

Iuliu Maniu's Unsuccessful Plan to Secure Democracy in Romania in the Autumn of 1944

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Keywords: *Iuliu Maniu; Nicolae Caranfil; Winston Churchill; Democracy; Wickham Steed*

The documents reveal how the leader of the National Peasant Party, Iuliu Maniu, approached the British envoys at Bucharest in order to support the return to a democratic régime in Romania. The support of Western strongest democracies was essential as the Soviet interferences in Romanian politics increased.

In the international context of the end of 1944, Maniu also feared that Hungary was going to choose a communist régime and Romania was going to lose the Northern Transylvania in Hungary's favour and shortly afterwards Romania was going to be communized or annexed to the Soviet Union¹.

The "Political Directive" for the British Mission recommended that her representatives should not communicate to Romanian politicians, as the Allied Control Commission on Romania, controlled by Soviets with American and British members, should interfere with the Romanian Government².

If Western democracies were prepared to stand against the Soviet Union, Maniu informed the British he would go to London to fully explain his plan, while Gr. Niculescu-Buzești and Ion Mihalache to Moscow. Maniu was also ready to assume premiership for the first time ever in a multi-party Government, as National Peasant leader convinced the Social-Democrats and Ploughmen's Front to support him. His Government would increase Romanians' belief in the independence of their country, the necessary condition for freedom and economic development³.

Maniu used Nicolae Caranfil as intermediary and after the latter's visit at the Foreign Office displeased British diplomats, Henry Wickham Steed, Maniu's old acquaintance, inquired the Foreign Office what kind of advice may be given to the Romanians as he could only think they had to look for compromises with the Soviets; Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign

¹ Public Record Office, Foreign Office (hereafter, PRO FO) 371/44054, Stevenson's Telegram of November 2, 1944 to War Office about the conversation with Georgescu, microfiches 5-8; see Appendix no. 3.

² I. Agrigoroaiei *et alii*, *Români în istoria universală*, III₃: *Izvoare străine pentru studiul istoriei românilor* (ed. by Ștefan S. Gorovei), Iași, 1988, p. 374-375; V. Fl. Dobrinescu *et alii*, *Relații militare româno-engleze (1918-1947)*, Pitești 1998, p. 202-203.

³ PRO FO 371/44054, mf. 5-8; see Appendix no. 3.

Affairs, fully agreed with Wickham Steed in a letter⁴. Several weeks after the Churchill-Stalin's "Percentage Agreement" of October 9, 1944, more pressure was exerted from London in order that British envoys should avoid Romanians⁵.

Maniu hoped to apply his plan until late November, when John Le Rougetel refused again to have a conversation with him and Burton Berry, State Department Representative, assured that Romania would remain an independent and sovereign state⁶.

On December 14, Radio Brazzaville, Free France's radio, broadcast almost correctly the content of what is known as the "Percentage Agreement" (Dalmatia remained in the Western world, while nothing was broadcast about Hungary), naming Churchill and Stalin as its authors, and it became clear for Maniu and his followers that Romania was heading towards Communism⁷.

Some difficulties in understanding when reading are due to the telegraphic speech or the missing words when telegrams were decrypted.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 371/44010, Maniu's Undated Letter to Wickham Steed, mf. 159. Id. 371/44011, Wickham Steed's Letter on October 23 1944 to Cadogan, mf. 113-114 and Cadogan's Letter of October 23, 1944 to Wickham Steed, mf. 116; see Appendix no. 2.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 371/44012, Sargent's Note of November 6, 1944, mf. 12.

⁶ Burton Berry, *Romanian Diaries, 1944-1947* (ed. by Cornelia Bodea), Iași 2000, p. 43-45.

⁷ PRO FO, 371/44014, Le Rougetel no. 305 of December 18, 1944 to Foreign Office, mf. 65.

Appendices:

1. Stevenson's⁸ Telegram of October 9, 1944 to War Office about the Conversation with Maniu

MOST SECRET

R.6242

CIPHER TELEGRAM 260463

This message will not be distributed outside British Government Departments or Headquarters or re-transmitted, even in cipher, without being paraphrased.

(Messages marked OTP need not be paraphrased)

ONE TIME PAD

From: British Mission, Roumania.

To: War Office

Recd. 0151 10 Oct. 44

MOST IMMEDIATE

RC. 34 cipher 9 October. TOP SECRET

From Air Vice Marshal. Following in precis conversation. Original follows, by bag.

In a private conversation which lasted some 6 hours Monsieur Maniu after warm compliments to Great Britain and Mr. Churchill to which I replied suitably expressed great pleasure at arrival British Mission and said that its stabilizing influence had already been felt. On behalf of H.M. Government I thanked him for his steadfast belief ever so (? long) and anxious a period that Gt. Britain with her allies would win the war and for courage and determination he had displayed during this time. I congratulated him on (? careful) part he had played in recent coup d'état which had been so valuable (? help) toward defeat of Germany. I found him a most dignified person and despite his age of some 72 years full of courage, common sense, with an active (? word omitted) and had been convinced allies would win and had tried to bring Roumania on to our side because we were fighting for democracy and because we were responsible for creating Greater Roumania. Hitler had sent Count Royan to try to change Maniu's views without success. Maniu informed Counsellor German Legation 1942 he could not (repeat not) accept as friend a people who elected a reactionary dictator. Two years later (a few months ago) Counsellor asked Maniu's advice on best action to be taken now. Maniu made a suggestion which was telegraphed to Wilhelmstrasse that Hitler should capitulate immediately while he still had land left with which to bargain for preservation of Germany itself.

Maniu expressed fear for Armistice terms and stated owing to destruction by Russia, Roumania would have insufficient grain next year. Moreover he considered if all but 12 divisions, repeat 12 divisions, of her army were disarmed,

⁸ Air Vice Marshal Donald F. Stevenson was the Head of the British Section in the Allied Control Commission on Romania.

Roumania could not (repeat not) defend herself on other fronts. I reassured him. Maniu was of the opinion that Russia had too free hand in Europe in Eastern Europe and, that England having abandoned Balkans, the Roumanians would have to prepare for new orientation towards the East. I reminded Maniu that sizes of British forces fighting in South-East Europe and elsewhere and that a Balkan Air Force already existed and that a force of moderate size was already fighting in Balkans. Maniu surmised that if Great Britain did NOT (repeat NOT) take Balkans more seriously, her interests would suffer. Great Britain must maintain her influence in Balkans by diplomatic means or by presence of powerful fleet in the Mediterranean. She must revise her diplomatic and political work. Great Britain could not (repeat not) allow deep penetration of communism into Balkans. I reminded him that there was NO (repeat NO) concrete evidence that Russia intended to Sovietise Roumania. I explained the influence of air power in modern power. I stated H.M. Govt was watching carefully Balkan policy, economics and strategy which were of great interest to us. Maniu said Russians were tending to produce conditions most favourable to Bolshevism. An important Roumanian communist personality had told him that if Roumania were to enjoy the good will of Russia, she must no (repeat no) longer be inspired by British policy. If such assurances were given, the Armistice terms would be applied more leniently. If not (repeat not), Russia would continue to destroy Roumanians' economic life, Bolshevism would thrive and both Roumania and Great Britain would suffer. Maniu was of opinion Great Britain and America must decide if they are to give Russia access to the sea. If not (repeat not), in Mediterranean Allies must control Balkans and find Roumania most suitable pivotal country. England and America must ensure Armistice terms are not (repeat not) applied so as to pauperise Roumania. I reassured him. They should also use their air forces to greater extent in Balkans in order to assist in destroying German and Hungarian forces in this part of Europe.

T.O.O. Nil

Note by C.6. Tels

Message delayed owing to mutilation.

(The Microfiches of Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office (hereafter, PRO FO), 371/44010, microfiches 64-65; Central National Historical Archives of Romania, Bucharest, Anglia [England] 1940-1945 Microfiche Collection (hereafter, CNHAR, BMC), Envelope No. 28)

2. Wickham Steed's Letter of 17.10.1944 to Cadogan

PERSONAL

7, LANSDOWNE HOUSE
LANSDOWNE HOUSE, W. 11
17th October, 1944.

Dear Sir Alexander Cadogan,

Pray forgive me if I make poor acknowledgment of your kind letter by writing you another on a very different subject.

I have today received from Dr. Maniu, the Romanian Peasant leader who is now a principal member of the Provisional Romanian Government, a letter in which he asks me to pay special attention to what its bearer will tell me about the present Romanian situation. The bearer was able to leave Roumania in a technical capacity some days ago and for various reasons cannot appear to be acting politically. He is a man of considerable standing, who before the Antonescu dictatorship, held office in more than a Roumanian cabinet.

I have known Maniu since 1907, and he has frequently found means to communicate with me since the war began. The bearer of his letter describes the situation as having been rendered almost desperate by the behaviour of various Communist parties and agencies under Russian direct control. Though all the opposition to the Antonescu régime was directed by Maniu and his friends, working in conjunction with Brătianu and the Liberals, they are being opposed and handicapped in every way by Communist manoeuvres, and feel themselves to be at the end of their tether. Strong propaganda is also being directed against King Michael and the Monarchy, apparently with the object of establishing some kind of Republican régime.

Maniu and his friends are handicapped by their inveterate habit of looking to this country for help and support and of not cultivating any relations with Russia. You may or may not know that for some 18 months before the Roumanian change of front, I broadcast weekly in French to Roumania and always warned them not to imagine that they could play England or United States off against Russia, and urged them to seek a direct understanding with the Russians. The bearer of Maniu's letter recognises this but says that through other British channels they were encouraged to rely upon British help.⁹ However this may be they find themselves now more distrusted by the Russians than are even former supporters of the Antonescu régime; and they feel that unless people in Moscow can in some way be induced to mitigate the present Russian policy of

⁹ Major Edward ("Eddie") George Boxshall, Special Operations Executive, former employee of the British companies operating in Interwar Romania and former son-in-law of Prince Barbu Știrbei.

direct interferences in Roumanian internal affairs, Maniu, Brătianu and the King will have to throw up the sponge and let things take what could hardly fall to be a catastrophic course.

In these circumstances Maniu had appealed to me for advice. The only advice I felt qualified to give was that he and Brătianu should not throw up the sponge but should do all they can to hold on and to give some support to King Michael.

I gather that some part of the detailed information on the position which has been given me today will already have been communicated to the Foreign Office. But as I know the situation in Roumania fairly well, and may have had some responsibility for hastening the change of front, I feel that I ought to tell you the gist of what I have been told in order that you may decide whether anything useful can possibly be done while the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are still at Moscow. I cannot say more, but in view of what I have heard I think I ought not to say less.

Pray forgive this intrusion, and believe me,

Very sincerely yours,

Wickham Steed (signed)

The Rt. Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, K.C.B.

(PRO FO 371/44011, mf. 113-114; CNHAR, BMC, Envelope No. 29)

3. Stevenson's Telegram of November 2, 1944 to War Office about the Conversation with Georgescu

From: British Military Mission Bucharest

To: War Office

Recd. 2245 2 Nov 44.

Rptd. SACMED for Resident Minister

Caserta.

EMERGENCY

RAC 185/112 cipher 2 Nov.

TOP SECRET

From Air Vice Marshal Stevenson

On 25th October I had message from Mr. Maniu asking me most urgently to see him. In view critical state in government quite apart my desire not to affect my position with Russians, I sent a message expressing regret and saying that proper channel of communication would be through Mr. Le Rougetel and invited him to get into touch. On 27th request was again made and I replied in similar terms. Last night I get secret and personal letter Mr Maniu to say it was critical for him express views and to ask advice. I therefore made suitable arrangements to meet Mr. Georgescu who is as much in his confidence as anybody. Message was as follows:

1st. After reflection he thought I was right to refuse meet him as will be clear from this telegram.

2nd. Mr Georgescu explained that while Mr Maniu knew Mr Le Rougetel proper channel, he still felt he would like to deal with me.

3rd. Mr Maniu has heard that an attempt is immediately to be made on his life as a result of meeting of National Peasant Party on Monday 23 October. After reflection he felt meeting was a mistake merely because it showed great strength his party.

He felt Russia also Russia had taken umbrage at some points in his speech. His personal guard is accordingly strengthened.

4th. He had good and reliable evidence Russia intends annex Roumania. Georgescu and Maniu never divulge source or details of important information but events now proved his information to be sound.

5th. Russian treatment Hungary in present conflict is good and much better than Roumanians had at hands Russia when she entered this country. He learns from reliable sources Hungary is prepared to go over 100% to Communism after conquest and Russia in return will support case for large portion Transylvania being returned to Hungary after war.

6th. If Hungary goes "Red", Roumania will stand little chance of avoiding annexation politically and physically.

7th. He therefore sent following message. If it intention of England (repeat England) that Roumania should pass over lock stock and barrel to Soviet Union, he was anxious to lead way to prepare country and to take it over to Communism and (? thus) the Soviet Union because if such event were left in hands of Communist Party, in Roumania blood will (? be) shed, exploitation and unhappiness could only result. On other hand if it were not intention England, he was prepared to fight Communism.

8th. He therefore suggested he should be flown at once for conversations and suggested M. Buzesti and M. Mihalache should go to Moscow.

9th. I assured him that the intention that he anticipated was certainly not in the mind of HM Govt and from Mr Churchill's speech in the House, a copy of which he must have read, it seemed that was not in the mind of Moscow either. Consequently I could see little advantage in proposed visit to London.

10th. I was inform that oject of the Buzești's visit to Moscow was to explain Marshal Stalin personally aim of the National Peasant Party. I explained that these aims had been made clear during last fortnight not only in Mr. Maniu's inspired speech but in the speeches of other leading members of the Party and that I felt therefore Moscow were well in the picture. I wondered whether such visit was worthwhile and in any case if suggestions were made, it was quite possible Moscow would refuse. Mr. Buzești also (? giving) earliest consent to have elections and to explain policy of cooperation.

11th. If it was aim that country should be governed by majority and should not (repeat not) by political coup de main (repeat political coup de main) (? in order to) become part of Soviet Union, Mr. Maniu was now prepared for the first time his career to take over premiership and to form government (National Peasant, National Liberal, Social Democate) and he sent message he had already drawn Social Democate and Ploughmen's Front away from Communist Party and had an assurance from M. Petrescu and M. Groza that in this event he would have their support. This would leave your (? their) position here practically isolated. I was asked for my advice. I replied present internal situation in Roumania was becoming intolerable that to give Roumania the best chance it was essential no time should be last in Roumania setting her house in order and strong government with a firm hand was best solution and that once in power determined effort must be made to pull administration together and to get country down and discharging its commitments under terms of treaty of agreement.

The suggested visits to London and Moscow were not again (? made) but as Mr. Maniu is least certain to raise matter again, I would be grateful for urgent instructions.

Please pass to Foreign Office.

TCC 1625 B

(PRO FO 371/44054, mf. 5-8; CNHAR, BMC, Envelope No. 72)