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## Proclamation of the Romanian Popular Republic

**T**he system of constitutional monarchy and the communist regime are, by their very nature, incompatible. Romania's entrance into Moscow's sphere of domination and the transition to the gradual establishment of a Soviet regime also included – sooner or later – the issue of abolishing monarchy. But this did not happen very easily.

**T**he unfolding of the 23 August 1944 coup d'état under the authority of King Michael, his courage in arresting Marshal Antonescu, Romania's joining the Allied Coalition and the participation in the war against Nazi Germany were acts that consolidated the Romanian king's position abroad and, implicitly, the monarchical system in Romania. King Michael was one of only five foreign personalities to be decorated with the 'Order of Victory' of the Soviet Union.



**A**t the same time, the monarchic feeling was very strongly present among Romanians. This was recognised even by Gheorghiu-Dej, PCR's leader, during discussions in Moscow from 2 to 3 April 1946, concerning the electoral programme of the alliance led by communists, the Democratic Parties Bloc (BPD). 'Taking into account that within the country there is a monarchic feeling, and that "historical" parties and even Tatarescu are using that issue, we believe that it would be better not to avoid this issue,' explained the Romanian leader, who considered that preservation of the monarchy was necessary to be mentioned in the BPD programme. Stalin then also dictated the formula which had to be included into the programme: 'Ensuring the democratic regime and full sovereignty of the Romanian state within a constitutional monarchy.'

**A**fter 23 August 1944, King Michael was forced to adapt his behaviour to the difficult conditions which the country experienced. He tried to resist the ultimate requests exposed by Vyshinsky on 27 February 1945, for the removal of the Radescu government and establishing a pro-communist executive led by Dr. Petru Groza. He sought alternative solutions, such as a government led by Prince Barbu Stirbey, he even thought about an eventual abdication. Lacking the support of western allies and counselled by the venerable PNL leader Dinu Bratianu, he finally chose the lesser evil, accommodating Soviet demands.

**A**nother courageous act was the 'royal strike' initiated in August 1945, a form of protest by which the Romanian sovereign refused to countersign decree-laws adopted by the government. In support of the sovereign and the 'royal strike,' one of the most important anti-communist rallies in countries under

Soviet occupation took place on 8 November 1945 in Bucharest. Following clashes with the counter-rally mobilised by the authorities, the result was eleven dead, seventy-five wounded and 1,500 people arrested.

**A**gain though, the step back made by Great Britain and the United States forced the Romanian king to eventually give up and accept the pale compromise solution obtained this time from the Soviet Union. The opposition the king made to the takeover of power by communists always had in view the use of political means and respect of the legal framework. He avoided being associated, for example, with protesters from the Palace Square on 8 November 1945 or with preparations made by General Aurel Aldea, leader of the 'National Resistance Movement,' for organising an anti-communist resistance and for building the king a special shelter as a refuge in case of the start of a war between Soviets and western powers.

**M**uch like the leaders of opposition 'historical' parties, King Michael continued to think that western powers would not abandon Romania and that the Soviets would withdraw after the signing of the peace treaty. Until then, the best solution seemed to be to wait, avoiding rising to Moscow's provocation by radical gestures. The simple existence of the monarchy represented a factor of hope and mobilisation for those opposing communism.

**T**his also explains the compromises – some of them quite important – which the Romanian sovereign made as he waited for a favourable change for the country. Such a compromise was the lack of any gesture of support for Iuliu Maniu and the other PNT leaders arrested, tried and convicted to hard years of prison in a typical Stalinist trial, in November 1947. The prudence of King Michael proved to be useless, as, less than two months later, he was himself forced to sign the abdication act of 30 December 1947.

**T**he monarchical system of Romania was part of the democratic appearances that Stalin preserved in the area of Soviet domination as long as he hoped to achieve some agreements with his former alliance partners from the Second World War. Also part of Moscow's strategy was that preserving the monarchy made the act of inserting the Communist Party in power easier to bear by Romanian society. But the conditions at the beginning of the Cold War and with the accelerated transition to a Stalinist regime, preserving the monarchic institution in Romania became unnecessary. By the end of 1947, King Michael had become the last monarch in the Soviet dominated eastern part of Europe.

**T**he preparation for abolishing the monarchy was carefully made by PCR leaders, both at the political and military levels. Among the most important measures was the appointment of Emil Bodnaras as Minister of Defence on 23 December 1947. A former officer of the royal army, trained as a spy in the USSR during the 1930s, Bodnaras had also proven his organisational capacities during other extremely tense moments, such as the Act of 23 August 1944. His presence was to be a guarantee that the army would act in favour of the communist power and without incident.

**O**n 30 December 1947, a governmental delegation led by Petru Groza and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who was also the Secretary General of PCR, presented to the king the abdication act and suggested that the 'interest of the Romanian people' would be served as well as avoiding violent incidents. After a short consultation with his close advisors, noting that the Royal Palace was surrounded by the army and phone lines had been cut, the king decided to sign the abdication act, by which he renounced to the throne both for him and his descendants, leaving to the people 'the freedom of choosing a new state form.'

**K**ing Michael, who had been the main protagonist of the coup d'état of 23 August 1944 when he had decided to arrest Marshal Antonescu, only a few years later was thus himself the target of a similar coup. However, unlike what had happened three years before, the communists endeavoured to give his removal from power the form of an 'amiable divorce,' according to the expression used by Prime Minister Petru Groza.

**D**uring the same day, the Assembly of Deputies voted to amend the Constitution, proclaimed a new form of state – the Popular Republic – and entrusted the attributions of head of state, exercised until then by the king, to a body called the Provisional Presidium of the Romanian Popular Republic, made up of the following: Mihail Sadoveanu, famous writer and President of the Assembly of Deputies, Constantin Parhon, famous doctor and president of the Romanian Association for Strengthening Ties with Soviet Union (ARLUS), Stefan Voitec, Minister of National Education, Gheorghe Stere, President of the Bucharest Court of Appeal, Ion Niculi, Vice-president of the Assembly of Deputies.

**O**n 4 January 1948, King Michael, accompanied by his family, left the territory of Romania. On the condition of maintaining a neutral position, he was allowed to retain Romanian citizenship and given a financial subsidy. 'The government gave the king exactly as much as it had to' Petru Groza told Stalin on 3 February 1948, 'in order not to be said that the government humiliated him, but not too much, so that he would not feel independent.' Stalin recommended that the 'young king' be allowed to retain Romanian citizenship and concluded: 'May God give anyone such a king!' Apart from these personal appreciations at a political level, with the removal of monarchical institution the last constitutional obstacle against the establishment of a Stalinist regime in Romania disappeared.

**T**ranslated from Romanian by George Tiugea, Proofread by Dr. Ian Copestake

  
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