

OCCASIONAL PAPERS IN ROMANIAN STUDIES

No. 1, 1995

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IN ROMANIAN STUDIES

No. 1

edited by

DENNIS DELETANT

School of Slavonic and East European Studies
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Occasional Papers in
Romanian Studies

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DENNIS DELETANT (editor)

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Introduction

The papers in this volume are the fruits of the Third Romanian Studies Day, held at SSEES in January 1995. The impulse for this one-day conference was the fiftieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference and the lessons for Romania. Among the topics discussed are the hopes entertained from Yalta, especially after Romania's *volte face* of August 1944, the misconceptions arising from the percentage agreement of October 1944 between Stalin and Churchill, and British attitudes towards Romania in the period 1944 to 1947.

Yalta became shorthand for the post-war division of Europe which suddenly disappeared in the passage of a year, from autumn 1989 to autumn 1990. Peter Siani-Davies offers us the first detailed account in English of the events in Timișoara, which sparked off the downfall of Europe's worst dictator and brought an end to that post-war division even closer. It is fashionable to consider that the end of the Cold War consigned Yalta to history. Yet questions still arise from Yalta which are valid today. Will there continue to be circumstances in which the major powers are unable or unwilling to prevent the imposition of dictatorship, the expulsion of ethnic minorities, and the disintegration of states? At Yalta the three governments committed themselves to help 'liberated peoples' achieve 'democratic self-government'. Is there a danger today of these powers underwriting 'undemocratic' settlements in the name of uneasy alliances? This is a concern that lies behind Elena Zamfirescu's paper when she suggests that the division of the former Soviet satellite states of Europe into Central and East European (or Balkan) states leads one to think about 'a possible resumption of the policy of "spheres of influence"'. Charles King, by taking the example of the Moldovans, demonstrates just how politically charged linguistic labels are in the post-Communist period where the effort to construct new national identities is a feature of political life in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

What most of these papers share is their destruction of a myth. Ivor Porter, a member of a three-man British team parachuted into Romania in December 1943 to make direct contact with pro-Allied Romanians, describes with the self-effacement typical of a truly courageous figure, and with a dry sense of humour, how sensitive King Michael was to the exigencies of *Realpolitik*. This is a picture quite removed from that of a powerless, timid youth presented in Communist historiography. Dennis Deletant demolishes the myth of the sole Communist authorship of the

23 August *coup* by highlighting the role of the King and of the opposition parties. Maurice Pearton challenges the popular image of the percentage agreement of two old men carving up Europe like a cake. He shows that the truth is far more complex, as indeed is the case with British–Romanian relations in the immediate post-war years. Mark Percival reveals that the opposition parties wanted general parliamentary elections put off as long as possible in the hope that Soviet troops would be withdrawn in the meantime! How far Elena Zamfirescu succeeds in destroying the ‘myth’ that Romania is an East European country is for the reader to decide. To argue that Moldovan identity is a myth is to presume that there is agreement as to what Moldovan really means. Charles King provides an admirable discussion of the radically different conceptions of ‘Moldovanness’ held by political groupings in the republic.

Without the organizational abilities of Radojka Miljević and Mark Percival, the contributors to the Studies Day would not have been assembled. This volume is testimony to the efforts of both organizers and contributors alike.

Dennis Deletant
July 1995

‘The Coup of 23 August 1944:
Personal Recollections of an SOE Mission’

IVOR PORTER

At the end of December, 1943, I went into Romania on an SOE mission to Juliu Maniu with Colonel de Chastelain and Captain Metianu. We were arrested and spent the first eight months at the Gendarmerie Headquarters in Bucharest. We were released on the 23rd of August. By the end of the year I had left SOE and returned to a more regular life on the staff of the British Political Adviser; and the small Romanian Communist Party was beginning, under Moscow’s critical eye, to flex its muscles.

In this piece I should like to say something about our rather odd relationship with the Antonescu authorities while in prison and about the coup, itself. My memory is, of course, bolstered by hindsight and a better understanding now of what was happening then than I had at the time. We were ignorant, for instance, of the Teheran conclusions and still half hoped for an Allied landing in the Balkans. We understood the vital contribution the Red Army was making by 1944 to victory over Hitler but failed to translate this into a requirement to satisfy all Stalin’s ambitions in Romania. We, therefore, saw contradictions in our policy which we should not have seen. We exhorted Romania to carry out a volte-face against Germany as a means, in Churchill’s words, of ‘working her passage home’. But we knew that for people like Maniu ‘home’ meant some type of Western democracy, not the unconditional surrender to the Soviet Union we were insisting should follow the coup. We had not realized that by 1944 expediency had become a necessary and, therefore, justified rule in our war councils, the Atlantic Charter a bit of an embarrassment, Maniu’s reminders of our 1940 war objectives an irritant. Queen Helen once noted in her diary ‘News from the Allies confirms ... that this country does not interest them except as an enemy’. There was truth in this that for us was difficult to accept. For Maniu it was impossible.

When SOE learned that Maniu was sending out an emissary to meet Allied representatives, our mission was despatched to prepare him for the shock of having to deal — not with Britain — but, in effect, exclusively with the Soviet Union. When, in October 1943, the Moscow meeting of Foreign Ministers had removed the little room for political manoeuvre left

to Britain in Romania, de Chastelain questioned the point of our mission at all. But London insisted. Chas, they thought, might persuade Maniu, an old friend, to accept the inevitable. Whether or not they were right, we shall never know. For instead of becoming Maniu's advisers in some comfortable safe house, we became Antonescu's advisers in a Gendarmerie prison.

I shall not go into the technical reasons for our failure to reach Maniu on 22 December 1943. Enough to say that we were relieved when the NCO escorting us to a small gendarmerie near Rosiori de Vede told the villagers 'sunt prieteni'. We hoped to elude the Germans by making a quick dash to the capital and to that end told the local authorities that we had a message for the Romanian government. We had no such message, but this story was published in the Turkish press and gave London more trouble with the ever suspicious Molotov. For us it served its purpose and by early next morning we were in Gendarmerie Head Quarters at Bucharest.

According to Colonel Teodorescu, Head of Gendarmerie Security, our arrival for Christmas had upset all their holiday arrangements. He asked us about our trip, and told us that, until a flat on the top floor had been prepared to house us permanently, we would have to make do in the cadets' sick room. He was disciplined and kind and in 1949 became a casualty of the Communist regime. I had a long telephone conversation only a few months ago with his widow.

We knew that according to Maniu, Antonescu, being an honourable man, would one day make amends for the harm he had done his country and it seemed to us that this moment was now approaching. Within twenty-four hours of our arrival in Bucharest the Marshal had informed de Chastelain through his close collaborator Vasiliu, Under-secretary at the Ministry of Interior with responsibility for the Gendarmerie, that he would protect us from the Germans. Churchill had intervened on our behalf but, in any case, Antonescu would see in us a useful potential link with the Allies. The German Minister, Manfred von Killinger, was to make several unsuccessful *démarches* for our removal to Germany. Even Hitler intervened. But Antonescu stuck to his guns and as late as 15 June von Killinger again raised the matter and was told that the Marshal's decision was final.

Antonescu warned us not to give the Germans any pretext for claiming that we had come in to sabotage oil. Otherwise they would have a valid reason for taking us over. Mihai Antonescu (known as Ica), his Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, and an international lawyer, would help us draft our declarations. We wrote three drafts before Ica was satisfied. At one point, during the interrogation, the Romanian authorities were even giving us advance notice of Berlin's follow-up questions.

We agreed with the Romanians to tell our German interrogators that we had come in on a short, fact-finding forage. To Vasiliu, Chas had admitted the true purpose of our mission but without disclosing any

names except that of Maniu himself. And Maniu, being Maniu, had already been to see the Marshal to accept full responsibility for us.

We had handed over our cyanide tablets without any sense of loss. We felt that given our privileged position with Vasiliu and with General Tobescu, Head of the Gendarmerie, we might still justify our mission by persuading Antonescu to conclude an armistice. We argued that no separate agreement with the Western Allies was possible, that Germany did not deserve Romania's loyalty and that the sooner Romania contributed to the Allied war the better would be her prospects at the peace settlement. They replied that, rather than submit to the Russians, the Marshal would fight on. However, he was very willing to co-operate with Western forces when they arrived. In March I noted in my diary five accounts of landings of Western troops in the region. Some would be pure wishful thinking, others a part of the Allied deception strategy.

But Antonescu played an active part in the approach to the Allies. When Maniu's first choice of envoy had been turned down by Ica as a Titulescu man, Antonescu suggested the experienced, clear-headed negotiator Prince Barbu Stirbey. And when the talks got under way in Cairo, he asked for an independent line of communication with General Wilson, Commander in Chief in the Middle East. We were delighted. He would use the transmitter we had brought in, and we obtained permission from SOE to provide him with a cypher and to cypher and decypher telegrams for him.

The Marshal's first telegram included such phrases as the 'bottomless pit of shame'. We thought it maudlin and Chas told Vasiliu that London was, in any case, sick and tired of these requests for guarantees against the Russians. Vasiliu would not shift, and we were about to despatch the telegram when Captain Petermann — our German interrogator — dropped in and stayed during the W/T scheduled period. The following day, we tried again, only to find that the crystals controlling the set's transmitting frequency were missing. Cristescu, head of the Siguranța, had, in fact, given them to the Germans. Since the Marshal thought his telegram had already gone, the matter was becoming urgent. On Sunday, 2 April, de Chastelain was taken to meet Maniu at the Baneasa woods. They had a long, confidential talk during which Chas persuaded them to allow the Marshal to make use of his illegal radio. When, therefore, on 13 April, telegrams containing the armistice terms were sent separately to Maniu and Antonescu, they were both handled by Maniu's wireless operator. Maniu's was decyphered and passed to him. Antonescu's was handed to Mihai Antonescu who took it to Vasiliu, who gave it to us for decyphering. Incidentally, both telegrams passed through the hands of Rica Georgescu, a collaborator of Maniu's who operated from a cell in the Siguranța's high security prison. We sent Antonescu a memorandum urging him to accept these terms before they were withdrawn. But they contained one sentence that could be read as leading to Soviet occupation. Antonescu, furious, refused even to acknowledge the

telegram. Maniu suggested negotiating on the text. Because he associated Stirbey with the hated Brătianu regime of the 1920s he never quite trusted his envoy and put down to incompetence the latter's inability to carry out his impossible instructions. He still believed in a special relationship with Britain, despatched telegrams for British eyes only, describing his mistrust of the Russians, telegrams which were automatically copied to Moscow. By the end of the month the Cairo talks had to all intents and purposes collapsed.

Meanwhile, the Germans took Antonescu's involvement in all this in their stride. They panicked Bucharest by summoning the two Antonescus to Germany, only days after Hungary had been occupied while Horthy was at Berchtesgarden. But they felt pretty sure of their man and, in any case, as Ribbentrop remarked to Ica, 'In their relations with Russia the British have gone beyond the point of no return and nothing will come of the Stirbey mission.'

On the night of the coup King Michael told us that he had been ready to act since the early spring but that the political parties had been slow to make up their minds. From the journals of Queen Helen and General Sănătescu, head of the King's Military Household, I now know more about this. On 23 March, the day the Antonescus left for Germany, the King asked General Sănătescu to sound out Opposition leaders and friendly generals about the possibility of an immediate anti-German volte-face. This was not the first time and their reaction, according to Queen Helen, was always the same. 'All swear fidelity and offer their hearts and souls and life but the moment Michael appeals to them all retire gracefully saying if only one had told them before but this certainly isn't the moment.' One reason for their reticence was the high number, as they thought, of German troops in Romania. Maniu's estimates were based on the number of rations claimed by the German authorities, which, for obvious reasons, were greatly inflated. On this occasion Antonescu told the King on his return that there were virtually no German troops in the country at that time. But by then, the moment for action had been missed. During the next five months the King and his group continued to meet at Foișor in Sinaia, or Casa Nouă in Bucharest or at Săvârșin where they were less exposed to Antonescu's spies, working on what Queen Helen calls the 'serious plan', the one that was eventually put into action.

On the evening of 22 August de Chastelain was called down. Vasiliu described the disastrous position on the front. Mihai Antonescu, who was more flexible than the Marshal, would go to Cairo to make peace with the Allies. Would de Chastelain accompany him? Chas agreed on certain conditions to be discussed in the morning.

Next morning, however, we could not contact Vasiliu. He was attending Antonescu's last cabinet meeting at Snagov. Nor did we know, of course, of the afternoon meeting in the Casa Nouă at which the Marshal, by insisting that he would do anything rather than break with

the Germans, triggered the coup. During the ten o'clock news that evening listeners were warned to leave their wirelesses on since an important message would follow and we almost turned ours off to avoid another pep talk from the Marshal. Then we heard the King reading his proclamation. The guards balanced their rifles against the wall and drank a glass of wine with us. Duty officers came up to celebrate. At eleven we were taken to the Palace through a cheering crowd, all lights on for the first time since the air raids started in April. I met Mircea Ionnițiu, the King's secretary, a man I would grow to like and respect during the next few years. The room was crowded and we were in a bit of a daze after eight months of incarceration. When we asked General Sănătescu, the new prime minister where Maniu and Brătianu were, he told us he had no idea. We talked to Titel Petrescu and Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. We were introduced to King Michael and after months of government propaganda found his assessment of the situation very refreshing. He seemed mature for his age and completely his own man. He had had a clear understanding of the damage Antonescu had done the country and had been determined to stop it. Like Carol I, he seemed to have a better feel for the reality of power politics than his Romanian advisers — and in particular what could reasonably be expected of the Allies.

I met Maniu next morning. What struck me most about him — apart from the warmth of his smile — was the fact that his attitude to the war seemed quite unchanged. His envoy, he complained, could never speak freely since the Soviet representative was always present. With 2,000 British parachutists, Romania could have broken with the Axis while the Russians were still beyond the Prut. Western influence could have been restored, he told me, in Eastern Europe.

Since the Palace was being systematically bombed, Rica Georgescu, Niculescu-Buzești, I and others moved to the vaults of the National Bank. There we set up Maniu's transmitter and again sent messages to Cairo. We gave them enemy troop positions, and confirmed the King's need for air support — which he got on the 25th in a massive American raid. The King, with Mircea Ionnițiu, had left during the night for Craiova and beyond. Other members of his group stayed in Bucharest. Chas had gone to Istanbul to report. Many Ministers had moved to a village outside Bucharest. The plans to cut German communications and take control of key institutions worked well. Local Romanian units held the Germans until troops could arrive from the front. The Romanian air force won the battle of Bucharest. We left the vaults on the 27th and I set up an office in town. When the Russians marched into the capital on the 31st, flags flying, bands playing, the whole region had been cleared by the Romanian army.

Looking back now to that period, it seems clear that by August 1944 Romania's position had become desperate whichever road she took. Had she followed Antonescu and Hitler to the end, she would have become a

battlefield and, at the peace settlement it is doubtful whether Transylvania would have been restored to her.

She took the alternative route, a risky volte-face which offered no guarantee of success or, were it successful, of recovering any credibility with the Allies. As important as its military success was, in my view, the King's restoration of the 1923 constitution and a government determined to fight for free elections was more important. It took Stalin over three years to destroy organised democratic resistance in Romania where he was forced, in Churchill's words, to show 'the pattern of things to come'.

The coup made provision for a return to Romanian democracy, which could only have been secured with the help of massive Western intervention. Nevertheless, it was the single most determined effort made in Romania between 1938 and 1989 to break out of a cycle of increasingly corrosive and degrading dictatorships.

Puzzles about the Percentages

MAURICE PEARTON

I encountered the 'percentages agreement' first when reading *Triumph and Tragedy* at the time of the book's appearance, in 1954. The date is important, insofar as I read the account of the transactions in Moscow in October 1944 (Chapter XV) without the benefit of the subsequent polemics. My reaction at the time was that the 'agreement' was, in essence, an attempt by Churchill to pin Stalin down to some limits, in a situation in which the only restriction on Russian influence in the Balkans was the Red Army's operational problems. This was — and remained — a distinctly minority view. Elsewhere, and especially in the United States, it was condemned as a cynical deal between two big Powers at the expense of a small state, excusable, if at all, only on the grounds that this is how big (European) Powers always behave. In Romania, comment was muted; among the emigration, and now in Romania itself, the 'agreement' is simply regarded as a 'betrayal'.

In all the argument, it was never made quite clear what specifically was the nature of the 'betrayal'. Churchill himself was clear and consistent. In Chapter XIV he writes, 'I had never felt that our relations with Romania and Bulgaria in the past called for any special sacrifices from us.' There was, thus, in his mind no undertaking towards Romania which any arrangement of the kind contemplated would violate. The Red Army had been in Romania for two months; it could not be expelled and clearly was not minded to withdraw. Earlier, in May 1944, Churchill had mooted the idea of a temporary division of spheres of action with the Russians over the Balkans.¹ So what happened in Moscow the following October was no improvisation.

Churchill's account, as expressed, might be clear and consistent; it might also be inadequate, in that it presents the 'percentages agreement' entirely in terms of Anglo-Soviet relations, to which considerations of Romania simply had to yield. In my view, the context is too narrow. That has skewed the discussion ever since and turned inquiry largely into a debate about the merits, or otherwise, of *Realpolitik*, principally from a moral, or moralizing, standpoint. So I would like to propose an alternative argument.

¹ See E.L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, Vol. IV, London, 1971, p. 115.

During 1944, the prospect of victory intensified the strains between the Allies, but there was some practical rapprochement between their views on Romania. The dictatorship of Antonescu, the Iron Guard movement, the pogroms of 1941 all made it easy to conclude that Romania had not only joined the Axis for reasons of foreign policy but had brought its institutions and social policies into line with those in Germany as well. Participation in the invasion of the Soviet Union, with aims which the setting-up of Transnistria clearly demonstrated, finally stamped Romania as a 'Fascist' state, albeit with some German and some Italian characteristics.

In Britain, this was the dominant view; the arguments of those who knew of the dilemmas and ambiguities attending Romanian policies counted for very little. Government, and hence the military authorities, focused on Romania as a unit in the Axis system and how, if at all, it could be prised loose. As long as the stream of German successes continued, this question was academic but the attitude does demonstrate that Romania was not regarded as an entity in itself but as part of a wider problem — the strategies governing military operations and, relatedly, relationships with the Russians.

They, of course, had long-standing suspicions of the Romanians as a people incapable of gratitude for the Russian blood shed in procuring their independence from Ottoman rule. More recently, they had filched Bessarabia from Russia and now had provided Germany with troops and transit to invade Russia. Furthermore, in setting up Transnistria, they had created a place of relative order, under proclaimed Romanian sovereignty, and one which had attracted Russian and Ukrainians living outside. In this way, its existence provided damning evidence of the weakness of the Soviet system and of the ineffectiveness of twenty years of propaganda and coercion. Victory would give an opportunity for a settling of accounts.

The Americans at this stage had no special views about Romania, except insofar as Ploesti offered a number of worthwhile targets. At the same time as Churchill's mind was moving towards 'percentages', American diplomats in Moscow were weighing up measures to get the Soviet Union to define its intentions. Averell Harriman, the Ambassador, writing to Cordell Hull, recording his fear that Russia intended to set up a sphere of influence in the Balkans (20th September), said:

It can be argued that American interest need not be concerned over the affairs of this area. What frightens me, however, is that when a country begins to extend its influence by strongarm methods under the guise of security, it is difficult to see how a line can be drawn.²

² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944*, Vol. IV, Washington, 1956, p. 933.

George Kennan, newly returned to Moscow, proposed the determination 'in conjunction with the British, of the line beyond which we cannot afford to permit the Russians to exercise unchallenged power'.³ This thinking was unacceptable to the Administration. It was — and continued to be — anxious to avoid getting drawn into 'the Balkan trouble centre' and into 'the longstanding rivalry between Great Britain and Russia'.

The Americans did, however, have a doctrine of war which maintained that operations had nothing to do with politics, but should be determined strictly by military criteria.⁴ They were, also, determined that Europe should be liberated by invading Germany from the west, to meet the Red Army invading from the east. On these grounds, they rejected Churchill's ideas about a strategy based on the Mediterranean, considering them not only diversionary but as cloaking wicked hegemonial motives. Such American suspicions of the British were matched by a total unwillingness to upset the Russians.

In strategic terms, Romania's fate was settled at Teheran. It is highly significant that the Conference took place five months after the battle of Kursk had given the Red Army a wider range of options, which it successfully exploited during the summer, advancing an average of 150 miles on a front 600 miles in length. By November, its bridgeheads were established on the western bank of the Dnieper. This spectacular military success enhanced Stalin's position at the Conference. He happily joined the Americans on issues which divided them from the British. Churchill's ideas of an alternative strategy were ditched, and the opportunity to get British and American troops into the Danube before the Red Army never was to materialize. The details of this strategy and the likelihood of its success are still contentious issues among historians; what is beyond argument is that American insistence on the 'west-east' strategy ensured that Stalin would be able to make his writ run wherever the Red Army advanced. The fundamental problem for the Western Allies thereafter was what limits would Stalin observe, or could be persuaded to observe, on the freedom of action conferred on him at Tehran. Their arguments, unlike his, could not be backed by military force in Eastern Europe. In these circumstances, they could either acquiesce in Stalin's claims, on grounds of the demands of Soviet security, or they could try to conclude

³ See W. Isaacson and E. Thomas, *The Wise Men*, New York, 1986, p. 239.

⁴ This was not just West Point teaching, but was deeply rooted in the culture. The dissociation of power and policy 'is most marked in America's traditional conception of war and peace as diametrically opposed states of affairs, to be governed by entirely different rules and considerations *without regard for the continuity of political conflict*. With the country at peace, foreign policy has been formed and executed with little regard for considerations of military power; but with the country at war foreign policy has been largely suspended and immediate military considerations have been dominant. Typically, ... the determining objective has been to obtain a clear-cut definitive military victory in the most effective manner as quickly as possible.' Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War. The Challenge to American Strategy*, Chicago, 1957 [emphasis added].

limiting agreements with him, to which he could be held in the future. In the event, they tried both.

The British had long defined their essential interest in the Balkans as keeping Salonika and the islands out of the hands of a major European power. They approached Balkan questions from the south. What varied in the pursuit of this objective was how far up the peninsula it was necessary to exercise influence in order to protect the littoral. In the same order of thinking, it was held absolutely vital to keep Russia from commanding the Straits. This particular perennial of the 'Eastern Question' surfaced again in 1944. Churchill himself speculated that Russia had broader ambitions for bringing not only the Balkans under Communist rule, but Italy as well. Foreign Office opinion scouted this apprehension on the grounds that Russia's own problems of reconstruction would require her to cooperate in a security system in which the principal element would be the continued subjection of Germany.

At this point, Romania entered the argument. In January 1944 the British reported to Moscow the arrest of the British agents parachuted into Romania the previous month. The Antonescu government used the occasion to put out peace feelers to Britain. The Russians did not comment substantially till April, when Molotov accused Churchill of trying to reach an agreement with Romania behind Russia's back. This response provoked a first-class row, in the course of which the Foreign Secretary, Eden, put to the Soviet Ambassador the suggestion that the Russians 'should temporarily regard Romanian affairs as mainly their concern under war conditions while leaving Greece to Britain'. He had tried the idea of operational demarcations on the Russians in 1942, but without success. Now the Soviet Government accepted the idea but inquired if it had been cleared with the United States. It had not, and Britain's belated approach to Washington drew a prompt refusal, then followed by acceptance but for only three months. Eden then asked the Russians if they were still interested; they replied that they were giving the matter further consideration. It was thus left in the air.

This was a messy business. The British grossly mishandled their exchanges with the United States and succeeded only in exacerbating American suspicion of their motives, but it is doubtful whether, even with more careful preparation, their proposals would have been acceptable. Roosevelt and his entourage were already taking the view that any trouble in the postwar world was likely to emanate from the British rather than the Russians. Moreover, they were not, in any case, going to adopt any position putting the President's re-election in November at risk. An Administration which made a virtue out of its hostility to 'spheres of influence' could not afford to condone its ally's behaviour. In June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ruled that no American forces were to be sent into any part of the Balkans, Hungary or Austria.

Then, on 23rd August, occurred the coup which ended Romania's subservience to the Axis and permitted the Red Army to advance swiftly not only into Romania but also into Bulgaria. This later move significantly improved the threat to the Straits — the Eastern Question in the air age. The seizure of Bulgaria, after a contrived four-day 'war', was not considered in isolation in London. By that time, the Russians had installed the Lublin Committee in Poland, had allowed the Warsaw Rising to go down to defeat, and done little to help the Slovaks in their revolt. Russia appeared to be relying on the Germans to eliminate any possible non-Communist leaderships and thus clear the way for Communist rule. When would the process stop?

Churchill decided to take the initiative with Stalin. He hoped that, Teheran notwithstanding, Allied military progress in Italy would allow British and American troops over the Brenner Pass and into Austria by this time. That did not, in fact, happen. Stubborn German resistance, appalling weather and the Americans' insistence in withdrawing their crack divisions for the invasion of southern France all slowed down the Allied advance. Churchill went gloomily to Moscow, thinking that American obduracy would, after all, allow Stalin to get what he wanted. There Churchill proposed, as he reported in Chapter XV of his 'personal narrative', divisions of influence in South-Eastern Europe during hostilities in terms of percentages. The bargaining produced a final ratio of 90:10 in favour of the Soviet Union as regards Romania (the quid pro quo was Greece). The Romanian ratio was no improvisation but was in line with long-term British assessments, now made more acute by the fact that the Red Army had already been in Romania for two months.

Much ink and more anguish have been spent over this particular episode. For the British, it was a commonsense solution to a problem which followed from the unmistakable demonstration at Teheran that the Americans were determined to run the war *their* way, and in accordance with *their* strategic presuppositions, and that there were severe limits to what Britain could do to influence their ideas and attitudes. Over and above protecting the position in Greece, the 'agreement' was intended to ascertain how far Stalin's Balkan ambitions ran and pin him to an overt indication of them which might, if necessary, be the basis of future bargaining. Churchill himself underlined this aspect when he insisted that the percentages were only guidelines during hostilities and were subject to review at a peace conference. Considered in these terms, the 'agreement' was an attempt by him to stop the attrition of British, and by implication American, rights and interests in South-Eastern Europe, and foreseeably Italy, at a juncture when he could expect no help from the Americans, if not the outright hostility he was to encounter only a few weeks later over Greece. On these grounds, it was held that the 'agreement' helped to stabilize a situation which was dangerous because too fluid. However, the manner in which this outcome was achieved attested to the displacement of Britain within the Alliance.

The displacement continued at Yalta. There, the position in Romania and Bulgaria was not specifically raised, but the transitional nature of the existing arrangements was confirmed in the Declaration on Liberated Europe. The Western leaders focused on other priorities; Churchill, on Poland, Roosevelt on a condominium with Russia in the Pacific as an inducement to Stalin to enter the war against Japan, and on Soviet membership of the new multilateral security organization. Above all, the future of Germany and reparations dominated the European agenda. Yalta was not the place at which any significant change in Romania's position could be advocated. That change came within a month of the Crimea meeting, when the combined efforts of the Soviet Government, the Red Army and the Romanian Communists procured the imposition of a Communist-dominated government in Bucharest, over vigorous protests from the US and more restrained ones from Britain, whose officials' drafting reflected the 'agreement' on percentages.

It has, in consequence, had a central place in the polemics ever since. In that context, it is commonly portrayed as a cynical allocation of territory by two 'Great Powers'. The arguments deployed above suggest a different reading. It was an attempt by the weaker of the two Western Allies, at a time when its relations with its stronger partner were acrimonious⁵ and were rapidly reaching their nadir, to put limits to the spread of Communist control and Communist influence in areas which the agreed strategy had consigned to the Red Army. As such, it was an early exercise in what later became known as 'containment'. For Romania, it was too late to try to establish a limit on the river Prut. Then and thereafter, the Soviet position in Eastern Europe could only be overturned if the Western Allies were prepared to fight — which they were not. So the only way of alleviating pressure on Romania was to deal with the power exercising it. That was the logic behind 'percentages'.

Until the end of the hostilities, British officials felt constrained by the 'agreement' of 9th October, but one may note that the Americans, who were not party to it, behaved in much the same way. The plain fact was that neither state could exercise the degree of leverage demanded to make Stalin give way over Romania. The record of Red Army and Romanian Communist actions soon showed that for him Romania was a special case; the accounts had to be settled. That was more than a matter of revenge. What the Western Allies did not know, was that, in the autumn of 1944, *before* the Moscow meeting and *before* Yalta, Party activists had been touring Soviet factories pointing out that the impending defeat of Germany did not mean the end of Fascism; Fascism was a function of capitalism at a certain stage of its development, and the struggle would have to go on as long as capitalism existed in Europe. So, better times for

⁵ In the United States, attacking Britain was one way of attacking the Administration in the then current electoral contest, without risking accusations of lack of patriotism.

the Russian people would have to be postponed. This doctrine, if applied to Romania, could only imply not a 'bourgeois' government responsive to Soviet wishes — roughly what the British had hoped for — but outright Communist rule.

Many Romanians clung to the hope that Allied policies towards Italy would provide a useful analogue for their own country. They did not grasp that the obvious similarities — the overthrow of the dictator, the change of sides, intervention on the Allied side — masked a wholly different position for Romania in Allied strategy, as settled at Teheran. Romania's position in 1944-45 rested not on Churchill's 'percentages' but on the 'west-east' strategy for destroying the military power of the Third Reich. As far as the Russians were concerned, the key factor was not what happened on 23rd August, but what had taken place between June 1941 and that date. Romania had aligned itself with Germany and Italy, and had been their faithful and effective ally thereafter. The coup of 23rd August did not cancel out Romania's participation in the invasion of the Soviet fatherland; Romania's repentance was only tactical; it would have to bear the consequences. At the core of this attitude was a recognition that Romanian arms had been successful and that Transnistria had been the evidence of that success. That was intolerable.

Any charge of 'betrayal' which can be made against British policy is not that 'percentages' allowed Russia into Romania — after Teheran there was nothing the British could do to prevent that — but that thereafter British officials, both wittingly and unwittingly, led pro-Western Romanians into thinking that 'the new democracies' were prepared to do something effective about the Soviet occupiers and their Communist protégés, when they were not. At that time, of course, the British were still thinking in terms of an orthodox peace conference, where the situation could be rectified in a general settlement. That, we know, did not happen. The post-war outcome in Romania could have been different only if, during the crucial weeks of 1944-45, General Patton's 'Hell on Wheels' had been streaming across the plains of Hungary instead of remaining at a standstill at Plzen, waiting for the Red Army to liberate Prague, by arrangement.

British Attitudes Towards the Romanian Historic Parties and the Monarchy, 1944-47

MARK PERCIVAL

'Maniu ... is behaving stupidly and should be left to suffer the consequences.' This was the view of Douglas Howard, the Head of the Foreign Office Southern Department, when in late November 1944 the National Peasant leader talked of withdrawing members of his party from the Romanian government led by General Sănătescu on the grounds that co-operation with the Communists (who held ministerial posts in that government) was impossible.¹ Howard felt that Maniu should be more willing to work with the Communists and his view was backed by Sir Orme Sargent, the Deputy Under Secretary responsible for overseeing the Southern Department.² The statement is an illustration of the highly negative view which British officials took of the National Peasant and National Liberal parties in the period between the coup of 23 August 1944 and the proclamation of the Romanian 'Peoples' Republic' at the end of 1947.

British attitudes to the Romanian historic parties should be seen in the context of overall policy towards Romania. In the late 1940s, Britain continued to show the indifference which it had demonstrated in the 1930s by its refusal to use economic policy to promote its own political influence at the expense of Germany.³ Thus while policy towards Romania in the 1930s fitted in with Britain's conciliatory attitude to German expansionism in Eastern Europe, in the 1940s it was linked to a similar attitude towards the Soviet Union. (This indifference is perhaps surprising in view of the considerable British commercial interests in Romania, which suffered both as a result of German and later Soviet expansionism.) The Churchill-Stalin Percentages Agreement of October 1944, which has been emotively described as a sell-out by Romanian historians such as Nicolae Baciú, was, in reality simply a manifestation

¹ London, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, FO 371 (hereafter PRO, FO 371), 43989, R19307; Minute by Howard, 27 November 1944.

² PRO, FO 371, 43989, R19307; Minute by Sargent, 28 November 1944.

³ D.B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers 1933-40*, Durham and London, 1989, pp. 113-14, 120-23; P.D. Quinlan, *Clash over Romania: British and American Policies Towards Romania, 1938-47*, Los Angeles, 1977 (hereafter *Clash over Romania*), pp. 37-38.

of British indifference rather than a definition of policy.⁴ There was no great conspiracy to carve up the Balkans in October 1944 — Britain was simply not interested in Romania and its policy would have differed only marginally if the infamous ‘naughty document’ had never existed.⁵

There was, therefore, a clear division between the objectives of the anti-Communist political forces in Romania on the one hand and the British on the other. While the anti-Communist forces wanted to prevent at all costs a Soviet/Communist takeover, the British, while not being pro-Soviet or pro-Communist, were anxious not to be manipulated into a position in which they would be seen to be opposing Soviet aims. In fact the division was apparent well before the coup of August 1944, and was a constant obstacle to efforts to bring Romania to the Allied side during the war. For Romanians like Maniu, who supported the Allies, the priority was preserving Romania’s territorial integrity (including Bessarabia and the Northern Bukovina until Soviet military successes made this unrealistic) and its political independence. For Britain, safeguarding the Soviet alliance against Germany was paramount.⁶

After the August 1944 coup, the first issue over which the historic parties and the British differed was on participation by Maniu and Brătianu in government. Both party leaders preferred to stay out of the two Sănătescu administrations which immediately followed the coup, and to put less important members of their parties forward, in a move which Ghita Ionescu interprets as an attempt by the two to avoid giving too much support to a government which might be seen as not having full sovereignty and which was unelected.⁷ However both Ian Le Rougetel, the head of the British political mission in Romania, and Foreign Office officials in London thought that the two party leaders ought to participate in the government, despite Maniu’s complaints that it was impossible to work with the Communist ministers. Shortly before the fall of the first Sănătescu government on 2 November 1944, a Southern Department official minuted that ‘if the machinery of government in Roumania breaks down, nobody will be more responsible than Mr Maniu with his endless intrigues’, while Le

⁴ N. Baciu, *Agonia României*, Cluj, 1990, pp. 116-26. For a more balanced account by a Romanian historian of British policy in this period see V. Dobrinescu, *Anglia și România între anii 1939-1947*, Bucharest, 1992.

⁵ By September 1945, the Percentages Agreement had broken down. The Foreign Office encouraged publicity over a show trial in Romania because of a Soviet press campaign against the Greek government and British policy in Greece. (PRO, FO 371, 48558, R15566; minute by Stewart.) This is the last time the Agreement is alluded to in open British documents.

⁶ K. Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 490-500; Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, pp. 79-103.

⁷ G. Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, London, 1964, p. 96.

Rougetel considered that the Soviets would be justified in imposing a military government if the uncertainty dragged on.⁸

When Maniu contemplated withdrawing members of his party from the government in late November 1944 because of the difficulties of working with the Communists, London decided that Le Rougetel should distance himself from the Peasant leader's activities. The British representative took the view that Maniu still thought in terms of the nationality politics of pre-First World War Vienna. 'He is a nice old boy, but a provincial', he wrote.⁹ Nevertheless Le Rougetel sympathized with the Peasant leader's complaint that he had been misled by the British in the negotiations before the August 1944 coup, and that Britain and the United States were doing nothing to prevent Romania's annexation by the Soviet Union. The British representative's more understanding view of Maniu found little sympathy in London.¹⁰

During the period of political uncertainty in early 1945, prior to the appointment of the Communist-dominated government of Petru Groza on March 6, British policy was influenced by the Churchill-Stalin agreement of October 1944. Le Rougetel's arguments for a more positive policy in view of British commercial interests in Romania were rejected, and London was reluctant about the U.S. idea of invoking the Yalta declaration on liberated Europe with respect to Romania.¹¹ In April 1945, a month after Groza took office, Maniu suggested to Le Rougetel that the King should be encouraged to dismiss Groza and appoint a more representative government. The Peasant leader was highly critical of Britain's indifference to the Romanian situation, which he found difficult to understand in view of British commercial interests. Le Rougetel thought Maniu's scheme was foolish, but London went further, instructing its political representative to avoid meetings with the Peasant leader. The comment was made by a Foreign Office official that the Soviet Union would take as strong exception to Britain intriguing with Maniu as the British would if a Soviet representative was found to be intriguing with the Greek Communists against the

⁸ PRO, FO 371, 43988, R18250; Telegram, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 9 November 1944; Minute by Reed, 10 November 1944: PRO, FO 371, 43988, R18368; Letter, Le Rougetel to Sargent, 27 October 1944.

⁹ PRO, FO 371, 43989, R19307; Telegram, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 25 November 1944; Minute by Sargent, 28 November 1944: PRO, FO 371, 48535, R201; Letter, Le Rougetel to Sargent, 10 December 1944.

¹⁰ PRO, FO 371, 43989, R19567; Telegram, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 27 November 1944; Minute by Mc. Dermott, 29 November 1944. Le Rougetel himself was criticized by officials in London and by Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, for being too sympathetic to the Romanians. (See minute by Eden 4 April 1945, PRO, FO 371, 48539, R6112.)

¹¹ PRO, FO 371, 48536, R2795; Minute, Le Rougetel to Sargent, 7 February 1945; Minute by Howard, 28 February 1945: PRO, FO 371, 48537, R4061; Minute by Williams, 1 March 1945.

Greek government.¹² When the King did go ahead and dismiss the government with American encouragement in August 1945, provoking a political crisis as Groza refused to resign, the British were highly sceptical of the scheme's likely chances of success. There are indications that, as early as September, Britain might have favoured a solution along the lines later adopted in the January 1946 Moscow Agreement when Britain and the U.S. recognized the Groza government, thus ending the political impasse, in return for the inclusion of one member of the National Peasant Party and one member of the Brătianu Liberals.¹³ The government also gave guarantees on freedom of the press and promised that fair elections would be held.

In practice the Moscow Agreement amounted to a climbdown by Britain and the U.S., since it was violated from the outset and no sanctions were taken against the Romanian government or even considered. The British had little time for efforts by the National Peasants and the Brătianu Liberals to achieve a better settlement. When the Soviets insisted that Maniu, Brătianu and Lupu should be excluded from a reorganized government, Britain confined itself to stating disagreement but complying with Soviet wishes.¹⁴ In late December 1945, the British learned of pressure by the National Peasant and Brătianu Liberal parties on the King to reorganize the government on much wider lines than those envisaged in the Moscow discussions. The plan would have exploited the King's traditional right to appoint the Ministers of War, Foreign Affairs and the Interior. The British gave the idea very short shrift. James Marjoribanks, First Secretary at the British Legation in Bucharest, told the King's Private Secretary that the Monarch would get no sympathy from Britain or the U.S. for government reorganization unless it followed advice from the Allied Control Commission.¹⁵

Once the Moscow Agreement had taken effect in January 1946 there was little sympathy from the British for the protests of representatives of the Peasant and Liberal parties at its repeated violation by the Groza government. A Peasant party memorandum, which the British Legation received in February, produced no reaction in London, and there was no support for an idea hinted at by Romniceanu, the Liberal representative in the government, that he should resign because of the

¹² PRO, FO 371, 48541, R7337; Telegram, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 23 April 1945; Minute by Stewart, 25 April 1945.

¹³ PRO, FO 371, 48607, R16525; Telegram, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 27 September 1945; PRO, FO 371, 48607, R16620; Telegram, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 27 September 1945. Le Rougetel reported to London that he had received information to the effect that Frank Roberts, Counsellor at the British Embassy in Moscow, had expressed this view to the Romanian Charge.

¹⁴ PRO, FO 371, 48564, R21548; Telegram, UK Delegation in Moscow to Foreign Office, 27 December 1945.

¹⁵ PRO, FO 371, 48564, R21632; Telegram, Marjoribanks to Foreign Office, 27 December 1945.

failure of Groza to allow the Peasant and Liberal representatives to participate properly in decision-making. (Such a resignation would have provoked a political crisis because of the requirement under the Moscow Agreement that the Liberals and Peasants should be included in the government.)¹⁶ When Maniu, Brătianu, Hațieganu and Romniceanu protested in July about the Election Bill and encouraged the King to delay signature pending advice from the Western missions (since these politicians regarded Britain and the U.S. as being responsible for the proper implementation of the Moscow Agreement), Adrian Holman, who had succeeded Le Rougetel in April, went so far as to say that the leaders of the historic parties were not assets in the effort to preserve democracy.¹⁷ In September, Maniu resorted to an appeal to Colonel de Chastelain, who had been a British S.O.E. officer in wartime Romania, for easier access to U.K. officials, who were distancing themselves from the Peasant leader and failing to respond to his communications. The Foreign Office reluctantly conceded that Maniu should be given the cold shoulder less often, but Christopher Warner, the officer responsible for Romanian affairs, minuted that Maniu was 'a tiresome, perhaps at times even a silly old man'.¹⁸

The lack of communication between the British and the Romanian historic parties was demonstrated by an astonishing failure by Britain to understand the parties' attitude towards elections after the Moscow Agreement. Britain pressed for early elections, assuming this was what the Peasants and Liberals wanted. However, in June 1946, the Foreign Office received a report from a representative of Shell, who had been in Romania, which said that the historic parties favoured *delaying* elections until after the Peace Treaty had been signed, by which time they assumed Soviet troops would have left the country.¹⁹ Holman was asked by London to clarify the position and he confirmed what the Shell representative had said. But by that stage it was far too late for Britain to change its policy. A note had only recently been sent to the Romanian government asking it to set a date for the elections. In a marvellous understatement one official in London noted that it would have been better if the Legation in Bucharest had supplied this information

¹⁶ PRO, FO 371, 59098, R3989; Memorandum by National Peasant Party sent to London under cover of letter, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 28 February 1946; PRO, FO 371, 59098, R5332, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 3 April 1946, Minute by Turner, 8 April 1946.

¹⁷ PRO, FO 371, 59134, R10558, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 16 July 1946.

¹⁸ PRO, FO 371, 59135, R13889; Letter, Maniu to De Chastelain, 18 August 1946; Letter, De Chastelain to Sargent, 13 September 1946; Minute by Warner, 27 September 1946.

¹⁹ PRO, FO 371, 59100, R8747; Report by Otto Stern (Shell), 11 June 1946.

earlier.²⁰ In his annual review for 1946, Holman questioned the wisdom of the British belief in encouraging early elections. This section was removed by officials in London before the final draft was printed.²¹

During 1947, the British attitude to the Peasant and Liberal parties continued to be cold. In May a former official of the Romanian Legation in London, by then in exile in Britain, told the Foreign Office that he thought British disinterestedness had encouraged the Romanian authorities to carry out arrests, and in the same month, Maniu complained to Holman that the British appeared completely to have forgotten the historic parties. (The Liberals were equally critical.) The Foreign Office was unsympathetic. An official from the Research Department considered that it would be better for Maniu and Brătianu to disappear from public life and make way for younger leaders. He went on to write that 'the whole of the Romanian politician class are under the suspicion of loving their country a little less than themselves and they prefer to live abroad on the profits of their former offices'.²² (In fact Maniu always refused to leave Romania and both he and Brătianu died in unpleasant conditions in Communist prisons.)

In November 1947, Maniu and the National Peasant Party leadership were put on trial following the dissolution of the party, and Maniu was sentenced to life imprisonment (others to varying terms). One of the accusations against Maniu was that he had helped to arrange the failed escape attempt of leading Peasant Party members in July. Holman considered that Britain could not protest about the dissolution of the party or the trial because the leadership had broken the law by trying to escape, and there was therefore some justification for the arrests.²³ The Foreign Office showed more interest in the trial than Holman and reminded its representative that it was about the suppression of the opposition as with the Petkov trial in Bulgaria.²⁴ However, Holman did not accept the Bulgarian parallel and was adamantly opposed to any kind of protest. He felt that Britain should avoid becoming involved, because it had escaped most of the accusations which had been directed against the U.S. mission, and considered that the defendants could be found

²⁰ PRO, FO 371, 59100, R8747; Telegram, Foreign Office to Holman, 28 June 1946; PRO, FO 371, 59100, R9816; Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 1 July 1946; Minute by Warner, 4 July 1946.

²¹ PRO, FO 371, 67233, R4150; Holman's Annual Report on Romania for 1946, dated 27 March 1947. File contains the version written by Holman, handwritten alterations made by officials in London, and the final printed report.

²² PRO, FO 371, 67235, R6657; Minute by Colville, 8 May 1947; PRO, FO 371, 67235, R6873; Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 20 May 1947; PRO, FO 371, 67235, R7209; Minute by Chalmer Bell, 6 May 1947.

²³ PRO, FO 371, 67239, R10376; Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 28 July 1947; PRO, FO 371, 67242, R14291; Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 25 October 1947.

²⁴ PRO, FO 371, 67243, R14622, Telegram, Foreign Office to Bucharest, 1 November 1947; Personal telegram, Sargent to Holman, 6 November 1947.

guilty in an English court. On 12 November in a telegram he reported the sentencing: 'Every defendant was, I think justifiably, found guilty legally on one or more of the charges.'²⁵ In a despatch written the same day, Holman wrote that facts had been revealed about the National Peasant Party at the trial 'which definitely establish it as a "fascist" organisation by East European standards'.²⁶

The British had a more positive view of King Michael than of the historic parties. There was none of the vehement personal criticism that was made of Maniu and Brătianu. In fact one official described the King as 'the only sensible and resolute man in Roumania'.²⁷ As far as the British attitude to his political role went, there was some change between 1944 and 1946. Immediately after the August 1944 coup, the B.B.C. was told to 'continue to give indirect support to King Michael and his government ... but do not build up King Michael as the national hero or imply that the present government is permanent'.²⁸ During the political uncertainty prior to the appointment of the Groza government in March 1945, the Foreign Office was reluctant to give the Monarch advice.²⁹ In June 1945, Le Rougetel expressed concern that the Communists might try to bring ex-King Carol back to Romania to replace Michael and thereby discredit the Monarchy. The Head of the Foreign Office Southern Department was sceptical as to whether this would really happen and thought that even if it did, the replacement of Michael by Carol 'would not make matters one jot worse from our point of view'.³⁰

After the Moscow Agreement, the King appeared to take on a more important role for British policy makers. Ostensibly, London's strategy was to persuade him to make concessions to the government in order to

²⁵ PRO, FO 371, 67243, R14554, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 31 October 1947: PRO, FO 371, 67243, R14612, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 1 November 1947: PRO, FO 371, 67243, R14613, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 1 November 1947: PRO, FO 371, 67244, R14894, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 7 November 1947: PRO, FO 371, 67244, R15107: Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 12 November 1947.

²⁶ PRO, FO 371, 67245, R15335; Despatch, Holman to Foreign Office, 12 November 1947. It is notable how little sympathy was shown by the British to those who hoped to escape from Communist-dominated Romania. In a telegram dated 5 June 1946 (PRO, FO 371, 59100, R8474), Holman reported that he had refused to guarantee to Vișoianu and Rădescu, who were proposing to escape, that they would not be sent back to Romania if they reached British-controlled territory. This fitted in with the policy towards 'Soviet citizens' who came into the hands of the British at the end of the war. See Nicholas Bethell, *The Last Secret: Forcible Repatriation to Russia, 1944-7*, London, 1974.

²⁷ PRO, FO 371, 43989, R19568; Minute by Clutton, 30 November 1944.

²⁸ PRO, FO 371, 43986, R14652; Political Warfare Executive weekly directive to the BBC Romanian Service, 15-22 September 1944.

²⁹ PRO, FO 371, 48537, R4245; Minute by Howard, 27 February 1945.

³⁰ PRO, FO 371, 48571, R10896; Telegram, Le Rougetel to Foreign Office, 25 June 1945; Minute by Hayter, 28 June 1945.

stay in office, so that later he would be able to dismiss a Communist-dominated government and return the country to democracy. Le Rougetel was told by London to encourage him to persuade the opposition parties to accept the Moscow Agreement, and in July 1946 the King was the key element in the idea advanced by Holman of a two-stage return to normality. First, fraudulent elections would take place (which Holman seemed to think of as progress because they would at least give the opposition some representation in Parliament) and then, at a later stage, the Monarch would dissolve Parliament and move to fresh elections.³¹ Britain showed no sympathy for the view expressed by Maniu in July 1946 that the Monarch should refuse to sign the electoral law, despite the Peasant leader's largely accurate prediction that signature would be paving the way for the disappearance of the Monarchy within a year. (In fact it lasted another eighteen months.)³²

After the fraudulent elections of November 1946, the King's Private Secretary told Holman that he thought the King should refuse to open Parliament. However, to do this he would need backing from Britain and the U.S. in the form of a statement that the undertaking made in the Moscow Agreement to hold free elections had not been fulfilled. London was unwilling to make such a statement, and when the King did go ahead and open Parliament at the beginning of December he made it clear to Holman that he had done so because of the absence of backing from Britain and the U.S. In his annual review for 1946, Holman criticized the Foreign Office's failure to make a statement. It was, he wrote, 'no easy task for the British and American representatives ... to explain ... the reasons which had prompted His Majesty's Government, with little or no warning, to modify their policy at this critical juncture'. London had no time for Holman's criticisms and, as with the passage which dealt with British policy over the elections, this section was removed from the final version of the annual review, printed in London. One Foreign Office official referred to Holman's 'local bias'. For his part, Holman asked to be recalled.³³

In November 1947, King Michael came to London to attend the wedding of Princess Elizabeth in spite of British reluctance that he should leave Romania. He returned on 21 December, nine days before

³¹ PRO, FO 371, 48564, R21632; Telegram, Foreign Office to Le Rougetel, 1 January 1946: PRO, FO 371, 59100, R9816, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 1 July 1946.

³² PRO, FO 371, 59101, R10405; Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 12 July 1946.

³³ PRO, FO 371, 59106, R16999; Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 23 November 1946: PRO, FO 371, 59106, R17046, Telegram, Foreign Office to Bucharest, 26 November 1946: PRO, FO 371, 59107, R17683; Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 5 December 1946: PRO, FO 371, 67233, R4150; Holman's Annual Report on Romania for 1946, dated 27 March 1947. (See note 21 above.) PRO, FO 371, 59136, R17522, Telegram, Holman to Foreign Office, 29 November 1946.

he was forced to abdicate. The abdication appears to have taken the British completely by surprise. It was simply reported in a telegram on 30 December, and the King seems to have been given no advice by the British Legation as to what he should do in the event of being asked to abdicate. There was virtually no commentary on the abdication either by the British Legation or by the Foreign Office in London. There appears to have been no communication between the King and the British Legation between his return to Romania on 21 December and his abdication on 30 December.³⁴

The King had supposedly been the linchpin of British policy. The idea had been that he should make concessions to the Communists in order to retain his position. The lack of advice on what he should do in the event of being told to abdicate and the lack of attention by the Foreign Office and the British Legation to the abdication question is a clear indication of the indifference with which British officials regarded Romania.

The distaste shown by British officials towards the Romanian historic parties and the indifference shown to the position of King Michael are the result of Britain's very different attitude to Romania's future compared with that of the anti-Communist political forces within the country. While it is a mistake to suggest, as Baciu does, that Britain actively promoted the Communist takeover, she nevertheless did not regard the preservation of democracy in Romania as a foreign policy priority. At least until the end of the war in Europe, this was not unreasonable. Baciu ignores the fact that in October 1944, when the Percentages Agreement was made, the war was by no means over. London was still being bombed (and continued to be well into 1945) and the British armed forces faced a difficult campaign before the final defeat of Germany.³⁵ In these circumstances, it was essential to ensure that the Soviet Union played its full part in the war, and was not antagonized. After the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, the conciliatory attitude shown by Britain towards Soviet designs in Romania is more difficult to justify. While Romanian politicians were often unrealistic in their expectations of British intervention, Britain would not have suffered at this stage (and might have gained, in view of its commercial interests) had it taken a more robust diplomatic stance against the fraudulently imposed Groza government and in favour of the political forces which had genuine support in Romania. For example, after the fraudulent elections of November 1946, Britain could have announced that it considered that the Moscow Agreement had not been fulfilled and hence could not regard the Groza government as legitimate, thus making the signing of a peace treaty impossible.

³⁴ PRO, FO 371, 67248, R17019; Telegram, Sarrell to Foreign Office, 30 December 1947.

³⁵ Baciu, *Agonia României*, pp. 116-26.

Furthermore, while it is true that Maniu at times showed a lack of political judgement (he was, after all, an old and sick man), the criticisms made by officials in London were often surprisingly irrational. Rather than attempting objectively to analyse *why* Maniu was behaving in the way he did, they preferred to make emotional, ill-thought-out and often unsubstantiated assessments. A more objective analysis would have led British officials to accept the realities of the situation, rather than to expect Romanian politicians to fit in with what Britain wanted. The clear divergence between the aims of the British on the one hand and the anti-Communist political forces in Romania on the other made it inevitable that their approaches would conflict.

What was the Role of the Romanian Communist Party in the Coup of 23 August 1944?

DENNIS DELETANT

It is one of the many ironies in the history of the Romanians that the principal architects of the coup of 23 August 1944, King Michael and the democratic leaders, overthrew a military dictatorship only to be virtually overthrown themselves within six months by another incipient totalitarian order. In East Germany and Poland, where the ravages of war had removed all political structures, it was relatively simple for Stalin to bring his client Communist parties to power, but in Romania the imposition of the new order required the removal of surviving structures. King Michael's coup had pre-empted any Soviet move to seize immediate power and when Soviet troops entered Bucharest eight days later they found a Romanian government without significant Communist representation ready to negotiate an armistice and hold elections.

Besides the crucial impact which it had upon the course charted by Stalin for the Romanian Communist Party, the coup was also responsible for bringing Dej into the forefront of the political events, thereby launching him on the road to power. Since Dej emerged first as the leader of that wing of the Party which was most closely involved with the coup, and then went on to secure his domination of the entire Party, the coup was accorded a sacred place in Party history. Even before Dej achieved supremacy within the Party, his Communist colleagues sought to deny the credit gained by the King and the major democratic parties for the coup by assuming it exclusively for themselves, thereby claiming legitimacy for their ascension to government. To this end, the role of the Romanian Communists in the coup was deliberately exaggerated by the Party to justify its right to rule the country. King Michael was relegated to the position of a mere spectator. In this endeavour, Communist apologists were abetted by the suppression by the Communist authorities of any accounts of the coup which did not fit into their scenario of the events.¹ Therefore the

¹ These included A.G. Lee, *Crown against Sickle*, London, 1950; R.H. Markham, *Rumania under the Soviet Yoke*, Boston, 1949; R. Bishop and E.S. Crayfield, *Russia Astride the Balkans*, London, 1949. The historiography of the coup is presented in R.R. King, *A History of the Romanian Communist Party*, Stanford,

accounts of key participants in the events, that is, of the King and of members of his entourage who escaped to the West, describing the King's crucial act in ordering the arrest of Marshal Antonescu on 23 August 1944 were largely unknown in Romania before the overthrow of the Communist regime.

An example of this distortion was Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu's account of the preparations for the coup, published on its first anniversary in *România liberă*. Pătrășcanu claimed that 'three meetings were held at the palace with King Michael in the chair to prepare for the coup of 23 August' at which he (Pătrășcanu) was 'the only representative of the entire opposition'.² This is incorrect. Preparations for the coup were discussed simultaneously at the palace, where the king consulted with his personal advisers, and by the so-called National Democratic Bloc, formed on 20 June 1944 from representatives of the National Peasant, National Liberal, Social Democratic, and Communist parties, who met at various houses. On 13 June Pătrășcanu and Bodnăraș met a group of the King's advisers but the main purpose is said to have been to discuss future relations with Moscow.³ While it is true that even before the formation of the NDB, Pătrășcanu and Titel Petrescu, the leader of the Social Democrats, were taking part in the secret preparations for the coup under the King's chairmanship, all the subsequent coup plans were discussed at meetings of the NDB, and the last meeting held before the coup, on 21 August, was attended by the King, his palace advisers, the leaders of the major opposition parties, and Pătrășcanu.⁴ Today, with the recent publication of eye-witness accounts of the coup and the

1980, pp. 40–43, and in M. Shafir, *Romania. Politics, Economics and Society*, London, 1985, pp. 30–37.

² L. Pătrășcanu, 'Cum s-a pregătit actul de la 23 august 1944', *România liberă*, p. 9.

³ In a conversation in December 1944 with V. Morev, the TASS correspondent in Romania, Pătrășcanu claimed that 'the first meeting in connection with the preparations for the coup took place with the King in May 1944. At the meeting, apart from the King, were generals Sănătescu, Mihail, Rășcanu, and Aldea, Niculescu-Buzești, Styrcea, Pătrășcanu and Bodnăraș. The last two were the only representatives of a political party.' (Foreign Policy Archive, Moscow, fond 0125, opis 33, file 6, folio 127, pp. 128–34.) I am grateful to Dr Florin Constantiniu for drawing my attention to this document. Morev's account contradicts the diary of Ioan Hudiță, a junior official in the National Peasant Party at the time of the coup. In it Niculescu-Buzești is reported to have met Pătrășcanu and Bodnăraș for the first time on 13 June (Ioan Hudiță, 'Pagini de Jurnal', *Magazin Istoric*, vol. 28, July 1994, no. 7, p. 41.

⁴ The most lucid account of the coup and preparations for it is given by Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous. With S.O.E. in Wartime Romania*, London, 1989 (hereafter *Operation Autonomous*). 'Autonomous' was the code-name for a three-man Special Operations Executive mission, parachuted into Romania on 22 December 1943. The team, consisting of Lt. Col. A.G.G. de Chastelain, Cpt. Ivor Porter and a Romanian radio operator Silviu Mețianu, was arrested almost immediately by Romanian gendarmes and taken to police headquarters in Bucharest where they remained until their release on 23 August 1944.

disclosure by contemporaries of Pătrășcanu and Dej of fresh information about the activities of the Romanian Communist Party during the war and its relationship to Moscow, the part played by the Communists in the coup can be determined with greater accuracy, and in the process the mystification of the coup perpetrated at Dej's behest can be dispelled.

Following the crushing defeat at Stalingrad, King Michael called for peace in his 1943 New Year broadcast to his people. Irritated by what he considered to be the indecisiveness of the opposition, led by Maniu and Brătianu, the young King declared later that he had been ready to take Romania out of the war against the Allies in February 1944 but that 'whenever plans appeared to be maturing he was prevented from taking action by objections raised by the opposition'.⁵ The King's impatience was doubtless a sign of his youth (he was only twenty-two), and the elderly Maniu advised more prudently against a coup at that time on the grounds that there were too many German troops in the country. Nevertheless, the King could turn to the wise counsels of his mother, Queen Helen, of General Sănătescu, the head of the military household, and of Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, the head of the cypher and communication section of the Foreign Ministry.

It was Maniu who was in regular radio contact with the British via a radio operator called Nicolae Țurcanu (code-named 'Reginald') who had been sent into Romania in June 1943 by SOE. At the end of October 1943, Maniu had expressed a desire to leave Romania in order to contact the Russians with British assistance. In response the Foreign Office told Maniu that any approaches from Romania, be they from individuals or from the government, should be addressed to all three Allies and that they should take the form of an offer by a duly authorized emissary to sign an unconditional surrender to the three principal Allies. Nevertheless, the Foreign Office told the Soviet government about Maniu's request. In Stockholm the Romanian Counsellor George Duca contacted the British and American Ministers in December 1943 in the name of Maniu about peace terms, unaware that his own Minister, Frederick Nanu, had been instructed by Marshal Antonescu and Foreign Minister Mihai Antonescu to put out his own peace feelers. Indeed, on 26 December, Nanu was approached by what he took to be an NKVD officer with an offer to deal with the Romanian government and contact was maintained for several months on a clandestine basis. Nanu was told that the Russians would keep the Western Allies informed and that strict secrecy should be maintained. On 13 April armistice terms agreed by the representatives of the American, British and Soviet governments in Cairo were transmitted to the Marshal and to Maniu. They called for a Romanian *volte face*

⁵ 'Report of Lt. Col. A.G.G. de Chastelain on the "Autonomous" Mission, dated September 1944' in *23 August 1944. Documente, II*, Bucharest, 1984, p. 802.

against the Germans, the payment of reparations to the Russians, the confirmation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina as Soviet territory, the restoration of Northern Transylvania to Romania, and the granting to Soviet troops of unrestricted movement, although not occupation, throughout Romania during the period of the armistice.⁶

The receipt of the terms seems to have caused a breach to open up between the Marshal and Maniu. In a letter written by Maniu in mid-April, the Peasant Party leader stated that Antonescu 'wished to continue the war at the side of the Germans', while Maniu accepted the terms and said that, once he was certain that Antonescu could not be moved, he would act in conjunction with the King.⁷ Even so, the suspicion that the Western Allies, and in particular Britain, had abandoned Romania to the Russians, troubled Maniu, who used the Romanian emissary to Cairo, Constantin Vişoianu, to voice these concerns to Christopher Steel, the British representative, at the end of May. This provoked Antony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, to instruct Steel to tell Vişoianu that there was no use in his trying to obtain assurances about British policy 'as distinct from that of the Soviet government'. But there was no rebuke from Eden when Steel, in answer to a further question from Vişoianu as to whether Maniu should form 'a democratic coalition embracing the Romanian Communist Party', replied that in his own view a broad national union of this kind would be 'warmly welcomed by Allied public opinion'.⁸

This cautious advice probably confirmed Maniu in his view that it would be good politics to bring the Communists into a coalition and when Vişoianu, who arrived in Cairo on 25 May, asked Daniel Semionovici Selod, the assistant to Nikolai Novikov, the Soviet representative in Cairo, to suggest a name, Selod replied 'Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu'.⁹ Although held under house arrest throughout 1943 and

⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944*, vol. IV, Washington DC, p. 170.

⁷ Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, London, 1976 (hereafter *British Policy in South-East Europe*), p. 233.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 237–38.

⁹ Interview with Corneliu Coposu, 31 October 1991. In a paper presented at a symposium in Paris on 22 May 1994, Coposu disclosed, in his capacity as Maniu's secretary and the person responsible for enciphering and deciphering Maniu's telegrams in the British code sent via Ţurcanu to Cairo, that in response to Novikov's suggestion to Vişoianu that the Romanian opposition should involve the section of the Comintern in Romania, Novikov was told that the number of Communists in Romania identified by the SSI (Romanian Intelligence) was 720, of whom 845 were foreigners. In reply, Maniu was told that it was common knowledge that a section of the Comintern in Romania did not exist but that public opinion abroad had to have the impression of the existence of a homogeneous opposition embracing all social and political categories. Maniu said that, in that case, he had nothing against the enlargement of the opposition. However, of the Communists contacted in Romania claimed to be the true representatives of the Romanian Communist Party. With some satisfaction, Maniu cabled Novikov for his direction as to who was official representative of the Comintern in Romania

early 1944 at a mountain village called Poiana Țapului near Sinaia, the King's summer residence, Pătrășcanu was kept informed of plans to take Romania out of the war by Colonel Octav Ulea, Master of Ceremonies at the Palace, and in April 1944 he negotiated an agreement with Titel Petrescu, the leader of the Social Democrats, to set up a United Workers' Front, thus giving the Communist Party greater authority. Both took part in the secret preparations for the coup under the King's chairmanship. Pătrășcanu was brought into meetings of a sub-committee under Colonel Dumitru Dămăceanu which prepared plans for the defence of Bucharest, and at the beginning of June he suggested that the Communist Party's military representative, Emil Bodnăraș (code-named engineer Ceaușu), should attend since he could organize small bands of armed workers who could assist in a *volte face*.

Bodnăraș made his first appearance at one of these meetings at a house on Calea Moșilor on the night of 13 June. Unlike his colleagues Dej, Apostol, Chișinevski and Georgescu, he had been exempted from internment at the Tîrgu-Jiu prison camp after being released from Caransebeș prison in December 1942 on the grounds of having been an officer in the Romanian army. His role in the preparations for the coup remains shadowy and has consequently fomented speculation, including the suggestion that he was used by Marshal Antonescu as a clandestine conduit to the Soviet authorities. After the Axis defeat at Stalingrad, it was clear to Antonescu that it would be prudent to establish closer links with the Russians and Bodnăraș was an obvious channel. Even members of the King's circle were impressed by Bodnăraș's dedication¹⁰ and the latter, in his turn, was sufficiently convinced by the thoroughness of the plans to be able to satisfy his Communist colleagues that the Romanian Communist Party stood to enhance its position by joining the National Peasant, National Liberal, and Social Democratic parties in the formation of the National Democratic Bloc on 20 June 1944.

A week later, the Allied representatives in Cairo received the plan drawn up by the King and the NDB for the coup. To be successful, Maniu argued, the coup had to be accompanied by three Allied actions. First, there should be a major Soviet offensive on the Romanian front within twenty-four hours of the *volte face*; second, three airborne brigades, either Anglo-American or Soviet, with an additional 2,000 parachute troops should be dropped at the time of the coup; third, there should be a heavy bombardment of communications with Hungary and Bulgaria. The plan met a favourable response from both the British and American representatives, yet when the American suggested a tripartite meeting to discuss it, the Soviet representative Nikolai Novikov said that this would be premature.

and Novikov replied: 'Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu' ('Exilul Românesc: Identitate și Conștiință istorică,' *Lupta*, 7 octombrie 1994, no. 232, p. 5).

¹⁰ Porter, *Operation Autonomous*, p. 175.

Novikov waited in vain for instructions from Moscow. The Russians had nothing to lose by pinning their hopes on a bilateral deal with Marshal Antonescu; this had the double advantage for them of dealing directly with Romania's military leader, thereby obviating the need to negotiate with Maniu, a figure who was likely to cause embarrassment to them in the future, and of giving them time, in view of the Marshal's hesitancy, to prepare for their military occupation of Romania. Indeed, at the beginning of June, Madame Alexandra Kollontay, the Soviet minister in Stockholm, had offered improved armistice conditions to Nanu which, in addition to an unconditional promise to return Transylvania, pledged to allow 'free areas' where the Romanian government would be sovereign, and where no foreign troops would be allowed to enter, to show leniency over reparations, and to allow 15 days between the signing of an armistice and a Romanian declaration of war on Germany.¹¹

Soviet hopes of Antonescu were dashed when the Marshal saw Hitler on 5 August. To Hitler's leading question as to whether Romania intended to fight on, Antonescu temporized by saying that this depended upon Germany's commitment to assist Romania stem the Russian advance, and upon the attitude of Hungary and Bulgaria. The Marshal returned to Bucharest in deep depression and did nothing about the Soviet terms. In the meantime, Maniu was desperately seeking a reply from Cairo to the coup plan sent on 27 June. On 7 July, the King and his advisors, including the opposition leaders, fixed 15 August as the date for action, hoping to synchronize their action with a Soviet offensive. The longer the coup was delayed, the greater the chance that the Red Army would push forward, occupying more Romanian territory and giving Moscow a reason for preferring a straightforward military conquest of the country without any help from the King and the opposition. Moreover, the increasingly frequent Anglo-American air raids on the oilfields around Ploiești and on Bucharest were a reminder to the Romanians of the cost of the alliance with Germany. Still Maniu heard nothing from Cairo, and the coup was postponed. Finally, on 20 August the long-awaited Soviet offensive came, prompting Maniu to inform Cairo that the King and his group had decided to take action.

The Soviet generals Malinovsky and Tolbukhin successfully launched a massive assault of almost one million troops and 1,500 tanks against the combined German and Romanian forces straddling the Prut. The front south of Iași was breached and the King rushed from Sinaia to Bucharest to consult with his advisors. The representatives of the political parties could not be located. The King asked Colonel Dămăceanu how long he needed to get his part of the plan, namely to seize the telephone exchange and the radio station, ready, and was told 'five days'. The coup was therefore fixed for 26 August at 1 pm. The

¹¹ Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe*, p. 239.

Marshal and Mihai Antonescu would be invited to lunch, after which there would be an audience to discuss the course to be adopted. If the Marshal refused negotiation with the Allies, the King would dismiss him and appoint a new government to be drawn from the opposition parties. This government would invite the Germans to evacuate Romania and empower its emissaries in Cairo, Barbu Știrbey and Constantin Vișoianu, to sign an armistice.

On the following evening, 21 August, the plans agreed by the King and his advisors the day before were approved by the members of the NDB at their last full meeting before the coup. It was attended by the King, Maniu, Brătianu, Pătrășcanu, Titel Petrescu, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, the head of Foreign Ministry communications, Ion Mocsony-Styrcea, the Marshal of the King's Household, General Constantin Sănătescu, and Mircea Ionnițiu, the King's private secretary.¹² Pătrășcanu came with a draft proclamation for the King's approval and argued, with Petrescu's backing, for a government of national unity led by Maniu. Maniu refused and pressed for a government of technicians, headed by a soldier, to handle the armistice conditions and the presence of the Red Army. The matter was left in the hands of Maniu and Pătrășcanu who were to draw up a list of ministers by 23 August. It was agreed that the politicians should disperse until the projected day of action, 26 August.

Yet once again, unforeseen circumstances intervened in the timing of the coup. Antonescu, dismayed by the rapid advance of the Soviet forces, was moving back and forth between the front in southern Moldavia and Bucharest and decided to return to the front on 24 August. This meant that he would probably be absent from the capital on the day fixed for the coup. The news, which had been picked up fortuitously by Styrcea, was quickly transmitted to the King who was able to get word to Maniu that the coup should be brought forward to 23 August. Mihai Antonescu, the Prime Minister, was unnerved by the deteriorating military situation and decided, on his own initiative, to negotiate an armistice with the Allies. He nevertheless told the Marshal on the evening of 22 August and the latter raised no objections. That same evening the Marshal told the German minister Clodius that he would make one last effort to halt the Russians, and that in the event of failure he reserved the right to act as he saw fit. After the meeting with Clodius Mihai Antonescu sent a courier to Stockholm instructing Nanu to tell Madame Kollontay of the Romanian government's willingness to *resume* (my italics) negotiations on an armistice, and not, as has been claimed, to conclude one. In the event the courier arrived on 24 August, the day after the coup.¹³

¹² Porter, *Operation Autonomous*, pp. 192–93.

¹³ See Nicholas Baciú, *Sell-Out to Stalin. The Tragic Errors of Churchill and Roosevelt*, New York, 1984, p. 147. The courier in question, Neagu Djuvara,

On the morning of 23 August, in a last-ditch effort to get the Marshal to conclude an armistice, Maniu and Constantin Brătianu asked the historian Gheorghe Brătianu, the Liberal leader's nephew, to use the respect he enjoyed with the Romanian leader to persuade him to see the King that afternoon. The Marshal listened to Brătianu's arguments and apparently agreed to go to the Palace, but on condition that Maniu and Gheorghe Brătianu sent him a letter by 3 pm confirming that they stood behind him in signing an armistice. The Marshal then gave instructions that an audience should be sought with the King at 4 pm. Mihai Antonescu was granted a separate one at 3.30.

The King now convened his advisors and decided that the show-down with the Marshal should take place at his audience that afternoon. Niculescu-Buzești and Styrcea left the palace to warn Maniu and Pătrășcanu respectively but Maniu was not at home and Pătrășcanu's contact said that Pătrășcanu and Titel Petrescu would come to the palace, but only after nightfall. Similarly, George Brătianu could find neither his uncle nor Maniu and was therefore unable to meet the Marshal's condition that he should bring a letter from both by 3 pm. When George Brătianu turned up to see the Marshal empty-handed the latter was furious and said that Mihai Antonescu could go to the palace alone and pass on the Marshal's apologies to the King.¹⁴

Mihai Antonescu arrived for his audience at the appointed time and was received by the King and General Sănătescu. He offered Marshal Antonescu's apologies, at which point Sănătescu left the room and telephoned the Marshal, saying that there was no point in snubbing the King at this critical time. The Marshal relented and agreed to come. He was escorted into the drawing room to meet the King who was with Mihai Antonescu and Sănătescu. The Marshal proceeded to give a detailed account of the situation at the front and said that he would only

made it quite clear to his audience at the fiftieth anniversary symposium on '23 August 1944 in the history of Romania', held in Bucharest on 8–9 October 1994 (to which King Michael had accepted an invitation but was refused entry to Romania by the authorities), that Mihai Antonescu, with the Marshal's approval, had merely told Nanu to approach Madame Kollontai to ask whether the earlier conditions given by the Russians were still valid or would have to be negotiated. At the same time, Djuvara revealed, Mihai Antonescu instructed Nanu not to tell the British and Americans of this approach to the Soviets. Mihai Antonescu did not, as Nanu later claimed, tell him that the Marshal was ready to withdraw and had given Mihai a free hand to sign the armistice (F.C. Nano, 'The First Soviet Double-Cross: A Chapter in the Secret History of World War II', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, vol. 12, Oct. 1952, no. 3, pp. 236–58). As Djuvara remarked, the events in the three-month period since the issue of the Russian conditions had rendered many of them irrelevant and the mere raising of the question as to whether they were still valid showed how out of touch with reality the two Antonescus were.

¹⁴ This account of events on 23 August is taken from M. Ionnițiu, '23 August 1944. Amintiri și reflecțiuni' (hereafter '23 August 1994'), *Revista istorică*, vol. 2, 1991, nos 9–10, pp. 557–75, and Porter, *Operation Autonomous*, pp. 198–202.

conclude an armistice after obtaining Hitler's consent. The King replied that the military situation would brook no further delay; since Soviet troops were already in occupation of part of the country an armistice should be signed immediately. Asked by the King whether he would stand aside for someone who would contact the Allies the Marshal replied, 'Never'. After withdrawing briefly to his study to inform his advisors, Styrcea, Buzești, Ionnițiu and General Aurel Aldea, that the moment had now come for the Marshal's arrest, the King returned to the drawing room and told the Marshal that, in concordance with the wishes of the Romanian people as expressed through the four democratic parties, he was taking the country out of the war to save it from disaster. If the Marshal refused to implement the King's wish that an armistice be concluded, then he should consider himself dismissed.

When the Marshal said he took orders from no one the King retorted that, in that case, he was dismissed and he left the room. As he did so he signalled to his aide, Colonel Emilian Ionescu, to arrest the Marshal and Mihai Antonescu. Ionescu summoned the four-man guard that had been prepared for such an eventuality and amid the protests of the Marshal the two Antonescus were escorted upstairs and locked in the King's large safe.

Back in his study the King consulted with his advisors as to the immediate steps to be taken. The leaders of the political parties had to be informed of the arrests, the Allies had to be notified, the military plan for the coup had to be executed, but most important of all, a Prime Minister had to be named to replace Mihai Antonescu. In the absence of Maniu, it was decided to appoint General Sănătescu, who enjoyed the respect of the army. Ionnițiu typed out a decree to this effect, the King signed it, and the new Prime Minister set out for army headquarters to transmit the order for Romanian troops under Colonel Dămăceanu to take up positions at strategic points in Bucharest and to cease hostilities against the Soviet forces at the front. Proof that the army placed their loyalty to their supreme commander, the King, above that to Marshal Antonescu, was the fact that not a single senior officer disobeyed Sănătescu's orders and not one of them defected to the Marshal.

Since Maniu and Pătrășcanu had failed to agree on a list of ministers, and neither was at the palace, the new government had to be formed on the spot from the King's advisors. Niculescu-Buzești, a counsellor in the Foreign Ministry, was elevated to Foreign Minister, and General Aldea became Minister of the Interior, while the representatives of the four parties in the NDB — Maniu, Brătianu, Petrescu and Pătrășcanu — were appointed Ministers of State without Portfolio. Ionnițiu was doubtless not alone in his feeling at the time that the politicians had, at this crucial moment, shown themselves to be 'a pathetic bunch'.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ionnițiu, '23 August 1994', p. 570.

The first of them to appear at the palace was Pătrășcanu, who arrived shortly after 8 pm. He brought with him the King's proclamation, which was approved after amendments by Buzești and Sănătescu, and the texts of two decrees, previously agreed at meetings of the NDB, granting an amnesty to political prisoners and abolishing the internment camps in which many Communists and other political detainees had been held. At the same time, Pătrășcanu asked the King for the post of Minister of Justice. Since none of the other political leaders had cabinet seats, the King did not want to risk an accusation of partiality, but given Pătrășcanu's legal background, his diligence in producing the draft proclamation and the decrees, and that he was the first member of the NDB to appear at the palace, the King offered him a compromise, Minister of Justice *ad-interim*. The fact that Pătrășcanu, alone among the political representatives, secured this temporary position gave rise in accounts about the formation of this new government to the supposition that he was acting on orders from the Communist Party and this, in turn, helped to cement the fiction in Communist historiography of the dominant role of the Party in the coup. On the other hand, it could be argued that Pătrășcanu, given the speed of events on the afternoon of 23 August, did not have time to contact the leaders of the Communist Party and in the face of a *fait accompli* decided to satisfy a personal vanity.¹⁶

Pătrășcanu's arrival at the palace was followed shortly afterwards by that of Titel Petrescu and then, an hour or so later, by that of Emil Bodnăraș who was presented to the King under the name of 'engineer Ceaușu' and head of a group of Communist-trained armed civilians known as the 'Patriotic Guards'. About an hour after the recording of the King's proclamation to the country announcing the coup and the immediate cessation of hostilities with the Allies was broadcast over the radio at 10.12 pm, Marshal Antonescu, who was still locked in the palace strong room, asked for paper and made his will. Another hour passed before Bodnăraș and a group of armed workers took charge of the two Antonescus and drove them away to a safe house in the Bucharest district of Vatra Luminoasă.¹⁷

Even today, political opponents of the King have joined admirers of Antonescu in seeking to make capital at the expense of the King over this transfer of the Marshal to the Communists, accusing the monarch of 'treachery'. The truth of the matter is that the first consideration for the King and the NDB had been, in planning the coup, to prevent the Marshal from reaching the German forces and thereby setting up a 'rebel' pro-German government. In this respect they were faced with a

¹⁶ This is the view of Ionnițiu.

¹⁷ L. Pătrășcanu, *op. cit.* Among this group of armed civilians was said to be Ștefan Mladin who for a period after 23 August was one of those responsible for the bodyguard of Gheorghiu-Dej.

problem: they did not want to hand Antonescu over to the police, whom the Marshal had used to harass the opposition leaders, for fear that they might release him. Pătrășcanu proposed instead that a civilian guard, drawn from trusted persons from all four opposition parties, should take custody of Antonescu until the police was purged. He was ready to offer volunteers from within the Communist Party and invited the other parties to do the same. This idea found favour with Maniu and Brătianu. At a subsequent meeting at the palace on 17 August, Maniu announced that he had a team of National Peasant Party volunteers ready to undertake this role. However, on the evening of the coup this team was not available, having been sent to Transylvania, according to Maniu, to assist in the fighting against the Germans. Custody of the Marshal was therefore left in the hands of Bodnăraș whose group was the only one to appear at the palace.¹⁸

Also taken to the house in Vatra Luminoasă were Antonescu's fellow ministers, General Constantin Pantazi, Minister of Defence, General Dumitru Popescu, Minister of the Interior, General Constantin Vasiliu, Under-secretary of State at the Interior Ministry, and Colonel Mircea Elefterescu, head of Bucharest Police. On 31 August, two days after Soviet troops entered Bucharest, the group was handed over by Bodnăraș into the custody of Lt. Gen. Tevcenkov and Maj. Gen. Nikolai Burenin, the commander of Soviet forces in Bucharest, on orders issued by General (later Marshal) Rodion Malinovski, Commander of Soviet operations in Romania.¹⁹

King Michael was still at a mountain retreat in the Carpathians, having left the capital for fear that it might fall to the Germans in the early hours of 24 August. With or without the King's presence, at the time when the Antonescus were handed over to the Soviet authorities the latter were in a position to impose their will without hindrance. Romania was now an occupied country and it is difficult to see how the King could have intervened against his new ally to prevent them taking a leader who had conducted hostilities against them during the previous

¹⁸ Ionnițiu, '23 August 1994', p. 574.

¹⁹ On the following day, the group was taken by train to Moscow and held until May 1946 in a castle some 60 km outside the Russian capital. According to an account written by Pantazi's son, they were well treated (Ion Pantazi, 'O mărturie indirectă despre 23 august', *Apoziția*, Munich, 1980–81, pp. 20–30. At the end of April 1946 all six were sent back to Bucharest to stand trial as 'war criminals'. On 17 May Marshal Antonescu, Mihai Antonescu, Pantazi, Vasiliu, Gheorghe Alexianu, the former Governor of Transnistria, Radu Lecca, former chief of Jewish Affairs, and Eugen Cristescu, head of Intelligence Service were sentenced to death. All, except the Marshal, lodged appeals and Cristescu, Lecca and Pantazi had their sentences commuted by the King, with the consent of government acting on the advice of the Soviet authorities. The Marshal's mother appealed to the King for clemency but, acting on the advice of the government, he denied her request. The two Antonescus, Alexianu and Vasiliu, were executed by firing squad in the grounds of Jilava prison at 6 pm on 1 June 1946.

three years. Those who argue that the King should have done so ignore the realities of the time.

What emerges from this description of the preparations for the coup and its implementation is that the Romanian Communists were but one of a number of players in the coup. Their part was defined by a number of considerations. As a party with little popular support within Romania, the Communists' importance in shaping the country's future depended on the influence their sponsor, Stalin, was able to wield in Romanian affairs and as the war progressed that importance was magnified by the advance of the Red Army. The inclusion of representatives of the Romanian Communist Party in the National Democratic Bloc was therefore sound politics, being regarded by the King and the major opposition leaders as tactful in view of the impending entry of the Red Army onto Romanian soil and the lead that the Soviet Union would take in determining the conditions of an armistice. But having said that, the Communists were allowed to play a bigger part in the coup because of the lapses of the other parties. These were compounded by the Communists' superior organization on the evening of the coup. Pătrășcanu was the first party representative to appear at the palace on 23 August; Maniu and Brătianu could not be contacted, and Bodnăraș and his 'Patriotic Guards' were the only civilian militia to arrive to take charge of Antonescu. These facts were used by the Communists to underpin their exaggerated claim to have played the leading role in the coup.

The Overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu

PETER SIANI-DAVIES

Five years have passed since the events which have popularly come to be known as the Romanian Revolution and it now seems appropriate to take stock and try and offer a history of the period leading to the overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu. As an event the revolution passed extremely rapidly with little more than one week elapsing between the first demonstrations in Timișoara, outside the house of the Hungarian pastor, László Tőkés, and the final flight of Ceaușescu from the Central Committee building in Bucharest. This brief period can broadly be divided into three phases.

The first of these began in Timișoara on the 15 December and was characterized by escalating street protests, frequently violent, by a disorganized crowd. These were brought to an abrupt halt on the 17 December when a brutal repression by the authorities drove the crowd from the streets of the city. Tentative signs of the second phase of protests began to emerge on the next day. More organized and largely peaceful in form and centred on the industrial workforce, these occurred initially within the factories but on the 20 December they spilled out into a huge demonstration in the centre of the city which directly led to the collapse of official rule in Timișoara. The third phase was to see the unrest spread out from beyond Timișoara first to surrounding towns in the Banat like Buziaș and Lugoj and, then, to other major cities and many smaller towns, largely in Transylvania but also including some centres such as Orșova and Ploiești, that lay just inside Oltenia and Muntenia.¹ Most significantly unrest also spread to Bucharest. In many of the smaller towns the overthrow of Ceaușescu was to pass peacefully, but in several of the larger cities and, especially, Bucharest, Cluj and Sibiu a pattern of events was to unfold similar to those in Timișoara, as violent street demonstrations were followed by repression which in turn led to mass protests. These rapidly undercut the last shreds of legitimacy held by the regime leading the security forces to withdraw their support and making the position of Ceaușescu untenable.

Considering the outbreak of unrest first, the pattern of the initial phase of the revolution was of a steadily increasing escalation in the scale of the

¹ Some indication of the events in the various counties of Romania can be found in Petre Popa and Ilie Ștefan, 'Ieri la Timișoara, azi în toată țara!', *România 16-22 decembrie: sânge, durere, speranță 1989-1990*, Bucharest, n.d., pp. 22-28.

protest matched by a growing radicalization of the crowd. The 15 December saw only a small demonstration by a core of less than one hundred protesters, mostly elderly members of Tőkés's congregation. Despite the fact that such a gathering blatantly contravened the draconian public assembly laws, no attempt was made to clear the crowds by force and the demonstration seems to have by and large dissolved peacefully. The next day a crowd of about seventy again gathered before swelling by nightfall to a thousand or more in number. As the proportion of Tőkés's parishioners became diluted, the mood of the crowd began to grow perceptibly more radical. Already the night before there had been cries for 'Liberty' and the Mayor had been so abused that Tőkés had feared his life might be at risk, but, now, as the slogans moved from material concerns for better living conditions to explicit attacks on the Romanian leadership, Tőkés was to write that he felt a mere prisoner of the crowd's anger.² Instead of the Hungarian pastor the predominantly Romanian and youthful crowd began to throw up its own leaders, some of whom scrambled to address the throng from the buffers of trams stranded amongst the heaving mass. Then, becoming markedly more aggressive, the crowd started to smash shop windows in the streets around Tőkés's church before the vast bulk began to drift towards other areas of the city. The two largest groups headed for the students' halls of residence and the building of the County Council of the Romanian Communist Party, which they appear to have unsuccessfully attempted to enter. As the night wore on, there was rioting in several parts of Timișoara and, as windows were smashed and vehicles burnt, the demonstrators increasingly came into conflict with the security forces, which by the end of the evening appear to have included the army.

The 17 December was a Sunday and the absence of work and a curiosity to see the devastation caused by the rioting of the night before led even larger crowds to gather, but, this time, not around Tőkés's church, which was sealed off after his forcible removal in the early hours of the morning, but in the main squares in the centre of the city. Around midday a large section of these crowds once more approaching the County Council building came into conflict with the security forces and in the pitched battle that ensued the protesters were eventually able to push the defenders' cordon far enough back to allow a small group of youths to enter the building and ransack the lower floors — an incident which seems to have further persuaded Ceaușescu of the necessity of ruthlessly crushing the demonstrations.³

² For Tőkés's recollections of these days see László Tőkés, *With God, For the People: the Autobiography of László Tőkés*, London, 1990, pp. 1-20, 145-66; also Felix Corley and John Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, Old Tappen, New Jersey, 1990, pp. 17-37.

³ For a number of accounts of these events, see Miodrag Milin, *Timișoara: 15-21 decembrie '89*, Timișoara, 1990, pp. 51-62, and Titus Suci, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură: traseele revoluției*, Timișoara, 1990, pp. 73-92. These two

The security forces eventually resecured control of the building, but chaos continued to reign elsewhere in the centre of the city as groups of stone-throwing demonstrators broke windows at will and set newspaper kiosks and vehicles on fire. Simultaneously, in a southern suburb another group of protesters had sprung an effective ambush on six tanks, trapping them between barricades and building works and forcing their crews to leave them abandoned.⁴ Thus, by late afternoon on the 17 December the authorities had effectively lost control of the centre of Timișoara, which was being ransacked by an angry crowd — some gauge of the scale of the unrest comes from official assessments that at this time over 300 shops were damaged at a cost of 5,000 million lei — and six tanks had fallen into the hands of the demonstrators, presaging a potentially dangerous escalation of the conflict.⁵

The response of the authorities to these events had often been so belated and lacking in decisive action that the agenda for much of the first part of the revolution was effectively set by the demonstrator. This, in part, seems to be because in dealing with Tőkés the authorities appear to have been operating under a number of constraints, some self-imposed, others forced upon them. Firstly, their actions seem to have been tempered to a certain extent by a desire not to overly antagonize world public opinion. Tőkés was already something of an international cause célèbre, featuring regularly on Hungarian radio and in reports carried by all the main Western shortwave radio stations broadcast to Romania, so that, by December 1989, there seems to have been a general consciousness of his protest, not only in Timișoara and Romania but also within the wider world.⁶ One consequence of this was that both the US and British Embassies dispatched officials to Timișoara to report on the situation and it may have been their presence on the morning of the 15 December that dissuaded the authorities from taking more decisive action.⁷ The authorities were also constrained by Ceaușescu's apparent

valuable books each containing dozens of eyewitness testimonies are the best sources for the events in Timișoara. I am grateful to Dennis Deletant for securing for me Milin's book. In English see Nestor Ratesh, *Romania: the Entangled Revolution*, The Washington Papers 152, New York, 1991, pp. 17-34, and Martyn Rady, *Romania in Turmoil: a Contemporary History*, London and New York, 1992, pp. 91-98.

⁴ For full details of this event in Calea Girocului see the various testimonies to be found in Milin, *Timișoara: 15-21 decembrie '89*, pp. 79-95, and Suci, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, pp. 66-124.

⁵ This figure is given in 'Raportul Comisiei Senatoriale Pentru Cercetarea Evenimentelor din Decembrie 1989: Secțiunea 3. Evenimentele desfășurate în perioada 16-22.12.1989 în municipiul București. 1. Acțiunile forțelor aparținând M.Ap.N. în garnizoana București în perioada 16-22.12.1989.', *Adevărul*, 'Ediție specială', 25 May 1992, p. 1.

⁶ Tőkés had a long history as a turbulent priest often at loggerheads with the authorities. For details of his troubles during 1989 see Tőkés, *With God, For the People*, pp. 124-44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7, and Corley and Eibner, *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, p. 21.

insistence that the removal of Tőkés should conform to some form of spurious legality. Before the eviction order was secured, the proceedings had dragged on through the best part of a whole year of legal wrangling, and after it was served there still seemed to be a reluctance to openly employ force — Tőkés was, eventually, spirited away in the middle of the night.⁸

The authorities initially appear to have believed that the problem could be solved by negotiations, but these were carried out on the 15 and 16 December at the lowest possible level by the Mayor of Timișoara, Petru Moț; no national figures were present nor even the local county leadership, who might have mustered more authority. Then, when the situation escalated and the regime decided to switch to a policy of repression, the numbers of troops initially deployed were insufficient for the task, allowing the demonstrators to achieve minor victories such as the ransacking of a fire engine, which built their confidence for future confrontations. Throughout, the central authorities displayed a marked lack of trust in the local personnel and there were frequent breakdowns of communication in the complex chain of command that had Ceaușescu himself at its head. Indeed, it seems to have been at his insistence that the military leadership adopted the singularly inappropriate tactics of deploying tanks against the fast moving stone-throwing demonstrators with serious consequences for the dimensions of the conflict.⁹ The absence of decisive action by the authorities at the onset permitted the conflict to spread beyond the confines of the area around Tőkés's church across the Bega Canal into the centre of Timișoara, thereby escalating the situation from a relatively minor local problem to one that would shake the very foundations of the regime.

This inability of the authorities to control the situation at its earliest stages was to lead, during the evening of the 17 December, to a brutal and bloody repression of the demonstrations. Following the arrival of senior military commanders from Bucharest, the security forces threw a cordon around the centre of the city, slowly squeezing the demonstrators into the Opera Square. Earlier in the day, there seems to have been some isolated shooting but now, at around 7.00 in the evening, the firing began in earnest and in the ensuing carnage, both in the centre of Timișoara and in several outlying districts, over sixty civilians were to die and 250 were to be wounded.¹⁰

⁸ Details of Tőkés's brutal removal from Timișoara can be found in Tőkés, *With God, For the People*, pp. 161-72.

⁹ This becomes clear from the Political Executive Committee transcript released after the events. It is reproduced in 'Ordin clar "Trageți!"', *România Liberă*, 10 January 1990, p. 3.

¹⁰ This is the figure of casualties in the main hospital of Timișoara in the early hours of the morning of 18 December. It is quite possible that more casualties were at some of the other hospitals in the town and there are also many reports that a large number of the wounded refused to go to hospital for fear of the

From the 18 December with the security forces patrolling the streets and a state of emergency applied in Timișoara in all but name, as people were instructed to pass only two at a time and any larger gathering was quickly broken up, the protests were driven from the streets into the only alternative place of mass socialization that was available, the factory workplace.¹¹ The Communist penchant for constructing big factories in even larger industrial complexes allowed for a concentration of sentiment and facilitated the free flow of information amongst the workforce. The passage of news about the disturbances was now further aided by the authorities, who ordered the convening of a series of workplace meetings in the hope of mobilizing the workers against the demonstrators. Ostensibly held to 'explain' the events and denounce the perpetrators as 'hooligans', these meetings for most workers merely offered confirmation of the rumours about the extent of the damage and unrest and, indeed, amongst the commuters from outside Timișoara, who until that point had probably little idea of the events which had occurred in the city over the weekend, they served to inform them of what had happened. Often given by representatives of the county Party leadership or higher management, these speeches appear to have normally been heard in silence, but in some of the larger factories, such as Electrobanat, they seem to have provided a forum for debate.¹² After preliminary meetings with senior management and officials from the county leadership, section heads returned to address their workmates, but not holding the same stamp of authority as senior officials their accounts sometimes led to cross-questioning and heated debate, thereby providing a platform for the airing of views critical of the regime.

As well as trying to mobilize the workforce in its support at the same time the regime also made an attempt to disguise the extent of the massacre by taking forty bodies from the mortuary at Timișoara for incineration in Bucharest.¹³ However, by closing the mortuary area for the duration of this operation the authorities only prompted the spread of

Securitate. Milin, Timișoara: 15-21 decembrie '89, p. 101, and Suci, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, p. 134.

¹¹ A state of emergency in Timiș county was only officially instituted by presidential decree on 21 December. For the text of the decree translated into English see *BBC Monitoring, Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 2 Eastern Europe*, EE/0646, B/2-3, 22 December 1989, Agerpres in English, 0910 gmt, 21 December 1989.

¹² A famous exception to the general rule of silence was the speech given by Claudiu Iordache at his institute IPROTIM. See George Galloway and Bob Wylie, *Downfall: the Ceaușescus and the Romanian Revolution*, London, 1991, p. 124.

¹³ For a full account of this incident see the summary of the facts from the Military Procurator reprinted in Filip Teodorescu, *Un risc asumat: Timișoara decembrie 1989*, Bucharest, 1992, pp. 294-99, together with the eyewitness accounts in Suci, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, pp. 151-54, 160-63. Details of the identity of the corpses removed from the mortuary appear in 'Primim de la asociația "17 decembrie" Timișoara', *Adevărul*, 13 March 1991, p. 5.

rumours, and one of the most emotive and sustained rallying cries amongst the demonstrators during the days that followed was for the return of the bodies for decent Christian burial. The circumstances surrounding the disappearance of these bodies also seem to lie at the root of continuing uncertainty over the real death toll during the revolution in Timișoara.

Indeed, as the unrest progressed, rumours and myths became increasingly significant in mobilizing the crowd. Two incidents in particular came to be seen as symbolizing the conflict. On 18 December, in the late afternoon, troops opened fire on a group of young protesters gathered on the steps of the Cathedral, leaving a twenty-two-year-old man dead. Until this point the precincts of the Cathedral seem to have come to represent an ideal of protection and sanctuary in the minds of many of the protesters — a place at which the forces of repression would not dare shoot. Thus, when it occurred, this incident, underpinned by ideas of sacrilege, seems to have embodied the image of a Manichean battle between good and evil, vividly striking the popular imagination and leading to a perceptible rise in tension.¹⁴

The next day the workers at Electrobanat occupied their factory and refusing to work, called for negotiations to settle their grievances — amongst which seems to have been demands for the withdrawal of the army from the area. Senior Party officials arrived to try and persuade the workers to return to work and as the negotiations continued a crowd gathered outside the factory on the bridge over the canal. Shortly afterwards, the security forces opened fire, injuring and possibly killing some of the crowd and sparking off extensive rioting throughout the area.¹⁵ The rumours following this incident were particularly graphic, the most striking being that a young boy had been shot and his body thrown into the Bega Canal. The strike at ELBA and the shooting and rioting in the area weaved a further strand in the mythology of the revolution. Gradually, as the rumours spread, the events seem to have become conflated and the distinction between factory and street blurred — the news was not only of a strike but also of shootings at ELBA. Instead of a single person, Tőkés, the symbol of the revolution, had now become a whole factory.¹⁶ Soon sympathy strikes were being reported, and the next day, as the strikers marched from their factories towards the centre of the city, slogans were chanted in support of the ELBA workers and the main column even marched across Timișoara to the factory before turning towards the centre. The violence of that day also heralded the failure of

¹⁴ For details see Milin, *Timișoara: 15-21 decembrie '89*, p. 109, and Suci, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, pp. 154-58.

¹⁵ For full accounts of these incidents see Milin, *Timișoara: 15-21 decembrie '89*, pp. 112-14; Suci, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, pp. 164-65, 174-76, and Ion Păchian Tatomișescu, 'Noaptea și zilele revoluției române din decembrie 1989, la Timișoara' in *Timișoara 16-22 decembrie 1989*, Timișoara, 1990, pp. 152-64.

¹⁶ Milin, *Timișoara: 15-21 decembrie '89*, p. 116.

the policy of repression. Even with such large numbers of troops and armoured vehicles in the city the authorities seemed powerless to halt further outbreaks of unrest, and during the coming day their resolve was to be tested until it broke.

Faced by this growing unrest in the factories the authorities seemed to have returned to the idea of a negotiated settlement based on a belief that the majority of the workers remained basically loyal to the regime. On the morning of 20 December representatives of the local Party leadership again went to the largest of the local factories to speak to the workers and try to get them to return to work and later in the day the Prime Minister, Constantin Dăscălescu, on the model of the regime's response to the earlier Braşov riots of 1987, arrived in Timișoara to negotiate with representatives of the protesters and, it seems, he was also expected to address a massed rally in Opera Square later in the day.

However, such plans were to founder on a massive display of protest as huge numbers of workers poured out of the factories and formed several long columns of marchers which snaked their way through the city to the centre. The exact circumstances out of which the protests grew are not entirely clear, but, it seems, that at some factories the management do appear to have locked doors in an attempt to prevent the workforce from leaving the premises, whilst in others the workers themselves were divided between those who wished to stay united and protected within the workplace and those who wished to run the risk of dispersment on the streets. At some points troops do appear to have tried to bar the way of the columns as they approached the centre — whether shots were fired in an attempt to disperse the crowds is unclear — but they were overwhelmed by sheer numbers, and, surrounded by a sea of protesters, the army was effectively neutralized as a fighting force in Timișoara. Instead of Dăscălescu, the assembled masses in the Opera Square were to hear a local Professor, Lorin Fortuna, who was to be the first leader of the revolution in Timișoara.

At the same time another section of the crowd moved to the County Council building and here a small delegation of between thirteen and eighteen protesters entered into negotiations with Dăscălescu, Emil Bobu and other members of the Party leadership.¹⁷ The negotiating group seem to have been a genuine *ad hoc* construction, spanning a wide range of professions and places of employment with none of the representatives being publicly known before the revolution. The talks took place against continuous chanting by the protesters outside. No agenda had been agreed beforehand and, at first, the demands were almost entirely concerned with the situation in Timișoara, being in many ways little more than a coherent articulation of the slogans of the demonstrators. However, as the afternoon progressed, a more radical position seems to have

¹⁷ For an account of the negotiations by one of the participants see Suciu, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, pp. 215-29.

evolved with demands for the resignation of Ceaușescu and his government and calls for free elections coming to the fore. Eventually, the talks seem to have ground into a stalemate with Dăscălescu playing for time by constantly referring to the need to confer with Bucharest. It became clear that the authorities were only willing to concede three of the lesser demands guaranteeing the immunity of the delegates, the release of detainees and the return of the bodies of the dead, and after Ceaușescu's uncompromising speech at 7.00 in the evening, in which he blamed the disturbances on hooligans and foreign provocateurs and offered no respite from the road of socialist construction, the negotiations fizzled out.¹⁸

Dăscălescu, Bobu and their entourage returned to Bucharest and a period of uneasy stalemate followed in Timișoara, with the authorities remaining in control of the County Council building whilst the demonstrators established their own centre of power at the Opera House. However, victory was far from assured and on the evening of the 20 and morning of the 21 December Ceaușescu made a further attempt to restore order in the city through the dispatch of fifteen train loads of crudely armed workers from Oltenia. However, when the first trains pulled into Timișoara South station they found nobody to meet them except for a few hundred protesters. Tired, hungry and confused, most remained waiting on the trains until they could return home.¹⁹

Afterwards, rumours of approaching troop trains and other dangers continued to circulate, and the next day, amidst the prevailing uncertainty as the numbers on the balcony of the Opera swelled, it soon became clear that there was little cohesion amongst the leaders of the revolution. Over many long years they had painfully been schooled in the expression of dissatisfaction but they had little understanding of the needs in constructing a revolution and, now, as the putative leaders attempted to draw up a programme, suspicions and frictions came to the fore. It was in this atmosphere that Radu Bălan, the Party Secretary of the county, appears to have been asked by some of the protesters to join the leadership. In general, he seems to have been not unpopular in the city —

¹⁸ A translation of Ceaușescu's speech can be found in *BBC*, EE/0646, B/1-2, 22 December 1989, Bucharest Home Service, 1700 gmt, 20 December 1989. After the speech workplace meetings were convened across Romania to denounce the events in Timișoara. Those in Bucharest seem to have been addressed by union and works' Party officials, not by major political figures. For accounts of such meetings, together with photographs showing obviously unenthusiastic workers, see 'Întreaga națiune, în deplină unitate în jurul partidului, este hotărâtă să-și apere cu fermitate cuceririle revoluționare, independența și integritatea patriei, să continue neabătut construcția socialistă', *România Liberă*, 21 December 1989, p. 2.

¹⁹ Seven trains departed from Craiova, three from Râmnicu Vâlcea, two from Slatina and one each from Drăgășani, Caracal and Balș. For details see Milin, *Timișoara: 15-21 decembrie '89*, pp. 170-71 and Suciu, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, p. 211.

he was applauded when he first spoke from the Opera balcony. His return may have been partly accepted because of the growing chaos in Timișoara and the need to normalize the situation to ensure a return to work and the regular supply of foodstuffs, but it may also have been a deliberate attempt by some of his rivals to undercut the power base of Fortuna.²⁰ By the morning of the 22 December events in Timișoara had followed a course which Bucharest was soon to emulate, as young and inexperienced demonstrators tried to come to terms with 'untainted' representatives of the old regime.

Meanwhile, as suggested in the earlier typology, the unrest had spread well beyond the bounds of the Banat to encompass many of the population centres of Transylvania as well as Bucharest. After Ceaușescu arrived back from Iran in the afternoon of the 20 December he ordered the convening of a huge mass demonstration for the next morning in the centre of Bucharest. The meeting was to be covered live on national television and radio, with the intention of demonstrating to the wider Romanian public that the regime continued to enjoy popular support and thereby legitimizing the repression of the demonstrations in Timișoara. Given the rising tensions it was a high risk strategy, but by seeing the unrest in Timișoara as the work of a few foreign agents and domestic malcontents Ceaușescu seems to have been able to convince himself that the vast bulk of the population could be relied upon to rally to his cause once the situation was clearly explained to them. To a large extent, Ceaușescu's position was based on a mythologized view of 1968 when, in a rousing rally in the centre of Bucharest, he had condemned the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and made a stirring declaration of Romania's national independence of action. At the time, this had won him great popular acclaim and, now, although he was aware that the situation was more serious than in 1968, he seems to have believed that the threat to Romania's territorial sovereignty was such as to permit him to successfully play the same national card for a second time. However, this time Ceaușescu's efforts to rally the population to his side were only to reveal the weakness of his position, and the look of startled bemusement that crossed his face following disturbances in the crowd during the rally only seems to have confirmed for many Romanians the frailty of the regime's grasp on power.²¹

The meeting broke up peremptorily and soon the events in Bucharest began to follow a course similar to those in Timișoara as scattered groups of youths moved through a larger crowd of onlookers and passing shoppers shouting slogans and urging their fellow citizens to join them in protest. Shop windows were broken and the security forces moved in to

²⁰ At least this seems to have been the intention of Ion Savu who says it was he who fetched Balan to the Opera. His testimony can be found in Suci, *Reportaj cu sufletul la gură*, pp. 246-48.

²¹ For a translation of Ceaușescu's speech see *BBC*, EE/0647, B/5-6, 23 December 1989, Bucharest Home Service, 1031 gmt, 21 December 1989.

disperse the protesters with tear gas and baton charges. The largest group of demonstrators gathered outside the Intercontinental Hotel in Piața Universității and here, at around 5.00 in the afternoon, after an incident involving a military lorry, the security forces opened fire on the crowd.²² In the night of rioting that followed over fifty demonstrators were killed and 460 others wounded before order was restored in the early hours of the morning.

As in Timișoara this repression appears to have merely triggered off further mass protests since early the next morning large concentrations of demonstrators began to march towards the centre of Bucharest. Again the exact circumstances are not clear, but in various places troops seem to have tried to halt the oncoming masses only to be overwhelmed by the huge number of protesters. Advancing to the centre somewhat surprisingly, the crowd found the security forces pulling back from the huge square outside the Central Committee building and thereby freeing access to the very centre of power. The order for the withdrawal seems to have been given at 10.45 with the process beginning at 11.00, but whether it was given independently of Ceaușescu or with his sanction remains one of the chief mysteries of the revolution.²³ Already by mid-morning military discipline had effectively collapsed as, isolated in a sea of demonstrators, detachments of soldiers began to fraternize with the civilian population. The standard remedy in such situations is to withdraw the troops involved and replace them with others drawn from elsewhere. This occurred in China at the time of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations and it may be that in Bucharest the withdrawal of the troops was also merely a strategic response to the prevailing military situation. It also seems that Ceaușescu, perhaps sensing that the army could not stem the tide of protests, preferred to place his faith in one last attempt to address 'his' people whilst at the same time taking the prudent step of ordering helicopters in case an evacuation was necessary. He was expected to make another attempt to address the nation from the TV studios in the Central Committee building at 13.00, but, before then, he seems to have ordered the organization of another mass rally and for the crowd to assemble the square had to be cleared.²⁴ Whatever, a large

²² For this incident see 'Raportul Comisiei Senatoriale Pentru Cercetarea Evenimentelor din Decembrie 1989: Secțiunea 3.1', *Adevărul*, 'Ediție specială', 25 May 1992, p. 2, and for a view from the side of the protesters with broadly the same details but differing interpretations see 'Ei, tinerii, au făcut revoluția. Ei, tinerii, scriu istoria', *Magazin Istoric*, seria noua, vol. 24, 1990, no. 2, p. 6.

²³ 'Raportul Comisiei Senatoriale Pentru Cercetarea Evenimentelor din Decembrie 1989: Secțiunea 3.1', *Adevărul*, 'Ediție specială', 25 May 1992, p. 3.

²⁴ *Televiziunea Română, Revoluția Română în direct*, Bucharest, 1990, p. 177. At his trial Dincă stated that on the morning of 22 December Elena Ceaușescu ordered him to proceed to the '23 August' factory to organize the workers to march to the centre. However, at the same time Barbu Petrescu, the Mayor of Bucharest, appeared and at Dincă's suggestion he was dispatched instead. 'Procesul a început: din rechizitoriul Procuraturii generale', *Adevărul*, 28

crowd gathered and, when Ceaușescu appeared on the balcony at approximately 11.30 and began to speak, he was soon interrupted by boos and catcalls and ushered away from the scene. Then, the crowd rushed the doors of the Central Committee building and, meeting little opposition, streamed inside. In front of them the Ceaușescus in an undignified scramble fled to the roof where a waiting helicopter took off at 12.08 carrying them, Emil Bobu, Manea Mănescu and two members of the presidential bodyguard first to Snagov and, then, following a farcical, almost tragi-comical series of events, which saw the presidential couple bundled from one car to another, to the point where they were detained in Tîrgoviște.²⁵

The abandonment of the regime by the security forces made the position of Ceaușescu untenable. As early as the 16 December the cry 'The Army is with us!' had been on the lips of the demonstrators in Timișoara, but it was not until the 22 December that the popular refrain found response. This persistent belief that the army would eventually side with the people both encouraged the demonstrators and sapped the morale of the military. To be effectively used as an instrument of repression within a revolutionary context an army must hold imprinted loyalties which give it a sense of institutional separateness. The largely conscript (75%) Romanian army, with only a sixteen-month period of military service, seems to have developed no such sense of separation, and, unwilling to countenance excessive employment on domestic civilian populations, both in Timișoara and Bucharest it effectively collapsed as a disciplined force after a single operation. Before December 1989 there seems to have been considerable dissatisfaction within the army both amongst the conscripts, who were often used as a form of forced labour on industrial projects, and within the officer corp where there appears to have been much resentment at what amounted to a gradual deprofessionalization of the military.²⁶ This lack of institutional

January 1990, p. 3. For the view of the protesters see Richard Donkin, 'I've waited all my life for this', *Financial Times*, 23 December 1989, p. 2.

²⁵ There are many accounts of the flight of the Ceaușescus and although most are rather full of hyperbole and implausibly contrast the pitiful and dejected state of the Ceaușescus with the heroism of those who were forced to drive them the basic facts seem to be fairly uniformly acknowledged even if the motives of many of the participants still remain unclear. For some accounts in English see Ramesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, pp. 70-73; Edward Behr, *Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite: the Rise and Fall of the Ceaușescus*, London, 1991, pp. 4-13; John Simpson, *The Darkness Crumbles: Despatches from the Barricades Revised and Updated*, London, 1992, pp. 279-85; Mark Almond, *The Rise and Fall of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu*, London, 1992, pp. 13-18, 230-31, and John Sweeny, *The Life and Evil Times of Nicolae Ceaușescu*, London, 1991, pp. 213-14, 218-21.

²⁶ In 1985 in response to severe shortages of electrical power the military were drafted into power stations but the exercise does not seem to have been an unalloyed success. See Paul Gafton, 'The State of Emergency and the Militarization of Power Industry', *Radio Free Europe Research*, Romanian

separateness and the disaffection of both the conscripts and the officer corp was inadvertently fused by Ceaușescu through his espousal of a nationalist ideology.²⁷ Nationalism stressed the same patriotic values that lay at the heart of the military value system thereby reestablishing the organic relationship between the army and nation, which had been diluted by internationalist tendencies in the immediate years after the Communist takeover when the Red Army was stationed in Romania. Following the embracement of nationalism, the Romanian army took on a renewed importance as the schoolroom of the nation in that it was the chief forum for patriotic socialization. This led to a widespread tendency both within the ranks of the military and within the people as a whole to identify the army with the nation, that is 'the people' at their widest extent, and on the streets of Timișoara and Bucharest this led the protesters to chant at the troops: 'We are the people, who do you defend?' In contrast, the Securitate were almost exclusively identified in the popular mind with the state, an important distinction which was to come to the fore during the next phase of the revolution.

Situation Report 16, 14 November 1985, pp. 7-11; *idem*, 'The Electricity Crisis', *Radio Free Europe Research*, Romanian Situation Report 17, 17 December 1985, pp. 27-32. In 1988 soldiers were reported to be building the Deva-Brad railway and apartments in Bucharest. See *The RUSI Soviet-Warsaw Pact Yearbook 1989*, Coulsdon, 1989-90, p. 270. For the Romanian army in the late 1980s see also Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era*, New York, 1988, pp. 175-95, and Jonathan Eyal, 'Romania: Between Appearances and Realities' in Jonathan Eyal (ed.), *The Warsaw Pact and the Balkans: Moscow's Southern Flank*, RUSI Defence Studies, Basingstoke and London, 1989, pp. 67-108.

²⁷ 'The period that youth spends in the army must give them not only thorough military knowledge but also a rich political and cultural knowledge. We must not for a minute forget that the army must be, par excellence, an advanced school of political and patriotic education [dedicated to] the formation of the new man, the builder of multilaterally developed socialist society.' Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Scînteia*, 3 October 1976, quoted in Walter M. Bacon Jnr, 'The Military and the Party in Romania' in Dale R. Herspring & Ivan Volgyes (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in Communist Systems*, Boulder, Colorado, 1978, p. 173.

Romania's Role in Post-Cold War Central Europe

ELENA ZAMFIRESCU

Condemned to oblivion for almost forty-five years, the term 'Central Europe' has gradually re-entered political discourse. Before 1989 it was used intermittently solely by *émigré* intellectuals from the countries in that region, but since 1990 it has gained fashionable currency in contemporary political analyses.

Two reasons lie behind its disappearance from the geopolitical representations of the period 1945-89. The first was the post-war extension of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence in Europe up to the Elba and Greece, which led to most of the area previously designated Central Europe being termed, together with the whole of the Soviet Union, 'Eastern Europe'. The second had much to do with the defeat, and indeed the failure, of the Third Reich's attempt to carve a Central Europe (*Mittleuropa*) under German domination.

It is as a consequence of the success of the post-1989 changes in Europe that the term 'Central Europe' has been resurrected: with their full political independence restored, the former Soviet satellites have also regained their geopolitical identity. As early as the spring of 1990, Zbigniew Brzezinski astutely observed that:

Today, Eastern Europe is again Central Europe — which it has always been historically, culturally and philosophically. The correct geographic designation of the area involved is also Central Europe — even though for half a century it was misleadingly labelled as Eastern Europe ... The fact is that the terms 'Eastern Europe' and 'Western Europe', as employed over the last several decades, were not geographic but geopolitical designations. They reflected the post-Yalta political division of Europe. Today, it is the Soviet Union that is again Europe's true geographic and geopolitical East.¹

Two years later, an important political document, 'The Declaration of the Extraordinary Meeting of the WEU Council of Ministers with the States of Central Europe', issued on 19 June 1992, at Petersberg (Germany), recognized the re-establishment of Central Europe. Its first paragraph identifies Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia (as it was then), Estonia,

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Beyond Chaos. A Policy for the West', *The National Interest*, Spring 1990, pp. 3-4. Although Brzezinski's formulation needs to be brought up to date by replacing the Soviet Union with the Russian Federation, his main point still stands.

Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania as 'States of Central Europe'. Far from endorsing the questionable opinion that post-Cold War Central Europe would include just three or four countries, the document suggests instead that the area in point could hardly be reduced to the nine enumerated countries, which are not, after all, identified as '*the* states of Central Europe', but as '*states* of Central Europe'. Unfortunately, this linguistic and perceptual change is not reflected in many journalistic or academic articles.² Political representatives of some of the WEU's member countries and associated partners (the nine countries defined as 'States of Central Europe') continue to speak as if the document had not been adopted.

The pertinence of a broader definition of Central Europe is also corroborated by the membership of a post-1989 sub-regional grouping which calls itself the Central European Initiative. Even though, for the time being, it comprises — besides Austria and Italy — just eight of the new democracies in the area that stretches from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic and the Black Sea, the presence of Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia among its members clearly indicates that Central Europe does not stop on the northern bank of the Danube. Given that the population of the latter two states is overwhelmingly made up of 'non-Western Christians', this grouping has also the merit of practically rejecting the idea that the eastern and southern borders of Central Europe would overlap with the religious 'fault line' of the year 1500.

Reacting to the growing neglect by Western scholars in the Cold War period of the differences which still remained between the dominant power of the 'Eastern bloc' and its western satellites, a number of writers and scholars from the latter group tried to keep alive the idea that Communism was not the choice of their compatriots, but their imposed fate. Some even insisted, given that the West had been equally responsible for the drawing up of borders after the Second World War, that it was the West's duty to help those countries come back to the world to which they naturally belonged.

Milan Kundera, the famous Czech writer, is frequently mentioned as one of the forerunners of these appeals on behalf of Central Europe. Acknowledging his remarkable contribution to the debate, Tony Judt also adds, however, that:

Kundera's own writings had been anticipated, for example, by the Romanian Mircea Eliade, writing in *Preuves*, in Paris, in 1952: 'these cultures [that is, those of Central Europe] ... are on the eve of their disappearance ... Does not Europe feel the amputation of a very part of its flesh? Because, in the end, all

² Elena Zamfirescu, "'The Flight' from the Balkans', *RUSI Journal*, December 1994.

these countries are in Europe, all these peoples belong to the European community.³

Given that Eliade's worries had been voiced only seven years after the end of the Second World War, it is a reasonable supposition that his representation of Central Europe — one including his own country — was echoing the inter-war geopolitical representation of the area under consideration. Many writings from the inter-war period concerning Central Europe invariably include Romania within this area.⁴

Indeed, some might be tempted to believe that Romania would have become Central European as a result of Transylvania's integration into the united Romanian state, born at the end of the First World War. Although the historical act of 1 December 1918 has undeniably changed the country's centre of gravity, it deserves underlining that Romania's belonging to, as it were, central-Central Europe, that is, the area north of the Danube, was already recognized before the First World War.

For example, in his 1910 book devoted to Romania,⁵ Alphonse Carpentier shared the view that she did not belong to the Balkans. Six years later, Otto Freiherr von Dungern noted that Romania was the link between the Balkans and the rest of Europe, adding that the Romanians did not recognize themselves as a 'Balkan people'.⁶ Stressing in 1917 that the Danube is the northern border of the Balkans, a Bulgarian academic, Anastase Ischirkoff, also confirmed, albeit indirectly, that Romania was a neighbour rather than an 'inhabitant' of the Balkans.⁷ Furthermore, the map appended to Jovan Cvijic's *La Peninsule Balkanique*⁸ clearly indicated that Romanian was situated 'outside the area'. Published before the end of the war and well before the conclusion of the Trianon Treaty, the map showed that the northern border of the Balkans was delineated by the Danube and Sava rivers.

³ Tony Judt, 'The Rediscovery of Central Europe', *Daedalus*, vol. 119, Winter 1990, no. 1, p. 33.

⁴ See Riccardo Riccardi, *La Romania — monografia geografica*, Rome, 1924; C.G. Rommenhoeller, *La Grande Roumanie*, ed. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1926; G. Peylavi de Fangeres, *Roumanie, Terre Latine*, Paris, 1929; Andre Tibal, *La Roumanie*, Paris, 1930; Emmanuel de Martonne, *Geographie Universelle*, vol. 4: *Europe Centrale (Suisse, Autriche, Hongrie, Tchecoslovaquie, Pologne, Roumanie)*, series edited by P. Vidal de la Blanche and L. Gallois, Paris, 1931; Ernest Lemonon, *La nouvelle Europe Centrale et son bilan economique (1919-1930)*, Paris, 1931, Ernst Schmidt, *Dir rumanischen Staates in ihrer historische Entwicklung*, Munich, 1932; Eugen Pittard, *Les races et l'histoire*, Paris, 1932; Andre Tibal, *Les communications dans l'Europe danubienne*, Bulletin no. 8-9, Paris, 1933; Jacques Ancel, 'L'Europe Centrale', Paris, 1936; Mario Ruffini, *La Romania e i romeni*, Milan, 1939.

⁵ Alphonse Carpentier, *La Roumanie moderne*, Brussels, 1910, p. 3.

⁶ Otto Freiherr von Dungern, *Rumanien*, ed. Friedrich Andreas Berthes, Gotha, 1916, p. 3.

⁷ Anastase Ischirkoff, *Bulgarien, Land und Leute*, Leipzig, 1917, p. 17.

⁸ Jovan Cvijic, *La Peninsule Balkanique*, Paris, 1918.

Almost twenty years after the establishment of the 'Eastern bloc', there were books published referring to 'the socialist republics in Central Europe', with Romania included among these republics, as, for example, in *Les républiques socialistes d'Europe Centrale*.⁹ The other 'socialist republics' — Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia — were defined as Balkan countries.

Three years later, a British author wrote:

Romania is often described as a Balkan country. The term Balkans is, strictly speaking, the name of a range of mountains in Bulgaria and as such is not applicable to a geographical region. As popularized by historians and political writers, however, the term has come to designate the culture, political systems, and other aspects of a group of countries of Southeastern Europe. Still, if we characterize Romania as a Balkan country in this sense, we are not being strictly accurate. The most important historical influences that have helped to shape the Romanian state and its people have come as much from the north, west and east as from the south. It is logical to consider Romania part of Central Europe, with strong links to the 'Balkan region'. But it may be more meaningful to associate Romania with Hungary, northern Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Austria than with Albania, Bulgaria and Greece ...¹⁰

Like most of the Western authors who have no doubts about Romania's belonging to Central Europe, J.M. Matley underlines that, besides her geographic location, there are also historical, cultural and political grounds for her association with states like Austria, former Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

As for the post-1989 period, many sources still consider Romania part of the East or part of the Balkans. Nevertheless, an increasing number of books, studies and atlases have started to recognize Romania as part of central Central Europe. One of the most accurate portraits of Romania's geographical location is to be found in Paul Magosci's impressive *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*.¹¹ Explaining their choice of the term *East Central Europe*, the editors themselves recognize that it would be more precise to describe the territory they cover, which forms literally the central third of the European continent (traditionally considered to lie within the longitudinal boundaries of 10°W and 60°E),¹² as *Central Europe* (10°E–35°E).

As specified by its authors, the territory examined by the atlas is 'subdivided into three geographic zones: (1) the northern zone; (2) the Alpine-Carpathian zone; and (3) the Balkan zone'; and the contemporary physiognomy of the three zones is the following: the northern zone

⁹ Andre Blanc *et al.*, *Les républiques socialistes d'Europe Centrale*, Paris, 1967, p. 1.

¹⁰ J.M. Matley, *Romania. A Profile*, London, 1970, p. 9.

¹¹ Paul Robert Magosci, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*, Seattle and London, 1993. The *Atlas* is part of the multivolume *History of East Central Europe* published by the University of Washington Press.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xi.

‘encompasses former East Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine (west of the Dnieper River) and Moldavia’; the Alpine-Carpathian zone ‘roughly coincides with the lands of the historic Habsburg Empire (minus Galicia) before the mid-nineteenth century and the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia [emphasis added]. Today this zone encompasses the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia (north of the Kupa-Sava rivers), and northeast Italy’; the Balkans, ‘this formerly Ottoman sphere of East Central Europe’, includes today ‘the contemporary states of Croatia (south of the Kupa-Sava rivers), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece and European Turkey’.¹³

This description makes it very clear that: (a) ‘the Visegrad area’ is just a component of the geographic entity called (East) Central Europe; (b) the Balkans are part and parcel of the latter. Those who insist on ousting the Balkans from (East) Central Europe and respectively on ‘attaching’ Romania to the Balkans might be disappointed by this objective portrait of our part of the continent. The more so because — as indicated by its editors — the broad zones described by this *historical* atlas ‘have been determined as much by historical as by geographic factors’. In other words, those countries grouped together have in common something more than certain geographic features. It is obvious that, on the one hand, this recent work does not verify the notion that Romania would owe her Central-Europeanness to Transylvania alone. All her historical provinces have always belonged to either the northern or the Alpine-Carpathian zone of (East) Central Europe. On the other hand, Magocsi’s *Historical Atlas* recalls that, although the Ottoman Empire was the suzerain of the Danubian principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia), unlike their south Danubian neighbours the latter preserved their sovereignty.

As I have endeavoured to demonstrate, Romania has, throughout the twentieth century, been identified by numerous academics from both Europe and America as a Central European country. Or, more exactly as one located in, as it were, ‘central Central Europe’. One should consider, however, the views of earlier historians to see whether they further corroborate Romania’s claim to Central-Europeanness.

Romania’s self-perception

It is a legitimate question to ask whether Romanians themselves have ever perceived their country as a Central European one. Quoting the famous Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, who preferred the term ‘Southeastern Europe’, many Western academics have been able to reply that the idea that Romania would be a Central European country was alien to the mind of many Romanians. Leaving aside the fact that Iorga, in one of his papers published in 1935, amended this view and stressed

¹³ Ibid., p. 2.

instead the Carpathian identity of his country, there is strong evidence that the way we define Romania after 1989 is neither a matter of fashion nor mimicry. On the contrary, we capitalize on a long tradition.

In connection with this, it is useful to recall that the flame of the 1848 revolutions did not bypass Romania. On the contrary, although not united yet, all her historical provinces took part in the 'European spring of the peoples' which had France and the Romanian Principalities as its respective western and eastern confines. While Romania's southern neighbours did not experience that pathbreaking event, history's clock was ticking at one and the same time for Romania and the other countries situated in the 'northern tier' of Central Europe. Had Romania owed her belonging to this specific area only to an event that was to take place seventy years later (1918), the other provinces would not have been affected by the revolutionary wave of 1848. But, according to accurate historical records, this was not the case.

Voicing his conationals' sense of belonging, Alexandru A.C. Sturdza complained, in 1904, about 'the strange error of the French and German geographers in persistently confusing us, in every respect, with the transdanubian, Balkan countries and peoples'.¹⁴ While for Sturdza the Danube seemed to represent a separation line between the countries dominated by the Carpathians — the hallmark of Central Europe — and the Balkan ones, other prominent Romanians shared the notion that the Danube was a natural frontier *within* Central Europe. One example is offered by the proposal advanced during the autumn of 1918 by Take Ionescu, concerning the creation of a Central European confederation among the countries situated between Germany and Russia, and between the Baltic and the Aegean Seas.

An indirect proof that seventy-five years ago the British mass media had not difficulty in recognizing Romania's 'Central Europeanness' can be found in the pages of the issue of the *Daily Telegraph* dated 20 October 1920. Explaining to its readers the reasons behind the French President, Millerand's, decision to award to Take Ionescu (Romania's Foreign Minister of the time) the Legion d'Honneur, the newspaper mentions, *inter alia*, 'the ability of his opinions on all the problems of Central Europe'. More recently, a Czech political scientist recalled that Take Ionescu was one of the few designers of 'non-German Mittleuropas':

During World War I a number of counter-schemes to the German Mittleuropa appeared. In 1918, for example, the Romanian premier Take Ionescu proposed to create an eighty-million-strong Central European confederation, formed by

¹⁴ Alexandru A.C. Sturdza, *La terre et la race. Roumaines depuis leurs origines jusqu'a nos jours*, Paris, 1904, p. 7.

all states situated between Germany and Russia. Similar ideas were developed in T.G. Masaryk's book *New Europe* (1918).¹⁵

Following in Take Ionescu's steps, Nicolae Titulescu also promoted the idea that the Danube linked, rather than separated, the countries crossed by it. When referring to Central Europe, however, he had in mind mainly the countries north of the Danube, tending to define Romania's southern neighbours as Balkan states.¹⁶ By the time Titulescu was Romania's Minister of Foreign Affairs Romania was a party to both the Little Entente (comprising Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, and having — through Romania — special ties to Poland) and the Balkan Pact, two facts which emblemize her geopolitical position. In 1931 Ernest Lemonon described this position as follows:

Geographically and historically, Romania is a bridge between the West and the East ... Her role has to be, once again, one of co-ordination and rapprochement ... Looked at from a Western perspective, she has to facilitate the relationship between the Danubian and the Balkan countries. Because she is the link between them. She has to rely on both the Danubian and the Balkan groupings. Romania could not belong to just one of them. But she is a necessary component in each of these groupings, in so far as she is the only country that can ensure the junction of the latter.¹⁷

This assessment of Romania's place and role in Central Europe is as true today as it was sixty-four years ago, and yet there is a tendency to mention Romania's participation in the Balkan Pact, while omitting mention of her strong inter-war links with former Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Romanians have never denied, however, their traditional links with the countries in the Balkans. Too long a history would mock them, if they dared such irreverence. To say nothing about geographic proximity. Yet, the important Balkan dimension of Romanian foreign policy is not explained by mere neighbourliness. It is a reflection of Romania's enduring economic, political and cultural ties. It indicates the country's direct and material interest in the fate of the Balkans as well as the willingness to make the most of her good relations with all her southern neighbours. That is why Romanians define their country today as one which is 'close to', and not simply 'bordering on', the Balkans. The more so because they are of the opinion that the term 'Balkans' should be seen less as designating a sort of 'endless European disease', and more as shorthand for South-Central Europe.

With respect to Romanians' perceptions of themselves in the inter-war period, it is useful to note that the academic world involved itself more

¹⁵ Milan Hauner, 'Germany? But Where Is It Situated?', *Perspectives. Review of Central European Affairs*, Prague, Summer 1994, p. 31.

¹⁶ See Nicolae Titulescu, *Documente diplomatice*, Bucharest, 1967, *passim*.

¹⁷ Ernest Lemonon, *La nouvelle Europe Central et son bilan economique (1919-1930)*, Paris, 1931, p. 212.

systematically in the debate about Romania's geopolitical position during this period. Even Iorga was not outside the criticism of younger scholars who reproached him for the fact that his favourite term (i.e. 'Southeastern Europe') did not accurately reflect the position and the role he himself recognized as pertaining to Romania — that of a fundamental linchpin between the West and the East, and between the North and the South of the continent. Romanian academics strongly argued the case that Romania be considered part and parcel of Central Europe. In doing so, they succeeded — rather better than their Romanian predecessors and their foreign counterpart — in highlighting the very foundations of their country's role as a predestined bridge between the different parts of Central Europe.¹⁸ (The most comprehensive analysis is found in N.M. Radulescu's *Romania's Geopolitical Position*.¹⁹)

During the years immediately after the Second World War, when the Soviet occupation troops were trying to impose an 'eastern' (even Slav) identity upon the country, it was mainly the Romanian diaspora in Western countries who denounced the cultural and historical crime committed against the genuine identity of their people. I have already mentioned Mircea Eliade. Another telling example is offered by a British book, published in 1956, in which Constantin Visoianu, a former Minister for Foreign Affairs, rightly points out in the introduction that:

Of all the countries subjugated by Soviet Russia, it is Romania that is subjected to the heaviest pressure, it is Romania that is most ruthlessly exploited ... The explanation must be sought in a combination of circumstances. The Romanian people are of Latin origin, and Soviet Russia is only too well aware of the deep resistance stemming from this. The Romanians have always looked toward the West, and have always shown resistance to suggestions coming from the East.²⁰

¹⁸ See, for example, S. Mehedinti, *Le pays et le peuple roumain*, 1927; I. Simionescu, *Tara noastră. Natura, oamenii, munca*, Bucharest, 1938; Mihai D. David, 'Probleme de ordin geopolitic ale locului și ale spațiului ocupate de status român' in *Considerații geopolitice asupra Statului Român*, Iași, 1939; M. Popa-Vereș, 'Schemă privind cercetările geopolitice sub aspectul intereselor naționale' in *Geopolitica*, Craiova, 1940; Ion Conea, *Destinul istoric al Carpaților*, Bucharest, 1941; Ion Simionescu, *Rumanien*, Bucharest, 1942; Ion Conea, 'O poziție geopolitică' in *Geopolitica și geoistoria*, 1943, no. 3; C. Brătescu *et al.*, *Unitatea și funcțiunile pământului și poporului românesc*, Bucharest, 1943; Vintilă Mihăilescu, 'România — țară de răspântie' in *Probleme de geografie românească*, Bucharest, 1944.

Parts of these studies can be found in Emil I. Emandi, Gh. Buzatu, Vasile S. Cucu (eds), *Geopolitica*, vol. 1, Iași, 1994. In reading them one needs, however, to sift the wheat from the chaff (some of them bear the stamp of the dubious geopolitical ideas and approaches characteristic of the inter-war period).

¹⁹ N.M. Rădulescu, 'Poziția geopolitică a României' in *Revista Geografică Română*, vol. 1, fasc. I, 1938.

²⁰ Constantin Visoianu, 'Introduction' in *Captive Romania*, ed. Alexandru Cretzianu, London, 1956, p. xv.

Given the stubborn efforts of Soviet hegemony to cut both the visible and invisible threads linking Romania to the West, and the fact that she was the only country in the 'Eastern bloc' surrounded by 'brotherly states', one can understand why, during the 1970s and 1980s, the voice of the Romanians was more muted than that of their peers in the area in reasserting their claim to Central Europeanness. One should add, however, that during the 1970s the academic world (particularly geographers and historians) had already made a start in amending the distorted picture of Romania.²¹

Romania's choice

Membership of Central Europe is not only about the geographic position of a given country, but about subscribing to the traditions, culture, political institutions and economic life of this region. Central Europe is that part of the Old Continent which, when offered the choice, opted for the values and the practices of the West. In other words, Central Europe is the continuation of Western Europe beyond the geographical borders of the latter, which explains why such countries as Germany, Greece, Austria or Finland — previously belonging to western, northern or southern Central Europe — have become intrinsic parts of the Western institutional framework.

Central Europe is also about a sense of belonging and about political options. As a country whose institutional, political, cultural and economic life has been, with the exclusion of the Cold War years, an intrinsic part of the Western world, Romania's desire to be included in Western institutions is a natural one. The clear and firmly stated goal of integration with the cardinal institutions of the West — the EU, the WEU and NATO — fully attests to the fact that we do not conceive of Romania's capability to play a positive role in the construction of a network of democratic stability in Central Europe as a 'given', as something that would simply derive from her geostrategic position. On the contrary, we believe that this role has much to do with our clear and irreversible option for democracy and free enterprise, and with the foreign policy options of post-1989 Romania.

Romania's option for integration with the European and Atlantic institutions enjoys the overall consensus of the political spectrum. Moreover, it is overwhelmingly supported by Romanian public opinion. According to the result of an opinion poll conducted last September, 83% of the respondents favoured membership in NATO, and 88% integration with the EU. At the same time, 62% of those interviewed found that Western investments in Romania were still wanting. Comparing these two sets of figures, one can see how the thrust for integration is not

²¹ See, for example, V. Tufescu, 'Presentation géographique de la Roumanie' in *Travaux de droit, d'économie, de sociologie et de science politiques*, no. 80 — *La Roumanie économique et culturelle*, Geneva, 1970, and Eliza Campus, *Din politica externă a României, 1913-1947*, Bucharest, 1980.

rooted simply in a sort of naive fascination with the 'glittering' part of Europe. Carefully read, they equally reflect the destination chosen for Romania by her citizens, and their readiness to pay the price for the achievement of that goal.

Our conviction that a significant American presence in Europe continues to be an irreplaceable asset for the stability and security of our continent is based both on the lessons of the past, and on the needs of the present. For reasons that are evident to all of us, the element of balance that can be provided by the United States is a guarantee that the vision of 'a new, integrated Europe of sovereign nations — a continent where democracy and free markets know no borders, but where nations can rest easy that their own borders will always be secure' (Bill Clinton) will turn into the reality of tomorrow.

Much has been said and written about a growing lack of American interest in Europe. In my opinion, this categorical verdict is corroborated neither by the efforts to adapt NATO to a new security environment and to its new roles, nor by the strong economic links between the USA and the European Union. The same goes for the recent decision of the US Department of State to rename the Office covering US relations with the countries situated between the Baltic Sea and the Black/Adriatic as the Office for Central European Affairs. Significantly, Romania is included among the countries belonging to the 'northern tier' of Central Europe.

Romania's role

As a riparian state on the Black Sea, with easy access to the Mediterranean, and to the Danube, Romania is a natural bridge between the West and the East, the North and the South. The more so, because she controls over 1,000 kilometres of the Danube's navigable course as well as the Black Sea–Danube Canal, the relevance of which has been enhanced by the completion of the new Rhine–Main–Danube connection. Under these circumstances, it cannot be a surprise that the political stability and economic development of Romania is growingly regarded as an asset for the larger area to which she belongs.

There are several reasons which inform this perception. Romania's internal stability made it possible physically to separate two zones of open or latent conflict. Her responsible, predictable international behaviour has been very helpful in preventing the mutual reinforcement of the eastern and respectively southern 'arcs of crisis'. Romania has good relations with all the countries situated south of the Danube, including all the successor states of the former Yugoslavia. As a result, she has been able to offer a constructive contribution to the international efforts devoted to the achievement of a peaceful settlement to the conflicts in the area. Furthermore, bearing in mind Romania's specific weight among the nations that are geographically close to this war, it is not difficult to understand why Romania is perceived as an important

stability factor *for* the Balkans. Looking beyond the conflicts of today, the daunting tasks of post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction, especially in former Yugoslavia, will necessarily require the sort of even-handed and constructive attitude that has been the hallmark of Romania's approach.

Finally, Romania does not aim at comfortably positioning herself at the receiving end of any security arrangements in Europe. Commensurate with the country's resources, military capabilities and comparative advantages in terms of strategic position and infrastructure facilities, Romania can, and is willing to, play the role of a security provider.

In terms of foreign policy, Romania has sought evenhandedness on the part of Western states and institutions towards all the countries in Central Europe, drawing attention to the risks of perpetuating the traditional pattern of a zero-sum game behaviour among these states. Objectively, there is little reason to complain about Romania's current status with the cardinal European and Atlantic institutions, so one might ask why the Romanians still insist on the necessity of non-discrimination? This balanced attitude has, at least, two main sources. Placed between the northern and the southern tier of Central Europe respectively, we are in a position to perceive more accurately than others the heavy costs of an additional fragmentation of an area already torn by centrifugal tendencies. Another source is a certain sense of responsibility, deriving from the fact that, next to Poland, Romania is the largest of the Central European countries that have a similar status with the EU, the WEU and NATO.

Insisting on the risks of an artificial division of Central Europe, we also take into account the fact that the democratic stability of all the Western neighbours of Ukraine is a vital prerequisite for the maintenance and consolidation of that new independent state, whose geographic significance for the whole of Europe has become more and more apparent.

It is for these and other equally solid reasons that we unreservedly favour the establishment of a reliable network of bilateral relations with all our peers in Central Europe, based on the pragmatic consideration that their democratic development and their economic consolidation is part of our own national interest. We regard this network of co-operation as an asset for our security and also as an important part of the 'dowry' Romania would like to bring to the Western institutions as a committed candidate and future active member.

Conclusion

In the last instance, what is at stake in the definition of today's Central Europe is not the fate of this or that country, but Western values and practices themselves. It would be, without doubt, an irony of history if the Western world — whose determination to resist Communist

expansionism drew much of its stamina from its fundamental belief in democracy, the free market economy, human rights and fundamental freedoms — would waste this period's unprecedented opportunity to extend them as far as possible.

To limit Central Europe to only a few countries, and to rely only on their democratic development, is to commit a double fault. The first one is to do an enormous injustice to the other countries in that area, which, consistent with their historical traditions, have again, after 1989, turned their faces to the West. The second is to show a serious disbelief in the attraction exerted by the very foundations of the Western world, that is, democracy and free initiative, and thereby to accept the notion that pluralism, rule of law, respect for human rights, and the market economy should just be 'historical accidents' which occurred in certain quarters of the world.

Finally, however unintentional, the linguistic division of Central Europe might make one think about a possible resumption of the policy of 'spheres of influence'.

Who are the Moldovans?

CHARLES KING

The effort to construct new, post-Communist national identities is a common feature of political life in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.¹ The relationship between these states' post-Communist future and their pre-Communist past has become a topic of heated debate in parliaments and academic institutions throughout the region, and in many cases, rival political and cultural élites often employ abstruse linguistic, ethnographic or historical arguments as weapons of politics.

The problem of defining what it means to be Moldovan, however, has had several unique twists. First, Moldova in its present borders has never existed as an independent political entity. Its fate has been inextricably linked to the histories of the early Romanian principalities, the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, Romania and the Soviet Union. Today nation-building and state-building in the Republic of Moldova thus amount to the same thing.

Second, given its historical ties with neighbouring states Moldova's current borders are the subject of some controversy.² Moldova is Romania's foremost irredenta. Much of the present-day republic belonged to the Kingdom of Romania between 1918 and 1940, and parties across the Romanian political spectrum have touted the reincorporation of Moldova as essential to eradicating the legacies of the Communist period. In Moldova itself, such sentiments have given impetus to a reactive indigenous nationalism. Portions of the former

¹ An expanded version of this piece was published as the first chapter of Charles King, *Post-Soviet Moldova: A Borderland in Transition*, London, 1995.

² From the mid-fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries, an independent Principality of Moldova emerged in the lands between the Carpathian mountains and the Black Sea. By the early sixteenth century, however, the principality had become a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. In 1812, the eastern half of Moldova — the 'Bessarabia' region located between the Prut and Dnestr rivers — was annexed by the Russian Empire, while the western half was incorporated into the newly created Romania after 1859. In 1918, political leaders in Bessarabia voted for union with Romania, and the region remained a province of the Romanian kingdom between the two world wars. In 1940, Bessarabia was annexed by the Soviet Union and united with a strip of land east of the Dnestr river — the 'Transnistria region' — to form the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, the predecessor of the current Republic of Moldova.

Principality of Moldova currently lie in Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and as an antidote to Romanian irredentism, some radical Moldovan nationalists have called for the incorporation of all these lands into a reconstituted 'Greater Moldova'.³ The problem of Moldova's national borders has so far been more the purview of poets than of politicians, but the lack of a regional consensus on the issue represents yet another potential source of instability in southeastern Europe.

Finally, the question of the 'true' ethno-national identity of Moldova's titular nationality remains the topic of bitter debate among local political and cultural élites. For many Moldovan intellectuals — a group whom I will label the 'pan-Romanianists' — the logical end of the national movement of the late 1980s and the creation of an independent Moldovan state in August 1991 should be reunion with the Romanian motherland. For this group, the pro-Romanian cultural reforms adopted after 1989 were merely the first step in making Moldovan identity no more than a regional affiliation within an enlarged 'Greater Romania'.

Over the last few years, however, so-called 'Moldovanist' factions within the political and cultural establishment have increasingly challenged the basic assumptions of the pan-Romanianist camp. Some members of the local élite have benefited considerably from independence, and many are thus disinclined to sacrifice their positions for the sake of pan-Romanian national union. Many prominent figures now argue that, while Moldovans and Romanians may be linked by a shared history and language, the two nevertheless constitute two separate nations and should get on with the task of building two separate states. Moldovanist forces soundly defeated the pan-Romanianists in the first post-Soviet parliamentary elections (27 February 1994) and, since then, have succeeded in reversing many of the cultural reforms adopted after 1989 — including a rejection of the Romanian national anthem and a resurrection of the concept of an independent Moldovan language.⁴

The controversy over what it means to be Moldovan is, in part, a legacy of the Soviet period. Soviet cultural policy centred around the cultivation of a native Moldovan nationalism. In other republics, 'bourgeois nationalists' were seen as a threat to the unity of the Soviet state, but in Moldova the subtle promotion of local nationalism provided an important guarantee of the stability of the Soviet Union's western border after the annexation of the Bessarabia region in 1940. In order to shore up Bessarabia's position within the Soviet Union, cultural policy

³ See, for example, *Moldovenii în istorie*, Chişinău, 1993, the cover of which shows the boundaries of 'Greater Moldova'.

⁴ Debates between these two camps are explored in detail in Charles King, 'Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism', *Slavic Review*, 53, 1994, 2, pp. 346-68.

centred around the notion of two separate 'eastern Romance peoples', the Moldovans and their cousins, the Romanians.⁵

To outside observers, the national movement of the late 1980s seemed to be aimed at the rejection of Moldovan-Romanian separateness. The appearance of Romanian cultural symbols at anti-government demonstrations and the eventual adoption of the Latin script for the Moldovan language seemed to point towards the wholesale repudiation of Moldovan distinctiveness as mere Stalinist deceit, a linguistic and ethnographic fraud perpetrated in order to buttress the annexation of Romanian territory in 1940. As the *New York Times* described it, the national movement was no less than a mass 'confession' that, despite decades of Soviet propaganda, Moldovans were really Romanians.⁶

However, to the surprise of many observers, the pan-Romanian euphoria of the late 1980s seems to have died away. Although public-opinion data are scarce, it seems that many Moldovans continue to insist that their national language and traditions are something other than Romanian. Many are willing to admit that they and the Romanians share certain cultural commonalities, but they jealously guard those traits which they see as uniquely Moldovan. The few public opinion surveys that have been carried out indicate that, when given a choice between the ethnic tags 'Romanian' and 'Moldovan', the republic's titular nationality overwhelmingly opts for the latter.⁷

While issues of economic reform and territorial separatism have plagued Moldovan policymakers since independence, the perennial question of Moldovan national and linguistic identity has been the main battleground of post-Soviet Moldovan politics. In the 1994 parliamentary elections, none of the major parties focused primarily on land reform or privatization; indeed, only parties with marginal support — such as the Social Democrats — attacked the more prominent parties for their failure to address serious issues of reform. Rather, it is the questions that have haunted Moldovan élites for most of this century that have continued to form the basis for post-Soviet political discourse: who are the

⁵ On cultural policy during the Soviet period, see: Wim P. van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography*, Boulder, Colorado, forthcoming; Charles King, 'Soviet Policy in the Annexed East European Borderlands: Language, Politics and Ethnicity in Moldova' in Odd Arne Westad, Sven Holtsmark and Iver B. Neumann (eds), *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945-89*, New York, 1994, pp. 69-93; and *idem*, *The Politics of Language in Moldova, 1924-1994*, DPhil dissertation, Oxford University, 1995.

⁶ *New York Times*, 25 February 1990.

⁷ I am grateful to William Crowther (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) for sharing his intriguing and, as yet, unpublished data on this subject. In the first half of 1995, Stephen Whitefield (Oxford University) will be co-ordinating a high-n survey on 'Ethnicity, Nationalism and Citizenship in the Former Soviet Union' which promises to shed some light on 'Moldovanness'.

Moldovans? what language do they speak? what is their relationship to Romania?

Certainly, Moldova's major political groupings give radically different answers to these questions.⁸ But for all the differences between them, they are now in agreement on one basic point: that Moldova's titular nationality really does seem to see itself, by and large, as something other than Romanian. The disagreements among these political forces — radical and moderate pan-Romanianist groups such as the Christian-Democratic Popular Front and the United Democratic Congress, and more Moldovanist factions such as the Agrarian Democratic Party and the Socialist Party — lie in how they account for this fact.

The first is what might be called the 'conspiratorial theory' of Moldovan identity, a view put forward largely by the most radical pan-Romanianists, particularly the Christian-Democratic Popular Front. According to this view, most Moldovans, if left to their own devices, would undoubtedly embrace their Romanian heritage. They are prevented from publicly doing so, however, by political factors which perpetuate their state of subjugation, especially the power of the ruling Agrarian Democratic Party, the pro-Russian orientation of the powerful Socialist Party, the neo-imperialist economic policy of the Russian Federation, and the collective-farm system. Moldovans will not be truly liberated, on this view, until they can openly admit their 'genuine' ethnicity, and such a goal can itself only be reached through the destruction of the feudal relations between agrarian élites and the peasants that are perpetuated by the collective farm system and dependence on the Russian Federation.

A second conception of Moldovan identity can be termed the 'denationalization theory'. On this view, Moldovans do in fact reject their putative 'Romanianness', but the repudiation of their true ethnicity has been the result of Soviet cultural policy. Moldovans thus suffer from a kind of false consciousness, a collective ethnic amnesia engendered by decades of Soviet efforts at destroying their sense of community with Romanians west of the Prut river. The entire thrust of Soviet historiography and linguistics was aimed at separating Moldovans from their ethnic confrères in Romania. According to the 'denationalization theory', Soviet policy was remarkably successful. Like the character in Chingiz Aitmatov's famous novel [*The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*], Moldovans have forgotten their past; they have lost touch with their genuine culture through the process of 'mankurtization' (*mancurtizare*) fostered by the Soviets. The task of pan-Romanianist intellectuals must now be to awaken a sense of 'Romanianness' within the Moldovan population, a project that must be approached with caution

⁸ A detailed analysis of political parties in post-Soviet Moldova is provided by Charles King, 'Moldova' in Bogdan Szajkowski (ed.), *Political Parties of Eastern Europe, Russia and the Successor States*, London, 1994, pp. 293-311.

lest any talk of immediate political union with Romania lead to the further alienation of an already misguided Moldovan populace. Public education, historical research and increased opportunities for travel and study in Romania are thus the most profitable paths for bringing enlightenment to the masses.

It should not be surprising that most Moldovan historians and other professional academics, many of whom are affiliated with the more moderate pan-Romanianist United Democratic Congress, subscribe to this theory of Moldovan identity. Not only does the project of enlightening the Moldovan populace strengthen the position of writers and academics in Moldovan society, but it also serves as a kind of personal penance, with many academics now turning their attention to dismantling a separate Moldovan identity which they themselves helped create during the Soviet period.

A final view of 'Moldovanness' is what might be termed the 'historical theory'. According to this view, Moldovans think of themselves as a different nation precisely because they are one. It is true that Moldovans and Romanians share common origins in Trajan's Dacia and have had a long, if not always happy, existence together as the major representatives of eastern Latinity. But nevertheless, the Moldovan principality of the Middle Ages, the annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire in 1812, the existence as a Russian imperial *guberniia* throughout the nineteenth century, the proclamation of an independent republic in 1918, the oppressive nature of Romanian rule between the wars, and the construction of a modern Moldovan state in the Soviet period have all contributed to the growth of a unique Moldovan nation.

Such a view, though similar to Soviet discourse on Moldovan identity, is different insofar as it takes the briefly independent Bessarabian republic of 1917-18 as an important basis for the post-Soviet Moldovan state, a notion elaborated in a speech by Moldovan president Mircea Snegur during the electoral campaign of early 1994.⁹ The pan-Romanianists, according to this view, thus misunderstood the main significance of the national movement of the late 1980s. The popular street demonstrations and mass rallies of the period were an expression of a distinctly Moldovan (not Romanian) national identity, a fact confirmed in the rejection of pan-Romanianist parties in the February 1994 parliamentary elections. It would betray the aims of the national movement and the purpose of the declaration of independence, say proponents of this theory, to trade the Soviet yoke for a Romanian one.

What, then, are we to make of these three theories of Moldovan identity? Which gives the most accurate account of 'Moldovanness', and which best answers the question posed in the title of this paper, Who are the Moldovans? The answer I suggest, though perhaps intellectually

⁹ Mircea Snegur, 'Republica Moldova este țara tuturor cetățenilor săi', *Pămînt și Oameni*, 12 February 1994, pp.,1, 3.

unsatisfying, is 'None of the above'. The reason is that all of these views, some of which have been mirrored in Western writing on Moldova since the 1960s, labour under the same misconception — that is, that humans have 'true' ethnic identities which can be objectively demonstrated through linguistic, historical or ethnographic research. If the massive literature on nationalism and ethnicity has demonstrated anything, however, it is that, in Ernest Gellner's famous phrase, nationalism invents nations and not the other way around. Certainly, debates over the political malleability of ethno-national identity continue to rage among students of ethnicity and nationalism. But the idea that such identities are varied and overlapping, intensely personal, highly contextual, and often mutually contradictory is completely uncontroversial.

This idea, however, has been as alien to internal debates on Moldovan identity as it has been to much of the Western literature on the region. Much of the literature has sought to 'prove' that, despite Soviet (and now post-Soviet) affirmations to the contrary, Moldovans and Romanians share a single ethnic and linguistic identity.¹⁰ However, it seems to me that rather than postulating a 'true' identity for the Moldovans and then explaining why they have or have not come to recognize it, we must begin any investigation of ethno-national identity — in Moldova or elsewhere — by accepting two rather pedestrian assumptions as fundamental: first, that a person's ethnic identity is simply what he says it is; and second, that trying to convince him otherwise, whether through force of arms or force of argument, is doing politics rather than studying it.

If these assumptions are indeed rather pedestrian, why have debates over the 'truth' or 'falsity' of rival visions of 'Moldovanness' continued to be at the centre of popular discourse? There are three major reasons. The first is historical, or more precisely, historiographical. In my view, in order to understand the ongoing conflicts over Moldovan identity, it is crucial to understand the origins of Soviet cultural policy in Moldova, particularly in the Moldovan Autonomous Republic which existed outside Ukraine from 1924 to 1940. The MASSR, as it was known, was the germ of the enlarged Soviet Moldovan republic which emerged after

¹⁰ The most representative book-length examples are Michael Bruchis, *Nations—Nationalities—People: A Study of the Nationalities Policy of the Communist Party in Soviet Moldavia*, Boulder, Colorado, 1984; *idem*, *One Step Back, Two Steps Forward: On the Language Policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the National Republics (Moldavian: A Look Back, A Survey, and Perspectives, 1924-1980)*, Boulder, Colorado, 1982; Maria Manoliu-Manea (ed.), *The Tragic Plight of a Border Area: Bessarabia and Bukovina*, n.c., 1983; and Nicholas Dima, *From Moldavia to Moldova: The Soviet—Romanian Territorial Dispute*, Boulder, Colorado, 1991.

Walter Feldman's 'The Theoretical Basis for the Definition of Moldavian Nationality', published in Ralph S. Clem (ed.), *The Soviet West: Interplay between Nationality and Social Organisation*, New York, 1975, pp. 46-59, was perhaps the only Western work before the 1980s that did not explicitly condemn the notion of a distinct Moldovan identity as dubious and artificial.

the annexation of Bessarabia from Romania; as such, the MASSR provided a laboratory for the elaboration of a distinct Moldovan language and culture, a Moldova 'in miniature', as cultural cadres in the MASSR often termed it.¹¹ In the past, the MASSR has been largely ignored or — more recently — denounced as the wanton seed from which the Stalinist fraud of a second eastern Romance language and people eventually sprang.¹² As a result, very little research has been carried out on this early Moldovan republic, an inchoate Moldovan state in which many of the barricades that now divide political and cultural élites were originally erected.

The second reason is methodological. In both the West and in Soviet Moldova itself, research which touched on the identity question was dominated by historians and historical linguists. In the case of the West, few political scientists, sociologists or sociolinguists had the requisite language skills or local contacts to carry out serious research on the region. The literature which emerged therefore lacked the analytical perspective which social scientific studies might have provided. Certainly, Western scholars provided an invaluable service by bringing to light the details of Soviet cultural policy in this often-forgotten corner of the USSR. But the fact that many approached studies of Moldova with an *idée fixe* concerning the submerged 'Romanianness' of the Moldovan people necessarily coloured research findings.

In the case of Soviet Moldova, social science as it is generally known in the West was largely absent until the perestroika period. Moreover, given the sensitivity of the identity question, history and linguistics were the most politicized of all academic disciplines, with scholarly arguments over mediaeval history or the pronunciation of fricatives serving as thin disguises for political disputes between the Soviet Union and Ceaușescu's Romania. Unfortunately, these disciplines remain highly politicized in post-Soviet Moldova, and there is little evidence of serious social scientific work on the complexities of ethno-national identity. I remember a conversation two years ago with the director of Moldova's National Institute of Sociology. When I asked him if the Institute planned to carry out public opinion surveys on ethno-national identity — at the time one of the most hotly debated topics in Moldovan political life — he responded that such an issue was the purview of historians and poets, not of sociologists. Any sociologist I know, however, would surely disagree, especially in the case of Moldova.

¹¹ V. Dembo, *Sovetskaia Moldaviia i bessarabskii vopros*, Moscow, 1925, p. 38.

¹² To my knowledge, the only detailed treatment of the MASSR ever published in the West is Klaus Heitmann, 'Rumänische Sprache und Literatur in Bessarabien und Transnistrien (die sogenannte moldauische Sprache und Literatur)', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 81, 1965, pp. 102-56. My DPhil dissertation provides a detailed analysis of cultural politics in the MASSR based on newly opened Moldovan party archives.

The third reason is political. The term 'identity politics' is much in vogue at the moment to describe the irruption onto the political scene of social groups who demand not only a say in the political process, but something more basic: the recognition of their distinctiveness, something the philosopher Charles Taylor has termed a demand for 'an acknowledgement of specificity' or 'the politics of difference'.¹³ However, the fundamental fact about this recognition of difference — sexual, regional, ethnic, national — is that the identities that emerge from the process of recognition are inextricably linked to power (or a lack thereof). Feminists demand not only a recognition of women as a distinct social group (something which in itself is unproblematic), but also a commitment on the part of individuals and governments to empowering women (such as by offering paid maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, etc.). The situation is the same for other groups — ethnic minorities, homosexuals, the disabled — who see a recognition of their distinct identity as merely the first step towards social and political empowerment.

To return to Moldova, political groupings offer radically different conceptions of 'Moldovanness' not because they are all motivated by some irrational nationalism, but because arcane debates over linguistics, historiography and ethnography represent a language through which Moldova's rational political struggles are articulated. One need only peruse any issue of key Moldovan newspapers — the Writers' Union organ *Literatură și Artă* (Literature and Art), the Christian Democratic Popular Front's *Țara* (The Country), the Republican Party's *Moldovanul* (The Moldovan) or the Socialist Party's *Spravedlivost'/Dreptatea* (Justice), to name a few — to see that, for both the pan-Romanianist and the Moldovanist camps, scholarship remains the handmaiden of politics.

This is also the chief reason for believing that 'Who are the Moldovans?' will continue to be a question at the forefront of political discourse. For members of the current government, resurrecting a modified version of the Soviet view on Moldovan distinctiveness cements their positions of power by buttressing Moldovan independence against irredentist rumblings coming from Bucharest. Moldova under the Agrarian Democratic Party has, since early 1994, toyed with an idea taken as fundamental in most other East European states: that the most legitimate state is one founded on a nation, and that the most legitimate nation is one with its own language. Since the February 1994 elections, the Agrarian Democrats and their allies have turned to the task of shoring up both.

Similarly, for members of pan-Romanianist groups, many of whom hold prominent posts in important cultural institutions, awakening the Romanian spirit in a somnolent peasantry will remain their primary

¹³ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992, pp. 38-39.

political task. Looking to the future, this bifurcation between the creative intelligentsia and the rest of Moldovan society is the greatest guarantor of the continued salience of identity politics. So long as Moldovan schoolchildren and university students continue to study literary Romanian, to take advantage of Romanian scholarships, and to explore the commonalities between both banks of the Prut, the question of ethno-national identity will remain one of the motors of the Moldovan political system.

Of course, greater familiarity with Romania on the part of young Moldovans may not necessarily lead in the direction that pan-Romanianists would like; indeed, familiarity may breed contempt, since Moldovans sometimes encounter patronizing attitudes on the part of their brothers in Bucharest. Still, the growth of a new generation educated in the spirit of pan-Romanianism may portend monumental changes once these young Moldovans begin to vote. I may then wish to reconsider my answer to the title of this contribution.

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