

## **THE GROUNDING OF THE IL-18 AIRCRAFTS OF “TAROM” COMPANY AND THE INFORMING OF THE U.S. LEGATION HEAD IN BUCHAREST (JANUARY – MARCH 1963)**

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**Abstract:** It has been 60 years since an Il-18 airliner of Tarom company was forced to land by emergency near the Cyprus village of Paphos. As the problems of refuelling Il-18 airliners continued in Bucharest after this very serious incident that took place on February 24, 1962, we set out to present some details about it and the decisions which have been taken by the Romanian authorities for preventing a new event. For this purpose, we had to use the completely unique photographs kept in an archive in Romania, some original documents wrote in Bucharest, in February and March 1963, by the chief of Legation of the United States of America and a report wrote by the Romanian Minister of Transport and Telecommunications.

**Keywords:** airplane, Cyprus, IL-18, Romania, the Soviet Union, the United States of America.

It has been 60 years since an Il-18 airliner of Tarom company was forced to land by emergency near the Cyprus village of Paphos. As the problems of refuelling Il-18 airliners continued in Bucharest after this very serious incident that took place on February 24, 1962, we set out to present some details about it and the decisions which have been taken by the Romanian authorities for preventing a new event. For this purpose, we had to use the completely unique photographs kept in an archive in Romania, some original documents wrote in Bucharest, in February and March 1963, by the chief of Legation of the United States of America and a report wrote by the Romanian Minister of Transport and Telecommunications.

On February 24, 1962, an Il-18 V aircraft (registered YR-IMB) was over the Mediterranean Sea, at an altitude of 7300 meters, when pilots Virgil Georgescu and Nicolae Anghel were surprised by the sudden shutdown of an engine. After about ten minutes of flying, two more thrusters stopped operating, and the fourth engine of the

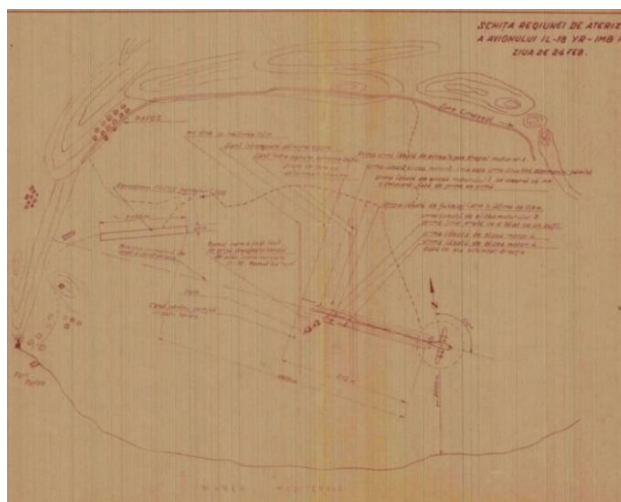
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aircraft stopped when the plane was at an altitude of 1700 meters and 15 kilometers away from the coastline of the island of Cyprus<sup>1</sup>.

On that Saturday, the Romanian plane was engaged in a special flight on the route Bucharest-Belgrade-Athens-Nicosia, without intermediate stopovers, with 79 emigrants of Mosaic religion and eight crew members. All the passengers wanted to get to Israel. The airport of destination and the special character of the flight are confirmed, inter alia, by the cargo manifest of the aircraft<sup>2</sup>.

Because the navigator Boris Ferderber had already encircled on the map the flat terrains that allowed an emergency landing, on the entire route, pilots Virgil Georgescu and Nicolae Anghel received information about a suitable place for landing with the dismantled train and about the necessary slope to descend the device, so as to reach the disused terrain of an airfield used by the Anglo-Americans in the World War II. The land in question was located in the immediate vicinity of Paphos. The service personnel in the control tower of the Nicosia airport was notified by the Romanian pilots about the position of the plane and about the uncommanded stopping of the engines. At the same time, an S.O.S. message was launched by radio.



**Fig. 1.** The sketch of the forced landing site of the IL-18 airliner (YR-IMB).

**Source:** Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file 25/1962, f. 76.

From the above sketch<sup>3</sup>, drawn up by the Romanian authorities, it appears that the former military aerodrome was provided with a short runway (of about 1.3 km), but the

<sup>1</sup> Central National Historical Archives (further quoted as: A.N.I.C.), Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file no. 25/1962, ff. 80; 82; 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 76.

pilots preferred to land with the train dismounted on a flat ground in the immediate vicinity because the fuel in the plane's tanks could leak and ignite from the sparks resulting from the landing on the belly, on a concrete runway, and on the ground there was no means for extinguishing fires. A tree in the direction of landing was severed with a wing after the plane came into contact with the ground. The distance travelled by the IL-18 on landing was 212 meters, and the beach was about two kilometres from where the aircraft stopped. Fortunately, there was no loss of life and no injury<sup>4</sup>. All passengers were boarded in buses from Paphos and transported to Nicosia with their luggage<sup>5</sup>.

To discover the cause of that incident, the specialists who arrived at the landing site dug a deep ditch next to one engine, disassembled the damaged propeller and replaced it with another. The engine was then switched on to check its operation in air stopping circumstances. That experiment demonstrated that the engine did not fail during the flight, and the cause of the serious event was another: the ice accumulated in the fuel filters of the engines.

There followed an expeditious repair of the plane in the same place, its move to the end of the airfield runway, an agitated take-off and a flight to an airport in the U.S.S.R. (at the beginning of March 1962). In exchange for that plane, the “Tarom” company received a new one.

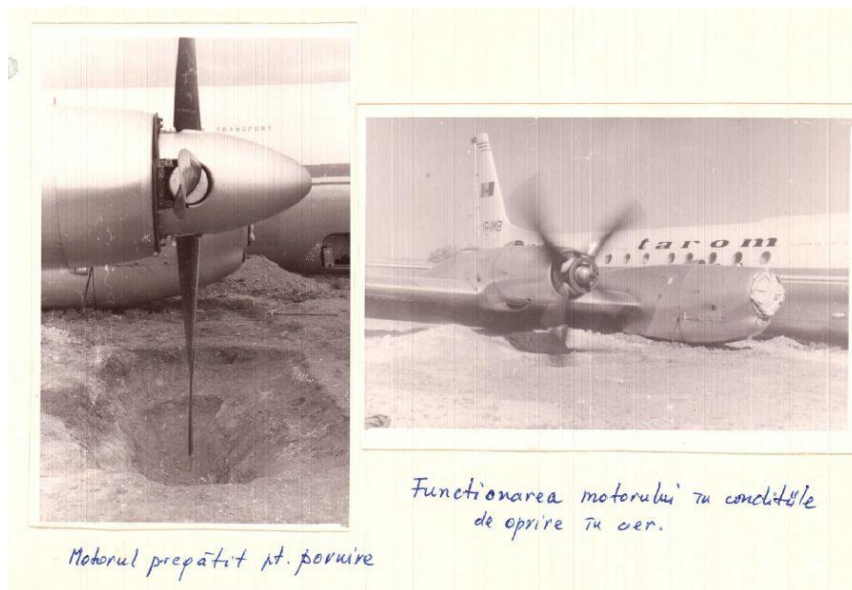


**Fig. 2.** The IL-18 airliner at the place of the forced landing.

**Source:** Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file 25/1962, f. 96.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 60; 79 passengers escape unhurt. Airliner in Paphos Field. ‘Magnificent landing’ by Rumanian pilot, in “Cyprus Mail”, vol. 58, no. 5772, Sunday, February 25, 1962, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> A.N.I.C., Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file no. 25/1962, f. 81.



**Fig. 3.** The checking operation of an engine after the forced landing.

**Source:** Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file 25/1962, f. 99.



**Fig. 4.** The IL-18 airliner at the place of the forced landing.

**Source:** Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file 25/1962, f. 97.



**Fig. 5.** The IL-18 airliner at the place of the forced landing.

**Source:** Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file 25/1962, f. 97.



**Fig. 6.** The IL-18 airliner at the place of the forced landing. The flap was damaged.

**Source:** Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file 25/1962, f. 98.



**Fig. 7.** The wing of IL-18 airliner clipped a tree during the forced landing.

**Source:** Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file 25/1962, f. 97.

A year later, William A. Crawford informed the U.S. Department of State about the grounding of the three Il-18s owned by the “Tarom” company. For example, in the telegram sent on February 13, 1963, the head of the U.S. Legation in Bucharest mentioned as follows:

“13. *IL-18's Grounded*

The three IL-18's of the TAROM international fleet have been grounded since January 31. IL-14's has replaced the IL-18's during this period. On IL-14 TAROM flight RO 205 Vienna-Bucharest February 12, the stewardess revealed that the grounding of IL-18's was due to icing in the fuel lines. (CONF)

*Comment:* Difficulties have appeared previously in these aircraft. Icing in the gas lines, however, has not been reported before. (CONF)”<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> William A. Crawford, *Minister Plenipotentiary (Romania), to Department of State, Bucharest, Romania, February 13, 1963*; File: POL 2-1 Joint Weekas RUM, no page; Box 4027; POL 19 GOV. OF DEPENDENCIES, RHOD & NYAS 7/1/63, POL 2-3 POLITICO-ECONOMIC REPORTS RUM; Central Foreign Policy File, 1963; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59 (RG 59), National Archives at College Park, College Park MD (NACP).

I.E. “13. *The grounding of Il-18*[:]

The three IL-18s of “TAROM” international fleet were grounded since 31 January. The Il-14 replaced IL-18 during this period. In the air flight RO 205 “TAROM”, Vienna-Bucharest, [carried out] on February 12 with an IL-14, the stewardess revealed that the grounding of the IL-18 was due to frost in the fuel pipes. (CONF[IDENTIAL])

A week later, William A. Crawford returned to that topic and informed the State Department board of:

“The reasons given for keeping [IL-18] on the ground [:]

A close friend of Petre PATRESCU (sic!), director of TAROM, stated that, following an investigation, the adviser to the Ministry of Transport had thus motivated the grounding of the IL-18 fleet of [aircraft] IL-18 of the TAROM [company]:

(1) TAROM and Ministry of Transport officials did not read all the technical manuals of IL-18.

(2) The Soviets refused to provide TAROM with fuel additives to eliminate the frost.

Operations with the IL-18 resumed on February 16 after being grounded as of January 25.

Commentary: The Soviet refusal of fuel additives was reportedly based on military security [reasons]. Therefore, Romanians looked for fuel additives in Western Europe, with England as the first solution”<sup>7</sup>.

The exact date regarding the grounding of the three IL-18 aircrafts in the endowment of the “TAROM” company is January 25, 1963. In the report he sent to Alexandru Drăghici (deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Internal Affairs), Dumitru Simulescu specified that date in the context of the problems that were registered with the fuel supply of those planes. The full report, drawn up by the Minister of Transport and Telecommunications, is further presented.

In the U.S. National Archives there is also another telegram regarding the special problems faced by “TAROM” and the way in which the communist authorities in Bucharest were trying to solve them. On March 15, 1963, William A. Crawford informed the U.S. Department of State of the rumour of the dismissal of the director of the company, as well as of the differences that had arisen between young and elderly pilots regarding the planning of flights on international routes, as follows:

“12. *Removal of TAROM Director Rumoured*

It is reliably understood that the Rumanian Ministry of Transport is so dissatisfied with the TAROM Airline operational deficit that Transport Ministry officials are said to be discussing removal of its director, Petre PATRESCU

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*Comment:* Previously, difficulties arose in these aircraft. However, frost in the fuel pipes had not been reported before. (CONF[IDENTIAL]). (Translation and text adaptation by: Petre Opreș).

<sup>7</sup> William A. Crawford, *Minister Plenipotentiary (Romania), to Department of State, Bucharest, Romania, February 20, 1963*; File: POL 2-1 Joint Weekas RUM, no page; Box 4027; POL 19 GOV. OF DEPENDENCIES, RHOD & NYAS 7/1/63, POL 2-3 POLITICO-ECONOMIC REPORTS RUM; Central Foreign Policy File, 1963; RG 59, NACP.

(*sic!*), and his replacement by Vladimir STINGACIU, a former TAROM director who is now Counsellor for the Ministry. (CONF)

*Comment:* Reportedly, Patrescu, a dedicated party engineer, erred in engrossing himself too deeply in the technical rather than strictly operational and profit-making aspects of the airline. (CONF)

### 13. *Young TAROM Pilots Get Preferential Treatment*

It is also reliably understood that TAROM senior pilots are suffering discrimination in flight scheduling and that junior pilots trained under the present regime are now being assigned the most desired international flights. (CONF)

*Comment:* Those TAROM pilots who received prewar training may be finding it more difficult than the younger pilots to adjust to the demands of the political system. (CONF)<sup>8</sup>.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to identify the director mentioned by the diplomat William A. Crawford in his telegrams: Petre Patrescu. What we know for sure is that, in the following period, “TAROM” company was led by Traian Rogojan, not by the engineer Vladimir Stîngaciu. Two years after the forced landing in Paphos of the Il-18 V aircraft, piloted by Virgil Georgescu and Nicolae Anghel, Traian Rogojan initiated a discussion with a member of the U.S. Legation from the Romanian capital about the technical performance of the “Boeing 727” aircraft (new, at that time) and requested on February 13, 1964 some comparative data with the “Caravelle 6 R” aircraft. The American sources we consulted indicate Traian Rogojan as director of “TAROM” company.

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<sup>8</sup> William A. Crawford, *Minister Plenipotentiary (Romania), to Department of State, Bucharest, Romania, March 15, 1963*; File: POL 2-1 Joint Weekas RUM, no page; Box 4027; POL 19 GOV. OF DEPENDENCIES, RHOD & NYAS 7/1/63, POL 2-3 POLITICO-ECONOMIC REPORTS RUM; Central Foreign Policy File, 1963; RG 59, NACP.

I.E. “12. *Rumor about the dismissal of the director of “TAROM” [company]*”

It is reliable that the Romanian Ministry of Transport is so dissatisfied with the operational deficit of the “TAROM” airline that officials from the Ministry of Transport are discussing the dismissal of its director, Petre PATRESCU (Pătrescu or Petrescu? – *note of P. Opris*), and his replacement by Vladimir STINGACIU (Stîngaciu – *note of P. Opris*), former director of “TAROM”, who is now an adviser in the ministry. (CONF[IDENTIAL])

*Commentary:* It seems that Pătrescu, an engineer dedicated to the party, was wrong to get too involved in the technical aspects, instead of the strictly operational and profit-making aspects of the airline. (CONF[IDENTIAL])

### 13. *Young TAROM pilots receive preferential treatment.*

It is also reliable that TAROM senior pilots are subject to discrimination in flight scheduling and junior pilots trained in the current regime are now assigned the most desired international flights. (CONF[IDENTIAL])

*Commentary:* Those TAROM pilots who were formed before the war may find that it is harder than young pilots to adapt to the demands of the political system. (CONF[IDENTIAL])”. (Translation and text adaptation: Petre Opris).



In the end, it is appropriate to remind the complete crew of the IL-18 V aircraft involved in the event that took place on February 24, 1962: pilot commander Virgil Georgescu (war veteran and, since 1959, chief pilot of “Tarom” company), copilot Nicolae Anghel, navigator Boris Ferderber (war veteran), radio-navigant operator Emilian Rotaru, flight mechanic Mircea Trandafir and flight attendants Nina Frîncu, Viorica Huțanu (the first female stewardess in Romania) and Elisabeta Crîșmaru<sup>9</sup>.

Initially, Alexandru Bârlădeanu recorded on the document received from Alexandru Drăghici about the “Paphos” case only the sentence “The pilots must be rewarded”<sup>10</sup>. His proposal was rightly completed, because the entire crew acted professionally on February 24, 1962 and all those listed above were decorated by the authorities in Bucharest<sup>11</sup>.

## ANNEX

*The report drawn up in February 1963 by Dumitru Simulescu (Minister of Transport and Telecommunications) and sent to Alexandru Drăghici (deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Internal Affairs), regarding the problems regarding the fuel supply of the IL-18 aircraft owned by “Tarom” company.*

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TO COMRADE DRĂGHICI ALEXANDRU  
DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

In order to eliminate the danger of damage due to the fuel supply of IL-18 aircrafts and for the application of the instruction for the use and control of fuels and lubricants and special liquids in civil aviation, we have taken the following measures:

- On February 4, a team of specialists was appointed, being given the task to analyse the causes of the phenomena occurring in the special oil T-1 and to take the necessary measures for their elimination.

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<sup>9</sup> A.N.I.C., Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Council of Ministers 1956–1966 fund, file no. 25/1962, f. 60.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Istoria aviației române*, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1984, p. 456.

In order to create the minimum conditions imposed by the observance of the instruction and provision arrived from the U.S.S.R., the team established an action plan on the organization of the supply of IL-18 aircrafts with quality oil, which consisted of the following:

1. Oil samples were taken from the tanks of the Otopeni warehouse and from the tanks of the aircrafts, which were transported to the refinery laboratory no. 1 Ploiesti where a series of samples were collected in the presence of the team, such as: fractional distillation, cloudiness temperature (appearance of ice crystals), freezing temperature.

On this occasion, it was found that the oil in the tanks of IL-18 aircraft (a mixture of different oil, coming from the supply at different foreign airports) does not meet the conditions imposed by the order. "Aeroflot" no. 489/1959.

The freezing started at minus 53° C and ended at minus 57° C, instead of starting at minus 60-65° C.

It was also found that the last 2 C.F.R. tanker boilers (about 100 tons) arrived in the Otopeni warehouse, on January 26 1963, had the sealing leads and lids damaged, thus allowing the moisture in the atmosphere to penetrate inside into the oil, which we know is very hygroscopic and to contaminate it. In this oil, finding multiple crystals of ice, it will no longer be able to be used, to be given for market consumption.

The oil from the tanks of the Otopeni warehouse (of Czechoslovak origin) corresponded to the conditions imposed during the analyses, although in this oil as well, subjected during self-fuelling to the pre-cooling operation, after about 12 hours, at a temperature of -26° C, crystals began to appear throughout the oil mass.

2. The following measures have been taken, upon these findings:

a) The entire fuel system (tanks, sewers, filters, etc.) on the board of the IL-18 airplanes was emptied, cleaned and washed, observing exactly the instructions for technical service.

b) The 16-tonne self-generators (type T.Z.-16) were cleaned and washed inside, in which oil was then introduced from the Otopeni warehouse, namely from the tanks whose contents met, during the tests, the imposed conditions.

c) Control decants and airport tests were carried out at Băneasa Airport before proceeding to the refuelling of the aircrafts.

d) Before refuelling, the antifreeze liquid "I" was introduced into the oil (arrived from the USSR by plane at 7, current year) in the proportion established by the Soviet instructions.

e) The aircraft's tanks were completely filled with oil, so as not to leave open spaces where atmospheric moisture could condense and oil, in its turn, absorb water from condensations.

After carrying out these operations, IL-18 aircraft were considered ready for flight, in terms of supply.

3. In parallel with these measures and operations of preparing the IL-18 aircraft for the flight, they were processed with all the personnel of the DTA (technical and flight), who had contingency with the technical operation of the IL-18 aircraft, the refueling and the handling and quality control of the special T-1 oil, the respective instructions of "Aeroflot" order no. 489/[1]959) and the technical act no. 1 of February 8, 1963, drawn up by the team of specialists, appointed by order of the Minister of February 5, 1963.

Moreover, it was also decided that the "Aeroflot" order, no. No 489/1959 to be printed by February 20, 1963, in 300 copies in the form of a pocket booklet and to be disseminated to all technical staff and seafarers, as a compulsory service instruction.

In order for this training to be better assimilated, it was decided that all flying and technical personnel should be trained between March 1–15, 1963, and then biannually, during the examinations of the flying, technical and airport personnel, before the start of summer and winter operation, this problem to be made part of the examination program with the amount of each specialty (pilots, on-board mechanics, operating engineers and Quality Inspection, personnel in the fuel and lubricants sector, etc.).

4. In order to ensure the continuation of the T-1 special oil supply of IL-18 aircrafts for a longer period, a stock of 180 tons was ensured in the Otopeni warehouse and 500 tons in the warehouse of the refinery nr. 1 Ploiești (based on the analysis reports performed).

5. For the improvement of the special T-1 oil quality, in terms of hygroscopicity, crystallization and freezing temperature, etc., there were discussions with the Ministry of Petroleum Industry and Chemistry and starting from March 1, the current year, and a type of oil with a series of improved characteristics would be manufactured. The Ministry of Oil and Chemistry Industry also issued an order in this regard, which also provided for the cession, by renting to TAROM, of a warehouse tank of about 250 tons and of a service tank of about 28 tons completely insulated and specially prepared in the Mogoșoaia warehouse, starting from February 25, 1963.

6. For the proper storage of aviation oil, petrol and lubricants until an adequate warehouse is built, the following measures have been taken:

a) The tanks from the Otopeni warehouse will be cleaned and washed periodically, as the oil will be consumed from them up to the established level, from the bottom of the tank (2 tanks were cleaned and washed again).

b) At each group of 2 tanks, caps equipped with sorb pipe, provided with individual isolation valves of the tanks and with common T-shaped connection directly to the tank supply hose, will be installed at the tank trucks. Thus, it will be avoided the penetration of moisture and water into the tanks, the dragging of the hoses on the ground, on which occasion impurities can fall in, while also easing the

work of the fuelers. Furthermore, each group of 2 tanks will be equipped with an access ladder to the tanks. So far, these works have been carried out on 2 groups of tanks (capacity = 300 tons), and up to Mech 5, current year, the same works will be carried out for 2 more groups.

The oil stored in these 4 tank groups will be the reserve stock for about 10 days during peak periods of air traffic, this stock will be refreshed quarterly so as not to distort.

c) The current consumption of T-1 special oil, with the date of March 1, 1963, will be ensured from the tanks from the Mogoșoaia warehouse (250 tons of warehouse tanks + 28 tons of service tank) made available to TAROM by the Ministry of Petroleum Industry and Chemistry. The tank plant shown above, which is in the process of redevelopment and cleaning, will be made available to TAROM starting from February 25, this year, on the basis of an annual contract.

d) Along with the measures listed above for the supply, storage and handling of oil especially for jet engines, a series of measures have been taken to put in order the petrol and lubricants warehouse in Băneasa, with a capacity of 150 tons (installation of electro-pump groups, supports for supply hoses, access sidewalks to unloading holes and decanting control cisterns, etc.).

7. In order to ensure a strict observance of the instructions for the storage, handling and use of fuels (oil and gasoline) and of lubricants and greases, the measure was taken to set up a laboratory for the control of fuels and lubricants. This laboratory will be set up at Băneasa Airport, in a building specially affected for this purpose, which is currently being developed. In order to equip this laboratory, the minimum equipment necessary for the oil and gasoline samples has been purchased so far, and the rest of the equipment and furniture will be completed further.

The normal operation of the laboratory will start on March 1, current year, the date by which the necessary personnel will be provided by transfer from the Ministry of Petroleum Industry and Chemistry (laboratory workers and oil technicians).

Up to March 1, current year, with the existing means and the measures taken, the samples and analyses required by "Aeroflot" order no. 489/[1]959, through the laboratory of Ploiești no. 1 refinery and the equipment located at the airport with the existing specialists.

8. Since the same problem of the special oil is raised for the M. Kogălniceanu airport in Constanța, it follows that, after solving the Băneasa airport issues, and on this airport specifically, to be taken the necessary measures, so that starting from April 15, current year, the international air traffic at the M. Kogălniceanu airport can start in the best possible conditions.

In relation to the measures taken and indicated in points 1-7 of this report, considering that the minimum conditions for the operation of IL-18 aircraft are met, as of February 16, current year, the international air traffic with this type of aircraft, which had been suspended from January 25, current year, has resumed international air traffic.

Bucharest, /II/1963  
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
(ss.) D. Simulescu

Central National Historical Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers –  
Council of Ministers 1956-1966 fund, file no. 7/1963, ff. 1-4.

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