

Soviet Union to Romania, 28-02-1945

In August 1944 Romania switched sides from the Axis to the Allies after a coup d'état had brought a new regime to power.¹ The British Prime Minister Churchill and the Soviet leader Stalin divided post-war Europe into different spheres of influence at a meeting in Moscow in October 1944. Romania fell in the Soviet sphere. In subsequent months the Soviet Union attempted to establish a communist regime in Romania.² The new government of Romania signed an armistice after the expulsion of German forces. The armistice was administered by the Allied Control Commission under the Allied Soviet High Command. The terms required Romania to give free passage to Soviet forces; offer reparation payments; contribute twelve infantry divisions to the Allied war effort, and give up significant swathes of territory (including Bessarabia and Northern Buvochina).³ Romanian society was heavily polarised with various political factions dividing the country.⁴ In late February 1945, riots erupted between communists and non-communists in Bucharest.⁵ The government of the Soviet Union communicated to the United States and Great Britain that action was needed from the Control Commission 'to bring about order to the country.'⁶ On 24 February Prime Minister Radescu called on all parties to oppose foreign intervention of any sort.⁷ On 27 February, the government of the Soviet Union sent the Assistant Foreign Minister Vyshinsky to the Romanian King Michael to demand that the Prime Minister Radescu would be relieved of his duties without any delay. When Vyshinsky returned the following afternoon King Michael told him he was conferring with party leaders about Radescu's succession. Vyshinsky was furious and presented him with an ultimatum to install Pretru Groza as prime minister within two hours, before 6.00 p.m. Reportedly, Vyshinski said:

I hereby submit the following order of Generalissimo Stalin: You will announce the resignation of General Nicolae Radescu as Prime Minister by eighteen hours today. Within two hours later, you will announce the appointment of his successor.⁸

Should the king choose not to comply, it would be seen as a hostile act which would meet with a fitting Soviet response. At the same time, large numbers of Soviet forces in the vicinity of Bucharest were put on alert, while Romanian troops were sent away to the border.⁹ There were over one Soviet million troops in Romania, and over one hundred thousand stationed close to the capital.¹⁰ The Romanian prime minister found refuge in the British embassy before the expiration of the deadline.¹¹ The king initially attempted to appoint Prince Stirbey to form a government on 27 February. But Vyshinsky, upon hearing of the news, telephoned that only the appointment of Petru Groza would be acceptable. The next day, at another brief meeting with King Michael, he repeated his demand adding: 'If our request is refused, we will consider such refusal a hostile act. Under those circumstances, the independence of Rumania can no longer be guaranteed.'¹² During that critical period, on 28 February, Great Britain and the United States, had only expressed their desire that the

¹ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 241–44. Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 100–102.

² See esp. Albert Resis, 'The Churchill-Stalin Secret "Percentages" Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944', *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (April 1978): 372–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1862322>.

³ Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 105–9.

⁴ Quinlan, 111–19.

⁵ Quinlan, 122–24.

⁶ Quinlan, 124.

⁷ As reported by Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 601. See also Ghița Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania, 1944-1962* (Greenwood Press, 1976), 105.

⁸ Robert Bishop and E. S. Crayfield, *Russia Astride the Balkans* (R.M. McBride, 1948), 171.

⁹ Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 127.

¹⁰ Bishop and Crayfield, *Russia Astride the Balkans*, 174.

¹¹ Bishop and Crayfield, 174.

¹² Bishop and Crayfield, 176.

new government should at least be 'representative of all parties'.¹³ The King subsequently conceded and asked Pretru Groza to put together a government with Groza as Prime Minister on 1 March 1945.¹⁴ In the weeks and months after the ultimatum and the subsequent change in leadership, Western powers, especially the United States, continued to quibble with the Soviet Union over the political orientation of Romania.¹⁵ The future of Romania repeatedly featured on the agenda of various international meetings and conferences.¹⁶ But after nearly two years of international and national political maneuvering, the Soviet Union prevailed. Prime Minister Pretru Groza held on to power, and King Michael was eventually forced into exile towards the end of 1947.¹⁷

¹³ Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 125.

¹⁴ Quinlan, 126.

¹⁵ See for instance James F Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*. (New York, N.Y.: Harper, 1947), 98–101.

¹⁶ Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, 129–30. See also Chapter VI, Last Attempt to Establish Democratic Government in Romania.

¹⁷ Quinlan, 157.