

1940 - ROMANIA AND RUSSIA

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Abstract. *More than 70 years have passed since the drama of the dismemberment of Greater Romania, and this subject - despite a vast and growing historical bibliography, both Romanian and foreign - is still highly controversial. We must state from the beginning that we do not share the opinion that history must be rewritten. We believe instead that history must be read again, namely studied anew, especially where a thorough, systematic study had not been done initially.*

Keywords: Carol II, Germany, Soviet Union, Bessarabia, Hungary, Bulgaria.

At the same time, we suggest a wider documentation, in particular the identification of new sources. With this in mind, we analyzed sources relating to some of the “main players” who witnessed the drama of June, 1940 in Bucharest:

- King Carol II's *Journal*.
- Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu, with his “Memoir” of 1 May 1943.
- Foreign Minister I. Gigurtu (1-27 June 1940), with his “Memoir” of 10 October 1944.

All of the above mentioned sources have been partially published in the volume *România cu și fără Antonescu* (Iași, 1991), as well as the recently published “Diary” of Petre Andrei.

It is difficult to find in the annals of the Romanian past, a more distressing, serious, unpredictable, and dangerous period than that in the summer and fall of

¹See Gh. Buzatu, Gh. I. Florescu, *Al doilea război mondial și România. O bibliografie*, Iași, Editura Academiei, 1981; George Ciorănescu, *Bessarabia: Disputed Land between East and West*, München, Ion Dumitru Verlag, 1985; second edition, Bucharest, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1993; Ion Ardeleanu and Mircea Mușat, *România după Marea Unire*, vol. II/2, 1933 – 1940, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988; V. Fl. Dobrinescu, *Bătălia pentru Basarabia (1918-1940)*, Iași, Editura Junimea, 1991; Mircea Mușat, *1940 – Drama României Mari*, București, Editura Fundației “România Mare”, 1992; Ioan Scurtu, C. Hlihor, *Anul 1940. Drama românilor dintre Prut și Nistru*, București, Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, 1992; Ilie Ceaușescu, ed., *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. I, București, Editura Militară, 1989; the most recent book, based upon a very rich bibliography, was edited by Gh. Buzatu, Marusia Cîrstea, Horia Dumitrescu, Cristina Păiușan, eds., *Iluzii, teamă, trădare în terrorism internațional = 1940. Omafiu Profesorului Ioan Scurtu*, I-II, Iași, Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2010.

1940. At that time, Romania, like Poland during the late eighteenth century, found itself politically and diplomatically isolated, and consequently lacked any prompt and efficient support from the outside, tormented by inner conflicts and, moreover, threatened from every side by great dangers, disputed by the Great Powers (the USSR and Germany), Romania became a patient on an surgery table, and despite all its protests it was amputated without hesitation. Thus, in less than three months, the Greater Romania of 1918 collapsed, losing one third of its territory and population; about 100,000 km and 7 million inhabitants, the majority of them Romanians. The last two cabinets of Carol's regime (Gheorghe Tătărescu, 11 May - 3 July 1940, and I. Gigurtu, 4 July - September, 1940) tried to avoid these great territorial losses by renouncing previous international obligations (the annulment of the English-French protection guarantee of April 1939 and cooperating with the Nazi Third Reich. But Berlin wanted Romania to accept the claims it imposed. King Carol II, keenly interested in maintaining his regime, under the circumstances, therefore, recommended the "reconciliation" of all internal political forces. Thus, negotiations began with representatives of the Iron Guard. After 22 June 1940 he replaced the *National Renaissance Front*, and Guardists were accepted in the government on 4 July, led by Horia Sima. Leaders of other political groups were involved in the decision to give up the territories of Bessarabia, Northern Bucovina, Northwestern Transylvania, and the Quadrilater - all claiming the necessity to save the state and the Romanian people. Their options were clearly expressed at the Crown Council summoned by Carol II on 27 June and 29 - 30 August 1940. During these meetings, some political leaders, such as Nicolae Iorga and Iuliu Maniu opposed this viewpoint.

After consultations with Hitler, in the spirit of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (23 August 1939) the government of the USSR presented two ultimatum notes to Bucharest (26 - 27 June 1940), asking for the immediate surrender of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina. Romania, under international pressure from all sides, yielded; thus, on 28 June 1940 the Romanian government communicated to Moscow that in order to avoid an armed conflict it was obliged to accept the claims of the USSR, mentioning that they agreed to the evacuation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, but not accepting their surrender. Such an attitude had the following consequences: the Soviet Union could not claim historical rights, in the future, over Romanian territories, as the Romanian government did not officially agree to the expansion of the Soviet Empire over Romanian lands.

The aggressive nature of the Soviet action was demonstrated by the threat of force, and the significant concentration of Soviet troops already camped on the east bank of the Dneister river. The Soviet ultimatum notes initiated the process of Greater Romania's total disintegration. As Moscow's claims had been accepted, how could the revisionist claims of Hungary and Bulgaria, both supported by Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union be denied? Consequently, the Bucharest government was forced to begin negotiations with Sofia and Budapest. The negotiations with Bulgaria concerning the Quadrilateral (Southern Dobroudja) took place in Craiova, while those with Hungary at Turnu Severin. The latter ones failed because of the exaggerated demands of Horthyist Hungary over Transylvania, so that finally Germany and Italy assumed the position of arbitrators, though neither of the sides requested it. Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano, the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy, called the representatives of the Bucharest and Budapest governments to Vienna, where, on 30 August 1940, they forced the signing of a document (officially called the Vienna Award, but, in fact, a Diktat), according to which Romania was forced to cede to Hungary the Northwestern part of Transylvania, namely 42,243 sq. km., with approximately 2.6 million inhabitants".

Under the circumstances, it is necessary to determine who bore the responsibility for this tragedy. First, in our opinion, there is only one cause for Romania's evolution during World War II: the decision of the Bucharest government of 27 June 1940, according to which Soviet claims to Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina¹ were accepted. Carol II and his government, led by Prime

¹Following the publication of the German Diplomatic Documents in the 1950's, it was revealed that I. V. Stalin and V. M. Molotov, when elaborated the ultimatum presented to Romania in June, 1940 (see Ministerstvo Innostranĭh Del Rossiiskoi Federatĭi, Arhiv Vneṣnei politiki SSSR, Moskva, fund 125 Romania), initially sought *all of Bucovina*, in addition to Bessarabia, but the Kremlin did not dare take any action without the consent of Berlin. V. M. Molotov informed his Nazi counterpart Joachim von Ribbentrop of Soviet intentions and the latter then informed Adolf Hitler. The Fuhrer's reaction was violent when he saw Bucovina on the list of Soviet demands. He accused Stalin, with good reason, of violating the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 as Bucovina had never appeared on the list of territories accepted by Berlin as being within the Soviet sphere of influence. Consequently, after an intense correspondence between Berlin and Moscow, the Soviets limited their claims over Romania, communicating to the Romanian minister in Moscow, Gheorghe Davidescu, in the first ultimatum of 26 June 1940 that Moscow insisted that Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina be handed over to the Soviets (see Hermann Weber, *Die Bukovina im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Hamburg, 1972, pp. 11-16 and Ilie Ceaușescu, ed., *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. I, pp. 266-268.

Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu, tried to share the responsibility for this decision: this is why two Crown Councils were summoned on 27 June 1940. The first at 12:20 (to discuss the first Soviet ultimatum) the second at 21:00 (to examine the reactions after presenting the same ultimatum). According to a fundamental source (King Carol's *Diary*), covering the period between 1937-1951¹ we shall point out, in what follows, the responsibilities of the political personalities of the time that took part in the two Councils (especially the last one):

The King notes in his *Journal* that 27 ministers took part in the first Crown Council:

- G. G. Mironescu (against acceptance of the ultimatum)
- N. Iorga (against)
- C. Angelescu (against)
- C. Argetoianu (for the acceptance of the ultimatum)
- Ernest Balif (for)
- Victor Iamandi (against)
- Victor Antonescu (against)
- Ștefan Ciobanu (against)
- Silviu Dragomir (against)
- Traian Pop (against)
- I. Gigurtu (discussions with the Russians)
- I. Christu (for)
- H. Hortolomei (against)
- Mircea Cancicov (for)
- Victor Slăvescu (discussions)
- General I. Ilcuș (for)
- C. C. Giurescu (discussions)
- Aurelian Benteoiu (for)
- Radu Portocală (discussions)

- M. Ghelmegeanu (for)

¹For published fragments from Carol II's *Diary* see Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, Iași, Editura Moldova, 1991, p. 36 ff. This document was used by Paul Hohenzollern (see *King Carol II. A Life of My Grandfather*, London, Methuen, 1988 or, in Romanian, *Carol al II-lea, Rege al României*, translated by Ileana Vulpescu, București, Editura Holding Reporter, 1991). Finally, Marcel-D. Ciucă published an integral edition of the *Diary* (see *Carol al II-lea, Regele României, Între datorie și pasiune. Însemnări zilnice*, 6 vols., București, 1995-2002).

- Mitiță Constantinescu (for)
- Petre Andrei (against)
- I. Macovei (for)
- Gh. Tătărescu (abstention)
- M. Ralea (discussions)
- Ernest Urdăreanu (against)
- General Florea Țenescu (for)

Summarizing the result of vote, he recorded: 11 votes *against*; 10 *for*; 5 for *discussions*; 1 *abstention*. The King's conclusion concerning the result is surprising: although the majority (11) pronounced *against*, the sovereign observed in a strange manner: "...The result of the vote was for receiving the ultimatum (?!)..." And then: "...From the beginning [of the meeting] there was observed a tendency toward yielding (?!)... "¹. The King didn't specify what his attitude was; we can only guess that he was *opposed* to yielding or he was amazed by what happened, taking into consideration his conclusion: "I cannot say I was very happy leaving this Council"². Carol's words were confirmed by another important witness, Petre Andrei, in his recently published *Diary*³ Both witnesses were in the epicenter of events and affirmed that:

- at Urdăreanu's urging they decided on mobilization;
- they decided they had to try "to gain time from the Russians";
- depending on the course of events a new Crown Council had to be summoned⁴. They had to consider a possible change of government. Alexandru Vaida-Voievod was hinted at as a possible Prime Minister, and I. Inculeț and I. Nistor were proposed as representatives of the threatened districts, and Constantin Argetoianu was considered as a possible Minister of Foreign Affairs (to replace I. Gigurtu)⁵. At the meeting on the evening of 27 June 1940 twenty-eight royal counsellors and Ministers were present; the only addition being the invitation of Alexandru VaidaVoievod⁶. The King presented the result of the vote whether to accept or reject the second Soviet ultimatum note:

- 19 for accepting the ultimatum.

¹Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, p. 42.

²*Ibidem*.

³Cf. Petre Andrei, *Jurnal. Memorialistică. Corespondență*, Iași, Editura Graphix, 1993, pp. 89-91.

⁴*Ibidem*, p. 90.

⁵Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, p. 43.

⁶*Ibidem*, pp. 43-44.

- 6 against (Nicolae Iorga, Victor Iamandi, Silviu Dragomir, Traian Pop, Ștefan Ciobanu, and Ernest Urdăreanu):

- 1 abstention (Victor Antonescu).

- 2 votes for accepting the ultimatum (Gheorghe Tătărescu and Florea Țenescu), which the King fails to mention.

The sovereign wrote in his journal: “I left [the Crown Council] sad and disgusted; all those who were playing the heroes at noon had turned coward. Only six votes of the twenty-six present [again he ignores the position of the Prime Minister and the Chief of Staff]¹ were for resistance. Their names deserve to be written with letters of gold in the book of Romanian honor ... [their names follow]”².

As to his own attitude, the King assures the possible reader of his *Diary* [destined to remain secret for 25 years] that: “... I closed the Council with a short speech in which I said that it was the most painful day of my life [...]. I consider it a great mistake to yield without any resistance almost a quarter of the country, but I am overwhelmed by the opinion of the great majority of those whom I asked for advice. I left without shaking hands with anyone, deeply sad and convinced that the consequences of this decision will be very grave for the country... “³.

In the opinion of Petre Andrei the information presented by General Țenescu and General Ilcuș was decisive in strengthening the belief that Romania *could not* resist an aggression by the Soviet Union, eventually combined with attacks by Hungary and Bulgaria⁴. As for air power, the ratio between Romania and the Soviet Union was 0 to 5, and a comparison of infantry forces showed that Romania had 40 divisions as compared to 141 divisions (the Soviet Union, Hungary; and Bulgaria combined). Everything had to lead (and led) to the conclusion that Romania *had no other choice but to yield to the Kremlin's demands*⁵.

¹ *Ibidem*. See also the memoirs of Gheorghe Tătărescu - his declaration of 1 May 1943 (Poiana-Gorj) - about the position expressed by himself and Florea Țenescu (*ibidem*, p. 93-94, details in what follows).

² *Ibidem*, p. 43.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

⁴ Petre Andrei, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

Today, after more than half a century, we can seriously ask:

- 1) Was it not possible *to reject* the Soviet ultimatum notes?
- 2) Were the participants in the Crown Council, on the shoulders of whom King Carol [in his *Journal*] laid the responsibility for the loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, not misinformed, in a premeditated manner, to limit their options? And if so, under what circumstances, by whom, and why?

The first aspect to be underlined is that in June 1940 not all political and military forces in Bucharest, nor national public opinion, shared the point of view that accepting the Soviet ultimatum was the only solution. We need only mention the opinions expressed by Nicolae Iorga and others at the Crown Council who opposed accepting the Soviet ultimatum. We can also mention the strident protest, accompanied by thousands of signatures, delivered at the joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate by Ștefan Ciobanu on 2 July 1940. On the same occasion, a memorial signed by Nicolae Iorga, Iuliu Maniu, C. I. C. Brătianu, Virgil Madgearu, C. Angheliescu, Stelian Popescu and others protesting the decision of the Crown Council was also presented¹. On 1 July 1940 General Ion Antonescu was received in audience by King Carol II; delivering to him a protest against yielding the territories²; this document was followed by an open letter from the General to the King that, as is known, led the monarch to order its author to be arrested. In this letter Antonescu complained: “The people and the army were disarmed without a fight. Their demoralization knows no limits. Their lack of trust in their leaders is complete. Their hatred of the guilty persons from the past is growing each day... “³. And, in conclusion, the future leader of the Romanian state declared that the damage done could not be repaired who were responsible for it as they only would make matters worse. There was only one solution: “Both the system and the people must be changed”⁴.

¹On the chronology of the events of 1940 see the synthesis of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, USA, Collection D. G. Popescu, Box 3, *The Circumstances of the Great Territorial Loss Suffered by Romania and their Consequences*.

² Ioan Scurtu, ed., *Pe marginea prăpastiei, 21-23 Ianuarie 1941*, vol. I, second edition, București, Editura Scripta, 1992, pp. 51-56.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 57-58.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p.58.

The second aspect that must be considered when trying to answer the question is how accurate was the information presented in the Crown Council on 27 June 1940 by the most well-informed participants, Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu, General Florea Țenescu, Chief of the General Staff, and General I. Ilcuș, Minister of War?

The military leaders, according to Gheorghe Tătărescu's account of the events, dated 1 May 1943, presented their information "in sober phrases, expressing a common view point: if necessary, the army will fight, but in a disproportion of forces that leaves no doubt about the outcome of the conflict"¹ Less than three years after the events, Tătărescu would claim that General Țenescu had been the most eloquent: "A complete and, at the same time, impressive explanation of the situation was presented by the Chief of Staff, General Țenescu, who, after declaring that the army would do its duty; insisted upon the inequality of forces that it would face. He pointed out the military capacity, training, and equipment of the Soviet Army, and he drew the conclusion that our army could resist it for a time, retreating to the Siret, but only if it would be supported by a powerful allied army, resulting from the organization of a political battle front that would result in the creation of a new military battle front. Without this support; the Chief of Staff believed that we must accept the ultimatum so we would not be forced to yield more tomorrow than they ask for today"². From the diary of Petre Andrei we also know that General Țenescu presented certain statistics to the Crown Council on the evening of 27 June 1940³. To force an opinion favorable to accepting Moscow's demands, the statement by the Chief of Staff that Romania could not place more than 40 divisions against the 140 divisions of the possible enemies (the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Bulgaria) was critical. Of these 140 divisions, the Soviets had at their disposal: 100 infantry divisions, 20 infantry brigades, 7 motorized divisions, and paratroopers⁴.

This is the appropriate place to stop and ask - were these estimates *realistic*?

¹ Cf. Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, p. 93.

² *Ibidem*, p. 93.

³ Petre Andrei, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

In the last few years historians in Chişinău have uncovered some very important documents related to this problem. Among these are:

- *The Note-Report* of 18 July 1940 (Moscow) signed by Major General V. Melikov, professor at the Academy of the General Staff of the Red Army, appointed by Marshal S.F. Timosenko; the Soviet Minister of Defense, to inspect how the troops on the southern battle front under the command of General G. K. Jukov, had fulfilled their mission during the months of June and July 1940 as planned by the Soviet *Stavka* with regard to the ultimatum notes presented to Romania¹

- *The Report* on the actions of the southern battle front troops in liberating (sic)! Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina during June and July, 1940, submitted by General Jukov and his subordinates².

- *A Note* concerning the situation of the southern battle front on 2 July 1940³.

The above-mentioned documents include information we believe to be *essential* for the elucidation of certain problems. For example, the number of forces mobilized by the Soviets, their overall strength; aims, means, and areas of operations, etc. On the basis of recently discovered Soviet documents we can deduce the following:

- Moscow's decision to act against Romania was taken in the first part of June, 1940⁴ (When England and France were occupied with the *Wehrmacht* assault in the west, and Hitler fully occupied with the final stages of the operation launched on 10 May 1940).

- Moscow initially planned the operation for the so-called liberation (in fact, occupation) of all of Bucovina, not taking into consideration Hitler's reaction concerning respecting the secret protocol of the 23 August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

- The operation was in the charge of the southern battle front, under the command of General Jukov, with its bases of operation in the special military

¹*The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its Consequences for Bessarabia. Documents*, Chişinău, Universitas, 1991.

²*Ibidem*, pp. 35-81.

³*Ibidem*, p. 81.

⁴The first order for troop concentrations on the east bank of the Dneister was issued on 10 April 1940 (*ibidem*, p. 66 – General Jukov's report).

region of Kiev and the military region of Odessa, uniting three armies, the 5th, the 9th, and the 12th.

- The final stage of training of the 9th and 12th armies was limited to the period 11 - 27 June 1940, so that on 24 they had to be concentrated and on 28 June in the early morning to be prepared for “crossing the state frontier”¹.

- At the level of the Headquarters of the southern battle front two variants of the operation plan were drawn up: the first, on 17 June 1940 (presented to the Stavka on 22 June 1940!), and the second variant, later, both taking into consideration two possibilities: the accepting or rejecting of Soviet claims by Romania².

- The *Note-Report* signed by General Melikov mentions these two variants of action by the southern battle front. Both of them contradict General Țenescu’s assertions made before the Crown Council on 27 June 1940, that if Romania risks war with the USSR, the Red Army would overstep the Prut and even the Siret. First of all, General-Țenescu had to be well-informed by Department II of the General Staff [Military Intelligence] about Moscow’s intentions; secondly, he had to assume that if Stalin overstepped the Prut it would mean a violation of the secret protocol of 23 August 1939 that Hitler would not allow. Evidenced by the fact that he refused to permit the Soviets to occupy southern Bucovina. On the other-hand, Melikov’s *Note-Report* confirms that, in case Romania refused to yield Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, Soviet troops were prepared to launch an invasion with the Prut river as the western limit of the operation: “If the government of Romania to withdraw from Northern Bucovina and Bessarabia voluntarily, and retreat with its troops across the Prut river”, Melikov concluded that the Red Armies, through a rapid offensive along the Dneister line would be compelled to liberate by force Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina³. In such an event the Soviets had to deliver - according to Jukov - a concentrated blow with the 12th Army along the Prut river in the direction of Iași, and with the 9th army, south of Chișinău, in the direction of Huși. The second variant, also considered by Melikov, had in view “solving the problem in a peaceful manner” (that is Bucharest yielding to Moscow’s demands), which would only require the “rapid

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

² *Ibidem*, p. 60-61.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

advancement of part of the Soviet troops concentrated along the Dneister into Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, taking up new lines along the Prut”¹.

During the discussions in the two Crown Councils held on 27 June 1940 the risk of an armed attack by the Soviet Union if they refused Molotov’s first ultimatum note was considered. The Soviet threat should have been an argument not for yielding, but on the contrary, for opposing Moscow’s aggression, something possible in two circumstances:

- if a prompt reaction came from a state supported by a strong, healthy army, not undermined by serious internal conflict and enjoying external peace;
- if the reaction represented *the last alternative* on the part of a state threatened by serious conflicts and lacking international support (as was Romania in June 1940) that decided to resist at any cost when faced with pressure and blackmail from the communist enemy in the east, not relying on a favorable evolution of general hostilities for resolving the problem of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, but opposing the Red Empire the only way it understood, by war, at all costs.

In this regard, we cannot ignore the problem of the Soviet troops number and quality, particularly the troops designated for the operations in Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina. From archival research, the military capabilities of Romania in the summer of 1940 are clearly known: it could not rely on more than 40 divisions, out of which, to defend the northeastern frontier 20 units were necessary (16 infantry divisions, 2 cavalry divisions etc.); and, at most, 2-3 divisions of infantry from the reserves of the General Staff². At the meeting of the Crown Council on the evening of 27 June 1940, General Țenescu referred to the existence of 40 divisions at his command. In exchange, he estimated the value of the united forces of the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Bulgaria at more than 140 divisions. Of course, these figures are exaggerated. First of all because there is no evidence of a plan of common action by those three states in the event that Romania would reject the Kremlin’s ultimatum notes. Secondly, General Țenescu; estimating the Soviet military forces separately, calculated 100 infantry divisions, 20 cavalry brigades, and 7 motorized divisions³. We suspect the

¹ *Ibidem*.

² Ilie Ceaușescu, ed., *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. I, p. 260-261.

³ Petre Andrei, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Romanian General deliberately misinformed the participants in the meeting of the Crown Council. It is necessary to compare the figures given by General Țenescu with real statistics, drawn from two important sources on opposing sides (for the sake of objectivity).

1) The study prepared by Department II of the Romanian General Staff, entitled *The Occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina by Soviet Troops*.

On 25 June 1940, taking into consideration the estimates provided by Department II of the General Staff, the most authorized source of military information available to the Bucharest government, and whose information General Țenescu, as Chief of Staff, had regularly at his disposal, estimated Soviet forces concentrated along the Romanian frontier to be as follows:

- Along the first battle line, 7 bodies of troops (18-20 infantry divisions), 5 independent cavalry divisions, and 4 motorized brigades.

- Along the second battle line, 5-7 bodies of troops (17-20 infantry divisions), 2 bodies of cavalry (5 cavalry divisions), and 3 mechanized brigades.

Thus, in total:

- 12-14 bodies of troops (35-40 infantry divisions), 2 bodies of cavalry (7 cavalry divisions), 5 independent cavalry divisions, and 7 mechanized brigades¹.

Within 8-15 days following the outbreak of hostilities the Soviets could bring into the area approximately 10-15 additional divisions drawn from the general reserve².

2) A Soviet report dated 2 July 1940 indicates the total forces on Jukov's southern battle front, including the troops introduced into Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina after 28 June 1940³.

Southern Battle Front (Total Forces)
32 infantry divisions

Troops Introduced into Romania
11 infantry divisions

¹ Cf. *The Occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina by Soviet Troops*, p. 16. This is prior to the events of June 1940. Before the ultimatum, the Romanian Secret Service estimated Soviet forces to be 40-50 infantry divisions, 12 cavalry divisions, 15 mechanised divisions, and 20 air force brigades (*ibidem*, p. 11).

² Cf. *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact...*, p. 81.

³ *Ibidem*.

2 motorized infantry divisions	1 motorized infantry division
6 cavalry divisions	4 cavalry divisions
11 tank brigades	5 tank brigades
3 air brigades	2 air brigades
16 artillery regiments (from Jukov's reserve)	0
14 artillery regiments	0
4 artillery divisions	0

A comparison of the sources demonstrates the quality of the estimates made by- the Romanian High Command (Department II) concerning the total military resources of the Soviet Union:

<i>Romanian Estimates</i>	<i>Actual Soviet Resources</i>
35-40 infantry divisions	34 infantry divisions
7 cavalry divisions	6 cavalry divisions
5 independent cavalry divisions	0 independent cavalry divisions
0 air brigades	3 air brigades
7 motorized brigades	7 motorized brigades
0 tanks brigades	11 tank brigades

In comparison with the effective units of the Red Army, the Romanian Army had at its disposal *at least 20 tactical units* (especially infantry and cavalry divisions) to protect its northeastern frontier, leading us to the conclusion that Soviet supremacy hardly exceeded 2:1. Thus, if Romania and the Soviet Union had come to a military confrontation over Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina in the summer of 1940, the disproportion of forces between the two potential belligerents would be *significant, but not decisive*. We do not neglect the fact that had hostilities broken out additional forces would have been brought into the area. The authorities in Bucharest, aware of the quality of their own troops, could not ignore the deficiencies of the enemy forces¹, an encouraging fact for the Romanians in the event of a conflict with the Red Army. In this regard the conclusion of the previously mentioned report prepared by Department II of the Romanian General Staff (point 6) is significant: "The fighting capacity of the Soviet Army is diminished because of. material needs, under-training of its troops,

¹In his report Jukov insisted upon the severe shortcomings of the Soviet forces during the occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina.

and especially low morale. The [Soviet] Army is impressive only in its numerical strength, and rapid and decisive action will disorganize it from the very beginning possibly even leading to the collapse of the regime”¹. Thus, the estimates given by General Țenescu at the meeting of the Crown Council on 27 June 1940 are wholly inaccurate, and the General possibly intentionally misinformed those present at the meeting, for, as we have seen, he had accurate estimations of Soviet strength at his disposal.

To find an adequate answer to the questions posed at the beginning of this study we must demonstrate the extent to which Romanian authorities were acquainted with Soviet military plans and preparations in 1940, and how well they understood the potential risk of unconditionally rejecting Molotov’s ultimatum notes. We shall not insist too much upon this point for it has been the subject of several studies and monographs, as well as published memoirs such as Grigore Gafencu’s well-known 1944 book² that referred to Soviet preparations (especially on a diplomatic level) in 1939-1940 to occupy Bessarabia. Moscow acted quickly - as in the case of Finland, the Baltic countries, and Poland - to transform the provisions of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact into reality. Thus, the leader of Soviet diplomacy began making preparations for an attack on Bessarabia already on 6 December 1939³ when the Kremlin approached Berlin. Military preparations were not neglected, in this respect, Department II of the Romanian General Staff, together with other governmental agencies, continually gathered information about Soviet actions and intentions. To demonstrate this we shall use the previously mentioned report prepared by Department II, information that was *at hand* for some of those participating in the Crown Council on 27 June

¹*The Occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina by Soviet Troops*, p. 24.

²See Grigore Gafencu, *Preliminaires de guerre a l’Est. De l’accord de Moscou (21 aout 1939) aux hostilites en Russie (22 juin 1941)*, Fribourg, W. Egloff, 1944, *passim*.

³Alexandru Cretzianu, Secretary of State in the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Romania (1939-1941) affirmed in a conference in Paris in 1954 that the Romanian government had indications already at the end of 1939 that the Soviet Union was preparing to attack Bessarabia. In this regard, the Romanian ambassador to Riga (Latvia), Grigore Niculescu-Buzești reported on 4 November 1939 that, “during the negotiations over the Russian-Latvian Military Treaty, the leader of the Soviet delegation, Vice-Commisar Isakoff, stated that when the negotiations with Finland were finished a military action against Bessarabia will take place, and important military forces are already concentrated at Harkov and Odessa for this purpose” (see Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, p. 61). The famous American journalist William Shirer also noted in his diary while he was in Berlin that “everybody in Moscow, including Stalin, imagines that the Red Army will be in Helsinki a week after the attack begins. They are so sure that they have even fixed the date of the attack for 6 December, but this was cancelled at the last “moment” (*ibidem*, p. 61-62).

(the king, the government, the army). On the basis of the information gathered by Department II the government in Bucharest knew about:

- the concentration of Soviet troops east of the Dneister during the first half of the year¹.

- that after 1 April 1940 the troop concentrations became systematic in preparation for an armed action by the Soviet Union in southeastern Europe, something also confirmed by Soviet sources².

- Communist propaganda began spreading rumors that Romania was preparing to attack the Soviet Union and that to prevent this the Kremlin will force (sic!) Romania to yield Bessarabia and Bucovina³.

- on 19 June 1940 Department II presented the report *Political and Strategic Considerations Concerning the Situation of Romania and the Surrender of France*, underlining the deterioration of the general situation in the country and that the Soviet Union will direct its actions against Romania. It proposed to defend Bessarabia and Bucovina, eventually carrying on the battle along the eastern Carpathians⁴. "The Soviet Union could benefit from the situation of Germany (with the majority of its troops in the west)," stressed Department II, and "pass to the offensive without announcing Berlin"⁵. The report of 19 June warned; "This intention [of the Soviet Union to occupy Bessarabia and Bucovina] must be considered as being quite probable and is in accord with all the information received recently by Department II of the General Staff"⁶.

Thus, the report prepared by Department II suggests that the presentation of the Soviet ultimatum at the end of June, 1940 did not come as a complete surprise to the Bucharest government⁷. What surprised them was the fact that reality was interfering, the confrontation of an unknown situation being disagreeable and full of aspects and consequences that could not, be perceived.

¹See *The Occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina by Soviet Troops*, p. 10.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11-12.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 12-13. On 23 May 1940 General Florea Țenescu stated in his report that he already knew of the secret protocol attached to the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact: "The Russian-German Pact leaves open to Russia the possibility of attacking Bessarabia. It is past time that the government should decide if Bessarabia is to be defended or evacuated. In accordance with this decision plans for evacuation or defense must be prepared. This is matter of extreme curenecy" (see Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire*, vol.II/2, p.103).

Thus, it is surprising the way in which Bucharest received the news of the presentation of the first Soviet ultimatum. Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu's notes reveal details about the attempts of the Romanian government to postpone the moment of decision, despite the fact that Romanian political and military leaders understood the Kremlin's aggressive intentions. Tătărescu recalled:

“The Crown Council [27 June 1940, 12 o'clock] opened under the King's presidency in a confused atmosphere. The King's counselors, members of the government, and the chiefs of the army were present. The sovereign presented the scope of the Council's meeting and gave me the floor. I explained in detail the history of our relations with the Soviets and all the efforts of the government to remove the threat of Russian aggression. Amidst absolute silence I read the ultimatum received that 'night and, at the end, I enumerated the military and administrative measures taken, asking for the government's permission to express my own opinion after all the members of the Council had spoken...’¹.

The advice to accept the Soviet ultimatum was surprising. We will not go into detail about- the Romanian government's consultations with Berlin and Rome, as well as with the countries belonging to the Balkan Pact, as they have been studied in detail². The results were discouraging, as is known, but we are surprised by the haste with which the officials in Bucharest opted for negotiations with Moscow, accepting the idea that concessions would be made with regard to Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina. Returning to Gheorghe Tătărescu's account of the first Crown Council meeting on 27 June 1940, the Prime Minister noted that “At the end of the debates I demonstrated the impossibility of resisting the Soviet Army and I pointed, out the consequences of such a resistance: the complete destruction of our army, the rapid invasion of the country by the Soviets and the destruction of the Romanian state. I also brought forward the impossibility of a military withdrawal and insisted on the necessity of maintaining our military forces intact until the last possible moment. In conclusion I asked for and the Council approved that- the government, in its response, acknowledge receipt of the ultimatum and ask for the establishment of a location where we could send the negotiators representing the Romanian state. In this way we tried to make a last attempt to open up discussions and gain time to evacuate the army, authorities,

¹ Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, p. 95.

² See Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire*, vol. II/2, pp. 1095-1137.

and the Romanian population that did not want to remain under Russian domination...”¹. The picture drawn by the head of the Romanian government was too gloomy. His presentation could not be but disheartening to those present, and, years later, in 1945-1947, the Soviets showed their appreciation for the Prime Minister’s attitude in 1940, permitting Gheorghe Tătărescu’s presence in Dr. Petru Groza’s government. As for the situation in the summer of 1940 - a “rapid invasion of the country” and the “destruction” of the Romanian state, as the Prime Minister foresaw in the event that the Soviet ultimatum was rejected, was not a real possibility. The balance of power between Germany and the Soviet Union had to be maintained in the region, and Tătărescu knew that this excluded the possibility that the Soviets would occupy the entire country. While it is true that Tătărescu did not have access to Soviet-German diplomatic correspondence that preceded the Soviet aggression in June, 1940, the Prime Minister had to know from his own special services (Department II of the General Staff and Moruzov’s S.S.I.) of the secret Nazi-Soviet collaboration and the intentions of Berlin and Moscow.

The ignorance demonstrated by the Bucharest government weighed heavily in the adoption of an inadequate response on 27 June 1940 that accepted the evacuation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina.

Although the Romanian government sought and received Berlin’s advice on 27 June 1940 that it should resolve in a peaceful manner the “disagreement” with Moscow (thus, to yield Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina)² what the government did not know (or could not find out) was that Hitler and Joachim von Ribbentrop directed Moscow’s attention - through the German ambassador to Moscow von der Schulenberg - to the fact while Germany had no interest in Bessarabia, the presence of Bucovina on the list of Soviet claims was a novelty, and they warned Moscow that Germany had important economic interests “in the other parts of Romania. These interests included agriculture and the oil fields. In addition, as I have often informed the Soviet government [the instructions to von Schulenberg were signed by Ribbentrop on 25 June 1940], Germany is anxious

¹ Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, p. 95.

² *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik, 1918-1945*, Band X, *Die Kriegsjahre (23 Juni bis 31 August 1940)*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1963, pp. 57-61, doc. 67 (Manfred von Killinger’s note on the discussion with King Carol II, Bucharest, 23-28 June 1940).

not to transform these regions into a theater of war...”¹. This represented a warning to Moscow that the Kremlin dare not ignore. If Bucharest had known about this document on 27 June 1940 it could have taken a different attitude toward the Soviet demands, unconditionally rejecting them.

In the course of the 20th century Bucharest governments threatened many times (and actually did so in 1916) to destroy the oil fields in Ploești in response to dangers presented by real or possible aggressors. A well known occurrence is that in 1939-1940 when the Romanian authorities cooperated with the English and French to mine the oil fields and deposits of liquid fuel at Ploești to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Nazi Reich². The action failed as a consequence of German countermeasures and as a result of the political reorientation of Romania toward Berlin during the first half of the year 1940³. This does not mean that on 27 June, in a mere 24 hours, the authorities in Bucharest could have considered destroying the oil fields in response to the possible Soviet aggression threatened in Molotov’s ultimatum⁴. The technical preparations, which were non-existent, did not allow for such a course of action, but with all the warnings received before this time, such a possibility should have been under consideration. It is difficult to understand why Bucharest, knowing of Berlin’s major interest in the Romanian oil fields, did not appeal to this argument, relying on it in case of an attack by the Red Army. It was only logical that the Romanian government should play on the German-Soviet dispute, as it knew full well that the Nazis would not allow the advancement of Soviet forces to the area of Ploești. Subsequent developments confirmed these assertions. For example, on 23 August 1940 Joachim von Ribbentrop transmitted to von der Schulenberg instructions to bring to Molotov’s attention that Germany and Italy interfered in the Romanian-Hungarian negotiations because they could not allow an outbreak of hostilities between Hungary and Romania over Transylvania as “both Axis powers have a

¹*Ibidem*, p. 11-12, doc. 13 (Joachim von Ribbentrop to the German Ambassador in Moscow, telegram no. 1074, 25 June 1940). See also Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire*, vol. II/2, p. 1015 ff.

²Cf. Horia Brestoiu, *Impact la paralela 45. Incursiune în culisele bătăliei pentru petrolul românesc*, Iași, Editura Junimea, 1986, *passim*.

³Cf. Philippe Marguerat, *Le III-e Reich et le pétrole roumain, 1938-1940*, Geneve-Leiden, 1977, *passim*.

⁴ We refer to the first ultimatum where Molotov warned Bucharest “to solve the problem immediately” and return Bessarabia to the USSR, “now that the Soviet military weakness is a thing of the past...” (see Gh. Buzatu, *România cu și fără Antonescu*, p. 80).

fundamental interest in the maintenance of peace and order in those areas". The head of German diplomacy did not hide the fact that, in the first place, Romanian grain and oil were of "vital significance for the Axis"¹. Another significant fact is that two months after the Soviet aggression against northeastern Romania, Berlin concluded that Soviet forces were *excessively close* to the region of Ploești. The territorial guarantee granted to Romania by Germany and Italy immediately after imposing the Diktat of Vienna² also signified a warning to Moscow that the extension of Soviet domination beyond the Prut would bring the Axis powers into the conflict. Molotov's reaction was to accuse Germany, through the territorial guarantee it granted to Romania, of violating article 3 of the Non-Aggression Pact of 23, August 1939³.

But there were several indications, prior to 27 June 1940, that the authorities in Bucharest had to appreciate of the importance of Romanian oil in the diplomacy and strategy of the Third Reich, especially after the English began a naval blockade of Germany after the outbreak of World War II⁴. The most recent work of international circulation concerning the oil problem during World War II⁵ confirms the major interest of Germany in Romanian resources, estimating that they supplied at least 1/3 of the military and civil necessities of the Reich during the period of the war⁶. Robert Goralski and Russell W. Freeburg, authors of the abovementioned work entitled *Oil and War*, consider that after Russia occupied Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina in June, 1940, it was no coincidence that in the following weeks." Their research *Hitler expounded his position concerning an invasion of Russia*⁷ confirms that at the end of June and the beginning of July 1940 Hitler's fatal decision to organize and offensive in the east against the Soviet Union had been made. After the Kremlin created the

¹ DAP, 1918-1945, Serie D: 1937-1945, Band X, pp. 485-487, doc. 415 (Telegram 1565/30 August 1940, Ribbentrop to the German Ambassador in Moscow). See also, Kurt W. Treptow, *The Diktat of Vienna in the Context of Nazi-Soviet Relations: A Documentary Presentation*, in "Transylvanian Review", vol. I, no.2 (Fall, 1992), doc. III, pp. 40-42.

² ADAP, 1918-1945, Serie D, Band X, pp. 480-481.

³ ADAP, 1918-1945, Serie D: 1937-1945, Band XI/1, Bonn, 1964, p. 41, doc. 38 (Telegram 1884/9 September 1940), pp. 47-53.

⁴ See Robert Goralski, Russell W. Freeburg, *Oil and War: How the Deadly Struggle for Fuel in World War II Meant Victory or Defeat*, New York, W. Morrow & Co. Inc., 1987, *passim*; Gh. Buzatu, *O istorie a petrolului românesc*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1998, p. 314 and foll.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Robert Goralski, Russell W. Freeburg, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

problem of Bessarabia and Bukovina, on 25 June 1940, General Halder wrote in his diary that Hitler was hesitating between the invasion of England and “a blow in the East”¹. On 22 July he recorded the Führer’s decision: “The Russian problem will be resolved in an offensive manner. The plan for the projected operation has to be elaborated”².

After estimating the significance of Romanian oil for Germany prior to the Soviet aggression of 27 June 1940, it is inconceivable that the government in Bucharest did not realize its importance³. Logically, on 27 June Romania’s response to the Soviet ultimatum should have taken into consideration the oil factor. It was the duty of the Romanian government and its information and counter-intelligence services to understand German intentions and the place of Romania in German plans, to the same extent as they understood its place in French and British plans. In this regard, the decisive element was learning Hitler’s long-range program, elaborated on 8 March 1939, for the Reich’s offensive actions on the continent during 1939-1941:

- 1939 (“not later than” 15 March)
- objective - Poland.

- as for Hungary and Romania the Fuhrer specified, “they, unquestionably enter within the vital space of Germany. The fall of Poland and the exercising of pressure will make them, of course, favorably disposed. Then we will have complete control over their agricultural and oil resources. The same applies to Yugoslavia. This plan will be fulfilled by 1940, then German will be undefeatable”⁴.

Therefore, the Führer’s speech pointed out the *essence* and the timing of the program: Romania had to be included by 1940 in the *Lebensraum* of Hitler’s Germany: Under the circumstances, Bucharest was forced to chose between Berlin and Moscow. Unfortunately, the Romanian government did not follow the example of Finland, but chose, instead, a policy of rapprochement toward Berlin. *The government of King Carol II chose the worst alternative, namely surrendering*

¹ Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*, I, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988, p. 70.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Philippe Marguerat, *op.cit*, p. 157.

⁴ Gh. Buzatu, *Dosare ale războiului mondial (1937-1945)*, Iași, Editura Junimea, 1978, p. 22.

Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, leading to an intensification of ‘collaboration with the Third Reich.

The only correct decision was *to defend the country* against any aggression. Such a decision would have been advantageous for Romania for several reasons:

- So as not to establish a *dangerous precedent* that was used by Romania’s enemies later that same year.

- The image of Romania would have been that of a state that fought to defend its rights against totalitarian aggression. Thus, V. M. Molotov was the first to observe that once Romania had accepted the Soviet claims it would do so the next time as well¹.

- Romania’s decision not only created a precedent for the loss of the other provinces (Transylvania and southern Dobroudja), but aided the Kremlin so that during the war against Germany, Moscow convinced its allies (first England, then later the United States) to recognize the territories they had annexed in 1939/1940, something that Hitler himself had accepted². These territories were subsequently recognized by the peace treaties as belonging to the Soviet Union.

From the above we may conclude that the decision of June 1940 had a long-term influence over Romania’s evolution, particularly during the first years of the war. *Resistance* would have been the ideal choice and the most advantageous for the country. To make this choice Romania needed a stable internal situation and external support.

Taking into consideration the political, social; and military situation of the country at that time one can easily understand *why* it did not make the only honorable decision - to fight the communist aggressor. From this point of view, Ion Antonescu was correct in his assessment of the “old regime” immediately after he took power³.

¹See Felix Ciuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovim. Iz dnevnika...*, Moskva, Terra, 1991, *passim*.

²Gh. Buzatu, ed., *Secretele protocolului secret von Ribbentrop-Molotov*, Iași, Editura Moldova, 1991. Special issue of the magazine “Moldova”, no. 8/1991; idem, *România sub Imperiul Haosului (1939-1945)*, București, Editura RAO, 2007 p. 32 and following.

³See Ion Antonescu, *ABC-ul anticomunismului românesc*, vol. I, Iași, Editura Moldova, 1992, p. 98. In his speech at Alba Iulia on 1 December 1940, Antonescu proclaimed: “...We must never forget that history never forgets the guilty ones; and we are all guilty; some of us because we said

It is completely true that the weakness of the old regime led to the crisis of surrendering Romanian territories, aggravating an already unstable political situation. King Carol II wrote in his *Diary* on 16 October 1943: “I am 50 years old and I must confess that despite this half a century I didn’t feel all the years on my shoulders. Looking back I conclude that my life did not lack interest and change. It was a continuous fight, a fight for my beliefs and for the progress of my people.

Even my love of Dudaia, that caused so much annoyance, was part of this continuous fight. I do not regret it for one minute, neither now during these troubled times, nor then when I was so happy. It has been a continuous source of joy, a shelter for my soul. I don’t dare say I didn’t make mistakes. Today I would say that the biggest mistake of my life was that I did not side with the Allies at all costs. I was wrong in listening to the cowards, such as Urdăreanu and others, who favored surrender to the Germans. It is true that Romania would have suffered, but not more than now and, at least, it would not have been humiliated. With all this past, we must look to the future and unite our forces to free Romania from the clutches of the Nazis”¹.

We have no choice but to conclude pessimistically: the ex-King was over optimistic and could not have known that owing to the great error of 27 June 1940 Romania was destined to the awful communist experiment that lasted 45 years².

nothing, others because they were wrong: all of us, because we accepted; for 20 years we wasted our strength, our thoughts, and our resources in useless fights over ideologies, stupid divisions, odious gossip, painful feuds, an inhuman attitudes. The mistakes came in time! A terrible deadline! The frontiers fell, one after the other, without being defended as Romania was totally surprised by the storm and weakened and without support. An eternal nation was punished for the sins of a single generation that is not everlasting”.

¹Carol al II-lea, *Între datorie și pasiune. Însemnări zilnice*, IV, București, 2000, p. 119-120.

²King Michael also expressed his regrets: “At the time [in June, 1940],” he confessed to the French journalist Philippe Viguie Desplaces, “I do not think that we had any choice; it would have been dangerous, even suicidal, to oppose the Germans and Russians. Later on I realized that we could still oppose them. Not for a long time, but we could still resist” (cf. Philippe Viguie Desplaces, *La Regne inacheve*, Paris, Michel Lafon, 1992, p. 77).
