



ORIGINAL PAPER

Colonel Black's scheme

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Abstract:

In October Romanian Vice – Consul in Istanbul (Constantinople) approached S . O . E. with plans for a military being in Romania backed by a group of Generals and a large proportion of the senior officers in the Army . Spokesman of the group , a Colonel in command of a regimental depot in Bucharest , informed the Vice – Consul that the group was willing to overthrow Antonescu by a coup d ‘ etat directed in the name of the King . The plans for Antonescu ‘ s arrest were said to be complete and the group wished to fix zero hour and arrange hire plans under our guidance .S.O.E . have collaborated with Vice – Consul in the past and have complete confidence in him. He in turn vouches for spokesman of the group . Three prominent Generals were said to be involved.

This article traces the evolution of the opposition group grouping around the military opposition in Romania between October 1943 and March 1944 and their contacts with Special Operations Executive.

Keywords: *Black, Special Operation Executive, vice-consul, Istanbul.*

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Vladescu-Olt informs S.O.E.

In October 1943, the Romanian vice-consul in Istanbul (Constantinople) approached the S.O.E. with plans for a military uprising in Romania, supported by a group of generals and a large part of the senior officers in the army. The group's spokesman informed the vice-consul that the group was willing to overthrow Antonescu through a coup d'état executed in the name of the King. It was said that the plans for Antonescu's arrest were complete and the group wanted to establish the starting point and organize future plans under the guidance of S.O.E. The group's spokesman was a colonel in charge of a regimental warehouse in Bucharest. S.O.E. they had worked with the Vice-Consul in the past and trusted him completely. He, in turn, vouched for the group's spokesperson. Three prominent generals were involved. In the group was the king's chief military advisor, General Constantin Sănătescu, the temporary commander of the 2nd army corps in Galați, General Gheorghe Potopeanu and the interim commander of the 4th Army and Constantin Nicolescu. The War Office believed that by holding high office throughout the war they would be able to influence the men under their command. After further consultation with S.O.E. the Vice Consul informed the group that this message had been delivered and was exploring means of communicating with them via wireless. S.O.E. they were not particularly eager to pass this report on to the Soviet government. Even assuming that the scheme was genuine, the British did not yet know what kind of support they would be required to give the plotters, who would want to know what treatment the United Nations would give the new regime if the plot succeeded. This scheme was sent to Colonel King Salter, Major Talbot-Rice and Major Holmes on 20 October. S.O.E. wrote to Nichols at the Foreign Office that day, asking for confirmation of the estimate of S.O.E. regarding the reliability and status of the Vice-Consul. The service responded on October 21. The Foreign Office has since requested the names of the generals, which have been provided. SOE stated that: *We understand that they are passing on the information to the Foreign Minister in Moscow, but perhaps it would be better not to reveal all the facts to the Russians at their current stage. About Cătălin Vlădescu it is said that our people from the Middle East have full confidence in him. He is an intimate collaborator of Ion Christu, the current Romanian minister in Sofia who, on a mission in Turkey not long ago, also gave evidence of his pro-allied sympathies. We know the names of the three principal generals who are said to be in the group, and the War Office, whom we have consulted, are of the opinion that they are officers of sufficient importance, who have held high office throughout this war, to be able to influence the people under their command. One of them is Constantin Sănătescu, the young king's military adviser. Although, of course, then the final decision must be yours, I wonder if it would be wise to reveal this plot to the Russians at this time. Perhaps it might be embarrassing to us later if the Moscow Conference does not produce the desired results and if the Russians refuse any suggestion of support for the revolt. We would prefer to see the additional details promised to you after a new meeting with the consul on October 15 before deciding whether or not to report this development to Moscow, where, as you know, the three foreign ministers will discuss Romanian matters.*

In London, in the correspondence between Hodgkinson, Talbot-Rice and S.O.E. officials, the problem appears on October 15 (EGB/RO/561/3) and again on October 20 (RO/602) when the outline of a military plot in Romania appears, which had been reported via Istanbul. On January 12, 1944, another telegram was received regarding this project. It is to be noted that, while the original scheme communicated to S.O.E. was in

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the nature of a military rising against Marshal Antonescu in the name of the King, the plan now proposed is one of surrendering parts of the Army, not to the Russians alone, but to a combined British token force with the Russians. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens, many S.O.E. telegrams)

Black commanded a regimental depot in Bucharest, and being a relative of White's chief in the Foreign Office, who has been in contact with British for some time, knew that White was in a position to inform the British of this proposal. Black claimed to speak on behalf of the Romanian Generals Nicolescu, Sanatescu and Potopopeanu. Nicolescu was an ex-Minister of War and now commands an army corps in Ploiesti and the Prahova Valley. Sanatescu has been placed in the royal palace as A.D.C. and military adviser to the King, while Protopopescu was in command of a division in Iasi and Bucovina.

The Generals who continue to support Antonescu were Pantazi, Jienescu, Steflea and Schwab. The last named was in command of the Brasov area. Antonescu at that moment depend for his personal safety upon the loyalty of the Guards battalion stationed in the building of the new Foreign Office, which housed the Council of Ministers. Opposition politicians were not aware of the proposed scheme, but it may be known to SOE most important nonpolitical collaborator. The objective of the rising was limited. It aims only at overthrowing Antonescu and his regime. Plans for Antonescu's arrest were complete, and it has been decided that if he resists arrest he will be shot. The officer entrusted with this duty had already been selected. Black has asked White to request the British to establish zero hour for the scheme, and the group wished to elaborate future plans under British guidance.

White has intimated to Black that he will inform the British, but has pointed out that the group should establish direct contact with the British. With this in view S.O.E. have sent word to Black, asking him to accept a W/T transmitter in order that we could have a regular and more rapid exchange of information with the group. S.O.E. have also advised the group to begin right away to lay down dumps of arms and ammunition, with a view to organizing an army of guerillas in the event of a German occupation. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens,, SOE Report: Subject: BLACK 63/13/ME/7. 27th October, 1943). Cairo informed London by several telegrams on 15 October (JSAP/RO/564/3) and again on 20 October (RO/601) and 31 October (RO/611), outlining a military plot in Romania, which was reported to them via Istanbul. It should be noted that while the initial plan communicated to them was in the nature of a military uprising against Marshal Antonescu in the name of the King, the plan presented in January 1944 is one of handing over parts of the army, not only to the Russians, but to a symbolic British force combined with the Russians. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens, Telegram EGB/RO/1039/3, 12th January 1944.)

The Issue of Group Member Integrity

In October, Masterson had two meetings with Vladescu-Olt and discussed with him first of all the possibility of a coup d'état in Romania, as a result of the information that Vladescu brought on this topic. The gist of the conversations was sent to S.O.E. London by signal and copies of these signals were attached, bearing in mind the corrupt nature in which some of the signals reach HQ in London. For now, there was little to add to the story other than Masterson wanted to point out that SOE should consider the scheme fully given that it was brought in by Vladescu-Olt. He always held a high

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opinion of this collaborator and at that moment, more than ever, he was fully convinced of his good faith, Colonel Black specifically asked Vladescu-Olt not to divulge his name for the time being. As stated in the telegram, Black is a relative of Ion Christu and knows that Vladescu-Olt has the full confidence of Ion Christu and that through this channel the scheme proposed by Colonel Black and his party will become known. by the British. It was unfortunate that Black contacted Vladescu-Olt only two or three days before the latter's departure from Romania, and therefore they could only have two meetings. Vladescu-Olt did not fail, even during these meetings, to convince Black that unless a more rapid method of communication could be established between their group and the British, there was no hope of effective collaboration. On his passage through Sofia, Vladescu-Olt informed Ion Christu of his conversations with Black. Ion Christu instructed Vladescu-Olt to contact S.O.E. immediately and obtain British reactions to the scheme. For now, the only safe channel to get a message to or from the group to S.O.E. was through Sofia, i.e. Ion Christu. So Vladescu-Olt could write to Ion Christu. Ion Christu, through a telegram - in Bucharest he would send the message to Colonel Black, Masterson signaled to Vladescu-Olt that he would pass the gist of the conversations to the British higher authorities but that in the meantime (especially since the courier had already left for Sofia), he should ask Black if he would agree to operate a WT. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens., S.O.E. Memorandum October 29.)

The issue of security was taken up twice, because S.O.E. realized that there were so many difficulties they were facing in Romania, given the neglect the opposition was showing towards the most important principles of security. Vladescu-Olt knew all about Dan's proposed visit to Switzerland. Although he realized the high esteem in which he was held by his S.O.E. friends in Romania, there seems to have been no reason to divulge information about Dan's trip. Furthermore, A/H 177 gave him the supposed name of D/E 27 (Constantinescu) and told him that he was still trying to find him and - the Serbian S.O.E. team member (Ranji) employed in Bucharest or elsewhere. A/H 177 could have communicated all this by B.B.C. code and brought the information to the S.O.E. just as early, bearing in mind that Vladescu-Olt brought with it messages 6 and 7 from Bucharest. Finally, there was another point raised by Vladescu-Olt, namely his relations with Gane and his references to the "Celea" danger. Vlădescu said that Gane called him from Ankara and asked him to go there for talks. He actually went there on the night of the 21st and it was definitely agreed with him that, for the first time, no mention would be made of the military scheme mentioned at the beginning of this letter during his conversation. Vladescu-Olt pointed out that he had a discussion with Gane in Bucharest before the latter's departure for Istanbul.

He had given him the telephone number of Chastelaine and advised him to call this number as soon as he arrived in Istanbul and that in this way he would contact D/H 5, who would be able to get in touch with Chastelaine or D/H 311 very easily and that no doubt one of the letters would come to Turkey to meet him. Vladescu-Olt did not know why Gane did not call this number and why he did not contact him.

As far as Buhagiar was concerned, he was contacted for the reasons that he was known by Gane in Romania, but mainly on account of Celea, as will be seen from what follows. Vladescu-Olt expected Gane to ask him to make arrangements for him to contact S.O.E. He pointed out that for the time being such contact was impossible, but if Gane wished to convey a message to S.O.E., he would undoubtedly do so through Vladescu-Olt. Ion Christu then turned to the Celea issue and asked how it was possible for a man like Celea to arrive in Bucharest and claim to have messages from H.A. representatives. The

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kind of man Celea is and the fact that he worked for the Romanian Secret Service and that everything he is told would get back to Mihai Antonescu and Cristescu. In fact, Celea, who was a rather obnoxious person, arranged to see Gane in Bucharest before the letter left, told him about the messages Buhagiar sent her. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens,, S.O.E. Memorandum about Celea).

A security issue was the presence of SIS in Istanbul through officer Celea. Romanian official circles in Istanbul seemed preoccupied with the Moscow Conference. Thus Vlădescu Olt reported that Celea of the Romanian Secret Service in the Romanian Legation in Ankara told a British agent that he had heard from the British that Romania had nothing to fear from the Moscow conference because although England would agree to sacrificing Baltic States she would not agree to quote sell Romania to the Russians. This information was telegraphed to Bucharest by Celea. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens,, Cypher message from: Cairo to: London ref no: 2452 23.10.)

The problem of communication between BLACK and S.O.E. -ISTANBUL members

Although the scheme appeared to them to be impossible, SOE officials asked Istanbul to leave them answers to the following questions:

- 1) Colonel "Black" will accept a B.L.O.C. and W/T operator; otherwise, a W/T set to be operated by him?
- 2) Does Maniu, king, Cretzianu or Caranfil know anything about the scheme?
- 3) Is the "Black" movement in any way connected to any of the political organizations?
- 4) S.O.E. London was asking for a written report giving further details, as it was not clear from paragraph F of the attached telegram, who would have led the operations on the Eastern Front immediately after the coup.(TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens, S.O.E. Telegram. London to Istanbul)

Following the first meeting with S.O.E., Vlădescu Olt sent a message to Black via Ion Christu informing him that he would send the message to the British and asking him to indicate whether the group would accept a w/t machine and to say where such a machine could be delivered to Bucharest and whether the group could provide a radio operator. Vlădescu Olt was told to advise the group to then start accumulating arms and ammunition and other equipment from various parts of the country for the organisation and arming of guerrillas in the event of German occupation. As soon as the number 5 cipher was in operation S.O.E. suggested that the extent of support expected from the army and the names of the generals behind the Black movement be indicated. S.O.E. hoped that the answer to the above would enable them to judge whether Dan was working with the group. Vlădescu Olt states that Black's integrity was secure and that he is a man they could trust implicitly as they had the good faith of Vlădescu Olt. The S.O.E. asked that he be allowed any further questions and instructions. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens,, S.O.E. telegram AH 89 to AH88)

S.O.E. suggested that 2 BES sets could be delivered. He considered that they might infiltrate one of the smaller A, M, 2. S.O.E. 6.0.3. devices S.O.E. 6.0.3. - asked Vlădescu -Olt if Dan was part of this group and he replied that he did not know, but at the same time he did not consider it impossible that Dan knew at least some of the generals forming the group. The opposition and other politicians did not know because of the secrecy. Vlădescu-Olt was going to contact them and maybe; they would bring more information on this and other subjects. S.O.E. noted that the air minister was mentioned in their signal as one of Antonescu's collaborators. Vlădescu-Olt could not say for

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certain that the King was aware, but the group had no doubt that he would play his part when the time came. General Sanatescu was placed in the Palace at the insistence of the group and his rank was much higher than normal for the position he holds. Vladescu-Olt was asked whether he knew whether the relations between Sanatescu and Styrcea were amicable. He didn't know, but thought they probably were, because Styrcea is definitely against Antonescu. The reason they asked him this was that they were considering Styrcea's property in Transylvania as a possible drop zone for a w/t machine they could send to this group. During Masterson's last visit to Istanbul in September 1943, he sent a message to Scanavy asking if he could visit Turkey, as he believed his connections with the Palace would allow him to discuss with Styrcea the possibility of setting up and leaving the area on his property. The messages were sent to Scanavy by Black Michael. One set of messages went through the mail and the second through the services of Vladescu-Olt. S.O.E. had heard from the latter that the letters he had received had been delivered. Both sets of letters had so far remained unanswered. Vladescu-Olt stated that he knew a very good friend of Styrcea' through whom he could send any message S.O.E. wished. S.O.E. believed that their first step, however, had to be to establish what the relationship between Styrcea and Sanatescu was? This was arranged to be done through Vladescu-Olt immediately. It showed that the whole scheme would get more. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens, A/H 89 Memorandum)

At the end of October 1943 S.O.E. Cairo sent S.O.E. Istanbul the following instructions: Since Gane has proposed the establishment of a reception area to receive B.L.O., it is possible that it is identical with Black's or Dan's proposals or both.

B. In this case, it would be preferable that instructions to Vladescu-Olt be sent to them via Reginald (Țurcanu) or via A/H.177.

C. To perform the November operation (Autonomous) they must have all full details of area, signals etc. by 8 November at the latest.

D. The message to Dan or Maniu must relate only to the receiving area or W/T communications or this engagement or some form of inland action

While the Moscow conference was in progress, Gane or Christu were asked to inquire about Jockey's situation without being informed of the latest facts known to S.O.E. On 13 January 1944 S.O.E. Cairo sent a telegram stating that Black's proposal contained in telegram 361 from Istanbul to Cairo was considered impracticable because British forces could not be involved in Romania, but a feasible plan might be possible if Black's plan could be linked to the political movement. It was suggested that S.O.E. Cairo provide another signaling plan. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens, Cypher message to: Istanbul REP NO: 1907, 29.10.43, RPT: LONDON REP NO: 2595)

S.O.E. assesses the strength of the movement

S.O.E. received additional information as follows. Two generals are bound by a plan: under the command of these two generals are a number of officers of all ranks ready to execute any orders from General Nicolescu. Once the movement has reached its peak, many others will immediately join. The following generals were not recommended to be contacted to join the movement: General Steflea, Chief of Staff General Pantazzi, Undersecretary of War; General Jienescu, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Air; General Schwab, in command of the Brasov district; General Rozin, in command of the Northern district of Moldavia, and General Macici, in command of the Sibiu district. The movement had about 500,000 men armed with Bren or Czechoslovakian rifles and cannons and captured Russian weapons, including Russian Brandt-type mortars. It was

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deficient in artillery, as the Romanian army lost most of its 105mm and 150mm guns at Stalingrad, as well as in tanks and anti-tank guns. Since the pro-German General Jienescu, the movement can only count on individuals in the Air Force. It was believed, however, that once the Movement began, individuals would be prepared to join and seize German equipment for this purpose. Generals Nicolescu and Potopeanu were ready to start the plan as soon as the British agreed to send a high-ranking officer with a force of about 1,000 to 2,000 paratroopers, which could be led immediately to the eastern front, where together with the Russian Command they would receive the unconditional surrender of the Romanian Army. In general, the presence of a token British force was insisted upon. S.O.E. asked whether the colonel in charge of the movement would accept a British liaison officer; whether Maniu and the King knew anything about the plan; whether the movement was connected with any political organisation; S.O.E. wanted further details of the scheme for Romania's surrender. Meanwhile, the British felt that the Soviet government should be aware that this scheme had been proposed. It was requested that the Soviets be informed accordingly and asked for their views. S.O.E. did not want to do anything about it until they knew Moscow's position. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens, R 744/230/6. ianuarie 1944. .M.R. FO to Moscow. FO. telegram nr. 119 EXTRA Zof 23th Octobre: Plan for military uprising in Romania.)

The Black Group and opposition activity

S.O.E. was also taking into consideration that there was a better chance of success if a w/t. machine could be attached to their group's headquarters before the coup was planned. During the discussions the following points also came up: due to his very serious illness, Vladescu-Olt was not as active as he would have liked to be during his stay in Bucharest. Only in the last days has he been able to move more freely. Among S.O.E. friends, he contacted A/H 177 and Gore. From the former he obtained information about the death of D/H 561, which D/H 5 had already reported. A/H 177 gave him messages 6 and 7 which S.O.E. gave London, which was an indication of the esteem in which Vladescu-Olt is held by A/H 177, it is interesting to note that the latter gave him the gist of these messages, and discussed with him the situation in the country. Both agreed on one point, namely their great disappointment at the inactivity and total lack of security of Maniu and his party's members and the other opposition political parties. Apparently, party and personal considerations were still foremost in the minds of many opposition leaders. If the Liberals seemed ahead of the curve to adhere to Maniu's policies, it was only to gain seats in a cabinet presided over by Maniu. They felt that, after a few months, they could overthrow Maniu. In the meantime, they all seem to be making the enormous mistake of believing that any government chaired by Maniu would have the blessing and support of the British and that this is their only hope of salvation. The British would save them from Russia. No information was kept secret by these "cafe" politicians and plans such as Maniu's departure from Romania were not only known in Bucharest political circles becoming known to the Germans. As an example of this, Vladescu-Olt stated that when Maniu was preparing to leave the country in the spring of 1943, a huge number of his party members came to greet him at the station in Bucharest as he was leaving for Costanza. Vladescu-Olt doubted that Maniu would ever be able to leave the country and, at his meeting with Gore, also expressed doubts that his projected departure in Maniu's company would ever materialize. Vladescu-Olt knew little about Dan and from the few observations that could be gleaned from him on the subject of Dan, S.O.E. understood that he regarded him as the dynamic leader that A/H 177 led

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S.O.E. to believe he was. However, he considered him to be very intelligent, very sincere, very pro-British and very well connected. He sent a high quality letter, a single lock code to "Black" by courier" and a plan with a signal. Assuming the generals we are informed are participating in the movement, Wade was supposed to get one of their Brandt-type mortars. The group was deficient in artillery because the Romanian army lost most of theirs at Stalingrad. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens,, DOCESR 744/2 30/0. ianuarie 1944. E.M.R. Foreign Office Telegram nr. 119 EXTRA Zof! R-35 109 tee RR-35 DH109/R0/1123/3.Istanbul.)

In a meeting at the end of January 1944, Vladescu-Olt as collaborator with Gane considered it appropriate to mention the Black Scheme. Gane told Vladescu-Olt to continue if he considered it in the interest of Romania, but he did not consider it necessary to ask for details and did not want to be a partner in the conduct of the country into anarchy. Vladescu-Olt declared that he could be a close friend of Maniu.

With regard to the merging of the Black movement with the political movement he will know the possibilities more exactly .He confirmed the 22 500 report that Chastelain was in the apartment at the gendarmery in Stephan the Great, but German demands for the surrender of the Autonomous team were refused. The interview was arranged through Vladescu-Olt. Gane himself welcomed the interview and arranged a future meeting in Ankara if necessary. These contradicts the 22500 report mentioned that Gane only wants to meet himself. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens,, Ciphred telegram from Istanbul desp. 30.1.1944.)

Informing Russian-American allies

S.O.E. Cairo in telegram XOD/RO/1119/3 of 20th January to London stated that they would prefer not to disclose details of the "Black" scheme in its then existing form which they considered undeveloped. They expected that more information would be available shortly, when replies would be received to the various messages sent to 'Colonel Black' by the courier Swian, who had left Istanbul for Romania on 19 January 1944.

S.O.E. believes that the real names of the generals behind the movement should not be revealed at this stage. With thematic modifications, Cairo agreed that the Russians should be announced. Thus, it was necessary to amend some paragraphs of the draft telegram in part to exclude the names. But the other information on the forces of the units etc. had to be included. The War Office might have some comments on the number of men involved.

S.O.E. agreed with the views of S.O.E. Cairo, as they were in charge of running the operation. But they felt it was desirable that the Russians knew the broad outlines of the plan.

S.O.E; authorised its representative in Moscow to communicate certain details of the Chastelain operation to his counterpart. (TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens,, Telegram, 20th January, 1944.(DTH/HO/1125/3))

The State Department memorandum reprising the British Embassy's briefing of 8 February agreed with the Embassy's comment that the scheme appeared to be embryonic and not very hopeful, and supported the view that time had passed since the original proposal of the plan in question, without any apparent crystallisation of the plan, the document tended to cast doubt on the likelihood of its eventual maturity. In addition, consideration of the proposal raised the question of the compatibility of the Romanian provision for the use of British symbolic forces with the principle of unconditional

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surrender. On the other hand, there was no known reason why the Romanian military elements should not be able to overthrow the Antonescu regime and link their authority over the country to the King's name and in collaboration with the Democratic elements-proceed to some neutral surrender and sign its terms before the representatives of the three principal Allies. American military authorities felt that contact should be maintained with Romanian dissident groups, in the hope that they might at some point be encouraged to rise up and force Romania to withdraw from the war on a basis favourable to the Allies.(TNA H5/782, Kew Gardens., 16 martie 1944. Telegramm nr. 1048.)

Conclusions

-Colonel Black's sketch was sent to S.O.E. by Cătălin Vlădescu Olt, the Romanian Consul in Istanbul:

-S.O.E. has checked on the loyalty of the members of the Black group to the Allied cause and has established who can and cannot be relied on among the Romanian army's subordinate officers.

-S.O.E. succeeded in establishing a channel of communication between the British intelligence service and the Black Group via WT and encrypted messages in French via the BBC.

S.O.E. tried to link the anti-Antonescu military resistance movement to the political movement. It failed because the security level of the political movement was very weak.

In February-March S.O.E. informed the Soviets and Americans about Black. The former gave no answer about Black, but decry the Autonomus scandal by accusing the British of conspiring with the Romanian opposition against them. This scandal ended with the Moscow Conference and the proxy agreement. The latter saw no progress and proposed abandoning this group.

Under these circumstances it is bizarre to claim in the S.O.E. final report that 23 August was in fact Colonel Black's scheme. (Zidaru Marian, *S.O.E. in Romania during the second world war. The Case Iuliu Maniu*, in *Conferința Internațională Nav-Mar-Edu 2007 15-17 noiembrie 2007*, p. 340.)

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Zidaru Marian, *S.O.E. in Romania during the second world war. The Case Iuliu Maniu*, in *Conferința Internațională Nav-Mar-Edu 2007 15-17 noiembrie 2007*, p. 340

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