

Romania in the Second World War

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The presidency of the Council of Ministers as a whole functioned, from September 12, 1940, until August 23, 1944, as a Civil Cabinet (Buzatu 1996, 178–204), directly subordinated to Marshal Antonescu (Drăgan 1989, 131). The Military Cabinet, established on September 14, 1940, initially included two offices, consisting exclusively of officers seconded from the Ministry of National Defense or the General Staff¹. The leadership of the Military Cabinet was entrusted to Colonel Polihron Dumitrescu, then to Colonel Mircea Elefterescu, and from October 1941 to Colonel Radu Davidescu². The members of the Military Cabinet were officers devoted to the Head of State, including Colonel Mircea Elefterescu, Adjutant Majors Eugen Niculescu and Alexandru Marin, Captains Ion Georgescu, Gh. Magherescu, N. Anghel and N. Caloenescu, Major Dr. Stroescu, Lt. Colonel Commander Popescu-Deveselu and others (Buzatu 2008).

In June 1941, Romania entered the war on the side of the Axis and against the USSR, hoping to regain the lost territories. According to Keith Hitchins, at the beginning of the campaign against Russia, Romanian and German forces from Moldova were concentrated in three army groups: the 3rd Romanian Army in the north; German 11th Army in the center, and Romanian 4th Army in the south, forming the Antonescu Army Group (Hitchins 1994). According to the *Journal of Marshal Ion Antonescu*, considered to have been written by Major Al. Marin, from January 27, 1941 to August 23, 1944, held the position of Minister of War: Iosif Iacobici, Army Corps General Constantin Pantazi, General C.A. Mihail Racoviță, General C.A. Constantin Sănătescu, General C.A. Ion Negulescu, General C.A. Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu, General C.A. Gheorghe Dobre, General C.A., and the Chief of Staff: Alexandru Ioanițiu, Division General Iosif Iacobici, General C.A. Ilie Șteflea, General C.A. Gheorghe Mihail, General C.A. Nicolae Rădescu, General C.A. Constantin Sănătescu, General C.A. (Buzatu 2008)

In a special issue of the *Revista de Istorie Militară*, no. 3-4 / 2021, dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Romania's entry into the Second World War, Ottmar Trască presents the situation of the Romanian army in the vision of the German Military Mission in Romania in the period preceding the "Barbarossa" operation (February - May 1941) for the invasion of the Soviet Union (Trașcă 2021, 5–19). The report of February 14, 1941 entitled "Evaluation of the Romanian Army" states: "The Romanian command corps has an inclination towards theory, scheme and petty work.

¹ ANIC, PCM - CM fund, file 69/1940, volume I, page 10.

² ANIC, PCM - CM fund, file 556/1941, *passim*.

For the most part he is not capable of energetic, lively leadership, especially in difficult situations, which changes rapidly. The vision for the field is missing ", the corps of officers being considered heterogeneous, with a fast understanding power, with a good theoretical training, but without having the strength and the will to resist "to the last man", the non-commissioned officers are almost non-existent, and "the Romanian soldier is a worthy material, willing to assimilate; he is usually docile and willing to assimilate, apparently even resilient and persevering; however, it generally has a low level of training. He lacks independent activity and thinking. His relationship with his superiors is, according to the Romanian mentality, based on fear of punishment rather than trust. The soldier's treatment is partly bad, and the living conditions in the barracks - according to our standards - are primitive. The balance does not even correspond to the modest living necessities". The report concluded that "the Romanian armed forces, for the most part, are not suitable for independent combat missions" (Trașcă 2021, 6–7).

On June 22, 1941, the German and Romanian armies began their campaign against the Soviet Union through "Operation Munich", the Romanian army being motivated by the desire to take Bessarabia and Bukovina back from the USSR. On July 5, 1941, the first Romanian troops entered Chernivtsi, and on July 10, the city of Soroca was liberated, then the town of Balti on July 12. The town of Orhei is liberated by the Romanian army on July 15. On July 21, the localities of Ismail, Chilia Nouă, Vâlcov are released (Duțu, Retegan, and Stefan 1991, 35–37). On July 27, 1941, Hitler asked Antonescu to cross the Dniester to control the territory between the Dniester and the Bug. The Romanian opposition declares itself against the advance of the Romanian army across the Dniester, stating that the priority of the Romanian interests is Transylvania. Antonescu decides to act according to Hitler's wishes, stating, in his letter sent to him on July 27, his faith in "the justice that Chancellor Führer Adolf Hitler will do to the Romanian people and secular rights, his mission in the Carpathians, on the Danube and from the Black Sea (Duțu, Retegan, and Stefan 1991, 38). In the battle of Odessa, between August 6 and October 16, 1941, the Romanians lost 17,792 soldiers, 63,345 wounded and 11,471 missing, a total of 92,608 people. Soviet troops from Odessa retreated to Sevastopol, where they resisted until mid-1942. To the losses of the military in 1941 of the Romanian army, were added the losses in the Calmuca Steppe, at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943.

According to Corneliu Coposu, Iuliu Maniu acted for Romania's exit from the alliance with Germany since January 1942 when, on the occasion of a reception given by the king on January

24, 1942 to celebrate the 83rd anniversary of the Union of Principalities, "Maniu made contact and obtained Royal approval for the start of the campaign to leave the fascist camp ..." (Coposu 1996, 42) (Mitru 1997). But after the Casablanca Conference (January 1943), F.D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle decided to accept armistices with Germany and its allies only on the condition of their unconditional surrender (Curtifan 2019).

In an interview on January 26, 1943 in Bucharest with Italian journalist Lamberto Sorrentini of *Il Tempo*, Antonescu stated: "I am fighting Russia, which is a mortal enemy of my country. We can endure Germany's robberies, but we can succumb to Russia's threat." ... "I have secret information about the Romanian communists who emigrated to the school in Moscow. They are subjugated by a madwoman, Ana Pauker, who sold her soul to Stalin and forced her compatriots to speak Russian, even among themselves, claiming that the Romanian language is a bastard mixture of dialects, to be replaced" (Buzatu 2008, 9–10). On April 21, 1943, at the Conference of Marshal Antonescu at the Higher War School in Bucharest, he stated:

"You know all too well the tragic conditions in which we took over the leadership of the State on September 6, 1940. The year 1940 brought us the catastrophe of the borders due to our isolation in the international space and the equivocal policy pursued by Romania. When I came to power, my first concern was to find a point of support outside, on a real force, which would give me the security and peace of mind of the military force, necessary for external and internal recovery. At that time, I had a choice: a. An alliance with Russia: At that time Russia was not an ally of England and America. The example of the Baltic States and Poland is enough to see what we can expect from this alliance. b. An alliance with the Great Powers, which in the past war helped us to achieve the national ideal. But France was out of the question, England and America unable to help us, and the example of the 1940 border catastrophe was edifying on the results of a policy alongside these great powers. c. An isolation policy. Maybe it was a solution, but dangerous for the Romanian Nation and I think it was an impossibility to practice. ... Caught in the game of these imperialisms, a policy of isolation was not possible. By 1940, two of the countries we could rely on had disappeared. Germany is the only support against threatening Russia." (Buzatu 2008, 589)

On June 7, 1943, Mircea Eliade wrote in the *Portuguese Journal*:

"In today's apocalyptic clash, my nation has too little luck to survive, this is my daily obsession [...] Romania and even the Romanian nation (in its elements of historical and cultural continuity) are going through the biggest crisis in their existence. We are neighbors with an empire about six times bigger than the whole of Europe ... In this decisive storm, our pilots [leaders] are blind. We have decimated our army in Russia; we lost all our weapons at Stalingrad, while the Hungarians kept their military force intact. Our blood sacrifice is compromised by the idiotic game of political leadership, which tries a double game with the Anglo-Saxons, losing what I had gained from the Germans, not gaining anything from the Anglo-Americans. The great Ica [Antonescu] has done one hundred percent politics

with the Germans, and he also wants to do politics now with the Anglo-Americans, sending imbecile emissaries, who are caught by the Gestapo, and who cost us new divisions on the front.” (Eliade 2006, 199–200).

Ion Antonescu tolerated, from 1943, the armistice probing of the Deputy Prime Minister Mihai Antonescu with the Western Allies (Deletant 1999, 34) (Ceașescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 24). Keith Hitchins states that in the spring of 1943, the Marshal authorized Mihai Antonescu to initiate contacts with the Western Allies (Hitchins 1994). According to Eugen Cristescu, the head of the SSI, on June 27, 1943, Mihai Antonescu left for Rome to propose to Mussolini the establishment of an Italian-Romanian "Latin Axis" to take the initiative of separate peace negotiations with the Anglo-Saxon Allies. Mussolini would recommend a two-month wait, but following the plot of July 25, 1943, the Duke was removed from power (Pelin 2005, 160). However, Great Britain and the USA only wanted an unconditional capitulation on the part of Romania, the British preferring to talk to Iuliu Maniu (Ceașescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 26). Resistance to the Soviet advance of May 6, 1944, revived Antonescu's hope in the ability of the Axis forces to stop the enemy.

On August 1, 1943, the Allies bombed the oil fields and refineries of Ploiești (Operation Tidal Wave). In November-December 1943, at the Tehran conference, Winston Churchill relied on keeping Greece in the British sphere of influence, giving up British claims on other Eastern European countries (Destremau 2015, 394) after losing the possibility of landing in the Balkans (Boniface 2014). There are opinions that President Roosevelt's adviser, Harry Hopkins (Roll 2013, 399), was a Soviet-influenced agent led by NKVD agent Ishak Ashmerov (Mark 1998, 1–31), favoring the USSR's advance in Europe at this crucial time. of the Romanian coup of August 23, 1944, and Churchill was allegedly manipulated by the "Cambridge Five", Soviet agents who ran the British intelligence services, convincing him that Eastern Europe was a lost cause for the British (Ferraro 2010). After the Tehran Conference, the Romanian Secret Intelligence Service (SSI) warned that

"In Moscow, it was decided that the three allied powers would occupy the territory under the control of the Wehrmacht and the countries allied with Germany. The USSR demanded military occupation until the final conclusion of the Peace (which would end 3-4 years after the end of the conflict) of Finland, Poland, Moldova to the Carpathians and the Romanian Dobrogea. At the same time, in the form of provisional guarantees, the USSR demanded the occupation of air and sea bases on the Dobrogea coast, probably Constanța". (Aparaschivei 2021)

Fearing that Hungary might try to annex the rest of Transylvania, Romania set up a secret reserve army of 220,000 men (Duțu and Dobre 1997, 263–75), made up of several officers from the General Staff, and Traian. Borcescu: The Anglo-Americans, who learned of this army through Traian Borcescu and Florin Begnescu (recruited in March 1943 for Intelligence Service by Dan Brătianu)³, believed that it could radically change their very commitments to the Soviet Union. Within the SSI, a disinformation structure was set up, the INTER-MAR Group, made up of 8-10 SSI cadres, to give the Germans false information, "so as not to give the Germans the opportunity to intervene directly in our domestic policy."⁴ (Aparaschivei 2021).

After the battle of Stalingrad from August 23, 1942 to February 2, 1943, the Soviet army began to advance and, in March 1944, reached the territory of Romania. From March to August 1944, the Eastern Front was stabilized on the Chisinau-Iasi-Targu Frumos line.

On March 23, 1944, King Mihai sent General Constantin Sănătescu to probe the attitude of the military under the Ministry of War and the General Staff about Ion Antonescu, but the answer was that the time had not come for a coup against the marshal (Lee 1998, 99–100). In this context, the King asked the political leaders to take responsibility for an armistice after a possible resignation of Antonescu, but did not obtain a firm confirmation from them (Lee 1998, 100).

On April 2, 1944, the Soviet government declared that "the Soviet Union did not seek to acquire any part of Romania's territory" " (Vianu 1976, 158). On April 4, he officially proposed to the Romanian government the conclusion of the armistice with the "restoration of the Romanian-Soviet border after the 1940 treaty" (Vianu 1976, 159), refused by Ion Antonescu on May 5 (Scurtu 1984).

In June 1944, with the collapse of the Central Army Group in Belarus and the landing in Normandy (Ceașescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 47), Ion Antonescu admitted the need for talks with the Allies (Ceașescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 24). The Russians agree in principle to impose less stringent conditions for peace, and Romania begins parallel negotiations in Cairo (with the three allied powers) and in Stockholm with the Soviets (Deletant 1999, 34). In the same month, a coalition of parties was formed, the "National Democratic Bloc", which included the National Peasant Party, the National Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Party and

³ ASRI, P, 25374, vol. 8, pp. 375-394; and CNSAS, Issue 23 August 1944, File P 010933, vol. 13

⁴ ASRI, Fund P (criminal), File no. 25374, vol 36, f 270

the Romanian Communist Party, with the objectives of taking over the leadership from the Marshal, to sign an armistice with the Allies. and to turn their weapons against Axis forces (Hitchins 1994, 498) (Deletant 1999, 45) (Constantinescu-Iasi 1968, 45). The Communists were to provide the people needed for the operations (Deletant 1999, 41). The political platform of the June 20 coalition, entitled "Declaration", signed by Lucrețiu Pătrășeanu, Constantin Titel Petrescu, Iuliu Maniu and Constantin I.C. Brătianu, provided for the urgent conclusion of an armistice with the United Nations, Romania's exit from the Axis, the liberation of the country from occupation, the abolition of the current dictatorial regime and its replacement with a constitutional-democratic regime, the maintenance of a democratic order and the achievement of peace "in accordance with the interests of the Romanian state and people"⁵ (Scurtu 1984). *Historia* magazine states that the involvement of *national* communist leaders in the act of August 23, 1944 allowed them to take political power at the expense of the *internationalist* communist group whose ultimate goal was the territorial dismemberment of Romania (Historia 2014).

On June 29, 1944, Iuliu Maniu called on the Allies, on behalf of the National Democratic Bloc, to send three brigades to Romania and to begin bombing Hungary and Bulgaria to disperse Axis forces after Antonescu's overthrow (Deletant 1999, 44, 239) (Ceaușescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 45), in exchange for the opening of the Romanian territory for the Red Army (Hitchins 1994, 498). Maniu received no response from the Allies (Deletant 1999, 45, 240) due to the reluctance of the Soviet representative. At the same time, the Soviet ambassador to Stockholm Alexandra Kollontai was negotiating with the Romanian ambassador Frederic Nanu, mandated by Antonescu (Deletant 1999, 44).

On August 5, 1944, suspecting a betrayal of the Romanians, Adolf Hitler called Marshal Antonescu to his headquarters in Rastenburg (Ceaușescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 27), following the German ambassador to Bucharest, Manfred Freiherr von Killinger, who suspected Antonescu of possible betrayal (Ceaușescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 84) by threatening "Polish-style retaliation" (Hitchins 1994, 498). Since Antonescu's main goal was to fight the Soviets, he accepted the idea that the only option was an alliance with Germany, refusing to respond to Moscow's June proposal (Deletant 1999, 45). Instead, on August 12, he sent emissaries to Istanbul to negotiate with the Anglo-Americans, but the conditions imposed by them were not

⁵ "*România liberă*", II, no. 9 of August 10, 1944.

accepted (Ceașescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 24, 27). Antonescu convinces Adolf Hitler of his loyalty, who refuses to believe in an August 21 report from the Luftwaffe about the imminence of a coup against Antonescu (Ceașescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 170). In this context, several Romanian generals accepted the collaboration with the political opposition against the marshal, together with King Mihai I of Romania (Deletant 1999, 35, 236).

On August 20, 1944, Mihai Antonescu requested the help of Turkey to obtain an armistice with Great Britain and the United States. Receiving no response, as the Soviets launched a second offensive in Iasi-Chisinau against Axis forces, the conspiracy group formed to oust Antonescu understood that it would have to act quickly. August 15, 1944, originally planned for the coup, was postponed due to failed negotiations. (Ceașescu, Constantiniu, and Ionescu 1985, 28, 84).

An article (Historia 2014) was published on the website of the magazine *Historia* (taken over by many of the publications, without specifying the author and undated), which talks about “the great betrayal from Iași, of August 20, 1944, of the Commander of the 4th Army, Army Corps General Mihai Racoviță, committed in close connection with the Royal House and the Communist Party”. He had made a statement to Marshal Antonescu in November 1942: "Germany has lost the war, we must now focus on not losing ours." In February 1943, Antonescu proposed to Mussolini a common way out of the war. Antonescu would have even proposed giving up power if the Allies preferred to negotiate with the opposition, to which the Soviet government, through Councilor Semionov, would have replied that "We Russians prefer to negotiate with the current Romanian Government and we are ready to help it liberate the country from the Germans ", an attitude also confirmed in Cairo by the Russian ambassador Novikov and the representatives of the other two allies, who categorically confirmed that they prefer negotiations with Marshal Antonescu and not with the King's envoys. In a discussion between Emil Bodnăraș and Dumitru Dămăceanu, they established that, in order to remove Antonescu and "to hasten Romania's exit from the war, a front segment from Iași, conspiratorially called "Poarta Iașiului" to be opened from military view at a certain date. This front segment, in case of retreat, came on the line of fortifications Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați. The established front segment had a width of 25 km between Erbiceni and Reditu Mitropoliei, north of Iasi, defended by the Romanian C. 5 A. from A. IV, commander general Nicolescu Constantin, and the Soviet Union to be announced. In addition to those established to be part of the military committee, General Aldea, Marshal of the Palace, and General Mihai Racoviță, Commander A. IV on the Moldovan Front, P.C. at Piatra Neamț”. In July 1944,

General Aurel Aldea met with General Racoviță, establishing a plan for the opening of the front in "Poarta Iașiului", and at the end of July 1944, Bodnăraș communicated to Stalin all the necessary details. On August 20, at 1:00 p.m., Soviet troops entered Iasi. Thus, the Romanian-German front in Moldova fell. On August 23, 1944, they were 60 km from Focsani, and by evening the Soviet vanguards had reached the line of fortifications.

Romanian troops participated in the war alongside Axis in the German Army Group under the name "Southern Ukraine" (WorldWar2.ro 2022). Regarding the Secret Intelligence Service (SSI), its head, Eugen Cristescu, a loyal supporter of Antonescu, reorganized the service taking as a model the modern structures of other secret services of that period, and was actively involved in defending the national interest by the information given, generally working from positions equal to Abwer- the German Army Intelligence Service and being in constant contact with the Anglo-American secret services (Tănase 2018).

Marshal Antonescu, convinced of the impossibility of stopping the Soviet assault (Hitchins 1994, 499), on the night of August 21 asked Ambassador Manfred von Killinger to engage all German reserves to support the front, and the next day, August 22, informed the Romanian government about his intention to continue the fight with Nazi Germany (Constantinescu-Iasi 1968, 42, 47). In the morning of August 23, he dismissed Generals Gheorghe Avramescu and Petre Dumitrescu, accusing them of opening the Soviet front, replacing them with a loyal man of his, Ilie Șteflea.

Following the withdrawal by Germany of the Gross Deutschland tank division and the Soviet offensive on the Iasi-Chisinau line, the King returned to Bucharest on a trip, accompanied by Secretary Mircea Ionițiu, Adjutant Emilian Ionescu and General Gheorghe Mihail, his adviser. on military issues, meeting with some military leaders, including Colonel Dumitru Dămăceanu, the commander of the Bucharest garrison (Lee 1998, 103–5), who spoke out in favor of the coup. The meeting was also attended by Constantin Sănătescu, Ioan Mocsony-Stârcea, Grigore Niculescu-Buzești, Mircea Ionițiu, Generals Gheorghe Mihail and Aurel Aldea. Dămăceanu said that it would take five days to occupy the strategic points in view of the blow, and thus the date of August 26 was set for this (Porter 2005, 104–5).

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