

# Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire: An Evaluation of the Role of Human Agency in Romania's Shift From Fascism to Communism in the Mid 20th Century

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(Portrait of King Michael)<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The field of modern eastern European history, as was the case with Soviet history, attracts few talented academics, and nearly none who do not have some predetermined political affiliations. This is largely due to the limited disclosure of communist associated archives in the late 20th century.<sup>2</sup> The bulk of Romanian historians tend to devote their career to ancient Romanian history, and those who do study modern events have tended to focus on the revisionist viewpoint of “inevitability”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Portrait of King Michael*, December 5, 2017, *Le News*, December 5, 2017, <https://lenews.ch/2017/12/05/former-king-michael-of-romania-dies-in-switzerland/>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Pipes, “Preface,” in *Three Whys of the Russian Revolution* (London: Pimlico, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> A form of historical determinism which suggests that certain events are unavoidable and certain to occur due to the preexisting circumstance of time and setting.

This revisionist (and post-Stalinist Soviet) scholarship has meant that the role of human agency in contemporary Romanian history is often overlooked, in the sense of agents acting on their own to influence history but also in terms of moral culpability. The purpose of this extended essay is to challenge the revisionist argument on Romanian historiography using a limited source base to discuss the key concept of human agency as defined above under the time period of 1939 to 1947. The historical analytical method of causation will be used to compare the two historical perspectives of human agency and inevitability.<sup>4</sup> My conclusions based on these sources suggest that King Michael I and British Clandestine actions overall shaped the fate of the Romanian nation far more than any processes of historical determinism.

## Introduction

Wednesday, August 23rd, 1944, HM Mihai (1940 to 1947), third and fifth Hohenzollern “by the grace of God and the will of the people, King of Romania” sat with General Constantin Sanatescu, the ex General Aurel Aldea who had been expelled by Marshal Ion Antonescu, and three civilians.<sup>5</sup> Within a matter of hours, these six conspirators would change the course of Romanian history in an act of the utmost significance for the future development of the state. King Michael would lead a *coup d'état* against his own government to seize power from Ion Antonescu, the *de facto* dictator of Romania, ending Romania's support to the Nazi regime and effectively shortening the war by six months as recognised by

<sup>4</sup> The interplay of diverse and multiple events and circumstances which influence an outcome; Agents acting on their own to influence events.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolette Franck, *La Roumanie Dans L'engrenage* (Paris: Elsevier-Sequoia, 1977), pp. 14-16

US President Harry S. Truman.<sup>6</sup>

As a nation, Romania went through more than twenty years of tyranny, and thus, developed prominent conditions for the rise of populist movements. No other marxist state fell through equally violent and more importantly, popular, upheaval. Today, Romania is encumbered with scandals of corruption amongst high ranking government officials.<sup>7</sup> This is not inconsistent with its course of history, and could suggest a behavioural historical consciousness which is fostering interwar populist movements. For example, the same anti-communist rhetoric employed in modern Romanian politics, played a large part in the rise of Antonescu and his subsequent dictatorship which culminated in a grandest failure, as Romania became a satellite state of the USSR.

The role of King Michael I is unique to Romania. He ruled for a mere seven years, but his legacy is perhaps the most prominent in contemporary Romania. Similarly, the clandestine actions undertaken by the United Kingdom and the Americans to apportion Romania to the USSR to “preserve” Greece is hardly discussed in contemporary history. As Prince Nicholas of Romania pointed out, in large factions of Romanian civil society, there is a distrust towards the Anglo Romanian relationship due to the failure of the alliance to ensure Romanian sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> The historiography surrounding Romanian history in the mid to late 20th century is very limited.

The methodology of this essay includes both primary and secondary sources namely works from previous diplomats and historians who worked in this time period namely Catherine Durandin in her book “*Histoire des Roumains*,” Nicolette Franck in her book “*La Roumanie dans l’engrenage*,” and Dennis Deletant in his work “*Clandestine British Actions in Romania*.”<sup>9</sup> These texts relate to the politically angled scope of this essay due to the authors’ involvements in diplomacy.

<sup>6</sup> Appendix A (Harry S Truman (Geneva, Geneva Canton , n.d.)

<sup>7</sup> Tara John, “Romania’s Protests: Everything You Need To Know,” Time (Time, February 6, 2017), Accessed 27 August 2020, <https://time.com/4660860/romania-protests-corruption-problem/>.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix B (Bahl, Utsav, and Nicholas Medforth-Mills. Prince Nicholas Medforth-Mills of Romania regarding the role of his grandfather, King Michael I of Romania in the mid to late 20th Century and with regards to coup d’état against the regime dictator Ion Antonescu. Personal, November 28, 2019.)

These sources, among others, provided a foundation for my extended essay, but they have their own biases and narrow perspectives. For more nuanced primary source research, I was able to access online Romanian archives. This was suitable because much of Romanian archives have not yet been examined, and therefore, there are no suitable interpretations or historiographies I could access on the topic from a post revisionist perspective.<sup>10</sup> I also interviewed some notable figures, particularly Prince Nicholas of Romania, the grandson of King Michael I who grew up in his grandfather's house during the time of King Michael’s exile from Romania.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, I received interview documentation of King Michael I from his grandson and lawyer, which is currently unavailable to the wider public.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, I consulted Romanian historian Radu Albu Comanescu from the University of Cluj.<sup>13</sup> These two primary sources provided the degree of unique understanding required to challenge the consensus of revisionist inevitability which this essay examines.

## Historical Context

The modern Romanian nation was established in 1878. One of the most fatal misfortunes in Romanian history is that millions of Romanians failed to be incorporated into independent Romania, particularly from regions

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Durandin, *Histoire Des Roumains* (Paris: Fayard, 1995); Nicolette Franck, *La Roumanie Dans L’engrenage* (Paris: Elsevier-Sequoia, 1977); Dennis Deletant, *British Clandestine Activities in Romania during the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Challenging the revisionist school of thought through a lens other than the Orthodox perspective. In the case of Romania, revisionist historians argued inevitability, meanwhile Orthodox historians lacked a common consensus with most pointing to intentionalist clandestine actions by the USSR.

<sup>11</sup> Appendix B (Bahl, Utsav, and Nicholas Medforth-Mills. Prince Nicholas Medforth-Mills of Romania regarding the role of his grandfather, King Michael I of Romania in the mid to late 20th Century and with regards to coup d’état against the regime dictator Ion Antonescu. Personal, November 28, 2019.)

<sup>12</sup> Michael. Regele Mihai. Other, n.d. Source Provided by Prince Nicholas of Romania, NOT OPEN FOR PUBLIC USE OR RELEASE. Transcript is with author of this paper, candidate gzs444, privately.

<sup>13</sup> Appendix C (Bahl, Utsav, and Radu Albu Comanescu. Romania: From fascism to communism. Personal, July 16, 2020.)

such as Bessarabia, Transylvania, and Bukovina. In 1919, ethnic Romanians comprised a mere half of the Romanian population at large. As acknowledged by Prince Nicholas, during the reign of King Ferdinand and King Carol II, Romania developed culturally and economically.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Prince Nicholas would have a reason to advocate monarchism in Romania, coming from the royal family, but his claims are based on statistical proof of real economic growth. The Romanian real GDP rose by 96% from 1920 to 1940.<sup>15</sup> The Romanian oil reserves played a large role in this newfound economic prowess. The cultural and economic rise of Romania after 1919 meant that her sovereignty could be challenged by ambitious neighbours such as the USSR. This coincided with an increased polarisation of politics in the 1930s, under King Carol II. This period of history in Romania is known as “the ebbing of History”.<sup>16</sup> Institutions such as the parliament lost their power to the monarchy. At the same time, the right wing sentiment in Romania grew. The youth, in particular, supported right wing politics as a supporter of popular Romanian nationalist sentiment. For this reason, in the early 1930s, the LAM (a university created political party) organised a political unit known as the Iron Guard. This party was built on nationalist sentiment and making Romania a powerful country in the East and West. The monarchy and major political parties disagreed with the quasi-fascist ideologies of the Iron Guard, and even officially began taking action against its leaders. However, Carol’s fatal mistake was legitimising the Iron Guard by attacking its right wing rhetoric. In 1939, when it was clear that Carol’s previous successes were far behind him, he was forced to collaborate with the Iron Guard and its leader, Antonescu.

<sup>14</sup> Appendix B (Bahl, Utsav, and Nicholas Medforth-Mills. Prince Nicholas Medforth-Mills of Romania regarding the role of his grandfather, King Michael I of Romania in the mid to late 20th Century and with regards to coup d’état against the regime dictator Ion Antonescu. Personal, November 28, 2019.)

<sup>15</sup> Victor Axenciuc and George Georgescu, “Gross Domestic Product – National Income of Romania 1862 – 2010. Secular Statistical Series and Methodological Foundations,” Munich Personal RePEc Archive (Munich Personal RePEc, October 16, 2017), Accessed 16 November 2020. [https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/84614/1/MPPRA\\_paper\\_84614.pdf](https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/84614/1/MPPRA_paper_84614.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Dennis Deletant, *British Clandestine Activities in Romania during the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 109.

As part of the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact (August 23rd, 1939), the USSR was allowed to annex the historically-Romanian lands of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina.<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to at least secure the lands of Transylvania, King Carol appointed a pro German cabinet, effectively raising the Iron Guard to the most powerful party in Romania. To stop further border changes, as part of a new deal, ratified in September of 1940 in Craiova, Romania was forced to cede 30% of Transylvania to Hungary.<sup>18</sup> This deal meant that the Nazis could secure Romanian borders and keep them safe from Soviet attacks, but it also turned public opinion heavily against King Carol. This was largely because the Romanian population at large felt this was an infringement on their national sovereignty at a time when populism was on the rise. Furthermore, public support for Nazism was low. In a futile attempt to save his power, King Carol asked Antonescu to form a coalition government, however, Antonescu seized the opportunity to take control himself. Carol was forced to abdicate and his 19 year old son, Michael, assumed the throne on 6th of September, 1940. The move meant that Ion Antonescu could take control of the Romanian state, but keep Michael as a figurehead of the monarchy to maintain popular support from the pro monarchist Romanians.

Antonescu subsequently purged members of the Iron Guard to consolidate his power and retain popularity amongst the Romanian people. By January 1941, Romania was a military dictatorship. Antonescu sought to secure Romania’s territories, threatened by the USSR and Hungary. This made his need to align with the Axis strong, and indeed, Antonescu formed a diplomatic relationship with Adolf Hitler.<sup>19</sup> As Dennis Deletant noted,

*Antonescu was far from being overawed by the Fuhrer, and he was, perhaps, the only person ever allowed to*

<sup>17</sup> A nonaggressive pact between Nazi Germany and USSR signed on the 23rd of August, 1939

<sup>18</sup> Ion Scurtu, “Collection of Documents and Materials Regarding the History of Romania,” *Collection of Documents and Materials Regarding the History of Romania* (Bucharest: University of Bucharest, n.d.), pp. 122-124

<sup>19</sup> The Axis powers was a military alliance between Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy to oppose the French, British, Soviet, and later United States, alliance.

*Speak his mind directly and freely to Hitler, often contradicting him.*

Deletant later noted in his book *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, Hitler respected Antonescu a great deal, but also needed him because of Romania's oil reserves which sustained over half of Germany's war efforts.<sup>20</sup> The claims made by Detelant are based on his academic research on Romanian history. Nonetheless, as a British historian, there is a chance of overemphasising Antonescu's influence to shift the British guilt of not assisting Romania once they shifted to the allies.

The satisfaction of territorial needs initially made Antonescu popular. After the Battle of Stalingrad (August 23rd 1942 to February 2nd 1943), however, dismay with Romania's allegiance to the Axis intensified. Antonescu was unwilling to compromise, and therefore, on August 23rd, 1944, Michael led a *coup d'état* to seize control of the government. (See Appendix D: *Romanian Political Sentiment During The Second World War* for deeper context).

### Inevitability

The question of inevitability in post-Soviet scholarship comes from the revisionist school of thought.<sup>21</sup> The general consensus is that Soviet domination in Eastern Europe was an inevitable result of the rise of communism in Russia. This suggests that the shift towards communism was preordained, and indeed a popular revolution. This is the precise reason that much of Romanian and Eastern European history is disregarded. In reality, the issue is far more complex. Why did Finland, under similar circumstances, not fall to communism? Indeed, Romania did not simply shift from the Iron Guard to the Iron Curtain seamlessly. The infiltration of key aspects of the Romanian economy by far-right leaders began in the late 1920s.<sup>22</sup>

In Romania, much like Nazi Germany, the fear of Soviet

infiltration fostered the consolidation of authoritarian power. The 1989 Romanian Revolution, which saw the end of communism, was so remarkably popular that one must ponder why Romania was communist in the first place. No other former Soviet or Soviet satellite state declared independence in such a violent manner. A simple solution comes from the geographical location of Romania. As Professor Comanescu put it,

*If Romania had been in the same geographical location as France, for example, it would have followed a very similar course of history, for the Romanian people and their history, the geography has played the largest part.*

Indeed, Romania never really had a popular sentiment for Nazism or communism, yet as it was right in the middle of the two, it had to side. Of course, this is easy to say in retrospect to the event. Comanescu's comment could also be limited by his Romanian nationality which would incentivise downplaying any popular communist sentiment due to the contemporary anti socialist sentiment in Romania. Nonetheless, the notion suggests a turn to communism was far more likely. However, Greece serves as a counterargument, as mentioned above. That does not mean that an argument for inevitability is non-existent.

The revisionist school of thought continuously proposed that the rise of communism in Romania was 'linear' and 'gradual' once allied victory was certain.<sup>23</sup> This is clear as the real rise of communism in Romania began far before the war had ended. In April of 1944, the Soviet Union began marching into Transnistria, and by August they were already in Bessarabia.<sup>24</sup> In that sense, Romania was on a path to communism before the King acted. If the Soviet Union were to 'liberate' Romania, as an Axis power, it would be able to justify communist

<sup>20</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> The question of inevitability in history is a form of historical determinism which suggests that certain events are unavoidable and certain to occur due to the preexisting circumstance of time and setting.

<sup>22</sup> Appendix B (Bahl, Utsav, and Nicholas Medforth-Mills. Prince Nicholas Medforth-Mills of Romania regarding the role of his grandfather, King Michael I of Romania in the mid to late 20th Century and with regards to coup d'état against the regime dictator Ion Antonescu. Personal, November 28, 2019.)

<sup>23</sup> Dan Little, "Marx's Ideas about Government," Marx's ideas about government, January 1, 1970, Accessed 05 October 2020. <https://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2019/02/marxs-ideas-about-government.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Durandin, "Les Luttes De L'Entre-Deux-Guerres," in *Histoire Des Roumains* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), pp. 314-315.

control over Romania. Michael's *coup d'état* was a last resort to stopping communism in Romania. The Romanian army could have resisted occupation, but morale was broken as evidenced in the Jassy Kishinev Offensive (August 20th to August 29th, 1944).<sup>25</sup> The only obstacle to a communist Romania was the Iron Guard. If this pillar of fascism fell, then it followed that Romania would automatically fall to communism. This is a consequence of complicated Romanian history stemming from 1918.

The postwar Romanian state, indeed, had great economic potential, but it was territorially dissatisfied. Moreover, Carol II made little effort to harmonise its new ethnically diverse populations. In the 1930s, the infant mortality rate was the highest in Europe, unemployment skyrocketed, and whereas illiteracy rates in central Europe virtually disappeared, Romania had a 42.2% illiteracy rate in 1930.<sup>26</sup> Prior to the 1930s, unlike other Eastern European states after the Great War, Romania chose to emulate the central European model, under King Ferdinand. This saw massive economic and social progress. As Professor Comanescu noted

*...political parties after the creation of a greater Romania, meant the conservative party died out. This was made to create a middle class by the rule of the liberals and socialists. It was shifting towards a Scandinavian model, but the laws were not passed to solidify these laws. It left a void in the right wing of the Romanian politics which was supported by Romanian advocates of democracy*

In this sense, the polarisation of Romanian politics meant Antonescu's rise to power was inevitable. However, the Iron Guard's support was so strongly based upon its anti-communist rhetoric that it became the only pillar between Romania and communism. As Prince Nicholas notes in his interview with me,

*The Soviet Union began infiltrating, gradually, aspects of the Romanian economy and culture as*

*early as 1933. The efforts of Carol to deteriorate Soviet influence through an alliance with the Anglo-Americans failed, and the Iron Guard filled that void.*

In such a sense, the Moscow Armistice (1944) was nothing more than symbolic; Romania was inevitably communist.<sup>27</sup>

### Human Agency

The question of human agency in Romania is largely ignored due to the lack of historiography surrounding post Soviet Romania before the revisionist interpretation of Eastern European communism. The role of King Michael is often shadowed by the clandestine activities of the allies in Romania, as well as the fragile interwar diplomacy in Europe.<sup>28</sup> One of the larger reasons Michael's role is underplayed is because of his age.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, during King Michael's second reign he had considerable influence.

One of the most prominent acts of human agency is the new 1933 Romanian constitution which established a centralised state where the power was in the hands of the government in Bucharest.<sup>30</sup> This essentially made it so that Antonescu inherited the structural system necessary for a dictatorship. The story goes that King Michael signed off control of the state to Antonescu, not as the result of incompetence, but because it was consistent with contemporary political sentiment.<sup>31</sup> However, the

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Heninen, "Armistice Agreement between the USSR and the United Kingdom, on the One Hand, and Finland and Romania on the Other," Armistice Agreement, 1997, Accessed 11 July 2020 [http://heninen.net/sopimus/1944\\_e.htm](http://heninen.net/sopimus/1944_e.htm).

<sup>28</sup> Dennis Deletant, "Clandestine British Operations in Romania, 1942-1943," in *British Clandestine Activities in Romania During the Second World War* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 90-107; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 108.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Durandin, "Les Luttes De L'Entre-Deux-Guerres," in *Histoire Des Roumains* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p. 323.

<sup>30</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW, "The Role of the Constitutional Court in the Consolidation of the Rule of Law," Venice Commission, 1994, <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-STD%281994%29010-e>, p. 104

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Durandin, "Les Luttes De L'Entre-Deux-Guerres," in *Histoire Des Roumains* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), pp. 316-318.

<sup>25</sup> Nicolette Franck, *La Roumanie Dans L'engrenage* (Paris: Elsevier-Sequoia, 1977), p. 167.

<sup>26</sup> Dennis Deletant, "Clandestine British Operations in Romania, 1942 -1943," in *British Clandestine Activities in Romania During the Second World War* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 109.

1933 constitution set by the monarchy earlier made it so that Antonescu did not establish a dictatorship, but instead almost inherited one. The will of the Romanian people to keep Romanian territories safe forced King Carol to transfer power to Antonescu as his last act prior to his abdication and Michael reaffirmed this.<sup>32</sup> The actions of Antonescu and King Michael after Carol's abdication, however, were driven by the same interests. In the 1940s onwards, it seems that Romania was not driven by ideological aims, but rather territorial ones and preserving sovereignty. A popular political adage at the time was "*We will always be with Germany against the Soviet Union, and always with the Anglo-Americans against the Germans.*"<sup>33</sup> This maxim shows that political policy was aimed at securing Romania's sovereignty above all, and did not have any strong ideological drive.

Perhaps, one of the most significant arguments in favour of human agency is a comparative argument with Greece and Finland. In Western scholarship, where the question of inevitability is most prominent, one would suggest that Axis failure in the war meant that Romania's geographical location suggested it would inevitably become communist. Therefore, all Michael did was shorten the war, and extend Romania's sovereignty by a year at best. However, Greece and Finland illustrate that not all countries in certain geographical regions had to become communist. The common misconception is that Michael accepted communism as a natural result of shifting sides in the war but proactively acted on his personal accord to switch sides, as he saw it, in his own words, as the *lesser of two evils*, as he once referenced to in an unpublished interview.<sup>34</sup> This can only be said in retrospect, which is the tone in which Michael spoke when he referred to this event over half a century later.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Appendix C (Bahl, Utsav, and Radu Albu Comanescu. Romania: From fascism to communism. Personal, July 16, 2020.)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Appendix B (Bahl, Utsav, and Nicholas Medforth-Mills. Prince Nicholas Medforth-Mills of Romania regarding the role of his grandfather, King Michael I of Romania in the mid to late 20th Century and with regards to coup d'état against the regime dictator Ion Antonescu. Personal, November 28, 2019.); Michael. Regele Mihai. Other, n.d. Source Provided by Prince Nicholas of Romania, NOT OPEN FOR PUBLIC USE OR RELEASE. Transcript is with author of this paper, candidate gzs444, privately.

Romania's leading politicians such as Iuliu Maniu were working in tandem with both Antonescu and Michael overtly.<sup>36</sup> This meant that although Antonescu did not support Michael's efforts to make an agreement with the Allies, he actively chose to be oblivious to the talks, and even participated in them secretly before concluding that it would be too dangerous. On the 13th of April 1944, the Kremlin submitted the following agreement,

*At this crucial time for the existence of the Romanian people, the Soviet Government... states in front of the whole world that it does not intend to destroy the Romanian state, nor to annex territories beyond the frontiers of 1941, nor to change the existing social system of the country.*<sup>37</sup>

This document was submitted only 4 months prior to Michael's *coup d'état*. Indeed, the document would likely have been exaggerated as Romania's exit from the Axis would be a guaranteed success. Nonetheless, the public disclosure of the document and its strictly contemporary nature suggests that there was some truth to the Kremlin's statement. The Yalta Conference, which decided the fate of the Romanian people, would not take place until 4th February 1945. Furthermore, the Yalta Conference promised that all original governments would be restored to the liberated countries with the exception of Romania and Bulgaria. As a result, if Romania was an exception to the liberation rule, how can its geography alone be blamed if Greece, with a similar geographical position, was not excluded from this rule? Even more so, if proximity to the Soviet Union, alliance with the Axis powers, and effective invasion meant that communism was unavoidable, then why was Finland, in those exact conditions to Romania but in the North, able to survive? The answer lies within the nature of the Anglo-Soviet relationship at the end of the Second World War. Michael

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>36</sup> Dennis Deletant, "Clandestine British Operations in Romania, 1942-1943," in *British Clandestine Activities in Romania During the Second World War* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> Ion Scurtu, "Collection of Documents and Materials Regarding the History of Romania," *Collection of Documents and Materials Regarding the History of Romania* (Bucharest: University of Bucharest, n.d.), pp. 219-220.

acted to preserve the sovereignty of Romania, but in doing so essentially ensured the fate of the Romanian people. On August 5th of 1944, Michael finalised the details for a *coup d'état* on his own government in Cairo.<sup>38</sup> However, instead of dictating the terms prior to the *coup*, he acted with the help of the Soviets prior to any agreement. The King, requested as noted in a rare memorandum of secret Anglo-Romanian talks by Henry Spitzmuller (a French diplomat serving in Romania for the Allied interests) in autumn of 1943, Michael revealed to a secret British intelligence officer that

*A putsch would lead to the complete and immediate occupation of Romania by Germany which would then have all of their resources at disposal immediately. The Marshal...continues to impose on the country a policy which is contrary to its wishes and its interests. If the Allies made a landing in the Balkans, everything would be simpler.*<sup>39</sup>

The King, indeed, was only reflecting on his contemporary situation in Romania. Michael had his own agenda. Nonetheless, the strictly limited audience that was informed of Michael's decision means this source can actually provide a rare and candid glimpse into the Anglo-Romanian talks before the *coup d'état*. It is interesting to note the date of the document was about two months prior to the Tehran conference. This conference (November 28th to December 1st, 1943) dismissed the Churchill Doctrine, which had hoped for an Allied liberation from the Mediterranean and Middle East, but Stalin rejected this outright.<sup>40</sup> Anglo-American landings in the Balkans before the Russians would therefore not be possible, sealing Romania's fate. Truman later noted, "*The bravery of King Michael, and the exit of Romania from the war, shortened the war by at least six months.*"<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Dennis Deletant, "Clandestine British Operations in Romania, 1942 -1943," in *British Clandestine Activities in Romania During the Second World War* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 114.

<sup>39</sup> Ion Scurtu, "Collection of Documents and Materials Regarding the History of Romania," *Collection of Documents and Materials Regarding the History of Romania* (Bucharest: University of Bucharest, n.d.), pp. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Nicolette Franck, "La Trahison De L'Ouest," in *La Roumanie Dans L'engrenage* (Paris: Elsevier-Sequoia, 1977), pp. 70-72.

It should be distinguished that Truman released this statement despite Romania already having been ceded to the Soviets in private, suggesting that there was no reason to glorify the role of Romania to Anglo-American interests. Truman's suggestion that Romania shortened the war essentially made it harder to justify for the Soviets to take total control over Romania, as it made an argument of liberation ambiguous. In August 1944, an Allied victory was not guaranteed. Therefore, Michael initially had the upper hand in pro-Allied talks. On the 29th of June, the Germans managed to hold off the Soviets in the Battle of Tannenberg line (July 25, 1944 to September 19, 1944), maintaining a solid position in Eastern Europe. Axis defeat was by no means a certainty in 1944. Romania, therefore, changed allegiances; they were not "liberated".

Michael's decision to proceed with arresting Antonescu was overtly anti-communist, rather than anti-fascist. As stated above, the primary objective of Romanian diplomacy was to ensure sovereignty, the ideological preference in Romania was neither fascist, and it was far from communist (representing some 1,000 people at most).<sup>42</sup> The reactionary negotiating policy by Michael, by requesting the aid of the Soviets in the Balkans, meant that any intervention on the part of the Allies would be as a form of liberation, therefore allowing the Soviets to dictate the future of Romanian politics. On the same day that the media celebrated as the French were liberated, June 29th, 1944, the Soviet army marched into Romania in parallel to the liberation of France, although in completely unrelated circumstances. The King, having supplied the Allies with a vital boost towards victory, had just fallen victim to the Anglo-American foreign policy which had neglected Eastern European and the Middle Eastern nations for the last half-century. In February 1945, Churchill confirmed to Stalin what the world should have already known: the very essence of the Romanian state,

<sup>41</sup> Truman, Harry S. Letter from Harry S. Truman to King Michael I of Romania. Geneva : Property of King Michael I's Lawyer, 1945.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix B (Bahl, Utsav, and Nicholas Medforth-Mills. Prince Nicholas Medforth-Mills of Romania regarding the role of his grandfather, King Michael I of Romania in the mid to late 20th Century and with regards to coup d'état against the regime dictator Ion Antonescu. Personal, November 28, 2019.)

sovereignty, shall no longer be gifted to the Romanian people.

### Conclusion

In Romania, by April 1944, there was nothing but relentless pressure from both the East (Soviets) and West (Germany). Unsuccessful in diplomacy, the King accomplished a miracle of saving the face of the Romanian people before the end of the war. Consequently though, more than 66 years of sovereignty died. The suggestion is not that Michael should be held responsible. Indeed, the fate of the Romanian people was decided already in Yalta, and Tehran before that. The switch to the Allies was a last effort to save Romanian sovereignty, a concept which dictated Romanian civil society in the 1940s. Michael's defiance should be remembered as an act of not only courage, but nationalism. Nonetheless, the failure to negotiate appropriate terms meant that Romania was too late to stop the rise of communism, a phenomenon that had been a feature in Romania since the early 1930s and remained until the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. If Romania's proximity to the Soviets, alliance with the Axis, and effective invasion meant that communism was unavoidable, then why was Finland, in the exact same circumstances, able to salvage sovereignty? Romania's economic prowess certainly played a factor, but diplomacy has a lot more to answer for. The contemporary works of Nicollette Franck and my personal interviews with Prince Nicholas of Romania and historian Radu Albu Comanescu suggest that geography, but above all, failed diplomacy, is the unsung ruler of causation in Romania's shift from fascism to communism. This, indeed, discredits much of the popular revisionist historiography, shedding light on the prominence of human agents such as King Michael and clandestine British actions in Romania. Indeed, there are inherent biases within these politically angled sources to magnify Michael's role. However, the supplementary archives accessed which have likely either been unseen or dismissed by modern Eastern European historians tends to agree with a more prolific role of human agents in Romania.

The lack of dedicated efforts to study Eastern European and Romanian history due to the pre-existing paradigm of revisionist historiography in ex-communist states has led to a willful ignorance of orthodox interpretations of Romanian history and a complete

absence of any post-revisionist arguments. This has tainted my investigation, making secondary sources limited. Similarly, while archives are available, the large scope of these records meant that the resources available for this essay were insufficient to fully uncover the full hidden gems present in archival materials. Nonetheless, this investigation fulfils its aim to challenge revisionist arguments on Romanian history and note the prominence of human agency as the key determinant in Romania's shift from fascism to communism. Lessons from Romania should serve as a stark reminder that in the great efforts we make to avoid our deepest fears, we often lead ourselves nothing but closer to them. Like the great stories of Scylla and Charybdis, Romanian national integrity is often undermined by its geography. However, it is the actions of these human agents that made one outcome far more likely than another. Communism in Romania began with the rise of fascism. Therefore, while it was the human agents who influenced the shift from fascism to communism in Romania, it was the rise of fascism that truly altered the course of Romanian history.

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### Appendix

#### *Appendix A*

*Documentation of Harry S Truman's Letter to King Michael I of Romania thanking him for his aid in the war, and for his 'courageous' coup d'etat*

Copy on request if permission is granted (I received this documentation from the personal lawyer of King Michael who I met at my internship at the Geneva City Mayor's Office, and helped put me in contact with Prince Nicholas of Romania). Permission to attach this to the public essay is not granted, but can be given on a private case by case basis.

*Appendix B (Transcribed manually)*

*Personal Interview with Prince Nicholas of Romania  
(Request access: ub2@williams.edu)*

*Appendix C (Notes)*

*Personal Interview with Professor Radu Albu Comanescu  
of the University of Cluj*

Western

-Specific nations that lived there

-Romanians lived somewhere else, they would have the same history as France

-Geography and History (The distinction between West and East)

-It is probably, Romania and Poland are probably the nations the most shaped by their geographical location (intersection areas), Romania (central, eastern, middle east).

-Pressure was tough enough to take in a lot (they were empires) from surrounding countries.

-Romania's geographic location was crucial in being played between Germany and the Soviet Union, but also resources. The only monarchy neighbouring the Soviet Union meaning Romania was enemy number 1 for Marxist Leninists, but Stalin had a lot of sympathy for King Michael which was not (reports telegrams Romanian communist and Stalin).

-Romania was going to suffer the pressure, but no one could know how?

-Paper napkin (Romanians are very frustrated), that napkin was signed October 1944, Soviets had already occupied Romania in September 12th 1944.

-Gates to Europe's south east, so Britain asked for 10% to stop putting pressure on Greece, and the Suez Canal.

-Inspiration that came from Mussolini, and fascism. Italian

fascism was considered with a positive way, created order, boosted economy, and kept away communism.

-Pillar of the Anglo French order in Europe.

-All political parties accepted that Carol comes back, even from 1930 the political spectrum felt the need of a stronger regime.

-Authoritarian rule, leftist social policies (king of the peasants)

-Push came on mystical anti semite combination.

-Ethnical diversity of Romania would matter because

1. It influenced our foreign policy (alliances to keep Hungarians and Bulgarians down)

2. Anti Semitism stimulated by Nazi Germany influence, and fascism in general. Moldovia had a large Jewish population coming in from Galicia, which were stimulated by leading political figures in Romania.

3. Hungarian problem? Constitution of 1933 focused on a unified central state, instead of trying to keep to the Romanian image. Antonescu did not love Transylvania because of foreigners.

“We will always be with Germany against the Soviet Union, and always against the Anglo Americans against the Germans”

Since 1933 convince ourselves with the Anglo American request that we negotiate with the Soviet Union, they had to see the foe as the ally as the ally of our allies. It was a game of smoke and mirrors.

Antonescu tolerated the opposition parties' negotiations knowing that Germany would lose the war to the allies.

Babuj question? Antonescu wanted communists included in Romanian government to appease the Soviets, but all communists were not truly Romanian. The link between communism and Judaism became a lot more strong as a result.

Worst fear was to see Romania become a soviet satellite state.

Communism was not a Romanian phenomenon until the Soviet occupation of Romania. It was an imposition with no political support with less than 1,000 supporters.

Presence of the King was to save Romania for three years.

King Michael, by arresting Antonescu, to finally send the message to the allies that we had shifted because the Russian's had already started to occupy Bessarabia and Transnistria by April 1944, and by July they were approaching Bucharest.

Queen Hellen, given the history of her own family, she already knew that the royalty would not end well. The King could not influence the course of Romanian history unless he seceded to the will of the anglo americans.

Constitution prohibited the King passing laws, without the approval of his communist powers.

They already started to erode the Romanian ministry.

Negotiations about abdication started in March 1945.

King Michael, if he had not arrested Antonescu, the Russians would have advanced anyway, if he had not been arrested he probably would have been killed anyway.

Communism in Soviet was generational, Romanian communism saw a lot more rebellion.

Substantial differences in terms of political elites, communists in Romania were imported, they allied themselves with outlaws, by the mid 1960

The Soviets did not see Romania as anything more than agricultural and industrial land.

Romania created a good relationship with China from the 60s onwards which stays to this day.

Stalinism and Romanian politics were very closely aligned, but the Soviets only saw Romania as a tool.

Corrupt government,

In 1960s the structure of government changed completely changing from communism more towards socialism.

Romania could not shift towards an alliance with the West. It was a result of the communist geography.

Hozzelhern was democratising the politics of Romania embracing democratic parliamentary rule. It was an expression of political will, political parties after the creation of a greater Romania, the conservative party died out. This was made to create a middle class by the rule of the liberals and socialists. It was shifting towards a scandinavian model, but the laws were not passed to solidify these laws. It left a void in the right wing of the Romanian politics which was supported by Romanian advocates of democracy, and the liberals attempted to fill this void but they were unsuccessful.

The emergence of nationalism in the 1930s , and the scars of not building an ethnically Romanian state.

The quality of the ideas deteriorated, and Romanian self identity began to fall apart.

The Liberals designed the constitution of 1993, and this issue simply persisted.

After the mid 1930s, foreign influence began to pour in with ideas and partnerships especially after the war with Spain and this shifted Romania from its natural course of history.

The natural evolution of Romanian politics ended by the mid 1930s with King Carol's influence on Romania.

Romania was confronted with numbers coming from American and Israeli specialists, it took Romania a long while to differentiate between how many Jews died in Romania and how many died in the greater Romania which Romanians had actually little control over.

The Antonescu regime was ordered to save Jews if they were the saving the economy, and Antonescu tried to save Jews in a way to help facilitate talks with the Anglo Americans and keep capital in Romania, but the Germans

knew this was an issue and they ordered Antonescu to massacre Jews in the reoccupation zones to deteriorate any future talks between Romania and Anglo-Americans.

Romanian state assumed responsibility for 400,000 Jews, but the Romanian nature was disorganised but we know it is clear that the Romanian state persecuted Jews far more than the Romanian people.

Caucescu was in power at a time where nationalism was on the rise again, and he supported rediscovering Romanian unity to legitimise his power. When King Carol II was imitating the fascist model, that became the model for Romanian communism. Psychological dictatorship continued from 1930 to 1990 almost indistinctly, the constitution of 1939 essentially led Romania to become a one party state.

Communism did not repeat the mistakes of instability that led to Antonescu's demise.

The instability continued into Romanian politics today, Romanian domestic policy has always been so heavily influenced by foreign policies and a transaction based society.

### Appendix D

*Romanian Political Sentiment During The Second World War (La Roumanie dans l'Engrenage, Nicolette Franck, Analysed by Candidate gzs444)*

Initially, the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact was beneficial for the Romanian people, as it secured the Romanian territories and allowed Romania to fight the Soviets in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina which was primarily successful. This made Antonescu very popular, however, in 1942, after the Battle of Stalingrad (August 23rd 1942 to February 2nd 1943) and a series of losses in the Soviet Union as Prince Nicholas said "*the alarm bells went ringing.*" Again, Nicholas says this only in retrospect. Furthermore, as the grandson of the King, he has spent most of his life researching his father's work and the history of Romania in the 20th century. As a combination of these two factors, Prince Nicholas could have been inclined to suggest that Antonescu was not favourable amongst the Romanian population, a claim that can only

be substantiated with further research. Nonetheless, works such as those of Nicolette Franck, show that as it became abundantly clear that the Axis were no longer favourites to win the war, and the efforts of the Romanian army in Bessarabia were failing; public support left Antonescu. After the Soviet victory at Stalingrad in January of 1943, it became clear to Antonescu that he would have to switch sides. However, whereas the allegiance to Hitler by Romanian people was not ideological, but purely a business deal which expired the minute it worked against Romania's interests, Antonescu stood firmly that he had an infamous 'gentleman's agreement'<sup>43</sup> with Hitler to go to the end of the world with him. This did not sit well with key members of the Romanian ministry, and particularly King Michael of Romania. On the 23rd of August, 1943, King Mihai arrested Marshal Ion Antonescu with the support of the allies ending his military dictatorship, and formally aligning Romania with the allies. King Michael promptly took control of the state, but by August of 1944 the Soviets entered Romania. This led to an internal power struggle for three years which ended with the forced abdication of King Michael under the threat of the murder of hundreds of Romanian children taken hostage by the Soviets in Bucharest.

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<sup>43</sup> Auswärtiges Amt, "Germany and Romania: Bilateral Relations," German Federal Foreign Office, October 13, 2020, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/romania/227976>.

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