

THE ROMANIAN ELECTION OF 1946 IN THE SWEDISH PRESS

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(Abstract)

The study analyses how the Swedish press presented the Romanian election of November 19, 1946. The research was undertaken at the Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bucharest). The Groza Government, imposed by the Soviets as the Red Army had occupied the country, on March 6th, 1945 rejected the United States and Great Britain's protests concerning the impossibility of the opposition parties to have the same conditions as the government's coalition of parties on the grounds that Anglo-Saxon powers' protests affected the national sovereignty of Romania, although the two powers and the Soviet Union represented the United Nations in defeated Romania, being empowered to implement the armistice convention (September 1944 to September 1947).

With few exceptions, the Swedish press, under the influence of Liberal or Conservative ideologies, presented the real faces of the electoral campaign under the influence of the denial of freedom (terror, violence and clashes of the government's hooligans with the opposition sympathizers in order to determine the latter to abandon the electoral meetings) and censorship.

After the election, almost the entire Swedish press presented the unsuccessful protests of the British and the United States Governments and the opposition parties concerning the cancellation of the elections due to massive electoral fraud, despite the allegations of *Ny Dag*, the newspaper of the Swedish Communist Party, and few leftist newspapers that the election was democratic, only the opposition parties used the violence, and demonstrated the wish of Romanian people to reject Fascism, antisemitism and white terror, supported by the Great Britain and the United States!

Introduction

Unlike Romania – bombarded, defeated, occupied by the Red Army and with a government imposed by the Soviet Union –, Sweden kept his military forces intact and could even produce a large sort of military equipment. Although with a social-democrat government, Sweden, like any other Nordic country, did not want any major change in domestic or foreign policy¹. Subsequently, in the aftermath of World War Two, Sweden continued to be loyal to the neutral creed, making quite clear from 1946 that the country would not adhere any major bloc and, although participated in the future Marshall Plan, the country refused to join talks for the future N.A.T.O.² The fundamental principle of the Swedish for-

eign policy could be summed up to the avoidance of any risk³. In order to improve relations with the new rising power from the East, Sweden signed a trade agreement with the Soviet Union in 1946, which was reducing almost completely the critics of muscovite press⁴. In 1948, Sweden proposed to Norway and Denmark to form the Scandinavian Defence Union, which would have reduced military tensions in the Baltic Sea, would have avoided the hypothetical occupation and the imposition of Communism in Finland, although Sweden had the Soviet Union in the proximity of its borders and lived constantly with the threat of being easily invaded by the Red Army.

The British Government became worried and forbade the exchange of information with Sweden, but not with Norway and Denmark; it also requested the British Minister in Stockholm to propose the Swedish Government the removal of anti-British generals and admirals⁵. The British Minister

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¹ François-Charles Mougel, *Europa de nord în secolul al XX-lea*, Traducere, prefață și note de Marian Ștefănescu, Ed. Corint, București, 2004, 112.

² *Documents on British Foreign Policy Overseas*, Series I, Volume IX (eds. Tony Insall, Patrick Salmon), London and New York, Routledge, 2013, 167.

³ *Ibidem*, 69.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 168.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 83.

to Sweden disagreed as the Swedish Minister of Defence acted as an apologist for Germany during the war and the Soviets lacked sympathy⁶. The most important part of the Swedish press showed moderation when commenting about the disagreements of the great victorious allies and hoped the new tensions can be diminished after their conferences, but this Swedish press discreetly worried in regard to the Soviet tendency to extend the influence; on the contrary, the small communist press in Sweden violently attacked the western powers accusing them of being warmongers⁷.

Romania and Sweden maintained their diplomatic relations during World War Two and neutral Sweden represented Romanian interests in several countries which were at war with Romania. Being neutral, the enemy countries even approached Romanian diplomats for the armistice in Stockholm in 1942 and 1943. Romanian political circles had a high regard towards Sweden, the country which allowed the first and the longest approaches in the issue of the armistice with Romania and the old crown prince (future King Gustaf VI Adolf, since 1950), a second cousin on their mothers' side to Queen Mother Helen of Romania (the latter was even more closely related to the kings-brothers of Denmark and Norway, on their fathers' side) visited and congratulated the Romanian legation for organizing the first Romanian art exhibition in Stockholm in September 1943, even though almost all knew in Sweden then that Germany and her allies would lose the war⁸.

News about Romania appeared in the Swedish press during World War Two, which appreciated the treatment for the Polish refugees and Romanian rights over Transylvania⁹.

The research was undertaken at the Diplomatic Archives within the Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Bucharest (Sweden fonds). As the Romanian election of November 19, 1946 represented a major subject – actually it was postponed several times in 1946 although the country had no parliament for over six years –, the Romanian legation in Sweden took great interest and analyzed press commentaries in regard to the elections. George Duca, the son of the murdered

Prime-Minister Ion Gheorghe Duca, was chargé d'affaires since August 1944 and made three reports on the subject. The first was a report in regard to many subjects for the timeframe November 1–15 – the subject of election consisting of two pages –, while the second, for the timeframe November 16–30, comprised seventeen pages and analysed all sort of reactions concerning the last days before the election and the outcome and the third report containing the comments of the Swedish press over Romania in February 1947.

The electoral campaign

The independent *Aftonbladet* (*The Evening Paper*) of November 2 mentioned that the Groza Government rejected British note which criticized the higher degree of denial of freedom during the electoral campaign considering the British interfered with the national sovereignty of Romania¹⁰.

It was obvious that the Western powers were powerless in Balkans and Central Europe as the Great Britain's complaints concerning the compensation for British companies from Romanian oil industry and Danube trade met no Soviet concession at the New York Conference, as the liberal *Dagens Nyheter* (*News of the Day*) of November 12 wrote¹¹.

During the days before the election, many Swedish newspapers informed on the right to vote for all women, but also the right of them to become members of the one-chamber parliament, the number of electors reached eight millions and

⁶ *Ibidem*, 93–94.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 126.

⁸ George Duca, *Cronica unui român în veacul XX*, vol. III, Jon Dumitru Verlag, München, 1985, 61.

⁹ Tănase Bujduveanu, Romania in the Swedish press (1940–1944), in Tănase Bujduveanu, *Relații româno-suedeze / Relations roumaines-suédoises / Relationships between Romania and Sweden*, Ed. Ex Ponto, Constanța, 2013, 189–190.

¹⁰ See the summary of the British Note of protest (in Romanian) of 28.10.1946 and Romanians' reply of 02.11.1946 (in Romanian), Ioan Chiper, Florin Constantiniu, Adrian Pop, *Sovietizarea României: Percepții anglo-americane (1944–1947)*, Ed. Iconica, București, 1993, 198–199.

The United States of America criticized the Groza Government in a Note of 28.10.1946. See the Romanian refusal to admit American criticism in the Note of 02.11.1946 (in Romanian) issued by Gheorghe Tătărescu, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers of Romania and Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Burton Y. Berry, the United States Representative in Romania, *România: Viața politică în documente. 1946*, Edited by Arhivele Statului din România (Ed. Ioan Scurtu), București, 1996, 424–425 and (in English) Burton Y. Berry, *Romanian Diaries, 1944–1947* (Ed. Cornelia Bodea), Iași, Oxford, Portland, The Center for Romanian Studies, 2000, 505–507.

Aftonbladet of 02.11.1946, Reports and press articles related to the international and domestic events of different countries, including Romania, 1945–1948 issue (author's translation), 200–220 Sweden, 1945–1949 box, Sweden fonds, the Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter DARMFA).

¹¹ *Dagens Nyheter* of 12.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

they would elect 414 members of parliament¹². The *Expressen* (*The Express*) quite happened to offer the figure of 7,998,000 people with the right to vote and 3200 candidates from twenty parties and organizations¹³.

According to many Swedish newspapers of November 15th, the United States insisted in a note that it is obliged by “The Declaration on Liberated Europe”, issued at Yalta, to ensure that Romanian people are free, which means that the Romanian elections must be fair, rejecting the Romanian Government’s allegation that the United States Government interfered with the elections, disrespecting Romania’s national sovereignty¹⁴.

On 15 November, the liberal *Dagens Nyheter*, published the opposition parties’ proposals (the National Peasant Party, the National Liberal Party and the Independent Social-Democratic Party) addressed to the Soviet, British and American Governments that they should supervise the electoral process as far 50% of the people with the right for vote, known as members or sympathizers of the opposition parties, had been removed by the Groza Government from the electoral lists¹⁵.

Communist Teohari Georgescu, the Interior Minister, stated in an article published by *Ny Dag* (*New Day*), the newspaper of the Swedish Communist Party, of November 18 about the incumbent government’s determination to stop all sorts of violence, although he did not believe that the long tradition of violence in Romanian elections could be eliminated in only one year and a half of his government, no one would be arrested for criminal activities related to the electoral process even though he would carry a weapon, while the last members of the opposition got free from prison one day before the election, but, according to him, only several tens of thousands were withdrawn the right to participate at the scrutiny (*sic!*)¹⁶.

The *Expressen* of 18 November appreciated that the British and United States Governments criticized the government for the climate of denying the freedom and lackness of political transparency, as only the communists really ruled the government

and praised the two governments for their willingness to avoid that Eastern Europe would fall into Soviet sphere of influence. The Groza Government dismissed all those allegations as interference in the domestic politics of Romania. The two western governments accused Romanian Government of faking electoral lists, of denying the right of opposition to meetings during the electoral campaign which were disbanded by armed hooligans acting under the government’s backing, while a heavy censorship was directed on the opposition. The American note of November 15 clearly stated that the elections had no possibility to express the wish of the Romanian people and the Americans, as signatory of the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe, had the obligation to guarantee the right of freedom for Romanians which meant the United States would refuse to admit the outcome as Romania had become a dictatorship¹⁷. The Swedish newspaper foresaw that the Groza Government would simply follow the old procedure of falsifying the elections, as its predecessors, more or less Fascist, had applied it¹⁸.

The leftist *Afton-Tidningen* (*The Evening Newspaper*) characterized the electoral campaign as bloody, citing *Radio Moscow* (emphasis added), which informed about peasants’ brutality who violently disrupted communist meetings on November 18, incited by the opposition parties (*sic!*). Subsequently, the Communist meetings were suspended in those areas.

Although the British labourist *Daily Herald* noted the lack of support for the government in villages, only the six parties, who formed the Groza Government, were allowed and managed to have electoral manifestos. Also, those parties offered butterflies. The communist Anna Pauker represented the most important political figure in the country, although she lacked any public office, but she used an influence similar to Tito in Yugoslavia and Dimitroff in Bulgaria. The newspaper concluded, as the British Government had done, the elections should be characterized as without access to media for all parties and without the right to

¹² Report concerning news of the Swedish press related to Romania, in the timeframe 15–30.11.1946 (author’s translation), *loc. cit.*

¹³ *Expressen* (no date), *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ Report concerning news of the Swedish press related to Romania, in the timeframe 15–30.11.1946 (author’s translation), *loc. cit.*

¹⁵ *Dagens Nyheter* of 15.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ny Dag* of 18.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

¹⁷ See the United States of America Note of 15.11.1946 (in English and in Romanian), issued by Berry and addressed to Tătărescu, *România în Anticamera Conferinței de Pace de la Paris: Documente* (hereafter RACPPD), Edited by Arhivele Naționale ale României (Ed. Marin-Radu Mocanu), București, 1996, 325–327.

¹⁸ *Expressen* of 18.11.1946, Reports and press articles related to the international and domestic events of different countries, including Romania, 1945–1948 issue (author’s translation), 200–220 Sweden, 1945–1949 box, Sweden fonds, DARMFA.

meetings for all parties¹⁹. In London, a spokesman of the National Peasant Party, expressed the view that a quarter of the Romanian peasants, approximate two million people, were removed the right to vote by Communist-dominated Government²⁰.

Ny Dag of November 19 falsely asserted that the parties within the government represented the landowners up to fifty hectares – actually, peasants with no land or almost none, as the landed people feared they would be forced to provide the land for the future associations of peasants controlled by the government, as in the Soviet Union –, while only the rich people supported the opposition parties (*sic!*). Another lie regarded the fact Maniu forbade the Communist Party in 1922 – actually the National Liberal Government forbade it in 1924, as Maniu rose to national leader in 1926 after his regional party, the National Romanian Party (based in Transylvania and Western Romania), united to the Peasant Party and became the President of the Council of Ministers only in 1928. The Anglo-Saxon powers behaved undemocratically as they supported the opposition parties and a victory of the opposition parties meant neo-fascism, antisemitism, white terror and the cancellation of the recent reforms (*sic!*)²¹.

The outcome

The liberals *Stockholms-Tidningen* (The Stockholm Times) and *Dagens Nyheter* of November 21, citing Reuter news agency, published that national liberal minister Mihail Romniceanu, one of the two ministers of the opposition in the government (both without portfolio, still), got injured in Galatz in the day of elections and bloody clashes happened in Brăila and many places, while other opposition candidates complained in regard to the access in the electoral section, only after the urns were already on their way to county' centers²².

The liberal *Göteborgs Handels-och Sjöfarts-Tidning* (*The Newspaper for Trade and Navigation from Gothenburg*) of November 21, citing the British *Daily Telegraph*, concluded the

elections stood successfully for a parody, as soldiers fully armed watched over the sections, while the Ministry of Interior, led by communist Teohari Georgescu, released the information that six people were killed and many others injured and blamed, without a proper investigation, and falsely accused Maniu and Brătianu, the opposition's leaders, who have applied fascist methods even in the day of scrutiny!²³

The *Dagens Nyheter* of November 21 also informed the readers in regard to an appeal of the opposition parties in order to cancel the elections due to the state of terror in which they were held and, as one of the unnamed leaders of the opposition had stated, an approximate of 30% were actually withdrawn the right to vote. The appeal could not be published in *Dreptatea* (*The Justice*), the newspaper of the National Peasant Party, as it could not pass the heavy censorship imposed by the government²⁴. On November 23, the Swedish newspaper announced Maniu and Brătianu wanted to appeal to United Nations Organization as they could prove the existence of electoral fraud, so frequent that in some polling stations the Bloc of Democratic Parties, the government's coalition of parties, got more votes than the people who had the right to vote in those polling stations!²⁵

The conservative *Svenska Dagbladet* (*The Swedish Daily News*) remained amazed as two presidents of the three oppositions parties, Dinu Brătianu and Constantin Titel Petrescu, failed to be elected. *The Soviet Radio* (*Moscow*), cited by the newspaper (emphasis added), stated the Romanian elections demonstrated the Romanian people rejected the international capitalism – actually, the ideologies ruling in western Europe, United States and Canada (*sic!*)²⁶.

Stockholms-Tidningen of November 21 characterized the election as bloody and the opposition leaders were arrested, facts for which the British Government refused to recognize the fraudulent election²⁷.

Ny Dag of November 23 appreciated the Romanian election as a victory for democracy (*sic!*) and criticized the British Government for subjectivity as the British had no protest against the Fascism imposed in Greece or against the state of

¹⁹ See British Note of 16.11.1946 (in English and in Romanian), issued by Adrian Holman, the British Political Representative in Romania, and addressed to Tătărescu, RACPPD, 327–331.

²⁰ *Aftontidningen* of 19.11.1946, Reports and press articles related to the international and domestic events of different countries, including Romania, 1945–1948 issue (author's translation), 200–220 Sweden, 1945–1949 box, Sweden fonds, DARMFA.

²¹ *Ny Dag* of 19.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

²² *Stockholms-Tidningen* of 21.11.1946 and *Dagens Nyheter* of 21.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

²³ *Göteborgs Handels-och Sjöfarts-Tidning* of 21.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

²⁴ *Dagens Nyheter* of 21.11.1946 *loc. cit.*

²⁵ *Dagens Nyheter* of 23.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

²⁶ *Svenska Dagbladet* of 22.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

²⁷ *Stockholms-Tidningen* of 22.11.1946 and of 23.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

non-combat in regard to Franco's Spain, but the British Government had no respect for the wishes of Romanian people (*sic!*), not forgetting to remind that the British had no protest for the Romanian elections in the past²⁸.

Afton-Tidningen of November 24 admitted the use of terror and violence, but for both sides. The newspaper noted that before the World War II only 40% of the people could vote in comparison with this election (only women with formal education could vote a decade earlier, note added), and only important fascist people had been withdrawn the rights to vote and be elected. *Afton-Tidningen* considered the limiting human rights as temporary, due to the tensions after the war²⁹.

Svenska Dagbladet of November 26 denied that the countries from Eastern Europe could qualify for a democracy, their governments themselves have considered them to be people's democracy, which meant for them a better democracy, but in fact a lesser democracy, as in the Romanian election, the government used violence and with the methods of ruling of the country Romania could qualify in the same category as a dictatorship. The peasants represented three quarters of the population and as they owned their land, (they wanted to keep it and did not provide it for an association of farmers, controlled by the communist state, note added), but their parties lost elections in Eastern Europe – although logically they could not in a democracy –, and their leaders happened to be exiled, defeated in elections, murdered or interned as an example in Romania and Ion Mihalache, the second in the leadership of the National Peasant Party, lost his rights to vote and to be elected (in 1941, Mihalache participated as volunteer in the war against the Soviet Union and lost these rights according to the electoral law, note added). As for the industrial workers, they stood against Communism in Romania and Bulgaria³⁰.

Although cautious as usual, *Morgon-Tidningen* (*The Morning Paper*), the newspaper of the Swedish Social-Democratic Party, mentioned in the issue of

²⁸ *Ny Dag* of 23.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

The British Government refused to consider the Romanian elections as fair. See the British Note of 30.11.1946, issued by Holman to Tătărescu, in RACPPD, 340–342.

²⁹ *Afton-Tidningen* of 24.11.1946, Reports and press articles related to the international and domestic events of different countries, including Romania, 1945–1948 issue (author's translation), 200–220 Sweden, 1945–1949 box, Sweden fonds, DARMFA.

³⁰ *Svenska Dagbladet* of 26.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

November 27 that United States Government did not accept the Romanian election as fair³¹.

The social democratic *Arbetet* (*The Labour*) from Malmö admitted on 3 February 1947 the Groza Government made pressures upon the voters, but Maniu and Brătianu should not complain anymore as they won always the elections after the king appointed prime-minister one of them. Actually it was a lie. That happened, but not to them. Maniu and his party always won by fair means their right to govern. As for Dinu Brătianu who never became the President of the Council of Ministers (the Prime-Minister), his elder brother, the famous Ion I.C. Brătianu, won several elections after late King Ferdinand appointed him shortly before the elections³².

The author in *Arbetet* denied the totalitarianism in Romania as Petru Groza, the incumbent Prime-Minister, chaired a party for peasants, and his deputy represented the president of a dissident part of the National Liberal Party, the Communists representing only a small fraction of the Government and the new Parliament, while Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were ruled by Communists and had abolished the monarchy, which was not Romania's case. Romanian Social-Democratic Party increased its political power and representation in the Parliament, and when the fight between them and communists began, the social democrats would be the only hope for democracy in Romania and would get the support of the free world against the communism and the panslavism. The article praised Petru Groza's policy of balance, which avoided any rise of the former Nazis. The author concluded that the time did not come for a Romanian democracy. The author blamed the Romanian people for accusing the Groza Government for the drought, for the Soviet occupation, for the war compensations, for the Soviet-Romanian trade agreement and the Sovrom companies – where the Soviets received half of the shares for nothing (note added) (*sic!*)³³.

Conclusions

As Sweden was an independent country, the press published all sorts of commentary in regard to Romanian elections. The communist *Ny Dag*, supported by few leftist newspapers, praised the Groza Government for its tolerance and its democratic policies (*sic!*).

The other newspapers, on the contrary, saw the

³¹ *Morgon-Tidningen* of 27.11.1946, *loc. cit.*

³² *Arbetet* of 03.02.1947, *loc. cit.*

³³ *Ibidem.*

methods used by the Romanian Government during the electoral campaign and the day of scrutiny as clear examples of a totalitarian regime, mainly the removal from the voters' registry of the opposition members or their known sympathizers, the denial of freedom, violence and censorship. One could suppose the Swedish press kept moderation during the electoral process as the social-democrat Swedish Government was known as cautiously, but the truth is that the Swedish major newspapers vigorously criticized the denial of freedom and use of force by the Groza Government during the electoral campaign. Without losing credibility, it is possible those major newspapers – liberal or conservative and with their parties were in opposition – should have reacted courageously against one of the fewest then-certain satellite of Moscow (Romania) as they had the chance for a payback

to Soviets as the Soviet press had adopted a hard line in the last months against the social-democrat Swedish Government, which ended only after the signing of the Soviet-Swedish trade agreement in October 1946, which included a Swedish loan used by the Soviet Union to buy Swedish products.

Also, the Swedish press published the allegations of the opposition parties as up to 50% of the voters were removed the right of vote – although too high to be believed, it was possible this percent could have existed in some areas, such as Transylvania, where almost all Romanians sympathized the National Peasant Party–, the fact the government received more votes than registered people in the polling station or the opposition parties' appeals in order to have foreign observers in polling stations or to cancel the election, after the electoral fraud.