessa, killing 128 soldiers and civilians, including General Ioan Glogojanu, the commander in charge of the city. Immediately, Marshal Antonescu ordered reprisals: for every Romanian or German officer killed, 200 communists were to be hanged; for every soldier, 100. On the night of October 22, the military authorities executed the order, and when day broke, 450 Jews, accused of being communists, could be seen hanging in the streets of Odessa. Additionally, approximately 50,000 Jews were sent on a forced march to Dalnik, about eight kilometers from the city, to be executed. Upon the intervention of the mayor of Odessa, Gherman Pântea, and that of General Macici, the column was sent back to Odessa, but not before the Jews in front were forcibly pushed into four large sheds and machine-gunned, after which the sheds with the bodies in them were set on fire. It is not known precisely how many Jews

sentences were commuted to life imprisonment on 5 June.³⁵ In August 1945, the discovery of two "terrorist" plots led to the arrest of 20 "hirelings of former Prime Minister Rădescu" and of another group of 17 people, accused of plotting "against the unity of the Romanian nation". Both groups included members of the National Peasant Party.

The young king was deeply discouraged by all these unfolding events and appealed to Britain and the United States for help, invoking the principles of the Atlantic Charter and the Yalta Declaration. On August 2, at the end of the Potsdam Conference, both countries announced that they would sign peace treaties "only with democratic governments recognized as such", which gave some hope to the king and the opposition leaders, Maniu and Brătianu.³⁶ The last one, even, discussed plans to remove the Groza government from power. On August 20, the king asked Groza to resign, but the prime minister, who had the support of General Susaikov, refused to do so. In response, King Mihai launched a boycott of the government, refusing to meet with ministers and sign decrees.

The stalemate lasted more than four months. It finally ended at the Moscow Conference of the Foreign Ministers of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, held between December 16 and 26. At this conference, it was decided that a commission, composed of ambassadors Clark Kerr, Harriman, and Deputy Foreign Minister Vyshinsky, would travel to Bucharest and meet with King Mihai where they would propose to him to appoint in the government two representative from the historical parties, one from the National Peasant Party and one from the National Liberal Party. After this restructuring, it was also agreed that free elections would be held "as soon as possible, on the basis of universal suffrage by secret ballot".³⁷

The Moscow Agreement was the final step taken by the Soviets towards obtaining Western recognition of their dominance in Romania.³⁸ Had its letter been upheld, the agreement would have represented a victory for King Mihai, but, as the subsequent events would soon prove, it merely allowed the Western allies to camouflage their powerlessness. Groza took steps to implement the stated terms, accepting Emil Hațieganu from the Peasant Party and Mihai Romniceanu from the Liberals into the cabinet as ministers without portfolio. On January 8, 1946, Groza gave assurances that he would hold elections in the near future and that he would give access to the radio and the rest of the press

were killed in this way, but the figure of 20,000 was invoked during Macici's trial (*Cotidianul*, Arhiva, vol. 5, no. 3, March 22, 1996, p. 3).

³⁵ *Universul*, June 6, 1945. Macici died of heart failure in the Aiud prison on June 15, 1950 (*Cotidianul*, Arhiva, vol. 5, no. 3, March 22, 1996, p. 7).

³⁶ Quinlan, *Clash Over Romania*, p. 140.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

to report on all parties. Based on these guarantees, Britain and the United States expressed their willingness to recognize the Groza government in early February, with the expectation that elections would take place in late April or early May. Groza, however, delayed the process. On May 27, both Britain and the United States issued protests, stating that Groza failed to honor his promises. Consequently, the Groza government finally put together an electoral law that would benefit him greatly. All left-wing parties would run on a common list, including the Social Democrats, which the communists had managed to split apart beforehand.

In May 1946, a new wave of arrests took place. Among those detained was General Aldea, the Minister of the Interior in the first Sănătescu government, who was arrested on May 27, accused of "plotting to destroy the unity of the Romanian state", on the grounds that "in the summer of 1945 he had gathered various subversive organizations under his own central command", to form a "National Resistance Movement". Initially, these groups had acted independently of one another, the most important of them being *Haiducii lui Avram Iancu* [Eng. trans.: The Outlaws of Avram Iancu], which had been established in Transylvania on December 1, 1944 by leading figures of the National Peasant Party, including the nephew of Iuliu Maniu. A branch of this group was *Divizia Sumanele Negre* [Eng. trans.: The Black Greatcoats Division], which also had its center of operations in Transylvania. In a statement to Siguranța, the security service, Aldea revealed that in the autumn of 1945, he had established links with these groups and subordinated them to do his bidding. In reality, the National Resistance Movement was a paper tiger: its main activities consisted of distributing rudimentary anti-communist propaganda. The movement's actions consisted primarily of attacks on Hungarians, carried out by the *Haiducii lui Avram Iancu* in revenge for the killing of Romanians at the hands of Hungarian policemen during the Hungarian rule of northern Transylvania. These acts were the ones that caused the greatest concern to the Soviet authorities, as they conjured the spectre of a civil war in Transylvania. Aldea was tried together with 55 "accomplices" shortly before the November elections and sentenced, on the 18th of that month, to hard labor for life.³⁹

During the electoral campaign, opposition meetings were frequently interrupted by gangs of hooligans. When the American political representative in Bucharest, Burton Berry, protested, Groza told him that:

³⁹Aldea died of heart failure in the Aiud prison on 17 October 1949. The Black Greatcoats Division took its name from the bands of men (Cătanele Negre) who revolted against the Hungarian authorities in the 1848 Revolution. Reports on this opposition group and on *Haiducii lui Avram Iancu*, together with samples of their manifestos, are preserved in the SRI Archives, fond "D", file 9046, volumes 1-4.

when they agreed to Moscow's decision, the Anglo-Americans were thinking in terms of free elections as they are held in England or America, while the Russians were thinking in terms of free elections as they are held in Russia. Given that the Russian army was present on the territory of Romania, the upcoming elections would probably be held in line with the Russian interpretation of the terms "free" and "unfettered".⁴⁰

The results of the elections, which took place on November 19, did not surprise the Foreign Office and the State Department. The government bloc claimed to have obtained almost 5,000,000 votes (84%), while the National Peasant Party received 800,000, and the Liberals, less than 300,000. The outcome of the elections was a unicameral parliament, in which 414 deputies were elected, of whom 348 represented the ruling parties and 66, the opposition. In the opinion of Western diplomats and press correspondents, the elections had been falsified, and, consequently Dean Acheson, the acting US Secretary of State, declared that his government would not recognize them. In the House of Commons, Hector McNeil, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, stated that the elections had been neither free nor fair. McNeil added that during the campaign, the opposition parties had not enjoyed complete freedom of expression, and that the arrangements on election day had been done in such a way that they permitted the falsification of the results on a large scale.⁴¹ All these allegations were confirmed by documents from the Romanian Communist Party's own archives, published after the overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu.⁴² And yet, despite these accusations, the British government decided, on the advice of the Foreign Office, not to support the American protests directed at the Russians, which would have included requests for the organization of new elections. Arguably, we can posit that the British had

⁴⁰ Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, p. 154.

⁴¹ The National Peasant Party could have increased its percentages if it had been, in the words of one researcher, "more coherent, better organized, better able to spread its propaganda and make contact with the grassroots political reality" (Dan Brett, *Peasants and Politics: Agrarianism and Rural Transformation in Romania, 1918-1947*. Thesis submitted to the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College, London, December 2010, p. 314.)

⁴² These archives contain "Confidential reports regarding the true results of the parliamentary elections". The figures from the counties of Cluj, Someș, and Turda show a clear, if not detached, victory for Maniu's National Peasant Party, which had obtained over 40% of the votes. In Someș, for example, the Communists were officially credited with winning 67.9% of the votes, while in reality they obtained only 22.8%. The National Peasant Party, officially, received only 11.1% of the votes. In reality, the party obtained 51.6% of the votes (Virgiliu Târău, "Campania electorală și rezultatul real al alegerilor din 19 noiembrie 1946 în județele Cluj, Someș și Turda", in Sorin Mitu and Florian Gogălțan, (eds.), *Studii de istorie a Transilvaniei*, Asociația Istoricilor din Transilvania și Banat, Cluj, 1994, pp. 204-212).

adopted a defeatist position and assumed that the Russians would see to this issue regardless of the American and British complaints.

King Mihai threatened to postpone the inauguration of the new Parliament. Burton Berry, the American representative in Bucharest, whom the King had asked for help, could not provide any encouragement. The signing of the Peace Treaty with Romania on February 10, 1947 was followed by additional arrests. The political clauses of the Treaty were so broad that the Ministry of the Interior could interpret the phrases “fascist-aligned organizations” and “war criminals” as it suited best. As one British observer noted, “there was no mention referring to a judicial body to prosecute such organizations and war criminals, [and] this allowed the Groza government to declare war on [members and supporters of the] National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party, accusing them of being ‘fascists’ or ‘war criminals’.”⁴³ On March 20, 315 members of the opposition parties were arrested, and on the night of May 4, another 600 arrests followed. There was no legal basis for these arrests; the arrests from May were made following a top-secret order from the Ministry of the Interior, with the detainees being sent to prisons in Gherla, Pitești, Craiova, and Miercurea Ciuc. Some of the 596 people sent to Gherla were peasants who had opposed collectivization, others were teachers, doctors, and priests who had campaigned for the opposition parties in November 1946. Many did not even know why they were arrested. A few managed to escape, and most of them were released after six months. However, the communist authorities had achieved their goal: to intimidate the population and prepare the ground for the liquidation of the opposition parties.

The campaign to remove the opposition parties, approved by Stalin and coordinated by Vyshinsky, had reached its final stage. Pintilie Bodnarenko, the head of Siguranță, the security apparatus, received instructions to sabotage the leadership of the Peasant Party. Bodnarenko complied with the request and had an *agent provocateur* convince Maniu's deputy, Ion Mihalache, to try to flee the country on a plane he would provide. The plan succeeded, and on July 14, 1947, Mihalache and several other prominent figures in the National Peasant Party were arrested as they were about to take off for Turkey from the airfield in Tămădău, situated about 46 km from Bucharest. A few days later, Maniu would also be detained, and the entire party leadership would be brought to justice on October 30, accused of having conspired against state security. Maniu and Mihalache were both sentenced to hard labor for life, a sentence commuted to life in prison. Neither of them would be seen in public ever since.⁴⁴

The last obstacle to achieving complete Soviet domination over Romania was King Mihai. Even in 1945, the preservation of the Romanian

⁴³ A. Gibson's manuscript.

⁴⁴ Maniu died in the Sighet prison on 2 February 1953, and Mihalache died in Râmnicu Sărat, on 5 March 1963.

monarchy in the Soviet orbit was regarded as an anomaly under the given circumstances. The young monarch had fought valiantly against the tentacles of Soviet power, which were slowly strangling the country's independence, receiving only middling support from Britain and the United States. Moreover, Maniu's show trial and the mockery the proceedings had made of the justice system were clear signs that the king's struggle was in vain. Still, the Romanian people clung to the king as the last symbol of a normal, stable future. In September 1947, Foreign Minister Tătărescu was urged to dismiss several hundred members of his own ministry who were seen as pro-Western. Then, on November 7, he and other liberal members of the cabinet had been dismissed on Groza's behest. The king felt obliged to accept the communists Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca as Foreign and Finance Ministers, and on December 23, Emil Bodnăraș became War Minister. On November 12, when the king visited London with the Queen Mother for the wedding of Princess Elisabeth, Groza and Gheorghiu-Dej had hoped that he would abdicate and not return home. Indeed, King Mihai would seek American advice on the matter, and the US ambassador in London considered that his return "would serve no useful purpose".⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the king, who, while abroad, had announced his engagement to Princess Anne of Bourbon-Parma, made the courageous decision to return, together with the Queen Mother, on December 21. Nine days later, the communists acted decisively. Groza and Gheorghiu-Dej summoned the king to Bucharest from his mountain residence in Sinaia and presented him with the abdication deed prepared in advance. When the king refused, the two gave him half an hour to think about his response. While the meeting was taking place, troops arrived and were instructed to surround the palace. The king again refused to sign, a point at which Groza threatened Mihai with the specter of civil war. Wanting to avoid a bloodbath, Michael relented. With his signature on the abdication deed, the Kingdom of Romania came to an end, and with it, so did the country's ability to act autonomously. On the same day, December 30, 1947, the Romanian People's Republic was proclaimed.

In the eyes of many people from Eastern Europe, the West had forfeited their own principles. Great Britain and the United States failed to uphold the commitments agreed on at the end of the Yalta Conference in February 1945, commitments made in the "Declaration of Liberated Europe", which stated that the parties would "foster conditions in which the liberated peoples could exercise ... the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they would live"⁴⁶. Because of this failure, Great

⁴⁵ Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, p. 157.

⁴⁶ The Declaration of Liberated Europe, Yalta Conference, February 1945. http://higherred.mheducation.com/sites/dl/free/0072849037/35264/01_5_liberated_europe.html, accessed on 15 August 2019.

Britain and the United States appeared to legitimize a policy rooted in what Churchill described as "force" and "distortion".⁴⁷ As illustrated throughout this study, at the time of the king's abdication, Romania's democratic system had already succumbed to this policy of force and distortions.

⁴⁷ "The Soviets," Churchill wrote to Roosevelt on 8 March 1945, "were able to impose 'the rule of a communist minority through force and distortion'." (Kevin Ruane, *Churchill and the Bomb in the Cold War*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2016, p. 104).