

General Rădescu's Sanctuary at the British Legation in Bucharest: the British Efforts to Secure his Life

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The British and the United States representatives played a minor role in the East European Allied policy as their Soviet ally that had occupied this part of Europe and believed the Westerners should behave in the same way with the Soviet representatives in Italy.

Under Soviet pressure and having the country occupied by the Red Army, King Michael had to accept the formation of a new Government formally presided by Petru Groza on March 6, 1945.

The former Prime-Minister General Nicolae Rădescu, fearing of being arrested by the new Government, appealed to the British¹. General Rădescu was granted sanctuary at the British Legation on March 6, 1945, the asylum being known under code name "Woodcock"². As they were members of the Allied Control Commission for Romania (ACC) and headed by the Soviets, the British had to address Soviets and also the new Romanian Government regarding this matter.

On March 7, 8,35 a.m., the Romanian Police, acting according to Groza's orders, tried to keep Rădescu isolated in his house but when they arrived, they did not find him³.

The main British officials dealing with the sanctuary were Stevenson, Le Rougetel and Marjoribanks. Air Vice Marshal Donald F. Stevenson was the head of the British Section in the ACC [informally known as the British Military Mission]; the War Office and the Foreign Office also called him during the activity in Romania by the title of "Commissioner"; his military rank was equivalent to a two star general. The British Military Mission and the Office of the British Political Representative, the latter headed by John Le Rougetel, having Marjoribanks as deputy, started their activity in Romania in the autumn of 1944. In September 1947, when the Romanian Peace Treaty came into force, the Office of the British Political Representative was formally transformed into the British Legation, although the Office was informally known as the British Legation – the name of Office was used

¹ The present study continues the author's previous study which dealt with the first days of sanctuary, see Marian-Alin Dudoi, *Acordarea azilului pentru Generalul Rădescu la Legația Britanică*. "Analele Universității din Craiova. Istorie" 17 (2010), 1, p. 233-240.

² Great Britain. Public Record Office, Foreign Office [hereafter PRO FO], 371/48541, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 521 of 12.05.1945 to Foreign Office (R. 8292; the content belonged to Stevenson).

³ *Un sfert de veac de urmărire: Documente din dosarele secrete ale Generalului Nicolae Rădescu* (ed. by Monica Grigore & Oana Ionel & Dragoș Marcu), Bucharest 2004, doc. 162-164, 292-295.

because the effects of the British Declaration of War in December 1941 would only end when a Peace Treaty with Romania came into force.

Although British solicited the protection of the Red Army during the sanctuary, Soviets refused by arguing that this was a matter of the Groza Government concern. The Romanian Government offered its assistance, but British refused as they had no intention to recognize it: despite British refusal, Romanian agents were being sent and sometimes they had conflicts with the British. Romanian agents had to escort British cars in order to arrest Rădescu if necessary by producing an accident in traffic – there were always ten Romanian Police cars and each had a team of two agents⁴. As the British continued to protest, at the end of April the Romanian protection ceased and Soviets accepted to grant a minimal protection⁵.

During the sanctuary, there was an action of the Romanian Police to kidnap Rădescu from the Mission yard, but it was prevented by the British soldiers⁶.

In the first days of sanctuary, Rădescu tried to persuade Le Rougetel to meet Vișoianu, but he was refused as a consequence of the fact that the British did not accept “for him to carry on any political activities of any kind, nor to receive or send messages.”⁷ Rădescu still insisted to see Vișoianu in order to secure his personal belongings found in his private house, occupied by Soviets at that time. Concerning this last matter, Le Rougetel promised that a message should be sent by Marjoribanks to Vișoianu and if the latter could do nothing, Rădescu had to be notified⁸. Rădescu considered his downfall as the effect of the announcement on February 19 to hold municipal elections in March, which have been lost by the highly unpopular Communists. A more plausible reason for installing the Soviets’ puppet Government in the rear of Red Army was Stalin’s desire to set up Soviet rule before Germany and Japan capitulations by preventing the discharging of all democratic energies the aftermath of the war. Subsequently, Vyshinski had informed King Michael at the end of February that a NDF Government had been a matter of prestige for Stalin and, in case King Michael had refused, Romania would have risked to lose its independence⁹.

The Romanian press, with few unimportant exceptions, avoided the subject of Rădescu’s sanctuary. Still, Vasile Stoica, Secretary General of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, offered the following formal reaction on behalf of Tătărescu: “The Romanian Government have noted the communication of the British Political Representative informing that General Rădescu had asked for sanctuary at the British Mission. The Government cannot conceal their surprise at this entirely unjustified action. General Rădescu had been neither molested nor interfered with in

⁴ *Ibidem*, doc. 171, 302-303.

⁵ See details in M. A. Dudoi, *Atitudinea britanică referitoare la supravegherea Misunii de la București (martie-aprilie 1945)*, in *România în relațiile internaționale: Diplomatie, minorități, istorie. In onorăm Ion Calafăteanu*, Târgoviște 2010, p. 207-213.

⁶ <http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/RomanianStudiesUK.pdf> (Dennis Deletant, *Romanian Studies in the UK*, lecture at the British Library on October 12, 2005).

⁷ PRO FO, 371/48538. Copy of Stevenson’s RAC dispatch no. 621/165 of 10.03.1945 to War Office.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Idem*, 371/48539, Le Rougetel’s dispatch no. 297 of 16.03.1945 to Foreign Office.

any way. Had this been so Roumanian authorities would have afforded full protection to him as they would to any Roumanian citizen within the frame of the existing laws. No threat is directed against the former President of the Council. The Romanian Government deplore that General Rădescu should by this very act have engendered a state of nervousness and unrest harmful to public order."¹⁰

The British forbade the United States correspondents, who participated at the celebrations held in Cluj concerning Transylvania returning to Romania, to have an interview with General¹¹.

British representatives had to take severe measure to protect the former Prime-Minister as the Groza Government was planning to support mass demonstrations outside the British Mission for intimidation purposes¹².

When discussing the matter with Stevenson, Colonel General Ivan Zaharovitch Susaïkov, ACC Deputy Chairman, considered the sanctuary as falling under the scope of the British-Romanian relations. Stevenson still reminded to Susaïkov that even Lenin was given harbour in Great Britain¹³.

In a hope to diminish Romanian surveillance of the British Mission, the Foreign Office suspended a draft dispatch to Molotov in which Great Britain was requiring military protection for the Bucharest Mission and the withdrawal of accusations of fascism against Rădescu, previously published in Moscow press¹⁴.

Shortly afterwards, the British Prime-Minister sought to recommend the Foreign Office to accept the Romanian Government promise, in writing only, that Rădescu would not be molested¹⁵. Churchill's judgment took into consideration the pressure upon the members of British Mission in Bucharest. Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary, agreed with the proposal¹⁶.

The Foreign Office decided to support the General's right in obtaining Soviet assurances to secure his freedom¹⁷. When Clark Kerr inquired on the Soviets' attitude, Molotov and Vyshinski refused to give any advice. The British finally decided to approach the Romanian Government for writing assurance in case that Rădescu would be free¹⁸. When meeting Tătărescu on April 13, Le Rougetel was secretly told about the Soviet control in Romanian affairs¹⁹.

¹⁰ Idem, 371/48550, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 266 of 13.06.1945 to Foreign Office.

¹¹ Idem, 371/48551, Copy of Stevenson's RAC dispatch no. 693.165 of 16.03.1945 to War Office. Ibidem, War Office dispatch no. 77.320 of 17.03.1945 to Stevenson.

¹² Idem, 371/48550, Copy of Stevenson's RAC dispatch no. 628.165 of 10.03.1945 to War Office.

¹³ Idem, 371/48551, Copy of Stevenson's RAC dispatch no. 709.125 of 18.03.1945 to War Office.

¹⁴ Ibidem, D.L. Stewart's draft of 20.03.1945.

¹⁵ Idem, 371/48539, Churchill's Personal Minute no. M. 205.5 of 18.03.1945 to Eden.

¹⁶ Ibidem, Eden's Personal Minute no. 45.128 of 23.03.1945 to Churchill.

¹⁷ Idem, 371/48552, Foreign Office dispatch no. 1610 of 2.04.1945 to Archibald Clark Kerr, British Ambassador in Moscow.

¹⁸ Idem, 371/48539, Clark Kerr's dispatch no. 1091 of 3.04.1945 to Foreign Office. Ibidem, Foreign Office dispatch no. 435 of 5.04.1945 to Le Rougetel. Ibidem, Copy of Dominion Office dispatch no. 569 of 7.04.1945 to the Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

¹⁹ Idem, 371/48540, Le Rougetel's dispatches nos. 420 and 426 of 13 and 14.04.1945 to Foreign Office.

On April 17, Tătărescu offered an official letter to Le Rougetel that the General would not be molested, but the Romanian Foreign Minister offered no guarantee if Rădescu was subject to a trial²⁰. Tătărescu would offer only formal assurances and the fact that the Romanian Government would protect Rădescu of any attempts on his life²¹. At the ACC meeting on the same day, Brigadier Edward Greer, acting on behalf of Stevenson, who was in Great Britain, proposed official assurances should be offered also by the Soviet High Command in Romania, the same assurances offered in the previous month in the case of Maniu, as required by Brigadier General Schuyler, Head of the United States Military Mission in Romania²². Lieutenant General Vladislav Petrovitch Vinogradov, ACC Chief of Staff, inquired whether the British were insisting for the official letter and Greer replied positively arguing that the Soviets previously declared they were responsible for maintaining the order and specified the need for written assurances before Rădescu left the sanctuary²³. Vinogradov agreed that a letter should be provided²⁴.

On April 20, Winston Churchill decided to accept the removal of sanctuary based upon Tătărescu's assurances only, but Le Rougetel and Greer disagreed and decided to postpone the event until they received Vinogradov's letter²⁵.

Two days later, Le Rougetel informed that General Rădescu accepted to leave the Legation in connection with Tătărescu's written assurance, but he hoped to be granted a safe conduct for leaving Romania²⁶. Le Rougetel persuaded him to apply an extra permit only after he would leave Legation, promised support for the extra permit and Rădescu agreed; also Burton Berry, United States Representative in Romania, promised he should write a letter to Soviets to support British proposal for a safe conduct²⁷. The same day undoubtedly to intimidate the British, as a Romanian demonstration outside Mission for supporting the rights of Jews in Palestine shouted also "surrender the guilty", Le Rougetel changed his mind and proposed Foreign Office that safe conduct should be granted to Rădescu before leaving Legation²⁸. In London, D. L. Stewart of Foreign Office agreed with Le Rougetel's last view,

²⁰ Idem, 371/48553, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 436 of 17.04.1945 to Foreign Office. Ibidem, Action Notes on a Meeting between Acting Commissioner and Lt. Gen. Vinogradov on 17.04.1945. Idem, 371/48541, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 442 of 17.04.1945 to Foreign Office (the content represented Tătărescu's letter addressed to Le Rougetel). Romanian National Archives, Folder CC of PCR, Foreign Affairs, ds. 1/1945, Copy of Tătărescu's undated note addressed to Le Rougetel.

²¹ PRO FO, 371/48541, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 442 of 17.04.1945 to Foreign Office. Romanian National Archives, Folder CC of PCR, Foreign Affairs, ds. 1/1945, Copy of Tătărescu's undated note addressed to Le Rougetel.

²² PRO FO, 371/48553, Action Notes on a Meeting between Acting Commissioner and Lt. Gen. Vinogradov on 17.04.1945.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem, Sargent's Minute to Churchill (P.M. 05/45/35) of 26.04.1945.

²⁶ Ibidem, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 459 of 22.04.1945 to Foreign Office.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem.

considered the British did as much as they can in the matter of Rădescu's sanctuary and opposed the idea of Rădescu's immigration in a British territory²⁹.

When Greer approached Vinogradov for the expected letter, the Soviet General clearly refused to provide it because he considered it unnecessary, motivated that the letter would in no way influence the people to molest Rădescu and took into consideration the Romanian Government's determination to stop any incident³⁰. When inquiring for the extra permit, Vinogradov considered it as a British-Romanian matter³¹. On March 6, even Susaikov, in a written dispatch, had announced Stevenson that the security in Romania was under the rule of ACC; this provided the necessary argument for the British request³². As the Soviet had imposed the puppet Government, they have switched over with to Romanian Government and played publicly the card of respecting Romanian sovereignty and its representative, the Groza Government.

Greer and Le Rougetel were not satisfied by the Soviet unwritten assurances and feared Rădescu would be charged under the new purge legislation³³. In London, Sir Orme Sargent, Assistant Under-Secretary of Foreign Office, disagreed with these views and proposed to Churchill, considering the British had done as much as they could, that sanctuary removal should take place immediately³⁴. Sargent supported Rădescu's application for an exit permit made after he would leave British Mission but opposed any British maintenance or the General's immigration into a British territory³⁵.

Finally, the British accepted only the Romanian Government assurances; their argument was given since "we clearly cannot keep him indefinitely, he will leave the Legation without delay"³⁶. British decided Rădescu will not receive any financial or any kind of support from them and they could not protest to a further trial of the General in the Romanian Courts as he was granted sanctuary only to prevent his assassination³⁷.

The end of sanctuary came on May 7, 1945, when Le Rougetel informed the Romanian Government and Stevenson made a similar communication to ACC on this matter³⁸.

²⁹ Ibidem, D.L. Stewart's note of 23.04.1945 on the report "Roumania: General Rădescu".

³⁰ Ibidem, Copy of Greer's RAC dispatch no. 1118/429 of 24.04.1945 to War Office.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² *România și armistițiul cu Națiunile Unite* (ed. by Marin Radu Mocanu), Bucharest 1995, Susaikov's dispatch of 6.03.1945 to Stevenson, p. 256-257.

³³ PRO FO, 371/48553, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 469 of 24.04.1945 to Foreign Office. Ibidem, Sargent's Minute to Churchill (P.M. 05/45/35) of 26.04.1945.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem, Copy of the Outward Telegram no. 762 of 6.05.1945 sent by Dominion Office to the Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Idem, 371/48554, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 505 of 7.05.1945 to Foreign Office. Ibidem, Foreign Office dispatch no. 60 of 12.05.1945 to British Embassy in Angora (Turkey). Ibidem, Copy of Dominion Office dispatch no. 815 of 12.05.1945 to the Governments of Canada, Australia,

Before leaving sanctuary, Rădescu thanked British Government for "the protection he had received at the critical moment when his Government fell. He fell this act by His Majesty's Government had saved his life on that occasion."³⁹ The NKVD cars placed in the vicinity of British Mission were withdrawn.

In the night of May 31-June 1, 20 civilians, thought to have represented Police, visited the house where the General was living in order to investigate the papers of a businessman who were sharing the house with Rădescu. The policeman on duty informed Tătărescu and a Police inspector soon arrived and they began to search the house, but no attempt was made to enter Rădescu's room. Șerbănescu, Rădescu's nephew-in-law, feared the action was made to intimidate his uncle because the businessman had no political activities and he was not in Bucharest⁴⁰.

In London, there were people who thought about the former Prime Minister's safety upon leaving the Legation, as the British honour should have not been affected. Mr. Martin, MP, inquired the Foreign Office in the House of Commons about the situation of Rădescu. On 13th June, the reply was given by Richard Law, Minister of Education, on behalf of Eden and consisted in the fact that General had left British Mission on May 7 as Romanian Government offered assurances in taking steps to protect him⁴¹.

Alerted by Rădescu's friends, British and United States officials manifested concern about the General's fate. On September 19, the American colonel Tucker tried to visit Rădescu, but the policeman on duty refused to let him enter. Fortunately, Rădescu heard and came outside telling he had been isolated, his physician could not consult him and his nephew and his wife were obliged to leave the house in order to be totally isolated. The same day, Stevenson, supported by his American counterpart Brigadier General Schuyler, complained to Soviet General Vinogradov in the matter of the house arrest. Vinogradov promised only to continue protection⁴².

To be recognized by British and United States Governments, Groza Government obliged to increase the degree of freedom. In this context on February 4, 1946, the house isolation was lifted⁴³. Fearing the arrest, Rădescu left Romania secretly by plane on June 15, 1946 and became one of the most important leaders of Romanian émigrés (until his death on May 16, 1953, in New York)⁴⁴.

New Zealand and South Africa and repeated as Dominion Office dispatch no. 615 of 12.05.1945 to United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations in San Francisco.

³⁹ Ibidem, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 512 of 11.05.1945 to Foreign Office (the text repeated Stevenson's RAC dispatch no. 1241 to War Office).

⁴⁰ Ibidem, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 591 of 1.06.1945 to Foreign Office. Ibidem, Le Rougetel's dispatch no. 608 of 6.06.1945 to Foreign Office.

⁴¹ Ibidem, Foreign Office dispatch no. 695 of 18.06.1945 to Le Rougetel.

⁴² Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Schuyler, *Misiune dificilă. Jurnal (28 ianuarie 1945-20 septembrie 1946)* (ed. by Alexandru Oșca & Mircea Chirițoiu). Bucharest 1997, p. 210-211. Romanian National Archives, USA Microfilm Collection, reel 667, Schuyler's dispatch no 715 of 21.09.1945 to U.S. Secretary of State.

⁴³ *Un sfert de veac de urmărire*, doc. 190, 327.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, doc. 213, 355.

General Rădescu's Sanctuary at the British Legation in Bucharest: the British Efforts to Secure his Life

(abstract)

The imposition of the Groza Government on March 6, 1945 in Romania occupied by Red Army determined the former Prime Minister General Nicolae Rădescu, accused by Romanian Communists and Soviets of "Fascism", to seek asylum at the British Legation in Bucharest. While granting sanctuary, the British also approached Romanian and Soviet Governments to secure General's life when leaving asylum.

Romanian Government offered only general assurances but Soviets refused to take part in this matter. Despite no Romanian formal assurances were issued in order not to be trialled, British determined Rădescu to leave Legation on May 7 to contribute to the Allies' unity before the Victory Day celebration.

As British honour was engaged, Romanian Government did not start prosecuting him and kept him under house arrest in order to prevent him from engaging in any political activity. On February 4, 1946, the isolation ceased but Rădescu, fearing of being arrested, left secretly Romania by plane on June 15, 1946.