

Serbian/Yugoslav-Romanian Relations and Interactions in the 20th Century

**Edited by
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The United Kingdom and Romanian-Yugoslav Relations in the 1950s¹

Abstract: During the war and the early post-war years, the United Kingdom was highly active in Yugoslavia and Romania, through its intelligence services or diplomatic missions. This is another reason for London to closely monitor the development of relations between the two countries in Southeast Europe in the 1950s. Based on unpublished British documents, the present study analyses how the tense relationship between the two neighbouring communist countries was perceived at the Foreign Office. Despite being geographically close, Romania and Yugoslavia held opposing ideological positions.

Keywords: Josip Broz Tito, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Yugoslavia, Romania, Cominform, United Kingdom

Romania was directly involved in what was to be called the „Tito-Stalin split” and hosted the Cominform Conference on 19–23 June 1948, which openly condemned the attitude of the Yugoslav leaders. The leader of the Romanian Workers’ Party Vasile Luca presented the activities of the Belgrade leadership in rather harsh terms. Furthermore, the authorities in Bucharest agreed to host the headquarters of the Communist Parties’ Information Office, as well as the editorial office of the official publication *Pentru pace trainică. Pentru democrație populară* [*For a lasting peace. For People’s Democracy*]. Moreover, in the spring of 1948, Romania decided to withdraw from a series of Balkan organisations.² On November 29, 1949, through the voice of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the Cominform criticized the socialist regime being built in Yugoslavia. Tito was reproached, among other things, for the way he implemented the five-year plan, with claims

¹ This research was conducted with the support of the Ministry of Education, through the Agency for Scholarships and Study Loans.

² Florin Constantiniu, Adrian Pop, *Schisma roșie. România și declanșarea conflictului sovieto-yugoslav (1948–1950)*, (Bucharest, Compania Publishing House, 2007), 35–39.

that it deprived his own population of well-being and that it helped the kulaks and capitalism.³

In September 1949, Romania recalled its ambassador in Belgrade, Teodor Rudenco, and a month later it denounced the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. In 1950, it began a trial against Titoism, in which two employees of the Yugoslav Embassy in Bucharest were sentenced, expulsion measures were taken for various other diplomats, a barbed wire fence was erected on the western border, and the military apparatus was put on alert. Further measures included the deportation of over 30,000 Serbs from the border area.⁴

In turn, Yugoslavia, after adopting the Stalinist model in the years 1945–1948, went through a period of isolationism between 1948 and 1950. After 1950, Yugoslavia began to strengthen its ties with Western states, particularly with the USA, but also with the United Kingdom. Its indirect inclusion in NATO through the Balkan Pact with Greece and Turkey led those in the Eastern Bloc to believe that Yugoslavia would formally ally with the West. Unlike the regime in Bucharest, the one in Belgrade had an important instrument for asserting itself internationally through the United Nations.⁵

For some historians, the rapid collectivization of agriculture, the accelerated industrialization process, and the wave of anti-Titoist repression were the Eastern Bloc's response to Belgrade's defiant attitude and the Soviet-Yugoslav split. The destruction of the monolithic image of communism required a response. On the other hand, Yugoslavia became a pioneer of decentralization and a socialist market economy, which appeared as an alternative to the monopolistic system in communist countries. Some authors argue that for the USA, between 1950 and 1955, Yugoslavia was a central piece in the strategy to destabilize Eastern Europe. Later, it became a strategic asset for Khrushchev in his process of de-Stalinization and in managing the events of 1956 behind the Iron Curtain.⁶

The events that led to Yugoslavia's exclusion from Cominform are as well-known as the course of action taken by two states, which had been on conflicting positions for over five years. Based on unpublished documents identified at The National Archives in London and within the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, this paper will try to present how

³ Gheorghe Onișoru, „Defecțiunea Titoistă” și România în Silviu B. Moldovan (coord.), *Problema Iugoslavă. Studii și Marginalii*, (Timișoara, Editura Meridian 21 Delta, 1998), 117–118.

⁴ Dan Cătănuș, „Reluarea relațiilor româno-iugoslave. Vizita lui Tito la București, 23–26 iunie 1956”, *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, nr. 3–4, vol. XII/2004, 73.

⁵ Aleksandar Životić, Jovan Čavoški, „On the Road to Belgrade: Yugoslavia, Third World Neutrals, and the Evolution of Global Non-Alignment, 1954–1961”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4, fall 2016, 79–80.

⁶ Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, „Workers' Councils in the Service of the Market: New Archival Evidence on the Origins of Self-Management in Yugoslavia 1948–1950”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 1, January 2014, 108–109.

London, through its diplomats in Bucharest, monitored Romania's involvement in this conflict, as well as the reaction of the Romanian authorities to the British public's attitude towards Yugoslavia. Great Britain was a key player throughout this period, being one of Belgrade's trusted international partners. In addition to the very good state-level relations, Yugoslav leaders had close contacts with the Labour Party. While they were in power, the Labour Party supported substantial aid to Yugoslavia, and after 1951, they remained a loyal advocate for Belgrade.⁷ In fact, Britain perceived the Tito-Stalin split as the perfect opportunity to promote its mainly economic interests in the Mediterranean and the Balkans.⁸ On the other hand, Romania was one of the USSR's loyal satellites. By monitoring the activities of the regime in Bucharest, some of the Kremlin's moves could be anticipated. Especially since the Romanian capital was a spearhead of anti-Titoist propaganda. Indeed, in 1951, the British Minister in Bucharest, W.J. Sullivan, wrote to London that in the Romanian press or in official speeches, Yugoslavia was the most attacked country after the United States and the United Kingdom.⁹

Concerns about a military intervention

W. StC. Roberts, the British Minister in Bucharest wrote in his annual report for the year 1949: „In 1949 the dominant factor in Romanian politics was the quarrel going outside its borders between Tito's Yugoslavia and Stalin's Russia. This was true also of 1948; but it was only during the course of 1949 that Soviet reaction to Yugoslav defiance crystallised throughout Cominform Eastern Europe. The story of Romania during 1949 reflects the clarification of Stalin's policy for reasserting the ideological hegemony of the Bolshevik Party and for reinsuring the absolute security of the Soviet State. In Romania the result of this assertion of the ascendancy of the Bolshevik Party and Soviet State has been two-fold: first, the Romanian Workers' Party has virtually ceased to function as an independent party, and secondly, the Romanian People's Republic has ceased to function as an independent State”.¹⁰

This brief paragraph actually summarises the manner in which British diplomats in Bucharest interpreted the impact Yugoslavia's exclusion from Cominform had upon Romania. From the British perspective, the Cominform's communiqué against Tito on 28 June 1948 marked for Romania

⁷ Aleksandar V. Miletić, „Political Parties and Movements as Alternative Options for Yugoslavia's Policy of International Cooperation”, *On the Fault lines of European and World Politics: Yugoslavia between Alliances and Neutrality/Non-Alignment*, ed. Srđan Mičić, Jovan Čavoški, (Belgrade, Institute for Recent History of Serbia, 2022), 294–295.

⁸ Katarina Spehnjak, „Josip Broz Tito's Visit to Great Britain in 1953”, *Review of Croatian History*, 1/2005, 275.

⁹ The National Archives London (TNAL), FO 371/95321, RR 1013/15, RR 1013/17, RR 1013/18.

¹⁰ TNAL, FO 371/88021, R 1016/2.

the beginning of its transition to socialism. British diplomats perceived this gesture of obedience to Moscow as the beginning of a „class struggle” on all fronts.¹¹ The British were primarily interested in the changes affecting the Romanian regime, in terms of redefining ideological objectives, propaganda tools and enlistment. The foreign policy dimension was to become increasingly significant for Western diplomats once the split started to produce effects on the current relations between the two countries.

After the end of World War II, the Balkans continued to be one of the hotspots in Europe. The civil war in Greece, the tensions between Yugoslavia and Italy concerning Trieste and Tito’s territorial claims on Austria led many in Western military circles to believe that a military conflict in this part of Europe was likely to break out at any time.¹² British diplomats in Belgrade and Sofia had mentioned the possibility of such military action as early as 1948, although they regarded it as rather unlikely. The issue started to be considered more seriously in 1949, once the number of incidents on Yugoslavia’s borders with the satellite states¹³ increased.

According to the British diplomats’ reports, in 1950 the Romanian society was actually hopeful that a war with the West, starting in Yugoslavia, could bring victory to the British who were to subsequently liberate and rebuild Romania.¹⁴ In this context, Romania’s military situation started to be more closely monitored by the British military attaché, with the aim of finding out to what extent Romania was capable of taking part in a military intervention in Yugoslavia and what role it could be given by the Soviet Union. According to the Romanian minister in London, the British press was closely monitoring the military tensions in the Balkans. On October 20, 1949, he reported that several newspapers, such as *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, and *News Chronicle*, had reported, based on information from the newspaper *Borba*, that Romanian-Soviet and Hungarian troop movements had been observed at the borders of Yugoslavia.¹⁵

In his report for 1949, the British military attaché in Bucharest wrote to the Foreign Office that although the state of the army had improved in the past year, it hardly seemed to be 100% loyal to the new regime. Consequently, it could not play a very important part in a European conflict, and was unlikely to be given such a role in a prospective Soviet-Yugoslav conflict. For the regime in Bucharest, the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Security, the Militia and the Border Guard troops had an important role. The number of soldiers involved in these structures almost equalled the regular army, with almost

¹¹ TNAL, FO 371/78597, R 2350.

¹² Tony Judt, *Epoca Postbelică. O istorie a Europei de după 1945*, (Iași, Polirom, 2008), 140.

¹³ Péter Vukman, „The possibility of a Soviet military attack against Yugoslavia in British archival documents (1948–1953)” *Currents of History* 1–2/2009, 165–166.

¹⁴ TNAL, FO 371/88048, R 1058/32.

¹⁵ Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], (AMAE), Fond Telegrama Londra, vol. octombrie-decembrie 1949, 54.

similar training and equipment. It is not clear whether they could have been used for offensive actions, but they would certainly have played the main role in defending the western border against Yugoslavia and were also in charge with defending the regime, even against its own Army. The British official concluded that Russia was very unlikely to give the Romanian Army any active role in the event of hostile action against Yugoslavia. Moreover, the defence of the country seemed to be entrusted primarily to the Militia and the Border Guards, with no military units at the border with Yugoslavia.¹⁶

On May 17, 1950, the Romanian Legation in London reported to Bucharest that *The Times* had published a news story from its correspondent in Yugoslavia stating that there were Soviet troop movements at the borders of Yugoslavia, that Soviet engineers were constructing pontoon bridges between Romania and Bulgaria, and that a military airport was being built in Timișoara. In response, Edvard Kardelj was reported to have said that Yugoslavia's patience had limits and that it might take countermeasures.¹⁷ Indeed, by the end of 1950, most officials in London believed that an attack on Yugoslavia could only come from the USSR satellite states, the solution in their view being to equip and train the Yugoslav army.¹⁸

As a result, in early 1951, the Foreign Office asked British diplomats in Bucharest and Sofia to express their views on the possibility of Bulgaria and Romania attacking Yugoslavia without the direct involvement of Moscow. The diplomats were also inquired with regard to the popular support for such an intervention or the likelihood of the two countries to refuse the Kremlin's request. The British minister claimed that the Romanian armed forces, including the troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Border Guards, numbered about 250,000 soldiers. The British officials estimated that the Romanians could mobilise 10 divisions, including one tank and one motorised division. However, only half of the troops could be sent to the front. Moreover, if the campaign was to be a long one, popular support was also likely to decrease, especially if Yugoslavia received Western aid. If Greece was to intervene on its own, no action at all would be taken.¹⁹

According to the military attaché in Bucharest, the Romanian army's biggest challenge was the lack of equipment. Various military exercises clearly indicated that troops still relied on animals as a means of transportations. Further challenges could come from the officer corps. Despite the purge campaigns, a significant number of officers from the old regime were still active. One can thus infer that the only role the Soviets most likely intended to give Romania was in securing supply lines and in small diversionary actions at the beginning of the attack. British diplomats concluded that Romania would have no choice

¹⁶ TNAL, FO 371/88075, R 1201/1.

¹⁷ AMAE, Fond Telegramme Londra, vol. mai-august 1950, 35.

¹⁸ Péter Vukman, „The possibility of a Soviet military attack against Yugoslavia...”, 171.

¹⁹ TNAL, FO 371/95354, R1192/1.

but to attack Yugoslavia with or without Soviet assistance if asked. The population was likely to comply with any demands placed upon them; however, they were not supportive of venturing into Yugoslavia. The two countries were not in opposition either traditionally or historically, nor did they have territorial disputes, as was the case with Hungary or Bulgaria. The political police were to maintain strict control over the population, yet sabotage was not totally excluded.²⁰

By their attitude towards Western diplomats, the Romanians fueled scenarios about potential military preparations on the border with Yugoslavia. In February 1951, the British Legation in Romania received orders from London to transfer two of the cars they had in Bucharest to Belgrade. The British minister requested that the RPR (People's Republic of Romania) government allow the drivers of the two cars to take a route through Timișoara to reach the Yugoslav capital. The British decided to send the military attaché and one of the secretaries to Belgrade with the two cars. Clearly, they also had the task of making military observations along the route. The Romanians refused to allow this and agreed to let the two cars leave the country only through the Borș border crossing. In other cases, the Romanians had allowed a Danish legation secretary and a Yugoslav secretary to travel through Timișoara to and from Belgrade.²¹

Romania's involvement in a Soviet military intervention in Yugoslavia was also discussed with other Western diplomats in Bucharest. In February 1951 the British Minister reported to the Foreign Office that he discussed the topic with the Swedish Minister. According to the latter, the general course of events in Bucharest indicated no signs of a mobilisation which would be necessary for such an initiative. In his opinion, the Romanian Army was not prepared for a major invasion, nor was the economy strong enough to support such an intervention.²² Nevertheless, Yugoslav officials continued to fuel fears of a potential military intervention by the Cominform states. On October 21, 1952, the Romanian Minister in London reported to Bucharest that on October 15, the Birmingham Post had published an interview with the Yugoslav ambassador in London, in which he discussed the war preparations of Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania at the Yugoslav border. The Yugoslav diplomat provided details about the military potential of these countries and about „alleged” border incidents.²³

Furthermore, the British diplomats were following closely the issue of border incidents between Romania and Yugoslavia, as reported in the Bucharest and Belgrade press, submitting detailed reports on the matter to the Foreign Office. These reports often included notes that indicated how British officials related to these events. The diplomats accredited to the two capitals kept each other informed about the events and the news published by the local

²⁰ TNAL, FO 371/95354, R1192/5.

²¹ TNAL, FO 371/95396, RR 1921/4, RR 1921/7.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ AMAE, Fond Telegramme Londra, vol. septembrie-octombrie 1952, 155.

press with regard to the border incidents. For instance, on 12 May 1951, the British diplomats in Bucharest noted that the Romanian press had for some time manifested an increased interest in border incidents between Yugoslavia and other countries such as Hungary and Bulgaria, yet little or nothing was mentioned about similar incidents, real or fictitious, on the Romanian-Yugoslav border. The information they were able to access was provided by the press, the radio or other sources outside Romania. On the other hand, they admitted that they could not understand the reasons behind Romania's deviation from the classic pattern of action. Definitely, this was not a gesture of tenderness to „Judas” Tito. They did not expect Romania to deviate from the line of action imposed by the Kremlin. Most probably, the Romanians did not want to cause a stir in a multi-ethnic border area.²⁴ In December 1950, the British diplomats located in Belgrade suggested that the Yugoslav press was quicker to publish news of border incidents because Tito wanted to provide the West with a version of the events before the attack of the Cominform propaganda.²⁵

In the summer of 1951, the regime in Bucharest adopted a very aggressive tone once again, reported British officials. They wondered if a new phase of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict was beginning. At the beginning of July, Romania presented Yugoslavia with a note of protest, holding Belgrade responsible for all the border incidents. The Romanian note came after Yugoslavia had sent and published several protests regarding the killing of a border guard and the deportation of border residents, including ethnic Romanians. According to the British, Romania's protest was seen as a manoeuvre to distract attention from internal realities. The publication of the note also coincided with the third anniversary of the Cominform's resolution condemning Yugoslavia. In parallel with the protest note, both *Scânteia* and the Cominform journal published new attacks, accusing Yugoslavia of attempting to provoke further tensions at the border and even a potential war. According to British officials, the increasingly violent rhetoric from the Romanians indicated that the conflict could escalate to a more aggressive phase. If Romania were to attack Yugoslavia in the near future, this propaganda would provide a justification for such actions.²⁶

These border incidents were sometimes extensively reported in the British press. For example, on December 28, 1950, the Romanian Legation in London reported to Bucharest that *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, *News Chronicle*, and *Daily Mail* had covered the incident at the Romanian-Yugoslav border, where a Romanian who crossed the border was shot by Yugoslav border guards. Subsequently, 150 Romanian soldiers opened fire to recover the body of the deceased. The Yugoslavs issued a note of protest and requested a joint commission to investigate the case.²⁷

²⁴ TNAL, FO 371/95336, R 10392/4.

²⁵ TNAL, FO 371/95336, R 10392/1.

²⁶ TNAL, FO 371/95336, RR 10392/7.

²⁷ AMAE, Fond Telegramme Londra, vol. septembrie-decembrie 1950, 201.

Often, the information published in the press and later included in British diplomats' reports gave the impression that the Romanian-Yugoslav border was a real front line, with dozens of soldiers engaging in mutual skirmishes, conducting incursions into opposing positions, kidnapping, or setting up ambushes to test the reaction capabilities of the other side.

The diplomatic protocol has lost its relevance

The deterioration of Romanian-Yugoslav relations also led to a series of issues related to diplomatic protocol. The peak of tension was reached on July 16, 1949, when Boško Letić and Nikola Medić, officials at the Yugoslav Embassy, were arrested while distributing Titoist pamphlets in Bucharest. Letić was the deputy press attaché at the Yugoslav Embassy in Bucharest, while Medić was a telegraphist. Subsequently, the authorities in the People's Republic of Romania demonstrated that the two were part of a complex espionage network and turned their trial into a major trial against Titoism.²⁸

In parallel, Romanian diplomats were prohibited from attending events organized by their Yugoslav counterparts and from extending invitations to them for Romanian-hosted events. On July 27, 1950, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest explicitly instructed the Legation in London not to invite the Yugoslavs to the reception on August 23 (the national day of communist Romania).²⁹ Such directives were consistently issued for all significant occasions requiring commemorative receptions. The list of countries whose diplomats were barred from Romanian-organized events was quite extensive. In 1952, Bucharest instructed the Legation in London not to invite representatives from Yugoslavia, Greece, Francoist Spain, the Kuomintang, South Korea, West Germany, Japan, Venezuela, and Cuba to the August 23 celebration.³⁰ On the other hand, both Albania and Yugoslavia celebrated their national day on the same date, November 28. Thus, the Romanians attended only the receptions hosted by Albania, while Western diplomats attended the one given by Yugoslavia. There were also more difficult moments. For example, in 1951, a drunken Soviet official accidentally entered the Yugoslav Embassy's reception. Upon realizing where he was, he withdrew without causing a scandal.³¹

There were also incidents where Yugoslav diplomats were harassed and roughed up by Romanian law enforcement. In September 1952, British diplomats in Bucharest reported to London that on September 3–4, the Yugoslav chargé d'affaires, Ljubomir Hrnjak, accompanied by an embassy employee, Hadži Pavlović, made a trip to Constanța. The Yugoslav diplomats in-

²⁸ Ionuț Nistor, *Procesul titoismului" în România (1950). Documente*, (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 2015), 16–24.

²⁹ AMAE, Fond Telegramme Londra, vol. mai-august 1950, 150.

³⁰ AMAE, Fond Telegramme Londra, vol. iulie-august 1952, 58.

³¹ TNAL, FO 371/95321, RR 1013/24.

formed their British colleagues that they were followed throughout their journey to Constanța and that, upon arrival, Militia officers entered their compartment without any reason. On the return trip, the same thing happened, with both Militia and Securitate officers (Romania Secret Police) entering their compartment in Constanța and demanding that they follow them to the Militia station, which they refused. It appears that the issue was related to them allegedly photographing prohibited areas. The Militia officers reportedly tried to forcibly take their film, roughing up Hadži Pavlović in the process. The Yugoslav officials filed a complaint, claiming the incident was a direct attack on their diplomatic immunity.³² This incident sparked an exchange of protest notes between the two sides. The Yugoslavs publicized the case in the Belgrade press, while the Romanians responded by writing in *Scântea* about the aggressiveness of Yugoslav diplomats, who had also been involved in incidents in other capitals, such as Sofia. Despite this conflict, Hrnjak, who was nearing the end of his term, left the People's Republic of Romania on September 22 without any issues. Numerous members of Western missions, including the Argentine minister and the U.S. chargé d'affaires, attended a farewell party. Only the Italian minister did not attend.³³

The Romanian military attaché in London wrote to Bucharest on December 12, 1953, stating that the Yugoslav military attaché had invited him to a reception on December 22 to celebrate Army Day. „All friends” had been invited, and it was likely that they would attend. Participation was approved from Bucharest, signalling that the time had come for a thaw in the direct relations between the diplomats of the two countries.

Signs of détente

On March 16, 1953, Josip Broz Tito arrived in London for his first visit to a Western country since taking power in Yugoslavia. The visit was a publicity event for the Yugoslav leader, who sought to consolidate his power both domestically and internationally. The event was carefully prepared, with strict security measures in place. The next day, the Romanian minister in London reported to Bucharest that Tito had arrived in the United Kingdom and was greeted by Churchill and Eden. The Romanian official wrote that the security measures exceeded anything previously seen in England: „the entire procedure being very similar to that used by Hitler during his travels.” Even the newspapers *Daily Express* and *Birmingham Post* mocked these security measures. Yet, 1953 also brought the first signs of détente.

Stalin's death led to a decrease in the aggressiveness of propaganda. Dej did not agree with the break with Yugoslavia, but he could not oppose it. The issue was whether the Yugoslavs understood that it had been a forced gesture

³² TNAL, FO 371/100750, R 10392/2.

³³ TNAL, FO 371/100750, R 10392/3.

and how upset they were. From the second half of 1953, both sides began inviting each other and attending receptions or other official events. However, the signal for a reconfiguration of policy towards Yugoslavia came with Khrushchev and Bulganin's visit to Belgrade in May-June 1955, followed by a notice sent by the CPSU to fraternal parties on January 6, 1956, regarding the normalization of relations with Yugoslavia. During this time, several agreements and conventions were signed to restore rail, air, and postal connections, and starting in 1956, a series of trade and payment agreements were also signed.³⁴

In the summer of 1953, the British diplomats in Bucharest sent several briefings to London that mentioned a Romanian-Yugoslav framework for negotiations on border incidents.³⁵ However, information received on 9 September 1953 from the Yugoslav Chargé d'Affaires, recently returned from Belgrade, described the general atmosphere as becoming less tense. The Yugoslav official told his British counterparts that although his government had sent him to Timisoara with instructions for the negotiating delegation, the Romanians refused to give him a visa to enter via Banat, so that he had to come to Bucharest via Vienna and Budapest and was thus forced to send another Embassy official with instructions to Timisoara. The negotiations did not seem to go smoothly either, as the Yugoslavs wanted the commissions to include four members, including an army representative, a doctor and a policeman, whereas the Romanians wanted the commissions to be made solely of army representatives. The Yugoslavs proposed a commission to be appointed for each incident, so that the investigation could be performed without delay. The Romanians wanted the incidents discussed at regular meetings held every three months, whereas the Yugoslavs contended that the three-month period was excessively long, complicating the process of determining the specifics of an incident that resulted in a loss of life.³⁶

The Yugoslavs had a very good relationship with the British Legation in Bucharest, to which they handed over various documents to be submitted to the Romanians, documents which otherwise would not have become known because the Romanians obviously did not publish them. Such an example is the very important piece of information that H.C. Hainworth, a diplomat at the British Legation in Bucharest, obtained at the end of May 1954 from a Yugoslav colleague whom he had invited to lunch. Without providing further details, he said that Romania had recently proposed the partial reopening of the Romanian-Yugoslav border. Although the information was not very clear, it most probably referred to the opening of a rail traffic point. The Yugoslav diplomat asked his British counterpart if he knew anything about that, mentioning that he believed Romania wanted to gain easier access to the port of Tri-

³⁴ Dan Cătănuș, „Reluarea relațiilor româno-iugoslave. Vizita lui Tito la București, 23-26 iunie 1956”, *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, nr. 3-4, vol. XII/2004, 73-75.

³⁵ TNAL, FO 371/106461, R 10392/1, R 10392/2, R 10392/3.

³⁶ TNAL, FO 371/106461, R 10392/4.

este, in the context of new trade agreements signed with several western countries. Foreign Office officials concluded that it was most likely economic interest that lay behind this decision rather than any intentions of the countries behind the Iron Curtain to have normal relations with other states.³⁷

The Bucharest press reported the signing of an agreement in Belgrade on August 4, 1954, to reinstate railway traffic between the two countries through the points Jimbolia-Kikinda and Stamura Moravița-Vrșac.³⁸ On August 17, 1954, British diplomats informed London that the Yugoslav chargé d'affaires had told British diplomats that the Romanians initially wanted only the Jimbolia-Kikinda railway line to be opened. The reason given was that on the Romanian side, at Stamura Moravița, the line needed repairs and could only be opened in six months. The Yugoslavs believed that the real reason was the presence of significant Russian and Romanian military forces in that area. Furthermore, they believed that the improper behaviour of the Romanians towards Yugoslav diplomats in June and July was not merely the overzealousness of a policeman but a deliberate policy, influenced by the railway agreement negotiations and discussions about appointing a new Romanian ambassador to Belgrade.³⁹

In early 1956, Foreign Office officials asked diplomats in Bucharest to comment on a statement by Edvard Kardelj, who had allegedly said that the rapprochement between Yugoslavia and the satellite countries of the USSR was based on popular support. The British diplomats in Bucharest believed that in Romania's case the mutual economic interest simply prevailed and despite the trade agreement and the resumption of rail and air communications, Romania's foreign policy vision faithfully followed the direction imposed from Moscow. Moreover, they argued that Kardelj's ideas did not apply to Romania, despite the fact that a series of changes started to be visible. Prior to 1955, Yugoslav diplomats in Bucharest were closely monitored and treated with the same hostility applied to representatives of any Western country. In 1956, the Yugoslavs started to receive special attention, were openly courted and hospitality was exchanged at a very high level. According to the British officials, Ambassador Vujanović was about to end his term of office remaining in good terms with both sides, but were convinced that he would find Western society much more agreeable. British diplomats did not seem to believe that their Yugoslav counterparts expected them or their government to have any political influence over the Romanian government. Furthermore, as far as the delicate issue of the treatment of the Yugoslav minority in Romania⁴⁰ was concerned, there were no significant changes.

At the end of April 1956, the Yugoslav Ambassador informed the British Minister in Bucharest that, following Romanian-Yugoslav negotiations, the Serbian minority in Banat who had been deported would have the right

³⁷ TNAL, FO 371/111631, R 10392/1.

³⁸ TNAL, FO 371/111631, R 10392/5.

³⁹ TNAL, FO 371/111631, R 10392/6.

⁴⁰ TNAL, FO 371/122708, R 10392/1.

to return home and enjoy all civil rights. Additionally, there would be schools where instruction would be in Serbo-Croatian. Thus, one of the major disagreements between the two countries seemed to be resolved. Furthermore, many Yugoslavs arrested between 1948 and 1950 were set to be released. Gheorghe Apostol, the head of the trade unions in the People's Republic of Romania, visited Belgrade and, upon his return, presented a detailed report highlighting the historic friendship between the two peoples. He also mentioned that his delegation had been able to see the living conditions of the Romanian minority in Vršac.⁴¹

The Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement put PMR leader Gheorghiu-Dej in a difficult position. However, the way he managed the issue of de-Stalinization earned him Khrushchev's trust. Furthermore, the Yugoslavs did not call for his removal. The fact that Tito agreed to pass through Romania on his way to the USSR in May 1956 is clear evidence of this.⁴²

The British diplomats followed Tito's visit to Bucharest on 24–26 June 1956 with great interest. They described the very friendly welcoming ceremony, his ride in a convertible through the cheering crowds, which seemed to be there out of curiosity rather than coercion. Tito's busy schedule included receptions, banquets, visits to the oil fields in Ploiesti and public speeches. The diplomats also noted that despite being obviously tired, Tito was visibly self-assured, satisfied and happy to see his former detractors fawning over him. He opened his speech by addressing to the Romanian people and avoided mentioning the role of the USSR. In his public statements he avoided any mention with regard to the limitations of action imposed on Romania. The Yugoslavs believed that Romania's proposal to cooperate on a hydro-power plant at Porțile de Fier [the Iron Gates] indicated that the Popular Republic of Romania was free and able to take independent action. For the British diplomats, however, this perspective was far too optimistic. The Romanians' actions were still subject to approval from Moscow. The Yugoslavs were hopeful that closer commercial ties could pull Romania out of the USSR orbit. British officials, on the other hand, felt that Moscow was very confident in its control over Romania and actually hoped that these ties would have the opposite effect, bringing Yugoslavia closer to the USSR.⁴³

Equally close attention was paid to the visit of Dej and Chivu Stoica to Yugoslavia on 20–29 October 1956. The British diplomats in Bucharest informed London that the press in Romania had been preparing for this visit for a long time. Although they did not actually provide many details on the movements and speeches of the political leaders, extensive materials were

⁴¹ TNAL, FO 371/122708, R 10392/2.

⁴² Maurice Pearton, „The Romanian Leadership and Its Problems, 1956–1957–1958”, *Romania Observed. Studies in Contemporary Romanian History*, ed. Dennis Deletant, Maurice Pearton, (Bucharest, Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1998), 229–230.

⁴³ TNAL, FO 371/122708, R 10392/3.

published on Yugoslavia and its people, industry, natural beauty, and social progress. The British were not convinced that the Romanian leaders wanted to reassure their own people and the Yugoslavs of the sincerity of their feelings, but rather believed that they wanted to divert attention away from the events in Hungary and Poland. The published speeches did not indicate that the visit itself had any special significance. Dej's speech was classic, full of stereotypes. The diplomats tended to believe that Tito was probably trying to convince the Romanian leaders to follow their own path to socialism, but there was no sign that they were open to such an idea.⁴⁴

Between the two visits, on August 27, 1956, the British Minister in Bucharest informed London that Romania remained deeply committed to the hydroelectric project at the Iron Gates. On August 19, the newspaper *Scântea* published an article on pages 1 and 2 detailing technical aspects of the project. Gheorghiu-Dej reportedly told the Austrian chargé d'affaires at the August 23 reception that Romania would send a delegation to Belgrade to finalize the details of the joint commission and hoped to start the work the following autumn. It was unclear whether Romania was prioritizing political or economic ties, but it was evident that it was making efforts to strengthen its relations with Yugoslavia as much as possible. Later, Vujanović, the Yugoslav ambassador in Bucharest, had a final meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before leaving his post. He was asked by the ministry whether his government would push for the development of the Iron Gates project. Vujanović responded that the project would consume a significant amount of resources and could not be completed before 10 years. However, he stated that Belgrade placed great importance on the project as it would provide a valuable source of cheap energy. When asked if there would be a bridge at the top of the dam, he replied that Yugoslavia did not have major roads reaching that area and that such a project would be very costly. This indicates that the Romanians seem more eager to develop the project than the Yugoslavs.⁴⁵

On September 13, 1956, the British Minister informed London that Romanian-Yugoslav relations were not entirely smooth. A diplomat from the Yugoslav Embassy reported to the British diplomats that while commercial relations were progressing well, issues concerning the Yugoslav minority persisted. These families were scattered throughout the country, lacking income, employment, food, or housing. The few interventions made by the Yugoslav Embassy with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been rejected on the grounds of interference between the government and its citizens. The Yugoslav ambassador could only submit memoranda, and there was significant pressure on him as Belgrade was demanding a resolution to the situation.⁴⁶

In the context of the renewed cooling of relations between Yugoslavia and the USSR, Belgrade sought to maintain connections with some neigh-

⁴⁴ TNAL, FO 371/122708, R 10392/11.

⁴⁵ TNAL, FO 371/122708, R 10392/5.

⁴⁶ TNAL, FO 371/122708, R 10392/7.

bours, and Romania seemed to be the only country in the Eastern Bloc willing not to reignite ideological tensions. Belgrade made sure to convey this message to Western capitals as well. On 14 November 1957, Smiljan Pečjak, Press Counsellor at the Yugoslav Embassy in London, visited two Foreign Office officials, Swan and O. Goodison of the Southern Department. The British diplomats were somewhat surprised to learn from him that, of the satellite countries, Romania seemed the most determined to establish connections with countries outside the Soviet bloc, despite the limits imposed by Moscow. The Yugoslav counsellor had worked at the embassy in Bucharest between 1947 and 1948 and was very familiar with Romania. The British diplomats inferred that the Yugoslavs wanted to know if the UK was the only country that benefited from Romania's openness.⁴⁷

Pečjak's visit prompted the Foreign Office to seek clarification from diplomats in Bucharest. In a telegram sent on 27 November 1957, they pointed to the fact that in the past year relations between Yugoslavia and Romania had been friendlier than with any other satellite state. Even when it could not speak well of the Yugoslavs, Romania refrained as much as possible from using an aggressive tone. On the other hand, there was no reason to believe that Romania was to adopt a foreign policy line that differed from Moscow's. Bucharest acted within the same limits as the other satellite states. The Yugoslav Embassy in Bucharest was clearly treated better than any mission of a NATO country or Israel, perhaps also due to the special attitude of openness in terms of cultural and economic opportunities assumed by the Yugoslavs. Furthermore, Yugoslavia, like all other communist states, was represented in Bucharest by an ambassador, whereas Western European countries were represented by ministers. The Yugoslav ambassador's attitude towards the party and the Romanian state institutions was that of a communist diplomat. The Yugoslav embassy and diplomats enjoyed much better treatment than in the previous years and the government had a slightly more polite attitude towards Western missions and diplomats. Yet, as much „the right hand does not know the left hand is doing”, the fact that the activities of the secret police continued at the same pace actually indicated that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not put much pressure on the Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁸

Conclusions

The purpose of this research is to present various aspects of how British diplomats in Bucharest perceived and interpreted Romanian-Yugoslav relations in the 1950s. The information has been identified in several files dedicated specifically to Romanian-Yugoslav relations from The National Archives, as well as in correspondence between the Romanian Ministry of

⁴⁷ TNAL, FO 371/128898, R 1021/2.

⁴⁸ TNAL, FO 371/128898, R 1021/3.

Foreign Affairs and the Legation in London. The United Kingdom was one of Yugoslavia's important allies during the years 1948–1957, which explains London's high level of interest in the behaviour of Yugoslavia's neighbouring states. At the time, the information capacity of the British was rather limited, their reports relying primarily on information provided by the press, received from their Yugoslav counterparts or revealed in their discussions with colleagues from other diplomatic missions. London was mainly interested in information indicating if Romania was loyal to or independent from Moscow, and relations with Yugoslavia were an accurate indicator of these aspects. As we have shown, there were times when the British diplomats perceived the political movements quite accurately, but also numerous occasions when they became prisoners of their own information sources. Assessing the way in which other countries followed the events of the 1950s helps us complete the conclusions derived from analyses based on domestic sources.

Summary

In June 1948, through a resolution of the Cominform, read in Bucharest, Yugoslavia was excommunicated from the Socialist Bloc. Stalin could not accept even the slightest form of independence among the Soviet Union's satellites. Isolated among communist states, deprived of any economic and political support, Yugoslavia was strongly supported by Western states, especially by the United States and the United Kingdom. Yugoslavia's neighbors played an important role in the fight against the „Titoist heresy.” In every country surrounding Yugoslavia, political trials, purging campaigns, and propaganda actions took place to combat Titoism. Romania was no exception. Relations between the two countries were almost frozen, railway and road connections were closed, and the ambassadors from both capitals were withdrawn. Given Romania's role in this context, Bucharest became an important place from which the Tito-Stalin conflict could be monitored and analyzed. For this reason, British diplomats in Bucharest closely followed and reported in detail on the evolution of Romanian-Yugoslav relations. They wrote about the most tense moments, mutual harassments, border incidents, the threat of military intervention, and the first signs of détente. The British diplomats in Bucharest had a special relationship with their Yugoslav counterparts, who were their main source of information. In turn, Romanian diplomats in the United Kingdom closely followed and reported to Bucharest the reactions of the British press and political circles regarding Yugoslavia and Romania.

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