

## ASPECTS OF A 'BRILLIANT ASSERTION IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WORLD'.<sup>1</sup> THE THIRD WORLD IN SOCIALIST ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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**Abstract:** Ceaușescu's Romania and the Third World interacted through a complex and complicated relationship of which the economic and geopolitical dimensions were by far the most important. The present paper performs a brief analysis of this relationship, pinpointing the advantages and also the disadvantages that socialist Romania was able to extract from it.

**Key words:** „socialist developing country”, Third World, “Group of 77”, international economic relations, development

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### TIERMONDIST AMBITIONS

Presenting itself, starting with 1972, as a ‘socialist developing country’, the Romanian Socialist Republic (RSS) aimed to affirm its individuality with ratio to the rest, only socialist the East-European states, diversifying in this way its global commercial options. Targeted were the European Economic Community (EEC) and, first of all, the Third World countries. As a ‘socialist developing country’, RSS was giving more and more attention to the ‘new international order’ concept, residing, on short, in the ‘democratization of international relations’, amplifying the role of ‘small and middle’ states on the global stage, nurturing the new social forces that would have anticipated the coming of the (Leninist) ‘new’, permanently opposed to the ‘old’ (‘bourgeois’ and therefore ideologically overcome).<sup>2</sup> Within global geopolitical parameters, with a more and more deteriorated image in the West due to the lack of recognition for human rights, RSS aimed to play a active role in the Third World, with which it shared some ideological affinities of Maoist extraction.

<sup>1</sup> „România și președintele Nicolae Ceaușescu – strălucită afirmare în conștiința lumii”, Lumea 82 Almanah, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Linden, Communist states and international change. Romania and Yugoslavia in comparative perspective, (London, Sydney, Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 58-59; Robert King, „Romania and the third world”, Orbis, 4: (1978), 875-892; Concepția președintelui Nicolae Ceaușescu despre noua ordine economică internațională, (București: Editura Politică, 1976).

Because of the relaxation of the international environment once the Helsinki accords were signed in 1975, the dissident foreign policy of RSS was not as important as in the late 60's, when Bucharest managed to considerably distance itself from Moscow. The collaborative propensity of the United States and the Soviet Union, both confronted with a large specter of global problems – had diminished the RSS's utility as a Western pressure tool against Moscow. Here lies the main signification of RSS's decision to intensify relations with developing states. Declaring itself a 'socialist developing country' and trying to integrate within the 'Group of 77' (international group formed by developing UN member states) or in the nonaligned movement (international group consisting of states which rejected the affiliation to or against a military block), the RSS actually tried to obtain, through third parts, new forms of access to the credits and the developed markets, on which it was marginalized due to the uncompetitive products it tried to sell. How? In July 1971, the EEC indicated willingness to grant preferential treatment to imports from developing countries' and Romania, along with Bulgaria, proved receptive. Especially the first, which made consistent steps in this sense, but with only partial success

As well, UN procedures necessary for integrating RSS in the 'Group of 77', an alliance, as mentioned, of African, Arab, Asian or South American states which tried to remain neutral in the superpower confrontation in order to expand the range of their economic opportunities – were initiated. Ceaușescu and propagandists of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) were very active in promoting the image of RSS as a developing country, without forgetting to simultaneously mention its socialist, both to avoid Moscow's supplementary indisposition, irritated enough by the boost of Romanian foreign policy in the second half of the 60's. Correlative, the 'new international order' was vigorously affirmed within the UN and beyond, something which 'apparently naturalized credibility to Romania's claim to be a developing country'.<sup>3</sup>

The economic compatibility between RSS and the Third World states consisted in Romanian exports of 'machines, equipment and complete installations', for which it received 'raw materials, textiles and semiprocessed products'. For Robert King, 'Such a commercial structure is typical for economic exchanges between industrialized and developing countries'.<sup>4</sup> Ceaușescu was pretty much aware of this aspect. The proof lies in the fact that the general secretary of RCP publicly presented RSS as a developing model for the Third World, *Dovada rezidă în faptul că el însuși prezenta public RSR ca model de dezvoltare pentru lumea a treia*, of which, however, it would have been part.

“Regarding the path the weak developed countries must walk, it depends first of all on the decisions revolutionary nationalist forces take in every country. But Romania's experience proves that for every people who wishes to quickly liquidate underdevelopment and to ensure its economic-social progress, it is necessary that the national health is hold by himself.

Second, it is necessary to concentrate the available material and financial means in the main decisive directions of the country's development and, in the first place, in the direction of developing industry and agriculture. It is understandable that in order to realize

<sup>3</sup> King, „Romania”, 880-882.

<sup>4</sup> King, „Romania”, 879.

a quick progress the training of necessary cadres is imposed, both specialists with superior studies and qualified workers for all fields of activity; without this progress is not conceivable.

And, finally, I would like to mention that it is an objective necessity for countries which take on the development road to realize a large collaboration both among them, and with socialist countries and other states in the world – on the basis of respect and mutual advantage.”<sup>5</sup>

This is exactly the developmental strategy that Ceaușescu conceived and applied in the RSS. As for the specialists or future specialists which to implement the developmental process, Ceaușescu did not forget to mention the ‘technical assistance’ the RSS offered to the Third World countries, consisting, in 1971, if we give credit to official dates, in ‘642 Romanian specialists, from which over 500 in African countries. From developing countries study in Romania in several teaching institutes 665 students, from which 166 from the African continent countries’. For the Bucharest leader, underdeveloped countries needed to intensify commercial contacts with RSS, first of all, and among themselves, thus prospering together with the one country which wanted to pass as their benevolent tutor, Romania: ‘the way of production cooperation represents a solution – the only solution I could say – to allow small and middle countries to obtain a quick progress on the path of economic and social development, therefore on the path of strengthening national independence’.<sup>6</sup>

#### **ACCEPTANCE IN THE ‘GROUP OF 77’**

Communist Romania’s efforts to come close with underdeveloped states and to be accepted, within the UN, in the ‘Group of 77’, did not started during the Ceaușescu era’, but in the last years of Gheorghiu-Dej’s leadership, when Bucharest’s foreign policy was progressively drifting from that of the Soviet Union and the ‘socialist camp’. Romania filled its application to the ‘Group of 77’ in 1964, the year of Bucharest’s maximum visibility on the international stage during Gheorghiu Dej’s leadership. ‘But the group was organized in regional sections, Asian, African and Latin-American and Romania was not acceptable for none of these sections. Doubts regarding receiving some non-regional members, Romania’s motives, and the effect its position as a COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the economic organization of the ‘socialist camp’, m.n.) member would have had over the negotiating possibilities of the group, led to its rejection’.<sup>7</sup> But Yugoslavia was allowed membership in the ‘Group of 77’ as a recognition of its essential contribution to create the nonaligned movement during the Bandung conference from 1955, being included in the Asian section of the group’.<sup>8</sup> The Romanian efforts were not, however, stopped by this failure.

<sup>5</sup> *Politica externă a României socialiste*, (București: Editura Politică, 1972), 129-130.

<sup>6</sup> *Politica externă*, 130-131; Arturo Frondizi, „Noua ordine economică internațională. Experiența României”, în *Concepția președintelui Nicolae Ceaușescu*, 61; Constantin Botoran; Gheorghe Unc, *Tradiții de solidaritate ale mișcării muncitorești și democratice din România cu lupta de emancipare națională și socială a popoarelor din Asia, Africa și America Latină*, București: Editura Politică, 1977), 227.

<sup>7</sup> Colin Lawson, „National independence and reciprocal advantages: the political economy of Romanian-South relations”, *Soviet Studies*, 3: (1983), 362-375.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolae Nicolae, *O lume așa cum am cunoscut-o. Amintirile unui fost ambasador al României*, (București: Pro Domo, 2000, 171-172.

After 1965, boosted by the obtaining of as many economic advantages as possible, RSS will resume its insistences to become a part of the group, constantly offering support to its initiatives in the UN.<sup>9</sup>

Nicolae Nicolae, a former ambassador in the United States in the second half of the 70's and dismissed by Ceaușescu after the escape of general Ion Mihai Pacepa in this country, for which it was, to a certain point, responsible – remembers the process through which Romania finally became a member of the 'Group of 77'. As regional appurtenance it was opted for the Latin American section, there being the most high-rank officials willing to sustain RSS's cause. 'The Brazilian and Argentinean delegations agreed to support receivment in their group, but conditioned this support on to a declaration of the Romanian part trough which it renounced its appurtenance to the list of countries with centralized economy at the UNCTAD'. A request impossible to be accepted by the Romanian part because the dangerous political tensions it would have entailed in the Bucharest-Moscow relationship. Finally, the Latin-American section gave up this claim, asking only that 'Romania not to pretend to participate at the decisions specific to the countries in this area'. The Romanian delegation had nothing to object, being satisfies that it had managed to make its application for the 'Group of 77' supported by one of the regional sections.

RSS had to face a redoubtable opposition. 'The first, but also the most difficult adversary, was the Arab countries, present both in the Asian and the African group. The Arabs manifested a certain irritation because, with the occasion of voting in the UN a resolution, initiated by them, trough Zionism was stigmatized, the Romanian delegation absented from the vote. RSS had notable political-economical relations with Israel, and it did not afford to compromise them. The second adversary was the African countries, especially those of Black Africa', not much impressed, it appears, by the Romanian economic courtship, despite Bucharest's real economic and propagandistic efforts. Furthermore, the Yugoslav minister of finances also opposed, at least in a first phase, thus placing himself outside the official position of its government, which supported, Nicolae claims, RSS's application.<sup>10</sup> Finally, RSS's most wanted appurtenance to the 'Group of 77' became realty, paradoxically, in spite of the opposition of numerous Arab and African countries which constituted the Third World itself according to the economic foreign policy of Bucharest.<sup>11</sup>

Inside the country, the event was emphatically presented as a confirmation of the more and more important status of RSS and Ceaușescu personally in the international life, being catalogued as unavoidable.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, RSS's integration in the 'Group of 77' validated 'a principle convincingly supported by our party, by its general secretary, that there is no and it cannot be a valid reason for which a socialist country that is in the same time a developing country not to act as a member of the "Group of 77"'.<sup>13</sup> The Soviets were not delighted by the Romanian success, manifesting soon their discontempt during a COMECON meeting. The delegation representing RSS at COMECON would have

<sup>9</sup> Lawson, „National”, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Nicolae, O lume, 174.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Gafton and the Romanian Section, „Romania's presence in Black Africa”, Situation Report/Romania, Radio Free Europe research paper, 23 May 1979, Arhiva 1989, 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Lawson, „National”, 366.

<sup>13</sup> Constantin Ene; Radu Bogdan, „Instituirea unei noi ordini economice internaționale și lichidarea subdezvoltării”, în Constantin Ene (coord.), România. Douăzeci de ani de diplomație multilaterală, (București: Editura Politică, 1985), 209.

fought back by claiming that ‘the Romanian government has no obligation to ask the agreement of USSR for its international actions, and the respective action had the objective of promoting specific interests of the Romanian economy’.<sup>14</sup> We should mention here that racist African states like South Africa, Rhodesia or Namibia did not occupy any place on RSS’s diplomatic agenda, Bucharest permanently and publicly condemning ‘apartheid and racial discrimination’.<sup>15</sup>

### **THE IMPOSSIBLE INTEGRATION INTO THE NONALIGNED MOVEMENT**

If RSS’s strategy to become a member of the “Group of 77” was successful, not the same can be said on its repeated efforts to be accepted in the nonaligned movement, consisting basically from the same states as the ‘Group of 77’ but not belonging to the UN. The fact that RSS was a member of the Warsaw Treaty Organization mattered more for the nonaligned movement than its COMECON appurtenance mattered for the ‘Group of 77’. Ceaușescu’s ambition to transform RSS into a nonaligned country failed to materialize, Bucharest being able to obtain only the observer status at some meetings of the organization.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, RSS courted the nonaligned movement even in 1989, stressing the ‘large’ collaboration and the technical assistance it offered its members. Furthermore, the ‘essential’, according to Ceaușescu, ‘consists not in the appurtenance or non-appurtenance to different political-military groups, but in the positions and the way of action of states to affirm the new international relations, in the active promotion of the peaceful coexistence principles, of the essential objectives, of the peace cause, of independence, sovereignty, detention and international collaboration’.<sup>17</sup> Or, more explicitly,

“(…) Regarding the Third World, we have mentioned before that Romania is a full member of the group of developing countries (Group of 77, m.n.). This does not contradict at all Romania’s position as a socialist country and as a COMECON member or other organisms, including the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Furthermore, Romania wishes to participate as observer to the activity of nonaligned countries, considering that its policy to support the anti-imperialist struggle, the national liberation struggle, the people independence harmoniously combines with the preoccupations of these countries. The fact that Romania is a Warsaw Treaty member does not constitute an obstacle in its participation as an observer to the activity of the nonaligned countries. I wish to remind that, at the constitution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, it was affirmed that it is temporary, that it will be abolished once NATO will be abolished. We have the firm conviction that we must reach the abolishment of all military blocks and to realize a new collaboration, on the principle of equality, a world of peace and collaboration.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Nicolae, O lume, 178.

<sup>15</sup> Gafton and the Romanian section: 23 may 1979, 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> King, „Romania”, 882-885.

<sup>17</sup> George Sprințeroiu, „România și mișcarea de nealinere”, în Cristian Popișteanu, (coord.), *Independență, nealinere, pace. Momente și semnificații ale unei mișcări istorice a secolului XX*, (București: Editura Politică, 1989), 30; Situation Report/Romania, Radio Free Europe research paper, 19 August 1976, Arhiva 1989, 2; George Ciorănescu, „Rumania and the nonaligned countries”, Background Report/Romania, Radio Free Europe research paper, 4 August 1976, Arhiva 1989, 1-8.

<sup>18</sup> Constantin Oancea et. al., *Tratatul de la Varșovia, 1955-1980. Culegere de documente*, (București: Editura Politică, 1981), 63-64.

The limits of Soviet tolerance over the Ceaușescu regime's 'deviant' policy were making their presence felt, and will continue to do so even after Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, stressing the importance of a frequent theme of Romanian foreign policy, that of the simultaneous abolition of both 'military blocks' and the defense character of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, Ceaușescu implied that it would not make concessions beyond a certain point, a fact which the Soviet part understood and accepted, as long as RSS remained, despite its dissidence, a member of the 'socialist camp'.

RSS' claim to be considered a 'developing socialist state', aiming to reach in time the 'stage of middle developed country'<sup>19</sup>, did not possess the persuasion which Ceaușescu hoped for, as Colin Lawson observes: 'No one doubts that Romania as once an underdeveloped country. No one believes Romania is as much as developed as the most industrialized market economies. But there are little convincing proofs that Romania is presently an underdeveloped country, in the general sense of the term'.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Ceaușescu was not thinking to quit. The economic price paid by the RSS for the appurtenance of the 'Group of 77', consisting of credits granted to the African, Arab or Asian states within the organization, was a highly expensive one for an economy that, paradoxically, borrowed on its turn from Western states in order to finance its ambitious industrialization program. There have been several gains, to be honest, but not high enough to justify, in palpable terms, RSS's necessity to integrate in the above mentioned organization, which leads to the conclusion that Ceaușescu's image of a world renowned politician counted more in taking the decision than the real economic interests of the Romanian state.<sup>21</sup> The romanticism of RSS's policy, both external and internal, perceiving itself through the prism of the RCP as a 'Prince Charming' which grew in a year like others in ten within an ideologically hostile world, made of the 'dragons of the modern world'<sup>22</sup> like 'imperialism', 'bourgeoisie' or capitalism, was in bloom.

Here are some numbers representing the amounts delivered to developing states before RSS was part of the 'Group of 77': Algeria and Argentina, 100 million dollars in 1972; Brazil, 180 million dollars in 1975; Egypt, 230 million dollars between 1972 and 1974; Iran, 135 million dollars between 1968 and 1969; Syria, approximately 170 million dollars between 1971 and 1974, and the list can go on.<sup>23</sup> In general, the RSS exported between 1965 and 1977, 'according to official Romanian statistics', twice as much as it has imported from the African states (Arab and non-Arab).<sup>24</sup> Between 1966 and 1970, the average credits offered by RSS to the Third World countries were up to 40 million dollars. Between 1971 and 1975 it simply exploded, reaching 350 million dollars,

<sup>19</sup> Gheorghe Obreja, *România în procesul trecerii la stadiul de țară mediu dezvoltată*, (București: Editura Politică, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Lawson, „National”, 369.

<sup>21</sup> Lawson, „National”, 371.

<sup>22</sup> Plenara Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român, 3-5 noiembrie 1971, (București: Editura Politică, 1971), 66-68; Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Raport la cel de-al XIV-lea Congres al Partidului Comunist Român*, 20 noiembrie 1989, (București: Editura Politică, 1989), 84-85; Michael Shafir, „Highlights of the 14th Party Congress”, *Situation Report/Romania*, Radio Free Europe research paper, 14 December 1989, Arhiva 1989.

<sup>23</sup> „Rumanian credits to other countries”, *Background Report/Romania*, Radio Free Europe research paper, 22 December 1975, Arhiva 1989, 1-8.

<sup>24</sup> Gafton and the Romanian section: 23 may 1979, 3-4.

outreaching by far any other East-European state<sup>25</sup>, a fact which proves Ceaușescu's perseverance in accepting the state it led into the organizational structures of the Third World. After 1976, this kind of help, offered with small interest rates on the basis of buying Romanian equipment and industrial technique or for raw materials – was intensified, affecting an economy which, in turn, was vertiginously entering the debt spiral.

Ceaușescu launched himself in true diplomatic peripluses in Africa and Asia. Many propagandistic volumes that described in the most eulogistic terms the meetings of the Romanian president with his homologous from states from the two continents testify in this sense.<sup>26</sup> But surely, the most important state with which RSS had political-economical relations and which majorly influenced its ideological strategy in approaching the Third World was China. This state will experience, after 1976, the year of Mao Tse Tung's death, a profound process of economic restructuration. 'Market socialism', as it was known, ensured an unusual synthesis for the communist world between economic planification and free market, China managing in this way to become attractive for foreign investors and to substantially develop its industrial infrastructure. It was precisely this new economic orientation that furthered it away from RSS, not willing to any kind of concessions to capitalism. Of course, the two states maintained their political collaboration at a high level, as Ceaușescu's visits in China and the Chinese leader Hua Guofeng in RSS proved both consumed in 1987.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Ceaușescu would not forget the credit of approximately 25 million dollars, 'non-repayable' and 'unconditional' which China granted RSS during the massive floods of 1970.<sup>28</sup> But, especially after 1980, the ideological and economical distance between the two parts will increase considerably, as China will chose the transition towards 'market socialism', while the Ceaușescu regime, not managing to understand and to adapt to the new world tendencies, was becoming more intransigent, rigid and oppressive than ever.

### **CONCLUSIONS: ECONOMY AND IDEOLOGY**

RSS intervened in the Third World mostly for pragmatic reasons, clearly deriving from Maoist principles: the Third World represented, for Mao, the new global proletariat, the 'periphery' which was about to destroy the hegemony of

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<sup>25</sup> Ronald Linden, „Romanian foreign policy in the 1980s”, în Daniel Nelson, (ed.), *Romania in the 80s*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 234.

<sup>26</sup> Sub auspiciile înțelegerii și cooperării internaționale. *Vizita tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretar general al Partidului Comunist Român, președintele Republicii Socialiste România, în Libia, Liban, Siria și Irak*, (București: Editura Politică, 1974); *Dezvoltarea colaborării și solidarității Partidului Comunist Român cu partidele comuniste și muncitorești, cu partidele socialiste și social-democrate, cu alte partide și organizații democratice, progresiste, cu partide de guvernământ, cu toate forțele antiimperialiste de pretutindeni*, (București: Editura Politică, 1978); *Solidaritate militantă. Întâlniri și convorbiri ale președintelui Republicii Socialiste România, Nicolae Ceaușescu, cu șefii de stat ai Guineii-Bissau, Senegalului, Siriei, R.P. Benin și cu președintele Comitetului Executiv al Organizației pentru Eliberarea Palestinei, în perioada aprilie 1976 - februarie 1977*, (București: Editura Politică, 1977); *Sub semnul solidarității româno-burundeze*, (București: Editura Politică, 1979); *Sub semnul solidarității româno-libiene*, (București: Editura Politică, 1979).

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Moore, „Hua Kuo-Feng in Romania”, *Situation Report/Romania*, Radio Free Europe research paper, 24 August 1978, Arhiva 1989, 1-16; *Sub semnul prieteniei frățești româno-chineze*, (București: Editura Politică, 1978).

<sup>28</sup> Ion Buzatu, *Istoria relațiilor României cu China din cele mai vechi timpuri până în zilele noastre*, (București: Meteor Press, 2004), 118; *Politica internațională a Partidului Comunist Român*, (București: Editura Politică, 1972), 195-196.

the Western 'centre' and therefore adapt the Leninist global revolution to the conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> The pragmatic reasons resided of course in the regime's efforts to efficientise the Romanian economy. And the latter was as ideologised as any other field of activity of what Kenneth Jowitt calls 'Leninist regimes'.<sup>30</sup>: massive industrialization, the central repartitions of production and activity branches, the voluntary neglect of light industry and the exporting of its products and the agricultural ones to finance the development of heavy industry – this kind of development planning is a direct consequence of the effect of Leninist ideology over all life aspects of a communist states, among which economic development.

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<sup>29</sup> For a short analysis on Maoism see Emanuel Copilaș 'Implozia leninismului. O reevaluare a conflictului sino-sovietic din perspectivă ideologică', Sfera Politicii, 141: (2009), 89-111.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Jowitt, *New world disorder. The Leninist extinction*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).



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