

World War II and Romanian Oil

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The Allies and Romanian Petroleum: A priority objective – Ploiești

Under the circumstances existing in the first stage of the world war, not only for Germany and the states of the Axis, but also for the Allied Powers, at first for Great Britain and France, and then for the United States and the Soviet Union, the question of Romanian petroleum gained a special significance¹. From March to August 1939, Paris had under special attention the economic aspects in its relations with Bucharest.² We have insisted on the French-British preparations, in 1939-1949, for the destruction of the petroliferous area in case of a German attack, the preparations being annihilated to a great extent as a result of the Canaris-Moruzov cooperation. If however, as a result of the capturing of the French archives at La-Charité-sur-Loire by the Germans, Paris's plans were revealed as early as 1940, London's intentions are less known. Our studies in the archives in London resulted in the discovery of some eloquent documents. It results from these documents that, in the secret operation aiming at the destruction of the petroliferous area, the British worked not only in cooperation with the French, but also on their own, but with the assistance of the Romanian military authorities. The British side involved not only the secrete services, but also officers and diplomats, a situation specific to the years 1939-1941, when England's Legation in Bucharest had a well defined role. Thus, the British Minister, Sir Reginald Hoare, controlled and informed London about the

¹ Cf. Gh. Buzatu, *A History of Romanian Oil*, II, Bucharest, Mica Valahie Publishing House, 2006, pp. 117-234; Idem, *O istorie a petrolului românesc*, Bucharest, Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1998, pp. 314-408.

² *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939, 2-e série (1936-1939)*, tome XV, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1981, doc. no. 177, 221, 230, 269; *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939...*, 2-e série (1936-1939), tome XVII, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1985, *passim*; Marie G. Brătianu, *Roumanie 1938-1940 vue de France. Recherche dans les archives françaises*, Paris, 1996, p. 59 and the following. See, in parallel, the actions of Berlin, Rome, and Moscow reflected in the official diplomatic documents published so far: *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945, Series D (1937-1941)*, Vols. VII-VIII, Baden-Baden, 1956-1961; *I Documenti diplomatici italiani, Nona serie (1939-1943)*, vois. I-II, Rome, 1954-1957; *Dokumenty vnešnei politiki. 1939 god*, t. XXII/1, Moskva, Izdatelstvo Mejdunarodnih Otnošeniia, 1992.

activities of the Military Attaché, Colonel Macnab.³ The report from December 15, 1939 of Colonel Macnab concerned his discussions of the previous day with Colonel Leonida of the Bureau of Operations of the Romanian General Staff. The Military Attaché reminded that, already in August 1939, he had handed the Chief of Staff in Bucharest the plan of the War Office regarding the oil destructions "in case of war", and, with this purpose, on December 8, the Foreign Office informed about its decision to deliver explosives to Romania.⁴ About the "progress" of the preparations, Macnab mentioned that the delegates of the Romanian General Staff had in view:

- the destruction of the means of communication;
- the destruction of all the port installations on the Danube and the blocking of the Orșova-Baziaș sector;
- the mining of certain sectors;
- the destruction of the petroliferous region.⁵

In 1940-1941, the gradual integration of Romania, under the circumstances of the *Wehrmacht's* successes in Western Europe, in the camp of the Axis was closely followed by the delegates of Great Britain to Bucharest who, not incidentally, had under the attention the oil industry and all the connected issues (the anti-aircraft defense of Ploiești area, the exports to Germany, the production and legislation etc.). We remind the reader of the ample reports sent from Bucharest regarding the general situation of the Romanian oil industry,⁶ the anti-aircraft protection of the refineries in Ploiești⁷ region, the petroleum exports to Germany and Italy in 1940 etc.⁸ After the members of the British Legation left Romania in February 1941, a great deal of information regarding the oil industry was received by London – via Washington – through the U.S. Legation in Bucharest.⁹ Special importance was gained, as the hostilities extended, especially after the attack against the U.S.S.R. on June 22, 1941 and

³ Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office – 371/23852, f. 189 (R. Hoare to the Foreign Office, Bucharest, December 16, 1939).

⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 190 (Bucharest, Despatch No. 16/1939, Macnab to R. Hoare).

⁵ *Ibidem*, ff. 190-193.

⁶ *Ibidem*, ff. 33-34 (Report no. 95/February 1, 1941, signed E.A. Berthoud); *ibidem*, ff. 101-105 (Report from March 2, 1941, signed by the same E.A. Berthoud and entitled *Romanian Oil Situation*). The document, broadcast by the *Committee on the Enemy Oil Position* in London, was also obtained by the British intelligence organisms (*Ibidem*, f. 100).

⁷ *Ibidem*, ff. 30-31 (Report no. 94/February 1, 1941, signed by E.A. Berthoud).

⁸ *Ibidem*, ff. 68-69 (Report no. 90, Bucharest, January 17, 1941, signed by E. A. Berthoud).

⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 149; *Ibidem*, ff. 156-157; *Ibidem*, ff. 173-180; *Ibidem*, f. 202. (All the measures are published in the Annexes).

the initiation of the Anglo-Soviet political-diplomatic and military cooperation, by the bombing of Romania's petroliferous region, of the refineries and the transportation means, of the ports on the Danube and at the Black Sea.¹⁰ Mention should be made that, on April 28, 1941, Sir Cecil Kisch of the *Petroleum Department* proposed that air raids should be performed starting from Greece or Turkey.¹¹ Immediately after June 22, 1941, the possibility appeared for the U.S.S.R.'s air forces based in Odessa to hit the petroleum objectives in Romania.¹² But the hopes in the Russians were not confirmed, their operations from June-July 1941 proving, under the circumstances of the successes of Hitler's "express war", insignificant. As for the British, they were not able, at least in 1940 and 1941, as General-Major Sir H.L. Ismay of the *War Cabinet* communicated on April 9, 1941, to initiate any air actions against the Romanian petroliferous region; the issue was debated on that very day at the level of the chiefs of staff in London and no decision was taken, although the operation represented a very secret objective.¹³ The further evolution of the hostilities, marked by the entrance of the United States in the camp led by the U.S.S.R. and Great Britain further determined, for 1942 and the following years, the implication in the mission of the bombing of the Romanian petroliferous region mainly of the American aviation, first based in Northern Africa and then in Italy.¹⁴

In the United States, even before the Japanese attack in Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was preoccupied with the petrol issue, both at national and general

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, ff. 196-197 (the letter exchange from July 8-9, 1941). Beginning with 1940, a major role in the planning, organizing, and carrying out of the sabotage actions in the countries of East-Central Europe, including Romania (petroleum, the Legionary rebellion etc.), was played by the famous British secret service *S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive)*, which had the mission – according the Premier Winston Churchill – “to set fire” to the old continent (see Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*, II, Bucharest, Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1995, pp. 12-13). In 1943-1944, the operation led by A.G.G. de Chastelain (code name *Autonomous*) was also coordinated by the *S.O.E.* and had as one of its main targets the Romanian oil industry (*Ibidem*, p. 335 and the following; Ivor Porter, *Operațiunea „Autonomous”*. În România în vreme de război, translation, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1991, *passim*).

¹¹ P.R.O., Foreign Office – 371/2352, ff. 146-147.

¹² *Ibidem*, f. 165 (Lord Hankey to Sir Charles Portal, the Air Marshal, London, June 22, 1931). On the same theme, Lord Hankey addressed Phillip Nichols of the Foreign Office (*Ibidem*, f. 196, London, July 8, 1941).

¹³ *Ibidem*, f. 49 (Sir H.L. Ismay to Gladwyn Jebb, from the Foreign Office).

¹⁴ Cf. Platon Chirnoagă, *Istoria politică și militară a războiului României contra Rusiei Sovietice*, Iași, 1998, pp. 183-184.

level.¹⁵ He was, for instance, among the initiators of the meeting of November 10, 1940 in Washington of the representatives of Roosevelt administration with the delegates of the big American trusts,¹⁶ on which occasion they examined the situation of petroleum in the countries of the Axis, the latter's efforts, headed by Germany, to conquer new areas of "black gold".¹⁷ They agreed on the fact that Germany, Italy, and Japan would be threatened in the future by the penury of liquid fuel, the quantities procured from the U.S.S.R. and Romania being satisfactory only for the time being.¹⁸ In June 1941, the American specialists discussed the aspects of the destruction of the oil sources accessible to the Axis in the Dutch Indies or in Romania.¹⁹ Only 24 hours after the Japanese raid in Hawaii, that is on December 8, 1941, a Council was constituted in the American capital-city, in the presence of Harold Ickes, one of the president's intimate friends, uniting all the large oil companies and independent producers (*Petroleum Industry War Council*).²⁰ Later, based on the decision taken on November 10, 1940 to present to President F.D. Roosevelt a plan of action regarding liquid fuel,²¹ on May 25, 1941 the head of the North-American Executive Committee appointed the Minister of Internal Affairs as *Petroleum Coordinator*.²² In a letter dated June 18, 1941, Roosevelt specified to Harold Ickes that the petroleum export/import in the United States represented "a part of our current foreign policy."²³ After the entrance of the United States in the war, Roosevelt Administration approved the new name for the organism under the leadership of Harold Ickes: *Office of Petroleum Coordinator for War*, which functioned until the end of the hostilities (1942-1945).²⁴ During the war years, Ickes' service played an important role in mobilizing the resources for leading the operations, as well as in planning the oil policy of the United States. Numerous studies and synopses²⁵ or programs were elaborated.²⁶ One of these programs dated 1943,

¹⁵ See *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, III, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1954, p. 297.

¹⁶ *Standard Oil* was represented by E.J. Sadler, vice-president.

¹⁷ *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, III, p. 297.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 297-298.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 537.

²⁰ See F.D. Roosevelt Library and Archives, Hyde Park, New York, Official File 4 435 (*Petroleum Coordinator for War*).

²¹ *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, p. 298.

²² See F.D. Roosevelt Library and Archives, Official File 4 435 (*Petroleum Coordinator for War*).

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, H.L. Ickes was *Petroleum Administrator for War*.

²⁵ See, for instance, the Report from April 1994, with numerous references to the role and place of Romania in the international oil industry (Official File 4 435 B).

studied by us in the American presidential archive at Hyde Park (New York), pointed out that petroleum had become – by use and degree of interest – a universal product,²⁷ whence the conclusion that the national security of the United States was based on the fact that “black oil” should be in the possession of the Americans.²⁸ As we have previously shown, based on the data in the North-American archives, we considered it natural, during the hostilities that opposed Romania to the United States in the period December 1941 (June 1942) – August 1944, for Washington to intend to accomplish the radiography of the enemy at the Mouths of the Danube and, in this sense, an essential role was played by the military or civilian intelligence services – *Military Intelligence Division* (through *G-2*), *Office of Naval Intelligence*, and, especially, the famous *Office of Strategic Services* (*O.S.S.*), the predecessor of today’s *C.I.A.*²⁹ It goes without saying that, in the flux of information that Washington was being bombarded with, an important place was reserved to the oil industry in Romania,³⁰ especially since the North-American authorities interpreted correctly the role of Bucharest in the supply of Germany with liquid fuel, which, despite its great military successes in the 1939-1942 phase of the world war, still remained “hungry of petroleum.”³¹ There were numerous reports that identified the military objectives in Romania and among them an important place was occupied by Ploiești and Valea Prahovei.³² Also, in the analyses of the political-military and economic situation of Germany, the big American intelligence agencies insisted, when it was the case, on Romania and Romanian petroleum³³ in supporting the

²⁶ Cf. *A Foreign Oil Policy for the United States* (*Ibidem*).

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ See Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*, I, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1988, p. 361 and the following.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 361-363.

³¹ Cf. *Petrolul și strategia germană* (bulletin from March 5, 1942 of the United States’ Service for the Coordination of Information, in the National Archives of Romania (NAR), collection *Microfilme S.U.A.*, roll 634, frames 320-331).

³² See, for example, the report of Major Dudley J. Scholten from June 22, 1943 (idem, roll 687, frames 138-139) or the report of Allen Dulles, from the *O.S.S.* (the branch in Switzerland) for *G-2* (*Ibidem*, frame 142).

³³ See, for example, the materials: *Studiu comparativ asupra situației Germaniei în 1918-1943*, from August 13, 1943; *Studiu comparativ asupra economiei Germaniei pe pîcior de război în 1918 și în 1943*, from October 5, 1943; *Condițiile în care Germania ar putea accepta o pace separată cu Rusia*, from October 12, 1943; *Procesul prăbușirii Germaniei*, from December 4, 1943 (apud Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*, I, pp. 366-367).

Axis in its war effort.³⁴ The information collected throughout the world through different channels was centralized³⁵ at the level of the supreme organism of the United States – the Joint Intelligence Committee (J.I.C.), which published a weekly bulletin that periodically arrived on the desk of the head of the Executive Committee. Undoubtedly the references to Romania and the Romanian oil did not lack from the respective bulletins. Thus, in June 1943, Romania and Yugoslavia, Greece and Hungary were considered to be “of considerable importance to the Axis,” certainly for their products delivered primarily to the Nazi Reich (petroleum, copper and chromium, nickel and food).³⁶ Losing these countries would have caused a “substantial economic discomfort” to the Axis, but certainly the lack of the Romanian petroleum would have constituted “a serious blow for the German war machine.”³⁷ In the same bulletin, but in the chapter regarding Romania, it was mentioned that Bucharest was holding the first place among Germany’s European oil suppliers, covering 1/3 of the total production of the fascist Axis.³⁸ Romania was under the attention of the analysts in the syntheses referring to the international situation of liquid fuel, in 1942/1943 for instance.³⁹ In Adolph Hitler’s *Festung Europa*, Romania held by far the first place in the production of crude oil,⁴⁰ and Ploiești was among the European oil centers.⁴¹ That was precisely why the “cutting” of the supply with Romanian oil represented a serious blow for the German military effort,⁴² and the

³⁴ We notice, on the other hand, that numerous secret groups and networks in Romania (Iuliu Maniu, Rică Georgescu etc.) dealt with the gathering and transmitting of information to the British and the Americans regarding the oil industry (cf. Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*, II, *passim*; Ivor Porter, *Operation „Autonomous”*. With S.O.E. in Wartime Romania, London, Chatto and Windus, 1989, *passim*). Chastelain’s *Autonomous* group, launched in December 1943, had ample ramifications in the oil industry circles, the leader having worked in the field even before 1941 (cf. Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă...*, II, p. 351-352).

³⁵ Just as London, at the level of the *Military Intelligence 6 (Intelligence Service)*, *S.O.E. (Special Operation Service Executive)*, or *J.I.C. (Joint Intelligence Committee)* (Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă...*, II, pp. 9-13).

³⁶ Cf. Joint Intelligence Committee, *Weekly Summary*, Number 23/June 16, 1943, p. 13 (apud F.D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, *Map Room Papers*, Container 227).

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³⁹ Cf. “The Western Axis Oil Position”, in J.I.C., *Weekly Summary*, No. 24/June 23, 1943, p. 20 and the following (apud *Map Room Papers*, Container 227).

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 22-23.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 23.

bombing of Ploiești region was recommended.⁴³ Just as, on May 13, 1942, General George V. Strong, from the leadership of G-2, pointed out to General Eisenhower the "strategic importance of Ploiești".⁴⁴ Ploiești thus became, for the following period, "the maximum priority objective" of the American bombings.⁴⁵ The result of such proposals did not take long before being materialized, already at the time when the North-American forces were "in the vicinity" of Europe, in North Africa. The preparations for the bombing of Ploiești by the American airplanes taking off from the most various bases (Sevastopol – 380 miles; Ekaterinoslav – 650 miles; El Adem, Cyrenaica – 900 miles; Fuka, Egypt – 1 050 miles) were examined in detail.⁴⁶ On June 12, 1942,⁴⁷ a week after the American Congress sanctioned the intervention of the state of war between the United States and Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary,⁴⁸ 13 American B-24 bombers with the take-off base 1 300 miles away (Fayid, Egypt) hit Constanța and especially Ploiești (the refinery *Astra Română*). The code name of the operation was Halpro,⁴⁹ and the success was more than modest.⁵⁰ The fact that the essential objective was Ploiești resulted from the remarkable importance of the area for Hitler's war,⁵¹ who, as we have shown, was preoccupied and managed to transform it into the most redoubtable point of his European fortress.⁵²

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Memorandum*, in National Archives of Romania, collection *Microfilme S.U.A.*, roll 687, frame 135.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ John Sweetman, *Ploiesti Oil Strike*, p. 50 and the following.

⁴⁷ In May 1942, two Soviet airplanes bombed the "Orion" refinery in Ploiești, rendering it out of order for four months (the International Conference organized by The Institute of Military History and Theory, Ploiești, May 1993, where the "balance" and the "diagram" of the Allied air bombings of Ploiești were presented for the period August 1, 1943 – August 19, 1944).

⁴⁸ Cf. James Dugan, C. Stewart, *Ploiesti. The Great Ground-Air Battle of 1 August 1943*, New York, Random House, 1962, p. 8.

⁴⁹ From the name of General Henry ("Hap") H. Arnold (1886-1950), the head of the American Air Forces.

⁵⁰ James Dugan, C. Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-64; Alesandru Dușu, Florin Constantiniu, *Un episod puțin cunoscut al celui de-al doilea război mondial*, in "Revista de Istorie", Bucharest, no. 7/1989, p. 723 and the following.

⁵¹ In a message addressed to Mussolini on November 20, 1940, he considered that, "if the oil refineries [in Ploiești] are destroyed, then the loss will be irreparable" (*ADAP 1918-1945*, Series D, Band XI/2, *Die Kriegsjahre*, IV/2, 13. November 1940 bis 31. Januar 1941, Bonn, 1964, p. 536 (doc. no. 369).

⁵² Cf. James Dugan, C. Stewart, *Ploiesti...*, p. 24 and the following; Leon Wolff, *Low Level Mission*, New York, Arno Press, 1972, p. 67 and the following.

In the history of World War II, the raid of the Allied aviation against Ploiești on August 1, 1943 (code name: Tidal Wave)⁵³ occupies a special place from many points of view: preparation, execution, participating forces (on both sides), the significance of the hit, the military, political, economic, and psychological implications. Although, if we consider the modest results that we shall refer to, the attack in 1943, just like the one in June 1942, was "of a marginal strategic value."⁵⁴ Numerous specialists, some of them participants to the Tidal Wave,⁵⁵ insisted on the operation⁵⁶ or included that episode – which some leaders of the United Nations evoked during the Inter-Allied Conference in Casablanca (January 1943)⁵⁷ – in the official histories of the conflagration from 1939-1945.⁵⁸ Not without good reason, if we consider the coordinates of the

⁵³ About the preparation of the raid, at the level of the American Military High Command.

⁵⁴ Cf. Robert Goralski, Russell W. Freeburg, *Oil and War. How the Deadly Struggle for Fuel in World War II Meant Victory or Defeat*, New York, W. Morrow and Co., p. 243.

⁵⁵ See the international best-seller *Ploiesti...* by James Dugan and C. Stewart, quoted edition, IX (cf. French translation – *Operation <<Raz de marée>> sur les pétroles de Ploiesti. 1-er Août 1943*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1963); Leroy W. Newboy, *Target Ploiesti. View from a Bombsight*, Novato (California), Presidio Press, 1983.

⁵⁶ See Leon Wolff, *Low Level Mission*, *passim*; John Sweetman, *Ploiesti Oil Strike*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1974; Horia Brestoiu, *Impact la paralela 45°*, Iași, Junimea Publishing House, 1986; Eugen Preda, *Miza petrolului în vâltoarea războiului*, Bucharest, Military Publishing House, 1983; Eugen Stănescu, Iulia Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, Ploiești, 1994; Ilie Manole, Gavriil Preda, Eugen Stănescu, eds., *Festung Ploiești*, I-II, Ploiești, Printeuro Publishing House, 2003-2004; Gavriil Preda, *Importanța strategică a petrolului românesc. 1939-1947*, Ploiești, Printeuro Publishing House, 2001; Șerban Constantinescu, *Bombardamentele anglo-americeane efectuate asupra României în al doilea război mondial*, Bucharest, 1995; Șerban-Liviu Pavelescu, *Petrolul românesc de la intenții la fapte în strategia de război a Alianților. Prima mare lovitură aeriană asupra zonei petrolifere românești – 1 august 1943*, in Institutul de Studii Operativ-Strategice și Istorie Militară, „Anuar. Studii de politică de apărare, teorie, doctrină, artă și istorie militară”, Bucharest, Vasile Cârlova Publishing House, 1996, p. 158, and the studies of Maurice Pearton, Ilie Manole, Gavriil Preda, Alesandru Dușu, Florin Constantiniu, Narcis I. Gherghina, Vasile Berheciu, Constantin Chiper, Jipa Rotaru, Gheorghe Boblea, Aurel David, Șerban Pavelescu, Ion Aramă, Aurel Pentelescu a.o.

⁵⁷ Cf. James Dugan, C. Stewart, *Ploiesti...*, pp. 35-36; Constantin Chiper, *Orașul Ploiești – obiectiv strategic al coalițiilor beligerante în cel de-al doilea război mondial*, in Ilie Manole, ed., *Societate și Armată în Europa secolului XX*, Bucharest, 1995, p. 138.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, United States Army Air Force. Office of Air Force History, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, in seven volumes, II, Chicago, 1949, pp. 477-484; III, Chicago, 1951, p. 172 and the following (for the air operations in 1944); Sir Charles

issue, presented in so many official documents and scientific works. We shall appeal to the argument found in one of the documents that was at the basis of the approval by the military authorities in Washington of the plan of operation Tidal Wave. We are referring to the synthesis *The Significance of Rumanian Oil*,⁵⁹ from which we quote the considerations inserted at & 1:

"The bombing of the capacities of production, refining, and transportation in and around Ploiești, Romania, represents an immediate disaster of the oil economy of the Axis and, consequently, of the war effort of the Axis. Romania's oil production amounts to approximately 6,000,000 tons annually. This production represents 35% of the total fuel production of the Axis (including the synthetic products and the substitutes) and 70% of the total production of crude oil.⁶⁰ Without Romania's production of 500,000 tons per month, the Nazi Europe would remain with only 900,000 tons per month to confront a total consumption that could not be smaller than 1,400,000 tons per month, when the long expected summer offensive begins. If the Romanian oil production is destroyed, Germany would be forced to resort to its reserve stocks, which would practically be exhausted in four months (for details, see Table A).⁶¹ As a consequence of this situation, if Germany was deprived of the entire Romanian oil, the petroleum position of the Axis would rapidly become so disastrous that it would seriously interfere with the continuation of the military leading of the operations at a major scale."⁶²

From what we know, we do not believe there is a more consistent recognition in other sources – except, maybe, that of Winston S. Churchill – regarding the reasons for which Ploiești gained such an overwhelming importance for both camps engaged in the conflagration of 1939-1945.

Webster, Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945*, II/4, *Endeavor*, London, HMSO, 1962, pp. 221-222; Sir Charles Webster, Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945*, III, *Victory*, London, HMSO, 1961, pp. 225-243; C.J.C. Molony and collaborators, *History of the Second World War. Military Series. The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, V, London, HMSO, 1973, pp. 220-222. Information in the dictionaries and extensive encyclopaedias dedicated to the war (cf. Thomas Parrish, S.L.A. Marshall, eds., *The Simon and the Schuster Encyclopedia of World War II*, New York, 1978, pp. 499-500, 629).

⁵⁹ National Archives of Romania, collection *Microfilme S.U.A.*, roll 653, frames 34-36.

⁶⁰ The communicated data was approximately correct. In January 1943, in Berlin, the Romanian and German representatives agreed on the Romanian oil deliveries for that year – 4 million tons to the Reich and its allies (cf. N.A.R., the Ministry of the Oil Industry fund, file 1/1942, ff. 154-159).

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, roll 653, frame 38.

⁶² *Ibidem*, frames 34-36. The Ploiești petroleum center, it was pointed out further, at & 2, was the most concentrated in the world (*Ibidem*).

For the execution of Tidal Wave, scheduled after the landing in Sicily (operation Husky, July 9, 1943), the American Air Force IX was designated, under the command of Colonel (later General) Lewis H. Brereton (1890-1967), based in North Africa, in the Benghazi area.⁶³ The training of his subordinate aviation groups took place, in a sustained rhythm, above a "false Ploiești", especially in the last ten days of the month of July 1943, all the targets being "hit" in a completely satisfactory time. Finally, Brereton was assigned 178⁶⁴ bombers of the type Liberator B-24 (on which 1 761 Americans enplaned, plus a Canadian and an Englishman),⁶⁵ divided in several groups – Liberando (group 376), in the front, Traveling Circus (group 93), Pyramiders (group 98), Eight Balls (group 44), and Sky Scorpions (group 389), – each having to hit different targets: White 5 (the refinery *Colombia Aquila*) and Blue (the refinery *Creditul Minier – Brazi*); White 2 (the refinery *Vega*, the company *Concordia*) and White 3 (the refineries *Orion*, *Speranța*, and *Standard*, *Petrol Block*); White 1 (the refinery *Romanian-American*), White 4 (the refinery *Astra Română*) and Red (the refinery *Steaua Română – Câmpina*).⁶⁶ Shortly before the mission, at the order of General Henry ("Hap") H. Arnold, the head of the U.S. Military Air Forces, General Brereton was forbidden to fly to Ploiești,⁶⁷ his place being taken by General Uzal G. Ent.⁶⁸ At the break of dawn, on August 1, 1943,⁶⁹ the flight signal was given. Despite all the precautions (the absolute secret of the mission, the interdiction of radio communication, flight at low altitude to prevent radar detection, etc), as soon as the forces for Tidal Wave took off from Benghazi with the destination Ploiești, the Germans found out immediately: a post, unknown to the Allied secret services, installed near Athens, intercepted the transmissions of Air Force IX.⁷⁰ Under these circumstances, the impressive air "Armada" was held under surveillance by the Germans in order to find out its destination (Vienna, Sofia, Athens?), and, while it was flying across the Danube, a Romanian

⁶³ Cf. James Dugan, C. Stewart, *Ploiesti...*, p. 41 and the following.

⁶⁴ Leroy W. Newby, *Target Ploiesti*, p. 1-2. A plane exploded at takeoff, another went down in the Mediterranean, and others turned back, and thus only 165 B-24 airplanes engaged in the battle.

⁶⁵ James Dugan, C. Stewart, *Ploiesti...*, p. 83-84. The list of all the American participants in the raid, in *Ibidem*, pp. 304-385, as well as that of the German and Romanian combatants (*Ibidem*, pp. 386-397).

⁶⁶ See John Sweetman, *Ploiesti: Oil Strike*, pp. 143-145; Constantin Chiper, *Orașul Ploiești – obiectiv strategic...*, p. 138. See also James Dugan, C. Stewart, L. Newby etc.

⁶⁷ James Dugan, C. Stewart, *Ploiesti...*, p. 76.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 76-77, 322.

⁶⁹ At 04:00 hours GMT (the local time in Egypt – GMT + 3, and in Romania – GMT + 2) (*Ibidem*, p. 85).

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 86-87.

watch airplane intercepted it, a new objective being suspected – Bucharest. General alarm was given. The surprise attack could no longer be accomplished. A second element occurred: two of the groups took the wrong direction at the “entrance gate” in Târgoviște, turning towards Bucharest, and only afterwards returning towards Ploiești. The attack of the American bombers against the refineries in Ploiești and Cămpina was launched around 13:45 hours (the local time), lasting 27 minutes. Some of the targets were completely missed: “the admiral aircraft” of the group Liberando (K.K. Compton, General Ent) surveyed target White I (the refinery *Romanian-American*), without hitting it. It was – as Dugan and Stewart remarked⁷¹ – the third target as far as its economic importance, but the main one from a propagandistic stand point. By “sparing” it, the Americans offered Joseph Goebbels the pretext to assert that the Americans could not hit the assets of *Standard Oil Co.*, hitting in return the British, French, or Belgian refineries. And, indeed, the Red targets (the refinery *Steaua Română* in Cămpina) and White 4 (the refinery *Astra Română*) were hit, suffering losses in a proportion of 20-30%, inferior nevertheless to *Creditul Minier* (Blue), credited with destructions in a proportion of 75%.⁷² The unpredicted elements that occurred were conjugated with an estimation error committed by the Americans before the launching of Tidal Wave: they did not properly established, or they ignored (which is not the same thing) the practical capacity and possibility of retaliation of the Romanian and German defense forces in Ploiești. Although before August 1, 1943 everybody in the Allied camp had agreed that Ploiești had become “a colossal terrestrial armored ship, armed to resist the most terrible air attack,”⁷³ this reality was not treated as a warning,⁷⁴ and hence the losses suffered by the Americans were great. They were communicated to the U.S. Congress, on August 16, 1943, by President F.D. Roosevelt: 53 airplanes destroyed, 37 seriously damaged, others landed on various Allied or neutral airports, and only 88 returned to the base, in Benghazi, of which 2/3 were also damaged.⁷⁵ The human casualties were also important: of the 1 726 Allied aviators engaged in the fight above the petroliferous area, 310 died, 130 were wounded, 108 were taken prisoners, and 79 hospitalized in Turkey.⁷⁶ Certainly, in relation to the losses they suffered, the

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 139-140.

⁷² Cf. Constantin Chiper, *Orașul Ploiești – obiectiv strategic...*, p. 138.

⁷³ James Dugan, C. Stewart, *Ploiesti...*, p. 34.

⁷⁴ See the opinion of the American Colonel Crowne, in Aurel Pentelescu, *Colonelul american Crowne în România: Apărarea a.a. – „Rezultate cu totul excepționale”*, pp. 150-152.

⁷⁵ Eugen Stănescu and collaborators, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p. 48-49; Șerban-Liviu Pavelescu, *Petrolul românesc în strategia Aliaților...*, p. 155; Jipa Rotaru, *Bombardamentul de la 1 august 1943: victorie sau înfrângere*, pp. 140-143; Constantin Chiper, *Orașul Ploiești – obiectiv strategic...*, p. 138.

⁷⁶ Eugen Stănescu and collaborators, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p. 48.

damages caused by the Americans on August 1, 1943 were not very important. The hit targets were repaired in only a few weeks after the raid.⁷⁷ The semi-failure they suffered⁷⁸ determined the Allies to suspend, in the period August 2, 1943 – April 4, 1944, the air bombings of the petroliferous area. They were resumed systematically on the afternoon of April 5, 1944, being prolonged until August 1944,⁷⁹ the following refineries being hit: *Astra Română*, *Romanian-American*, *Vega*, *Orion*, *Colombia*, *Creditul Minier*, *Standard*, *Xenia* etc.⁸⁰ After the end of operation Tidal Wave, both parties proceeded to the analysis of the events and the evaluation of the damages. On the Romanian side, a detailed report was drawn up, only a few days after the attack, by Section II of the Air General Staff, which, on August 9, 1943, was presented in an abbreviated form to the Military Cabinet of Marshal Ion Antonescu.⁸¹ Other evaluations were also done, registering: damages of 52,537 tons of oil products in stock, but 121,265 tons salvaged; hit refineries, in order, *Steaua Română*, *Creditul Minier*, *Colombia*, *Astra Română*, *Vega*, and *Orion*, for which the total value of the damages was estimated to minimum 6 billion *lei*.⁸² As for the Americans, they photographed the petroliferous area between August 2 and August 19, 1943.⁸³ A first report, drawn up by the secret service of the American army on August 21, 1943 proved excessively optimistic: it was estimated that the refineries *Steaua Română* and *Creditul Minier* had been completely destroyed, and others (*Astra Română*, *Vega*, *Romanian-American*, and *Unirea*) had been “seriously hit”. It was considered

⁷⁷ According to the official statistics, during the air raid, the Romanian side there were 120 dead and 90 wounded.

⁷⁸ We base our assertions on the admittance by President F.D. Roosevelt in the American Congress two weeks after Tidal Wave, as well as on the fact that James Dugan and C. Stewart, the authors of the most famous and appreciated work dedicated to the events of August 1, 1943, designated the day of the air raid as being the black Sunday (see *Ploiești...*, chapter 13 – Black Sunday, pp. 224 and the following.)

⁷⁹ For the respective period, 696 dead and 675 wounded were registered (table presented at the International Conference at Secu-Ploiești, May 1993). Details regarding the Allied air missions over Romania, especially Ploiești, in the secret messages from April 7, 11, 18, 21, and 25; May 2, 6, 8, 16, 18, 22, 23, 25, and 30; June 6 and 13; July 4, 11, and 25; August 9, 1944 (F.D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, *Map Room*, Box no. 136, *passim*).

⁸⁰ See the table presented at the International Conference at Secu-Ploiești (May 1993); Eugen Stănescu and collaborators, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, pp. 59-63.

⁸¹ See Alesandru Duțu, Florin Constantiniu, *Raidul american asupra Ploieștiului din 1 august 1943. Mărturie inedită*, pp. 413-424.

⁸² N.A.R., the fund of the Ministry of the Oil Industry, file 41/1943, pages 86-91 (the note from August 16, 1943).

⁸³ See report no. 9 585/August 35, 1943 drawn up by the United States' *Middle East Intelligence* (N.A.R., the collection *Microfilme S.U.A.*, roll 687, frame 114 and the following).

that, for repairs, the minimum time was six months, while half of the crude oil production of Romania had been lost for one year.⁸⁴ They came back later, specifying that a "complete interpretation" was expected after the analysis of the information processed on the basis of the stereoscopic photographs taken after the raid.⁸⁵ The first satisfactory evaluations regarding the efficacy of operation Tidal Wave were mentioned in the informative bulletins broadcast by the J.I.C., which were received by President F.D. Roosevelt.⁸⁶

In the spring of 1944, depending on the evolution of the military operations on the fronts in the Mediterranean and Europe (the Allied offensive in Italy, the landing in France, the attacks of the Red Army on the Eastern Front), the petroliferous region of Ploiești remained a primary target for the Anglo-American aviation. Many of the ultra-secret messages received by President F.D. Roosevelt, declassified only in 1973,⁸⁷ attest to what degree Valea Prahovei and the city of Ploiești remained in the center of the Allies' attention. Thus, for instance, on April 11, 1944, it was stated that the economic positions of the Third Reich in Romania were "of the utmost interest".⁸⁸ Often in the months of April and May 1944, the communication and petroliferous centers in Romania were included among the preferred objectives of the Anglo-American aviation.⁸⁹ On May 15, 1944, it was recorded that "the petroleum in Ploiești was *the most important objective in the Balkans, more important than the communications [of the Axis] or any other centers* (author's emphasis)."⁹⁰ Also, on June 6, 1944, therefore in the hours that immediately succeeded the beginning of the landing in Normandy, the Headquarters of the Allied Air Forces in Caserta reported to the War Department in Washington that they had launched a massive attack (with the participation of 704 airplanes) over the targets – the refineries in Ploiești, Brașov, Turnu Severin, Pitești, and Belgrade.⁹¹ It was very clear that the Allied air actions

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, frame 112 (G.V. Strong to William T. Stone, Office of Economic Warfare).

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, frame 116 (Charles B. Rayner, from the Office of Economic Warfare, to General V. Strong, the head of the *Joint Intelligence Committee*, August 27, 1943). Charles B. Rayner was the head of *Enemy Oil Committee*, and his final report arrived on December 13, 1943 (*Ibidem*, frame 113 and the following).

⁸⁶ F.D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, *Map Room Papers*, Container 227 (J.I.C., *Weekly Summary*, no. 30/August 4, 1943, p. 4-5).

⁸⁷ They were sent by the *War Department* and they all were all marked with the indicative Top Secret.

⁸⁸ F.D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, *Map Room*, Box no. 136.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, *passim* (the messages from April 18, 21, and 25, May 2, 8, 15, 16, 22, 23, and 30, 1944).

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

on the European theaters of war had the essential purpose of supporting the landing in the West.⁹² Only a few days later, on June 13, 1944, Washington transmitted to the Headquarters of the Allied Air Forces in the Mediterranean (A.F.H.Q.) that:

"1. The petroleum objectives remain the first priority for the bombings in the South-Eastern Europe. If all the refineries in Ploiești are rendered out of order, the attacks can be directed towards the refineries in Austria and Hungary.

2. The secondary priority – transportation – [will consist] particularly in the mining of the Danube, in order to prevent the transportation of the crude oil from Romania to refineries anywhere."⁹³

In the same sense, on July 11, 1944, the United Committee of the Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Armed Forces transmitted to A.F.H.Q.:

"The priorities for the bombing effort in South-East Europe.

1. The petroleum objectives remain first priority.

2. The profitable objectives on the Danube and the ships in transit."⁹⁴

On July 25, 1944, a categorical specification was made:

"Petroleum remains [for the Allied air bombings in the south-east of the continent] the supreme objective."⁹⁵

The situation did not change before Romania changed its direction in the world war on August 23, 1944. We extract from the message from August 9, 1944: "... Petroleum remains the absolute priority."⁹⁶

Confronted with the danger of the Allied bombings, the Romanian authorities made efforts to ensure measures of protection.⁹⁷ Field Marshal Keitel gave repeated dispositions for the limitation of the damages of the Allied bombings of the Ploiești area.⁹⁸ But, however, until the last moment of the turning of August 23, 1944, the damages registered by the oil companies did not cease from being recorded,⁹⁹ as well as the decline of the export to Germany.¹⁰⁰

⁹² *Ibidem* (Message from June 7, 1944).

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ On January 25, 1944, Mihai Antonescu discussed such measures with Carl Clodius, A. Gerstenberg, and others (N.A.R., the Presidency of the Council of Ministers fund, file 15/1944, ff. 385-411).

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, the collection *Microfilme S.U.A.*, roll 607, frame 1792894 (documents from May 25, 1944).

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, the fund of the Ministry of the Oil Industry, files 66 and 89/1944; idem, file 1/1942 (documents from 1942-1944).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, file 145/1944. Numerous documents regarding the evaluation of the damages and the countermeasures imposed by the situation are found in the Romanian

Under such circumstances, the press in the neutral countries considered unfortunate Romania's position of possessor of oil resources in time of war, and, at the same time, predicted: "The region of Ploiești – wrote the daily paper *Neue Berner Zeitung* on April 9, 1944, in the article "The Battle for Romania" – brought Romania much wealth, but also the jealousy of other countries. The Allied side considers that the losing of Ploiești would end the war in a relatively short time."¹⁰¹

Romania's turn of August 23, 1944

The events that took place in Romania in August 1944 and their consequences were analyzed by historians thoroughly and under multiple aspects (military, political-diplomatic, economic, propagandistic etc.). It is not necessary, therefore, to go into details here.¹⁰² It is sufficient to point out that, after the stabilization of the Romanian-German front against the Soviet one on the disposition Kutu-Paşcani-Târgu Frumos-Iași-Chișinău-Dubăsari-the Dniester line all the way to the Black Sea, in May 1944, both camps had under their attention mainly the defense, respectively the conquering of the fortified line Focșani-Nămoloasa-Brăila and the petroliferous area of Ploiești, both of them having at stake the preservation of their disposition or, on the contrary, the creation of propitious conditions for future actions. On August 5, 1944, when he visited Hitler for the last time, at Rastenburg, Marshal Antonescu, at the direct question of the Führer regarding the continuation of the battle until the end alongside Germany, specified categorically that an answer would imply the guarantee of

Military Archives, Pitești, fund 951 (The Military Cabinet Ion Antonescu), 1942-1944, position 26, ff. 3, 14, 19-20, 3. They are, in their majority, informative notes from the summer of the year 1944 referring to the Allied bombings from June 24 or July 2-3, 1944 (information communicated by Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu).

¹⁰¹ N.A.R., the Ministry of National Propaganda fund (the Foreign Press), file 1395, page 26. Mention should be made that, after the overthrow of Antonescu's regime, the specialized organisms in Berlin worked until January 1945 to strike the complete balance of the German-Romanian economic relations in the period March 1940-August 1944 (cf. I. Chiper, *Problema petrolului în cadrul raporturilor germano-române. 1940-1944*, paper, Mangalia, September 14-15, 1998). The issues are richly reflected in the documents discovered by I. Chiper at Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Rumänien 7/2 275, 3009 and 3266). At the same time, Carl Clodius examined the evolution of the oil prices between 1939 and 1943. Some documents contain Berlin's request's to Romania to renounce the payment in gold for the products delivered to Germany (Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Rumänien 7/3 266).

¹⁰² See considerations and the updated bibliography in Gh. Buzatu, *România și războiul mondial din 1939-1945*, Iași, 1995, *passim*; Ioan Scurtu, Gh. Buzatu, *Istoria Românilor în secolul XX*, Bucharest, Paideia Publishing House, 1998, *passim*.

the O.K.W. that the *Wehrmacht* would guarantee the existing line of the front in Romania and, also, the security of the petroliferous region.¹⁰³ In the German defense plans, indeed, Ploiești area and the transportation means for the oil derivatives were in the center of attention in the spring of 1944.¹⁰⁴ As the suspected and expected moment of the offensive of the Ukrainian 2nd and 3rd Fronts in the region Iași-Chișinău was drawing near (20 August, 1944), the German and Romanian military authorities were concerned in July-August 1944 about the security of Ploiești area.¹⁰⁵ On the other side, the Allied aviation continued its raids over the petroleum targets,¹⁰⁶ while the Soviet High Command (*Stavka*), preparing the operation against the German-Romanian forces (the "Southern Ukraine" Army Group), aimed first of all at a concentric action at Iași-Chișinău for the capturing of the German Army 6 and the concomitant development of the offensive on the direction of the line Focșani-Nămoloasa-Brăila.¹⁰⁷ The events on the front in Moldavia, after August 20, 1944, offered the opportunity and not the cause for the action of the political forces in Bucharest,¹⁰⁸ which on the afternoon of August 23, 1944, three days earlier than the established plan, carried out the coup d'état, marked first of all by the arrest of Ion and Mihai Antonescu.¹⁰⁹ From the first moment of Romania's defection, from Germany's point of view, the events in Bucharest and the Allies' offensive conditioned each other mutually. The fall of Antonescu's regime automatically led to the breaking of Romania's alliance with the Nazi Reich and its last satellites in Europe and to the enrolling of the Romanian troops in the forces of the United Nations in the final war against Germany (August 1944 – May 1945).¹¹⁰ Under the military and political-diplomatic conditions that occurred, *Stavka* established in Moscow, on August

¹⁰³ Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu, 1938-1944*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1994, p. 250.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Percy Ernst Schramm, Hrsgb., *Kriegstagebuch des Obercommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtführungsstab)*, IV/7, 1. Januar 1944-22 Mai 1945, München, Bernard und Graefe Verlag, 1982, p. 783 and the following.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 802-803.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Sir Charles Webster, Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945*, III/5, *Victory*, London, 1961, pp. 225-229.

¹⁰⁷ See P.A. Jilin and collaborators, eds., *Osvoboditelnaia missiia Sovetskikh Voorujennih sil v Evrope vo Vtoroi Mirovoi voine. Dokumenty i materialy*, Moskva, Voennoe Izdatelstvo, 1985, pp. 39-40 (doc. no. 17 – the directive from August 2, 1944 of the Soviet *Stavka*, signed by I.V. Stalin and A.I. Antonov, for the offensive of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts – Operation Iași-Chișinău).

¹⁰⁸ Gh. Buzatu, ed., *Actul de la 23 august 1944 în context internațional. Studii și documente*, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1984, *passim*.

¹⁰⁹ Idem, *România și războiul mondial din 1939-1945*, p. 155 and the following.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

1944, as a fundamental objective for the Rodion Malinovski's 2nd Ukrainian Front the occupation of the rest of Romania, with Ploiești petroliferous region in the center of attention.¹¹¹ The capturing of the petroliferous area by the Soviets spared the Western Allies from supplementary efforts: after August 23, 1944, the units of the 15th Air Force were no longer mobilized for the bombing of the oil targets in Romania.¹¹²

The preferences won by the Allies through Romania's defection from the Axis were strengthened through the disadvantages caused to Germany and its satellites. The prestigious daily paper *New York Times* had every reason to consider, a few hours after the arrest of Ion and Mihai Antonescu in the Royal Palace in Bucharest, that, "From a political and military point of view, Romania's desertion from the Axis represents a major triumph for the Allies"¹¹³. The British Premier Winston S. Churchill, caught by the events in Italy, wrote in his *Memoirs* that would gain international celebrity, that Romania's action had determined "a complete overthrow of the military situation"¹¹⁴. The great European and extra-European commands and chancelleries, the international public opinion reacted promptly after Romania's turn, admitting quasi-unanimously its major significance for the development of the hostilities at a military, political-diplomatic, economic, and propagandistic level. The bulletins published in Washington by the *Joint Intelligence Committee (J.I.C.)* stated right away that, on the war theaters in France and Romania, Germany had suffered "a series of disconcerting military overthrows."¹¹⁵ The defense German system in South-Eastern Europe had suffered a "complete disintegration."¹¹⁶ The Reich was deprived of at least 30 divisions, but no less serious was, from an economic stand point, the loss of the petroliferous region of Valea Prahovei. From this area, the Reich had covered at least 28% of its consumption of liquid fuel, after August 23, 1944 being deprived of "the most precious" source.¹¹⁷ In Washington, the *Office*

¹¹¹ Cf. P.A. Jilin and collaborators, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 55 (doc. no. 30).

¹¹² Sir Charles Webster, Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945*, III/5, p. 229.

¹¹³ See no. 31 624 from August 24, 1944, p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Winston S. Churchill, *Memoires sur la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*, VI/1, Paris, Plon, 1953, p. 86. Harold Macmillan, the future British Premier, met Churchill on August 28, 1944, at Pomigliano (Italy), being in an "excellent state of mind, due most of all to the latest news from the battlefields and the surprising events in Romania" (see *War Diaries. Politics and War in the Mediterranean. January 1943-May 1945*, London, Macmillan, 1985, p. 510).

¹¹⁵ Cf. J.I.C., *Weekly Summary*, no. 85/August 24, 1944 (F.D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, *Map Room Papers*, Container no. 233).

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 86/August 31, 1944, ff. 6-8.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, ff. 18-19.

of *Naval Intelligence (O.N.I.)* estimated in similar terms the consequences of the coup d'état in Bucharest. A synthesis of the service from September 6, 1944, considering that the importance of the Romanian oil had been "enormous" for Germany, predicted that the loss of the respective source by Berlin would constitute "a serious physical and moral blow"¹¹⁸. On this side of the Ocean, in London, the *Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee – J.I.C.*, without having in view Romania's turn of August 23, 1944, decided two days earlier to continue the bombing of South-Eastern Europe, with the special mention that "the oil objectives are still top priority"¹¹⁹. Twenty four hours later, the *J.I.C.*'s decision was identical: "the oil objectives must remain the highest priority for the air operations against South-Eastern Europe"¹²⁰. After the overthrows in Bucharest, on August 28, 1944, the *J.I.C.* elaborated the synthesis Germany's Situation in the Balkans,¹²¹ which predicted "a fundamental change in the German strategy" as a result of the last "series of military disasters" and of the "loss of the Romanian petroleum"¹²². On August 30, 1944, the *J.I.C.* drew up and handed to the British for a report entitled "The effect of Romania's capitulation on Germany's oil position",¹²³ the conclusion being one and one alone: the defection of Bucharest "immensely increased Germany's oil difficulties"¹²⁴. The issue was studied thoroughly during the meeting of September 4, 1944 of the *J.I.C.*¹²⁵ The realities were alarming for the Axis: the air bombings of all the German oil objectives on the continent, combined with Romania's defection, had reduced the enemy's liquid fuel production "to very low figures"¹²⁶. As the Romanian resources had become "inaccessible" to the Reich, the total production for the previous month had not exceeded 540,000 tons, namely 40% of the "normal" production of 1 340,000 tons per month.¹²⁷ Consequently, for the month of September 1944 – through the elimination of the Romanian resources – the oil

¹¹⁸ Cf. *The ONI Weekly*, vol. III, no. 36/September 6, 1944, p. 2785 (F.D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, *Map Room Papers*, Container 223).

¹¹⁹ Great Britain, Public Record Office, London, Kew, *Cabinet 79/79*, f. 343 [JIC (44) 367 (0)].

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 338 [COS (44) 283rd Meeting (2)].

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, ff. 140-143 [JIC (44) 379 (0) Final].

¹²² *Ibidem*, f. 142.

¹²³ *Idem*, *Cabinet 79/80*, ff. 145-147 [JIC(44) 382 (Final)].

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 147.

¹²⁵ See Gh. Buzatu, *România și războiul mondial din 1939-1945*, pp. 252-255 (doc. no. 37); Great Britain, PRO, *Cabinet 79/80*, f. 236 and the following [JIC (44) 390 (0) Final].

¹²⁶ Gh. Buzatu, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

production of the Reich was evaluated to 600,000 tons (43% of the "normal")¹²⁸. For the resistance of the Reich against the assault of the Allies on the entire European continent, "an ever more pronounced paralysis of the war machine" loomed with ever increasing certainty¹²⁹.

The atmosphere existing at the Führer's headquarters at the moment when the news arrived about the arrest of Ion Antonescu and Mihai Antonescu was described in many documents and memoirs,¹³⁰ as well as in syntheses dedicated to the war. Andreas Hillgruber investigated the catastrophe of the German troops in Romania after the blow of August 23, 1944.¹³¹ The well-known historian David Irving described the facts with accuracy.¹³² Both with the regret of losing an important ally in the person of Marshal Ion Antonescu as well as with the unpredictable military and political-diplomatic consequences, the Führer was shocked by the prospect of the lack of the Romanian oil resources.¹³³ Another famous British specialist, John Erickson, considered: "Romania's defection on August 23 changed the military defeat of Germany into a catastrophe"¹³⁴. For Leon Wolff, a historian we have mentioned previously, the loss of the refineries in Ploiești in August 1944 coincided with the moment when "the German war machine began to collapse."¹³⁵

We should ask ourselves, at the end, what did the disaster caused by Hitler's loss of the Romanian petroleum consist in? According to the data used by Andreas Hillgruber,¹³⁶ Romania's oil deliveries in the period January 1939-July 1944 to Germany, the German armies on the fronts, and the Protectorate of Czechia and Moravia amounted to 11,632,000 tons.¹³⁷ According to the reliable sources we have often used in the pages above, this quantity represented, on the whole, 1/3 of the general consumption of the Reich during the world conflagration of 1939-1945. Therefore, it was not an exaggerated quantity, nor was it insignificant! Nevertheless, it was sufficient to ensure the leading of the

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 254.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 181 and the following.

¹³¹ Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu*, p. 261 and the following.

¹³² See David Irving, *Hitler's War (1942-1945)*, London, Macmillan, 1983, pp. 692-694; *idem*, *Hitler's War*, abridged edition, New York, Avon Books, 1990, pp. 679-681.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 797.

¹³⁴ John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin. Stalin's War with Germany*, II, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, p. 360.

¹³⁵ Leon Wolff, *Low Level Mission*, p. 222.

¹³⁶ According to exclusively German sources.

¹³⁷ See Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu*, pp. 290-291 (tables 5 and 6).

operations at a continental scale, and not only that. The significance of the contribution in oil of Antonescu's Romania was best emphasized by one of the key personages in Hitler's Germany. The former Minister of the Reich's Armament, Albert Speer, in a dialog with the well known historian, Jacques de Launay in 1966, answered without reticence to the latter's question about "what was the material cause of Germany's final defeat?": "It is clear that this cause was the lack of fuel. If we consider only the aviation's necessity of gasoline, these were in 1944 approximately 175,000 tons per month and, beginning with June, we were able to ensure only less than 50,000 tons per month, and starting with August 1944, when our troops had to leave Romania, the number decreased under 20,000 tons. It was obvious that we were headed for disaster.

This was the cause of the defeat. It appeared not as a result of the strategic air bombings executed by the British and the Americans, as the production continued to increase in the oil derricks in the west, but *through the loss, after August 23, 1944, of the supply sources from Romania [...]*

Without any doubt, *that day of August 23, 1944 in Bucharest led to a decisive turn in the history of the production and economy of war, therefore in the history of the conflagration...* (author's emphasis) ¹³⁸.

Unfortunately, Romania engaged after August 23, 1944 until May 12, 1945 in the war against Germany and its last satellites, in the camp of the United Nations (the Romanian troops were "integrated" on the great units of the U.S.S.R.) and this situation did not brought any benefit. We cannot assert that Romania *won the war* next to the great allies, but *it certainly did lose the peace!* The war of 1941-1944 and petroleum represented the essential cause of this catastrophe.

¹³⁸ See Jacques de Launay, *23 august 1944: O cotitură hotărâtoare pentru sfârșitul războiului*, in "Magazin Istoric", Bucharest, no. 12 (129)/December 1977, p. 15. See also Albert Speer, *În umbra lui Hitler. Memorii*, II, Bucharest, Nemira Publishing House, 1997, pp. 37-39.