



## FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE COLLABORATION DURING KING CAROL II DICTATORSHIP (1938-1940)

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*In February 1938, King Carol II imposed his political will and turned from a mediator into an important actor. When the royal dictatorship was established, the political parties were banned, the military took over the leadership of counties and town halls and the structures of force were given increased powers. At the same time, Romania began to be isolated externally, because of both certain scenarios of the revisionist states and the conciliation policy adopted by England and France. Against this background, the Romanian intelligence services launched actions of exploration and information exchange with traditional partners (England and France), and with Germany, with multiple purposes. From the English and the French, help was needed to counter revisionism, while from the Germans we required cooperation regarding the Soviet space, all with the purpose of maintaining Romania's integrity. The results, not always favourable, were analysed and presented to political-military decision-makers, those who had to make the final decisions.*

*Keywords: Romania, Carol II, Special Intelligence Service, collaboration, USSR, Germany.*

At the December 1937 elections, no party won 40% of the votes, so they could form a one-party government. Although it organised the elections, the National Liberal Party/PNL obtained 36%, followed by the National Peasant Party/PNȚ with 20% and the “*Everything for the Fatherland*” Party (the political group of the Legionary Movement) with 15%. On 28 December 1937, the King appointed Octavian Goga as Prime Minister, the leader of the Christian National Party, which ranked fourth in elections with 9.15% and dissolved the legislative bodies on 18 January 1938. At the same date, new parliamentary elections were announced, which were supposed to take place in early March 1938. The dissatisfaction of certain internal and external circles with the right-wing government programme, the intention of getting closer to Italy and Germany in terms of foreign policy and the electoral deal concluded by Octavian Goga with the Legionary Movement led to the King’s decision to change the regime. It seems that the governments in London and Paris explicitly called for the removal of the Goga-Cuza cabinet and the appointment of a government meant to “*establish the dictatorship*”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, on 10 February 1938, the King expressed to the Prime Minister the desire to establish a national union government and Octavian Goga resigned. On the same night, 10/11 February 1938, a government was formed under the presidency of Patriarch Miron Cristea. The first measures were the appointment of military prefects, decreeing the state of siege and censorship at national level<sup>2</sup> and the cancellation of the March 1938 elections, which ended the period of constitutional monarchy and opened the path towards the personal regime of King Carol II<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Șerban Milcoveanu, *Vârf de lance. Secolul XX. Depoziții de martor al epocii și relatări de participare la evenimente*, INST, 2006, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> For more details on the censorship measures of that time, see Ioan Lăcustă, *Cenzura veghează 1937-1939*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For more details on Romania’s evolution in this period, see: Al. Gh. Savu, *Dictatura regală*, Editura Politică, București, 1970. Florea Nedelcu, *Viața politică din România în preajma instaurării dictaturii regale*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1973; Florea Nedelcu, *De la Restaurație la dictatura regală. Din viața politică a României 1930-1938*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1981; Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria României în anii 1918-1940. Evoluția regimului politic de la democrație la dictatură*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1996, pp. 161-188.



*The new cabinet led by Patriarch Miron Cristea was “an eclectic government”, composed of centre-right people, animated by a spirit of duty and a touch of political opportunism, which had the mission to restore and maintain order in the country. That is why, the first measures taken were in this direction: the declaration of the state of siege, the establishment of censorship, the appointment of senior officers as prefects, a new law for the repression of offenses against public peace etc.*

The new cabinet led by Patriarch Miron Cristea was “an eclectic government”<sup>4</sup>, composed of centre-right people, animated by a spirit of duty and a touch of political opportunism, which had the mission to restore and maintain order in the country. That is why, the first measures taken were in this direction: the declaration of the state of siege, the establishment of censorship, the appointment of senior officers as prefects, a new law for the repression of offenses against public peace etc. On 20 February 1938, a new Constitution was drafted, four days later being submitted to public opinion “for good science and purpose”<sup>5</sup>, and on 27 February 1938, it was promulgated. On this occasion, the new Prime Minister delivered a speech that was seen by contemporaries as “a broad indictment for political parties”<sup>6</sup>. The new Constitution revealed that the king became “an active political factor”<sup>7</sup>, which exercised the legislative power through the National Representation (the deputies being elected for 6 years, and the senators for 9) and the executive power through the government. Nationally, the recrudescence of right-wing extremist actions increased, and the King shifted between harsh repression and attempts to bring the legionary movement closer<sup>8</sup>.

From the administrative point of view, on 14 August 1938, a new law was promulgated, in which a new structure emerged – the Land, 10 in the whole country, governed by royal residents. On 12 October 1938, guilds of civil servants, craftsmen and workers were created (instead of the trade unions), and on 16 December 1938, the National Renaissance Front<sup>9</sup> was established, the only legally accepted party. On 22 June 1940, the Front of the National Renaissance was transformed into the Party of the Nation, a “single and totalitarian party”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria românilor în secolul XX*, Editura Paideia, București, 1999, p. 343.

<sup>5</sup> Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *op. cit.*, p. 344. The Constitution was published in *Monitorul Oficial* no. 48/27 February 1938.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 345.

<sup>7</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria României...*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>8</sup> For more details on the evolution of the Legionary Movement in that period, see: Ioan Scurtu (coord.), *Ideologie și formațiuni de dreapta în România*, vol. V (1938-1940), INST, București, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For more details on the organisation and functioning of the National Revival Party, see: Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-364; Petre Țurlea, *Partidul unui rege: Frontul Renașterii Naționale*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria României...*, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

and the same day the Law-Decree for the defence of the unique and totalitarian public order of the Romanian state came into force.

The third government led by Miron Cristea was formed on 1 February 1939, but the Patriarch was ill, which prevented him from taking the oath. In less than three weeks, on 21 February 1939, he went to France for medical treatment to improve his condition. The age, the medical conditions, the turmoil of the political life and, perhaps, the stress of the function contributed to his death, on 6 March 1939, at 23.35 hours, in the city of Cannes.

The new Prime Minister became Armand Călinescu, a former member of the PNȚ leadership, who switched sides to embrace the King's position in the action of installing a strong-handed government. He had been Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister, so his appointment was not a surprise on the political scene. The only drawback was its anglophile policy, which was in opposition to European realities. The harsh measures against the legionary movement (or the Iron Guard) and the inflexibility in foreign policy culminated with his assassination on 21 September 1939 by a legionary band. For one week (21-28 September 1939) General Gheorghe Argeșanu was Prime Minister, in charge of leading the repression of the legionary movement, followed by Constantin Argetoianu, also very close to the King (28 September – 23 November 1939) and Gheorghe Tătărescu (24 November 1939 – 4 July 1940). The change of orientation in the foreign policy forced again the change of the Prime Minister, so that the position was entrusted to Ion Gigurtu, an industrialist known for his pro German views. This appointment could not save Romania from the territorial losses of the summer of 1940, so the King was forced to resort to one of the people who opposed him and who he had sent to the Bistrița monastery: General Ion Antonescu. On 4 September 1940, the General was appointed Prime Minister, the following day receiving "full powers for the leadership of the Romanian state"<sup>11</sup>, which inaugurated the entry of Romania into a new political constellation.

King Carol II wanted power, he obtained it, but he did not rise to the level of rhetoric and times, despite all the attempted formulas of government. The dissolution of the constitutional political system, the sinuous path in the relations with the legionary movement and the lack



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<sup>11</sup> The appointment and responsibilities of the Prime Minister were published in the *Official Gazette (Monitorul Oficial)* no. 205/5 September 1940, part I.



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of procurement of the Romanian armed forces can be blamed entirely on him. The interests of the Romanian state were the maintenance of territorial integrity, respectively the consolidation of national independence and sovereignty. In this respect, the state leadership had to identify the external threats and limit the internal vulnerabilities. After 10 years of rule, King Carol was unable to maintain territorial integrity nor to develop the capabilities of the Romanian state to the extent of being able to withstand external threats<sup>12</sup>.

Between 1938 and 1940, revisionism reached its peak<sup>13</sup>, and Romania was one of the victims of this policy initiated by Hungary and Germany. Externally, the rise of the revisionist political currents did not find strong opposition from France and England, which applied a conciliation policy. In March 1938, Austria was annexed to the Third Reich, without any opposition from the democratic states. A few months later, in September 1938, the Munich Conference (29-30 September 1938), attended by the Prime Ministers of Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany, decided to dismantle Czechoslovakia in the hope of maintaining peace in Europe. Anticipating the danger posed by Romania, King Carol II paid a visit to London<sup>14</sup> (15-18 November 1938) and Paris (19-21 November 1938) to receive the most effective political, economic and military support. On his return, he went to Berlin and discussed with Chancellor Adolf Hitler (24 November 1938) the evolution of bilateral and, in particular, economic relations. The latter were initiated at the level of specialists, on 12 February 1939 and were concluded on 23 February 1939<sup>15</sup>, with the signing of an economic treaty. The much-needed Anglo-French support was achieved only by certain guarantees for territorial integrity, offered at the same time to Romania and Greece (13 April 1939).

The European political balance was broken by the conclusion of the treaty between Germany and the USSR (23 August 1939), known

<sup>12</sup> For more details on this, see Mihail E. Ionescu, *Carol al II-lea și securitatea națională*, in "Dosarele Istoriei", nr. 5/2000, pp. 50-53.

<sup>13</sup> For more details on border changes at that time, see Aurică Simion, *Agresiunile naziste din Europa în anii 1938-1939*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1983.

<sup>14</sup> For more details on the position of the Great Britain regarding Romania, see: David Britton Funderburk, *Politica Marii Britanii față de România (1938-1940)*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> For more details on this treaty, see A. Niri, *Istoricul unui tratat înrobitor (Tratatul economic româno-german din martie 1939)*, Editura Științifică, București, 1965.

as the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact<sup>16</sup>, by which the two states divided their spheres of influence between the Baltic and the Black Sea. The first transposition of the secret plan into practice was the attack against Poland on 1 September 1939, which resulted in an Anglo-French declaration of war issued to Berlin (3 September 1939), but without practical consequences. On 17 September 1939, Soviet troops entered Poland and, shortly, the two powers divided their areas of interest, according to the previously established details. Immediately after the attack on Poland, on 6 September 1939, the Crown Council proclaimed Romania's neutrality, and in the following period, the Romanian diplomacy tried to create a Neutral Bloc, to delimit the territorial aggressions and to create a defence system. Events on the continental political scene imposed a new economic agreement with Germany (4 April 1940) and an oil pact with Belgium, the Netherlands and France. Subsequently, the government discussed the reorientation of foreign policy to Germany, given its expansion on the continent and, in particular, the interest for Romanian petroleum products.

During the analysed period, the external intelligence collaboration was the responsibility of the Secret Intelligence Service (SSI), which took place at both the traditional, Anglo-French level and the German one, mainly through the exchange of data on the USSR. In 1938, the SSI notified the Abwehr about Soviet attempts to penetrate the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich's intelligence services, providing actual intelligence in this regard. Major Constantin Ionescu-Micandru, the head of the Eastern Front of the External Intelligence Section of the SSI, was sent to Berlin by his superior, Mihail Moruzov, in June and October-November 1939, on which occasions a connection system was developed and the contact persons of the two institutions were established. Between 22 and 24 June 1939, the Romanian intelligence officer proposed to the German party a "concrete"<sup>17</sup> collaboration for collecting data on the USSR. The German side replied affirmatively,



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<sup>16</sup> For more details, see Emilian Bold, Ilie Seftiuc, *Pactul Ribbentrop – Molotov*, Institutul European, Iași, 1998; Alexandru Moșanu, Ion Buga (coord.), *Anexarea Basarabiei în anul 1940 de către Uniunea Sovietică – o consecință directă a pactului Molotov-Ribbentrop*, Chișinău, 2002; Ioan C. Popa, *Fața nevăzută a agresorului. Pactul Ribbentrop – Molotov și urmările lui pentru România*, Editura Semne, București, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Cristian Troncotă, *Mihail Moruzov și Serviciul Secret de Informații al Armatei Române*, Editura INI, București, 1996, p. 93.



mentioning that it did not have “*specialised elements*”<sup>18</sup> on this level, but it could contribute financially. Ionescu-Micandru declined financial support and initialled the bilateral agreement. During the second meeting, the Romanian major discussed with his counterpart, the head of the Eastern Front, Major Pruck, who wrote to him, on 30 October 1939, “*we have become friends with the devil*”<sup>19</sup>, an allusion to the recent pact concluded between Berlin and Moscow, with negative and predictable consequences since then. The following day, the SSI representative was received by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris<sup>20</sup> and gave him «*The Analysis of the Romanian Armed Forces Intelligence Service for the Head of the German Armed Forces Intelligence Service*»<sup>21</sup>, meant to strengthen the collaboration between the two institutions. The head of the Abwehr appointed Dr Wagner as the official representative in Bucharest, with duties on the oil area and counter espionage on the Danube. He was in the Romanian capital on 8-12 November 1939, on this occasion being received by the head of the SSI, Mihail Moruzov. Also, in November 1939, Major Pruck arrived in Bucharest and provided us with a list of identified Soviet agents active in Romania.

Some explosions in refineries and some train loaded with petroleum products crashes caught the attention of Abwehr, which saw them as acts of sabotage. As a result, on 10 December 1939, Admiral Canaris and Lieutenant-Colonel Bentivegni, the head of the Offensive Counterintelligence Section, came to Bucharest, where for two days developed the counter sabotage and counter espionage measures. Ionescu-Micandru went to the capital of Germany on 18 December 1939, and the topics of the talks were how to secure the Prahova Valley and the Danube.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>20</sup> Admiral Wilhelm Franz Canaris (1 January 1887, Aplerbeck – 9 May 1945, Flossenburg) a naval officer in World War I, in which he commanded a submarine and acted informationally in Spain. He continued his career after 1918 in the army intelligence service, and on 1 January 1935, he was appointed head of Abwehr, which he led until 1944. Following the attack on Hitler (20 July 1944), his involvement was proved, a fact for which he was investigated, arrested, tried and sentenced to death. For more details about his life and activity, in André Brissaud, *Canaris. Le «petit amiral» prince de l'espionnage allemand (1887-1945)*, Librairie Academique Perrin, Paris, 1970; Jaroslav Kokoška, *Amiralul Canaris* (translated by Teodora Alexandru-Dobrițoiu), Editura Militară, București, 1970; Richard Bassett, *Spionul-șef al lui Hitler. Misterul Wilhelm Canaris*, Editura RAO, București, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> The document was edited in Cristian Troncotă, *Mihail Moruzov...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-304.

At the beginning of March 1940, Mihail Moruzov went personally to Berlin, where he met his counterpart, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, and General Wilhelm Keitel<sup>22</sup>, the Chief of the General Staff. One of the practical applications of the bilateral talks was the strengthening of the security measures of the Danube ports. Captain von Weiss conducted an inspection in the port cities of Turnu-Severin and Orșova (22-24 March 1940) and found that the guard “*is not enough*”<sup>23</sup>, the area of the oil tanks had to be strengthened and patrol vessels had to be equipped with rescue equipment.

The Abwehr liaison officer in Bucharest, Dr Wagner, met with Moruzov (3 May 1940) and asked how Romania would react in the event of a French-British attack in the oil area. Admiral Canaris returned to Bucharest (28-30 May 1940) and, on this occasion, an exchange of information about the Red Army took place.

The Germans correctly analysed Moruzov’s intelligence power, as well as his influence on the King, so, in early September 1940, when King Carol II was forced to abdicate, they found a formula to oust the head of the SSI. He was invited to a trilateral conference, in Venice, exactly when the events that led to General Antonescu’s call to power and abdication of King Carol II were taking place in Romania. Although he was offered a delay in returning to the country, Moruzov, perhaps too confident in his power and influence, chose to return. He was arrested, taken to the Capital Police Prefecture and then to the Jilava prison, where he was assassinated on 26/27 November 1940. The Chief of the Abwehr arrived on 7 September 1940 in Bucharest, and the next day he was received by the new Prime Minister, on which occasion the coordinates of intelligence collaboration were established. Admiral Canaris could have demanded both Moruzov’s release and his silencing, especially after discovering actual data, in the archive of the French intelligence service, that he was working on more levels.

Collaboration with traditional allies was maintained through the exchange of information and reciprocal inquiries on continental



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<sup>22</sup> Fieldmarshal Wilhelm Keitel (22 September 1882, Helmsherde – 16 October 1946, Nuremberg) artillery officer, participated in World War I, led various departments in the Ministry of War (1935-1937) and the High Command of the Wehrmacht/OKW (1938-1945). On 8 May 1945, he signed the surrender of Germany before the United Nations, and the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg judged and sentenced him to death (1946).

<sup>23</sup> Central Historical National Archives (ANIC), *Presidency of the Council of Ministries – Special Intelligence Service Collection (PCM-SSI)*, file 22/1940, p. 50.



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geopolitical relations. For a fairer picture, Moruzov sent in a European tour Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe N. Petrescu, former military attaché in Rome, head of the 2 Counterintelligence Office of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intelligence Section of the Great General Staff and assigned as tactical attaché with the SSI. During the period 3-18 March 1939, he visited Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, England and France, where he discussed with representatives of the intelligence services, but also with military and political factors<sup>24</sup>. A second tour took place only in France and England (27 March – 6 April 1939)<sup>25</sup>, where he tried to find out about the way the political circles saw Romania and to purchase armaments. After his visit to Germany and a short break in Bucharest, Moruzov visited his counterparts in France and England, to test the possibilities of supporting Romania. The head of the Intelligence Office of the French General Staff acknowledged that he had a small staff and that the best intelligence he had on Germany was from the SSI. In London (31 March – 3 April 1940), Moruzov had the opportunity to see the disinterest and the coldness with which Romania was treated, both from a military point of view, by the refusal to export arms, but also economically, by the lack of interest regarding investments/acquisitions in/from Romania. However, according to Moruzov, the British proved to be “*much more realistic*”<sup>26</sup> than the French in analysing the geopolitical future of Europe.

Mihail Moruzov proved himself a player with strategic thinking, but the events outweighed the possibilities of action and reaction. He tried to use all means to obtain useful data for the country, possibly anticipating, played correctly in relation to his partners, but did not consider the possibility that they would make such a flagrant mistake against him. Perhaps too full of himself, he overcame his possibilities and neglected the preservation instinct, so he chose to return to the country at a totally unfavourable time for his career and, above all, his life. Ultimately, after 16 years at the helm of SSI, he did not imagine that those whom he protected during difficult times, led by Horia Sima, would choose the simplest option to silence him: his assassination.

<sup>24</sup> The report on the tour and the results obtained by Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe N. Petrescu was published in Cristian Troncotă, *Mihail Moruzov...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-269.

<sup>25</sup> More details on the visits in the two countries in *Ibid*, pp. 270-277.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103.

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