

# The Third Reich and the Act of 23 August 1944

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THE EVENTS of 23 August 1944, namely, the overturn of the political regime led by Marshal Ion Antonescu, the de facto dissolution of the alliance between Romania and the Third Reich, as well as Romania joining the coalition of the United Nations, have definitely attracted over time the constant interest of Romanian and foreign historians, as demonstrated by the publication of a significant number of papers, studies, document collections, and memoirs of the political and military personalities involved, both Romanian and German, etc. If during the communist regime most historiographical studies published in Romania, and dealing directly or tangentially with the act of 23 August 1944, endeavored—with few notable exceptions<sup>1</sup>—to highlight, at the expense of falsifying the historical truth, the role played by the Romanian Communist Party in overturning Antonescu's regime, the situation would change radically following the events of December 1989. The end of the censorship imposed by the communist regime and the access of the scientific community to fundamental documentary sources created the premises necessary for approaching and analyz-

ing, on real scientific bases, research topics which were forbidden, ignored or distorted before 1989, including the act of 23 August 1944. Although the results of the investigation of this crucial and, at the same time, controversial event in the Romanian contemporary history have generated a wide range of opinions and interpretations,<sup>2</sup> a succinct examination of the historiographical papers published after December 1989 dealing with this matter reveals the fact that there are still numerous “missing pieces” concerning the preparation and implementation of the act of 23 August 1944. In addition to the notable absence from the historiographical debate of studies based on Soviet documentary sources, kept in the archives of the Russian Federation, which would allow historians to clarify certain extremely important aspects concerning the position adopted by the Kremlin in relation to the events in Romania, among the less investigated issues, in our opinion, there is the manner in which the leaders of the Third Reich were informed about the evolution of the internal situation in Romania during 1944, and the way in which the Nazi decision-makers led by Adolf Hitler interpreted the information received through different channels (diplomatic, military, secret services) and reacted on 23 August 1944 and during the following days.<sup>3</sup>

The political and military events occurred in the summer of 1944 had a determinant influence on the internal and international situation of Romania. The success of the Normandy landings of the Allies, the attacks launched by the Red Army on the Eastern Front (the Bagration and Lvov–Sandomierz operations of June–July 1944) and, finally, the severance by Turkey of the diplomatic relations with the Third Reich at the beginning of August 1944 came to increase the skepticism of the public opinion and of the Romanian political and military circles towards the benefits of continuing the alliance with Germany. On the other hand, the alarming evolution of the internal political situation in Romania, the mounting dissatisfaction with the policies of Antonescu’s regime, the chronic war fatigue visible in the Romanian society and the initial measures initiated by the democratic opposition with a view to withdrawing Romania from the war did not go unnoticed by the leaders of the Third Reich. Although the number of warnings received by Berlin during 1944 about the possibility of Romania withdrawing from the alliance with Germany increased exponentially, the reports drafted by the German services present in Romania, namely, the German Legation, the German Military Mission, the information services (OKW/Amt Ausland/Abwehr, Amt VI-SD Ausland) or the German Ethnic Group, generally included contradictory data and thus failed to offer a coherent image of the real situation in the country. Despite this shortcoming, the reports drafted by the German services in Romania contain two common political and military elements which largely foreshadow the evolution of Romanian–German relations in the summer of 1944 and especially the final events of August 1944.

**S**TARTING FROM the information in the German documentary sources consulted (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, Bundesarchiv Berlin, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg im Breisgau, Institut für Zeitgeschichte Munich, etc.), and from the existing specialized literature, in the following we will attempt to present succinctly and to analyze the evolution of the relationship between Romania and Germany in the period leading to the act of 23 August 1944, the information transmitted to Berlin by the German Legation in Bucharest, the German Military Mission, the leaders of the German Ethnic Group or by the two rival secret services—OKW/Amt Ausland/Abwehr and Amt VI-SD Ausland—concerning the internal situation in Romania, as well as to assess the way in which it was received in Berlin and, especially, to what extent it was taken into consideration in the decisions adopted by the leaders of the Third Reich as a response to the developments recorded in the internal political life of Romania.

Thus, in 1944 Berlin received through different communication channels genuine information about the actions initiated by the democratic opposition, the Royal House and, last but not least, the disgruntled elements within the Great General Headquarters, in order to remove the Antonescu regime from power and to conclude an armistice with the United Nations. However, the warnings failed to produce any concrete effects, as the leaders of the Third Reich constantly ignored them and seriously underestimated the ability of the democratic opposition to remove Marshal Ion Antonescu from power. This behavior can be explained by the unlimited confidence that Berlin and especially Hitler had in the leader of Romania. Most of the leaders of the Third Reich thought that as long as Marshal Ion Antonescu remained in charge of Romania there were no real reasons for concern for Germany. On the other hand, from a military point of view, the German services failed to correctly indicate the importance of the military factor in maintaining the stability of Antonescu's regime and, implicitly, the alliance with Germany. For example, in February 1944 the German Legation in Bucharest believed that as long as the military operations took place on the territory of Bessarabia, the Romanian Army would most likely resist. In exchange, if the Soviet troops crossed the Prut River and entered the Old Kingdom, it

*would probably mean, to the extent that German help would not be made available, the political and military collapse of Romania, even if there were an attempt at a last-minute peace treaty with England and America.<sup>4</sup>*

Another assessment of Romania's situation and attitude was performed during the same month by the "General Headquarters for the Liaison with Romania of

the German Navy—Marine-Verbindungsstab Rumänien,” based on the premise that the Marshal had a firm grip on power and there was no reason to doubt his loyalty towards Germany, even if his entourage was partially made up of Anglophile personalities. After presenting the position of the King, of the Army and of various political currents towards Antonescu’s regime and the alliance with Germany, the authors of the report reiterated the special importance of the Eastern Front for the Marshal’s position and the evolution of Romanian–German relations:

*If the evolution on the Eastern Front is not unfavorable and Turkey remains neutral, there is no danger of Romania deserting. But unless these premises are met, then we must expect Romania’s withdrawal from the war, if there are no changes in the composition of the current government at the appropriate time.<sup>5</sup>*

Even the invasion of the Romanian territory by the Red Army during the offensive operations of March 1944 did not seem to affect, in the opinion of the German military leaders, the position of the Head of the Romanian General Headquarters and the attitude of the public opinion, as the head of the German Military Mission, General of the Cavalry Erik Hansen, communicated to the OKW on 2 April 1944 that the Marshal’s will to fight was “unshaken,” and 3 days later the OKW representative, Fritz Poleck, a colonel with the General Headquarters, who had travelled to Romania on a work mission, reported to his superiors that “Romania is not failing, but it will continue to take part in the increased war efforts.”<sup>6</sup> Berlin received similar information also from the Abwehr and, after it was subordinated to the SS and integrated in February 1944 within the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (The Central Security Office of the Reich) (RSHA), from the new German information structure—the Militärisches Amt. For example, a report drafted by Militärisches Amt on 5 August 1944 states that:

*As before, the instruments of political power are exclusively in the hands of the Marshal and of the Romanian Army. The opposition is not supported by any movement willing to fight and capable of taking the power away from the Marshal.<sup>7</sup>*

Even after the last high-level meeting between Adolf Hitler and Ion Antonescu, which took place in Rastenburg on 5 August 1944 and ended without the clarification Berlin was hoping for, given that the Marshal failed to provide a conclusive answer on the matter of continuing the war as an ally of Nazi Germany,<sup>8</sup> the Führer and his close collaborators were convinced that they had managed to convince the leader of Romania to remain an ally of the Reich. This convic-

tion, incomprehensible at first sight and which lasted until the coup d'état of 23 August 1944, can be explained by the personal confidence that Adolf Hitler<sup>9</sup> placed in Marshal Ion Antonescu, and by the reports submitted by the German authorities in Bucharest in August 1944, which highlighted the fact that the meeting with the Führer and the stabilization of the military situation on the Eastern Front had restored the faith of the Romanian leader in Germany's ability to redress the situation on the various war theaters, being convinced to remain an ally of the Reich<sup>10</sup> until the very end. Nevertheless, the decisive factor which ultimately determined Romania's attitude was the military situation in the southern part of the Eastern Front, which was recognized and underlined in the reports submitted to the hierarchy in Berlin by the representatives of the Reich accredited in Romania. In this respect, the conclusion expressed by the German military attaché, Major General Karl Spalcke, a short time before the coup d'état, is quite telling:

*The situation on the Eastern Front and, particularly, the resistance of Army Group South [Ukraine] is and remains the decisive element for Romania's attitude.*<sup>11</sup>

If the reports drafted by the representatives of the different German services (OKW, Auswärtiges Amt, Militärisches Amt) attempted to present the situation in Romania in an optimistic light, overestimating the political stability of Antonescu's regime and underestimating the role of the democratic opposition, the evaluations of the leaders of the German Ethnic Group led by Andreas Schmidt described the situation in Romania in a much somber light. Although at the beginning of 1944 Andreas Schmidt's position at the head of the German Ethnic Group was seriously eroded as a result of his totalitarian leadership style,<sup>12</sup> his reports to Berlin painted an image much closer to the real situation in Romania. Using information from a network made up mainly of SD officers of German ethnicity, which covered practically the entire territory of the country and which was very effective,<sup>13</sup> during 1944 the leaders of the German Ethnic Group provided to the Third Reich very critical reports about the policies promoted by Antonescu's regime. Despite the presence of certain ideological and racial clichés—such as the alleged influence of Jews over the evolution of political life in Romania—these reports show a good knowledge of the state of mind in Romania as well as of the backstage actions undertaken by the main political and military factors in the government and the opposition, particularly the armistice talks with the Allies and the USSR.

Thus, Andreas Schmidt identified two opposing tendencies, which, in his opinion, were present in the policies promoted by the Romanian government and the Vice-president of the Council of Ministers, Mihai Antonescu. While the

Romanian leader was considered an advocate of the collaboration with Germany and of continuing the war, Mihai Antonescu was seen as the main exponent of the circles which struggled to “sabotage” the Marshal’s political line, with the aim of leaving the alliance with the Third Reich and withdrawing Romania from the war. The leader of the German Ethnic Group believed that the developments on the Eastern Front were especially important for Romania’s future attitude towards maintaining the alliance with Germany and continuing the war,<sup>14</sup> an opinion constantly reiterated in the previously mentioned reports submitted to Berlin in the spring and summer of 1944. For example, in a note from the end of July–beginning of August 1944 he states that:

*In these notes, the political situation is characterized, overall, as stable, in the sense that only a change in the military situation in the southern sector of the Eastern Front could lead to political changes in Romania.*<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Andreas Schmidt did more than just submit the abovementioned reports. Alarmed by the evolution of the situation in Romania, around 10 August 1944 the leader of the German Ethnic Group went in person to Hitler’s general headquarters in Eastern Prussia to personally present the situation in Romania to the leaders of the Reich. Received in audience by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop, Andreas Schmidt drew his attention to the seriousness of the political situation in Romania, requesting that adequate measures be adopted. After the meeting, Joachim von Ribbentrop sent a telegram to the German Legation in Bucharest requesting them to check the information concerning the imminent defection of Romania. In his answer—dating probably from 15 August 1944—the plenipotentiary minister Manfred von Killinger qualified these statements as “vicious rumors” and claimed that there was no doubt about Romania’s loyalty.<sup>16</sup> Andreas Schmidt appointed Fritz Cloos, head of department in the German Ethnic Group and leader of the organization of German workers in Romania, to inform Manfred von Killinger during the audience of 16 August 1944 about the tense internal situation. The German plenipotentiary minister ignored this warning as well, claimed that “the situation was under control” and gave assurances that all the necessary measures had been taken. “We must not lose our calm”—Manfred von Killinger said to his interlocutor.<sup>17</sup> This shows that Berlin was informed in general about the political evolution in Romania and about the initiatives aimed at leaving the alliance with Germany and withdrawing from the war. Nevertheless, in most cases the data obtained were contradictory, unable to offer a unitary and convincing image of the real intentions of the decision-making circles in Romania. Even when the German services—such as the leaders of the German Ethnic Group headed

by Andreas Schmidt—received genuine information about the possibility of Romania's defection, the leaders of the Third Reich ignored it, and continued inexplicably to hold the conviction that for as long as Marshal Ion Antonescu was the leader there was no reason to worry.

Consequently, the events which occurred in Bucharest were a complete surprise for Adolf Hitler, the OKW and the Auswärtiges Amt, on the one hand, and the German authorities in Romania, on the other. Gathered in the building of the German Legation in Bucharest after learning the first news about the arrest of Marshal Ion Antonescu and his main collaborators, and about the intention of the new government to sign an armistice with the United Nations, the main representatives of the Reich in Romania came up with two scenarios based on their perception of the events in Bucharest, namely, the German reaction, and the offer of the Romanian government to grant 15 days to the German troops to withdraw from Romania. Seriously underestimating the importance, magnitude, and consequences of the events in progress, Lieutenant General Alfred Gerstenberg considered that the coup d'état had been the work of a small group, headed by the king, without the support of the population and of the army. Therefore, he was in favor of squashing the putsch and arresting its authors. In this respect, he proposed an air raid over the capital and sending the 5<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Artillery Division stationed in Ploiești to occupy Bucharest.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, General Erik Hansen, Admiral Werner Tillesen, General Karl Spalcke and members of the diplomatic corps believed that the coup d'état was supported by the public opinion and the army and, thus, the conditions offered by the Romanians should be accepted.<sup>19</sup> Adolf Hitler, informed about the events in the Romanian capital through the royal proclamation and the report of the head of the General Headquarters of the Luftwaffe, Aviation General Werner Kreipe, opted for the solution proposed by Alfred Gerstenberg, ordering the army on the night of 23/24 August 1944 to squash the putsch, to occupy the capital and to form a government led by a pro-German general, if Marshal Ion Antonescu was no longer available.<sup>20</sup> Also, the Führer subordinated all the authorities, the leading echelons and the German troops—Wehrmacht and SS—on the Romanian territory to the high command of Army Group South Ukraine.<sup>21</sup>

**S**HORTLY AFTER Adolf Hitler and the OKW—misinformed about the real situation in Bucharest by Lieutenant-General Alfred Gerstenberg—issued the order to squash the putsch and specified the details of the armed intervention, around 2 a.m., generals Erik Hansen and Alfred Gerstenberg, accompanied by the counselor of the Legation, Gerhard Stelzer, headed to the Palace to discuss with the Prime Minister, General Constantin Sănătescu, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigore Niculescu-Buzești about the possibility



of withdrawing the German troops from the Romanian territory. After a “cold, but fair” reception, the Prime Minister informed them that Romania had to seek an armistice and repeated the offer of free passage for the German troops, if they refrained from any hostilities.

Following a consultation over the phone with the German Legation, Erik Hansen and Alfred Gerstenberg agreed to convey the offer of the Romanian government to the German leadership. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigore Niculescu-Buzești complained again that the German troops had opened fire in the Băneasa area, General Alfred Gerstenberg expressed his willingness—with the permission of the Romanian authorities—to go there in order to secure a ceasefire. After arriving in the German camp, Alfred Gerstenberg broke his promise, arrested the Romanian officers who accompanied him, Colonel Valeriu Șelescu and Captain Bogdan Florescu, and ordered the execution of the last preparations for the operations to occupy the capital, which would start at 7.30.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, having returned to the Legation building, at around 3.00 a.m. General Erik Hansen send a radiogram to the head of the General Headquarters of the OKW, Colonel General Alfred Jodl, in which he presented the real situation in Bucharest and insisted against the planned actions which, considering the existing ratio of forces, he considered unpromising.<sup>23</sup> The same point of view was repeated insistently by Erik Hansen also in subsequent phone conversations with Colonel General Jodl (around 3.30 a.m.),<sup>24</sup> and with the leaders of Army Group South Ukraine (around 4.05 a.m.).<sup>25</sup> As expected, the efforts made by General Erik Hansen in order to convince Berlin to accept the offer of the Romanian government remained futile. According to his testimony, Colonel General Jodl “listened to my explanations in silence, and at the end he stated that ‘I will report adequately to the Führer.’”<sup>26</sup> However, Hitler maintained his decision to occupy the capital and to squash the putsch, which was reconfirmed by telephone to Army Group South Ukraine in the morning of 24 August 1944 (at 5.00 a.m.) by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel.<sup>27</sup> Shortly after this communication (at 5.10 a.m.), the order to initiate the German riposte was conveyed to Colonel General Alfred Gerstenberg, on the outskirts of the capital, who continued to be optimistic about the chances of success of the mission. Persuaded that “the new Romanian government was only a small group that ‘were wetting their pants’ and that Bucharest was defended only by a very thin layer of Romanian troops,” he ordered the attack at 7.30 a.m.<sup>28</sup>

However, the German riposte was late and unrealistic. Because of the delay, of the insufficient preparation, and especially because they had seriously underestimated the potential of the Romanian Army and there was a lack of German troops with experience on the battlefield, the operations aimed at occupying the capital and squashing the putsch were destined to fail from the very beginning.



In fact, from the very first hours, the attack led by General Alfred Gerstenberg was met with the fierce resistance of the Romanian troops—well prepared and supplied with ammunition and weapons, including German tanks recently delivered by the Reich—under the command of General Iosif Teodorescu.<sup>29</sup> Thus, after some initial progress, the attack was soon stopped in the northern part of the Capital. At 11.30 a.m. General Gerstenberg reported over the phone to the leaders of Army Group South Ukraine that “the resistance is very strong and we cannot enter the city,” requesting that new troops be sent and increased air support.<sup>30</sup> The Luftwaffe had already attacked 150 points in the Capital around 11 a.m., but their effects were contrary to the expectations of the German authorities. As compared to the damages caused by the Allied aviation in the interval April–August 1944, the bombardment of the Luftwaffe—even if it hit important objectives, such as the Royal Palace or the building of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers—did not cause significant material damage or human losses, but politically it represented a serious mistake, as it increased the anti-German feelings of the public opinion and offered the Romanian authorities a pretext to declare war on the Third Reich on 25 August 1944.<sup>31</sup>

The coup d'état of 23 August 1944 and Romania's withdrawal from the alliance with the Third Reich accelerated the end of the hostilities on the southern sector of the Eastern Front, the situation of Army Group South Ukraine quickly becoming catastrophic. Because the Romanian Army carried out without hesitation the royal proclamation—which stipulated a ceasefire on the Eastern Front—and abandoned its positions, many German units were soon encircled, captured or destroyed by the Red Army. Thus, on 24 August 1944, Soviet units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Fronts met in Leova, surrounding 5 general commands and 16 divisions of the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army, which were captured or destroyed.<sup>32</sup> Severe human and material losses were also suffered by the Luftwaffe, the Kriegsmarine, and other German services. For example, the German Fourth Air Fleet reported a number of 16,130 wounded or missing soldiers (officers, under-officers, troops, and administrative staff).<sup>33</sup> According to the official data communicated by the Soviet General Headquarters on 13 September 1944, the German losses were estimated at 256,000 people, with 150,000 dead and 106,000 prisoners. According to the same data, the German war material captured or destroyed was also impressive: 330 planes, 830 tanks, 3,500 canons, and 35,000 vehicles. Last, but not least, the total losses suffered by the Romanian and German troops amounted to 610,000 soldiers.<sup>34</sup> Even if the numbers offered by the Soviet sources are undoubtedly exaggerated, we can state with certainty that the human and material losses suffered by Army Group South Ukraine after the Iași–Chișinău operation and Romania's withdrawal from the alliance with Germany were extremely high.

This immense defeat cannot be ascribed exclusively to the coup d'état of 23 August 1944 and to Romania's withdrawal from the war. As explained by former German military leaders more or less involved in the events taking place on the Romanian theater of war, the delayed and incorrect measures adopted by the decision makers within the Reich are also to be blamed. As evidence, we believe that it is enough to mention the weakening of the military potential of Army Group South Ukraine in the eve of the Soviet offensive, as almost all of its tank divisions were transferred to other sectors of the front, the failure of the German intelligence services to learn the exact details of the plans aimed at removing Marshal Ion Antonescu from power, the errors of the leaders of Army Group South Ukraine during the military operations and, last but not least, underestimating the consequences and the support of the public opinion, of the political class and of the army for King Michael I's action. Could Army Group South Ukraine have been able to successfully resist for a longer period on the fortified line Focșani–Nămoloasa–Galați, even until “the occupation of Berlin,” as some German historiographical studies<sup>35</sup> claim, thus avoiding the occupation of the entire national territory and of the Balkan states by the Red Army? Taking into consideration the ratio of forces on the Romanian front in the summer of 1944, namely, the total air supremacy of the Allies,<sup>36</sup> we believe that the German and Romanian armies had absolutely no chance to resist on the Focșani–Nămoloasa–Galați defensive line.

**F**OR THE Third Reich, the political, economic, and military consequences of Romania's defection were devastating. From a political point of view, for Berlin the act of 23 August meant losing an ally and gaining a new enemy. In addition, the step taken by Romania considerably influenced the attitude of the other allies/satellites of Germany, namely, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland, and Slovakia. From an economic point of view, the loss of the oilfields around Ploiești led to a dramatic decrease in the quantity of fuel supplied to the German war machine. Thus, according to a report submitted to the OKW on 13 October 1944, after the loss of the oilfields, fuel production as compared to April 1944—the last “normal” month before the start of the bombardments of the Allied aviation—had decreased by 95% for kerosene, 61% for gasoline, and 40% for Diesel fuel!<sup>37</sup> In short, the military losses incurred by Army Group South Ukraine represented a major obstacle for the potential of the German war machine. Thus, in the interval 1 January–1 December 1944 the German Land Army (including the Waffen ss) lost 88 divisions, the number of newly created or recomposed ones being estimated at 110.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, a sketchy estimate reveals that around 1/5 of the total losses of the German army in 1944 were due to the military disaster experienced by Army Group South Ukraine in

Romania. To these losses one should also add the fact that the German positions in the Balkans were annihilated, which forced the OKW to withdraw the German troops from Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia. All of these facts fully confirm the historians' opinion that the defeat of Army Group South Ukraine in Romania represented for the Wehrmacht a second Stalingrad.<sup>39</sup> For that matter, in the course of a subsequent conversation between Adolf Hitler and Ante Pavelić (18 September 1944), the Führer himself would name three major crises which the Wehrmacht had had to deal with in 1944: the Normandy landings, the fall of Army Group Center and, last but not least, "Romania's betrayal" on 23 August 1944.<sup>40</sup>



## Notes

1. See A. Simion, *Preliminarii politico-diplomatice ale insurecției române din august 1944* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1979), 421 sq.; Fl. Constantiniu, "Însemnările unui agent secret britanic în ajunul insurecției române din august 1944" (I–II), *Revista de istorie* 35, 1 (1982): 161–170; 35, 5–6 (1982): 735–739; Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *România și organizarea postbelică a lumii 1945–1947* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1988), 24–58; Gh. Buzatu, *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988), 145–190, 229–304; Ioan Chiper, "Actul istoric de la 23 August 1944 în contextul politicii marilor puteri față de România" (I–II), *Revista de istorie* 42, 9 (1989): 927–944; 42, 10 (1989): 1019–1034.
2. From the rich literature published after 1989 about the act of 23 August 1944, see especially Ion Șuța, *România la cumpăna istoriei: August '44* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1991); Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu and Ion Pătroi, *Anglia și România între anii 1939–1947* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1992), 217 sq.; Gh. Buzatu, *România și Războiul Mondial din 1939–1945* (Iași: Centrul de Istorie și Civilizație Europeană, 1995), 145–256; Apostol Stan, *Iuliu Maniu: Naționalism și democrație: Biografia unui mare român* (Bucharest: Editura Saeculum I.O., 1997), 412 sq.; Gh. Buzatu, *O istorie a petrolului românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), 366 sq.; Alesandru Dușu, *Între Wehrmacht și Armata Roșie: Relații de comandament româno-germane și româno-sovietice (1941–1945)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2000), 214 sq.; Gh. Buzatu, *România și Marile Puteri (1939–1947)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 351–402; Gh. Buzatu and Dana Beldiman, *23 august 1939–23 august 1944: România și proba bumerangului* (Bucharest: Editura Mica Valahie, 2003); Traia Udrea, *23 August 1944: Controverse istorico-politice: Studiu istoriografic* (Bucharest: Editura Alex Alex, 2004); Gavriil Preda, ed., *23 august 1944: Legende și adevăr: Controverse și evaluări. Studii și comunicări prezentate la Simpozionul Științific 23 August în Ploiești și Valea Pra-*

- bovei, Ploiești, 22 august 2005* (Bucharest: Editura Evenimentul și Capital, 2005); Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940–44* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Elena Iuliana Lache, *Statutul internațional al României de la război la pace 1939–1947* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2010), 260–274; Petre Otu, *Pace și război în spațiul românesc: Secolul al XX-lea* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2010), 290–301; Ottmar Trașcă, *Relațiile politico-militare româno-germane: Septembrie 1940–august 1944* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2013), 619–698.
3. A notable exception in this respect is represented by the papers and studies authored by Eugen Bantea, Ioan Chiper, as well as by Tiberiu Coliban and Nicolae Jurcă. See Eugen Bantea, *Insurecția română în jurnalul de război al grupului de armate german "Ucraina de sud"* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1974); Ioan Chiper, "Surse germane despre misiunea Chastelain în România," *Revista de istorie* 35, 12 (1982): 1339–1351; id., "Situația politică din România în primăvara și vara anului 1944 în lumina unor documente germane," *Revista de istorie* 37, 6 (1984): 518–533; id., "În culisele adversarului: capacitatea de reacție a Germaniei față de evoluția situației din România în ajunul lui 23 august 1944," *Revista de istorie* 37, 8 (1984): 782–792; Tiberiu Coliban and Nicolae Jurcă, "Actul de la 23 August 1944 în documente din arhivele vest-germane," *Cymidava* 14 (1989): 259–290.
  4. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin (hereafter cited as PAAAB), R 29711, Büro des Staatssekretärs-Rumänien, vol. 15, 1 November 1943–30 April 1944, E. 187204–187205, Telegramm Nr. 520 der deutschen Gesandtschaft in Bukarest vom 15.02.1944, gez. Manfred von Killinger.
  5. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg im Breisgau (hereafter cited as BMF), RM 35 III/173, Bericht des Marine-Verbindungsstabes Rumänien vom 05.02.1944 über Lage und Stimmung in Rumänien.
  6. Percy Ernst Schramm in collab. with Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Andreas Hillgruber, and Walther Hubatsch, eds., *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*, vol. 4, *1 Januar 1944–12 Mai 1945*, introduced and explained by Percy Ernst Schramm (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1961), 774–775.
  7. Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (Central Historical National Archives of Romania) (hereafter cited as ANIC), Bucharest, coll. Microfilme SUA—Documente germane microfilmate la Alexandria/Virginia (USA microfilms—German documents microfilmed at Alexandria/Virginia), rolls 59, fols. 5631433–5631434, Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, Wehrmachtführungsstab, Amtsgruppe Ausland, OKW/988.2. Bericht des Militärischen Amtes des Reichsicherheitshauptamtes vom 05.08.1944 über die innerpolitische Lage in Rumänien.
  8. For the high-level German–Romanian meetings of 5 August 1944 see BMF, RH 2—Generalstab des Heeres—/2911, fols. 11–14, Bericht über die Reise mit dem Königlichen Rumänischen Militärattache ins Führerhauptquartier, anlässlich des Staatsbesuches des Marschalls Ion Antonescu am 05-06.08.1944; *Antonescu–Hitler: Corespondență și întâlniri inedite (1940–1944)*, edited by Vasile Arimia, Ion Ardeleanu, Ștefan Lache, coord. by Florin Constantiniu, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Cozia, 1991), document no. 83, pp. 166–176; document no. 86, pp. 195–204;

- Sebastian Balta, *Rumänien und die Großmächte in der Ära Antonescu (1940–1944)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 401–407.
9. For Adolf Hitler, “Romania was Marshal Antonescu and vice versa.” PAAAB, R 29704, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Rumänien, vol. 9, 1 April–30 June 1942, E.159619–159621, Telegramm Nr. 1524 der deutschen Gesandtschaft in Bukarest vom 22.04.1942, gez. Manfred von Killinger; Balta, 469.
  10. BMF, RH 2—Generalstab des Heeres -/2911, fol. 24, Bericht des Militärattachés Bukarest Nr. 404/44 gKdos. vom 08.08.1944; RW 5—Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Amt Ausland/Abwehr -/470, Bericht des Militärattachés Bukarest Nr. 483/44 gKdos. vom 14.08.1944, gez. Karl Spalcke. See also Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinkel Verlag, 1951), 331.
  11. BMF, RW 5—Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Amt Ausland/Abwehr -/470, Bericht des Militärattachés in Bukarest Nr. 483/44 gKdos. vom 14.08.1944, gez. Karl Spalcke.
  12. PAAAB, R 29711, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Rumänien, vol. 15, 1 November 1943–30 April 1944, E 187415–187420, Bericht Nr. 13/44 geh. des deutschen Konsulats Kronstadt vom 03.04.1944 betreffend Volksgruppenführer Andreas Schmidt, gez. Wilhelm Rodde.
  13. See Ottmar Trașcă, “Die Deutsche Volksgruppe und die Tätigkeit des Amtes VI des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes (SD-Ausland) in Rumänien 1940–1944,” in *Nationalsozialismus und Regionalbewusstsein im östlichen Europa*, edited by Burkhard Olschowsky and Ingo Loose (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 269–289.
  14. PAAAB, R 101118, Inland II geheim, vol. 427, Berichte und Meldungen zur Lage in und über Rumänien 1944–1945, E. 393363. Inland II 1634 g. Aufzeichnung über die politische Atmosphäre in Rumänien.
  15. Ibid.
  16. Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu: Relațiile germano-române 1938–1944*, edited and bio-bibliographical study by Stelian Neagoie (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 396, n. 20.
  17. Michael Kroner, “Ahnungslosigkeit oder Hochverrat? Manfred von Killinger in Bukarest 1941–1944,” *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter* 43, 2 (1994): 128.
  18. See the note of 23 August 1944 from the personal diary of aviation General Werner Kreipe: “Telephone conversation with Manfred von Killinger (Plenipotentiary Minister) and Alfred Gerstenberg (Luftwaffe Attaché) in Bucharest. Both of them locked in the building of the Legation. Killinger, completely devastated, sends his regards to the Führer. Gerstenberg’s proposal concerning the use of the Stuka and of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Division, he wants to occupy the city! Telephone conversation with Hitler, who supports Gerstenberg’s proposals. He requests the arrest of the King. The telephone connection with Bucharest was restored again and then interrupted.” Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, F 29-Persönliches Kriegstagebuch des Generals des Fliegers Werner Kreipe als Chef des Generalstabes der Luftwaffe für die Zeit vom 22.07–02.11.1944. Eintragung vom 23.08.1944; BMF, RL 7–4—Luftflottenkommando 4 -/485, fols. 7–8, Bericht der Luftflotte 4 an OKL über Vertrat und Rückzug aus Rumänien vom 11.02.1945.

19. Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, zs 1130, General der Kavallerie Erik Hansen, *Antworten in erweiterter Berichtform auf eine Anfrage des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte-München (Br/be vom 21.01.1956)*, gez. Erik Hansen, fol. 97; PAAAB, Nachlass Fritz Gebhard Schellhorn, Aufzeichnung über die Ereignisse während meiner Tätigkeit als Leiter des Deutschen Konsulats in Czernowitz, in Jassy, wieder in Czernowitz und der Konsularabteilung der Gesandtschaft in Bukarest. Mai 1934–August 1944, Tübingen, den 30. Juni 1961, gez. Dr. Fritz Gebhard Schellhorn, Generalkonsul außer Dienst, fols. 78–79.
20. The order issued by Hitler had the following content: “Führer’s Order: Immediately arrest the camarilla of traitors; stifle any possible rebellion. Form a new government headed by a philo-German General. I empower General Gerstenberg to ensure the execution in agreement with the German Plenipotentiary Minister. All available German forces are at your disposal. Communicate immediately if you have enough resources.” *23 August 1944: Documente 1944*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), document no. 690, pp. 451–452; BMF, RH 19 V—Heeresgruppe Süd-ukraine –/36, fol. 57, Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe Süd-ukraine, Eintragung vom 24.08.1944; Schramm et al., 4/1: 805; Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, zs 163, Ivo Thilo von Trotha, “Kämpfe der Heeresgruppe Süd-Ukraine (später Süd) von 20.08.1944 (Beginn des russischen Einbruchs nach Rumänien)-November 1944 (Verteidigung Budapests),” fol. 16; PAAAB, Nachlass Fritz Gebhard Schellhorn, fol. 78.
21. Schramm et al., 4/1: 805; Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, zs 163, von Trotha, “Kämpfe der Heeresgruppe Süd-Ukraine,” fol. 16.
22. Constantin Sănătescu, *Jurnal*, with a foreword by Simona Ghițescu-Sănătescu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 166, note from 24.08.1944; Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, zs 1130, General der Kavallerie Erik Hansen, *Antworten in erweiterter Berichtform*, fols. 98–99; *Diplomați germani la București 1937–1944: Din memoriile dr. Rolf Pusch, atașat de legatie, și dr. Gerhard Stelzer, consilier de legatie*, translated by Ileana Sturdza and Cristian Scarlat, edited with notes, index and selection of the illustrative material by Cristian Scarlat (Bucharest: All Educational, 2001), 196. According to the statements of the German General Fritz Gebhard Schellhorn, who in the last 2 years spent as a Russian prisoner shared a cell with Lieutenant General Alfred Gerstenberg, the latter assured him repeatedly that he had acted on the orders he had received and he had arrested the officer who accompanied him because he was threatened by the Romanian troops. See also PAAAB, Nachlass Fritz Gebhard Schellhorn, fols. 79–80.
23. “. . . The preparations were performed according to the order received on 23.8, at 23.45, to the extent that this was possible. However, in agreement with the German Plenipotentiary Minister, I inform you that this is not the putsch of the palace camarilla, but a well-planned coup d’état, announced to the population and the troops on the radio. The measure is supported by the majority of the population. There is no general who is against the King and wants to form a new government, because they are all faithful to the King. Extensive isolation measures were implemented against all German services and troops in Bucharest. The transmission of orders has become practically impossible. At the moment the ratio of forces fails to



provide any perspectives of a military or political success. . . . signed Erik Hansen.” BMF, RL 7-4—Luftflottenkommando 4 -/485, fol. 28, Funkspruch des Deutschen Generals bei der Oberkommando der Rumänischen Wehrmacht vom 24.08.1944, 02.58. Uhr.

24. Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, zs 1130, General der Kavallerie Erik Hansen, *Antworten in erweiterter Berichtform*, fol. 99.
25. BMF, RH 19 V—Heeresgruppe Südukraine -/36, fol. 58, Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe Südukraine, Eintragung vom 24.08.1944.
26. Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, zs 1130, General der Kavallerie Erik Hansen, *Antworten in erweiterter Berichtform*, fol. 100.
27. BMF, RH 19 V—Heeresgruppe Südukraine -/36, fols. 58–59, Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe Südukraine, Eintragung vom 24.08.1944.
28. BMF, RH 19 V—Heeresgruppe Südukraine -/36, fol. 59, Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe Südukraine, Eintragung vom 24.08.1944.
29. BMF, RL 7-4—Luftflottenkommando 4-/485, fols. 12–13; Schramm et al., 4/1: 806; Hillgruber, 260.
30. BMF, RH 19 V—Heeresgruppe Südukraine -/36, fol. 59, Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe Südukraine, Eintragung vom 24.08.1944; Schramm et al., 4/1: 807.
31. PAAAB, Nachlass Fritz Gebhard Schellhorn, fol. 80; Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, zs 163, von Trotha, “Kämpfe der Heeresgruppe Süd-Ukraine,” fol. 16; Schramm et al., 4/1: 806–808; Hillgruber, 260–261; *Diplomați germani la București*, 196.
32. “After collecting all of the dispersed elements, the following Army Corps Headquarters and Divisions have to be considered destroyed: Gen. Kdo. IV., VII., XXX., XXXIV., LII., A.K.; 9., 62., 79., 106., 161., 257., 258., 282., 294., 302., 306., 320., 335., 370., 376., 384. Inf. Div.” BMF, RH 19 V—Heeresgruppe Südukraine -/98, fol. 23, Fernschreiben der Heeresgruppe Südukraine an OKH/Gen. St. d. Heeres, Nr. 3648/g.Kdos. vom 22.09.1944, gez. Helmuth von Grolmann; RW 4—Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Wehrmachtführungsstab -/845. Zustand der Divisionen der Heeresgruppe Südukraine nach Wochenmeldung. Stand: 04.09.1944. See also Guderian, 333; Klaus Schönherr, *Luptele Wehrmachtului în România 1944*, translated from German by Elena Matei, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised and expanded (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2015), 161–172; Hillgruber, 263. The losses reported by Army Group South Ukraine do not include the 76<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division, almost completely destroyed, while the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and the 13<sup>th</sup> Armored Division also suffered heavy losses. See Hans Kissel, *Die Katastrophe in Rumänien* (Darmstadt: Wehr und Wissen Verlagsgesellschaft, 1964), 153.
33. Kissel, 153.
34. Kissel, 153.
35. See Kissel, 160.
36. In a top-secret report addressed to Auswärtiges Amt on 19 August 1944, Plenipotentiary Minister Manfred von Killinger launched a final desperate appeal, showing that the defense of the oilfields could not cope with the airstrikes of the Allied aviation. He argued that on 18 August 1944, only 50 German and Romanian fighter planes were



available for the fight against 1,100 enemy planes and warned that: “if no superior fighter planes and air-defense artillery are made available, the oilfields will not be kept in operation.” PAAAB, R 27801, Handakten Ritter, Akten betreffend Rumänien, 1944, E 370518, Telegramm Nr. S. 57 der deutschen Gesandtschaft in Bukarest vom 19.08.1944, gez. Manfred von Killinger. The specialized literature convincingly demonstrated that the Romanian anti-aircraft defense, especially in the oilfields, was literally overwhelmed by the Allied aviation in the interval April–August 1944. See Aurel Pentelescu, *Aeronautica română pe Frontul de Est (1941–1944)* (Bucharest: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare “Carol I,” 2006), 178–186.

37. BMF, RW 19—Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt -/3168, Beitrag zum Monatsbericht vom 13.10.1944, geheim.
38. BMF, RH 2—Generalstab des Heeres -/1387, fol. 4, Verluste und Zugänge von Division Verbänden vom 01.01–31.12.1944 (Heer und Waffen ss).
39. B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), 585; Kissel, 152.
40. Andreas Hillgruber, ed., *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler*, 2<sup>nd</sup> part., *Vetrauliche Aufzeichnungen über Unterredungen mit Vertretern des Auslandes 1942–1944* (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1970), document no. 66, p. 511.

## Abstract

### The Third Reich and the Act of 23 August 1944

In 1944 Berlin received through different communication channels genuine information about the actions initiated by the democratic opposition, the Royal House and, last but not least, the disgruntled elements within the Great General Headquarters in order to remove the Antonescu regime from power and to conclude an armistice with the United Nations. However, the warnings failed to produce any concrete effects, as the leaders of the Third Reich constantly ignored them and seriously underestimated the ability of the democratic opposition to remove Marshal Ion Antonescu from power. For the Third Reich, the political, economic and military consequences of Romania’s defection were devastating. From a political point of view, for Berlin the act of 23 August meant losing an ally and gaining a new enemy. In addition, the step taken by Romania considerably influenced the attitude of the other allies/satellites of Germany, namely, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland, and Slovakia. From an economic point of view, the loss of the oilfields around Ploiești led to a dramatic decrease in the quantity of fuel supplied to the German war machine. The Führer himself would name three major crises with which the Wehrmacht had had to deal in 1944: the Normandy landings, the fall of Army Group Center and, last but not least, “Romania’s betrayal” on 23 August 1944.

## Keywords

Romania, Third Reich, Ion Antonescu, 23 August 1944 coup d’état