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Formation of the Petru Groza government and the beginning of Romania's communization

In contemporary historiography, the process formulated by British historian Hugh Seton-Watson has become classical, according to which the imposition by the Soviet Union of communist regimes in Eastern Europe was achieved by the successive transition from governments representing real coalitions to fictional coalitions and, then, to communist one-colour governments ('monolithic regimes'). This evolution depended on the advances of the Red Army on the ground and on the agreements periodically achieved between leaders of the three Allied great powers. Romania also followed this model.

The first governments appointed after 23 August 1944, which also included PCR members – the two governments led by General Constantin Sanatescu and the government led by General Nicolae Radescu –, were the expression of real coalitions, in spite of the fact that gradually the communists strengthened their positions.



Correlation with the development of negotiations between the great powers is demonstrated by the fact that only one day after the end of Churchill's visit to the USSR (18 October) – during which the percentages agreement with Stalin was concluded – representatives of the National Democratic Front (FND/communists and social democrats) resigned from the government, for the purpose of igniting a political crisis that would allow them to subsequently increase their share of ministries. As a result, on 4 November 1944, the second Sanatescu cabinet was formed, in which FND representatives secured the position of deputy Prime Minister, a third of ministries and three state sub-secretariats.

For Moscow, though, this was not a satisfactory solution, as historical parties, together with representatives of the army, still had a majority in the Romanian government (twenty-four ministries out of thirty-four). Pressures resumed and, to this end, Andrey Vyshinsky, the first deputy of Vyacheslav Molotov and, at the same time, proxy of the Soviet government for the activity of the Allied Control Commission in Romania, was sent to Bucharest. The pretext of his arrival in Romania was the lack of fulfilment by the Romanian government of obligations established through the Truce Agreement (especially the lack of measures to bring war criminals to justice and a delay in the purging of the state administration). In addition, Vyshinsky used other pressure tools against Romanian authorities, such as the postponement of handing over Northern Transylvania to Romania. Anatoly Lavrentyev, People's Commissar for Foreign Relations of the Russian SFSR, wrote in a memoir addressing this issue to Vyshinsky: 'The issue of handing over Northern Transylvania has to become a lever of influence over the

Romanian government not only in what concerns fulfilment of economic obligations provided by the Truce Convention, but also regarding its internal and foreign policy.'

At the end of Vyshinsky's visit, Romania was forced to establish a new government on 6 December 1944, led by General Radescu and withdraw its recently installed administration from Northern Transylvania. Moscow's success was not complete, however. The main ministers desired by FND representatives (Interior and War) had not been obtained this time either and General Radescu was even more determined than his predecessor to preserve order and democracy in the country.

The uncertainty caused by the manner of the discussions from the Yalta Conference (rescheduled from 4 to 11 February 1945) for a short time delayed the Soviets from pressuring Romania. They resumed, however, much stronger after the meeting of the 'Three Greats' from Crimea.

Once again, Vyshinsky was sent on a mission to Bucharest; this time the pretext was the order given by General Radescu to shoot FND protesters (in reality, this was a provocation very well directed by Romanian and Soviet communists). According to Constantin Visoianu who was a witness to the meeting of 27 February 1945 between King Michael I and Vyshinsky, the latter summoned the sovereign with two ultimate requests from Moscow: '[...] dismissal of Radescu government and creation of another one made up of representatives of democratic parties [meaning FND] and of politically unaffiliated people.' And he ended: 'That's all! I am waiting for the news concerning dismissal of General Radescu! Then he left, slamming the door with such a force that the plaster around it cracked.'

The king eventually gave up, especially since the Soviets had promised to hand over Northern Transylvania and reduce the economic burden provided by the truce convention. On 6 March 1945 a government led by Dr. Petru Groza was appointed. Although it presented itself as a government 'of broad democratic concentration' in the spirit of the Yalta 'Declaration,' in reality it was made up of parties and organisations allied with the PCR and of 'road companions,' such as the liberal dissidents led by Gheorghe Tatarescu.

The choice of government leadership in the person of Dr. Petru Groza, leader of the Ploughmen's Front, and the appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs of a former Liberal Prime Minister from the interwar period, Gheorghe Tatarescu, were just superficial measures to appease western allies, a staging of a 'fictional coalition,' according to the formula used by Seton-Watson. In reality, the government was controlled by communists and acted on Moscow's instructions.

The new government's programme envisaged, among others: the most sincere friendship and collaboration with the USSR; consistent application of the truce convention; achievement of a radical land reform; supporting with all its efforts Romania's participation in the anti-Nazi war; elimination from public life of collaborationists, 'fascists, legionnaires, Nazis,' etc. The last ideas of this governmental programme, applied under the pretext of combating fascism in the country, allowed the Groza government to undertake abusive actions against political opponents, especially against leaders of democratic bourgeois parties.

One of the methods envisaged by Moscow to consolidate the position of the Groza government was the re-establishment of a Romanian administration in Northern Transylvania on 9 March 1945, marked by a

symbolic celebration in Cluj, to which Vyshinsky and the members of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission were also invited.

A further measure designed to bring greater popularity to the government was to decree a new land reform on 23 March 1945, by which 1.1 million hectares of land were expropriated and given as property to 800,000 families, of which 400,000 families were peasants without land.

An unforeseen obstacle was the ‘royal strike,’ a form of protest by which the Romanian sovereign refused to countersign decree-laws adopted by the government. The king’s decision was based on the fact that, following the Potsdam Conference (17 July – 2 August 1945), the three Great Powers expressed their decision to conduct peace negotiations with former allies of Germany only if they had established ‘recognised democratic governments.’ However, the USA and Great Britain refused to recognise the Groza government, considering that the latter failed to be representative of the country’s democratic powers.

Thanks to the firm support offered by the Soviets, the Groza government managed to overcome this crisis, while King Michael was gradually abandoned by the Anglo-Americans. This was apparent during the Moscow conference of foreign affairs ministers from the four Allied great powers in December 1945, where a superficial solution was adopted to unblock the situation in Romania by including in the Groza government a representative of the National Peasant Party (PNT) and one of the National Liberal Party (PNL), as minister without portfolio and the organisation of democratic parliamentary elections as soon as possible. After this ‘treatment,’ the Groza government was recognised on 5 February 1946 by the USA and Great Britain, and the hopes for establishing a truly representative government that would organise fair parliamentary elections crumbled.

The results of the electoral ballot of 19 November 1946 were fraudulent, with the alliance led by communists (Bloc of Democratic Parties) receiving 79.86 per cent of the votes and 378 of a total of 414 parliamentary mandates. PNT received thirty-three mandates and PNL only three mandates. The real results are not known, but there is sufficient evidence to doubt their verity.

While the control of the Communist Party over state institutions increased, at the economic level measures of nationalisation were taken that aimed at weakening the economic power of the bourgeoisie: establishment of the so-called industrial offices; nationalisation of the National Bank (December 1946); and monetary stabilisation (August 1947). In 1945 the creation of joint Romanian-Soviet companies (Sovroms) was initiated, by which the main branches of the Romanian economy were placed under Soviet control.

In the context of the breaking up of the ‘Great Alliance’ and the beginning of the Cold War, during 1947 Stalin considered that superficial appearances of democracy in countries under Moscow’s control was no longer necessary. As a result, much like the other countries in its region, Romania began on an accelerated path towards a Stalinist monolithic regime: political opposition was dissolved and its main leaders were arrested and convicted; the last ‘road companions’ – representatives of PNL-Gheorghe Tatarescu – were eliminated from government and parliament (November 1947); King Michael was forced to abdicate, monarchy was abolished and the Popular Republic was established (on 30 December 1947). These would be followed by the adoption of a Soviet kind of Constitution (13 April 1948), the initiation of the nationalisation process (June 1948), then collectivisation (March 1949). Petru Groza remained as the

head of government until June 1952.

Translated from Romanian by George Tiugea, Proofread by Dr. Ian Copestake



PhD Ana-Maria Cătănuș



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