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British Clandestine Activities in Romania During The Second World War

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Romania began to figure in British calculations about Hitler's intentions in Central and Eastern Europe after the *Anschluss* of March 1938. It was generally believed in the War Office that Germany would seek to impose its will on the area before turning its attention towards Western Europe. Given Romania's geographical position, there was little Britain could offer her. The brutal fact of British-Romanian relations, bluntly expressed by one historian, was that 'Germany is inconveniently in the way: opportunity, proximity of manufacture and the logistics of supply all told in favour of the Third Reich.'¹ This held, of course, for military as well as economic matters. In these circumstances the British concluded that their only weapon against German ambitions in countries which fell into Hitler's orbit were military subversive operations.

Accordingly, in March 1938, when the *Wehrmacht* marched over the Austrian frontier and began its occupation of the country, Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair, the Head of the British Secret Intelligence Service, approved the creation of a special unit, Section D, which would plan sabotage in enemy-occupied lands. The unit was given the cover title of the Statistical Research Department of the War Office. Chosen to lead it was Major Laurence Grand, a thirty-nine-year-old Sapper and graduate of Cambridge. Grand was recommended for the post to Sinclair by Stewart Menzies, head of Section II, the military section of SIS. Appointed as his assistant was Major Montague Chidson, an intelligence officer with a distinguished record who had served as SIS head of station in Bucharest in 1931. Grand obtained a large Victorian mansion, The Frythe,

in Hertfordshire and trained a small number of men in the practice of sabotage, in particular in the use of explosives, as well as preparing papers on the benefits of 'irregular warfare' carried out by well-organized and well-armed partisan groups.²

Grand and Section D were not alone in the intelligence community to be engaged in such activity. In October 1938, another Sapper Major John Holland, was appointed to a small section of the War Office known as GS(R) (General Staff (Research)), created two years earlier as a 'think tank' to look into specific subjects of interest to the Army Council. Holland's brief was to study the characteristics of guerrilla warfare with special reference to recent operations in China and Spain. At the same time, he was given secret instructions by the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff to report on the possibility of providing British support for insurgency in any country of Central and Eastern Europe overrun by the German Army.³ To avoid duplication of effort, the Director of Military Intelligence, General Henry Pownall, agreed that Holland and Grand should coordinate their research and Holland moved into Grand's Section D premises. In January 1939, Holland was authorized by the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Lord Gort, to expand GS(R) by the additions of two officers: an expert on demolition and explosives, and an officer to be in charge of organization, recruitment and training. For the first position he chose another Sapper, Major Millis Jefferis, and for the second, Lt-Col Colin Gubbins, who had seen service in Russia, Ireland and India.

Hitler's occupation of Prague in March 1939 gave even greater urgency to the work of Holland and Grand. With Gubbins established as his assistant (since April 1939), Holland expanded his section, recruiting more officers and earmarking personnel for training in sabotage. The latter were commissioned in the Officers' Emergency Reserve (OER) in advance of general mobilization. At the same time, it was decided that GS(R) should be placed under the supervision of the Director of Military Intelligence and be renamed Military Intelligence (Research) MI(R).

In the economic sphere Romania had been brought into the orbit of Germany by the signature on 23 March 1939 of the German-Romanian economic treaty, under the terms of which the Germans undertook to supply the Romanian armed forces with arms and equipment in return for Romanian goods. Fearful that Germany would seize Romania's oil both Britain and France gave guarantees to Romania on 13 April. When the guarantee was announced British military planners were deep in debate about Romania's role in case of war with Germany.⁴ From Bucharest, Sir Reginald Hoare, the British Minister, pointed out that the indispensable condition of Romania's participation on the side of Britain and France was an Allied army of 100,000 backed by a strong air force in Cyprus.⁵

MI(R) recognized that Romania's oil was particularly tempting to Hitler and considered the problem under two rubrics – destruction of the oil-fields and the interdiction of supply routes by the Danube and the rail network.⁶ Gubbins visited Romania secretly and talked with engineers of oil companies with a British shareholding whose expertise was vital to the success of any sabotage of the oilfields. As the granting of the Anglo-French guarantee necessitated close military cooperation with the Romanian General Staff, the British and French military attachés, respectively Macnab and General Delhomme, opened discussions with the Romanian General Staff which included the feasibility of destroying the oil-wells should Germany invade Romania. The Romanian Prime Minister, Armand Călinescu, supported an Anglo-French proposal to draw up such plans. In June, three new recruits to MI(R), Commander Dymock Watson of the Royal Navy, Major Young and Major Walter, prepared an appreciation and plans under the supervision of Holland.

The appreciation considered that if destruction was to be certain, military occupation was necessary, and that communications were more important than the oilfields as targets for sabotage. Plans were not prepared for military occupation but were drawn up for: a) destruction in conjunction with the Romanian General Staff and the Romanian Army; b) partial destruction by British oilfield engineers assisted by a field company of sappers; c) destruction

of communications with the assistance of the Romanian Army. During July and August reconnaissances were carried out and the appreciation and the plan came before the Chiefs of Staff in August who approved them. On 25 August, Commander Watson went to Bucharest to meet a French engineer Leon Wenger, who had been sent by the *Deuxième Bureau* to represent French interests in the discussions with the Romanian General Staff on demolition of the oil-wells. Their first meeting - held without the Romanians - was also attended by Lt-Col Gubbins who, in the face of the German attack, had had to make a hasty withdrawal from Warsaw to Romania together with several other MI(R) officers almost as soon as they arrived. It was agreed that whatever assurances the British and French received from the Romanian Government, the chances of carrying them out under war conditions and with any efficiency were slight. It was therefore decided that the British and French should prepare subsidiary plans of their own to make certain that all items of vital importance were destroyed under their direction. These plans foresaw a role for French troops from Syria should the Romanian General Staff balk at playing its part. The existence of this 'back-up' plan was not to be disclosed to the Romanians.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 changed the nature of the relationship between Britain and Romania. Germany was now a declared enemy of Britain, but remained a possible ally of Romania. Denial to Germany of Romania's oil became even more urgent. Plans for denying oil supplies delivered by barge along the Danube centred on blocking the points in the Kazan defile (Iron Gates), either by blockships or by detonating the cliffs on the Yugoslav side. They were to be supplemented by the pre-emptive chartering of all available river vessels and the creation of a shortage of pilots at the Iron Gates by offering them extended paid holidays – through the Goeland Transport and Trading Company, set up in January 1940 by the British Government to concentrate under one management measures of economic warfare.

During February and March 1940, preparations for placing British personnel with armaments and ammunition stores in the Goeland fleet operating on the Danube were made,

and a number of Iron Gates pilots were bought off so they would not work for the Germans. The operation was in the charge of Captain Max Despard, British naval attache to Romania. On 29 March 1940, a British merchant vessel, berthed at Sulina (with sixty-eight officers and ratings) and a cargo of ninety-five cases invoiced as Chrysler spares to the Chrysler agent in Budapest. The cases passed customs control without a hitch – Despard had been supplied with £1,500 ‘to ensure the cooperation of Romanian personnel – and were handed over to his men. They contained thirty tons of arms and ammunition, including three Vickers machine guns, limpet mines and six hundred pounds of high explosive, and were transferred to the lighter ‘Termonde’. Other vessels, acquired by the Goeland company and flying the British merchant marine flag, gave the flotilla a commercial appearance. The crews were made up of seamen from the Royal and Royal Australian navies, and local personnel with experience of the Danube. The expedition was led by a Royal Navy officer, Commander A.P. Gibson.

It left Sulina on 1 April, shadowed by a steamer chartered by German military intelligence. Two days later, it reached Giurgiu to take on fuel but the port captain delayed permission for the tugs to go to the oiling berth long enough for a search to be made of the cargo on the insistence of a German officer. Romanian officials searched the main tug and found uniforms, arms and some five hundred pounds sterling in local currency. The latter were impounded but on the protest of the British legation they were returned. On 5 April, the ‘Termonde’ was inspected. The discovery of the explosives confirmed German suspicions. Wilhelm Fabricius, the German minister to Bucharest, told the Romanian Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu that Germany would suspend arms’ deliveries if the flotilla were allowed to proceed, a threat that was referred to King Carol. Carol gave way and the vessels were ordered to return to Brăila, without their cargo. This, the British could have access to later since Romania was neutral. The ships eventually left individually for Istanbul between the end of May and 20 June.

On 1 July 1940, Romanian Prime Minister Ion Gigurtu announced the reorientation of Romania's foreign policy towards Germany. The following day, King Carol asked Hitler for a military mission.

The new alignment ruled out any hope of destroying the oilfields or installations. Twenty-four hours earlier, seventeen British subjects resident in Ploiești were ordered to leave by 9 am on 4 July and Constanța by midnight the same day. Sir Reginald Hoare, the British minister to Romania, intervened to secure a delay. The General Staff invoked 'a widespread plan of sabotage.... organized by the British.' The only plan was that worked out in collaboration with the French with the General Staff under Călinescu. But the Romanians' hand had been forced by the discovery among secret documents of the French General Staff captured by the Germans on 19 June in a train at Charité sur Loire of the Anglo-French plan to carry out sabotage in the oil-fields and a list of the personnel involved. A large number of French and British engineers were expelled. Of the seventeen British expelled, eleven had been involved in the sabotage planning.

In July 1940, in response to German victories in continental Europe, MI(R) and Section D were merged to form Special Operations 2, part of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) created in that month on Churchill's orders with a brief 'to set Europe ablaze'. Tasked with sabotage and subversion, its actual strength in personnel is unclear. Grand was made head of SO(2) and his second-in-command was Charles Hambro. In Romania, the attempt to set the country ablaze had been comprehensively extinguished by the failure of operations to blow up the oilwells. SOE now turned its attention to building an anti-German resistance within the country. With the consolidation of Romania's alignment with Germany after Ion Antonescu's advent to power in September 1940, SOE concentrated on developing contacts with pro-British members of the National Peasant Party. The central figure was its leader, Iuliu Maniu. Colonel Bill Bailey, SOE representative in Istanbul, visited Bucharest during Christmas 1940 and discussed with the British Minister Sir Reginald Hoare SOE's scheme to create a local pro-Ally

organization comprising the residue of Maniu's party. Bailey's deputy, Alfred George Gardyne de Chastelain used two visits in January and February as diplomatic courier to contact the Romanians with whom SOE planned to work after the Legation left, principally Maniu, Rică Georgescu⁷, and Ion Popovici.

SOE's plans for 'setting Romania ablaze' came to nothing On 10 February 1941, Hoare informed Romania's military dictator, Ion Antonescu, by note that since Romania was being used by Germany as a military base 'without one word of dissent from you', he and his staff would be withdrawing on 15 February or as soon after as a ship was available.⁸ The withdrawal of the British Legation meant that there was no SOE officer to coordinate any sabotage action by the Romanians. On the eve of Britain's severance of diplomatic relations Hoare, admitting that 'the game is up', could do nothing more than agree with Maniu that the National Peasant Party should maintain contact with the British by radio. And for almost three years radio and occasional courier were the means of contact with Romania. A wireless set was left with Georgescu (code-named 'Jockey') and ten million *lei* from the coffers of the British-owned *Unirea* oil company to fund a resistance group of members of Maniu's party. The Minister's final impression was that 'though Maniu's intentions are the very best, he is sadly lacking in inspiration.....However, there is nobody else who could head a patriotic movement, and so at present it is Maniu or nothing.'

Radio contact was broken when both Georgescu and his associates were caught by the Germans on 15 August 1941 and handed over to the Romanians.⁹ The priority for SOE was to repair the link. They were helped by two members of the Romanian foreign service, Ion Christu, chief of the economic section of the Foreign Ministry, and Cătălin Vlădescu-Olt, a secretary in the diplomatic service. In November 1941, Christu travelled to Istanbul as head of a Romanian trade delegation, of which Vlădescu-Olt was a member. A meeting with de Chastelain, in charge of SOE in Istanbul, enabled Christu to pass on his view that the sooner Romania withdrew from

the war, the better. The two arranged that Christu get in touch with Maniu in order to revive the communications link with the British.

Following Britain's declaration of war upon Romania on 7 December 1941, broader considerations of relations with its new ally, the Soviet Union, dictated British policy towards Antonescu. The defeat of the Axis powers and, as a prerequisite for this goal, the preservation of Allied unity, became paramount considerations for Churchill and Roosevelt and remained so throughout the war.

In December 1941, Satvet Lutfi Tozan (SOE code-name *Pants*) Satvet Lutfi Tozan, a Turkish financier who acted as honorary Finnish consul in Istanbul, and was a personal friend of De Chastelain, travelled to Bucharest where he contacted Maniu and secured his agreement to:

- (a) to accept sufficient funds as a war chest with which to reorganise work against the Axis;
- (b) to accept two new W/T sets with their respective signal plans and ciphers;
- (c) to organize a large-scale go-slow movement in Romanian industry and means of transport;
- (d) to answer a number of questionnaires dealing with political, military and economic matters in Romania and in Hungary¹⁰.

Tozan undertook agreed to visit Romania a second time to hand over funds, W/T sets, questionnaires, and ciphers, but did not leave until mid-March 1942.

In early January 1942 the Foreign Office and SOE were in agreement that 'Maniu is our best hope of starting an anti-Axis movement' and that 'a *coup d'état* would be the goal to aim at'; the implication was that he should therefore stay in Romania.¹¹ However, correspondence in

mid-January between Foreign Office officials suggests that Maniu had decided to leave Romania 'for British territory', and SOE in Cairo was asked to issue travel documents for the party under English names.¹² Yet Maniu appears to have had second thoughts for he never took up the opportunity. He argued that he had to remain in Romania to lead his Party since he was the only person capable of doing so. that only he had the ability to do so. He also claimed that, had he gone into exile, this would have damaged his standing in Romania.¹³

A minute dated 9 February 1942, which appears to have been written by De Chastelain in Istanbul, notes that:

Towards the end of December we succeeded in getting a friend

[Tozan, author's note] into Roumania to contact A

[Alec code-name for Maniu, author's note] with whom our

Istanbul organisation had been in close relations before the Axis

occupation of that country and a number of our friends

who acted as intermediaries were arrested and at the same

time we lost our W/T communication.

1. From the contact that our friend had with A it resulted that :

a) He was still our friend.

b) That he was still convinced that we could win the war.

c) That he continued to believe that his country should be ranged on our side and in the war now proceeding between ourselves and the totalitarians.

2. A stated that he and his followers which included a number of generals in the Roumanian Army and with the assistance of the Army itself are prepared to revolt against the Antonescu Government and to attack the German occupying troops providing he received an Anglo-Russian assurance that the Russians will not invade Roumania.

3. To start revolt A stated that he considered that his intention is to persuade Roumanian troops from proceeding to the Eastern Front. This he claims he can do.

4. A also stated that he required two W/T sets which he would instal in order to be in communication with us.
5. A indicated that he would require funds for distribution among his 60 country organisations and also for acquiring available arms and munition.
6. For the success of his revolt A did not ask for any outside armed assistance but if the above mentioned guarantee were given he suggested that leaflets be dropped over Roumania coinciding with the revolt.
7. From the telegraphic correspondence we have had with London it would appear that the desired guarantee will not be forthcoming by the 14th February when PANTS [Savtet Lufti Tozan] according to present plans intends paying his next visit to A. Indeed we have no encouragement from London to believe that the guarantee will be given at any time.¹⁴

Tozan eventually left by car for Sofia en route to Romania on the morning of 14 March 1942:

Prior to his departure, he had despatched one W/T set via the Finnish courier to the Turkish Embassy in Bucharest and another via a returning Finnish consul to the Turkish Legation in Budapest. With him he took two cars, one containing a large quantity of tobacco as a present to the Finnish troops on the Russian front, a large number of cigarettes in the boxes of which were concealed part of the material for Maniu, a quantity of precious stones and foreign currency, questionnaires, signal plan and cipher. Travelling as a Finnish consul, he possessed *laissez-passers* for all frontiers and was not subject to customs examination. He performed a few commissions in Sofia and arrived in Bucharest towards the end of March, where he succeeded in handing over to Maniu the W/T set, cash, precious stones, questionnaires, signal plan and cipher. From there he proceeded to Budapest where by misadventure he was arrested and imprisoned.¹⁵

De Chastelain is reported to have sent two other wireless transmitters through Vlădescu-Olt whom Christu arranged to be appointed Consul-General in Istanbul from 1 April 1942, and member, without any special duties, of the Romanian legation staff in Ankara from 1 July. Dividing his time between Istanbul and Ankara, Vlădescu-Olt was able to throw agent of the Romanian Secret Service (SSI) of his scent and see de Chastelain on several occasions. He used his visits to Bucharest to take the two wireless transmitters.¹⁶

Maniu's indecisiveness did not prevent Eden from presenting him to the Russians as the best chance of getting Romania to abandon the Axis. An *aide-mémoire* handed by Eden to Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to London, on 21 March argued that the only person with whom negotiations over Romania's exit from the war could be conducted was Maniu.¹⁷ Six days later, Eden enquired whether Maisky had received a response, and on 29 April he wrote again. It was only on 15 May that the ambassador told Eden that the Soviet government 'did not for the moment want to take any action with M. Maniu.'¹⁸

There was also an absence of positive action on Maniu's part. It was most obvious at the paramilitary level. If the British believed that a 'patriotic movement' headed by Maniu would undertake the kind of resistance operations undertaken by Mihailovici and Tito in Yugoslavia, then they were to be sorely disappointed. Indeed, Maniu's inaction in this regard was acutely embarrassing to the Romanian section of SOE. Yet in Maniu's mind suspicion of Russia's intentions in the event of a German-Romanian defeat constituted a serious obstacle.. In September 1942, Maniu had communicated his concern to SOE:

so long as we do not know positively....that the allied nations are willing
to exclude a Russian invasion of Romania once the German front collapses
.....it is practically impossible for our opposition...to come out against the
Axis and organize anything with concrete effect.¹⁹

The Foreign Office was unwilling to raise this matter with Moscow, for fear of giving the Russians an opportunity to openly declare their interests in respect of Romania.²⁰

In March 1943, the Russians reacted. Eden, who was visiting Moscow, received a personal letter from Molotov. Whilst declining any contact with Maniu themselves, the Russians supported continued British links: 'it is possible that in the course of negotiations a basis may be found for collaboration between this group and the British and Soviet governments.'²¹

With this green light from Moscow SOE was given authority to prepare missions to Romania. The first was dispatched in June 1943 to work alongside Maniu. Captain Thomas Charles David Augusten Russell MC of the Scots Guards was dropped together with a Romanian wireless operator Nicolae Țurcanu on the night of 15/16 June in Yugoslavia on a mission code-named 'Ranji' to Romania. This was the first British-led mission to be despatched by SOE to Romania since it entered the war. The mission's task was to penetrate into Romania for the purposes of 'opening-up W/T communications, effecting contact with Maniu's organization, and organizing a reception area in the Romanian Carpathians.' The two-man team was dropped to a reception committee arranged by a British mission with Mihailovici's forces in the Homolje area.

The 'Ranji' mission, augmented by a Romanian-speaking Serb Chetnik, after a preliminary reconnaissance of the Golubac area, eventually crossed the Danube into Romania on 2 August. Towards the middle of the month they established themselves in a forest near Varciorova, where they made contact with the Pitulescu brothers, one of whom was a prominent Peasant Party associate of Maniu, and from where they sent their first W/T messages from Romania on 12 and 13 August. It was in this forest that Captain Russell was murdered on 4 September, probably for the gold sovereigns he was carrying to use as payment. Post-war enquiry never succeeded in establishing by whom he was killed

The only form of peace acceptable to the Western Allies - announced by Roosevelt at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 - was unconditional surrender. At the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in October, Molotov declared that Romania should surrender unconditionally. The instructions for the second SOE mission, code-named 'Autonomous', were widened to include advice to Maniu on the need for unconditional surrender. At the same time, the Foreign Office stressed that all approaches should be addressed to the Soviet and US governments, as well as to the British.

The second SOE mission to Romania had been planned in spring 1943. De Chastelain, the head of SOE in Istanbul, left Turkey for London and in July travelled to Canada in order to recruit native speakers for missions to Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. He returned to London and went on to Egypt for parachute training in preparation for the mission to Romania, code-named 'Autonomous'. Radio contact was maintained through 'Reginald' with Rică Georgescu who despite being in jail in Bucharest, was given liberal visiting rights by the authorities and was allowed to roam at leisure inside the prison.²² Originally, the mission had been conceived as a classical operation – to disrupt German communications – but Stalin unexpectedly agreed in November that Maniu should be allowed to send an emissary to the Allies to discuss operational details for the overthrow of Antonescu and 'its replacement by a Government prepared to surrender unconditionally to the three principal Allies.' The Soviet Government insisted that a Soviet representative take part in the negotiations. 'Autonomous' now assumed a predominantly political purpose, de Chastelain's task being to inform Maniu personally of the apparent Soviet change of heart.²³

De Chastelain's attempt was made with Ivor Porter, a former English-language teacher in Bucharest, who had been recruited into SOE in spring 1941 after leaving Romania, and with a Romanian sabotage expert, Silviu Mețianu. At 00.30 hours on 22 December the three men were dropped in thick mist. They landed some fourteen kilometres from the dropping zone. With whistles to help them locate each other, de Chastelain and Porter soon met up but it took them

over two hours to find Mețianu. They hid in a wood until daybreak and then set out to find the car which should have been awaiting them. De Chastelain asked a peasant woman for directions but on their way back they were seen by gendarmes and civilians with rifles who fired over their heads. They were escorted to the gendarmerie post in Ploșca, a village some 100 km to the south-west of Bucharest, where they were welcomed by the local dignitaries and given a hearty meal. From there they were driven to Turnu-Măgurele and then on to police headquarters in Bucharest where they remained until their release on 23 August 1944. Their radio transmitter went with them.²⁴

During their internment in Bucharest Berlin requested on several occasions that de Chastelain be handed over to them but Marshal Antonescu steadfastly refused. Two German officers were allowed to question the group, but under Romanian supervision. Senior Romanian officials interrogated the group independently, including General C.Z. Vasiliu, deputy minister of the interior, Eugen Cristescu, head of the Secret service, and General Constantin Tobescu of the gendarmerie. The prisoners were treated well, were taken for occasional drives, and de Chastelain was allowed to undergo dental treatment in town.

On 2 April 1944, de Chastelain was taken to see Maniu. He urged Maniu to carry out a *coup* as soon as possible since the retreat of the Germans in the east made conditions propitious. It was, however, King Michael who, on 23 August, arrested Marshal Antonescu. At 10.30 that night Michael broadcast his proclamation to the nation wherein he ended hostilities against the United Nations and ordered his forces to support the Soviet troops.

The premier British intelligence agency, MI6, also ran a network that was active throughout the war in gathering and passing on information to the British authorities about Axis military operations in the area between the rivers Dniester and Bug in southern Ukraine that was administered by Romania between 1941 and the early part of 1944. The network was headed by Alexander Eck.

Eck had had a truly international career, in keeping with his background. He was born on 16 December 1876 in the province of Polock in Poland, then under Russian rule, of a Swedish father and a Russian mother. In 1909, he left Russia and settled in France, living successively in Nancy, Nice and Paris. On the outbreak of the First World War, Eck volunteered along with another eighty Russian political emigrés to join the French army. He served in 1915 as an intelligence officer at the headquarters of General Sarrail in Salonica, and after the armistice of 11 November 1918 was sent as part of the Allied Military Mission to Slovakia. He was demobilized in January 1920, in Paris. Between 1921 and 1934, he lectured in Russian at the University of Ghent, from where he moved to the University of Brussels to become professor of Byzantine and Slavonic Studies. In 1939, after the outbreak of war, he re-joined the intelligence bureau of the French Army with the rank of captain and in February 1940 proposed to his superiors that he take advantage of an invitation from the eminent historian Nicolae Iorga to give a series of lectures at *Institutul de Istorie Universală* and at Bucharest university in order to gather intelligence about Romanian defences in Bessarabia, about German spies posing as journalists, and about German troop movements in the country. They agreed and on 28 February 1940 he arrived in Bucharest.

After the fall of France in June 1940, Eck's offer to work for MI6 was accepted. His profession as a scholar of Byzantium afforded him cover for lecturing at *Institutul de Istorie Universală* and at the French Institute of Byzantine Studies where its director, Professor Laurent gave him an office. Eck's young female companion, Margareta Haller, assisted Eck in his espionage activity by handling the reports that came in from the members of the network.

The MI6 network coordinated by Eck included French nationals resident in Romania who after the fall of France in June 1940 committed themselves to the Allied cause. Eck added to their number several Romanian recruits, two of the most notable being Dan Brătianu, head of the Bucharest office of the Romanian Telephone Company, and George Tomaziu, an artist and nephew of George Enescu, the Romanian composer.

Eck's network was betrayed by Constantin Poltzer.²⁵ In mid-June 1944, Polzer revealed his activity for Eck to Colonel Vasile Nicolau, head of the Military Statistical Bureau in Odobești, who then went to Bucharest with a number of subordinates to round up the network. On 17 June 1944, Eck was arrested with Haller in Ciorogârla, on the outskirts of Bucharest, where they had taken refuge from the Allied air-raids on the capital. Other members of his network were also picked up. Tomaziu, too, was arrested at his home in Bucharest and was taken to Odobești where he was held under guard in an old farmhouse. He was beaten by his Romanian interrogators and went on hunger-strike. Two days later he saw Eck, Haller and other colleagues from his window. They were being held in an adjacent building (Eck was initially given a hotel room in Odobești where he was held under guard). After nine days without food Tomaziu's interrogation was suspended. Eck gave a declaration in Tomaziu's presence that he was head of the MI6 network in Romania and Tomaziu admitted his own part. Eck consigned his declaration to paper at the request of the military prosecutor Captain Ion Săvulescu.

Conclusion

'Shattered illusions' might be the best description of the sentiments held by the British authorities and the Romanian opposition to Axis rule regarding Romania's fate during the Second World War and its aftermath. During the war the military facts were never conducive to a defection strategy for Romania but fact that the British failed to dispel the illusion held by Romanians that there was a chance of surrender to the western Allies played into the hands of the Germans and their anti-Soviet friends in Romania and weakened the position of the Romanian opposition.

If the success of British military clandestine activities in Romania is to be judged by their effectiveness in fulfilling their principal purpose - the destruction of the oil-fields and the interdiction of supply routes by the Danube and the rail network - then the verdict can only be one of failure. Although in the period 1940- 1944 there were a few isolated rail accidents, fires

and explosions which might have been ascribed to sabotage, the importance of these in the context of oil production and export to the Reich from Romania was minimal. In fact, the battle for "the black gold," waged by the *Abwehr* with the British and French intelligence agencies, was won in 1940. Victory ensured the continued supply of fuel to the German war machine until interrupted by Allied air-raids in the period from April to August 1944. The destruction of the British and French sabotage networks in the oil fields removed any possibility of the interruption of Romanian oil exports to Germany. Foreseeing this defeat, the British diplomat Robin Hankey, the head of chancery at the British legation in Bucharest, had noted in September 1940 that "for the future our hopes of stopping oil seem to rest almost entirely on air operations, supplemented by anything that can be done of a less regular character"²⁶.

Less disappointing results came from the task assigned to the MI6 network. It managed to transmit details of Axis military activity in Transnistria, and of troop movements in Romania, between 1940 and 1945. On a political level, the efforts of SOE to persuade Antonescu, through Iuliu Maniu and Romanian public opinion, to abandon the Axis camp were inconclusive. The increasingly frequent Anglo-American air raids on the oilfields around Ploiești and on Bucharest in April 1944 were a more effective reminder to all Romanians of the cost of the alliance with Germany, but it was the advance of the Red Army on Romanian territory and the beginning, on 20 August, of the Soviet offensive that concentrated minds and prompted King Michael and the anti-Antonescu opposition to decide to take action. The result was the *coup* three days later.

It is tragic and ironic that precisely the opposition to the Antonescu regime which had been nurtured by SOE found itself the target of Britain's wartime ally after the *coup*. What Maniu and his colleagues had feared regarding Stalin's designs upon Romania proved to be justified. Yet in London Maniu's stock was low. His indecisiveness in early 1942 and unwillingness to take firm political decisions was to hang over him in the Foreign Office after the *coup* and undermined confidence in him. Officials were highly critical of what they saw as

Maniu's failure to appreciate that Romania was at war with Britain as well as with Russia. Ian Le Rougetel, the British Political Representative in Romania, while sympathetic to Maniu, thought that he should participate in government after Antonescu's arrest. His refusal to do so proved in retrospect to be a major tactical error for the National Peasant party was more easily relegated to the sidelines as the Soviet Union imposed its will with increasing severity on Romania. The suppression of the democratic process required the elimination of the 'historical' parties and Maniu to a certain degree opened the door to such an eventuality.

For Maniu, on the other hand, the suspicion that Romania had been abandoned by Britain preyed on his mind. Maniu's words, reported to London on 1 December 1944, that he would quite understand it if the British government wanted Romania to cast in her lot with Russia rather than the West, but would be grateful to receive word from them to this effect, stung the Prime Minister into minuting to Eden, "Surely we are not called upon to make such an admission"²⁷. Maniu begged repeatedly to be told whether Romania had been traded into the Soviet sphere of influence, and each time British representatives were instructed to deny this. Several years later, Archibald Clark Kerr, the British ambassador in Moscow who visited Bucharest in the spring of 1945, confessed that one of the most distasteful things he had ever been asked to do was to lie to a man like Maniu²⁸. These lies led Maniu, and other democratic leaders in Romania, to compromise themselves unwittingly in the eyes of the Soviets in actions which were to cost them their liberty and were to condemn them to spend their final years in prison.

¹ Maurice Pearton in 'British Policy Towards Romania: 1939-1941', in Dennis Deletant, Maurice Pearton, *Romania Observed* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), p.66.

² Nigel West, *MI6. British Secret Intelligence Operations, 1909-45* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p.60.

³ Peter Wilkinson, Joan Bright Astley, *Gubbins and SOE* (London: Pen and Sword, 1997), p.34.

⁴ Maurice Pearton, 'British Policy Towards Romania: 1939-1941', p.87.

⁵ A condition not dissimilar to that placed by Marshal Antonescu and Iuliu Maniu in their peace feelers towards Britain and the United States during 1943 and 1944, the difference being that the Soviet Union had replaced Nazi Germany as the potential enemy.

⁶ Maurice Pearton, 'British Intelligence in Romania, 1938-1941', *Romanian and British Historians on the Contemporary History of Romania*, ed. by George Cipăianu and Virgiliu Țârău (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj-Napoca University Press, 2000), p.190.

⁷ Georgescu had studied engineering at a Birmingham University in England and worked for the *Unirea* company - where he met de Chastelain -before joining the Româno-Americana (Standard Oil) company. He was a member of a group of National Peasant Party activists in Banat who, in January 1938, were besieged by the police in their local party headquarters in Timișoara after violent clashes with the Iron Guard. The siege was lifted at the intervention of Maniu. After the Vienna Award of August 1940, Georgescu helped to establish the association 'Pro Transylvania' and with the support of Maniu forged links with SOE, providing information about German actions in Romania.

⁸ Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous: With S.O.E. in Wartime Romania* (London : Chatto and Windus, 1989), p.66.

⁹ Under questioning during his trial with Ion Antonescu and their associates, Mihai Antonescu stated that the Germans wanted Georgescu to be put on trial but he 'did not consider it to be in the Romanians' interestbecause that interest did not require that publicity should be given to a matter of espionage involving Britain at that time.....I intervened [to ensure] that there should never be a trial' (*Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu. Documente*, vol.1, (Bucharest: Editura Saeculum, Europa Nova, 1995), pp. 289-90).

¹⁰ The National Archives, Kew, London (henceforth TNA), HS 7/186, p.10.

¹¹ Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p.224.

¹² *Ibid* and TNA, HS 5/760 'Tom [codename of Maniu] departure from Romania', telegram from Cairo to SOE in London 19 January 1942.

¹³ TNA HS 5/763.

¹⁴ TNA HS 5/765

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

¹⁶ Private, unpublished memoir of Archibald Gibson, a correspondent for The Times in Bucharest in the inter-war years.

¹⁷ Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy*, p.225.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*,p.226; Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous*, p.93.

²² Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous* p.78.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.102.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.111-18.

²⁵ A Romanian Army captain who passed on details of German troop movements in the area of Bacău (Report on the interrogation of Gheorghe Tomaziu, no date, *Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor fostei Securității* (Archive of the National Council for the Study of the former *Securitate* Archives), Fond Penal 1076, vol. 4, f. 5.)

²⁶ Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy*, p. 40.

²⁷ Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy*, p.242.

²⁸ Ivor Porter, *Operation Autonomous*, p.238.