

ECONOMICAL DIVERGENCES AND GEOPOLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES. ROMANIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE LAST PERIOD OF THE GHEORGHIU-DEJ REGIME

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Abstract: The reconfiguring of Romania's international position at the beginning of the "60 represents a complex and insufficiently analyzed process, with numerous economical, geopolitical and social implications that help us understand the foreign orientation of Romanian communism in its ideological and political (i)maturity stage. In this context, the stake of the Romanian step can be reduced to the following questions: to what extent did Bucharest distance itself from Moscow? How did it use the contemporary international dynamics in order to attain its goals? Without claiming to offer exhaustive responses, the present essay proposes only to hatch the premises which entailed the autonomization of Romania's international position with reference to the Moscow centre.

Key words: International context, Sino-Soviet conflict, Romania-COMECON dispute, "independence" declaration, national communism

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INTRODUCTION

Nothing anticipated in 1960, at the third Congress of Romanian Workers Party (RWP), the sudden cooling of Romanian-Soviet relations which will occur after only two years. With this occasion, Gheorghiu-Dej, the prime-secretary of RWP, expressed himself turgid towards the most important socialist state, servilely insisting upon Moscow's international merits, which it considered "a model of Leninist policy through the consistency with which promotes the principles of coexistence, through its scientific character based on the profound analysis of all international factors, through the firmness and principledness it unmask the followers of international tensions, through the perseverance with which it militates for the union of peace forces".¹ Truly, there were no palpable

¹ Congresul..., 1960, p. 99. The documentation for this article was partially facilitated by an AMPOSDRU scholarship, obtained through the following grant: Investeste în oamenii! Fondul Social European, Programul Operațional Sectorial pentru Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane 2007-2013, proiectul „Studiile doctorale factor major de dezvoltare al cercetărilor socio-umane și umaniste”.

political or economical animosities between Bucharest and Moscow that year; the dissident foreign policy (not independent, because the Romanian state never withdrawn from the economical and security structures of the “socialist camp”) of Romania will begin, as I intend to prove, only in 1962, with Bucharest’s opposition towards the attempts of supranationalization the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), guided by the Soviet Union² – not at all in 1956, as some Romanian authors argue.³

Surely, the successful economical and implicitly political defying of Moscow would have not been possible in the absence of the Sino-Soviet conflict.⁴ Speculating with ability the dispute between the two colossus of the communist world, the Popular Republic of Romania, (RPR) will consolidate both its economical position and its international political orientation. Of course, it will not manage to really mediate the conflict between Beijing and Moscow, as it tried to pose in order to ameliorate its image within the communist world; it will obtain, however, a growing weight in the internal affairs of the “socialist camp” and a increasingly good reputation in the West, which it will massively exploit in the years to come.

AN UNEXPECTED REACTION: ROMANIA AGAINST THE SUPRANATIONALIZATION OF COMECON

Founded in 1949 in order to facilitate Moscow’s economic control over the young “popular democracies”, but also as some kind of Soviet replica to the Marshall Plan,⁵ COMECON did not benefited by a notable activity during Stalin’s last years. The only relatively important result, which materialized at the initiative of the Soviet foreign minister Viaceslav Molotov, consisted in the buiding in 1950 of the Giurgiu-Ruse bridge, which unites the Romanian, respectively Bulgarian shore of the Danube, an investment sustained by “all the countries of the socialist camp”.⁶

The reactivation of the organization occurred only after another four years, when Khrushchev, paying attention to the West-European plans of economical integration which will led to the creation of the European Economic Community, started the reconfiguring and the reinforcement of it. Besides of general-ideological reasons like the acceleration of “socialism’s construction”, the Khrushchevite plan resumed the reasons advanced at the founding of COMECON: a more efficient planning of economic development of the East European satellites and also a production specialization in order to avoid a useless competition between member states and to lay the basis of complementing their economies. There were also clear signs of a tendency towards the centralization of the Council: the member states would have permanent representatives in COMECON, which would meet more often, and a secretariat would be established in Moscow, “whose responsibilities were reflected in preparing materials for the sessions of the Council and monitoring the decisions made during ordinary and extraordinary sessions of COMECON”.⁷

² Shafir, M., 1986, p. 34, King, R., 1980, p. 141, Moraru, C., 2008, p. 92, Braun, A., 1978, p. 4, Jowitt, K., 1971, pp. 198-199.

³ Constantiniu, F., 2002, p. 467, Brucan, S., 1992, p. 72, Fischer-Galați, S., 1998, pp. 174-175, Anton, M., 2007, p. 101.

⁴ Shafir, M., 1985, p. 177, Fischer-Galați, S., 1966, pp. 268-269, Burks, R.V., 1966, p. 96).

⁵ Stanciu, C., 2005, p. 43.

⁶ Țăranu, L., 2007, p. 31, Betea, L., 1997, p. 144.

⁷ Țăranu, L., 2007, p. 67, Ionescu, G., 1994, p. 375.

Production specialization within COMECON, industrial, in the first phase - benefited especially the developed economies of the “camp”, like Czechoslovakia and the GDR which also successfully insisted on adopting, in 1956, this type of intraregional economical planning.⁸ Furthermore, these two states paid, starting with 1950, the raw materials imported from Poland, Romania or Bulgaria at prices beyond the international level, a strategy aiming to compete more efficiently the products obtained on capitalist markets.⁹ But Czechoslovakia and the GDR did not manage to obtain sufficiently competitive industrial products for the global market, as they could not oblige the other “popular democracies” to buy them.¹⁰ “Because of this, starting with 1959, the Czechs and the East Germans will change tactics, moving the focus from the industrial specialization to specialization in agriculture”.¹¹ This moment represents the premise of the future disputes between Romania and COMECON. Dissatisfied by the fact that it had to supply raw materials to Czechoslovakia and the GDR at a onerously price, Bucharest saw also its industrial plans threatened, being suggested to reorient towards the developing of agriculture and leave industrial development on the account of the more advanced members of the “socialist camp”. In this way, the argument continued, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland would have become the main agricultural suppliers of COMECON, while Czechoslovakia or the GDR could have concentrated on industrial development, whose results were to be also disseminated among the entire “camp”.

Bucharest disavowed, with the partial support of Warsaw, the separation of communist states between agrarian and industrialized, but the Czechoslovaks and East-Germans, eager to develop as soon as possible their economies, even on the expense of other “brotherly countries”, raised once again the initiative in the following year.¹² Again, without success. Because the initiatives of Czechoslovakia and the GDR were advantaging the Soviet Union, Moscow decided to intervene in order to overcome the deadlock in which COMECON found itself. Khrushchev instructed the Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka to prepare a meeting of the Council for the year 1962; he surely would have done it in the precedent year if the Sino-Soviet conflict would not have come out in the open trough the expulsion of Albany, vehemently pro-Chinese, from the XXII Congress of the CPSU and also from the “socialist camp”. With this occasion, the following principles were about to be adapted: the supranationalization of COMECON trough “the creation of an supranational organ, which would have made mandatory decisions for states, putting aside the principle based on the elaboration of recommendations” then, the decisions, which were based on unanimous views, were to be replaced by the ambiguous syntagm of “unity of ideas”; the amplifying of the decisional weight of the secretariat, which was to be configured “proportionally with the contribution of expense covering” of COMECON; finally, “the internationalization of production forces trough rationale territorial division”.¹³ The Romanian delegation will firmly

⁸ Montias, M., 1964, p. 130, Gaston Marin, G., 2003, pp. 245-246

⁹ Țăranu, L., 2007, p. 94

¹⁰ Romania had an unpleasant experience of this kind when, after it had reached a substantial commercial agreement with Czechoslovakia in 1958, Prague supplied the industrial equipments very late, those being also of such a low quality that [the Romanian, m.n.] program of industrialization launched at the end of the 40's was coming close to a failure. (Țăranu, L., 2007, pp. 107-108)

¹¹ Cătănuș, D., 2005a, pp. 72-73

¹² Cătănuș, D., 2005a, pp. 73-74

¹³ Cătănuș, D., 2005b, pp. 78-79

and systematically reject these proposals on the basis of the right, ideologically potentiated, to build its own heavy industry in order to accelerate the economic development of the country and, why not, to consolidate the position of the political elite – arguing “that every decision regarding Romania [and its economy, m.n.] was the exclusive competence of the leadership of this country”.¹⁴ The dispute between RPR and COMECON will become, from now on, public.¹⁵ Choosing a protectionist economic orientation, Bucharest was making the first steps on the ideological terrain on which it will obstinately maintain itself until 1989, that of national communism.

Paul Niculescu-Mizil affirms that the Soviet Union would have supported the principle of “production specialization” launched by Czechoslovakia and the GDR even since the conference of communist parties from 1960, held in Moscow. The Romanian delegation presumably opposed it and the Soviets, in order to avoid additional political tensions – the Moscow-Beijing conflict was developing rapidly and on a large scale – channeled the problem towards COMECON.¹⁶ The information, although plausible, is not confirmed by other documentary sources that I have consulted.

What determined Khrushchev to back up Czechoslovakia and the GDR within COMECON, if at the end of the 50's he had not made a single gesture in this regard? Besides the influence of the European Economic Community model over the Soviet leader, which he tried to imitate in order to defeat in the future¹⁷, the conflict between Beijing and Moscow threatened the Soviet Union's preeminence over the communist world; as a consequence, the Kremlin struggled to combat the eventual ideological, political and economic attractiveness of the Chinese alternative among the “popular democracies”; not least, Khrushchev's economic plans threw the Soviet Union in a deep crisis, Moscow being practically unable to supply, as it did until then, when it benefited from a “relatively stable” economy – raw materials and agricultural products “to the most developed COMECON states”, Czechoslovakia and the GDR. “Consequently, these states were put in the situation to find other suppliers like, for example, Romania”.¹⁸

Confronted however with the Romanian resistance, to which the Poles would once again rally because of some economic conditions similar to the Romanian ones, although Gomułka was constrained to call the above mentioned COMECON session¹⁹ - Khrushchev had to renounce. Not for long, though. The next year will be witness to a new Soviet initiative towards supranationalizing COMECON, which outlined itself more and more as “Romanian-Soviet”²⁰ divergence. Once again, Bucharest rejected, through the voice of the representative of the Romanian delegation, Alexandru Bărlădeanu, the Soviet plans for supranationalizing COMECON, arguing that they undermine national sovereignty.²¹ The “premature” character of such an initiative was also invoked, as well as the absence of a feasibility study made “in common” over the

¹⁴ Moraru, C., 2008, p. 182, Stanciu, C., 2009, pp. 244-245

¹⁵ Montias, M., 1967, p. 213

¹⁶ Niculescu-Mizil, P., 2001, p. 96

¹⁷ Cioroianu, A., 2005, pp. 272-274

¹⁸ Cătănuș, D., 2006, pp. 79-80

¹⁹ Țăranu, L., 2007, pp. 151-152

²⁰ Cătănuș, D., 2005b, p. 92

²¹ Betea, L., 1997, p. 145, Cătănuș, D., 2005b, pp. 93-94, Cătănuș, D., 2004a, p. 187, Montias, M., 1967, p. 215

“opportunities” and the “ways” of establishing “common enterprises”. Each of these potential “common enterprises”, the Romanian part argued, “in order to carry on its activity”, needed “to be constituted as a juridical person in one of the COMECON member states, were to have its main headquarters and its leading organs and to embrace the shape of an enterprise having the nationality of that state”.²² Another critique against the Council resided in its unrepresentativity for the communist world, states like Yugoslavia or China not being members of this organization (from political reason, they were either not convoked, either declined the invitation to join COMECON).²³ The report presented by Bârlădeanu within the meeting of the Political Bureau of the RWP regarding the activity of the Romanian delegation at the Council launched a very harsh reaction from Gheorghiu-Dej. “What they propose leads in fact to the infringement of sovereignty, of interference in the internal affairs of the countries. It is foreseen a union on production branches based on a majority of votes, but what will be then the job of the government of the countries, to agree, than who is planning? Planning is one of the distinctive features in all the life fields of that certain state. Any infringement of this right the state has means interference in the affairs of the state.”²⁴

The Council started to be perceived in Romania as an instrument to which certain states transformed their priorities and economic necessities into “general problems of the camp”, trying to externalize the costs of their industrial development over the members whose economic progresses were only beginning.²⁵ The responsibility for the absence of COMECON’s notable results was channeled by these states towards the members which, without doing anything else but protecting their legitimate, “Leninist” interest to industrialize themselves, were thus obstructing the functionality of the entire organization through “nationalist manifestations” or “autarkical tendencies”.²⁶

The Romanian resistance was built on the basis of the principles adopted at the international conferences of the communist parties, consumed in 1957 and 1960 in Moscow. Although the Sino-Soviet polemics over ideological aspects were starting to spread, the 1957 conference led to the adoption of a common document, partially reviewed three years later, when the dispute between Beijing and Moscow was on the verge of overcoming the small framework of party backstage. The main points over which the participants reached a consensus consisted in the appreciation of the global progresses of socialism compared with “imperialism”, whose succumbing due to “internal contradictions” was just a matter of time; the aspirations of socialist states for a peaceful development and avoiding military conflicts; the successes of communist parties “in fighting sectarianism and dogmatism, through the elimination of the consequences of the personality cult” and the rejection of (Yugoslav) revisionism, concomitant to defending the “purity” of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The aspect most appreciated by Romanian communists was that the communist parties were to interrelate on the basis of “proletarian internationalism”, combining “close unity, collaboration and the common struggle of all the workers and revolutionary parties” with «political and organizational independence, with the

²² Țăranu, L., 2001, pp. 133-145

²³ Montias, M., 1967, p. 218

²⁴ Cătănuș, D., 2004a, p. 188

²⁵ Rețegan, M., Duțu, A., 2004, pp. 34-35

²⁶ Rețegan, M., Duțu, A., 2004, p. 36

sovereignty of each party, with the non-interference of one in the internal affairs of another”.²⁷

But this last principle was systematically broken, for the Bucharest leaders, through the perseverant attempts of supranationalizing COMECON. The ones which acted in this way forgot that, the argument continued, a basic premise of overcoming economic underdevelopment and of advancement, largely simultaneous, of the socialist countries towards communism resides in standardization of “the levels of economical development”. Production specialization inside the Council was not contributing at all to this desideratum; on the contrary, its promoters tried to potentiate the existing economic inequalities among the “brotherly countries”, acting like during the time of “the old capitalist division of labor which reserved the backward countries the role of agrarian products, raw materials and market suppliers for the industrialized countries”.²⁸ A very serious accusation. The solution? Only “socialist industrialization”, supported by the Political Bureau of RWP, could eliminate the economic inequalities among the socialist states. For Romania, industrialization also possessed the great advantage of maintaining a certain social stability through avoiding the overpopulation of the agricultural environment, also contributing to, if not to the acceptance, at least to the toleration of the regime and implicitly to its consolidation; one cannot talk therefore about a brave switch to nationalism of Romanian communism. The regime was not trying to satisfy popular interests, but its own, as proves the case of the sovroms through which Romanian economy was fully exploited by Moscow in the first years after the formation of the RPR. Nationalism’s recovery was conjuncturally operated and, offering gratifying results, like improving the party’s image both internally and internationally, it was, gradually, expanded. Romanian national communism appeared for political reasons, not because of some authentic nationalist conviction of the regime; manipulating the symbols of the Romanians’ nationalist mythology, it started by constituting an interface between the regime and the population. Only in the Ceaușescu period a profound nationalization of Romanian communism occurs, rather a fascization of it.

Returning to the dispute between Bucharest and COMECON, the supranationalization of the latter, the Romanian communists argued, could only contribute to “the birth of great misunderstandings, complaints and dissensions” between socialist states. Appealing to the ideology and the common goals of the “brotherly countries”, RWP underlined the fact that “the problems of different viewpoints are to be found” must be apprehended cautiously and understanding, “in internationalist spirit”; the fruitful solving of economic and political differences does not depend on the “intervention of a supranational organ which would arbitrate or impose solutions”, but in the good faith and in the availability to cooperate from equal positions of all the members of the “socialist camp”.²⁹

One can affirm, finally, that although pro-Western manifestations of Romania’s international economic orientation can be identified since the end of the 50’s³⁰, they became consistent only at the beginning of the following decade,

²⁷ Cătănuș, D., 2003, pp. 198-199

²⁸ Rețegan, M., Duțu, A., 2004, p. 132

²⁹ Rețegan, M., Duțu, A., 2004, pp. 142-143

³⁰ Șafir, M., 1985, p. 48

once the conflict of interests within COMECON were aggravated.³¹ Bucharest did not systematically followed the improvement of commercial relations with the West, but was constrained to proceed in this way by the new economical situation within the communist world, which threatened do diminish its access to resources perceived as capital for the industrial development. Unlike the economic relations with the “brotherly countries”, the economic relations with Western states implied, at least in the first phase, the disadvantage of the nationalizations the regime had put into practice on a large scale immediately after it came to power and which caused important loses to the non-communist states involved in business on the Romanian market. In order to resume the economic relations, these states had to be compensated.³² In the same time, in order to avoid endangering its industrialization plans, Bucharest widened the range of raw materials suppliers. Beside the Soviet Union, it orientated towards suppliers like India, Brasilia or United Arab Emirates.³³

The Romanian-Soviet political relations remained, starting with those years, on a descending path – the economic relations were not affected in a great extent – despite the visit Nikita Khrushchev undertook in Bucharest in the second half of 1962 in order to convince the RWP leadership of the opportunity to supranationalize the COMECON and that this organization would not substitute the national leaderships of the socialist states. Despite the existing frictions, the speeches made by Gheorghiu-Dej with this occasion were, as accustomed, encomiastic towards the Soviet Union and Khrushchev personally, containing even words of praise to “the international socialist work division”!³⁴ The Soviet leader manifested its dissatisfaction with reference with the efforts made to industrialize the Romanian economy, and gave also an unfavorable interpretation to the plans of building, beginning with the autumn of the same year, of the Galați steel mill.³⁵ To the Soviet conciliating attempts from the next year, which sought a personal meeting between Khrushchev and Gheorghiu-Dej, was responded with delays which masked an obvious refusal: the Romanian part would have met the leader of the Soviet Union only after finalizing a document which would have encapsulated Bucharest’s international orientation; only then a pertinent and convincingly argued discussion could have taken place.³⁶ But, once that document would be made public in April 1964, any meeting in order to attenuate the Romanian-Soviet dissonances would become useless. The autonomous economic position of Romania became reality, as will soon the political one – a denouement to which, as we are about to see, the Sino-Soviet conflict contributed to a great extent.

“THESE ARE WORSE THAN THE YUGOSLAVS”. THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROMANIAN POSITION WITHIN THE SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT

The Sino-Soviet conflict was one of the most complex events ever to affect the communist world, at least as important as the de-Stalinization initiated by Nikita Khrushchev in February 1956. It had an enormous influence, through its scale and vehemence, over the prestige, the image and eventually over the power

³¹ Cătănuș, D., 2006, p. 118

³² Stanciu, C., 2005, p. 79

³³ Montias, M., 1967, pp. 229-230

³⁴ Gheorghiu-Dej, G., 1962, p. 372

³⁵ Anton, M., 2007, pp. 141-147, Fischer-Galați, s., 1967, p. 91

³⁶ Stanciu, C., 2009, pp. 257-260, Moraru, C., 2008, p. 184

of international communism. Although it took place simultaneously on several levels, its ideological dimension (hard to differentiate within communists regime by the political one) of the conflict remains the most important: both China and the Soviet Union tried to impose its on acception of Leninism, bitingly disputing the role of centre of the communist world.³⁷

Being in full revolutionary impetus, Maoist China rejected de-Stalinization by associating it to a concession made to the “imperialist” enemy in the ideological war fought against it. It did not agreed also to the peaceful coexistence, considering that a more combative approach the “decaying” global capitalism would have advantaged the international communist movement and it would have accelerated the process of completing the world revolution. Not least, China’s economic interests would have benefited over a revival of the Cold War because it would have obtained more funds and economic assistance from the Soviet Union; a relaxed international environment would have reoriented the priorities of Soviet economy by making Moscow concentrate on internal objectives and diminishing the support for the economic development of the “brotherly countries”. Moscow offered a matching response to Beijing’s challenge, after initially refrained from bringing the conflict with China into the open. When this became official in 1961, at the XXII Congress of the CPSU, the Soviet leaders described China as irresponsible and its propensity towards a conflicting approach over the international relations in the nuclear era profoundly harmful for the stage international communism was passing trough then. In this point, Mao has attracted the hostility of the great majority of the communist parties when he argues that, in the eventuality of a devastating nuclear conflict between socialism and “imperialism”, even if half of the world’s population would disappear, the other half would have quickly prospered because of the extinction of the enemy, and the advancement towards communism would have been therefore accelerated. Even since 1961, the more than 1300 Soviet economic advisors were redrawn from the Chinese territory, a fact which entailed a massive rebound of the country’s industrial development projects. Moreover, Moscow did not offer any support for the recapturing of Taiwan, dominated by the nationalist forces of Cian Kai Şek. In ideological terms, the Soviets accused the Chinese of “left-wing communism” (romanticism and revolutionary intransigency, harmful, trough the absence of compromises, seen as an adherence to the purity of the revolutionary ideal, to the interests of the communist movement as a whole), while the last accused the first, because the recent acception of the possibility to reach communism trough peaceful, parliamentary means – of “revisionism” and “betrayal” of the classical Marxist-Leninist principles.³⁸

Since the first signs of the dispute between the two colossus of the communist world, RPR placed itself, from conviction, but not vehemently, on Moscow’s side.³⁹ Bucharest, although, it recognized certain merits of China’s industrial development, was hostile to the “popular communes” which Mao organized, as well as to the “great leap forward”, trough which Beijing followed what could be called a “shock therapy” oriented towards the sharp liquidation of the underdevelopment the immense country suffered from.⁴⁰

³⁷ Tucker, R., 1971, p. 212, Copilaş, E., 2009, pp. 97-111

³⁸ Soulet, J.F., 1998, pp. 138-146, Copilaş, 2009, pp. 97-111

³⁹ Neagoe-Pleşa, E., Pleşa, L., 2006, pp. 246-247, Radio Free Europe, 1961, p. 16

⁴⁰ Yong, L., 2006, p. 93

At the third Congress of RWP (1960), Khrushchev launched a harsh attack at the Chinese delegation, to which Gheorghiu-Dej covertly subscribed, naming China in particular “some kind of factious action within the international communist movement”.⁴¹ Even if it supported China’s integration in the UN, blaming “the American imperialism” which “cannot forget that the victory of the Chinese revolution gave the entire colonial system a massive blow, animating the fight for freedom and national independence of the other oppressed peoples”⁴² – the Sino-Soviet relations found themselves in an unfavorable situation, and Beijing did not manifested any appreciations towards Bucharest’s gesture.

The greatest concern of RWP regarding the attitude of the Chinese communists consisted in the “dogmatic” manner in which they approached the problem of war. Beijing’s orientation was equated with a “great danger” which “is not to be joked about”, proving in the same time “contempt (...) regarding the human being”. “I believe that these people”, Gheorghiu-Dej affirmed, “if we are not careful they can even throw us into adventure, they can throw themselves in very serious and very grave stuff” which would entail major prejudices for the whole “socialist camp”.⁴³ The Chinese understanding over war issues was blamed because it had repercussions as “undermining the trust of the peoples in the possibilities of defending peace” and “adventurous actions in foreign policy”, leading I the end “to «leftism» and sectarianism”. On the whole, the Chinese communists were guilty of “underrating” the “forces of peace and socialism”.⁴⁴

Although considered by the RWP leader to be “worse than the Yugoslavs”⁴⁵, the relations between the Chinese and Romanian communists begun to improve gradually since 1962, due to the discordances that Romania start having with the Soviet Union regarding the transformation of COMECON in an supranational organization. The Romanian and the Chinese press stopped publishing hostile articles. At the beginning of the next year, the Romanian ambassador at Beijing informed about the dissensions that had emerged in the Romanian-Soviet relations and tried to justify Romania’s behavior at the third RWP Congress as “not being part of Dej’s plans”. The Chinese answer was “kind” and “understanding”, thus initiating a substantial improvement of the relations between the two parts.⁴⁶ Moreover, as if anticipating the “revolutionary” changes China will experience in the last decade of Mao Zedong’s leadership, Romanian politicians like Emil Bodnăraș advanced even from the third Congress of RWP, held in 1960, the concept of “cultural revolution”, which was meant to “ensure for the whole cultural and scientific creation the ideological content of the working class’s conception over the world – the ideology of Marxism-Leninism”.⁴⁷ The scientists promptly subscribed to the new ideological tendency, arguing that, in Romania, the “cultural revolution” is based on the following tasks: “liquidation of illiteracy, founding the education on new bases, organization of a ramified system of cultural-educational institutions, shaping the socialist culture, creating the new intellectuality, faithful to the cause of the working class, conducting a sustained activity of disseminating the Marxist-Leninist

⁴¹ Yong, L., 2006, pp. 119-127

⁴² Gheorghiu-Dej, G., 1961, p. 265

⁴³ Cătănuș, D., 2004a, pp. 74-75, 80

⁴⁴ Cătănuș, D., 2004a, p. 123

⁴⁵ Cătănuș, D., 2004a, p. 109

⁴⁶ Yong, L., 2006, pp. 136-141, Yong, L., 2003, p. 158

⁴⁷ Congresul..., 1960, p. 367

ideology to the masses, creating the socialist conscience, in order to continually expand economy and culture.”⁴⁸

Officially, RPR made a stand through the refusal to categorically join one of the conflicting sides and through the permanent appeals to stop the polemics and solve the litigious question through bilateral discussions. It even tried to temper the dispute by sending, in March 1964, a delegation led by prime-minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer at Beijing. Received with a certain circumspection, as a potential messenger of Soviet interests, the delegation did not achieve its purpose, although it pursued the hosts to suspend the conflict for a month;⁴⁹ it contributed however to a great extent to the consolidation and expansion of the Sino-Romanian relations.⁵⁰ Bucharest did not really try, as it is frequently believed, to mediate the Sino-Soviet dispute; it had a much too small political weight to really count within the dispute, remembers the foreign minister from that period, Corneliu Mănescu.⁵¹ Moreover, even Maurer affirms, without equivocal, the main reason of that particular visit: “I did not go there to mediate the Russians conflict with the Chinese. I went there with the aim of making China understand our politics as a politics of overcoming Soviet hegemony. To win, therefore, China’s support”.⁵²

Particularly, both the Soviet Union and China were accused of being hypocritical because they tried to “present things as the public polemic would start from principled matters. But, putting aside this cover, it can be seen that the stake of the conflict is immeasurable ambition, the fight for the hegemonic role in the communist movement and in the socialist camp”.⁵³ Although it firmly stood for peaceful coexistence, seeming to favor the Soviet arguments, RPR supported China regarding the improbability of nonviolent transition from capitalism to communism: “Not one of the socialist countries experienced the revolution without violence”, warning however about “the absolutization of the non-peaceful way”. Finally, “Essential for ensuring the proletarian revolution is that the working class and the party know how to use all the means, to master all forms of struggle, to be fully prepared for every eventuality in order to change quickly a form of struggle with the other, according to the changes that happen in the concrete conditions of the revolution’s unfolding”.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Romanian communists considered that neither China, neither the Soviet Union adopted a true Leninist stand with reference to the conflict, as they were convinced that the RWP was doing. “Quoting Lenin, during the public polemic, C.P.S.U. refers only to the peaceful way [to reach socialism, m.n.], and the Chinese C.P. only to the violent way. Our party, in its Declaration [from April 1964, m.n.], quotes Lenin entirely”.⁵⁵

Speculating the tensions which occurred within the international communist movement between China and the Soviet Union, RPR won a larger capacity of maneuver in following its own interests and managed to overcome the pressures Moscow made upon it by through COMECON. Although it inclined

⁴⁸ Badale, T.; Coțău, G., 1962, pp. 271-272

⁴⁹ DJTAN, 1964, f. 135, Allison Remington, R., 1971, p. 74

⁵⁰ Yong, L., 2003, p. 165, 159

⁵¹ Betea, L., 2001a, p. 91

⁵² Betea, L., 2001b, p. 176

⁵³ DJTAN, 1964, f. 135

⁵⁴ DJTAN, 1964, f. 140

⁵⁵ DJTAN, 1964, f. 141

towards China, it did so from strictly political reasons; as we have seen, there were no notable ideological affinities between Bucharest and Beijing. The situation of the communist world in the first half of the 60's determined RWP to clarify its position inside it and the manner in which it considered that its members should interact.

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE APRIL 1964 MOMENT FOR ROMANIAN COMMUNISM. PREMISES, DIMENSIONS, CONSEQUENCES

“Dear comrade Gheorghiu-Dej! We are both communists and we both come from among the working class. We both represent the interests of our peoples, of our states. These interests insistently require that the U.S.S.R. and the R.P.R. will always stand as brothers in the same lines of our common struggle against imperialism”.⁵⁶ This is how Khrushchev wrote to the general secretary of the RWP, in the spring of 1963, insisting to obtain a bilateral meeting in order to solve the recent disputes which visible affected the Romanian-Soviet relations. But Dej was not at all receptive to the advances of his homologous; on the contrary, using the existing context of the international communist movement to extend as much as possible its diplomatic weight and its range of action, RPR will issue the following year a document which remained defining for the international orientation of Romanian communism for its entire existence.

“Declaration of the Romanian Workers Party position in the international communist and workers movement problems” or simply, but historically inadequate, “The independence declaration” of RWP has consecrated the rejection of Moscow’s tutelary pretensions, imprinting it in the same time the filigree of Ceaușescu’s Romania foreign policy: calculated dissidence.⁵⁷ The Romanian-Soviet dispute has reached its climax. Even if its main dimension was, undoubtedly, economic, the dispute was conducted also in geopolitical, cultural, historical or territorial terms.

Khrushchev’s decision to send nuclear weapons into Cuba substantially contributed to the deterioration of the relations between Bucharest and Moscow. “He did not talked to me, he did not ask my opinion”, remembers resentfully Gheorghiu-Dej, “but simply brought to my knowledge that he is sending missiles into Cuba”.⁵⁸ Invoking the membership of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, (WTO), RPR blamed the fact that it was not consulted regarding such an important decision, which could have entailed a world conflagration in which Bucharest would have been engaged, although totally unwittingly, due to its belonging to the “socialist camp”. “Because we are members of the Warsaw Pact we should have informed each other, discuss, decide together if it is good or not to send those missiles there. We found out only after they were sent”.⁵⁹ Moreover, Bucharest was neither announced of the Soviet decision to redrawn the missiles from Cuba, rallying therefore to the Chinese position which interpreted the whole action of Moscow as “adventurous”.⁶⁰

Culturally, the Romanian-Soviet divergences materialized through the profound limitation of the Russian language and literature’s influence over the educational program. The Maxim Gorki Institute was practically abolished by

⁵⁶ Moraru, C., 2008, p. 229

⁵⁷ Copilaș, E., *Politica externă...*, on publishing in Sfera Politicii

⁵⁸ Cătănuș, D., 2004a, p. 233, Out, P., 2004, pp. 38-39

⁵⁹ Cătănuș, D., 2004a, p. 346

⁶⁰ Cătănuș, D., 2004a, pp. 202-203, Cătănuș, D., 2002, p. 179

being incorporated into the Slavistics Faculty, part of a “new institute of Foreign Languages and literature” within the Bucharest University. A symbol of “the Soviet hegemony over the Romanian cultural life during the Stalinist era”, the Maxim Gorki institute had, during the academic year 1957-1958, around 150 teachers and about 630 students. Concomitant to the irritation that it caused to Moscow, Bucharest’s gesture benefited by the support of the population, “for which the Russian language was always an exasperating burden”.⁶¹ Furthermore, starting with 1962, *Scânteia* daily will allocate increasingly smaller spaces to the news about the Soviet Union and of its “achievements”, seeking to affirm its distancing from Moscow through the media as well, although indirectly.⁶² Not least, “cultural exchanges with the West had been intensified. In August 1963 the jamming of Western radio broadcasts in Romania was stopped”. Gradually, in the country arrived more and more “plays, books, movies, expositions, academics and tourists from England and United States, France and Italy”.⁶³

The animosity which occurred in the XIXth century between the Romanian Principates and the Tsarist Empire represents a subject not at all neglected by the post 1989 Romanian historiography. But in the communist period, the subject was reintegrated into the historical circuit only at the beginning of the 60’s, as a result of Bucharest’s efforts to liberate itself from Soviet tutelage. The oppressions to which Russian imperialism subjected the population and the Romanian political elite from that period were brought into actuality through some unpublished manuscripts discovered in the Dutch archives and written by no one else than Karl Marx. The blow was truly skilful, Moscow being unable to contradict the main theoretician of communism without paying a massive ideological price. Marx insists upon the baneful role of the Tsarist absolutism, which manifested itself systematically against “the fundamental rights of the Romanian people to settle the internal affairs of the country on its own will”. Moreover, Marx continued, “These provinces «have withered at the shadow of Russian protection», and that relatively small part of the political elite which argued for the modernization of the country and its Western orientation was confronted with “Russia’s predominant influence” which “worked intensely in order to baffle this kind of plans”. Then, “To be suspected of nurturing patriotic feelings equated with the exclusion from public offices. The slavishness regarding Russia’s interests was a promotion tool... From prince to the most modest functionary, they all knew that their job was at the mercy of the Russian consul...”⁶⁴ Referring to the population’s feelings for the Russian power, Marx noted: “«The Romanian peasant» nurtures for the «muscal» (Muscovite) only hatred”.⁶⁵ Any comment is useless.

Notes on Romanians invalidated, with Marx’s own words, Moscow’s historical pretensions over Bessarabia. Paul Niculescu-Mizil claims that he was the first member from RWP leadership which has been made aware of the existence of the manuscripts. The first two editions of the work, which amounted only several tens of copies, were published exclusively for the use of the political elite. Only in December 1964 was the book printed for public use, accompanied by a solid critical apparatus. As expected, it had a major success. But RWP leadership was cautious enough to present the “the problem as belonging

⁶¹ Radio Free Europe, 1963, f. 1-2

⁶² Anton, M., 2007, p. 149

⁶³ Ionescu, G., 1994, p. 380

⁶⁴ Marx, K., 1964, pp. 174-175

⁶⁵ Marx, K., 1964, p. 167

exclusively to the historical research”, trying therefore to attenuate its obvious territorial and political valences.⁶⁶

The Bessarabian problem represented a permanent litigious point in the Romanian-Soviet relations. United with Romania in 1918, it will be returned in 1940, due to the Wien dictate, to the Soviet Union, along with North Bukovina and Herța County. During the Antonescu period, Bessarabia was returned, *de facto*, to Romania, but it was once again yielded to the Soviets at the end of the war. Within the Sino-Soviet dispute, Mao, appreciating the indirect support offered by the Romanian leadership at the 1964 visit, recognized the Romanian character of the province, considering its incorporation into the Soviet Union as a discretionary gesture. When returning, the Romanian delegation made a short stop in Moscow, informing Khrushchev about the topics discussed with the Chinese leadership. When the prime-minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer told the Soviet leader about this detail, Khrushchev experienced an unpleasant feeling, sensing “that the Romanians were still holding a grudge on us because we gave back Bessarabia to the Soviet Union after the war”.⁶⁷ Immediately after the Red Army regained the province, Moscow started an intense and systematic process of Sovietizing it, trying to annihilate by all possible means the identity of Romanian ethnics. The Soviets acted on two major directions: raising the educational level of the population and, implicitly, of the ideologization degree towards the acception of the communist ideals, and, respectively, destroying all the connctions with the mother country.⁶⁸

Soon before the “Declaration of independence” appeared, Moscow gave course to a last attempt to sustain its integrationist economic plans – this time, by academic means – trough the article “Problems of economic development of the Danube districts from Romania, Bulgaria and the U.S.S.R., written by the economist E.B. Valev, professor at Moscow University. The economic development of the socialist states was obstructed by national strait-laces, which were endangering in the end the possibility of reaching communism; in order to overcome this shortcoming, Valev proposed the creation of “interstate economic complexes” pragmatically configured and superior to the obsolete national boundaries, which from now one were impeding progress. As a consequence, Valev affirmed the necessity of constituting a “territorial production complex of Lower Danube” made of “«Romania, Bulgaria and the U.S.S.R.’s Danube districts», mounting a 150,000 km² surface, with a population of 11 million inhabitants”. Romania’s territorial, demographical and that of resource supplier was to be however highly superior compared with the other two participant states. In this way, 42 % of RPR’s territory (100,000km²) and 48 % of its population (9 million inhabitants) was to be integrated in this complex, while Bulgaria would have ensured 38,000 km² and 2 million inhabitants, and the Soviet Union 120 000 km² and approximately 700,000 inhabitants. Moreover, on the Romanian territory part of the complex, which included București, Ploiești, Argeș, Dobrogea, Galați and Oltenia regions, “was realizing 48 % from the global industrial production of the country, 54 % of the car production, 51 % from the chemical production, 86 % from the production of oil and gas. Those regions occupied 44,5 % from the country’s agricultural surface, 31,8 % from the forest fond and ensured 58,5 %

⁶⁶ Niculescu Mizil, P., 1997, p. 279

⁶⁷ Anton, M., 2007, p. 176, Harrington, J.; Courtney, B., 2002, p. 231

⁶⁸ Dima, N., 1982

from the wheat production and 60 % from the corn production”.⁶⁹ Taking into account the existing tensions between Bucharest and Moscow in the field of supranational economic integration, we can politically, not necessarily economically, understand the harshness of the Romanian authorities’ reaction, which referred to the “Valev plan” as a ridiculous and in the same time extremely grave attempt to the integrity and national sovereignty of the Romanian state.⁷⁰

The gradual distancing from Moscow, materialized through the activities above mentioned, culminated in April 1964 with the issuing of the document which remained known under the improper name, as I have mentioned before, of “Independence declaration”. It made public the RWP position regarding the principles which should guide international relations, regardless of the ideological system of the states: non-interference in internal affairs, respect for sovereignty and national interests, full cooperation starting from the equal rights of each state etc. Also, the Declaration ideologically admonished, in very harsh terms, Moscow’s ambition to coordinate the economies of socialist states, which it labeled as premature and unrealistic.⁷¹ Claiming that it acts on the basis of true Leninist principles, Romanian communists affirmed the incommensurable contribution of the “experience” and of the struggles of each communist party to the “common treasure of the Marxist-Leninist teaching”, a process to which they contributed from equal bases, not being subordinated to one another.⁷²

Another idea which appears in the document and which will be intensely used after 1965 is that of the simultaneous “annihilation” of “military blocks” like NATO and WTO, these representing “a permanent threat to the world peace”.⁷³ One can clearly observe the normative and also programmatic character of the Declaration, which will represent from now on the main theoretical guide of communist Romania’s foreign policy. Cataloging it as a “credo” of Romanian communism, the famous political scientist Ghiță Ionescu affirms that the Declaration represented for the RWP “the first original contribution” of this kind. Although rhetorically the document was not so sore as the ones produced by China or Albania, it was the product of a factual, not declarative logic: “the Romanian style” of approaching the issues of the international communist movement could be characterized as “cryptic and indirect – actions being stronger than words”.⁷⁴

Romanian communists accepted the peaceful coexistence and its tremendous importance for the new era of mankind, but they were drawing attention in the same time over the fact that “The policy of peaceful coexistence does not mean renouncing class struggle or making peace with the imperialists (sic!)”.⁷⁵ On the contrary, following the Leninist teachings, “The Romanian Workers Party considered necessary to show that the communist and workers parties must conduct a large revolutionary struggle, to handle all forms of struggle, without exception”. Socialism should have continued its victorious global march by adapting to the local conditions, therefore the insistence to which

⁶⁹ Preda, G., 2001, pp. 504-505

⁷⁰ Preda, G., 2001, p. 507; Montias, M., 1967, pp. 219-223

⁷¹ Banu, F., Țăranu, L., 2004, p. 107

⁷² Banu, F., Țăranu, L., 2004, pp. 134-135

⁷³ Banu, F., Țăranu, L., 2004, p. 96, Shafir, M., 1985, pp. 175-176

⁷⁴ Ionescu, G., 1965, p. 243, Olteanu, N.; Ciobanu, I., 2001, p. 515, Giurescu, D., 2004, p. 15, Skilling, G., 1964, p. 151, Brzezinski, Z., 1971, p. 442

⁷⁵ DJTAN, 1964, f. 138

Moscow was supporting peaceful, parliamentary means to advance to socialism resonated for the Romanian communists with a “slip towards opportunism”.⁷⁶ On the other hand, equally erroneous was considered to be “the absolutization of the non-peaceful way” to expand socialism, as was presented by Maoist China.⁷⁷

In order to confer authenticity to the new “national-communist” direction it had adopted, RWP launched an intense campaign to popularize it, doubled by a massive liberation of political inmates.⁷⁸ “In Romania, the Declaration enjoyed a unanimous approbation”, remembers Sorin Toma, former chief-redactor at *Scântea* daily, by then expelled from the party and marginalized.⁷⁹ Although the regime had won certain popularity⁸⁰, the political climate remained a tensed one, and the economic shortcomings endured by the population were still very much present. “The material shortcomings and the low living standard continued to place Romania, excepting Albania, to the last place among the «brotherly countries»”.⁸¹

If the Western media was not covering its interest for the Declaration, journalists from the socialist countries will appear much more reserved. That was because Moscow tergiversated the adoption of an official stand towards the document, which contained explicit reactions against the Soviet manner of approaching the economic and ideological problems of the communist world. In the end, the Soviet Union will manifest certain diplomacy by simply ignoring the main arguments of the Declaration, a fact which did not really bothered Bucharest. In this way, “the Moscow leadership saved what it could: it maintained the collaboration with a party – RWP – which was not prepared to definitively break the relations with «big brother» and was neither intending to”.⁸²

CONCLUSIONS: “THE MAIN THING IS THAT WE GO TOGETHER”

With this sentence did the Soviet ambassador I.K. Jegalin end its conversation with Gheorghiu-Dej on the 21 of June 1964, immediately after the Romanian leader affirmed: “Differences of opinions can exist, but, if I do not agree with a problem, that must not be considered anti-Sovietism (sic!)”.⁸³ As a consequence, regardless of how one understands the metamorphosis of Romanian foreign policy at the beginning of the 60’s – as “simulated permanence”⁸⁴, “partial alignment”⁸⁵, “autonomy”⁸⁶, “calculated dissidence”⁸⁷ – the distancing of Bucharest from the socialist camp was not completed, Romania remaining a member of COMECON, respectively WTO, despite the fact that its range of international action widened considerably. David Floyd considers that, from an economical point of view, Romania became truly independent, its autonomy being limited only to the political sphere.⁸⁸ His assumption can be contradicted both from an empirical and from an ideological perspective. In the first place, the commercial relationships that Bucharest developed with the

⁷⁶ DJTAN, 1964, f. 139

⁷⁷ DJTAN, 1964, f. 140

⁷⁸ Stanciu, C., 2010, p. 57

⁷⁹ Toma, S., 2004, p. 189

⁸⁰ Deletant, D., 2006, p. 158

⁸¹ Țirău, L., 2005, p. 495, Tismăneanu, V., 2005, p. 221

⁸² Cătănuș, D., 2004b, p. 45, Alison Remington, R., 1971, pp. 75-76

⁸³ Moraru, C., 2008, p. 51

⁸⁴ Shafir, M., 1985, 175

⁸⁵ Farlow, R., apud. Shafir, M., 1985, p. 175

⁸⁶ King, R., 1980, p. 136; Gross, G., 1966, p. 16

⁸⁷ Copilaș, E., *Politica externă...* on publishing in Sfera Politicii

⁸⁸ Floyd, D., 1965, p. 114

West, although substantial, could have never substituted the economical ties with the communist world, which were even reinforced in the 80's. In fact, due to this policy of massive industrialization, RPR's economy was substantially "complementary" compared to the Soviet economy, even since the end of the 50's. With other words, Bucharest was economically dependent on Moscow, despite the dissonances with a pronounced political character which had occurred between the two parts.⁸⁹ Then, within communist regimes, the economic is always subordinated to the political, even with the price of its efficiency, in order to maintain under supervision and shortly eliminate any source of independent thinking or activity and therefore a potentially hostile one. The separation of the two domains is not as feasible and relevant as in the case of non-communist regimes, being preferable to avoid it. Extrapolating the argument at the level of foreign policy, the economical dependency of RPR to the Soviet Union was implicitly translated into a certain political dependency, a fact which invalidates the presumable independence of Bucharest on the stage of international relations: it remained neither more nor less than an autonomous actor.

Beside economical or ideological reasons, Dej's antipathy towards Khrushchev contributed to a great extent to the distancing of Romanian politics from Moscow. "The contacts between Gheorghiu-Dej and Khrushchev were always tensed", remembers Paul Sfetcu, the former secretary of the RWP's leader. The two communist rulers never had "sincere, clear, open discussions, each having its own reserves" because their political objectives with reference to the "socialist camp" did not coincide.⁹⁰

The first manifestations of RPR's economic dissidence regarding COMECON were faced in the West with reserves and even skepticism, the country being known "for a long time as one of the most docile «satellites» of Moscow".⁹¹ But, because of the divergent interests and due to the political flair of Gheorghiu-Dej, "the Romanian national deviation"⁹² was shortly impossible to ignore. Randolph Braham wrote with humor in the summer of 1964 that "if the present position of the Chinese communists will ever prevail in the international communist movement, Gheorghiu Dej could easily prove that he was a Stalinist all along".⁹³ And so it was indeed. The calculated dissidence of Romanian communism, which followed, in orthodox ideological terms, its self-consolidation, regardless of the provenience of the resources put into service of this desideratum, became the filigree of the international orientation of the regime until its violent end, consumed in December 1989.

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⁸⁹ Montias, M., 1967, p. 182

⁹⁰ Sfetcu, P., 2008, p. 327, Deletant, D., 2001, pp. 214-215, Fejtő F., 1979, p. 176

⁹¹ Gross, G., 1966, pp. 16-17, Burks, R.V., 1966, p. 93

⁹² Burks, R.V., 1966, p. 93

⁹³ Braham, R., 1964, p. 16

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