

THE TILEA AFFAIR: A FURTHER INQUIRY

On the afternoon of March 17, 1939 the excited Romanian Minister in London Viorel V. Tilea warned the British Government that his little country appeared to be Hitler's next victim, and that Bucharest had received an "ultimatum" which would give Germany control over the Romanian economy. The startling shift in British foreign policy that this warning helped to bring about is well-known to diplomatic historians. Yet after almost forty years the so-called "Tilea affair" is still surrounded by considerable mystery. In order to shed additional light on this event, this paper will examine British-Romanian relations prior to March 1939, as well as Tilea's activities and the veracity of the ultimatum.

Surprisingly, historians have largely ignored Britain's relations with Romania before the Tilea affair. Studies of the origins of World War II say little about Romania until the middle of March 1939 when suddenly the fate of this small Balkan country becomes of prime importance to the security of the Western Powers. Was Britain's interest in Romania something that sprang up overnight, or had it been developing gradually?

Historically, England's involvement in Romania was confined primarily to trade and finance. On the other hand, she traditionally followed a policy of "nonintervention" in the political affairs of Eastern Europe including Romania. During much of the inter-war period the British Government's main activity in Romania was promoting suitable economic and financial conditions for the development of the oil trade and protecting British investments. After 1936, however, with the ever-increasing influence of Nazi Germany in South Eastern Europe, as well as the development of fascism in Romania, London became worried about Romania's political future.

This growing concern was manifested in a number of ways prior to March 1939. England's reaction to the shortlived Goga Government was one indication. Octavian Goga, an anti-Semitic Transylvanian poet and leader of the fascist National Christian Party, was appointed Premier by King Carol in December 1937¹. Both London and Paris feared that this would disrupt Romania's

1. For a recent study of the Goga Government see Paul A. Shapiro, "Prelude to Dictatorship in Romania: The National Christian Party in Power, December 1937 - February 1938", *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 8 (1974) 45-88. See also Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu* (Wiesbaden, 1954), 12-16; I. Scurtu, "Lupta partidelor

traditional pro-Western foreign policy and significantly increase the influence of Germany. The British were also worried that the new government would unleash a brutal campaign against the Jews.

The Goga Government tried to allay these by claiming that Romania's foreign policy would remain basically the same². We desire "to maintain the closest relations with England" Goga asserted³. But the British and the French put little faith in these assurances. Moreover, no sooner had Goga come to power than the government took the lead in stirring up anti-Semitism. The end result was numerous protests from London and Paris. Mild at first, by the end of January the Western Powers were even threatening to regard the treaties which recognized Romania's ownership of Transylvania and Bessarabia as being annulled if the government refused to alter its policies⁴. London cancelled King Carol's upcoming state visit to England, and Sir Reginald Hoare, the English Minister in Bucarest, made it clear to the Romanians that Whitehall would do all it could to get the Goga Government removed⁵.

The hectic career of the Goga Government lasted only six weeks. Although Carol's reasons for removing the government mainly concerned domestic affairs, the protests of the Western nations helped⁶. Shortly afterwards, in order to allay fears in the West, the Romanians announced that they were continuing their traditional foreign policy. In the same statement they noted that "a wide development of Anglo-Rumanian relations in all spheres will therefore be one of our principal tasks"⁷.

Another indication of Britain's growing concern and sympathy for Romania was manifested by the improvement of King Carol's reputation in England.

politice în alegerile parlamentare din decembrie 1937", *Studii, Revista de istoria* 20 (1967), I, pp. 145-162.

2. Gunther to Secretary of State, January 20, 1938, State Department Dispatch, 871.00/591, 13, National Archives, Washington; *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939* (Paris, 1972), 2^e Série, VII, 796, 813-816. See also Shapiro, "Prelude to Dictatorship", 74-75; O. M. Oprea, *Nicolae Titulescu's Diplomatic Activity* (Bucharest, 1968), 162.

3. Gunther to Secretary of State, *op. cit.*, 13-14. See also *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (10 v., Washington, 1946-1948), III, 38; *United States Department of State* (Washington, 1943-1972), *Foreign Relations 1938*, I, 1-2.

4. *Foreign Relations 1938*, I, 5; Gunther to Secretary of State, February 9, 1938, State Department Telegram, No. 21, 751.71/33.

5. Jérôme et Jean Tharaud, *L'envoyé de l'Archange* (Paris, 1939), 210; Florea Nedelcu, "Cu privire la politica externă a României în perioada guvernării Goga-Cuza", *Studii privind politica externă a României 1919-1939*, (1969), 206.

6. Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 15-16; *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945* (Washington, 1949-1956), Series D, V, 250-251; Gunther to Secretary of State, February 11, 1938, State Department Telegram, No. 23, 871.00/596.

7. *Documents on International Affairs 1938* (ed. Monica Curtis, London), I, 290.

Carol, the eldest son of Queen Marie (formerly Princess Marie of Edinburgh) and King Ferdinand and the great-grandson of Queen Victoria, acquired world fame as an international playboy in the twenties. His exploits received a great deal of coverage by the British press who dubbed him the “royal rapsallion” and “Carol the Cad”⁸. Carol lived in England for a short time with his celebrated red-headed Jewish mistress Madame Magda Lupescu after he renounced his rights to the throne rather than give up Magda in 1925. In 1928 the British Government expelled him from the country for allegedly conspiring to launch a coup d'état and seize the Romanian throne from his infant son. His reputation sank even lower after he recovered the throne in a dazzling airplane coup in 1930. As King, Carol endeavored to erect a government in which the monarch was the dominant figure. He disliked the Romanian party system, and had little, if any, belief in representative government⁹. British Labour circles sharply criticized him for his anti-democratic policies. As fascism grew in Romania, however, the attitude of the British press changed. Because of Carol's growing opposition to fascist groups, who he had come to view as a threat to his own position, “the bad boy of the Balkans” began to be depicted as a fighter of fascism and a friend of Great Britain¹⁰. His removal of the Goga Government further enhanced his reputation in England, even though he replaced it with a royal dictatorship¹¹. The old royal lover stories were forgotten.

Carol's new image as a strong ruler and the savior of Romania from fascism was clearly manifested by the very warm welcome he received in November 1938 when he made his first state visit to England¹². The press praised his cour-

8. Carol was born on 16 October 1893. He became Crown Prince in 1914 after the death of his grandfather King Carol I. In 1917 he contracted a morganatic marriage with a general's daughter. The marriage did not last long, and several years later he married Princess Helen of Greece. Their only son, Prince Michael, was born in 1921. Four years later Carol deserted his wife and renounced his rights to the Romanian throne. In 1930 he returned to Romania and reclaimed the throne.

9. Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others* (Stanford, California, 1970), 276; Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1951), 170.

10. A. L. Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler and Lupescu* (London, 1942), 100, 116. For an interesting account of the changing attitude of the British see Vernon McKenzie, *Through Turbulent Years* (New York, 1938), 131-135.

11. See *The Times*, London, February 12, April 1, 19, November 15-18, 1938; *The Manchester Guardian*, November 15-18, 1938; *The Evening Standard*, November 15-18, 1938; *Fortnightly* (January-June, 1938), 580-587; *Fortnightly* (January-June, 1939), 315-319; *New Statesman and Nation* (January-June, 1939), 450-451. See also Lord Sempill's report of his visit to Romania, March 24, 1939, F.O. 371/23832 R 2005/113/37, Public Record Office, London.

12. The visit took place from 15 to 18 November, 1938.

age in resisting fascism¹³. He met the King, the Prime Minister, and other government officials, as well as a number of important businessmen. He was the guest at several lavish banquets, a parade was given in his honor, and he was made a Knight of the Garter¹⁴. For this great-grandson of Queen Victoria, who ten years earlier had been forced to leave the country, it was a great personal triumph.

At the same time, Carol desired to bring about closer relations with Great Britain. In order to offset the growing supremacy of Germany in South Eastern Europe, the resourceful King hoped that England would assume a more important role¹⁵. Moreover, he was convinced that in a future war, barring a Communist triumph, England would ultimately be victorious¹⁶. "Therefore in his view", stated the German Minister to Romania Wilhelm Fabricius, "it is advisable to be on the side of Great Britain"¹⁷. Carol also hoped to establish closer economic relations with Britain, especially with an eye to borrowing money in order to purchase much needed military equipment.

In the spring and summer of 1938 there were further signs of increasing English interest in Romania. There was talk of British loans, and numerous visits by noted Englishmen to Romania to investigate the possibility of capital investments¹⁸. The Romanian press was especially favorable to Britain, and an English chair was established at Bucharest University¹⁹. Foreign Minister Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen described the interest which the English manifested in the development of the economy as "unprecedented".

The American Legation reported that "for the first time England is resorting to propaganda here both cultural and economic".

In the cultural field there has been a series of lectures, the organization of a British Institute for the teaching of English and emphasis on newspaper propaganda through Reuter's which it is understood is now controlled by the British Government²⁰.

13. See *The Times*, London, *The Manchester Guardian*, and *The Evening Standard* for 15-18 November, 1938.

14. *The Times*, London, November 15-18, 1938; *New York Times*, November 16, 1938.

15. Viorica Moisuc, "Orientations dans le politique extérieure de la Roumanie après le Pacte de Munich", *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* V (1966), II, 327-330; Hillgruber, *Hittler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 23; Viorica Moisuc, "La Situation de la Roumanie pendant la période mars-septembre 1938", *Studia Balcanica* 7 (1973) 160.

16. *German Foreign Policy*, II, 574.

17. *Ibid.*

18. American Legation to Secretary of State, August 10, 1939, State Department Dispatch, No. 1026, 871.00/698, 32.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Gunther to Secretary of State, October 20, 1938, State Department Dispatch, No. 571, 871.00/652, 7.

In June former Romanian Premier and close friend of King Carol, Gheorge Tătărescu, showed up in London on an unofficial visit to strengthen economic relations between the two countries. Later Lord Lloyd, the head of the British Council, visited King Carol. This flurry of British activity climaxed with the purchase by the English of two hundred thousand tons of Romanian wheat in order to help the latter solve her huge wheat surplus problem²¹.

These activities worried the astute German Minister in Bucharest. In July he advised the Foreign Ministry "that prompt and satisfactory deliveries in the armaments field are the best means of combating the fanciful designs of the British for erecting an economic bulwark against German expansion"²². By the end of August the Germans had altered their tactics. Fabricius told Comnen that Germany was interested in buying "wheat in considerable quantities to help Rumania out of her difficulty". But Fabricius pointed out, "it is out of the question for us to make an offer so long as M. Mitiță Constantinescu continued his British policy"²³. At the same time, he advised Berlin to be cautious in making purchase offers for fear of helping British transactions. On a number of occasions in conversations with Romanian officials Fabricius dangled the possibility of large German purchases of various items, but only if they orientated their policy away from England.

After the Munich Agreement, however, in order not to antagonize Hitler, London returned to a cautious and hesitant policy towards South Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the British kept a close watch on Romania. While outwardly during the winter of 1938-1939 there appeared to be a relaxation of international tensions, the Foreign Office became increasingly worried about Hitler's future plans. Reports from various sources indicated that Hitler was bent on war, and that one of the possible targets was Romania²⁴. Joseph Kennedy, the wealthy American Ambassador to England, believed that in February the British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax

came to the opinion ... that England must fight if Hitler enters Rumania. He is not inclined to think an entrance into Hungary should provoke a

21. Letter from Leith-Ross to Sargent, January 16, 1939, F.O. 371/23831 R 395/21/67; L. Zivkova, "British Economic Policy in the Balkans on the Eve of the World War II", *Studia Balcanica* 4 (1971) 176-177.

22. *German Foreign Policy*, V, 290.

23. *Ibid.*, V, 319. Constantinescu was the Governor of the Romanian National Bank and Minister of National Economy. Berlin viewed him as one of the chief instigators behind the attempt to bring Romania and England closer together economically. Foreign Office Minute, January 17, 1939, F. O. 371/23831 R 498/113/37.

24. Sidney Aster, 1939. *The Making of the Second World War* (New York, 1973), 38-60 passim.

war because he says Hungary is at the present minute honeycombed with Nazism. But on a step into Rumania he believes that England cannot wait any longer²⁵.

Moreover, in January and February the English stepped-up their economic activity in Romania again²⁶. Hence, it is clear that well before March 1939 England's interest in Romania had been developing, and that her concern with Romania's safety after Tilea's famous ultimatum was not simply an involvement that suddenly came about.

England's importance to Romania's foreign trade, however, was small compared with Germany's²⁷. Romania's strategic location and her numerous resources, especially oil, made her a potentially valuable ally for Hitler²⁸. By the end of 1938 one-third of Romania's trade was with the Reich. Part of this was simply because Germany offered the highest prices for her goods, as well as other economic advantages Romania could not obtain elsewhere²⁹. In addition, Carol viewed closer economic ties as a way not only to maintain friendly relations between the two countries, but also to prevent Hitler from giving strong support to Hungary's clamoring to get Transylvania back. Yet Carol was clearly aware that such a policy could result in Romania becoming an economic and political satellite of Berlin.

In November 1938, when Carol visited Hitler at the Berghof in Bavaria, discussions began about an extensive economic treaty between the two countries. During the middle of the following March the negotiations reached a climax. Many Romanians felt that Germany's economic objectives were too far-reaching, and that they would cause serious economic and political problems for

25. Kennedy to Secretary of State, March 18, 1939, State Department Telegram, No. 360, 740.00/630.

26. Sempill's report, March 24, 1939, F.O. 371/23832 R 2005/113/37; *German Foreign Policy*, V, 395-396.

27. For example, in 1938 thirty-seven percent of Romania's imports and twenty-six percent of her exports were with Germany (including Austria), while her imports and exports with Great Britain were only eight and eleven percent respectively. See *South-Eastern Europe: A Political and Economic Survey* (Publication of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1939), 126; Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 249.

28. Besides Hillgruber, for German policy towards Romania see Martin Broszat, "Deutschland-Ungarn-Rumänien. Entwicklung und Grundfaktoren nationalsozialistischer Hegemonial Bündnispolitik, 1938-1941", *Historische Zeitschrift* 206 (1968) 45-96; Wolfgang Miede, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien 1933-1938* (Frankfurt/M., 1973).

29. Roberts, *Romania*, 216; Antonin Basch, *The Danube Basin and the German Economic Sphere* (New York, 1943), 179, 184, 191-192; R. Deutsch, "The Foreign Policy of Romania and the Dynamics of Peace (1932-1936)", *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* V (1966), I, 130-131.

their country³⁰. Indeed, this was no normal economic treaty. Fabricius told the Foreign Ministry that if their proposals were agreed to Germany would achieve predominance in Romania³¹. The Romanian Government was in a precarious position. There were aspects of the treaty which Carol was very reluctant to go along with³². On the other hand, he feared antagonizing Hitler, and diplomatic relations had just begun to return to normal since he had the Romanian fascist leader Corneliu Z. Codreanu killed several months before.

Fearing the growing German influence in Romania, as well as the developing crisis in Czechoslovakia, Viorel V. Tilea, the recently appointed Romanian Minister to England, tried to persuade the British Government to make several gestures to show its concern for his country. Without being instructed by Bucharest, on 14 March he called on the British Foreign Office for an interview. To the Deputy Under-Secretary of State Sir Orme Sargent, Tilea pointed out his anxiety about the threatening situation in Eastern Europe, and urged him to announce the upcoming commercial mission to Romania at once, and to raise the British Legation in Bucharest to an embassy. But to Tilea's disappointment Sargent, who had more pressing problems to deal with, would only promise that "his suggestions would be considered"³³.

Nevertheless, Tilea was not a man who could be put off easily. In his early forties, wealthy and ambitious, he was essentially a powerful businessman and politician, not a professional diplomat. He was one of Romania's leading industrialists. A friend of King Carol, Tilea was active in politics being appointed to various government posts and special committees, especially those involving economics. He was also an ardent Anglophile. In 1923 he founded a British-Romanian cultural society in Cluj, and was the Acting President of the Anglo-Romanian Society from 1931 to 1939. Before being appointed Romanian Minister to England, his previous diplomatic experience was limited to participating in several governmental committees, acting as a delegate of the Romanian National Council for Transylvania in Paris in 1919, and serving as attaché and secretary to the Romanian Legation in London in 1920.

30. Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 46. See also Moisuc, "Politique extérieure de la Roumanie", 331, 333-334.

31. *German Foreign Policy*, V, 393. See also Basch, *Danube Basin*, 213-215.

32. Gunther to Secretary of State, April 5, 1939, State Department Dispatch, No. 834, 762.71/89, 2-3. See also Cristian Popisteanu, "Diplomatic Actions Carried Out by Romania in the Spring and Summer of 1939", *Studia Balcanica* 7 (1973) 254-255.

33. *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (London, 1949-1954), Third Series, IV, 283-284. See also Foreign Office Minute—discussion of proposed trade mission to Romania, March 2, 1939, F. O. 371/23832 R1470/113/37; Foreign Office to Hoare, March 4, 1939, F.O. 371/23832 R1495/113/37.

Although a dedicated Romanian patriot, his personal probity has remained unclear. English historian Sidney Aster claimed that the view of Tilea as being untrustworthy held by some British officials in the late thirties was unfair and not supported by any evidence³⁴. Yet Aster's excellent book "1939. The Making of the Second World War" (and apparently his own research) only covers Tilea up to the outbreak of the war. His activities during the war caused the British to further distrust him³⁵. In addition, close acquaintances held a similar opinion.

Since Tilea arrived in London on February 1st he had been working hard to bring Britain and Romania closer together³⁶. So far he had little to show for it. What gave Tilea his opportunity, of course, was Hitler's swift occupation of the rest of Czechoslovakia on the 15th of March.

This startled and outraged English public opinion³⁷. The view that Hitler only wanted to reunite Germans with the Reich and would leave the rest of Europe alone was shattered. Moreover, many Englishmen feared that Hitler was already preparing his next move which could come at almost any time. The British Government was also very upset. But in spite of this, Prime Minister Chamberlain was not prepared to go much further than making mild verbal protests to Berlin³⁸. Appeasement was not dead yet.

On the afternoon of the 16th Tilea hurried to the Foreign Office. Again speaking "entirely personally" the excited Romanian Minister told Sargent that his government had "from secret and other sources...good reason to believe that within the next few months" the Germans "would proceed to disintegrate Roumania" as they had Czechoslovakia. Tilea then asked "how far they could count upon Great Britain in the event of their having in the near future to face and resist—as they certainly would—a German threat of this kind"³⁹. He also

34. Aster, 1939, 66.

35. For example in the spring of 1939 English Under-Secretary of State Alexander Cadogan told Tilea that a British guarantee to Romania was directed against an attack by Germany and not by the Soviet Union. As far as the English could tell Tilea kept this information to himself although his own Foreign Minister made repeated inquiries to London during the following fall to see if the guarantee covered a Russian attack. *British Foreign Policy*, V, 66; Foreign Office Minute, January 27, 1940, F.O.371/24968 R1425/9/37.

36. Foreign Office to Bucharest, February 3, 1939, F.O. 371/23831 R826/113/37; Conversation between Leith-Ross and Tilea, February 2, 1939, F. O. 371/23831 R827/113/37; Conversation between Cadogan and Tilea, February 1, 1939, F. O. 371/23831 R858/113/37; Conversation between Hudson and Tilea, February 22, 1939, F. O. 371/23832 R1342/113/37.

37. Martin Gilbert; Richard Gott, *The Appeasers* (Boston, 1963), 233; William Rock, *Appeasement on Trial* (New York, 1966), 203-211.

38. Aster, 1939, 29-35; *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945* (ed. David Dilks, New York, 1971), 157; L. S. Amery, *My Political Life* (London, 1955), III, 307-308.

39. *British Foreign Policy*, IV, 284.

requested that Britain loan Romania ten million pounds for the purchase of war materials. This time Sargent was worried. Without promising anything though, Sargent explained that his proposals raised “questions of high policy”, and that he would contact Lord Halifax.

At 6 a.m. on the following morning Tilea received “a mysterious telephone call from Paris”. The caller, whose voice Tilea immediately recognized, informed him of the details of the economic demands the Germans had made on Romania⁴⁰. Later that morning he received a telegram from Bucharest telling him to warn the British of the potentially grave consequences to all European nations of the growing belief that Hitler was the sole arbiter of their fate⁴¹.

That afternoon Tilea rushed back to the Foreign Office. This time he spoke to Lord Halifax. In order to convince the British of the urgency of the situation, Tilea backed up what he had said to Sargent the day before with his own private information on the German-Romanian negotiations. He told the Foreign Minister that during the last few days the Germans asked his government “to grant them a monopoly of Roumanian exports” as well as adopt other economic measures which would restrict their industrial production in the interest of Germany. In return Germany would guarantee Romania’s frontiers. “This seemed to the Roumanian Government something very much like an ultimatum”. Tilea then stated that it “was of the utmost importance” that the British “should consider with all urgency whether they could give a precise indication of the action they would take in the event of Roumania being a victim of German aggression”. In stressing the urgency of the situation, Tilea warned that “it was by no means to be excluded that the German Government would make an almost immediate thrust upon Roumania”⁴².

Tilea’s ultimatum triggered a formidable change in British foreign policy. Within hours of his historic conversation with Halifax, the Foreign Office began to look for a way to protect Romania from aggression, which ultimately led to British and French guarantees to Romania, Poland, and Greece. In less than a month England largely reversed her traditional policy towards Eastern Europe, and became fatefully committed to defend these countries against Hitler.

One aspect of this that has continually puzzled historians has been the seemingly paradoxical impact that the fate of little Romania had on England’s foreign policy. Of course part of this is explained by the threat to Romania coming just after Hitler seized the rest of Czechoslovakia. Yet this is not the whole

40. *The Times*, London, November 20, 1968. Who this was is still unknown.

41. Viorica Moisuc, *Diplomația României și problema apărării suveranității și independenței naționale în perioada martie 1938-mai 1940* (București, 1971), 137-138.

42. *British Foreign Policy*, IV, 366-367.

story. As already shown after the mid-thirties Britain had become increasingly worried over the political future of Romania. A German takeover of Romania, or the establishment of a native fascist government within Romania with close ties to the Reich, would have further disrupted the disintegrating balance of power, and meant a loss to the West of a former ally and long time friend in South Eastern Europe. Moreover, London was very aware of the importance of Romanian oil to Germany, especially if a war should break out. On the day after Tilea saw Halifax the Chiefs of Staff told government officials that if Berlin controlled Romania's oil the effects of a wartime blockade would be largely nullified. They also pointed out that German domination of Romania would allow them to directly threaten Greece, Turkey, and the Eastern Mediterranean⁴³. In addition, the Foreign Office feared that Hitler intended to go to war, and that German activities in the East were a prelude to an attack in the West⁴⁴. This point helps to explain why the Foreign Office went ahead with its efforts to protect Romania even though officials soon came to question the veracity of the ultimatum.

Was there really an ultimatum? On 18 March Hoare notified London that the Romanian Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu told him that there "was not a word of truth in" Tilea's ultimatum claim⁴⁵. Two days later King Carol assured Hoare that "there had at no moment been" an ultimatum⁴⁶. At the same time, the Germans asserted that the ultimatum was "pure invention" and "deliberate mischief-making". Perhaps most important an ultimatum has never shown up in any archive to date.

If this is the truth of the matter, as the evidence indicates, where did the idea of an ultimatum come from? Did Tilea invent it, or was he acting on instructions from Bucharest? In a recent letter to this author Radu Florescu Sr., who at the time was the Counsellor of the Romanian Legation in London and acted as chargé d'affaires when Tilea was away, wrote: "There was no ultimatum". Tilea "called it an ultimatum" because of "his inexperience in handling diplomatic business"⁴⁷. Other evidence supports this. Before he left Bucharest for his London post, Tilea had received a broad mandate from King Carol to do all he could to bring the two nations closer together. On 20 March the British Minister to Romania informed the Foreign Office that he was "inclined to conclude that before leaving for London" Tilea had received from Carol "some sort of general instructions to use every effort to convince... H. M. Gov-

43. Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 160.

44. *British Foreign Policy*, IV, 615.

45. *Ibid.*, IV, 369-370.

46. *Ibid.*, IV, 398.

47. Letter, Radu Florescu Sr., to the author, June 25, 1976.

ernment of the necessities of the situation in South-Eastern Europe and that he set about his task with impulsive naïveté⁴⁸. This also agrees with the reports of the American Minister to Romania Franklin Mott Gunther, who around the beginning of April 1939 had several conversations with Tilea. Following these talks he notified the State Department that Tilea “admitted to me that he only followed his instructions without using the word ultimatum⁴⁹. Gafencu described it as an “excess of zeal”.

Tilea exaggerated. Part of this was because of his limited diplomatic experience. He frankly admitted to Gunther “that he was no diplomat⁵⁰. Still one cannot but wonder when considering Tilea’s personality if part of it was deliberate.

Unfortunately some of Tilea’s explanations of what happened conflict with each other⁵¹. In trying to justify his actions in the London Times of November 20th, 1968, Tilea stated that when he talked to Halifax on the 17th he did not talk of an actual ultimatum only of what amounted to a virtual ultimatum⁵². Regardless of the semantics, what he said was seen by the British as an ultimatum. Moreover, in several conversations during the days that followed he adamantly claimed there was an ultimatum, and refused to back down when cross-examined by the British⁵³.

Nevertheless, in order to present the entire picture it must be pointed out that Tilea was gravely worried about the future of his country as an independent state. Not only were the Germans exerting heavy pressure on Romania to sign the economic treaty, but also there was fear that an attack on Romania by Hungary and Germany was imminent⁵⁴. A few days before the Western Powers did practically nothing to stop Hitler from taking over the rest of Czechoslovakia. Would the same thing happen to Romania? A Romanian patriot, Tilea acted to save his country from a similar fate.

48. *British Foreign Policy*, IV, 399; Aster, 1939, 66-67.

49. Gunther to Secretary of State, April 5, 1939, State Department Dispatch, No. 834, 762.71/89, 3.

50. Gunther to Secretary of State, April 4, 1939, State Department Dispatch, No. 830, 762.71/87.

51. Moisuc, *Diplomația României*, 138-139.

52. *The Times*, London, November 20, 1968.

53. Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 160; *British Foreign Policy*, IV, 389.

54. Moisuc, “Politique extérieure de la Roumanie”, 331, 336-337; *British Foreign Policy*, IV, 421, 433; Leith-Ross to Secretary of State, March 22, 1939, F. O 371/23832 R2055/113/37. See also Mircea Malița, *Romanian Diplomacy: A Historical Survey* (Bucharest, 1970), 108; Conversation between Radu Irimescu and the Under-Secretary of State, March 27, 1939, State Department Memorandum, 762.71/71; Bullitt to Secretary of State, March 21, 1939, State Department Telegram, No. 530, 871.00/679.