

THE FIRST YEARS OF THE FOREIGN POLITICS OF THE CEAUȘESCU REGIME IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE HUNGARIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. A SYNTHETIC APPROACH

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PRIMII ANI AI POLITICII EXTERNE A REGIMULUI CEAUȘESCU ÎN DOCUMENTELE MINISTERULUI MAGHIAR AL AFACERILOR EXTERNE. O ABORDARE DE SINTEZĂ

ABSTRACT: *This study represents the result of a larger individual research work, performed by the author in diplomatic archives from Budapest. The main issue in focus is represented by the perceptions of Hungarian diplomats and Communist Party officials concerning evolutions on the level of Romanian foreign policy during the first years of the Ceaușescu regime. We can observe that this issue is a very complex one, defined through the complexity of relations between the two neighbor countries, but in the same time, certain specific characteristics can be noticed. Hungarian Communist leaders paid attention in a special way the new direction Romanian's foreign policy took results of Romanian forced industrialization and the situation of Hungarian minority in Romania. In the text of this current study, these tendencies are described, analyzed and illustrated through significant case studies. By this, a complex image of synthesis is offered to the reader, while its details can be developed for the future through publishing articles debating certain case studies focused on specific problems.*

KEYWORDS: Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romanian foreign policy, diplomacy, Hungary, Soviet Bloc.

REZUMAT: *Studiul de față reprezintă rodul unei cercetări individuale mai ample, efectuată în arhivele diplomatice de la Budapesta. Problema principală pe care se află în focus este reprezentată de felul de a percepe evoluțiile din România pe planul politicii externe a diplomaților și oamenilor politici maghiari în cursul primilor ani ai regimului Ceaușescu. Se poate observa că această problematică este una foarte complexă, definită prin natura legăturilor complexe între cele două țări vecine, totuși, se pot observa anumite caracteristici aparte. Lideri comuniști maghiari au monitorizat în mod special noua direcție a politicii externe române, rezultatele industrializării forțate și situația minorității maghiare din România. În textul studiului, se descriu, se analizează și se ilustrează, prin studiile de caz relevante, aceste preocupări, oferind cititorului o imagine de sinteză complexă, ale cărui detalii pot fi dezvoltate prin publicarea a mai multor studii de caz focusate pe probleme specifice.*

CUVINTE CHEIE: Nicolae Ceaușescu, politica externă a României, diplomație, Ungaria, blocul sovietic.

INTRODUCTION

For the socialist Hungary, Romania represented, as a neighbour country, a major focus. In the first years of Ceausescu's regime, Hungarian communist leaders particularly monitored the new direction of the Romanian foreign policy, the results of the forced industrialisation and the status of the Hungarian

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minority in Romania. Usually, for the diplomacy of any country, even though, in theory, all possible partners have to be treated equally, the great powers and the neighbour countries have priority and are granted a greater attention, for practical reasons. For the Romanian and the Hungarian leadership, the neighbour country always represented a great focus – even this was not reflected by the press and the public discourse of those times – both in terms of bilateral relations, and in terms of analogy with third parties.

This research is the outcome of an intense one-month investigation undertaken in the National Archives of Hungary, where I managed to review all the available boxes in the stock of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the period 1965–1969 regarding Romania.

As happened for other countries as well, the archivists of foreign affairs in Hungary had two collections for Romania: the first one, under code letter k, included official documents lying at the basis of the diplomatic official exchange: notices, official telegrams, etc. The second one, under code letter j, is wider and includes indirect references on all information that could be considered important by the Budapest leadership on Romania: confidential communications, reports, etc. After reviewing them, we could conclude that the Hungarian leadership's attitude towards Romania was determined by four aspects: the person of Ceausescu, Romania's position and role in the socialist group, especially its attitude towards the Soviet Union, bilateral relations and the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania. The Hungarian diplomatic also carefully monitored Romania's successes and failures regarding the development of relations with the Western world and the third world.

In the following, I shall present, one by one, the elements determining these positions, as well as describe them with relevant case studies. Obviously, this study does not aim at drawing up an exhaustive monograph regarding Romanian-Hungarian diplomatic relations, for various reasons. The foreign politics of both communist Romania¹ and communist Hungary² has a very rich bibliography and some good works in the field of Romanian-Hungarian bilateral relations have also been published lately³. However, a review of the general trends, with relevant case studies, may provide the interested with a general image of Hungary's concerns regarding Romania in the first years of Ceausescu's regime.

The socialist countries, like the governments of the United States and Western Europe were highly interested in Gheorghiu Dej's policy of autonomy⁴ and believed that Ceausescu was the right man for an opening of the communist world, a starting point for fair negotiations. Ceausescu was highly sympathized in the West, so that his accession to the power resulted in the publication of a story in the *Washington Post* stating that, in Romania, „the power was concentrated in hands of the young nationalist secretary general, Nicolae Ceausescu”⁵. His actions at the level of foreign politics, as well as the relative liberalisation of Romania reinforced this positive feeling. Such actions included the pursuit of diplomatic relations with Israel during the Six-Day War, the recognition of Federal Germany as a state and, especially, Ceausescu's attitude on the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops to Czechoslovakia. On August 21, 1968, Ceausescu addresses the public and says: „The choice of the ways of socialist construction is the issue of every party, of every state, of every people”, and „Our entire party, the Romanian people as a whole, think that the military intervention in Czechoslovakia is a deep mistake”⁶. Silviu Brucan said the following about Ceausescu in a book published after the 1989 revolution: „Nicolae Ceausescu was an

¹ For instance: Malița, 2014; Georgescu, 2011; Stanciu, 2011; Burakowski, 2011; Croitor, Borsa, 2007; Fedor, 2010; Dragomir, 2010; Stanciu, 2010; etc.

² We mention the following: Johancsik, 2010; Borhi, 1994; Békés, 2004; Simon, 2012; Földes, 2016; Gough, 2006; etc.

³ For instance: Földes, 2007; Fodor, 2011; etc.

⁴ Kunze, 2002, p. 217

⁵ *Washington Post*, 1965, July 25

⁶ Durandine, 1999, p. 97

economic disaster and a political monster, but he had some flashes of genius in the foreign policy, which turned Romania from a passive actor on the international stake into a player able to score goals in the fight between the East and the West during the Cold War.”⁷

ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLITICS DURING 1965– 1968. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The question is the following: what can be said about Romania's foreign politics during Ceausescu's mandate? Is it a policy of real independence from the Soviet Union, a policy of formal independence, of autonomy, or did it remain a mere satellite? This is also dealt with in Aurel Brown's book, who claims that one cannot talk about independence in the case of Romanian diplomacy, only about autonomy in its actions, since Romania always remained a member of the Warsaw Pact and of the Common Market, but he also admits that, as directed by the Soviets, Romania was criticised in the Eastern European press for its recognition of West Germany.⁸ Why could this happen? In order to explain this, Romania's foreign politics must be reviewed, with all its major movements.

It is a fact that, after the brutal stalinisation of Romania, its foreign politics was also subordinated to the interests of the Soviet Union in a monolithic framework; however, this would gradually change with Stalin's death.⁹

In this context, of the confrontational climate, even though the USA never had a negative image at the level of the collective mentality of the Romanian people, the USA are seen as an enemy in the official propaganda. The study of Virgiliu Târău regarding caricatures in the 1950–1951 Romanian press, where the United States and prominent leaders thereof, along with other Western powers, are presented in a negative manner, is highly interesting and valuable from this point of view. A caricature titled „The invasion of the culture of war instigators“ depicts a gorilla with a bob hat on its head, reproducing the American flag, holding a bloody bat in its right hand, under a scarf that covers a red book with Sartre's name on it. A swastika band is on the gorilla's left hand, which holds the atomic bomb, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and a bag with dollars. The gorilla tramples over the works of Tolstoy, Dickens, Goethe, Balzac and Romain Rolland.¹⁰ The caricature is an illustrative one, and is not even remotely the only one from this period; almost every issue of *Scanteia* includes one or several of this kind. However, things will gradually change after Stalin's death, from the period of Dej's leadership, and the process will be visible, even spectacular, during Ceausescu's presidency.

The Romanian communists welcomed China's estrangement from the Soviet Union and the worsening of the relations between them, because they could have a somewhat freer approach within the Soviet block so as to avoid Soviet military intervention, without endangering the nature of the regime at any time, under any circumstance. Dej's Romania did not witness events such as the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and the leader's bursts in terms of diplomacy were no danger at all for the communism or for the Soviet Union which, as long as Romania was secured from all sides, could allow this country to take a certain autonomy in its actions.¹¹ Since Romania was surrounded by other socialist countries, there was no great danger for its communism to disappear due to combined actions of the anti-communist forces in the country – which were non-significant, but still existed – and of the West, and the possibility of anti-Soviet resistance was also dim. Thus, Romania could begin foreign policy actions which were not necessarily welcomed by Moscow, but, anyway, were tolerated. Thus, Dej delegated an ambassador to

⁷ Brucan, 1998, p. 137

⁸ Braun 1978, p. 11.

⁹ Kirk, Răceanu 1995, p. 14.

¹⁰ Târău 2000, p 215–226.

¹¹ Braun 1978, p. 110.

Albania in 1963, when all the other Eastern European countries boycotted this country according to the Soviet orders.¹²

At the same time, the first approaches to the West are made. An important moment from this point of view takes place in April 1964, when the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party stated that Romania was neutral in the Chinese-Soviet conflict and that it wanted to establish and develop commercial relations with all the countries on the globe, irrespective of their social regime.¹³ As for Romania's external manifestations, it can be said that it behaved neither as a Soviet vassal, nor as a Chinese one. This was visible especially in the meetings of the United Nations, where it showed sympathy to the countries it qualifies as progressive from a socialist perspective. Thus, Romania and the Soviet Union vote for Angola's accession to the United Nations, while China does not take part in the vote. However, when Vietnam's invasion to Cambodia had to be criticised, Romania would vote against the Soviet Union, along with China and the United States.¹⁴ Nevertheless, this happened to the end of the 1970s; probably for fear of the big brother, the Romanian vote was not too different from the Soviet one in the 1960s. Until 1967, Romania's representative only once voted otherwise than the Soviet one, for the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. One cannot say that Romania did not have a visible outstanding diplomacy in this period, as it was the first European state to establish relations with the Palestine Liberation Front and who requested, along with the Soviet Union, for the PLO to be able to take part in the meetings of the UN Security Council. In terms of European cooperation, Romania has a project to establish a block of small European states in 1965.¹⁵

THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE DIPLOMACY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY ON THE FIRST YEARS OF CEAUSESCU'S REGIME

The diplomacy and secret services of Hungary had become acquainted with Ceausescu's biography and activities from the time of Dej, but they paid no major attention to it, not even after he was elected the secretary general. Ceausescu's first short biography, recorded in the Archives of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is dated 1967.¹⁶ The general perception was that, probably, Gheorghiu-Dej's successor would be an older, more experienced politician.¹⁷

As for the interpersonal relations between Kádár and Ceausescu, they were fair, but not cordial, and there was no special friendship between them. Kádár preferred the company of Soviets, Czechoslovaks and Poles, while Ceausescu developed good relations with Tito and Zhivkov. This did not stop them from gestures of mutual courtesy. For instance, on March 8, 1968, Ceausescu sent a card and a bunch of flowers to Kádár's wife, and Hungary's leading couple gladly received the Romanian leader's gesture of friendship and respect, also sending a thank you note.¹⁸

In May 1967, Ceausescu visited Hungary and talked with his Hungarian counterpart about the development of tourism. Accompanied by Kádár on his road to the airport, Ceausescu talked about the role and responsibility of the two leaders to develop bilateral relations. Kádár basically agreed, but he underlined that more meetings were needed between minister officials, factory managers,¹⁹ which had generated discontent among the Hungarians regarding the attitude of Romanians.²⁰

¹² *Ibidem*, p 4–5.

¹³ Kirk, Răceanu 1995, p. 15.

¹⁴ Weiner 1984, p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

¹⁶ ANU. XIX-J-1-j, 1967. Box no 76. Doc. No. 001648/44.

¹⁷ ANU .. XIX-J-1-j, 1965. Box no. 95. Document no. 004801/19. Report of November 19, 1961. f 1.

¹⁸ ANU XIX-J-1-k, 1968. box no. 32. Doc no. 3013–1

¹⁹ ANU XIX-J-1-k, 1967. Box no. 77. Doc no. 001648/74

²⁰ See: ANU, XIX-J-1-j, 1965. Box 95. Doc. 004801/5; Doc 004801/13; 1965. Box no. 94. Doc. 004801/39; 1967. Box 79.

A troublesome issue of bilateral relations was Romania's position within the socialist group²¹. This also is supported by a very large bibliography, so, in the following, we shall only reflect on some particularly important aspects, described through relevant case studies in the documents serving as primary sources for this work.

After the Soviet troops left Romania in 1958 and after Gheorghiu-Dej's disputes with the Soviets – such as the reception of the Valev plan – the PMR Declaration of 1964 was the symbolic start of a Romanian foreign policy quite independent from the USSR. Hungary, instead, chose a different direction: it adopted a USSR-favourable approach in terms of foreign policy, and a different model in terms of internal politics – developing economic relations with the West, simultaneously with the Soviet relations. In his book, Johancsik János summarizes this as follows: „For Hungary's foreign politics, the Soviet orientation did not mean exclusively the development of friendship relations with the Soviet Union, but also the adoption at the level of global diplomacy, the pursuit of its politics and the cooperation with the other socialist countries within the Soviet-led alliance. „²²

The Chinese-Soviet conflict left a room of manoeuvre for the Romanian communists, but the outcomes were not significant, perhaps also due to the different motivations of the two sides. China was looking for a political partner, and the Romanian communists would have rather discussed practical issues (a joint attitude towards Vietnam, economic cooperation, etc.).²³ PCR criticised the Chinese position more than once, but independently from the others. The Romanian delegation withdrew from the congress of the communist parties that took place in Budapest on February 26, 1968, because of the anti-Chinese criticism and because the Soviet Union would have wanted the adoption of a joint position against China.²⁴

As for bilateral relations, several Hungarian party officials and members of the public administration felt a fair, but distant attitude from their Romanian counterparts. For instance, Földes László, the director of the Hungarian Forest Fund,²⁵ mentioned that Romanians either did not participate, or participated passively in the conferences of socialist states on forestry issues. Another example would be Ceausescu's attitude in Belgrade, at a reception of September 1967. In a courtesy discussion, Hungary's ambassador to Belgrade asked Ceausescu what he thought of the situation in Vietnam and whether he had any concrete recommendations to solve the issue. Ceausescu briefly answered: his opinion had already been notified to the Vietnamese.²⁶

Doc. 001648/2; Doc. 001648/31; Doc. 001648/16; Doc. 001648/9; Doc. 001648/3; 1966. Box 97. Doc. 002404. The references in this note include reports of high officials of the Hungarian state to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, upon the latter's request. The reports are synoptic, i.e. they all describe a fair, but distant, somehow fearful attitude of Romanian counterparts, especially compared to counterparts in other European socialist states. For this note, when the documents quoted in a row are located in the same box, we mentioned the number of the box in front of the first document of the concerned row.

²¹ On this topic, see: Betea, (coord), Mihai, Țiu 2015; Stanciu 2011; Hunya, Réti, Süle, Tóth 1990; Lakatos 2014; Anton, Chipar 2003; Malița 2007. Etc.

²² Johancsik 2010, p. 264.

²³ See: Buzatu 2011; Croitor, Borsa 2007; Croitor 2014.

²⁴ Malița, 2007, p 85.

²⁵ Of the many reports listed in note 8, I decided to quote the document ANU XIX-J-1-j, 1967. Box 79, Doc. no. 001648/3 as a study case, because Földes László was more important than the position he held in the hierarchy of Hungarian communists. As a veteran of the First World War, he adhered to the Hungarian Communist Party in 1937 (when it was illegal). During the Second World War, because he circulated anti-war and anti-fascist propaganda, he was arrested and sent by train to a concentration camp in Germany; however, he managed to escape and joined anti-fascist and pro-Soviet protesters, standing out in the guerilla fights of the Budapest neighbourhood of Újpest against the paramilitary volunteers of the Arrow Cross Party. After the war, he held a range of medium level positions in party and public bodies. During the anti-communist revolution of the fall of 1956, he worked in the Ministry of Defence, where he took part in a conspiracy of various military leaders to overturn Nagy Imre; however, due to the Soviet intervention, the plan was not fulfilled. He was one of the first to join the line led by Kádár János, and during his term he became Adjunct Minister of Defence and one of his closest collaborators. He remained loyal to the latter and retired in 1980.

²⁶ ANU. XIX-J-1-j, 1967. Box 76, Doc. 002193/4

Besides the development of bilateral relations at a political, cultural and economic level, the situation of the Hungarian minority was also important for Budapest.

The general opinion – not only of the Hungarians: we also have Czechoslovak, Polish and Soviet testimonies as well – was that Ceausescu was extremely nationalist.²⁷ Budapest had a particular attitude toward the changes in Romania: on the one hand, they intensely monitored Bucharest's movements in terms of cultural or administrative policy, but without any visible interference. Most likely, they would not have received Soviet support for that at that time; the Soviet leaders had a duplicitous attitude, determined by propaganda and false realism: on the one hand, they also monitored the situation in Romania and even interfered – according to all clues, the Hungarian Autonomous Region was created under pressure from the Soviets²⁸ – but, at the same time, they ordered a „freezing“ of all national conflicts after 1948, with a view to maintaining the unity of the socialist group – even if only apparently.

Among the socialist states of Europe, Romania was relatively marginalised, for various reasons; firstly, due to its more precarious economic situation compared to the others, due to its geographical location – Central European states had a good cooperation, in general, implying joint military exercises and a relative economic interdependence – as well as due to its attitude towards the primacy of the Soviet Union.

To this purpose, a report of the Hungarian Socialist Labour Party synthesized the position of PCR as follows:

- in their discussions with fellow party leaders, Romanian communist leaders try to promote their own viewpoint;
- they always refer to the abstract principles of independence, sovereignty, non-interference with the internal affairs of other countries, full equality between nations, that should underpin relations between states; they do not say, but they imply that they primarily think of relations between socialist countries
- they consider that all parties have the exclusive right of elaborating their own political line, the forms and methods of the activities they pursue, because no one can be more aware of the economic and social capacities of the concerned country than its own communist party. With this opportunity, they seldom pass the occasion to criticise the Komintern and the Soviet Communist Party.
- they consider that both the Soviet and the Chinese party are equally responsible for the frictions within the socialist group.
- they consider that the role of small states and parties increases in the current situation, as they may manifest opinions and positions that may bring a constructive contribution to solving global political conflicts.²⁹

Sometimes, the independent attitude of Romanians was criticised or laughed upon by third parties. Such a case is noted in a report of the Hungarian ambassador to Berlin. The Romanian ambassador Cleja, who enthusiastically explained the fair Romanian position, saying that Romania had a good relation with everyone and developed its relations with the Soviet Union, with China, Yugoslavia and Albania, was answered the following by the German Professor Doernberg: „I am sorry, Ambassador, but what you are saying is not a harmonisation of opinions, at most it is a consequence of it.“³⁰ According to the Hungarian diplomat's report, Cleja did not answer anything, but looked for other people to talk to.

However, the Romanian attitude of independence also generated some respect. In general, Romanian officials who criticised the Soviet Union, and such criticism was easily learned by the concerned

²⁷ For instance, see the position of Wladislaw Kruczek of Poland, who qualified Ceausescu as a nationalist and sly person, pursuing an anti-Soviet policy. ANU XIX-J-1-j, 1968. Box 77, Doc. 003192.

²⁸ Bottoni 2008.

²⁹ ANU. XIX-J-1-j, 1965. Box 94, Doc. 003377/18

³⁰ ANU XIX-J-1-j. 1965. Box 94, Doc. 003377/18.

persons – several ambassadors, the minister Leontin Salajan, etc. – were not sanctioned. Sometimes, the respect for Romanians even defied the leadership of the Soviet Union. Thus, on November 19, 1966, at the closing party of the Ninth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party, when Ceausescu left the party, almost all Bulgarian leaders accompanied him to the station, and only president G. Traykov remained with Brezhnev. When Zhivkov returned, Brezhnev stood up and left.³¹

Romania has more developed economic relations with the other socialist countries in its region, but it made considerable efforts to open to western markets. Relations with Western Europe particularly developed: according to the comments of Hungarian diplomats, cultural relations with France and Italy³² and economic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany developed at a good pace.³³ However, the western states did not take over the part of the neighbouring countries within the Comecon, and the economic balance of trade with Western European countries was generally passive, with Italy being the only exception.³⁴

Very serious initiatives dealt with the United States of America as well, but Romania's attitude regarding the American intervention in Congo, the Dominican Republic and Vietnam froze the relations.³⁵ This would only change with Nixon's visit to Bucharest on August 3–4, 1969.³⁶

Romania improved its relations with Scandinavian countries, especially at the party level³⁷, and normalized its relations with Israel³⁸, Greece and Turkey³⁹.

Romania attempted to appear as a technology and finished goods exporter and as a raw materials importer to third world countries. In the first years of Ceausescu's regime, these steps were taken carefully and not very successfully. Just some examples:

According to some Indonesian sources, in 1965, Romania offered to sell some oil facilities. However, the Indonesians were informed by the Indians that Romanian facilities were not the best and they entered a supply contract with Japan. The sale of the same facilities to Yugoslavia failed as well.⁴⁰

Another failure was the agreement with the Republic of Congo. As Massambat-Debat was removed, his successors did not observe the agreement entered in 1968, which caused serious damage to Romania.⁴¹

CONCLUSIONS

Much more could be said, as the international relations system and the world of diplomacy are highly complex. In the following years, I intend to extend my research on this topic, dealing with the archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The image provided by Hungarian diplomatic archives is highly complex, but also presents certain drawbacks, since Hungarian diplomats were, in most cases, passive observers of the evolution of Romanian diplomacy, did not interfere with it and no consistent strategy aiming at having any influence upon it was pursued by Hungary.

In the first years of Ceausescu's regime, Budapest took a position of expectation, with no great illusion or expectations, but with no pessimism either. The evolutions in Romania represented a source of

³¹ ANU XIX-J-1-j, 1966. Box 100, Doc. 00330062.

³² ANU XIX-J-1-j. 1965. Box 95, Doc. 003458

³³ ANU. XIX-J-1-j. 1965. Box 95, Doc. 004801/16

³⁴ ANU. XIX-J-1-j 1969. Box 80, Doc. 002115/1.

³⁵ ANU. XIX-J-1-j 1965. Box 93, Doc. 004801/19

³⁶ Harrington, Joseph F; Courtney J. Bruce, *Relații româno-americane*, Institutul European, 2002; Artur Lakatos, „Câteva premise privind vizita lui Nixon în România”, *Acta Musei Napocensis*, issue 47/II, 2010, pp 183–200.

³⁷ ANU. XIX-J-1-j 1966. Box 97, Doc. 004922

³⁸ ANU. XIX-J-1-j 1968. Box 77, 00791/2

³⁹ ANU. XIX-J-1-j 1965. Box 93, Doc. 004801/19

⁴⁰ ANU. XIX-J-1-j. 1965. Box 95, Doc. 002980

⁴¹ ANU XIX-J-1-j 1969, Box. 78. Doc. 003397/6

learning, positive or negative models, but also analogies for the country's own politics. The comments of the Hungarian diplomats and officials regarding the realities of the first years of Ceausescu's regime are worth to be noted.

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