

A Dutch diplomatic report of March 1945 in regard to Romanian politics

(Un raport diplomatic olandez din martie 1945 referitor la politica românească)

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Summary: The report of the Dutch envoy to Romania, issued on 27th March 1945, was addressed to Le Rougetel, his British counterpart.

Dutch worries clearly developed after 6th March 1945, when Soviets, who had been occupying the country, managed to impose in Romania a Government headed by Petru Groza, actually dominated by Communists. The report clearly stated that a communist Romania was not going to buy products from Western Europe and United States.

Although not expressed, we can assume the Dutch feared about the confiscation in the near future of the “Romanian Astra” company, the main oil company in Romania, which belonged to the famous Dutch-British concern called “Royal Dutch Shell”.

Keywords: Cold War, communism, democracy, diplomacy, Iuliu Maniu

The agrarian reform implemented by the Groza Government was not only offering land to the peasants, but also it increased the role of the government in agriculture as the state confiscated the agricultural machinery from the bigger landowners and it would decide which peasants could use it; this meant for Dutch that only the peasants who would vote the Communists and their political allies could use the agricultural machinery.

Finally, the Dutch envoy sustained the absolute necessity that the Americans and the British to find the means of keeping freedom in an independent Romania, as the people were by far not Communist and can defend themselves until the creation of a communist agriculture and industry, and in order to protect Western economic interests.

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Rezumat

Raportul trimisului olandez în România, purtând data de 27 martie 1945, a fost adresat lui Le Rougetel, omologul său britanic.

Îngrijorările olandeze au apărut în special după data de 6 martie 1945, când sovieticii, care ocupaseră țara, au reușit să impună un guvern condus de Petru Groza, în fapt dominat de comuniști.

Raportul precizează că o România comunistă nu va cumpăra produse din vestul Europei sau din Statele Unite. Deși neexprimată, putem presupune că olandezii se temeau de confiscarea în viitorul apropiat a companiei „Astra Română”, principala companie petrolieră din România, care era deținută de faimosul concern anglo-olandez ”Royal Dutch Shell”.

Reforma agrară implementată de guvernul Groza nu numai că oferea pământ țăranilor, dar creștea și rolul guvernului în agricultură, deoarece statul confisca mașinile agricole de la marii proprietari de pământ și urma să decidă care dintre țărani putea să le folosească; pentru olandezi, aceasta însemna că doar țăranii care votau comuniștii și aliații lor politici puteau să folosească mașinile agricole.

La finalul raportului, trimisul olandez a susținut ca o necesitate absolută ca americanii și britanicii să găsească mijloacele pentru a menține libertatea într-o România independentă, întrucât cetățenii ei nu sunt comuniști în marea lor majoritate și pot să reacționeze până la trecerea la o agricultură și industrie comuniste, și pentru a proteja interesele economice occidentale.

DELEGATION GENERALE DE PAYS-BAS

Bucharest 27th March 1945

No. 113

Mr. J. H. Le Rougetel

Political Representative of the H.B.M. Government

Bucharest

The political happenings in Roumania during the last weeks are inevitably leading to a situation which must cause the greatest concern to those Allied Nations – the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Netherlands – which for many years had well established interests in this country.

Our direct and indirect interests are today of the following nature:

- a) the great capital investments established in Roumania by the nationals of our countries and developed for many decades;
- b) the possibilities of a free and independent, prosperous Roumania as a market for our products, more necessary than ever after this war;
- c) the necessity for Roumania as a former enemy to bear its share in the payment of the losses caused to the Allies and generally in the economic upbuilding of Europe;
- d) the necessity for Roumania to a peaceful and orderly member of the family of Nations in this part of Europe, which since centuries was considered as the powder barrel of Europe.

In view of all this I feel obliged as representative of the Royal Netherlands Government to submit to you some considerations about the present position, the further development of which will endanger in the most serious way all our interests.

I.1.) The development of the political situation since 23rd August 1944 leading to the installation of the present Government, was undoubtedly influenced by the mistakes made by the right-wing parties. The delegation of less important and inexperienced members of these parties, by their leaders, in Cabinets, which had to start rebuilding Roumania under the most difficult circumstances, the unwillingness of these party-leaders to share the direct responsibility of governing their country, caused mainly by political egotism, was one of the biggest mistakes.

2.) The leading members of these parties express the view that the Soviet Government intended, since August, to obtain for its political co-ideologists in Roumania complete power in this country. This however would only be the first etappe, leading afterwards to the status of Roumania as a full member of the U.S.S.R.

3.) I don't think that it is worth while to discuss at this moment, whether the victory of the Communists in Roumania is due to the mistakes made by the other parties or to their own strategy and methods of fighting, or finally to the long term-strategy of the Soviet Government, manoeuvring since August in order to reach its well established goal.

4.) It is less the past than the future which interests us. Even if it could be proved that the direct intervention of the Soviet authorities in the internal political affairs of Roumania, at the end of February, was not just a stage on the beforehand traced road to the adherence to the U.S.S.R., but that it was genuinely caused by the deep mistrust of the Russians in the upper and middle classes – which in Roumania are more representative of the “bourgeois”-type than elsewhere – and that still now the Soviet Government does not consider a closer relationship with this country, I am afraid that this relationship – incorporation of Romania in the Soviet Union, will become the only possible alternative if the Soviet Government wishes to maintain a communist regime in this country.

5.) The establishment of a purely communist regime in Russia after 1917 became possibly mainly because that huge country is to a very great extent self-supporting. It could afford, even with the sacrifice of millions of lives and with an abnormally low standard of living to close its doors and still, starting from scratch, to become after 25 years of nearly complete isolation, a country with more capital goods than most of the other nations of the world.

6.) Such a development would be completely impossible for an independent, communist Roumania. This country with its very limited industrial resources, is bound to import most of her needs of fabricated goods and industrial raw materials and in order to pay these imports, to export its surplus of agricultural and other raw materials. It needs for its international trade, international confidence and it cannot be doubted that under an inexperienced communist regime such confidence will not be given. It is also out of question that even after many years amongst the

Roumanian communist people will be found capable enough to administer the country.

7.) The communist regime in a country where the vast majority of the people is hostile to communist ideals, where even the adherents are more interested in the material advantages than in ideals, can only be maintained by dictatorial measures – as introduced at this moment – abolition of all freedoms.

8.) What then is the only alternative, if the doors of Western Europe are closed? Complete economic dependency upon its only political friend: Russia – exactly the same thing which Germany had in store for its satellites. And from this stage to political dependency is only one step.

9.) I have mentioned at the beginning of this letter the four main groups of interests which our countries have in Roumania. It is easy to understand that these interests will be irretrievably lost, if Roumania is no longer a free and independent country.

II.1.) The so-called "agrarian reforms" which means the immediate confiscation of the greatest part of the land property of the upper classes and the problematic confiscation in the near future of the remainder, is the first of the purely political measures which the new communist regime in Roumania has carried through.

2.) This measure in itself, by its economic consequences, will be utterly harmful to the interests of our countries. It will strongly diminish if not stop altogether the ability of Roumania to produce, to buy from abroad, to pay its debts. Already for these reasons we ought to object that Roumania under the obligations of an Armistice Convention changes its economic structure in a way detrimental in the highest degree to our established interests. The political consequences however may be worse still.

3.) About 80% of the Roumanian population is living in villages and on the land. Politically speaking the great majority of the peasant class has always been an adherent of the National Peasant Party (this party came to life after the previous war as the result of an amalgamation of the – Transsylvanian – National Party under Dr. Maniu and the Peasants Party – funded in the old Kingdom under Mihalache).

4.) The Roumanian peasant is very strongly an individualist, but since generations he has been taught to vote for "those in power" for the Government which appoints the village mayor, the notary public, the schoolteacher. That is the reason why the Liberal Governments between 1920 and 1927 even with a very little coercion could obtain majorities in the rural communities. The peasant however ripened politically speaking and in the elections of 1937, the last elections held in Roumania, the Liberal Government failed to obtain even the then necessary majority of 40% of the votes, an unprecedented occurrence in Roumanian history.

5.) Free elections at this moment would undoubtedly show a great majority for the National Peasants Party. The communists know this and in the "agrarian reform" they have found the only and most efficient weapon to beat their opponents.

6.) The agrarian reform changes completely the structure of Roumanian rural life. It will create a rural proletariat with owners of less than one, maximum three hectares, a property which does not enable the owner to subsist. The possibility which existed before for such small holders to find a supplementary income by working on the land of the bigger landowners, disappears with this class of owners.

7.) The reform bill provides that the whole confiscated mechanical outfit of the landowners, necessary for labouring the soil, becomes the property of the state, and will be given on lease to the peasants. The application of the law will be put into the hands of village committees, to be appointed by the village mayor, that is by the Government.

8.) The consequences of these provisions are easy to be foreseen. The political influence of the bigger landowners disappears completely. The newly created committees, twins of the factory committees in industrial plants, to be chosen of course amongst the members of the Communist Ploughmen Party, and supported by the newly created landowners, will rule over the whole life of the rural community. They allocate the confiscated land, they distribute seeds, mechanical outfit, livestock, fuel etc. No peasant will be able to subsist if he does not obey the orders of the Committee.

9.) How this will affect committees in the future is clear. They will be free, no visible coercion is necessary and eventual allied observers will find few reasons to complain; but the peasant knows what will happen to him if he votes for the other side.

I have indicated the two main dangerpoints of the present situation. They can be summarized as follows:

1.) A communist regime in Roumania must lead to the closest possible relationship with Soviet Russia.

2.) A change in the regime, brought about by peaceful means – elections – becomes hardly possible after the agrarian reform has been fully applied and certainly impossible as soon as the regime has caught the industrial and the agricultural population firmly in its grip.

If we have no means or if we fail to change the course of events, our interests in Roumania are doomed.

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xxx Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, 371/48553 (studiat la Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, București, Microfilme Anglia Microfișe 1940-1945, plicul 97, microfișele 91-94)

