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Romanian-Soviet political-diplomatic relations, 1965-1970

DOCTORAL THESIS

- Abstract –

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Over the years, the Cold War experienced several international crises that had repercussions on the relations between the two blocs formed after the Second World War and the relations between the member states of each bloc. How strange it might seem, but the socialist block, at first sight, a formation with monolith unity, was, in turn, crushed by internal "family" disputes. The foreign policy of communist Romania during this period, even if it did not attack the essence of socialism as the Czechoslovakians had done in 1968, fascinated the West through its spectacular manifestations.

The tension in Romanian-Soviet relations since the beginning of the sixties of the last century seemed to have ended with the removal of N. S. Khrushchev from the leadership of the P.C.U.S. in November 1964 and the death of Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej in March 1965. The new administration in Bucharest gave clear signals that it wanted to lay the foundations for a new beginning in the relations between the two states. Moscow had the same intention. The reality that the Soviets encountered in September 1965, during the official visit to Moscow of the Romanian delegation led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, the secretary-general of the P.C.R., was likely to demonstrate to the leadership of the P.C.U.S. that the disagreements between them and the Romanians were much more profound than the misunderstandings regarding economic cooperation within the C.A.E.R. and the insults of N.S. Khrushchev.

The events that followed strengthened this conviction, and the fact that the new leadership of the P.C.R. continued to implement the line of internal and external policy edification established in April 1964 meant, in principle, the continuation of the manifestation of divergences between the two states. In the context of the events that took place after the September 1965 meeting in Moscow, the leadership in Bucharest continued to distinguish itself in one way or another from the position adopted by the U.S.S.R. and other socialist states.

In its path towards an independent foreign policy, the Romanian side resorted to the policy of small steps. First, the Romanians expressed their distinct point of view regarding the divergences in the communist and international labor movement, i.e., within the "family" framework, then at the European level, by establishing diplomatic relations with the R.F.G. in January 1967, after which followed the regional level, i.e., the Six Day War of June 1967, and finally, the international one personified by the non-proliferation treaty. In 1968, Romanians were put in a position to express themselves regarding a new "family" conflict caused by the military suppression of the Prague Spring.

The subject of this paper encompasses the most important foreign policy actions taken by the new leadership from Bucharest between 1965 and 1970. Of course, they take root in the Declaration of April 1964; therefore, in their analysis, we started with the importance of the

political legacy left by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. In drawing the chronological limit, I took into account the arrival of Nicolae Ceaușescu at the head of the P.M.R./P.C.R. in 1965 and the signing of the Romanian-Soviet friendship, collaboration and mutual assistance treaty of July 7, 1970. Ceaușescu's coming to the head of the party in 1965 opened a new page in the history of Romanians. At the same time, the Soviets also had a new leader elected in the fall of 1964. These events are why we chose 1965 as the lower limit. As for the upper limit, 1970, then we mention that the signing of the Romanian bilateral treaty, the Soviet Union had, at least on a declarative level, the purpose of ending the disputes that had arisen throughout these years. We intended to determine whether this objective was achieved.

By selecting the most important foreign policy actions undertaken by the Romanian leadership during this time, we aimed to analyze how they affected Romanian-Soviet bilateral relations and to identify to what extent the resulting divergences influenced the signing of a bilateral agreement between the two countries. Our approach demonstrated that the negotiation of the new treaty of friendship encapsulated in miniature all the disputes that arose during this period. The Soviet side hoped that this document would force the Romanian leadership to accept all of Moscow's theses regarding how the socialist bloc should function, which the Romanians consistently rejected.

In addition to the introduction, the historiography of the problem, conclusions, and bibliography, the work includes six chapters in which we analyze the major issues shaping the agenda of bilateral relations. Given that I had access to numerous files kept in the archive of the former C.C. of the P.C.U.S., as well as those within the National Archives of Romania and the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, we proposed to corroborate the historical sources available at this stage. We aimed to critically analyze the documents to elucidate the message behind the statements and actions undertaken by the two parties, not just stinging the events and meetings during which the issues that interest us were put on the agenda. This thesis can be part of the revisionist current, with certain post-revisionist elements, because we tried to dismantle, through arguments, primarily based on documents, many of the conclusions already made in Romanian and foreign historiography.

The first chapter refers to the position adopted by the Bucharest leadership towards the disputes in the international communist and labor movement. Our attention was focused on the path taken by the Communist and Workers' parties from March 1965 to June 1969, when the International Conference of the Communist and Workers' Parties took place, and the actions taken by the Romanian side in this context. The analysis of this issue revealed that the Romanian side was no longer satisfied with the role of a simple governing party that participated in the meetings

organized by the Soviets or the interlopers. The Romanians wanted to become a distinct voice, demonstrating by their example that the theses of Marx, Engels, and Lenin could be applied anywhere in the world if adapted to local conditions.

The Chinese were also an eloquent example of this. Their conflict with the Soviets gave the Romanians a free hand to focus on their national interests and to develop a program that would allow the achievement of the objective of the development of the Romanian state, which would ultimately lead to ensuring independence from the Soviets in all spheres of life. The problems in the communist movement represented a historical chance that the Romanians took full advantage of.

The Romanian side, however, did not only dream of universality within the communist movement but also the recognition of its role at the European, regional, and international levels. Thus, the following three chapters reflect the steps taken to achieve this goal. It is about establishing diplomatic relations with the R.F.G. in January 1967, refusing to condemn Israel during the Six-Day War of June 1967, and submitting amendments to the non-proliferation treaty signed in 1968. Even though these issues represent different levels, from the European to the international, the essential characteristic that makes them unite is the challenge of the hegemon role of the U.S.S.R., of the right of the Soviets to say what is right and what is wrong, of Moscow's intention to subordinate international life to its interests. The desire to become an actor with full rights in global life was one of the pillars of this policy. Still, the factor that propelled it was the intention to accelerate the pace of development of the Romanian state to ensure total independence from Moscow.

Just like in the first chapter and the following three, we sought, first of all, to understand, on the one hand, why the Romanian leadership adopted a distinct position each time, what its motivation was, and, on the other hand, let's also analyze the interests of the Soviet side that explained how they related to the actions taken by the Romanian side. At the same time, I also pointed out the duplicitous aspect of the Romanian foreign policy, which manifests itself prominently in some cases and can be mainly explained by the need to respond to the actions and interests of the Soviets in the S.S.R.

As for the fifth chapter, dedicated to the events in Czechoslovakia in the spring-summer of 1968, we aimed to contextualize the military intervention of August 21, 1968, by elucidating the period before this act so that we could observe how the distinct position of Romanians, what measures has Bucharest taken internally and externally. We tried to answer the following questions: why did the Romanian side support democratization in Czechoslovakia?; why were the Romanians not invited to participate in the meetings that prepared the intervention?; was there a

real danger of military intervention in Romania?; why did the Romanian leadership vehemently criticize the military intervention but reaffirmed its commitments to the Warsaw Treaty, whose members had intervened militarily in Czechoslovakia?; why did the Romanian side make efforts to improve relations with the Soviets after their conviction?

In the last chapter, reserved for the Romanian-Soviet friendship treaty, elements from the rest of the chapters can be found because, as I mentioned earlier, Moscow intended to achieve with his help what it had failed to achieve through various kinds of pressure, primarily economic. The analysis of this problem revealed that, in reality, the Soviets were the big losers in this endeavor, and the Romanian side managed to keep its sovereign right to make decisions on foreign policy without asking for the Soviets' consent.

From our perspective, our most significant achievement is to have introduced into the historical circuit a multitude of new documents from the Soviet archives, primarily unknown or utterly unknown to the Romanian public. However, this approach was only complete with the reinterpretation of Romanian sources exceptionally well known to researchers in this space. In this vein, we have problematized many aspects of the researched problems. We have put forward many hypotheses that present our perspective on contradictory matters. Undoubtedly, subjectivism is also present in this thesis, although we tried to approach the analyzed issues objectively. Our principal asset is the lack of attachment to communism in either country, giving us more than generous room for maneuver.

Indeed, the present paper aims to bring a new breath to the research of Romanian-Soviet relations in a significant period for defining the policy of independence from Moscow. However, considering that some of the Soviet documents related to the issues we are addressing are still classified, we emphasize the fact that this material can and must become, in turn, the subject of research to complement it with other documentary sources that will either confirm or, on the contrary, they will deny the conclusions we reached at this stage.

Our research approach demonstrated how important it is to corroborate sources, especially if we analyze the evolution of bilateral relations between two states. In addition to the documents from the archive of the former C.C. of the P.C.U.S., they supplemented the information that the Romanian public already knew and outlined different perspectives on many events that marked Romanian-Soviet relations between 1965 and 1970. At the same time, the historical sources preserved in Bucharest remain more than generous if they are approached critically and, being contextualized and corroborated with the Soviet ones, they reveal new and new ideas.

Many of the conclusions reached by Romanian historians, based only on Romanian documents, are debatable and, in some cases, even erroneous. Of course, we do not question their

good faith, but we emphasize the need to be highly cautious when drawing conclusions based on sources from only one of the parties involved. And in our case, we analyzed certain aspects of bilateral relations based on Soviet documents. For this reason, in the future, historical sources may complement or contradict the conclusions we have reached at this stage. This process is a normal phenomenon in history.

The choice of the period between 1965 and 1970 proved to be an inspired decision because in these years of the first political five-year period after the arrival of Ceaușescu at the head of the P.C.R. all aspects of the independent foreign policy, the foundations of which were laid in April 1964, crystallized and fully manifested. Gradually, the Romanians became a distinct voice within the communist and labor movement, within the socialist bloc, then within the European, regional, and international.

The Soviet-Chinese dissensions offered Bucharest the historic opportunity to start the process of distancing itself from Moscow, which, being too absorbed by its differences with Beijing, did not react radically to the position adopted by the Romanians. We presume the Romanians have never adopted a neutral position towards this conflict. The April Declaration itself confirms this fact by presenting the situation created. The Romanian leadership admired the spectacular character of the independent policy of the Chinese, taking over certain elements that met the needs of the Romanian state. Right from this moment, the tendency of the Romanian side towards the uplift of its perspective on the events of international life began to manifest itself more and more.

Indeed, at the declarative level, in the official documents, the new Romanian leadership remained faithful to the principles enunciated in 1964. In practice, however, things were quite different. The method of introducing changes or corrections of the moral position every time the national, party, and personal prestige interests of Ceaușescu demanded became something usual. For example, such a situation happened during the organization and holding of the International Conference of the Communist and Workers' Parties, which had the purpose of consecrating, even on a symbolic level, the existing schism in the Communist camp. According to the April 1964 Declaration, it would have been expected for the Romanians not to participate in this meeting since the primary condition for holding the respective conference had not been applied. We refer to participating in the Conference of the P.C.U.S. and the P.C. Chinese.

The desire to become a player with equal rights within the communist movement, to demonstrate the correctness of its foreign policy principles, to use as wide a platform as possible for their promotion and, implicitly, for more or less direct criticism of the Soviets, led to the need to deviate from this position. The Romanians' participation in the preparation of the Convention

and its actual work proved that Bucharest realized how changeable the situation was on the ground and how inappropriate it was to apply the principles mot à mot. It seems that the Romanians were instead guided by Machiavellian principles in their steps, especially by the one supporting the idea that the end justifies the means.

The leadership from Bucharest made considerable efforts to simultaneously achieve two significant objectives: securing national interests and raising the prestige of the Romanian state and its leadership to the highest levels. From our perspective, establishing diplomatic relations with the F.R.G. and refusing to define Israel as an aggressor state in the context of the Six-Day War can be interpreted starting from this intention. The difference is that the first case was planned step by step, and the second occurred almost spontaneously.

Contrary to all the statements regarding the inadmissibility of the adoption within the Warsaw Treaty of some decisions that would be binding for the member states or that would direct their policy, the Romanians themselves referred to a document adopted within this organization to motivate the decision to establish diplomatic relations with R.F.G. in January 1967. The given action represents additional proof for our thesis that when national and prestigious interests prevailed, the Romanians deviated either totally or partially from those stipulated previously.

The position adopted by the Romanian leadership in the context of the escalation of the situation in the Middle East in June 1967 starts from a lucid analysis of reality. Even today, there is no exhaustive picture of the causes that led to the outbreak of hostilities, which is why the attempt to approach the created situation equidistantly was a decision that speaks to us of the manifestation of a certain maturity in the analysis of international life that is manifested at the level of the Romanian leadership.

Negotiating the provisions of the future non-proliferation treaty put the S.S.R. face to face with the classic element of the Cold War – the US-Soviet consensus was not up for discussion. However, Bucharest was willing to counter this practice by advancing its initiatives regarding such an important issue. As in the other cases, this time, the Romanians' position was based on national interests and the intention to dismantle the hegemony of the two superpowers, even if the Romanian state did not possess nuclear weapons.

Their demand to include provisions on general disarmament in the non-proliferation treaty was exaggerated since non-proliferation was only one aspect of disarmament. At the same time, considering that the Romanians persistently asked the Soviets for patents to manufacture weapons and even fighter planes, we conclude that many of the Romanians' requests were imbued with duplicity. However, the representatives of Romania and other states were right when they requested that the nuclear states offer them guarantees that they would not be subject to a nuclear

attack since they did not have this weapon. The actuality of such a provision has become urgent today in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian War, which started on February 24, 2022.

The events related to the Prague Spring focused on Romanians' internal situation and the nature of relations between the member states of the Warsaw Treaty. From our point of view, the condemnation of the military intervention in Czechoslovakia by the five member states of this organization started from purely pragmatic interests. Nicolae Ceaușescu would never have risked his position to criticize the Soviets if he had not been sure the latter would not resort to this measure. Instead, through the harsh criticism brought, in particular, to the Soviets, the artisans of the intervention, the Romanian leader accumulated enormous internal and external political capital. This political capital represented the source that fueled the Romanian economy in the following years.

At the same time, another feature of the Romanian leadership's policy came to light in this context, fervently supported by Ceaușescu. We mean building good relations with both the capitalist and the socialist world; that is the principle of peaceful coexistence. Bucharest always tried to have several options that it could consider and that offered room for maneuvering in case one of them created difficulties. The Romanian economy, still dependent on the Soviet one, could not develop without the support of the U.S.S.R. That is why the Romanian leadership did not hesitate to restore relations with the Soviets.

The documents we have access to at this moment, as well as the critical analysis of the steps taken by the Romanian leadership, have brought us to the conclusion that in August 1968, there was no danger of military intervention in Romania. Intentionally or not, it is inevitable that the Romanians benefited from these rumors. This time the position of a potential victim of aggression brought additional dividends, augmenting those gained through criticism of the intervention in Czechoslovakia.

The Soviets were not so much disturbed by the Declaration of April 1964 itself as by the stubbornness of the Romanians to put its provisions into practice. Moscow perceived every foreign policy action of the Romanians that contravened its interests as directed against it. To some extent, it was so, but the national interests of the Romanians always prevailed. The fact that they clashed with those of the Soviets and, in this way, challenged the right of the Soviets always to impose their point of view was a bonus that the Romanians took full advantage of.

The Soviets failed to resolve the delicate issues in their relations with the Romanians through the Romanian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Collaboration, and Mutual Assistance. The inclusion of provisions regarding the military obligations of Romanians if the U.S.S.R. had been attacked by any state in the world, including the Republic of Chinese, proved to be a utopia. After

the Second World War, in the context of the presence of nuclear weapons in the endowment of these states, a collision between the great powers was practically impossible. Instead, the Romanians included the new treaty wording, allowing them to continue having a distinct position on foreign policy issues whenever necessary.

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