

# Romania and the Great Powers on the Eve of War (Tilea's Case)

Gh. Buzatu, Marusia Cîrstea

Numerous syntheses, monographs and specialty papers, memoirs or volumes of documents published after 1945 in England, Romania and in some other countries approach in more or less details the evolution of the political relation between London and Bucharest on the eve of the Second World War. At the same time we underline that important inedited documents are still, in diplomatic archives waiting to enter in the scientific circuit. As to the interpretation of the facts and the pointing of their significance we have to remark that, as it seems natural fact, the opinions of the specialists is not always in agreement. A single *moment* (being, at the same time a single case) makes an exception: March, 17, 1939, V. V. Tilea's step at the *Foreign Office* to obtain British assistance in favor of Romania. Without considering that this fact was a climax – it being rather a *test* of Anglo-Romanian relations, the overwhelming majority of the specialists completely agree with the fact that V. V. Tilea's step is among the *reference points* of the general diplomacy during the inter-war epoch. Thus, according to Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott ; the authors of a classical book devoted to the appeasement thought that, the conference between Halifax and Tilea may be considered as one of the most important political events of the period between the two world wars<sup>1</sup>. Naturally they had in view the consequences of Tilea's step carried out immediately after the occupation of Prague by Hitler for the re-orientation of England's policy towards the Third Reich and, for only several months, the place of London among the virtual enemies of Berlin in the

then future world war. The American historian Paul D. Quinlan concludes: Tilea's action provoked „a formidable change in British foreign policy”<sup>2</sup>.

One can state that, far the present, the essential data of „Tilea case” are well known. Only one unknown factor persists – as it is known – : *who* telephoned him<sup>3</sup>, in the morning of 17 March, 1939 to inform him on the forwarding of a German ultimatum to Romania? There have been various standpoints – we had one of our own<sup>4</sup> – but the problem cannot be considered as having been solved. Not to consider again the entire „Tilea case” we intend to subject to your attention – in the annex of our intervention – some of the most illustrative documents and some of the most /specialized opinions expressed by various specialists. The research of such materials gives a general image of the actual stage of the research work referring to the famous step of the Romanian Minister in London on 17 March, 1939. Consequently we propose ourselves that, without abusing the patience of the honored auditorium, to submit – as we already announced in the sub-title of our intervention – some conclusions and suggestions resorting to some inedited documents.

1. Today, all specialists agree on one point: during the spring of 1939 *there was no* ultimatum of Germany forwarded to Bucharest. Within the Romanian-German economic negotiations held in Bucharest the representatives of Berlin advanced daring proposals, resorted on pressures, but did not deliver – neither *de facto* nor *de jure* – any

ultimatum. It is worth remarking that on 17 March 1939 Tilea himself was extremely nuanced in all his diplomatic steps, insistently précising to the representatives of the *Foreign Office* that the German claims on Romania were only very similar with an ultimatum. Lord Halifax and his collaborators in their telegrams and declarations of those days understood exactly the content of – Tilea's words, underlining that: „These seemed to the Romanian Government something very much like an ultimatum”<sup>5</sup>; „These proposals took the form of an ultimatum”<sup>6</sup>; and Oliver Harvey, writing in his *diary* of Tilea's visits at the *Foreign Office* noted: „Romanian Minister (Tilea) called to see Secretary, of State and said that Germany was demanding *in the form of an ultimatum* a monopoly of Rumanian exports...”<sup>7</sup>

As it is known, willing or not (?), all the nuances concerning the ultimatum of Germany disappeared in the reports issued by the international press starting from 18 March 1939<sup>8</sup>.

2. It is also known that Tilea himself showed Cadogan, on 18 March 1939, that the news about German pressures under the form of an ultimatum had reached him 24 hours before, by telephone, from Paris ; the source was not yet indicated by „cipher” : „He [Tilea] said – Cadogan noted immediately after the conference – that he received it from *a private source*, which, on further questioning, he declared to be *the general manager of a big Rumanian industrialist who had come especially to Paris to pass the news on to him*”<sup>9</sup>. The Canadian historian Sidney Aster indicated Max Auschnitt as the „private source” of Tilea, in the middle of March 1939 the big industrialist being actually in the capital of France<sup>10</sup>.

Here we need to reveal that some historians indicate other sources : Telford Taylor, for example, does not ignore, recently, that on 17 March, 1939 Tilea met the representatives of „The Times” and „The Daily Telegraph”<sup>11</sup>. A recent document discovered by us in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest confirms the following facts: on 20 March

1939, Dianu, the Romanian Minister in Moscow communicated to Grigore Gafencu that he had met the British Ambassador in the capital of USSR and that the latter had told him that : „the Romanian Minister in London, made a necessary step at the Foreign Office on the basis of the information given by the correspondent of „Times” (about whom Litvinov told me)...”<sup>12</sup>

‘3. It is also known what happened after Tilea's step : the denial by Bucharest of the news about the German ultimatum; the temporary recall of the Romanian diplomat to his country etc., etc. Why did Tilea act in the known manner that is very decidedly and courageously? Some specialists revealed that the Romanian diplomat had „very large commissions” (Sidney Aster): King Carol II, Premier Armand Călinescu, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigore Gafencu. We must add to the known documents Gafencu's speech at the lunch offered in honor of Tilea by the „Anglo-Romanian” society on the occasion of his appointment as Minister in London (17 January, 1939): Tilea's nomination – Gafencu declared – represented „the honor of a faithfulness”, and he was to make of himself in England the interpreter of Romanian feelings of sympathy and high esteem”<sup>13</sup>. The most recent studies attest that as soon as he arrived in London, Tilea decidedly acted to obtain England's economic, financial and political assistance for the support of Romania as against the pretences and the plans of Germany<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the Romanian diplomat was to take another step – after 45 days – as a consequence of the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the future vision of German danger for Romania. He did not prove – as some of his ex-collaborators reproached him – „lack of experience”<sup>15</sup>, but, in difficult circumstances he took steps, on his own responsibility”<sup>16</sup> being preoccupied with the fate of his own country and to avoid the German danger as well as with the success of his mission in the British capital<sup>17</sup>.

4. The news on the German ultimatum was denied by the Romanian Government the day after Tilea's step. But if we consider Tilea's step as it actually was – German pressures

very much like an ultimatum – we become aware that the Romanian diplomat was not wrong and that he did not resort to a bluff. This side of the fact was recognized as such even by those who repudiated him in March 1939 from various reasons! The American historian David B. Funderburk, the today's United States Ambassador in Bucharest, noticed : „It would be more exact to affirm that in fact what he (Tilea) had said was *misinterpreted or exaggerated*. Anyway, taking into account the Romanian-German economic agreement of 23 March 1939 and the subsequent relations between Berlin and Bucharest Tilea's apprehension proved to be reasonable. [...] King Carol II repeated Tilea's anxieties [ ... ] Moreover, Alex Cretzianu, the general secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was sent to London „officially to guide Tilea who could not be trusted ; but, in fact, to let British know that Tilea had said them the truth” (A. Chanady, J. Jensen)<sup>18</sup>. An inedited document from Romanian diplomatic archives attests that Grigore Gafencu himself – he is said to have been in disagreement with Tilea in March 1939<sup>19</sup> – entirely confirmed the apprehensions of the Romanian Minister in London and he did it only three days after Tilea's step at the *Foreign Office*. Thus, on 20 March 1939 Gafencu sent to Gh. Tătărescu, Romanian Ambassador in Paris, a „top confidential and personal” report. I selected from this document which might have been the basis of a step of the Romanian diplomat at the French Cabinet the following paragraphs:

„I have been asked from several sides about Romania's attitude and policy in these moments of general anxiety. I have also been asked to precise our attitude in view of a possible common action of the Western Powers to re-establish the equilibrium and to enforce the security of the European states.

I am authorized to clarify the standpoint of the Romanian government in this way:

1. Romania is decided to defend her boundaries and independence. Any touch of our frontiers will mean armed defense.

2. Without being imminent, the danger is not out of question. There are general reasons for anxiety. We also have got information

about concentrations of exceptional forces – German troops in Slovakia, Hungarian troops near our frontiers – which directly concern us [...] Romania carried out so far military preparations not to be surprised by events.

3. Romania guarded and guards against a policy towards Germany which might be regarded as provoking. Any action of this kind would quicken the rhythm of political and military actions of Germany and would hasten the events which would find us and the Western Powers on unfavorable and unfinished defending position.

Consequently, we do not believe the necessity of a Pact of mutual assistance.

But we do believe that both for us and for the general ambiance of European policy it is necessary that the Great Western Powers let by their own initiative know in a most précised way that they do not admit new changes of frontiers and territories; in Europe and that they are decided to help us with all their military forces to defend our frontiers [...]

5. Due to the above mentioned things, we want to be known that in order that our resistance could be more efficient and the value of the guarantee of our borders more real it is necessary that Romania should be helped as quickly and perfectly as possible in her efforts of arming preparations. This is more so as due to the disappearance of Czechoslovakia all our orders in the course of execution and deliverance to this country are suspended and might be cancelled...<sup>20</sup>.

Bearing in mind paragraphs 2 and 5 of this report and taking into account the general tone of the document I can draw the conclusion that Gafencu himself was on Tilea's tracks this time he was the one to alert the French government!

5. We appeal again to David B. Funderburk findings: „*Much more important than the question if Tilea exaggerated or if the reports on his declarations have been misinterpreted was the reaction of British government*”<sup>21</sup>. The author brings about as an argument documents from the archive of London Cabinet, documents which attest that „Tilea's timely indiscretion influenced British policy”<sup>22</sup>.

Leaving for our British colleagues to determine at what degree Tilea's action provoked a change of attitude of Her Majesty's Government –, a fact so much commented by numerous specialists, considered even by A. J. P. Taylor<sup>23</sup> – it is worth mentioning that after the Romanian Minister's conference with Halifax, the *Foreign Office* promptly reacted setting in motion its entire gearing just during the night of 17/18 March 1939. The aim was but one : to understand which was the attitude of the interested states to prevent the change of Romania into a victim of the Third Reich? On the basis of British diplomatic documents already published and of the Romanian ones I investigated this aspect so that I shall no longer insist upon it<sup>24</sup>. In connection with this it appears another problem : after the repudiation of the news about the German ultimatum and the short re-call of Tilea to Bucharest the British government was asked by the Romanian government not to lose its confidence in the Minister accredited to London. Actually, as it is known, Her Majesty's Cabinet, *Foreign Office* remained in, best contacts with V. V. Tilea until the end of his official mission in London in the Fall of 1940 when the Romanian diplomat decided to remain in England during hostilities as a sign of hostility towards I. Antonescu's dictatorship. Such a situation, it is important to underline would not have been possible if : 1. in March 1939 Tilea had launched a false alarm a fact that would have compromised him in the eyes of British authorities ; 2. the British government had not „profited” after Tilea's action in the meaning I revealed here in the above quoted paper, that the action of the Romanian diplomat could represent in March 1939 „not the impetus, but the necessary alibi” for the abandonment of the conciliatorism with Hitler<sup>25</sup>. Several documents during the years of the War prove that Tilea continued to enjoy the esteem of British officialdom. At the –beginning of

1941, the British Press („The Daily Sketch”, 28.03.1941) released, the news that „The Romanian Committee” initiated and led by Tilea would have been possibly „sponsored by the British government”<sup>26</sup>. As it is known it was only an approach : „The Romanian National Committee” which was to play at a certain moment the role of an exiled Romanian government in London did not survive. Overconfident in the advice and actions of Iuliu Maniu, the British authorities – and consequently the ones of the United States – did not admit such a committee and less than that Tilea as its leader. Iuliu Maniu and Grigore Gafencu had expressed their doubt concerning Tilea<sup>27</sup> due to the fact that in Romania the ex-diplomat did not enjoy a good reputation being considered as the „collaborator of King Carol II”<sup>28</sup>. But in England Tilea enjoyed the support and encouragement of numerous sincere friends, his initiative being supported by the celebrated professor Seton Watson<sup>29</sup>. When it appeared the problem of the leadership of the „Free Romanian Movement”, Tilea's name was the one most insistently pronounced<sup>30</sup> a fact that proves that the British had no doubts as to „his sincerity and honesty”<sup>31</sup>.

We are convinced that such British manifestations for the advantage of Tilea in 1941 would not have been explainable if, two years before the ex-Minister of the Romanian Legation in London had acted as an „un-experienced” or without a real basis. We can, therefore, conclude that even under this last aspect V. V. Tilea's action of 17 March 1939 was fully justified and correctly interpreted by the British officials.

The last problem we should like to insist: In 1998, in London, were published the *Memoirs* of the Romanian diplomat, and surely the book represents the veritable „the epilogue” of the so-called *Tilea's case*. We publish in the annex a chapter from Tilea's *Memoirs*.

## ANNEX

Tilea's Bombshell<sup>32</sup>

Coming three days after the occupation of Prague, the leaking of the news that pressure was being exerted to subjugate Romania economically caused a great stir in London and rage in Berlin. In Bucharest, Gafencu was furious. Later that day Viorel was summoned by Sir Alexander Cadogan to the Foreign Office. Their conversation is here given in full<sup>33</sup>:

'I asked the Romanian Minister to call this afternoon and I read to him most of Sir R. Hoare's telegram No. 45. I said that, in view of the statement which he had made last night to the Secretary of State and to myself about the so-called German ultimatum, this denial of it, coming from the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, was rather disconcerting, and I asked him whether he could give me any further explanation of the situation.

M. Tilea produced a telegram from his Minister for Foreign Affairs in Romanian, of which he read out a translation to the effect that he was to give a categorical denial of the story of an ultimatum and that the negotiations with the German Government were continuing <<within the cadre which he knew>>.

He then went on to explain to me that he was quite convinced that the story of the ultimatum was true, but he added that it had been presented by the Germans about ten days before the recent Czech crisis and had been turned down at once by the Romanian Government. He said that he had received it from a private source, which, on further questioning, he declared to be the general manager of a big Romanian industrialist, who had come specially to Paris to pass the news on to him. He added that he had recently written to the Romanian Minister of Economics, referring to this ultimatum and urging that the Romanian Government should hold out against it. The Minister of Economics had rung him up this morning to say that discussions with the Germans were continuing on questions of principle: that they were not discussing details and that he hoped to continue discussion of general principles in order to gain time.

I said that it was not clear to me that M. Tilea had at any time obtained knowledge of the ultimatum directly from his Government. He observed that the Minister of Economics, in speaking to him this morning in reference to his letter, had not denied the ultimatum. I observed that he had equally, if the substance of his remarks had been given correctly to me, not confirmed the truth of the report. Nothing would shake M. Tilea as to the truth of his story about the ultimatum. He said that there were many cross-currents in Romania, but that he was convinced that it was true that the ultimatum had been presented and had been refused: his fear was that the refusal might not be maintained. He saw that it was somewhat disconcerting for us to have this conflict on information: he himself realised that he was in a delicate position: he did not mind so much about his position vis-à-vis the authorities in Bucharest, but he was afraid that his position here might be compromised. I said that I hoped that that would not be the case. It was perhaps possible to believe that there was some truth in both stories. According to him this ultimatum had been presented some little time ago and had been rejected out of hand and, therefore, if that had disappeared as a basis of negotiation, it was perhaps possible for the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs to say now that <<economic negotiations with the Germans were proceeding on completely normal lines>>. Indeed, if that were the case, his remark that <<the tone of the German negotiations was more conciliatory since the Czech coup than before>> was for the moment true.

Finally M. Tilea said that he thought that on the whole the appearance of this story in the press in London had not done any harm.

In taking leave of me, he referred to his representations in favour of a loan to Romania and he explained that he had not informed his Government that he had put this proposal to us. He felt that in the case of a refusal that would dishearten his Government and might have a very bad effect in Bucharest.

On the whole I do not think that my interview with M. Tilea increased my confidence in him.

From his closing remark it is obvious that Sir Alexander Cadogan did not believe Viorel, and a number of historians, including A.J.P. Taylor in his *Origins of the Second World War*, were to follow suit, doubting the veracity of his statement and considering the mysterious telephone call as a complete fabrication. He was called a warmonger, and the Nazi press accused him of lying. The *Volkischer Beobachter* declared it a conspiracy between Vansittart and Tilea.

Viorel could not disclose the names of the two intermediaries who had transmitted the message, which he thought emanated from King Carol with the full knowledge of Prime Minister Calinescu (who was also Minister of Defence and Minister of the Interior) and of Gafencu. This is why, when passing on the telephone message to Lord Halifax on 17 March, Viorel thought he was speaking in the name of Government, that wanted to act unofficially so as not to precipitate a German attack before the mechanism of a West-East alliance could be established. His initiative had been to disclose it to the press, as he thought the British Government would act too slowly. Great was his surprise at Gafencu's angry denial, and at being recalled to Bucharest on the 19<sup>th</sup>. This means that he was wrong to have supposed that Gafencu knew of the private message sent to him. It seems he wanted to replace Viorel with Raoul Bossy but the King refused, because to him Viorel represented Transylvanian youth – an unlikely reason for keeping an envoy in London<sup>34</sup>. That same day Marthe Bibesco was told by Malcolm MacDonald, son of Ramsay MacDonald, one of the many leading figures smitten by her at some stage, that King Carol had sent on S.O.S. to King George VI, so she thought Tilea was right to be worried<sup>35</sup>.

While London was seething with diplomatic activity – the departure of the German Ambassador, arrival of Sir Nevile Henderson from Berlin, various ambassadors calling on Lord Halifax, such as Corbin (France), Kennedy (U.S.A.) and Maisky (U.R.S.S.) – Viorel stayed at his Legation and sent a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest on 19 March: <<I consider it my duty to inform Your Excellency that the publication of the denied

information has woken public opinion to reality... people were beginning to get accustomed to Czechoslovakia's destruction, which was taken as a fait accompli. It also stopped British public opinion becoming accustomed to swallowing any poison given in instalments. At the same time, it showed the whole Anglo-Saxon world that Romania existed, and would resist being crushed from any side, and it crystallised the public's belief that a further extension of German domination in the South-East was inadmissible. All this has created a huge wave of sympathy for Romania... Those who know the Nazi outlook stressed the fact that the publication may have stopped pressure on us, for the time being, for their plan has been revealed in all its brutality>><sup>36</sup>.

The Prime Minister, Calinescu, having telephoned to say everything was all right, Viorel was in no particular hurry to return to Bucharest as an East-West alliance was taking shape. His friends rallied round him.

On Monday, 20 March, Viorel's day was full of phone calls and meetings, but he had some relief in the evening at a dinner of the Worshipful Company of Coachmakers, whose Master, Mr. Peter Croall, was a Scot. Next day *The Scotsman* described the event: 'The Romanian Minister was given an ovation notable for its warmth and length. M. Tilea, who referred to the <<still hopeful discussions>> which were taking place, interested the Company by his references to the ties between the northern parts of his country and Scotland. In Transylvania they wore the kilt, though it was a few inches longer, they played the pipes, they had haggis, and they performed the sword dance'.

In the manuscript of his diary (kept at Balliol College, Oxford) Harold Nicolson noted, in his entry for March 20, that everyone seemed puzzled by Tilea's ultimatum. He himself suspected that the story of the ultimatum came from Bucharest at the highest level.

'King Carol... sent on S.O.S. to Tilea who being perhaps over-zealous had rushed off to the Foreign Office-ul. They had tried to mobilize the Balkans. Hitler on hearing of this told Wohlthat to withdraw his ultimatum and force the Romanian Government to assert that no ultimatum had been delivered. In fact they back out without appearing to lose face. But poor Tilea will be accused of impulsiveness.'

March 21. In the evening Baldwin-Webb and I have arranged a dinner for Tilea. Some sixty members turn up and many of them are crowded out and have to dine upstairs. Tilea makes a dull and discreet speech and is afterwards asked the most indiscreet questions. He answers them extremely well and in fact makes a splendid impression. He says definitely that if Romania is invaded the Romanians will fight'.

Earlier that day Viorel had sent a coded telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest: 'For the urgent attention of H.M. the King. Yesterday's Cabinet meeting decided in principle that Romania should be helped, and authorized Lord Halifax to start negotiations for the formation of an Eastern Pact of mutual assistance.

Halifax decided to work with extreme speed and sent the proposal to Paris, Moscow and Warsaw yesterday, so as to draw up first a common declaration, that in their desire to maintain peace they are in favour of guaranteeing the frontiers of other countries too, that might join in. That is the gist – I have not yet seen the next. Then a conference would be called of all the interested powers. Here firm optimism is shown, particularly as the first soundings had favourable results. Yesterday's speech by Lord Halifax – who also mentioned the denial made by the Romanian Government – proves this. The Conservative Party clearly told the Government that it favoured this policy to block Germany's advance, of which they are now convinced here.

I would like to point out to your Excellency, that the foreign correspondents of the great English dailies in Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Warsaw reported to their papers their impression that Germany intends, for economic reasons, to bring Romania into the orbit of the German Empire in the course of this year, using force if necessary. Besides, some members of the German Embassy here have expressed the same views for some time. In case of a war, both the food situation in Germany, as well as the urgent need of oil for the air force and for mechanized transport, would be the main motives. This opinion is shared here by all the political and military circles who urge quick action.

In the course of yesterday and today, it was confirmed to me in government, parliamentary, financial and diplomatic circles that the

conviction is growing among British public opinion that Romania constitutes a vital point for the British Empire, which must be defended at once...

In my opinion, it would be a grave mistake if today, when we can no longer have any confidence in Germany's words and when we may expect anything from them, we did not benefit from the support which England – and others – are prepared to give us not only in writing, but also in practice. We can no longer pursue a policy of perfect balance today, not when the Western Powers have come to a decision. To ignore their initiative would hand us over to Germany with all its inevitable consequences, as seen by what happened to another state.

The creation of this pact between East and West does not imply an aggressive hostility towards Germany, but the creation of a strong basis on which to make a final attempt to reach a compromise for avoiding war. If your Excellency thinks that in the present circumstances, which are developing with unusual speed, it is of vital necessity that I should absent myself from London, I shall comply, although I am convinced that in the difficult moments through which the whole world is passing only quick actions and results count, and those are best achieved here<sup>37</sup>.

The Star (21.3.39) made some perceptive comments:

'The shrewd and active M. Tilea, Romanian Minister in London, has become for the present the most noticeable of foreign diplomats in this city. His position is curious. Within a few days he has managed to persuade the British Government to take in his country an interest which King Carol failed to arouse during his visit last year. That is primarily due to the invasion of Czecho-Slovakia. Now M. Tilea finds himself compelled to exercise his persuasive powers on his own Government. In Bucharest there are two minds on the problem of openly joining a defensive European alliance. The two minds, I gather, are both in the head of King Carol himself and as he, too, is a dictator, the matter is not unimportant'.

[The next day the Star, under the heading London Envoy goes to Carol, wrote:] 'M. Tilea, Romanian Minister in London, is expected to arrive in Bucharest soon. He will report to King Carol and the Government on the latest

developments and will, it is understood, receive new instructions. Trade talks between Germany and Romania, which were expected to have resulted in the signing of a limited agreement today, have come to a halt. Herr Wohlthat, head of the German delegation, is leaving for Berlin to obtain fresh instructions'.

In the event Wohlthat did not return to Berlin, and after an all-night session, the trade agreement with Germany was signed on 23 March, the Romanian Government claiming that it did not infringe Romania's independence. On that day Viorel was on his way to Bucharest. A fortnight later he was back at his post in London.

The first vindication of Viorel came some months later in a telegram to Lord Halifax from Sir Reginald Hoare in Bucharest on 21 November 1939<sup>38</sup>.

'1. I have the honour to transmit herewith a record of conversation, communicated to me by Monsieur Wenger, between Colonel Radulescu, Head of the Bureau of Industrial Mobilisation of the Army, and Monsieur Marinescu, Chairman of the Concordia Oil Company, with whom Monsieur Wenger is in close relations.

2. I do not know Colonel Radulescu personally, but Colonel Macnab entirely shares Monsieur Wenger's view that, though he may have an exaggerated sense of his own importance, he is certainly a man of great ability and driving power.

3. It will be remembered that on March 17<sup>th</sup> last... the Romanian Minister informed Your Lordship that the German Government had presented certain economic demands to the Romanian Government which the latter <<was disposed to regard as in the nature of an ultimatum>>.

4. It will further be remembered that both Monsieur Gafencu, and subsequently also the King to whom I spoke in accordance with your instructions, categorically denied that any communications had been received from Germany which could remotely be regarded as an ultimatum. In spite of these denials, Monsieur Tilea, as you informed me in your telegram No. 44 of March 19<sup>th</sup>, maintained that whatever might be said to me here, his statement had been essentially correct.

5. I would draw your attention to the fact that what Colonel Radulescu is recorded as having said on the subject of Romanian

mobilisation in March, is substantially confirmed by my Military Attaché's reports, ending with my telegram No. 66 of March 22<sup>nd</sup>. The conclusion appears to be that the language held in London by Monsieur Tilea corresponded more closely with the facts than that held to me by either the Minister for Foreign Affairs or the King himself, though why the King should be willing to give in London information which he withheld here is not readily comprehensible.

[There follows the gist of Radulescu's conversation with Marinescu about what happened in Bucharest on 18 March. At the time Radulescu was still a Major]. On that day at 11 p.m. he was at a friend's house when he was urgently called to the General Staff by the Commander-in-Chief, as the King had asked the Commander-in-Chief's opinion about how possible it was to resist German pressure. The General Staff officers hesitated. The Commander-in-Chief, however, asked Major Radulescu to voice his opinion as being the youngest officer there. He answered they should not hesitate, they should resist at all costs and added: <<It is not a question of finding out whether we can resist. What we do is not for results but for history. If we are crushed, by having tried to resist, we will have preserved our rights>>.'

The Head of the General Staff went to see the King at midnight, after he had just seen all his Ministers. They had all advised him to give way.

During his absence the discussion amongst the officers of the General Staff continued and Major Radulescu won them all over. When the General came back he was told of this unanimous opinion. He then went back to the King and it was decided to call up class 5 [of army reservists] immediately and orders were sent out to all the General Staff bureaux to prepare for resistance. When on 20 March German sent a sort of ultimatum it was answered by calling up five more classes.

Since that date, Major Radulescu seems to have acquired considerable influence, not only with the General Staff but also with the King. As the facts above are the result of one man's account, they need to be verified, but in any case, they show an interesting state of mind in the Romanian General Staff.

An interesting side-light concerns a secretary at the German Legation in Bucharest



called Schmidt. In a letter (13 June 1939) from Sir Reginald Hoare to Maurice Ingham at the Foreign Office, the death of Schmidt in April 1939 is reported, ostensibly because he 'chattered about the famous <<Tilea ultimatum>>'<sup>39</sup>. (This document was discovered and a copy sent to Viorel by Sidney Aster).

The written proof of the actual existence of the mysterious telephone call and its content came in 1957 from an unlikely source – the office of a Counsellor at Law in Washington, Jacques Wasserman, who sent Viorel a United States Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service questionnaire on behalf of his client, Nicolae Malaxa, who wanted to become a U.S. citizen. After asking whether he was the Romanian Minister <<stationed in London, England>> in 1939, and whether he was engaged in this capacity at the time the Commercial Treaty of 23 March 1939 was being signed between Romania and Germany, also whether he knew Nicolae Malaxa, and when he first became acquainted with him, it goes on to ask:

Prior to the execution of the 1939 Treaty, did Malaxa send Adrian Dumitrescu to Paris to telephone you?

Did Dumitrescu then advise you by phone of the German economic demands which Clodius [the German negotiator] handed to the Romanian Government?

Did you then use this information in conversation with the members of the British Government and did also advise the English Press of the same?

As a result, did Lord Halifax attempt to create a peace bloc against Germany and did Anglo-Saxon opinion become aware of the danger of German economic domination of Europe?

Is there any doubt in your mind of Malaxa's sincere opposition to the German Commercial Treaty of 1939? (etc.)

To refresh Viorel's memory Wasserman also enclosed a copy of a letter Viorel had written to Malaxa on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1946, when he heard the latter was in Paris. Each of the questions above was based on a statement Viorel made in this letter, starting with <<you will remember that a few days after Hitler took Prague, in March 1939, you sent M. Adrian Dumitrescu to Paris to telephone me from there all the details of the German economic demands which Clodius handed over to the Romanian Government>>. He then went on to remind Malaxa of the use he made of the information. He concluded that, in order not to endanger his life under German occupation, he had of course never disclosed Malaxa's name, but asked for permission to do so now, both in conversation and in writing.

Malaxa was an important industrialist in Romania in 1939, so obviously he did not want the Romanian economy limited just to agriculture. He was growing in favour with King Carol at the time, and must have offered his services to transmit the message to Viorel by private means. Adrian Dumitrescu was Malaxa's General Manager. So what Viorel told Lord Halifax on 17 March 1939 and Sir Alexander Cadogan on 18 March 1939 (without giving names) was true. The telephone call was no fabrication.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Martin Gilbert, Richard Gott, *Conciliatorii*, București, 1966, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Paul D. Quinlan, *The Tilea Affair: A Further Inquiry*, in „Balkan Studies”, Vol. 19 (1), Thessaloniki, 1978, p. 155; *idem*, *Clash over Romania, British and American Policies towards Romania : 1938-1947*, Los Angeles, 1977, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> See, in annex, the *Memoirs of V. V. Tilea*.

<sup>4</sup> Gh. Buzatu, *Dosare ale războiului mondial (1939-1945)*, Iași, 1978, pp. 11-43, 222-235.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>6</sup> Halifax – 18.III.1939 (Arhivele Statului București, fond *Microfilme Anglia*, rola 5, c. 43).

<sup>7</sup> John Harvey (Ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940*, London, 1970, p. 262.

<sup>8</sup> Gh. Buzatu, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Gh. Buzatu, Valeriu Dobrinescu, *Din arhiva istorică a României contemporane*, I, in *AIIAI*, XX, 1983, p. 348.

<sup>10</sup> Sidney Aster, *1939: The Making of the Second World War*, London, 1973, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> Telford Taylor, *Munich, the Price of Peace*, New York, 1980, pp. 959-960.

- <sup>12</sup> Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României, București, fond 71/1920, 1944, U.R.S.S. Relații cu România, vol. 86 (1939), f. 121 (teleg. no. 778).
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, fond 71/România: General, vol. 6, f. 28.
- <sup>14</sup> M. I. Rooke, *The Concept of Political Trading in Peacetime. The British Government and Trade with South-Eastern Europe, 1938-39*, in *RESEE*, 2/XXII, 1984, pp. 191-192.
- <sup>15</sup> See Paul D. Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, p. 42.
- <sup>16</sup> Ian Colvin, *Vansittart in Office*, London – New York, 1963, pp. 299-300.
- <sup>17</sup> Sidney Aster, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- <sup>18</sup> David Britton Funderburk, *Politica Marii Britanii față de România 1938-1940. Studiu asupra strategiei economice și politice*, București, 1933, pp. 96-97.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Sidney Aster, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 396.
- <sup>20</sup> Arhiva M.A.E., fond 71/1920-1944, U.R.S.S. Relații cu România, vol. 86 (1939), f. 124-126 (Report No. 18 255/20.III. 1939).
- <sup>21</sup> David Britton Funderburk, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>23</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Second Edition, New York, 1979, p. 200.
- <sup>24</sup> Gh. Buzatu, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-35.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.
- <sup>26</sup> PRO, FO 3711/ 29978 (Philip Nichols to Sir Maurice Peterson, London 5.IV.1941).
- <sup>27</sup> PRO, FO 371/29977 (Rex A. Leeper to Sir Orme Sargent, London/14.III.1941); *ibidem* (Sir Stafford Cripps to Foreign Office, Moscow, teleg. no. 205/7.III.1941).
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibidem* (R. Hoare to Philip Nichols, Bucharest /4.I.1941).
- <sup>29</sup> PRO, FO 371/29976 (Philip Nichols to Sir Orme Sargent, London/20.II.1941).
- <sup>30</sup> PRO, FO 371/29977 (Donald Bell to Philip Nichols, London/24.II.1941).
- <sup>31</sup> PRO, FO 371/29977 (Rex A. Leeper to Sir Orme Sargent, London/14.III.1941).
- <sup>32</sup> Viorel Virgil Tilea, *Envoy Extraordinary. Memoirs of a Romanian Diplomat*, edited by Ileana Tilea, London, Haggerston Press, 1998, pp. 219-227).
- <sup>33</sup> Document C358, initialled and dated 18.3.1939 by the Foreign Secretary.
- <sup>34</sup> Raoul Bossy, *Amintiri din viața diplomatică*, vol. II, Humanitas Publishers, ed. Stelian Neagoe, pp. 130-131.
- <sup>35</sup> Marthe Bibescu, *Jurnal Politic 1939-1941*, p. 55.
- <sup>36</sup> Tilea 582.
- <sup>37</sup> Tilea 589.
- <sup>38</sup> Document stamped R10674, 23.11.1939, pp. 224-225, headed *Very Confidential*.
- <sup>39</sup> F.O. 371/23832.