

Soviet Union to Romania, 26-6-1940

After annexing the Baltic States (see cases Soviet Union to Lithuania, 14-06-1940, Soviet Union to Latvia, 16-06-1940 and Soviet Union to Estonia, 16-06-1940), the government of the Soviet Union turned to Romania, eyeing the territories of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina which belonged to Romania. As part of the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact, Germany and the Soviet Union had agreed that these two territories fell within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence.¹ For months already the government of the Soviet Union had been increasing diplomatic pressure on Romania.² In early June, it had ordered the mobilisation of its military forces along Romania's borders.³ On June 26 1940, at 11 p.m., the Romanian diplomatic representative in Moscow was presented with an ultimatum by Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov. Molotov demanded Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to be ceded to the USSR and requested a reply within twenty-four hours. The ultimatum – which was published on 28 June – accused Romania of taking 'advantage of the military weakness of Russia' as it 'robbed the USSR by force of part of her territory – namely, Bessarabia– and thus broke the century-old unity of Bessarabia (principally occupied by Ukrainians) and the Ukrainian Soviet Republic.'⁴ It continued:

[...] Therefore the Government of the USSR regards it as necessary and timely and in the interest of justice to begin with Roumania immediate negotiations regarding the return of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. This question is organically linked with the question of transferring to the Soviet Union the part of Bukovina which, in the composition of the population, is historically and linguistically bound up with the Soviet Ukraine. Such an act would compensate – only to a small degree of course – for the great wrong done to the Soviet Union and the population of Bessarabia by the twenty-two years of Roumanian domination of Bessarabia. The transfer of these territories to the Soviet Union would thus be an act of justice.⁵

The following day, on the morning of 27 June, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov added the threat that Soviet forces would invade Romania if no answer was forthcoming that day.⁶ After the Romanian king discussed the ultimatum with his council of advisors, it was communicated to the government of the Soviet Union that Romania was inclined to comply, but kindly requested for negotiations to take place. Foreign Minister Molotov ignored this request and asked the Romanian Representative Davidescu whether Romania would comply or not. Davidescu then replied affirmatively. Subsequently, the Soviet government demanded the full evacuation of both Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina over the next four days, starting from 12:00 on 28 June.⁷ Meanwhile the Romanian government had been seeking assistance from Germany and Italy.⁸ The governments of both countries, however, strongly recommended Romania to comply with the ultimatum.⁹ Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey also declined to come to Romania's side.¹⁰ Only Great Britain pledged to

¹ Sužiedėlis, "The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: The Documents."

² International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania et al., *Chapter 3: The June/July 1940 Romanian Withdrawal from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and Its Consequences on Interethnic Relations in Romania in Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania* (Polirom, 2005), 4.

³ Romania et al., 5.

⁴ Keesing's, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1940*, vol. Vol. IV (Longman Group, 1940), 4121.

⁵ Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1936-1941*, 2:332–33.

⁶ J. W. Brügel, 'Das Sowjetische Ultimatum an Rumänien Im Juni 1940', *Vierteljahrshefte Für Zeitgeschichte* 11, no. 4 (1 October 1963): 412.

⁷ Brügel, 414. Keesing's, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1940*, Vol. IV:4121.

⁸ Brügel, 'Das Sowjetische Ultimatum an Rumänien Im Juni 1940', 409–12.

⁹ Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1936-1941*, 2:332–33. Beevor, *The Second World War*, 146.

¹⁰ Brügel, 'Das Sowjetische Ultimatum an Rumänien Im Juni 1940', 413.

assist Romania although not in any material sense.¹¹ France had been invaded by Germany earlier that month while the United States continued down its isolationist course. At 11.00 the next morning the Romanian representative to the Soviet Union let it be known that the Romanian Government accepted the Russian demands.¹² The note he carried, read:

In order to avoid the grave consequences that might follow the use of force and the opening of hostilities in this part of Europe, the Romanian government is obliged to accept the conditions of evacuation indicated in the Soviet response.¹³

Subsequently the Soviet Union swiftly set in motion the occupation of these two territories which stretched over 50,000 square km and comprised 3.8 million people.¹⁴ Despite Romanian compliance with the ultimatum, and orders from the Romanian government to the Romanian military to retreat, numerous clashes occurred between armed forces of Romania and the Soviet Union. Soviet forces deployed rapidly, and according to some accounts aggressively, and sometimes beyond the demarcated zones, which resulted both in military and civilian casualties.¹⁵ On 3 July, the Soviet Union called the evacuation complete and closed the new border with Romania.¹⁶

¹¹ Frank Marzari, 'The Bessarabian Microcosm, September 1939 – February 1940', *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 12, no. 2 (1 July 1970): 131.

¹² Brützel, 'Das Sowjetische Ultimatum an Rumänien Im Juni 1940', 414–15. Keesing's, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1940*, Vol. IV:4121.

¹³ Romania et al., *Chapter 3: The June/July 1940 Romanian Withdrawal from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and Its Consequences on Interethnic Relations in Romania in Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, 8. Émile-C. Ciurea, 'L'Effondrement Des Frontières Roumaines En 1940: Ses Conditions Internationales', *Revue d'histoire de La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 5, no. 20 (1 October 1955): 25.

¹⁴ Romania et al., *Chapter 3: The June/July 1940 Romanian Withdrawal from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and Its Consequences on Interethnic Relations in Romania in Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, 8.

¹⁵ Keesing's, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1940*, Vol. IV:4121. Romania et al., *Chapter 3: The June/July 1940 Romanian Withdrawal from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and Its Consequences on Interethnic Relations in Romania in Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, 11–13, 18.

¹⁶ Romania et al., *Chapter 3: The June/July 1940 Romanian Withdrawal from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and Its Consequences on Interethnic Relations in Romania in Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, 12.