

## THE ISSUE OF REGENCY DURING KING MIHAI'S ROYAL STRIKE (1945)

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(Abstract)

Romania was considered a defeated country in the World War II and was occupied by the Red Army, under Armistice, supervised by the Soviet Union, the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1945 the Soviets imposed to King Mihai the loyal Groza Government, found unacceptable by the USA and the UK. Encouraged by those two powers, Mihai dismissed the Government but Groza stayed in power as the King and the opposition could not match the Red Army. Mihai addressed the three powers in the matter and refused any collaboration with the Government, including the signing of Royal Decrees for approving laws made only by the Government, after the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1945 marking the beginning of the so-called Royal Strike,

The Government used all sorts of pressure in order that the King should resume his duties and warned him he would be deposed. In September the Government approached the Soviets in order to assume the Royal Prerogative but the Groza Cabinet continued to rule Romania as the only political power neglecting the King.

In December, the Soviets and the Romanian Communists that dominated the Cabinet thought about a Regency Council under their control but the Allies's Moscow Conference proposed Mihai to add two ministers of the opposition. Provided only with the opposition's help, the King had to accept in January 1946 and ended unsuccessfully the Royal Strike.

As no Romanian Parliament existed the Government sent their law projects to the King and they became laws under the form of Royal Decrees. This modality allowed the Communists to prepare the illegal transformation of Romania into a Communist State and this under King's patronage! To stop this, King Mihai [Michael], encouraged at and after the Potsdam Conference, by the Great Britain and especially the United States of America – who supervised with the Soviet Union the Armistice with the defeated Romania, demanded Petru Groza, President of the Council of Ministers [Prime Minister], to resign on the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1945 but Groza, backed by the occupying Soviets, refused although the King could not be refused according to the Constitution; consequently Mihai refused to have any collaboration with the Government for four months and a half, a period called the Royal Strike [in Romanian, *Greva regală*]<sup>1</sup>.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August General Constantin Vasiliu Rășcanu, War Minister, requested an audience with the King, under Queen-Mother Elena's presence, and tried to influence the latter in order to convince his son to attend the ceremony the following day arguing the King would be placed under restraint for many years and declared insane. Rășcanu broke down at the end of audience but no change happened<sup>2</sup>. Rășcanu made another try and

<sup>1</sup> Dinu Zamfirescu, "Implicațiile externe," in *6 Martie 1945. Aservirea*, München: Jon Dumitru – Verlag, 1983, 42.  
Dinu C. Giurescu, *Imposibila încercare: Greva regală, 1945. Documente diplomatice* (hereafter D.C. Giurescu), (1999), București: Editura Enciclopedică (1999), 11–19.

Ghiță Ionescu, *Comunismul în România*, București: Editura Litera (1994), 146.

Arthur Gould Lee, *Elena, Regina-Mamă a României, Prințesa de Grecia și Danemarca. O biografie autorizată*, Traducere din engleză de Liana Alecu, București: Editura Enciclopedică (2000), 224–225.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, 225.

The Microfiches of Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office (hereafter PRO FO) 371/48557, The Telegram no. 922 of 11.09.1945 of John H. Le Rougetel,

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returned with a delegation of Romanian Generals but Mihai refused to grant the audience.<sup>3</sup> The fact appeared in Queen Elena's diary and Nelly Catargi, Queen's Lady-in-Waiting, when the latter met the British and proved the hard pressure upon the King. Also in Government's circles, Gheorghe Tătărescu, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Foreign Minister, started waving the idea of the returning of former King Carol II [Charles II], Mihai's father, as Tătărescu had been the former king's friend and favourite Prime Minister<sup>4</sup>.

In May 1945 Carol II had appealed for French visa in order to leave Brazil for his property in Normandy and the French Government had granted it but three weeks later the French had canceled it as the British Government and Romanian emigration in France had criticized any return in Europe fearing the former King would want to replace his son.<sup>5</sup>

In August, the Americans intervened to the Portuguese Government to cancel the visa for Portugal as the former King intended to leave Rio de Janeiro.<sup>6</sup> Two days later, the United States found the request observed as the Portuguese Ambassador in Brazil withdrew the visa.<sup>7</sup> The Americans approached the French Government to refuse any visa for Carol II<sup>8</sup>.

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British Political Representative in Romania, to Foreign Office (Robert Anthony Eden was the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) (R. 15422 in Foreign Office; the telegram's content belonged to Air Vice-Marshal Donald F. Stevenson, Head of the British Military Mission in Romania), mf. 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Misiunile lui A.I. Vășinski în România. (Din istoria relațiilor româno-sovietice, 1944–1946). Documente secrete*, București (1997), Doc. no. 68, Susaikov's Report of 22.08.1945 to A.A. Lavrichev, 69.

<sup>4</sup> The Telegram of 22.08.1945 of Roy M. Melbourne, Acting U.S. Representative in Romania, to State Department, D.C. Giurescu (1999), doc. no. 40, 204.

<sup>5</sup> The telegram no. 2 of 8.01.1945 of M.A. du Chayla, French Chargé d'Affaires in Lisbon, to Georges Bidault, French Foreign Minister, and François Coulet's (French Foreign Office) Telegram no. 34 of 23.07.1945 to Jean Paul-Boncour, French Minister in Romania, Mark László-Herbert, *Abdicarea regelui Mihai I. Documente diplomatice inedite*, București, Editura Humanitas, (2010), 86–87.

<sup>6</sup> The Telegram no. 1404 of 27.08.1945 of James Francis Byrnes, U.S. Secretary of State, to Crocker, the United States Chargé d'Affaires in Portugal, *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers*, 1945, Volume V, *Europe*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office) 1967, 597–598; available at <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=article&did=FRUS.FRUS1945v05.i0009&cid=FRUS.FRUS1945v05&isize=M>, accessed on 30.06.2016.

<sup>7</sup> See note 74, *Ibid.*, 598.

<sup>8</sup> Byrnes's Telegram no. 2128 of 1.09.1945 to Adolf A. Berle, the United States Ambassador in Brazil, *Ibid.*,

In the meeting of 24 August, The Government criticized the King for listening to reactionary parties (National Peasants and National Liberals) and thus affecting the Crown's interests (*sic!*); this meeting's communiqué, published only eleven days later, publicly notified the Romanians about a discord between the King and the Presidency of the Council of Ministry, the formal denomination of the Government<sup>9</sup>.

As the Court received threats in regard to the Sovereign's life, they recommended he should stay in the Kisselef Palace, also known as Elisabeta Palace because Carol II had constructed it for his sister [Elizabeth], as the Royal Palace had been bombarded by the Germans in last August<sup>10</sup>.

Tătărescu played both sides seeking to secure prominence for himself and his party by achieving the role of peacemaker but ultimately he hoped to limit the spread of Communism in Romania. He informed prominent members of his party, fact admitted by an important Communist whose identity was not disclosed, that the real purpose of Groza's visit to Moscow aimed at Stalin's help for assuming the Royal Prerogative by the Government; no matter under which form but one that would deprive, at least temporarily, Mihai of acting as a King<sup>11</sup>. Using an intermediary, Tătărescu warned Mihai about being deposed and told this to the Soviets<sup>12</sup>. After the Moscow visit, the Communists

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602; available at <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=article&did=FRUS.FRUS1945v05.i0009&cid=FRUS.FRUS1945v05&isize=M>, accessed on 30.06.2016.

<sup>9</sup> The Telegram of 6.09.1945 of Burton Yost Berry, U.S. Representative in Romania, to State Department, D.C. Giurescu (1999), doc. no. 81, 288.

<sup>10</sup> Melbourne Telegram nr. 581 of 22.08.1945 to Byrnes, *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers*, 1945, Volume V, *Europe*, 585; available at <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=article&did=FRUS.FRUS1945v05.i0009&cid=FRUS.FRUS1945v05&isize=M>, accessed on 30.06.2016.

*O domnie intreruptă: Majestatea Sa, Regele Mihai I al României. Convorbiri cu Philippe Vigié Desplaces*, Versiune în limba română: Ecaterina Stamatiu, București: Editura Libra (1995), 102.

Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Schuyler, *Misiune dificilă. Jurnal (28 ianuarie 1945 – 20 septembrie 1946)*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, (1997), 188.

Paul D. Quinlan, *Ciocnire deasupra României. Politica anglo-americană față de România, 1938–1947*, Traducere de Gheorghe Onișoru, Iași: The Center for Romanian Studies (1995), 141.

<sup>11</sup> PRO FO 371/48557, Le Rougetel's Telegram no. 899 of 4.09.1945 to FO (R. 15007 in FO), mf. 116.

<sup>12</sup> *Misiunile lui A.I. Vășinski în România...*, Doc. no. 73, Vyshinski's Conversation Notes with Tătărescu on 6.09.1945, 200.

approached again the possibility of a Regency, but, secretly, Tătărescu informed Mihai he was willing to support him and the Regency had no chance to be put into practice<sup>13</sup>.

Arguing the need of Royal Decrees for the military and clerks wages' rising, the Government took into consideration to propose that the King should declare himself ill and the Government would assume the Royal Prerogative and would impose the risings<sup>14</sup>.

With no contact to Mihai, the Government continued to believe in the possibility of assuming Royal Prerogative but declaring the King absent from the country (*sic!*) due to the fact he had refused in the last thirty days to sign any decrees but Mihai rejected Tătărescu's audience who had to transmit a message from Stalin<sup>15</sup>. The King's Private Secretary, Mihai Ionnițiu, informed the United States Mission about the pressures upon the King, including an ultimatum of 24 hours<sup>16</sup>. Tătărescu tried using his friend, this time mentioned – Scanavi, to convince Mihai but he resisted and the Government didn't dare to usurp the Royal Prerogative<sup>17</sup>.

On 26<sup>th</sup> September, the Foreign Minister met with Sergey (Sergo) Kavtaradze, Soviet Ambassador, and told him the Government had not been making any progress with the King, who had declared “Să-mi ia guvernul prerogativele si tot nu voi face concesii!” (“The Government may take my prerogatives and I will still not make any concession”!, author's translation). The Foreign Minister also argued the Western representatives were often seen at the Elisabeta Palace<sup>18</sup>. A relief for the Government happened when the two Royals left Bucharest for Sinaia, where they remained for over three months<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Telegram no. 681 of 14.09.1945 of Charles Hulick, U.S. Acting Representative in Romania, to State Department, Giurescu (1999), doc. no. 89, 303.

<sup>14</sup> Hulick's Telegram no. 696 of 18.09.1945 to State Department, *Ibid.*, doc. no. 92, 310.

<sup>15</sup> Note (excerpt), Romanian National Archives (Bucharest), Fund *Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, Serviciul Special de Informații* (hereafter RNA, PCM.SSI), Dossier no. 12/1944, f. 106.

<sup>16</sup> Hulick's Telegram no. 716 of 21.09.1945 to State Department, Giurescu (1999), doc. no. 94, 313.

<sup>17</sup> Hulick's Telegram no. 720 of 21.09.1945 to State Department, *Ibid.*, doc. no. 96, 318.

<sup>18</sup> *Misiunile lui A.I. Vășinski în România...*, Doc. no. 77, Kavtaradze Telephone Transcription of 26.09.1945 to Dekzanov, Soviet Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 205.

<sup>19</sup> A. Gould Lee, *Elena, Regina-Mamă a României, Prințesa de Grecia și Danemarca. O biografie autorizată*, 226.

The self-imposed isolation at the Peleş Castle, the mountain Royal residence in Sinaia, strengthened the worldwide opinion of the crisis between the Crown and the Government<sup>20</sup>.

At the end of September, the Communists had to accept they could not use the Royal Prerogative and imposed unlawfully decisions without being signed by the King and without being published in “Monitorul Oficial” [“The Official Monitor”] – requirements imposed by the Constitution; those facts clearly revealed the Government's disrespect for state affairs<sup>21</sup>.

At the beginning of October, Mihai decided to leave the throne in case the Groza Government would not resign; that information provided by the Romanian Special Intelligence Service [in Romanian, *Serviciul Special de Informații*] would prove unreliable but showed Mihai's constant determination<sup>22</sup>. The failure of the Allies's London Conference (the 2 October) diminished Mihai's chances in bringing a new Government but also the Communists had no other choice than to renounce temporarily to negotiate with the Crown as they had found Mihai impossible to reach to an agreement with<sup>23</sup>.

In December, the Soviets, the Communists and Tătărescu were preparing to publicly open the subject of a Regency Council, despite Groza's reluctance. The proposed Regents were Princess Elisabeta, King Michael's aunt and former Queen of Greece, the reluctant Romanian Orthodox Patriarch, Nicodim [Nicodem], and the President of High Court of Justice and Cassation, Oconel Cireș, as the Soviets believed Prince Nicolae, King's uncle and Elisabeta and Carol II's brother, allegedly refused to return from Switzerland. Elisabeta represented the biggest shareholder of the new SovromBanc [The Soviet-Romanian Bank], criticized the King and kept close connections with Tătărescu. Cireș was considered the Groza Government's protégé<sup>24</sup>. Tătărescu hoped

Ivor Porter, *Mihai I al României. Regele și Țara*, Ediția a II-a, Traducere de Gabriel Tudor, revizuită de Christian Mititelu, București: Editura Allfa (2008), 142.

<sup>20</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution*, (New York: Praeger Publications in Russian History and World Communism), Third Edition, 1956, Second Printing, (1961), 207.

<sup>21</sup> Berry's Telegram no. 744 of 27.09.1945 to State Department, Giurescu (1999) doc. no. 100, 327–328.

<sup>22</sup> Source Demostene's Note of 4.10.1945, RNA, PCM.SSI, Dossier no. 12/1944, f. 110.

<sup>23</sup> Source Rudy's Note of 4.10.1945, *Ibid.*, f. 111.

<sup>24</sup> Burton Y. Berry, *Romanian Diaries, 1944–1947*, Edited by Cornelia Bodea, Iași-Oxford-Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies (2000), 322.

he would succeed to become a member of Regency instead of Princess Elisabeta or Cireș<sup>25</sup>.

Later information proved that the Patriarch and Cireș would not accept to enter Regency Council if Mihai was deposed<sup>26</sup>. Nicodim refused, although the Soviet High Command made him a visit, on the grounds of being too old<sup>27</sup>. Probably, the two expected the result of Big Three Allies's Moscow Conference, held between the 16 and 26 December 1945.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December, also the Senior members of the Romanian War Forces rejected the idea of any sort of Regency when consulted by the War Minister<sup>28</sup>.

Viorel Virgil Tilea, the last Romanian Minister in the United Kingdom and since then self-exiled in that country, notified the British Foreign Office, and Grigore Gafenco confirmed from Paris, that Ana Pauker, an important Romanian Communist, arrived in Paris and tried, using her comrades in the French Communist Party, to persuade French Government to help Carol II to return to Europe with the purpose of installing him on the throne<sup>29</sup>. The British Foreign Office intervened to the Portuguese Government to deny Carol II's transit facilities<sup>30</sup>. Also the French Government was asked to deny Carol II the right to enter France even though he was issued a French visa<sup>31</sup>. Under the British and the United States' new demarches, Georges Bidault, French Foreign Minister, renewed the assurance of denying any visa<sup>32</sup>.

In the next two years, another candidate seemed promoted by the Communists to become king, the minor prince Ștefan, the eldest son of Archduchess Ileana, Mihai's aunt<sup>33</sup>.

The disappointing end of the Royal Strike, although Mihai continued to reign, came shortly after the Moscow Conference when the Big Three Allies decided to enlarge the Groza Government (and not to be removed from office as the King hoped) with only a National-Peasant Minister (Maniu's party, in opposition) and a National-Liberal Minister (Dinu Brătianu's party, in opposition), promised free elections, freedom of the press etc.<sup>34</sup>.

In September the issue of Regency took the form of assuming the Royal Prerogative by the Groza Government while in December it evolved into a moderate solution under the Council of Regency.

The Regency proposals represented the highest level of pressures upon the King during the Royal Strike in order that the latter should resume the collaboration with the Soviet-imposed Groza Government and demonstrated the Soviets and the Communists' determination to stay indefinitely in power no matter what the Constitution's provisions were.

Berry's Dispatch no. 966 of 13.12.1945 to Byrnes, Romanian National Archives (Bucharest), USA Microfilm Collection, Reel no. 667, frame 867–868.

Ion Calafeteanu (coordonator), *Istoria politicii externe românești în date*, București: Editura Enciclopedică (2003), 347; Porter *op. cit.*, 146.

<sup>25</sup> Berry *op. cit.*, 2000, 315; Schuyler *op. cit.*, 269; Source Mihai's Note of 22.12.1945, RNA, PCM.SSI, Dossier no. 12/1944, f. 130.

<sup>26</sup> Source Titu's Note of 17.12.1945, *Ibid.*, f. 128.

<sup>27</sup> Source Mihai's Note of 22.12.1945, *Ibid.*, f. 130.

<sup>28</sup> PRO FO 371/48564, The Telegram no. 1322 of 22.12.1945 of James Marjoribanks, British Acting Political Representative in Romania, to Foreign Office (R. 21447 in Foreign Office), mf. 133.

<sup>29</sup> The Note of 19.12.1945 of Orme S. Sargent, British Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (R. 21213 in Foreign Office), Id., 371/48542, mf. 139.

<sup>30</sup> Foreign Office's Telegram no. 913 of 21.12.2016 to British Embassy in Lisbon (R. 21213 in Foreign Office), *Ibid.*, mf. 141.

<sup>31</sup> Foreign Office's Telegram no. 3013 of 21.12.2016 to British Embassy in Paris (R. 21213 in Foreign Office), *Ibid.*, mf. 139.

<sup>32</sup> George Bidault's Dispatch of 20.12.1945 to Jefferson Caffery, the United States Ambassador in Paris,

M. László-Herbert (2010), 101.

<sup>33</sup> Note of 15.07.1947, RNA, PCM. SSI, File no. 13/1944, vol. 1, f. 184.

<sup>34</sup> Dinu C. Giurescu, "Soarta României este hotărâtă la Moscova," in *Istoria Românilor*, vol. IX, *România în anii 1940–1947*, Editată de Academia Română (coordonator Dinu C. Giurescu), București: Editura Enciclopedică, (2008), 608–609.