

THE ACTIVITY OF AIR VICE MARSHAL DONALD F. STEVENSON, HEAD OF THE BRITISH MILITARY MISSION IN ROMANIA (1944–1945)

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(Abstract)

The Air Vice Marshal Donald F. Stevenson was the Head of the British Section in the Romanian Allied Control Commission [hereafter ACC], controlled by the Soviet representatives, from the autumn of 1944 until the autumn of 1947; the War Office and the Foreign Office also called him during the activity in Romania with the title “Commissioner”; his military rank was equivalent to a two star General. According to the note prepared for the visit to his sovereign, King George VI, on the 13th of April 1945, his function was „the British representative on the Allied Control Commission and the Head of British Military Mission in Romania”. His character truly denoted the features of a gentleman and, because of that, he lacked the ability for compromises in politics. Stevenson had been Air Aide-de-Camp to King George VI (1939–1940).

The study was based on Foreign Office microfiches that were analysed at the Romanian National Archives. Stevenson reported to War Office, but in most cases War Office sent copies to Foreign Office; the British Political Representative in Romania was a diplomat and reported to Foreign Office. Concerning the name “Romania”, British spelt “Roumania” and the Americans “Rumania”.

On the 18th of September 1944 when Foreign Office and War Office made recommendations for the prospective British Mission in Romania, they supported the lack of “desire to see Roumania fall under permanent Soviet control and any attempt by the Soviet authorities to encroach unnecessarily on Roumanian sovereignty or independence should be resisted”, the “ultimate policy is to ensure an independent and friendly Roumania but it must be always remembered that Roumania is a conquered country which will have to work for her passage home”, “provided King Michael proves his worth, is sufficiently co-operative, and wanted by the majority of Roumanians, we should support him”, “you should not allow any members of your Mission to indulge in actions such as secret contact with members of other Roumanian parties” and “H.M.G. will wish to recover their political position and influence in Roumania which they possessed before the war. Although during the armistice period Soviet influence will be predominant, there can be no question of our abdicating of our claims to have an equal share in the post-war period of all political question affecting Roumania.”¹

In June 1944, Roosevelt, United States President, agreed Churchill’s proposal that Soviet Union should define and apply all Allies’ military interests for three months in Eastern Europe; this event marked the beginning of Western Powers’ hands-off policy in Eastern Europe². How could we explain the Political Directive, shortly before Stalin-Churchill “Percentage Agreement”? The great number of discords between State Department/Foreign Office and their President/Prime-Minister represented a possible answer³.

Winston Churchill had not supported an active British policy in Romania because of the “Percentage Agreement” concluded with Stalin on the 9th of October 1944 and he advised Eden, beginning with November 1944, that Le Rougetel should limit British interferences in Romania.⁴ Later he reminded

² [the document] “Political Directive for the British Element of the Allied Mission of Control” (18 September 1944), I. Agrigoroaiei, Gh. Buzatu and V. Cristian, *Românii în istoria universală*, vol. III, *Izvoare străine pentru studiul istoriei românilor*, volume edited by Ștefan S. Gorovei, Iași, 1988, 375 (see Romanian translation in Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, Lenuța Nicolescu and Gheorghe Nicolescu, *Relații militare româno-engleze*, Pitești, 1998, 202–203).

³ Lynn Etheridge Davis, *The Cold War begins. Soviet-American Conflict over Eastern Europe*, Princeton, 1974, 159.

³ *Ibidem*, 159.

⁴ Dennis Deletant, *British Policy towards Romania: 23 August 1944 – 6 March 1945*. (Dennis Deletant, Maurice

¹ J.N. Henderson’s dispatch of 12.04.1945 to Alan Lascelles, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, 371/48574 (hereafter PRO FO).

to Eden: “I think we had pretty good treatment from Stalin in Greece, much better in fact than we have had from the Americans. It is an awful thing that one cannot have it both ways, but you and I took great responsibility and we cannot overplay our hand in Roumania least of all at a time like this. Without letting it appear in telegrams, you ought to make your will felt.”⁵ A draft reply on behalf of Eden was prepared by Foreign Office for Churchill in order to confirm his agreement, but Eden refused to send it; Eden’s refusal could be explained by a similar dispatch already sent to British Mission in Bucharest⁶. Indeed British representatives were warned, beginning with November 1944, not to interfere with Soviet policy in Romania but only in order to support the Soviet war effort. The Yalta Declaration provided theoretical possibilities for democratic regimes in Eastern Europe and Foreign Office tried to maintain in Romania this perspective for less than a month (until the 6th of March). On the 4th of March, Churchill demanded to Eden that clear instructions should be sent to British representatives at Bucharest as Britain should not further interfere in Romania because Britain had imposed its will in Greece and Great Britain should not interfere to Soviet policy in regard to Romania⁷; few days later he wrote to Eden again to limit British involvement in Romania because “we, for considerations well known to you, accepted in a special degree the predominance of Russia in this theatre”⁸; Eden had already agreed and explained that “*to be fair to Stevenson, I think we must bear in mind that to begin with it was on our instructions* [Foreign Office dispatches – author’s note] *that he took such active steps to try to bring about the formation of a truly representative coalition in the place of the Rădescu Government, and it was only on the 5th of March⁹ that we warned him to go slow*” [emphasis added]¹⁰.

Pearson), *Romania observed. Studies in Contemporary Romanian History*, București, (1998), 136.

See details to Nicolae Baciu, *Agonia României, 1944–1948. Dosarele secrete acuză*, București, 1997, 136–140.

⁵ Churchill’s Personal Minute M. 1207/4 of 11.12.1944 to Eden, PRO FO 371/44014.

⁶ Eden’s note in pencil of 14. 12.1944, *Ibid.*

⁷ Churchill’s Personal Minute of 4.03.1945 to Eden, in Chipier 1993, 123–124.

⁸ Churchill’s Personal Minute no. M 205/5 of 13.03.1945 to Eden, PRO FO 371/48539.

⁹ Foreign Office dispatch no. 275 of 5.03.1945 to British Mission at Bucharest (sent from U.K., at 10,20 p.m.), Id. 371/48537; due to the fact that Great Britain and United States proposed to settle the matter of two Polish Governments with Soviet Union, this dispatch advised British representatives to support the policy adopted by the United States representatives in Bucharest.

¹⁰ Eden’s dispatch no. 45/112 of 15.03.1945 to Churchill, Id. 371/48539.

Churchill was anti-communist but, because of the “Percentage Agreement” and the consultations required for Poland in the beginning of 1945, he considered that the United States should be responsible for limiting Soviet expansion in Central and Eastern Europe¹¹.

Beginning with the 5th of March 1945, the British representatives at Bucharest were dissatisfied with the British Government decision to take no action against the Soviet pressure in Romania when King Michael was obliged to appoint the Petru Groza’s puppet Government, highly supported by the Soviet Union. Churchill made a strong secret proposal to the United States Government that the latter should demand a tripartite consultation of the three Allies for supporting a true Government coalition in Romania but Soviet Union, during consultation, refused to withdraw its support for Groza Government; the British Prime-Minister reason was the previous “Percentage Agreement” that Greece would remain capitalist and Romania would pass in the Soviet area of interest at least until the end of the war in Europe. The end of all British hopes concerning Romania, upon the outbreak of King Michael’s Royal Strike in August 1945, came with the Moscow Agreement (December 1945) when Soviet Union succeeded in maintaining the Groza Government (adding two opposition ministers) but King Michael remained on the throne¹².

When in the spring of 1945, Stevenson tried to stop Soviet plan to communize Romania and Prime Minister Winston Churchill even communicated to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary, his contempt about Air Vice Marshal’s actions: “Stevenson has, I am sure, made great friends with the King and Queen” and “his prejudices against the Russians are natural and strong.”¹³

The British Military Mission and the Office of the British Political Representative, the latter was headed by John Le Rougetel (until the spring of 1946, his deputy was James Marjoribanks until the autumn of 1945) and Adrian Holman, started their activity in Romania in the autumn of 1944 and activated until September 1947; they were in the same yard. In September 1947, when the

¹¹ Churchill’s letter no. 905 of 8.03.1945 to Roosevelt, in Chipier 1993, 139–141.

¹² Cf. Mark Percival, British Policy from the “Percentage Agreement” of October 1944 to the Moscow Agreement of December 1945. When was the Reality of Soviet Control effectively conceded? *Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană*, 2/2003, 100.

¹³ Winston Churchill’s Personal Minute of 13.03.1945 to Anthony Eden (R 4514 in Foreign Office), PRO FO, 371/48539.

Romanian Peace Treaty came into force, the Office of the British Political Representative was officially transformed into the British Legation even though the Office was informally known as the British Legation; the term "Office" was used because the effects of the British Declaration of War in December 1941 would only end when a Peace Treaty with Romania came into force.

The first British representatives, including Stevenson and John Le Rougetel, arrived in Bucharest on the 26th of September 1944¹⁴. The next day, Stevenson met Lieutenant General Vinogradov, Deputy Chairman of ACC¹⁵.

At the beginning of December 1944, Stevenson informed London about the certainty of Soviet plan to communize Romania especially after Vyshinski's arrival to Bucharest¹⁶.

On the 26th of December 1944, Stevenson went into an audience with King Michael and Queen Helen when he referred to Soviet complain about Romanian attitude to avoid accomplishing his obligations according to the Armistice Convention; King Michael promised to take the necessary steps with the Rădescu Government¹⁷.

Vinogradov agreed Stevenson's request the latter met Savel Rădulescu, President of Romanian commission for execution of armistice, who told him communists would plan a demonstration on the 24th of February, 14.00 hours, and they would have slogans as "Rădescu, Maniu and Ilie Lazăr are friends of Fascists and are pushing country into the arms of Fascists."¹⁸

On the night of 23/24 February 1945, Stevenson telegraphed to War Office that was it highly probable that Russian troops would intervene to stop a civil war provoked by Romanian communists; he sent a note to Vinogradov concerning an ACC meeting, but Vinogradov answered on 03.00 hours that only he could decide an ACC meeting if necessary; Stevenson mentioned he would propose to General Schuyler, the United States Chief Representative, to accept civil war, having been being triggered by Romanian

communists, but that civil war could be eradicated by the civil power represented by the Rădescu Government¹⁹.

The same night Stevenson was informed by Schuyler, the United States Chief Representative in ACC, that a demonstration of 3500 armed communists would take place that afternoon, being possible the seizure of government buildings by communists and Rădescu, Maniu and Brătianu's assassination and Romanian communists were going to create as much disorder as possible in order that the Soviet army would intervene to stop the civil war; Schuyler also told Stevenson he would demand that morning an ACC meeting to stop communist demonstration²⁰. Vinogradov refused the ACC meeting.

Stevenson communicated to War Office about "the possibility of King [Michael] and Queen-Mother [Helen] seeking sanctuary in British Mission may arise" and solicited "instructions urgently."²¹ British Government decided Foreign Office should send a positive reply.²² Foreign Office informed the British Embassy in Angora about "the possibility of M. Maniu and even the King and Queen-Mother seeking sanctuary in British Military Mission may arise. Authorisation to grant this should they apply has also been given to Air Vice Marshal Stevenson."²³

One of the highest merits of Stevenson was the implication in granting sanctuary to General Rădescu, the former Romanian Prime Minister, in the Office of the British Political Representative. Rădescu solicited the right for sanctuary on the 4th of March 1945 on the grounds his life was in danger²⁴. British Government granted the right for sanctuary to Rădescu on the 5th of March but the latter would present to British Military Mission in Bucharest the next day, 17,00 hours²⁵. The same

¹⁴ Foreign Office dispatch no. 444 of 2.10.1944 to Lord Halifax (British Embassy at Washington), Id., 371/44009.

¹⁵ Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 7 of 27.09.1944 to Foreign Office (the content belonging to Stevenson and it was sent for War Office), *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Dominion Office dispatch no. 1759 of 2.12.1944 to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa Governments, Id., 371/43989.

¹⁷ Dominion Office dispatch no. 14 of 4.01.1945 to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa Governments, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 476/423 of 23.02.1945 to War Office, Id., 371/48537.

¹⁹ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 477/165 of 24.02.1945 to War Office, *Ibid.*

²⁰ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 478/165 of 24.02.1945 to War Office, *Ibid.*

²¹ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 570/165 of 6.03.1945 to War Office (R 4463 in Foreign Office), Id., 371/48538.

²² Anthony Eden's dispatch no. 282 of 6.03.1945 to the Office of the British Political Representative in Bucharest, *Ibid.*

²³ Foreign Office dispatch no. 22 of 7.03.1945 to British Embassy in Angora, Id., 371/48537 (Id., file 81).

²⁴ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 556/165 of 4.03.1945 to War Office (R 4316 in Foreign Office), *Ibid.*

Marian-Alin Dudoi, Acordarea azilului pentru Generalul Rădescu la Legația Britanică. *Analele Universității din Craiova. Istorie (AUCI)*, XV, 1(17)/2010, 235.

²⁵ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 571/165 of 6.03.1945 to War Office (R 4545 in Foreign Office), PRO FO, 371/48538.

evening, Stevenson informed on the matter the Soviet General Vasiliev, a member of ACC²⁶.

Anthony Eden communicated to the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, to solicit Soviet Government support for the protection of the Office of the British Political Representative in Bucharest because "Air Vice Marshal Stevenson reports that there is a possibility that Groza has issued instructions for Rădescu to be brought dead or alive out of the British Mission where he is taking sanctuary."²⁷ On behalf of the British Government the Air Vice Marshal solicited on the 8th of March to Deputy Chairman of ACC, General Susaikov, a meeting of ACC concerning the military protection of the Office of the British Political Representative, where General Rădescu had been granted sanctuary, but the Soviet General "saw NO reason for an ACC meeting" and invited him to discuss the matter with Admiral Bogdenko, which took place the same day at 23,00 hours when Stevenson presented a note demanding an ACC meeting, "full military protection by ACC should be provided for this building [*de facto* The British Legation, *de jure* The Office of the British Political Representative] and the Roumanian Government should be warned NOT to molest" and "nevertheless so that there would be NO misunderstanding I said he would realize that the honour of Britain was engaged"; answering Bogdenko's questions, he affirmed Rădescu's sanctuary was granted by British Government, the building would be protected by British personnel according to fire orders approved by British Government and, concerning the military protection of the Office of the British Political Representative in Bucharest, he warned "it would be a great pity if with the resources available it was NOT possible for ACC to re-insure against such a happening which would not only effect our relations [the relations of British representatives at Bucharest with the Soviet counterpart] but relations on a much wider sphere"²⁸. On the 17th of March 1945 at the sixth combined meeting of

Dudoi 2010, 233.

Cortland Van Rensselaer Schuyler, *Misiune dificilă. Jurnal 28 ianuarie 1945–20 septembrie 1946*, Foreword by Dumitru Cioflină, Editors Alexandru Oșca și Mircea Chirițoiu, București, 1997, 63.

²⁶ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 576/165 of 6.03.1945 to War Office (R 4546 in Foreign Office), PRO FO, 371/48538. Dudoi 2010, 234.

²⁷ Anthony Eden's dispatch no. 1123 of 7.03.1945 to Sir Archibald Clark Kerr (sent on 8 March), PRO FO 371/48538. Dudoi 2010, 237.

²⁸ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 602/165 of 9.03.1945 to War Office (R 4938 in Foreign Office), PRO FO, 371/48538. M.A. Dudoi, *Acordarea.... Loc. cit.*, 236.

ACC, Stevenson presented "a formal request for the preservation of the sanctity of British Legation in Bucharest" and "thank General Susaikov for the measures that had been taken by Russian High Command for the protection of the Legation."²⁹

Air Vice Marshal informed War Office about the discussion he had had with General Schuyler; General Schuyler had affirmed that his source had seen Iuliu Maniu in the morning of the 7th of March³⁰. Maniu had said he would never ask sanctuary to anybody and he had been considering the newly-appointed Groza Government as the beginning of new repetitions of bad incidents in his life – the beginning of a new dictatorship; the Leader of National Peasant Party had decided that "as always he was prepared to fight to the end and was taking the necessary party steps to continue what has been his life's struggle."³¹ Ending his dispatch, Stevenson expressed a profound admiration concerning "Maniu's steadfastness and determination in what is almost an overwhelming situation."³²

When Air Vice Marshal informed London about the new list of the Soviet dignitaries of ACC (amongst them the most important were the Chairman Marshal Rodion Malinovski, Deputy Chairman Colonel General Ivan Zaharovitch Susaikov, Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Vladislav Petrovitch Vinogradov and Assistant to Chairman Rear Admiral Bogdenko), he mentioned his suspicion concerning the secret affiliation to NKVD, the Soviet Intelligence Service, of Susaikov and Bogdenko³³. Marshal Malinovski and later Marshal Tolbukhin were only formally Chairmen of ACC and for this reason all activity were under Deputy Chairman's leadership; until March 1945 Deputy Chairman was General Vinogradov.

On the 14th of March, he reported the newly appointed agents of Romanian Security Police had destroyed type and texts, that had already passed by the censorship of ACC, of the weekly review *Dreptatea Poporului*, published by the National Peasant Party³⁴.

On the 19th of April, a dispatch of United States Embassy at London informed State Department that

²⁹ Notes taken of the Sixth Combined Meeting of Allied Control Commission Romania, PRO FO, 371/48540.

³⁰ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 588 of 7.03.1945 to War Office, Id., 371/48538.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 769/112 of 22.03.1945 to War Office (R 5329 in Foreign Office), Id., 371/48574.

³⁴ Stevenson's dispatch no. RAC 748/429 of 20.03.1945 to War Office (R 5429 in Foreign Office), Id., 371/48551.

Stevenson, who was then in the United Kingdom, had been considering Groza Government as a puppet Government of Soviet Union and Teohari Georgescu, the Minister of Interior, as the key figure in implementing Soviet policy³⁵.

Schuyler, after returning from Washington where he had met President Truman, told Stevenson that Truman intended to use the pressure of public opinion, lend-lease and especially post-war credits in order to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union³⁶.

At the Potsdam Conference, Churchill complained to Stalin that British Mission in Romania was placed in conditions of internment; Churchill affirmed that he had the information from Stevenson³⁷. In order to stop the process of comunization, Stevenson proposed to London a tripartite leadership of ACC because Soviet Union continued the “deliberate attempt to remove the last vestiges of British influence”³⁸.

Le Rougetel and Stevenson did not recommend to Foreign Office to recognise Groza Government; on 7 August 1945 Le Rougetel wrote: “Both the Vice Marshal and I most emphatically disagree with the view that Groza Government once it is officially recognised by us will in time give way to a respectable democratic régime. On the contrary we are convinced that recognition by Western Powers would enable a small group of local Communist to recover and finally to consolidate power which has been slipping from their grasp in recent weeks. It seems to us most unlikely that in these circumstances independence of this country would be established for many years to come”³⁹.

Stevenson was informed by General Nicolaescu, Head of the Romanian Household, in the morning of 23th of August 1945 Colonel General Ivan Susaikov, together with other Soviet officials, had had an audience to King Michael and had presented a Note on behalf of the Soviet Government demanding the king should withdraw the Note to the three Allies concerning Prime Minister Groza’s

refuse to resign but Michael had refused Susaikov’s proposal; while Soviets had been leaving, they had met Nicolaescu and Susaikov had accused the king and his court “responsible for the present situation in this country, on account of which many tears will be flowing”⁴⁰.

During ACC meeting Air Vice Marshal presented a letter of protest addressed to General Susaikov against the article had been published in *Izvestia* on 8 September and republished in Romanian press on the 9th of September that had referred to American and British representatives in ACC as King Michael’s persuaders to demand Groza’s resignation; further Stevenson protested against the accusations of violating ACC procedure by King Michael’s persuasion to dismiss Groza Government without any consent of Soviet colleagues, he considered article as “unfounded assertions” and demanded the censorship of any repetition in Romanian press under article number 16 of Romanian Armistice Convention⁴¹.

Stevenson agreed to inform London upon several manifestos of the Organization of the Bandits of Avram Iancu that planned to fight against comunization; the last manifesto of 10 October ended with “Long live Roumanian-English-French-American friendship!”⁴².

At a dinner party Susaikov admitted “in strictest confidence that the Groza Government was in fact established in Roumania by force” because Romanian Army had planned to start the war against the Soviet Armies that fought in Budapest siege⁴³. The last information was incorrect because Budapest had capitulated on the 13th of February 1945.

After the demonstration for King Michael’s Day on the 8th of November, Air Vice Marshal protested in the matter of arrests that have already made by the Groza Government and asked in a letter to General Susaikov to determine Romanian Government to stop arresting until the investigation was complete⁴⁴. He and General Schuyler proposed to General

³⁵ Dinu C. Giurescu, *Uzurpatorii. România 6 Martie 1945–7 Ianuarie 1946*, București, (2004), 64.

³⁶ Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 565 of 27.05.1945 to Foreign Office (the content belonging to Stevenson), PRO FO, 48541.

³⁷ Harry Hanak, *The Politics of Impotence: The British observe Romania 6 March 1945 to 30 December 1947*. (I. Agrigoroaiei, G. Buzatu, V. Cristian), *Românii în istoria universală*, vol. III₁, Iași, (1988), 423.

³⁸ Stevenson’s dispatch no. RAC 2065/195 of 28.07.1945 to War Office (R 12729 in Foreign Office), PRO FO, 371/48542.

³⁹ Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 771 of 7.08.1945 to Foreign Office (R 13258 in Foreign Office), Id., 371/48607.

⁴⁰ Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 927 of 12.09.1945 to Foreign Office (R 15529, the content belonging to Stevenson) to Foreign Office, Id., 371/48558.

⁴¹ Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 932 of 14.09.1945 to Foreign Office (R 15652, the content belonging to Stevenson) to Foreign Office, *Ibid.*

⁴² Le Rougetel’s dispatch to T.E. Bromley (R18478 in Foreign Office), Id., 371/48542.

⁴³ Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 1101 of 27.10.1945 to Foreign Office (R 18323, the content belonging to Stevenson), *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 1169 of 10.11.1945 to Foreign Office (R 19077, the content belonging to Stevenson) to Foreign Office, Id., 371/48563.

Susaikov to visit the places where the new arrested were taken in custody because they both had the information the arrested had had part of brutal treatment to extract “confessions”⁴⁵. Consequently General Susaikov accepted an investigation should begin⁴⁶. At ACC meeting on the 22th of November Susaikov forbade the investigation and rejected Stevenson complaint about the illegal communist demonstration on the 12th of November, the day when the opposition buried the dead of the 8th of November; Susaikov motivated his decisions with

the impossibility to intervene in the Romanian Government internal policy⁴⁷.

Stevenson implied actively in the activity of ACC showing his attitude in preserving the democracy and human rights; he contributed to the right of the Romanian Royal Family to be granted sanctuary if necessary, supported to War Office the cause of General Rădescu’s sanctuary and informed upon the Groza Government illegal arrests of the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party’s members and sympathizers.

⁴⁵ Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 1180 of 12.11.1945 to Foreign Office (R 19076, the content belonging to Stevenson) to Foreign Office, *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Stevenson’s dispatch no. RAC 3262/195 of 16.11.1945 to War Office (R 20156 in Foreign Office), *Id.*, 371/48564.

⁴⁷ Schuyler 1997, 255.