

COMMUNIZATION OF ROMANIA: NOVEMBER 1946 ELECTIONS

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The emergence of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe (including Romania) after WW2 was possible due to the West's failure to employ measurements to preempt Soviet ambitions of imposing a new order in the Region. As a result of Churchill's and Stalin's infamous percentages agreement of October 1944, Russia was given a 90% stake in the postwar fate of Romania in exchange for the West's 90% stake in Greece. Communism was never popular among the people, Romanians were forced to accept and live under a hated regime. After August 23, 1944, Soviet troops were present in Romania and under their protection and Moscow's orders and influence; the Romanian Communist Party (whose members at that time were mostly opportunists, losers, and imported activists from the Soviet Union) became more and more influential and powerful in the country. The Red Army finally left Romania in 1958 and Communism fell in 1989.

In order to better understand the political atmosphere in Romania before the 1946 elections it is perhaps useful to review some historical facts, shortly presented below.

In March 1944 Red Army troops entered Romanian territory. On August 23, 1944, Romania accepted the Armistice with the USA, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union and declares war to the Axis countries. A few days later the Red Army entered Bucharest, despite the fact the Romanian Army has previously liberated the city from the German troops. With the help of the Red Army a pro-Communist and pro-Soviet government is installed in Romania on March 6, 1945, with Dr. Petru Groza as Prime Minister. It was considered from the start a force-imposed and a non-democratic action. On February 4, 1946, USA and Great Britain granted the new Romanian government diplomatic recognition. In exchange, the Groza government promised free elections and promulgated an electoral legislation. The Communist Interior Minister quietly conducted sample elections in a few selected villages. The results astounded the Communists and confirmed private estimates of the overwhelming support for the opposition (National Peasants Party, followed by the National Liberal Party). Polls showed that on average only 1 in 26 families supported the new Communist regime. The general elections were held on November 19, 1946. The Communists won only 7-8% of the votes, however due to massive fraud they claimed 90% of the ballots. On December 30, 1947 King Mihai was forced to abdicate and go into exile.

Political situation in Romania before the 1946 elections

The Groza government, whose political fortunes depended heavily on Soviet benefaction, had no illusions about the extent of its popularity. This government was theoretically a coalition one, however the Communists held crucial posts, including the Interior, Army, Justice, Economic Affairs, Propaganda, and Communications Ministries. The delay of the elections was undoubtedly driven by the Communists realization that they had no hope of winning a free one.

The Soviets forced Romania to relinquish considerable amounts of industrial equipment and supplies, remit an enormous reparation debt, as well as to pay heavily for the maintenance of the Soviet troops stationed in the country. Like other East European countries under Soviet influence, Romania refused to participate in the Marshall Plan for the economic reconstruction of Europe. In May 1945, Romania and the Soviet Union signed a long-term economic agreement that provided for the creation of joint-stock companies, known as Sovroms, through which the Soviet Union controlled Romania's major

sources of income, including the oil and uranium industries. The Sovroms were tax exempt and Soviets held key management positions. Moreover, by May 1945, the cost of living in Bucharest alone had risen 27 times since before WW2 and the inflation was effectively skyrocketing.

In the Summer of 1946 the Groza regime finally promulgated the electoral legislation, however the electoral commission responsible for administering the elections was placed under the regimes direct control. While endeavoring to maintain its virtual monopoly on the public discourse, the regime fabricated stipulations that kept many of the opposition off the ballot and many members of the opposition were stricken from the electoral lists entirely. In the end, the government resolved to hold the elections on November 19, 1946. Despite aggressive Communist propaganda and pre-electoral agitation, the vast majority of Romanians was unconvinced about the benefit of the new system to be implemented in Romania.

The Communists participated in the elections as Blocul Partidelor Democratice (Democratic Parties Block) and choose the sun as their symbol. The BPD warned the population, especially peasants, “if you want to protect your land, vote for the sun”. The Communists did all in their power to create an election win. The government coerced the printers union into refusing to print material that was critical of the government and impeded distribution of opposition party newspapers. Supplies of paper rolls for the opposition newspapers were delayed or even stopped. Communist propaganda was dirty and leaders of the opposition were labeled as traitors, collaborationists, “sold to the West”, reactionary, profascists, anti-Soviet and were charged with undermining Romania’s economy and national unity. Communist hatchet men attacked opposition political workers at campaign gatherings.

On November 19, 1946, Romanians cast ballots in an obviously rigged election. Documented sources suggest that only a small percentage of all the ballots were distributed to the voters directly and in a large number of instances a number of ballots already marked in the favor of the “sun” were introduced into the ballot box. On Election Day the majority of the ballots that had been cast for the National Peasant and the National Liberal Parties were simply thrown away. By fraud and threatening the population the Communists claimed the support of 90% of the voters. Nobody could do anything about this because of the presence of the Red Army in Romania. Romania’s fate was sealed; it was now on the Soviet side of the Iron Curtain.

Communist postal propaganda before the 1946 elections

Immediately following the installation of the Groza government, the communist propaganda started to be extremely active. Stamps issued by the Romanian Post were particularly targeted. In preparation for the forthcoming elections, several Communist related issues were printed. Because they are listed in all major catalogues they are not reproduced in this article.

On April 30, 1945, a set of 6 stamps and 1 miniature sheet titled “Apararea Patriotica” (Patriotic Defense) were released (Scott #B261-B267). Three of the stamps and the miniature sheet depict the portraits of Ilie Pintilie, Bernath Andrei, and Filimon Sirbu, all notorious Communists. Due to the very high surcharges, these stamps are extremely difficult to find on genuine commercially used covers and/or post cards.

A second set, dedicated to the 1st Congress of the “Romanian-Soviet Union Relationship Association” (known as ARLUS), was released on May 20, 1945 (Scott #B268-B272), while another Communist related set was issued on June 30, 1945. The latter was dedicated to the “Labor General Confederation”, a notorious international Communist organization and the three stamps (issued in perforate and imperforate versions) depict portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin (Scott #B273-B278). Romanian Postal History Bulletin 2002; 13:3 (Whole number 39)

The imperforated stamps were issued in blocks of 4 with a limited printing of only 10,000 copies. These stamps are also extremely difficult to find on commercial mail.

A set of two stamps dedicated to the “Plowmen’s Front” (Frontul Plugarilor, a Communist organization lead by Dr. Petru Groza) followed on August 23, 1945 (Scott #B290-B291). A scarce cover franked with this set, locally registered sent in Brasov in September 1945 is shown in Figure 1. This set was overprinted with new values on February 1946 (Scott #B318-B325). One must note that the high surcharges on the stamps of the latter 2 issues was entirely destined to fund the “Plowmen’s Front”! This is perhaps the only case in the world when surcharges on postage stamps were used to raise money for funding political parties!

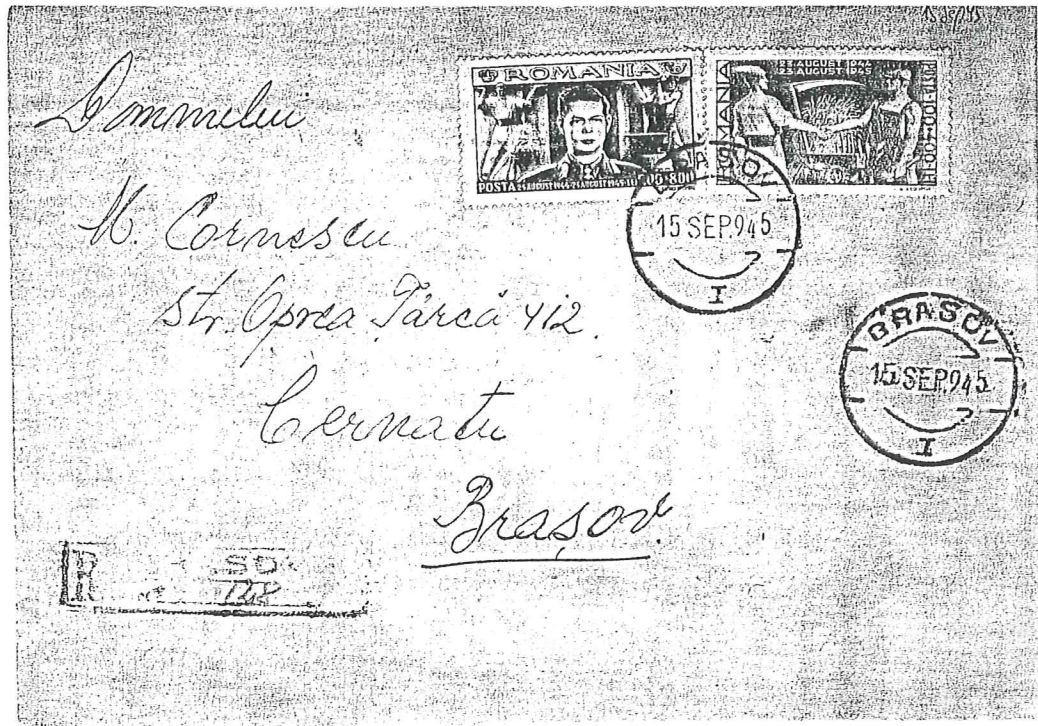


Fig. 1

A set of 6 stamps (Scott #B326-B328) and 1 souvenir sheet (not listed in Scott) were released on March 6 1946 to popularize the Agrarian Reform done by the Communist regime only for electoral propaganda. The miniature sheet depicts Dr. Petru Groza distributing land titles to the peasants. The land so “generously” given to the peasants was brutally recovered from them a few years later, once the so-called “Collectivization of the Agriculture” started in 1948. The registered cover in Fig 2, sent in April 1946 from Arad to Satu-Mare is franked, among the definitive stamps, with 2 stamps of 80 lei from this issue. Stamps from this issue are scarce on genuine commercial mail, especially the values of the set bearing surcharges.

On October 20, 1946 a set of 5 stamps and 1 miniature sheet (Scott #625-627 and B338-B339) dedicated to the 2nd ARLUS Congress were issued. Fig.3 depicts a registered picture post card (ppc’s are seldom sent by registered mail!) sent in March 1947 from Campulung-Bucovina to Bucharest, franked with a 200 lei definitive stamp and a nice block of 4 of the 80 lei stamp from the 2nd ARLUS Congress issue. The ppc in Fig.4, locally sent in Baia-Mare in November 1946, is franked with 2 stamps of 100 lei from the same issue. A non-philatelic registered and express cover sent in March 1947 from Campulung-Bucovina to Bucharest franked with a block of 4 of the 300 lei stamp from the same issue, is illustrated in Fig.5.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

The item illustrated in Figure 6 is a souvenir cover sent by air mail from Constanta to Bucharest in November 1946 and it is franked with the complete set of the 2nd ARLUS Congress issue.

Once the Communists “won” the elections, the number of Communist related postal issues increased considerably in the following years.

A big target for the Communist propaganda before the 1946 elections was the Army, where most of the officers and soldiers were still loyal to the Monarchy. The military post card illustrated in Fig 7 was
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printed and distributed free of charge by the Romanian Communist Party to soldiers enrolled in the Romanian Army a month or two before the elections. Note the “Votati Lista Nr.1 A Blocului Partidelor Democratice” (Vote the Democratic Parties Bloc, List No.1) slogan at the bottom. It is a rare item and to my knowledge there are no similar ones genuinely sent through the mail.

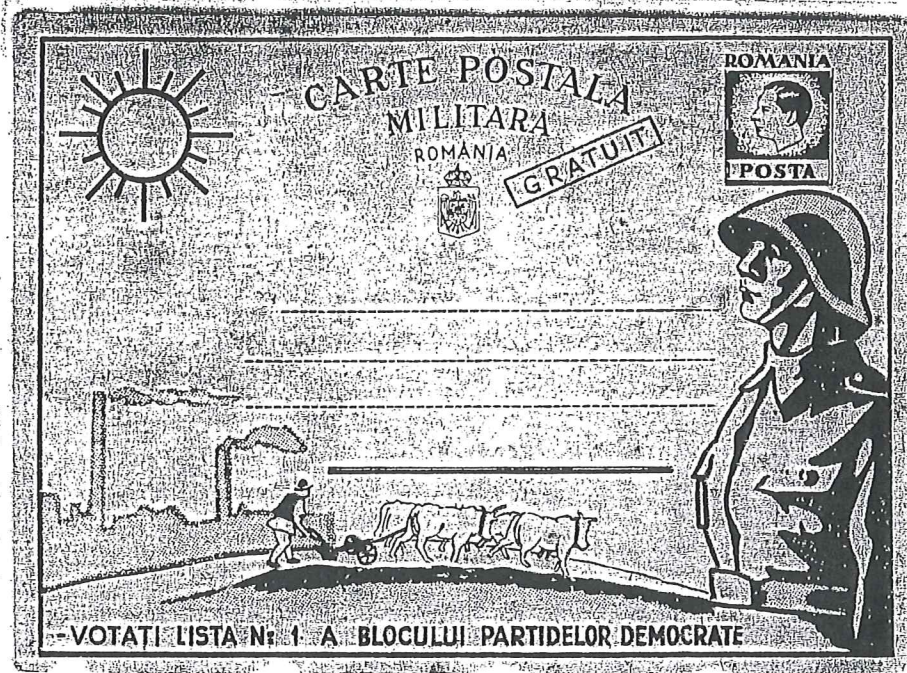


Fig. 7

Before the 1946 elections the Communists prepared gummed propaganda labels that were also distributed free of charge and were intended to be affixed on all mail, including telegram forms (as one can see in Fig.8). It is not clear yet if these labels were distributed through post offices or by other means. The labels depict the Sun and bear a text that reads “Votati/ Soarele/ Semnul/ Blocului Partidelor Democratice” (Vote the Sun, the Symbol of the Democratic Parties Bloc) and are known printed in blue or red on white paper. The gum and the perfect perforation suggest these labels were prepared at “The Fabrica de Timbre” (Stamp Printing House) in Bucharest. The quantity printed is as yet unknown. Genuine mailed items bearing such labels are scarce.

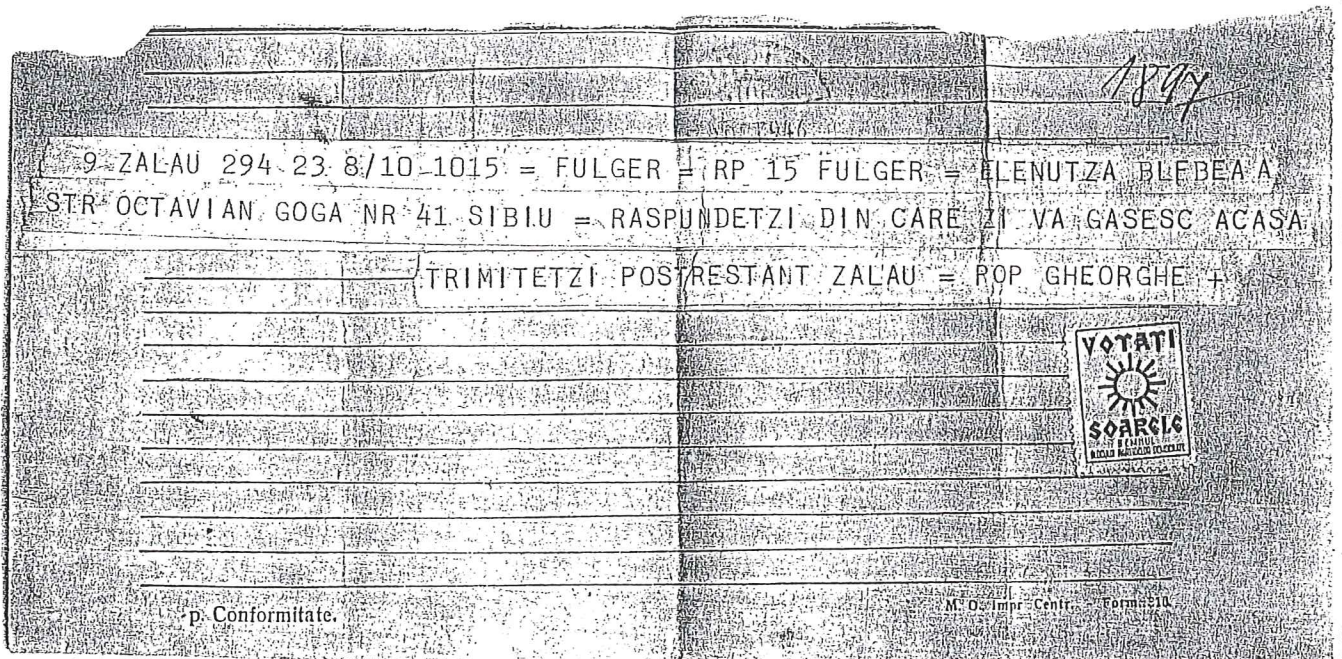


Fig. 8

The item illustrated in Figure 9 is a stampless official hand-made cover (using some official forms that remained from the Hungarian administration!) locally sent from the Timisoara Police Station to the Timisoara City Hall. A Communist propaganda label printed in blue is affixed in the upper right corner of the cover. The item illustrated in Figure 10, a cover sent on November 9, 1946, from Brasov to Bucharest, has a similar propaganda label printed in red affixed on the front and also a special propaganda handstamp that reads “Votati Soarele” (Vote the Sun). Another type of propaganda handstamp in use on mail prior to the 1946 elections is the one applied on the cover in Fig.11 and reads



Fig. 9

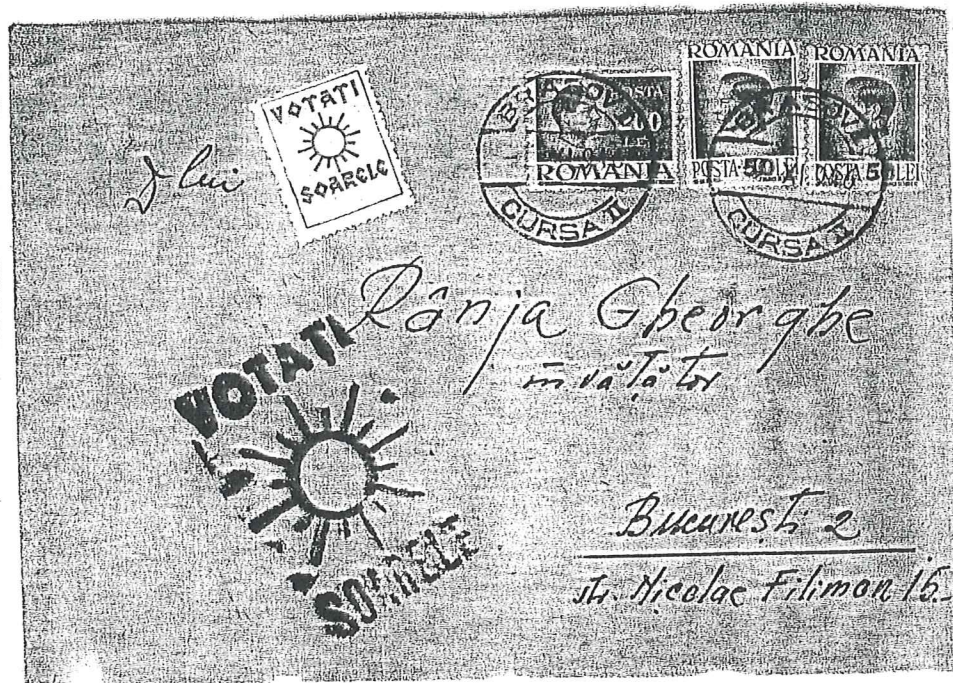


Fig. 10



Fig. 11

“Votati/Soarele/Lista Nr.1” (Vote the Sun/List No.1). Finally, another type of propaganda handstamp that reads “Traiasca Victoria/Blocului Partidelor/Democratice In Alegerei” (Long Live the Victory of the Democratic Parties Bloc in the Elections) is illustrated in Fig.12. Propaganda handstamps like the latter are also known as having been applied to incoming mail from abroad and apparently were in use in some county capitals and Bucharest. All these propaganda labels and handstamps are found on items mailed between September and November 1946.



Fig. 12