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# British Policy Towards Romania, 1936–41

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SORIN ARHIRE, MAR 3 2019

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Throughout the entire nineteenth century, the peoples of Central Europe were shown no significant official interest by the British; although the latter knew of the existence of the Hungarians, Poles and Romanians, their general attitude was that of gracious ignorance.[1] For many centuries, the British showed greater interest and concern for matters related to the peoples of Transvaal, Honduras and New Zealand than to the Romanians, although the latter were both geographically closer and more numerous.[2] This relatively low interest was the consequence of the fact that Great Britain had no major economic interests in this part of the European continent; at the same time, it was also the consequence of the priorities of British foreign policy which very tenaciously pursued the maintenance of the European balance of power, even when this meant sacrificing the national ideals of the peoples of East Central Europe. Moreover, because of their insularity, the British had formed their own way of thinking, which made no difference between concepts of 'close' and 'far.' As it is very edifyingly described by Peter Calvocoressi: 'Geographers might talk of the 'Far' East and measure the distance to India in thousands of miles, but to many an Englishman, Delhi and Singapore and Hong Kong were psychologically no further away than Calais; they were often more familiar, and they were, of course, more British.'[3] Therefore it is not at all by chance that when he wrote his famous *Dracula*, Bram Stoker placed the action in the Eastern end of Transylvania,[4] since for the inhabitants of the British Isles this was Europe's last civilised province, 'the end of the world' beyond which nothingness started.[5]

One may undoubtedly say that while negotiating the 1919 and 1920 peace treaties, which followed the First World War, direct contacts between British and Romanian politicians were more numerous than ever before. The question of new frontiers dominated their diplomatic relations. Founded in 1918, Greater Romania constantly faced the revisionist attitude of the states which had lost their territories to Bucharest's benefit. Throughout the interwar years, Soviet Russia was claiming Bessarabia in the East, Bulgaria was asking for the South Dobruja in the South and at the western borders, Hungary had not given up to getting Transylvania back. By signing the Paris Peace Treaties of 1919–20, London recognised Romanian borders with Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria but the problem of the Eastern frontier remained open. Firstly, Britain and other Allied powers were eager to support Romania in the Bessarabian dispute. On 28 October 1920, they signed a special protocol recognising Bessarabia to be a part of Romania. Although ratified by the British only two years later, the Bessarabian protocol never entered into force due to the fact that Japan did not ratify it.

For almost the entire interwar period, more precisely until 1938, Great Britain did not have a clearly outlined political or economic strategy towards Romania. Most British actions concerning the Romanian space were based on some general principles such as the maintenance of peace, of the *status quo* established following the Paris Peace Conference or of the influence exercised by the League of Nations. Romania did not have an official alliance with Britain but due to the fact that the latter's support was very important for the League of Nations, it ensured a good relationship between the two countries. However, for almost the entire period between the two wars, Romania played a minor role for the officials in London globally, much less important than other regional countries, like Greece, Turkey or Cyprus, where British interests were strong, but also traditional.

Romania was situated at the periphery of British sea routes, which linked Britain with the Near East and India, but

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close to the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles which gave it major importance in case of war. British public opinion but also the large majority of politicians thought Romania was a far-off East Central European country where one could get to after a three days journey by rail or a 14-hour flight, as there was no direct route.[6]

The description made by Sir Sacheverell Sitwell who visited Romania in 1937 left no doubt about the little knowledge the British had about the Southeastern state:

At the first mention of going to Romania, a great many persons, including myself, take down their atlas and open the map. No one would bother to do this over more familiar countries. For Romania, there can be no question, is among the lesser known lands of Europe. [...] It is far away. If you embarked on the train, determined, for some obscure reason, to continue in it upon the longest journey possible in Europe, the probability is that you would step out, four days later, upon the platform of Constanța, on the Black Sea [...]. It is a matter of principle. Most persons are satisfied that Europe ends at the Dniester and the Black Sea. So that Romania is at the far end of Europe.[7]

Fallen under the dominance of a Great Power, Romania could have become a threat to British interests in the Mediterranean. At the same time, since the Prahova Valley was at the time one of the richest oil-fields in Europe, German control over the Romanian territory would have significantly diminished the efficiency of a naval blockade, as was in fact proven by the Second World War.

The wave of Britain's interests in Romania was triggered by the German re-militarisation of the Rhineland which started 7 March 1936. This implied the end of all security plans as drawn-up at the end of the First World War and it pushed the British government towards a more conciliatory policy. The re-occupation of the Rhineland also marked its consequences on Romanian diplomacy. On 29 August 1936, Nicolae Titulescu was removed from the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest. For four years, he had outlined Romania's foreign policy and clearly oriented it towards France and Britain, while he neglected Germany. The dismissal of Titulescu did not remain un-echoed in Britain. The British press showed great interest in the replacement of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs; some newspapers saw it as a major shift in Romania's foreign policy which was no stranger to Germany. Thus, *The Daily Telegraph* stated that the dismissal of Titulescu actually made way to major changes both in Romanian politics and in the general European situation. Moreover, the same newspaper argued that there were enough similarities between the Romanian situation and the *coup* in Greece by the Germanophile dictator General Ioannis Metaxas (1936–41), and also the preparations made by King Boris III of Bulgaria (1918–43) to bring dictatorship to his country to the benefit of Germany.[8]

### British cultural influence and propaganda in Romania

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as during the interwar period, the cultural influence of Great Britain in Romania was minimal. The British believed that Romania was entirely under the French cultural orbit and thus, there was no point in wasting resources for a cause which was almost lost from the very beginning. Having started with a major handicap compared to France and Germany, the British cultural influence in Romania had been weak all throughout the interwar period. Some sort of revival of this influence became noticeable in 1936 and went on until 1940. Political events had a major influence on the cultural impact of Great Britain in the Romanian society.

France's economic weakness in the mid-1930s, which had major political and military repercussions, triggered a relative decrease of the French presence in Romania. As a result, the British acted in the cultural sector just like they had done in the international theatre, by trying to fill the void left by France's relative withdrawal. Romania was beginning to be a territory increasingly worthy of consideration and Great Britain's efforts, although a bit later. To counteract the increasingly significant German cultural influence, the British changed their attitude towards Romania, and allocated larger financial means for the promotion of their own culture.

An important role in British cultural diplomacy was played by the Anglo-Romanian Society. This institution was set up in 1927 at the initiative of a group of English university scholars and intellectuals with the purpose of developing Romanian-British cultural relations. Cultural centres were opened in Cluj, Cernăuți, Galatz and Constanța and on the tenth anniversary of its existence 'The English House' was inaugurated in Bucharest. The 'The English House'

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became the centre of the organization with a library of over two thousand volumes. The existence of this library was all the more valuable as in Romania, there were almost no books in English.[9] As a British journalist noticed during a short visit to Romania, English books were almost entirely absent while the very few that were available were actually published by German publishers and were often exaggeratedly expensive and with significant omissions compared to the originals. Also, important progress was made in spreading the knowledge of English among the Romanian population. In the years between the wars, departments of English language and literature were set up at Jassy, Cluj and Cernăuți universities, and the last one was set up in Bucharest in 1936.[10]

In August 1939, the Foreign Office asked the BBC for the first time to introduce news bulletins in Romanian – this request was first fulfilled as soon as the war started, when a few Romanian speakers from Great Britain were hastily recruited for the job.[11] After the collapse of France and the hasty evacuation of British soldiers from Dunkirk in the summer of 1940, the propaganda messages of the BBC in Romania became more important as they were the only way to counteract the growing influence of the DNB, the official German news agency, which practically controlled all newspapers, radios and news bulletins in Romania.[12] Therefore, on 19 September 1940, there was a request to introduce a second news bulletin and the Romanian broadcasting time reached 4 hours and 40 minutes per week in an attempt to give Romanian listeners the official point of view of the government in London. Britain had been at war for over a year and the BBC was an important part of the war effort, which coded messages to resistance groups in Romania.[13]

### The Visit of King Carol II to Great Britain in November 1938

There are important changes that occurred on the international relations in 1938. After the Czechoslovak loss of the Sudetenland to Germany in October, Romanian King Carol II (1930–40) decided to undertake a diplomatic tour to Britain, France and Belgium. In turn, the British too were interested in this visit, as they realised that the *Anschluss* in March 1938 had contributed to the increase of German influence in South-East Europe. Thus, Britain had to act in order to provide the states from this side of Europe another *point d'appui* besides the one provided by Berlin.[14] The Southern Department[15] in the Foreign Office contributed significantly to making this visit happen; as emphasized in a report drawn-up by its officials. If the re-invitation of King Carol had been delayed, Romania's situation in front of Germany would have deteriorated even further – especially since Austria's unification with the *ReichThird Reich* had triggered feelings of fear amongst Romanians rather than a desire to cooperate with the Germans.[16] The official visit of King Carol II to London between 15 and 18 November 1938, as a guest of the British King George VI (1936–52), was prepared to the smallest details.

Carol II held talks both with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (1937–40) and with Foreign Secretary, the Viscount Edward Halifax (1938–40) but the results were rather modest. The matter of a British credit granted to Romania for the purchase of war supplies made in Britain remained undecided and in the economic field; although not entirely waiving involvement, the British replied that it seemed natural to them for Germany to hold a dominant position in South-East Europe. Britain continued to be interested in commercial exchanges with Romania, but for the moment, it settled with the second rank in the foreign trade with this country. The officials in London were also aware that there was a tradition of excellent Romanian-German economic cooperation, which had been interrupted by the First World War. Politically, British officials ensured the king that Europe was not divided into spheres of influence at Munich.[17]

The promotion of the British Legation in Bucharest to the rank of embassy was another wish Carol had. However Whitehall, which had been planning to promote the diplomatic mission in Romania since 1937, now realised that the period following the Munich Conference was not the appropriate time for such a decision. Britain had no desire to pointlessly offend Germany, especially since the freshly instated balance of power already seemed to be very fragile.

In parallel with the talks held by the Romanian king, there were also negotiations between the Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen (1938–39) and his British counterpart, Lord Halifax. Within the policy of not economically abandoning Southeastern Europe to Germany, the head of the Foreign Office committed to present to his experts the matter of encircling the *ReichThird Reich*. Halifax's request to drop the prices of Romanian goods at least at the level of international prices as a premise for intensified bilateral exchanges was justified as it was well known that the British could buy wheat and oil from other countries for less money compared to the purchases they

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could make in Romania.[18] If, however, these purchases were made, they were considered 'unnecessary imports' and their only purpose was to deprive Germany of its important resources.

In the four days of the king's stay in London, there were also mutual gestures of courtesy of the two kings. Carol II made public his decision to donate a piece of land to the Anglo-Romanian Society in Bucharest with the purpose of erecting a building for the future British Institute.[19] George VI in turn awarded his Romanian guest the Order of the Garter, a distinction that the Romanian sovereign had been dreaming of since the spring of 1938. However, this personal achievement did nothing but mitigate to some extent the general lack of success of this official visit to Great Britain.

Organised at a time when major changes occurred in European power relations, the Romanian king's visit to London was a consequence of the decision made in Munich. Although there were some rumours saying that the following year King George VI and Queen Elisabeth would be received in Bucharest, which did not happen, the official visit in Great Britain did not yield the expected results. It confirmed that Britain would not provide significant help to Romania against the claims of revisionist states.

### The awarding of British guarantees in April 1939

Defying the decisions of the Munich Conference on 15 March 1939, the German army occupied the rest of the Czech territory that remained after the agreement in the Bavarian capital. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was created while Slovakia had claimed its independence just a day before, although in reality it was a German satellite. For the British, this was the final straw. Up to that point, Chamberlain had accepted Hitler's claims that Germany had been treated too harshly in Versailles by having been denied the self-determination principle. The ethnic Czech lands' inclusion in the *Reich* was an entirely new development which proved unacceptable for the government in London. Thus, Britain decided to grant independence guarantees to certain East Central European states, either alone or together with France. [20] As British proposals to conclude general mutual assistance pacts between Great Britain, the Soviet Union, Poland and Romania were rejected (Poland and Romania did not want to challenge Germany), the British government decided to enter into direct contacts with Poland and Romania. The consequences on the Foreign Office policy were very big: 'And so, in its efforts to keep the European peace through a collective security system, the British government was pushed by the Polish and Romanian governments to make decisions which served Polish and Romanian interests. But, whether they also corresponded to the objectives of the British government was debatable.'[21]

In the spring of 1939, when the outbreak of war was becoming increasingly likely, Romania was seen by Chamberlain and also by the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy[22] as strategically important both for its oil and for the support it could provide to Poland in the case of a German attack. The Romanian-German economic agreement of 23 March 1939 alarmed London, and consequently Britain supported Romania in order to show the Germans that they were not entirely disinterested in East Central Europe, even though they recognised some sort of economic priority of the *Reich* in the region. London's gesture was not necessarily economic, but rather political, which would have constituted the moral support the Romanians needed to hold on to in front of Germany's future economic and political pressures.[23] On 13 April 1939, the British government embarked on an action entirely atypical for its traditional foreign policy by providing guarantees of independence but not of integrity for Romania and Greece after having previously provided them to Poland on 31 March. The guarantees provided to these three countries, but especially to Poland and Romania, were given to intimidate Hitler and make him more moderate, rather than for practical reasons. Most certainly, Chamberlain and his collaborators were aware that it was practically impossible to send British troops to fight for these countries. The British first considered Greece due to the annexation of Albania by Italy. However, the inclusion of Romania in these guarantees resulted from pressures from France, which wished to show proof of Anglo-French unity. By making this decision, in less than one month Britain radically changed its traditional foreign policy towards East Central Europe.[24]

The granting of these guarantees was a consequence of the failure of the British plan to build in East Central Europe a system of states united against Germany through mutual assistance treaties. The Romanian government, not wanting to challenge Germany, turned down London's proposals so as to be able to hold onto its ties to the *Reich*.

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Hence the guarantees given by the British and French to Romania on 13 April were exactly what the Romanian government wanted: a unilateral insurance of the two great democratic powers with regard to Romania's independence; this was because according to the text of these guarantees, the Romanians were not obliged to help Britain and France. The consequences of the Foreign Office policy were among the most significant.

### British citizens in Romania in 1940–41

Despite that Romania originally remained neutral in the Second World War, Bucharest-London relations worsened profoundly in 1940, especially during the Romanian national-legionary regime between 14 September 1940 and 23 January 1941. The cooling of relations between the two countries was the result of a continuous process of deterioration of the bilateral relations which had started a while earlier. The Romanian foreign policy was perceived as hostile due to the hosting of a German Military Mission in Romania, followed further by its accession to the Tripartite Pact in November 1940. The poor bilateral relationships were influenced decisively by two other issues: the withholding by Romanian authorities of British boats from the Danube, and especially the arrest of several British citizens and their subsequent maltreatment by members of the Legionary Movement.

Although the first days of July 1940 witnessed the expulsion of 27 British subjects, along with another hundred that left on the day of proclamation of the national-legionary state of Romania,[25] there were still some British citizens in the Romanian territory, most of them working in the oil sector or in industry. Although, in late September and early October 1940, members of the Legionary Movement kidnapped some British citizens, state police were not involved in these 'arrests.' These British citizens were suspected of preparing the destruction of the oil industry in Prahova Valley, in order to sabotage its oil-export to Germany [26]

The news about the kidnapping and maltreatment of British subjects reached the diplomats of the British Legation in Bucharest through the Consul Norman Mayers who asked for details from the General Prosecutor of Romania.[27] The British Consul requested that the General Prosecutor let him know whether the competent magistrate had been informed about these illegal arrests because the 48-hour deadline had passed. He also asked to carry out urgent investigations to elucidate the circumstances in which the British citizens were detained, and asked to be informed when he could see the respective detainees.[28]

The day after the intervention of Consul Norman Mayers, the head of the Foreign Office, Lord Halifax, handed over to the head of the Romanian diplomatic mission in London a *note verbale*, which categorically condemned the way British citizens were being treated.[29] The situation had become particularly serious since Romanian Foreign Minister Mihail Sturdza (1940–41) instructed Radu Florescu, the Romanian *chargé d'affaires*, to tell officials in London that the arrested British citizens were being prosecuted for acts of sabotage against the Romanian state.[30] Since the reply did not match the requests expressed by the British side, the breaking of diplomatic relations appeared imminent, as the Romanian diplomat in London declared.[31]

Faced with extremely energetic protests, the *Conducător* (Ruler) of Romania General Ion Antonescu (1940–44) became extremely worried by the prospect that diplomatic ties to Britain might be broken, and by possible air strikes from the Royal Air Force over the Prahova Valley or Bucharest.[32] In consequence, the British citizens arrested by the Legionaries were taken over by state authorities. Later, the Military Tribunal in Bucharest declared them innocent. Finally, the prisoners were free and they left Romania immediately in October 1940.

Resentment towards the way the British citizens were treated continued for quite some time. The British Envoy to Romania, Sir Reginald Hoare (1934–41), insistently requested some sort of 'satisfaction' for the incidents that occurred in September-October 1940.[33] These incidents brought an important contribution to the shift in the Foreign Office policy towards Romania, which resulted in the suppression of the British and Romanian Legations taking place three months later on 15 February 1941.

### The breaking of diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Romania in 1941

Romania paid a heavy price for the change of geopolitical balance in Europe after the beginning of the Second World

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War. In the summer of 1940, Bucharest complied with the Soviet ultimatum to evacuate Bessarabia and the Northern Bukovina, which were immediately annexed by the Soviet Union. In total, the Romanian Kingdom gave to the USSR a surface of 50,762 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 3,776,309 inhabitants out of which 53.5% were Romanians. At this moment, the Romanian realised that it would not receive any support from the British who were fighting for their own survival in the 'Battle of Britain.' Regarding the impact of France's defeat on British policy towards Romania, it is interesting to mention the viewpoint of American journalist Rosie G. Waldeck, who was in Bucharest at the time.

To the Romanians, England, the Empire, the Anglo-Saxon way of life, were admirable but something as exotic and far away as the Chinese civilization of the 16th century. In spite of its failings during the previous twenty years, France was the dominating force in Romania and the liberal order ruled only through the medium of France. This was a basic fact not only about the past but also the future. It showed that here no Anglo-Saxon order – any order at all – had to be represented, translated or interpreted by France, Germany or Russia. And this applied not only to Romania, but to the whole of South-East Europe. Nowhere in these parts of the world was England real enough to be accepted as a dominating force. This was why, tonight, after the fall of Paris, the English were already licked in Romania, though they did not acknowledge it. It was not so much that the defeat of France confirmed the notion of the supposed invincibility of the German army, but more that the fall of France robbed the English of their Viceroy in Romania. This Viceroy was France.[34]

Great Britain's reaction to the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina was rather reserved; Philip Broad, a civil servant of the Foreign Office, wrote in a minute that: 'it was almost inevitable that this should happen sooner or later. From our own purely selfish point of view this ... does not greatly change the position. Romania has gone too far towards the Axis Powers for there to be any question of her thinking of appealing to our guarantee.' On 28 June 1940, when Richard Austen Butler, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office met with the Romanian Minister in London, all he could provide was a statement by which the government in London did not recognise *de jure* that the two provinces belonged to the Soviet state.[35]

A noticeable shift in Great Britain's policy towards Romania would not occur until 1 July 1940 when Romania waived the French-British guarantees in an offensive manner. The Foreign Office found out from the press that Romania waived the guarantees without informing them in advance. This made London determined not to reply to Bucharest.[36]

The establishment of the pro-German Romanian government led by General Ion Gigurtu on 4 July 1940 (and with Mihail Manoilescu as Minister for Foreign Affairs), led to an even more striking worsening of relations between Britain and Romania. Romania's withdrawal from the League of Nations on 11 July, the proclamation of the national-legionary state on 14 September, and especially the arrival of a German military mission in Romania, whose role was to protect the oil fields of Prahova Valley and train the Romanian army, convinced the British that Bucharest had permanently moved to the camp of the *ReichThird Reich*. The pro-German orientation of the government of Ion Gigurtu was concluded with the Tripartite Pact and the signature of General Ion Antonescu in Berlin on 23 November 1940.

London, considering that Romania was an occupied country, viewed the further existence of the British Legation in Bucharest as pointless. In the second half of 1940, it no longer fulfilled its role of diplomatic mission, but had become a mere observation point. Under these circumstances, as early as 8 October 1940, Sir Reginald Hoare was given permission to withdraw the British Legation from Bucharest whenever he considered it. Therefore, on 15 February 1941, diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Romania were broken after the blocking of Romania's funds in London.

### Romanian emigration to Britain

One of the consequences of the outbreak of war was widespread emigration towards Western Europe because of the Axis conquest of several European countries and the pro-Axis policy shifts of various states. First this targeted France, but when France exited the war, Britain became the centre of emigration. Primarily moving to London but also the rest of Britain, were citizens from Western and Central Europe, and Romania was no exception. The number

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of Romanian citizens amounted to about 2,000. Some of them had been working at the Romanian Legation and other related institutions, and refused to return home after 15 February 1941 when diplomatic ties between Great Britain and Romania were broken off. There were also other people who had gotten to Britain other ways.[37]

On 22 June 1941, when Romanian troops, in collaboration with those of the *Wehrmacht*, attacked the Soviet Union, Britain hosted two rival Romanian groups: the Romanian Democratic Committee and the Free Romanian Movement. The first one was led by Victor Cornea, while the second was led by Virgil Viorel Tilea, the former Romanian Plenipotentiary Minister in London. Each of them was aiming to get legal recognition as an official movement from the British government. But as the Free Romanian Movement had only 52 members, including 22 Romanian sailors who had refused to return to Romania in December 1940, and the Romanian Democratic Committee, which was even smaller, British authorities were not keen on recognising either of the two movements because these factions were not representative of Romanian public opinion.[38] Besides their size, the Whitehall had other reasons for not recognising them officially. Both movements were led by people lacking political acumen. Moreover, officials of the Foreign Office were very much aware that the recognition of a movement under the leadership of V. V. Tilea would automatically lead to the deterioration of solidarity with the British cause maintained in Romania by the members of the National Peasant Party led by Iuliu Maniu.[39] What also mattered to the British, after having monitored their activities, was the impression the two groups made. The conclusion they reached was that there was a strong feeling of animosity for Great Britain among Romanians and that 'it is not always safe to take as gospel what a member of one fraction will say about the adherents of another.'[40]

Romania's participation in the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 gave new hopes to the two Romanian groups that they would get their much sought after official recognition. However, the disagreements between them reached maximum levels. Also, Romania's former King Carol II, who abdicated in September 1940, announced from the Mexican capital that he wished to take over the leadership of a Romanian government in exile and to travel to Britain. The Foreign Office, feeling the distance to the former King as well as to the two rival groups, decided on 8 September 1941 to set up a confidential Romanian organisation known as the Romanian Office. Major D. P. Back was appointed to organise this Romanian Office while he also was instructed to perform the duties of a liaison officer between the British government and the newly created organisation. The British were planning to designate the members of this organization and drafted a preliminary list of those who could join the office and also of those individuals who had to be excluded.[41]

The Romanian Office did not have the necessary time to take shape, as on 7 December 1941 Britain declared war on Romania. From this moment, London decided to support the Romanian politician Iuliu Maniu (the leader of the Transylvanian opposition). During 1941, Romanians in England had not managed to agree and put together a united front; at this point, any chance of setting up a Romanian organization to oppose Antonescu's regime had been shattered because in this newly created situation, the British government recommended they stop any political activity.[42] No recognition was possible now but the British government was willing to help the members of the Romanian emigration to participate individually in Britain's war effort, if they so desired.

By the end of 1941, Britain was forced to adopt a firm position towards Romania, Hungary and Finland, whose troops were engaged in German military operations against the USSR. Due to the advance of the Romanian troops on the Soviet territory, the Kremlin had asked the British since early September 1941 to declare war on Romania.[43] But, being convinced that the sympathy of most Romanians went to Great Britain and not to Germany,[44] Churchill was not at all keen on fulfilling this request – he even argued his point of view in a letter sent to Stalin. But the need of solidarity between Great Britain and the Soviet Union plus the fear that Stalin could sign a separate peace agreement with Germany forced Churchill to give in.[45] On 30 November 1941, the British government, through the Legation of the United States in Bucharest, sent to the Romanian government an ultimatum asking them to cease military operations against the USSR by 5 December 1941; otherwise, the only alternative was to declare a state of war between Britain and Romania.

Marshal Antonescu's reply to the British ultimatum took the form of a justification, counting the acts of violence committed by the Soviets and the loss of Bessarabia and of Northern Bukovina in the summer of 1940. Antonescu argued that Romania was defending itself against Soviet aggression. But he did not reassure London that hostilities

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would cease as the British had requested.

On 5 December 1941, Churchill approved the declaration of war on Romania, Hungary and Finland. Two days later, this was communicated to the Romanian government. The pressures of the Soviet Union in London proved to be decisive in the British declaration. Soon Churchill confided to Anthony Eden that: 'my opinion about the lack of wisdom of this measure remains unaltered.'<sup>[46]</sup> Coincidence or not, the British declaration of war on Romania occurred the same day as the Pearl Harbour attack, which led to the globalisation of the conflict through the participation of the United States. Wishing to make the Axis more cohesive, Germany and Italy also declared war on America and on 12 December, in accordance with Article II of the Tripartite Pact, Romania acted similarly.

*\*Translated by Silvana Vulcan*

### Notes

[1] Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului. Europa Răsăriteană de la Stalin la Havel*. Translated by Alexandru Vlad. Jassy: Polirom Publishing House, 1997, 32.

[2] David Britton Funderburk, *Politica Marii Britanii față de România 1938–1940. Studiu asupra strategiei economice și politice*. Translated by Ion Stanciu. Bucharest: Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1983, 21.

[3] Peter Calvocoressi, *World Politics since 1945*. London, New York, Boston, etc.: Pearson Longman, 2009, 183.

[4] Jan Palmowski, *Dicționar Oxford de istorie universală contemporană. De la 1900 până azi*. Translated by Simona Ceaușu. Bucharest: ALL Publishing House, 2005, vol. II, 460; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995, 132–4.

[5] The historiography of Romanian-British relations has no study which comprises all aspects of their interwar bilateral relations. Historians focus primarily on the study of the development of political, economic and cultural ties between Britain and Romania. In general, Anglo-Saxon historiography was concerned with the analysis of British foreign policy in a wider context describing the attitude of the Foreign Office and the London-based government towards the great European and world powers with few papers dedicated exclusively to Romania. There are also publications dedicated to the analysis of British foreign policy in the era the Second World War, such as Elizabeth Barker's *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, which dedicates two chapters to Romania, or Paul D. Quinlan's *British and American Policies towards Romania 1938-1947*. The book of American historian David Britton Funderburk (*British Policy toward Romania: A Study in Economic and Political Strategy*, 1983) is one of the few works dealing exclusively with the Romanian-British relationship in the late 1930s.

[6] The Orient Express would leave from London each Sunday and Thursday, not from the Victoria Station but from the East Station. As for air travels, there was no direct flight from Great Britain to Romania, but one had to transfer to planes flown by Air France, Lufthansa or Lares. Maurice Pearton, 'British-Romanian Relations during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; Some Reflections,' in: *In and Out of Focus: Romania and Britain: Relations and Perspectives from 1930 to the Present*, edited by Dennis Deletant, 8, Bucharest: Cavallioti Publishing House, 2005.

[7] Sacheverell Sitwell, *Roumanian Journey*. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1938, 15.

[8] *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 August 1936.

[9] *Adevărul*, 20 February 1937.

[10] At its foundation in 1864, the University of Bucharest could only provide studies in one modern language, which was of course French, with Latin as a classical language. In the 1870s Italian was also introduced, while Slavic



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languages came in the next decade. The first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the inauguration of a German Studies Department, followed by Spanish and Russian in 1930 and 1934 respectively. As the reader may see, the first English department was only established in 1936, which shows how low the cultural influence of Britain was in Romania. Mihaela Irimia, 'English Studies at the University of Bucharest since the Foundation of the English Department in 1936,' in: *In and Out of Focus: Romania and Britain: Relations and Perspectives from 1930 to the Present*, edited by Dennis Deletant, 15–17, Bucharest: Cavallioti Publishing House, 2005.

[11] [http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/specials/168\\_bbcro\\_istorie/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/specials/168_bbcro_istorie/index.shtml), accessed 23 July 2018.

[12] Ivor Porter, *Operațiunea 'Autonomous' în România pe vreme de război*. Translated by George G. Potra and Delia Răzdolescu. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2008, 66.

[13] [http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/specials/168\\_bbcro\\_istorie/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/specials/168_bbcro_istorie/index.shtml), accessed 23 July 2018.

[14] The National Archives (hereafter, TNA), Foreign Office 371 Romania (hereafter, FO 371) 22445, 180. Kew, UK.

[15] According to the organisation of the Foreign Office departments, all matters concerning Romania fell with the competence of the Southern Department.

[16] TNA, FO 371 Romania, 180–1.

[17] Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, regele Carol și mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile germano-române (1938–1944)*. Translated by Stelian Neagoe. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 1994, 60.

[18] Funderburk, *Politica Marii Britanii*, 83.

[19] *Seara*, 25 November 1938.

[20] Funderburk, *Politica Marii Britanii*, 94.

[21] Hillgruber, *Hitler, regele Carol și mareșalul Antonescu*, 71.

[22] The Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy consisted of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, Sir John Simon, Chancellor of Exchequer, Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for the Home Department, Sir Thomas Inskip, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, W. S. Morrison, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Viscount Runciman, Lord President of the Council, Viscount Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Chatfield, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence and Oliver Stanley, President of the Board of Trade. TNA, FO 371 Romania, 23736/1939, 185.

[23] Funderburk, *Politica Marii Britanii*, 112.

[24] Paul D. Quinlan, *Clash over Romania: British and American Policies toward Romania: 1938–1947*. Los Angeles: American Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1977, 46.

[25] The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter, RMFA), fund Anglia (hereafter, Anglia) vol. 41, sheets 5, 8.

[26] To see the full statements given by Percy R. Clark, Jock Anderson, Alexander Miller and J. E. Treacy to the British Plenipotentiary Minister in Bucharest, Sir Reginald Hoare, after their release from the hands of the legionaries, see Sorin Arhire, 'Situația cetățenilor britanici în timpul statului național-legionar din România,' *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica* 11/I (2007): 363–86.

[27] Norman Mayers, 'Letter sent to the General Prosecutor of Romania,' 28 September 1940, sheet 320. RMFA, Anglia vol. 14.

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[28] Ibid., fund Romania, vol. 131, sheets 381–383.

[29] Telegram sent from the Romanian Legation in London to Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 September 1940. Ibid., Anglia, vol. 231, sheet 284.

[30] Telegram sent by the Plenipotentiary Minister in London to the head of the Romanian diplomacy, 9 October 1940. Ibid., vol. 14, sheet 194.

[31] Telegram sent by Radu Florescu to Romania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 October 1940. Ibid., sheet 202.

[32] *Stenogramele Ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 1, Bucharest: The National Archives of Romania, 112. Cabinet Council Reunion from 26 September 1940.

[33] Telegram sent by Alexandru Cretzianu, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of Justice, Mihai Antonescu, 11 January 1941. RMFA, Anglia, vol. 14, sheet 497.

[34] Rosie Goldschmidt Waldeck, *Athene Palace Bucharest: Hitler's 'New Order' Comes to Rumania*. London: Constable, 1943, 37.

[35] Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*. London, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1976, 72.

[36] Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 63.

[37] Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu and Ion Pătroiu, *Anglia și România între anii 1939–1947*. Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House RA, 1992, 106.

[38] Letter sent by Colonel C. E. Ponsonby to Colonel Scovell, 20 August 1941. The National Archives of Romania, the Central Historic Archives Directorate (hereafter, NARCHAD), Anglia Microfilm Archives (hereafter, AMA), reel 444, frame 503.

[39] Report sent by R. A. Butler, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, to Brendon Bracken, MP, 24 June 1941. Ibid., frame 77.

[40] Letter sent by Colonel Ponsonby to Colonel Scovell, 20 August 1941. Ibid., frame 503.

[41] Document drawn-up by Mr. Leeper for Mr. Murray, 19 September 1941. Ibid., frames 621–5.

[42] D. G. Danielopol, *Jurnal londonez*. Jassy: European Institute, 1995, 239.

[43] Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 71.

[44] Probably the British Prime Minister relied, among others, on the statement of Sir Reginald Hoare, former Plenipotentiary Minister in Romania who was saying the following in *The Times* from 18 February 1941 '[...] the Roumanian people almost unanimously hate the Germans and pray for our victory; this is true not only for the French educated higher classes but for the masses [...]'. NARCHAD, AMA, reel 444, frame 402. In exchange, in spite of all the discipline and efforts of the *Wehrmacht*, the Germans did not enjoy too much sympathy in Romania. On the contrary, they were treated with coldness and the Romanians' attitude was in obvious contrast with the warm, friendly atmosphere that they found in Hungary and Bulgaria. Alexandru Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage: Political Memoirs of a Romanian Diplomat, 1918–1947*. Jassy, Oxford, Portland: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 1998, 238.

[45] Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 71–2.

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[46] Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1950. Apud Ibid.

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