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THE ROMANIAN ELECTION OF 1946 IN THE NORWEGIAN PRESS

Marian-Alin Dudoï*

Keywords: Cold War, communism, democracy, freedom, Iuliu Maniu.

Abstract

The study analyses how the Norwegian Press presented the Romanian parliamentary election of 19 November 1946.

The author studied editorials, already translated in Romanian by the Romanian Legation in Oslo at that time, and found at the Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Bucharest.

As it has promised to the United States and British Governments in order to be recognized by those two great powers, the Groza Government, backed by the occupying Soviets, had to organize the election.

The most important Norwegian press depicted the violence and pressure on the opposition to stop meetings, the fact that the government's representatives banished the opposition's ones from the polling places, how the government bought votes on the black market, how a part of the people used more than one vote, or how the opposition's supporters were not allowed to vote.

Despite less important far-left newspapers, the most prestigious Norwegian newspapers concluded that the election was neither fair or free.

Introduction

After World War II Romania and Norway had to reconstruct their economies, despite not having been destroyed by the war. Romania had to endure the Red Army's presence, Soviet intervention in economy, and the famine due to drought and was forced to pay a large war debt. Ruled by Soviets, the Allied Control Commission on Romania had to supervise the armistice, while the other two members of the Commission, the United States and Great Britain (and Northern Ireland), frequently criticized the Groza Government imposed by the Soviets on 6 March 1945, and recognized it only one year later, as Prime-Minister Petru Groza (formally, the President of the Council of Ministers), a Soviet puppet, and his deputy and Minister for Foreign Affairs, dissident Liberal Gheorghe Tătărescu, promised to hold fair elections and make Romania a democratic country. Hoping for a large international recognition also necessary in order to be admitted in the United Nations Organisation and to determine the people and the world to believe that Romania was an independent country, the Groza Government began to promote his policies in Europe, and included the resumption of the diplomatic relations with small European countries.

The Romanian-Norwegian diplomatic relations have been interrupted in the first years of World

War II and were formally resumed when Minister Constantin Văllimărescu presented his Letter of Credence to Norwegian King on 1 August 1946; he had only one member in his staff, Counsellor Grigore Cugler.¹ Norway did not send any diplomatic personnel to Bucharest.²

Having border with the Soviet Union and with the Soviets being interested in their Svalbard/Spitzbergen islands, Norway considered in 1946 either to become member of a proposed Scandianavian Defence Union, either to remain neutral, although it had a democratic regime.³ This did not help too

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¹ Romanian Diplomatic and Consular Representatives of 20.05.1947, United States Microfilm Collection, No. 637 Reel, Central National Historical Archives, Bucharest.

King Michael's Decree of 09.07.1946, *Romanian Norwegian Relations. Diplomatic Documents (1905–1947)*, Editors and Contributors: Jardar Seim, Stelian Obiziuc, Alin Victor Matei, Doru Liciu, Andrei Căpușan and Nicolae Alexandru Nicolescu, Bucharest (2007), 204.

² Bujduveanu, Tănase, *Relationships between Romania and Norway. The Presence of Romanians in Norway. The presence of Norwegians in Romania*, Constanța (2013), 151.

³ Collier's dispatch no. 220 of 01.07.1946 to Bevin, *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, Series I, Volume IX, *The Nordic Countries: From War to Cold War, 1944–1951*, London and New York (2013), 124–126.

much as in the last part of 1946 the Soviet Union raised the issue of special rights on Svalbard islands, despite Norwegian reluctance.⁴ Few months later, the Norwegian Parliament decided to reject in secret session “negotiations of a military character with any single foreign power concerning the defence of a region under Norwegian sovereignty” putting an end to the Soviet hopes; the Norwegians tried not to embarrass the Soviets then, thus an Assistant Secretary for Foreign Affairs delivered in person the letter to the Soviet Ministry for Foreign Affairs.⁵ The mounting international tension of the Cold War and the fear of a Soviet attack made Norway renounce a neutral course in favour of a Western oriented one in 1948⁶. As in any Nordic country, the people were in no mood for any revolution.⁷

Our research was undertaken at the Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, where most Norwegian articles in press were found translated in Romanian or represented syntheses of the Romanian Legation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The electoral campaign

After the Groza Government delayed the election several times due to the famine and the Paris Peace Conference, where Romania participated as a defeated country, they finally decided to hold the election on 19 November 1946.

The conservative “Morgenbladet” of 21 November mentioned that the Anglo-American representatives in the Allied Control Commission on Romania, despite it being ruled by the Soviets, protested before the elections as the opposition parties did not have access to Radio Bucharest and their political meetings ended in clashes with government’s agents without any intervention from the state’s authorities, such as the police or the gendarmerie. After a short presentation of the parties, the National-Peasant Party was described as the most important, the one that had been suffering the most from government oppression, although his program was related to British Labour Party as it supported peasants to be given more land and a part of industry should be owned by the state.⁸

⁴ Collier’s dispatch no. 416 of 26.11.1946 to Attlee, *Ibid.*, 147–150.

⁵ Collier’s telegram no. 55 of 19.02.1947 to Bevin, *Ibid.*, 164–165.

⁶ Collier’s letter of 27.12.1947 to Hankey, *Ibid.*, 199–200.

⁷ François-Charles Mougel, *Europa de nord în secolul al XX-lea*. Traducere, note și prefață de Marian Ștefănescu, București (2004), 112.

⁸ “Morgenbladet” of 21.11.1946, File 3, Box 1 Norway (1945–1947), Norway fonds, the Diplomatic Archives of the

From its private correspondent, “Friheten” of 19 November, the official newspaper of the Norwegian Communist Party, mentioned that that would be the first election after nine years and the government were led by the Communist and Social-Democrat parties, to which one million and a half persons were enrolled. The government was confident in winning the elections as the members of trade unions reached three millions. The opposition parties were supported by their own active press and represented the peasants, respectively the bourgeoisie. All women were offered the right to vote for the first time.⁹

Using an Associated Press release, “Dagbladet”, a Liberal newspaper, of the same day, noted in the article’s headline that eight millions of Romanians were entitled to vote and the fact that no government had lost any election. The opposition parties concentrated on the consolidation of middle class, while the government parties praised the ties with the Soviet Union. The United States and the Great Britain had criticized the way the government had organized the electoral campaign considering the election had not been free by stating, amongst other things, that the government agents had not allowed the opposition sympathizers to gather in electoral meetings. The government had denied the accusations by stating no one was entitled to criticize the way Romania was organizing its elections, while the Anglo-Americans had protested as the government had promised in the spring to hold free elections.¹⁰ In some cases, Bucharest Reuters correspondent, the main source for the most Norwegian newspapers in the issue, supposed that the British and the United States Governments, as those governments have already warned, would withdraw the Groza Government’s recognition in case of fraudulent election.¹¹

The election

The Groza Government won 347 seats from the total of 414 seats of the Romanian Parliament and managed to determine forty-six foreign correspondents to sign a statement about the fair

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, Romania (hereafter Norway fonds).

⁹ “Friheten” of 19.11.1946, *Ibid.*

¹⁰ “Dagbladet” of 19.11.1946, *Ibid.*

¹¹ Mark Percival, *Politica britanică față de România în 1946*. Romulus Rusan (ed.), *Anale Sighet 3. Începutul sfârșitului (instituții, mentalități, evenimente). Comunicări prezentate la Simpozionul de la Sighetu Marmăției (7–9 iunie 1996)*, București (1996), 100–101.

elections, including six from France, two from the United States and two from the Grest Britain.¹²

“Friheten” of 20 November informed that the election took place respecting the condition of voters’ liberty. According to Radio Bucharest, fifty foreign journalists were present and they were allowed to travel wherever they wanted to see the condition of a fair election.¹³

In the same day, Press Telegraph announced that the government parties got a large majority of about 80%.¹⁴

The political struggle went beyond reason, Norsk Telegrambyrå, citing a Reuters release, announced that Minister Mihail Romniceanu, the only representative of National-Liberal Party in the Groza Government, which had only two opposition Ministers, got severely injured during the election at Galați.¹⁵

Provided by an Associated Press release, “Morgenbladet” of 21 November, a conservative newspaper, adopted critical views, even in the headline of the article informing about the elections in turmoil, the selling of votes and beaten opposition newsagents who were hospitalized. The government protested in regard to the opposition members that had attacked one of the Communist headquarters and other violences. The opposition parties accused the government of many illegal electoral activities, including the facts that the electoral lists did not include all voting people and that a part of the voters sold their right.¹⁶

Another critical analysis was provided by the conservative “Aftenposten” of 21 November, the most prestigious Norwegian newspaper with 140 000 daily copies sold at the time, which informed about the violences upon an unspecified opposition minister and the fact that some opposition sympatizers simply refused to vote as a way of protest. The correspondent of London “Daily Telegraph” went in a village, 30 kilometers away of Bucharest, where the opposition officials were obliged to leave the polling place, while half of the ones with the right of voting, known as certain sympatizers of the opposition, were forbidden to enter the ward; but when the correspondent arrived with a small English flag in front of the

car, the peasants got very happy, as they knew then they could vote. Such things happened to many British and American correspondents. All information had been published by the “Daily Telegraph” of the previous day.¹⁷

The following day, “Aftenposten”, citing “Daily Telegraph” of 21 November, informed the readers that British Minister Adrian Holman, actually the British Political Representative in Romania as the senior representative of the British Foreign Office there, stated that many violences occurred, many opposition representatives got arrested in the morning of November 19 and many opposition representatives were forbidden to supervise the electoral commission of the ward. Also, the same voters used many ballots, other were obliged to use the ballot with the government candidate already chosen.¹⁸ However, in order not to threat the position of King Michael and the Social-Democrats’ existing independence in relation to the Romanian Communist Party, the only solutions remained in delaying the imposition of Communism, the British Government decided to stop protesting in the issue of election.¹⁹

The conservative “Morgenbladet” of 21 November concluded that, as in the case of Bulgarian elections of November 3, the existing government simply imposed the result, as the election was just a formality.²⁰

“Bergen Arbeiderblad” of 23 November presented in detail the conflict between the government coalition and the opposition parties but it took the side of the Groza Government, falsely considering that the opposition parties had played some sort of role in bringing Fascism in recent Romania. Citing British Conservative “The Times” of 12 November, this Norwegian newspaper admitted the Groza Government was democratic only according to the Soviet lines, but rejected the moral support for the opposition parties as the Labour Government of Britain encouraged the Romanian opposition parties and, by this, the Groza Government could approach even more the Soviet Union.²¹

As “Friheten” earlier, “Arbeidet” from Bergen, Norway’s second largest city, of 29 November

¹² „Statement of the foreign press correspondents on the elections” published by the newspaper “Universul” of 21.11.1946, *Romania. The Political Life in Documents 1946*, Edited by the State Archives of Romania, Bucharest (1996).

¹³ “Friheten of 20.11.1946, Norway fonds.

¹⁴ Press Telegraph release of 20.11.1946, *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Norsk Telegrambyro release of 20.11.1946, *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “Morgenbladet” of 21.11.1946, *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “Aftenposten” of 21.11.1946, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Aftenposten” of 22.11.1946, *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Harry Hanak, *The politics of Impotence: The British observe Romania (6 March 1945 to 30 December 1947)*. I. Agrigoroaiei, Gh. Buzatu, V. Cristian (eds.), *România în istoria universală*, Iași (1988), 38.

²⁰ “Morgenbladet” of 21.11.1946, Norway fonds.

²¹ “Bergens Arbeiderblad” of 23.11.1946, *Ibid.*

saluted the victory of the Groza Government, as it feared that the opposition parties could have returned, in the case of victory, to Fascism, a memory that still had been haunting Norway, although it admitted that both the government and the opposition parties appealed to violence.²²

As Tătărescu presided over a small dissident party which split from the National-Liberal Party and belonged to the government coalition, the Romanian Legation in Oslo was encouraged to find favourable news for the Government. Thus the Romanian Minister informed Bucharest that “Vart Lånd” of December 13, citing a United Press release, considered exaggerated the assertion of Iuliu Maniu, the president of National-Peasant Party, that the government got only 16% in the elections.²³ Also, “Friheten” of December 14 republished Émile Buré’s commentary in the French “L’Ordre” which supported the Groza Government and rejected to support the annullment of the election only by the fact that Anglo-Americans media published only one photograph where the police blocked the entrance in a polling place.²⁴

“Aftenposten” continued to support the idea that some changes may have happened, as the oppositions circles intended to approach the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the victorious Great Powers to debate the issue. One regarded the possibility of new elections in the spring of 1947, while the other referred to the possibility that the National-Peasant Party could be given 150 seats in the Parliament in order to become the biggest party but still the multi-party government coalition would govern.²⁵ “Aftenposten” was falsely influenced by Bucharest correspondents as the British Government had no intention to criticise the Groza Government after the election as it could not challenge the Soviet domination or could make things even worse in the country.²⁶

Conclusion

The study provides various opinions in regard to the Romanian election of 19 November 1946, and creates the impression that Norwegian press was caught in the Soviet trap by presenting opposing

views of the election fairness, but it is not the case. This happened because between 1945 and 1947 Norway had not defined clearly its foreign policy, wrongly believing in pacifism and good relations with the Soviet Union, including the media which followed the soon-abandoned way. Nonetheless the most read Norwegian newspapers, “Aftenposten”, “Dagbladet” and “Morgenbladet”, criticized the fraudulent election, in fact won by the National Peasant Party, and the continuous oppression of the opposition parties before and in the day of the election allowing most Norwegians to know that soon Romania would be forced to become a Communist country, the denial of freedom for the people being one of its consequences.

²² “Arbeider” of 29.11.1946, *Ibid.*

²³ Văllimărescu’s dispatch no. 371 of 19.12.1946 to Tătărescu, *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Mark Percival, Politică britanică față de România în 1946. Romulus Rusan (ed.), *Anale Sighet 5. Căderea Cortinei Începutul sfârșitului (instituții, mentalități, evenimente). Comunicări prezentate la Simpozionul de la Sighetu Marmației (20–22 iunie 1997)*, București (1997), 685.