

# **Khrushchev, Ulbricht and Gheorghiu-Dej. Romania's Policy towards East Germany between Solidarity and Autonomy (1953-1962)**

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Romania's relations with the German Democratic Republic (GDR) illustrate better than anything the sinuous road towards autonomy in foreign affairs underwent by the Gheorghiu-Dej regime. Moreover, it proves the discrete penetration of interest in foreign policy, a field previously dominated by ideology and submission in front of Moscow. After Stalin's death, each Communist regime in Eastern Europe needed to find the suitable balance between change and stability, between Soviet and national interests. This new direction was learnt step by step, by all Communist regimes. The change began with Malenkov's "New Course". The redefinition of Soviet priorities in foreign affairs associated with an enlargement in the satellites' space of maneuver determined all Communist regimes to redefine their own policies. From 1953 to 1962 Gheorghiu-Dej had embarked on a difficult slalom, trying to promote his interests while pretending they were not in contradiction with Moscow. In 1962, he stopped pretending. During these years, Ulbricht did pretty much the same thing. The Romanian-East German relations from 1953 to 1962 are a story of action and reaction: Khrushchev acted while Ulbricht and Gheorghiu-Dej reacted. Action and reaction happened in different spheres and had different meanings: the first aimed at reform but the second aimed at autonomy. That was the meaning Gheorghiu-Dej had given to reform.

## **The Definition of Solidarity: "Their Adversary is Our Adversary"**

The implementation of the "New Course" began in Germany. The German issue remained a priority for the Soviet foreign policy because, after a West German state had already been established, its rearming was under way at that time. Moscow was determined to prevent West Germany's integration in NATO at all costs, even without Stalin. But East Germany, with its great economic and social difficulties, was far from being a model for the West. East Berlin was not in the position to compete with West Berlin, and Khrushchev understood that well. Thousands of East German citizens were fleeing to the West through Berlin daily, which created serious

problems for the Ulbricht regime, especially regarding image and prestige<sup>1</sup>. The situation in GDR needed rapid improvement, as the Presidium of the CPSU had already decided on 27 May 1953. East German Communist leader Walter Ulbricht and premier Otto Grotewohl were summoned to Moscow on June 2 where they had to endure severe Soviet criticism for their policy of forced Socialist construction<sup>2</sup>.

Returned home, the two took rapid measures meant to please the Kremlin. On June 9, the Politburo of SED [*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*] decided to abandon the policy of forced Socialist construction in favor of a more socially oriented policy: more funds for consumer goods industry, halting forced collectivization and religious persecutions etc. Such measures were a bit late, though, and incomplete. They were not able to prevent the famous riot of the Berlin workers, which took place from June 16 to 17 1953. The workers' discontent was directly caused by very high work norms, but a special factor was also the regime's vulnerability, obvious in society after the return from Moscow. The insecurity manifested by the authorities amplified the tensions already existing among workers. The sudden shift in the regime's policy raised confusion and the admittance of mistakes caused real panic among party members.

On June 13, groups of construction workers wrote a message addressed to premier Grotewohl asking for the annulment of all changes in work norms, on a harsh, ultimatum tone. The situation evolved on June 17 in a mass demonstration with political character. Tens of thousands of workers from various factories in East Berlin declared strike and went out in the streets<sup>3</sup>. The protesters demanded free elections, freedom to form non-Communist political parties, vandalized Stalin's statue in Berlin. Also, anti-Soviet slogans were cried out<sup>4</sup>. The authorities responded with increased insecurity, deciding – under mass pressure – to reduce the work norms. An impressive number of security workers was mobilized, but to no effect. Many party officials at central or local level were forced to run from the protesters. In some places, security forces fraternized with the protesters. The weak reaction of the Ulbricht regime determined the Soviets to take action. The Western border in Berlin was closed and Martial Law was declared. The Soviets insisted that the repression be conducted by the East German Popular Militias, supported by Soviet troops<sup>5</sup>. At the questioning which followed the repression, many of the detainees

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Kramer, *The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe. Internal and External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part I)*, "Journal of Cold War Studies", 1 (1999), 1, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> James Richter, *Reexamining Soviet Policy Towards Germany During the Beria Interregnum*, Working Paper nr. 3, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, 1992, p. 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> M. Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> *Uprising in East Germany 1953* (ed. by Christian F. Ostermann), Central European University Press, 2003, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 186. In his report to Molotov and Bulganin, V. Semionov, Commandant of Soviet troops in Berlin, described certain "provocations" coming from West Berlin and his concern that participants at a demonstration of support in West Berlin could force the border into the East sector. Western radio stations employed massive propaganda, instigating East Berliners to riot against the regime.

argued that their protest was mostly caused by Ulbricht's mistakes, which he had previously admitted<sup>6</sup>. Moscow was confronted with a first "burning" reaction to the "New Course". It proved once again how weak the East German regime was, but it also illustrated how dangerous sudden shifts in policy can be, especially when accompanied by radical self-criticism.

The CMEA reforms initiated by Moscow in 1953-1954, meant to make the organization more efficient, also focused on Germany. GDR was a huge burden on the Soviet Union, economically, and a very sensitive issue politically. This is why Khrushchev decided to ask for a more active involvement of the peoples' democracies in support of East Germany.

In March 1954, a session of CMEA discussed the problem of industrialization in the satellite countries and the support of industrialization through foreign trade. Mikoian expressed severe criticism against all Communist leaderships in Eastern Europe for their irrational program of accelerated industrialization. Romania was a good example in this regard. Mikoian declared the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product allocated to industrialization was unreasonably high "which caused great difficulties, which the Romanian comrades are trying to solve"<sup>7</sup>. This criticism also regarded agricultural policies. Romania and Bulgaria, Mikoian mentioned, had paid little attention to the development of agriculture which is why neither of the two countries had managed to reach the interwar level of production. This somehow anticipated future divergences with Moscow, on the issue on Romania's developmental policies.

Regarding Germany, Mikoian emphasized the political necessity to support this country, especially considering the consequences of the workers' riot. He specifically requested Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary to make efforts in order to provide the GDR with the food and agricultural products needed<sup>8</sup>. The CMEA session in March 1954 also adopted a resolution regarding East Germany. The document stressed certain obligations the member countries had – in Moscow's vision – regarding East Germany: "considering the fact that maintaining a high level of economic development and material welfare of the working masses in Germany concerns not only the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union, but all member countries of CMEA, the Council admits as necessary for all peoples' democracies to help the GDR and satisfy its economic demands"<sup>9</sup>. Those demands consisted mainly in food products. Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary were mentioned in the Resolution as obligated to deliver cereals and meat to the GDR. The issue was very delicate for Khrushchev, after the USA had undertaken consistent measures of

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<sup>6</sup> M. Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 45-54.

<sup>7</sup> ANIC, fond CAER, file 13/1954. *Note din discursul tov. Mikoian 26.III.1954*, f. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22-25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, file 14/1954. *Anexa no. 3 la Protocol. Despre măsurile pentru acordarea ajutorului Republicii Democratice Germane*, p. 10. Note: all English translations of original Romanian documents belong to the author.

aid in favor of the East Berliners, by delivering packets of food. This illustrated the Soviet incapacity to handle East Germany<sup>10</sup>.

In January 1956, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs delivered a note to the Central Committees of all Communist parties in Eastern Europe, regarding several foreign policy issues. The note was intended as a preliminary statement of foreign policy from Moscow, for the Conference of Communist parties which took place in Moscow, starting with 6 January. The note established a series of priorities for the Communist countries, like developing relations with third world countries, intensifying activity in the Warsaw Treaty Organizations as a response to NATO initiatives and so on. Among these priorities, East Germany occupied a special place<sup>11</sup>. The Soviet government recommended its satellites to offer full support to Ulbricht's proposals aimed at unification, as illusory as they may be. Especially GDR's proposal for an All-German Council should be endorsed by the peoples' democracies. The note also added: "it must be considered that the competition between the socialist and capitalist systems evolves in very acute forms in Germany, that millions of Germans may draw wrong conclusions from the present development of the West German economy, which may be explained through circumstantial factors. This is why we must help the German comrades by all means, in their most important task: overcoming present difficulties in the economic life of GDR and creating a superior situation compared to West Germany in what concerns the material conditions of life for the working class"<sup>12</sup>. The note also asked the peoples' democracies to prove enthusiasm in supporting GDR's positions in various international organizations, in order to improve the credibility of the East German regime.

At the above-mentioned Conference, Khrushchev reiterated the idea, insisting that the peoples' democracies must increase their contribution in supporting Soviet policies in world affairs, including the consolidation of the East German regime. Khrushchev described the German problem as a "matter of honor" for the entire "Socialist camp": "[...] their adversary is our adversary. That is why we must mobilize all our resources to help strengthen the German Democratic Republic. Presently, our help is insufficient"<sup>13</sup>. A concrete form of support, in Khrushchev's opinion, was to rely on the GDR in providing industrial products. Most countries, he emphasized, build their own industrial capacities for various products, while the East German industry remains insufficiently used<sup>14</sup>.

Ulbricht himself brought up the issue of economic cooperation with other peoples' democracies, as a key factor in GDR's economic hardships. Most of the agreements concerning deliveries of raw materials have been delayed for one reason or another. At the same time, large quantities of products contracted from East

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<sup>10</sup> Christian Ostermann, *Keeping the Pot Simmering: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953*, "German Studies Review" 15 (1996), 2, p. 70-79.

<sup>11</sup> ANIC, fond CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, file 1/1956. *Notă informativă a Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al URSS cu privire la problemele politicii externe*, p. 71-79.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, file 2/1956. *Procesul-verbal al Consfăturii*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

German factories have not been acquired. Ulbricht advocated his cause with great ability, always connecting GDR's economic development with West Germany, stressing the political factor. West Germany, Ulbricht declared at the next Conference of Communist parties in June 1956, has the capacity to increase its exports very much. GDR, on the other hand, needs a lot of imports from the capitalist countries, but cannot insure them because of a terrible lack of hard currency. GDR is not able to export as much as West Germany, on the Western markets, which is why it has a deficit of hard currency. He did not forget to mention that most of GDR's imports of raw materials and food products for the next few years were not contracted yet. Such problems were very acute in what concerned imports of coal, non-ferrous metals and cereals. The most important downfall of such a situation, in Ulbricht's view, was political. GDR was not in the position to have any political influence on the working class in West Germany, because the standard of living there was much higher than in East Germany. In Germany, Socialism was viewed in terms of standards of living and GDR was far behind, he mentioned<sup>15</sup>.

Ulbricht used the political argument to convince other peoples' democracies to increase their exports to GDR and also to somehow use the Soviet political priorities in his own favor. Ulbricht knew that Moscow was very sensitive to aspects involving Germany and all other Communist leaders knew that as well. So Ulbricht's appeal was regarded, in a certain measure, as a Soviet appeal. Gheorghiu-Dej was willing to do everything to serve Soviet wishes, but later on he will see in Ulbricht's repeated call for help a manifestation of national interests. Competition for development in the late 1950s and early 1960s will generate ideas like the principle of specialization. That is when Gheorghiu-Dej will begin to oppose Ulbricht attitude of relating economic needs to political aspects.

The Soviet Union placed a lot of importance on the refugee crisis in Berlin, due to the political damage it caused, but saw the solution in different terms. Since 1952, Ulbricht requested Moscow to take measures for closing the West Berlin border, but Moscow disagreed. To Stalin, after the first Berlin crisis, the solution seemed radical and politically unacceptable. The "New Course" was, in 1953, Moscow's response to Ulbricht's proposal<sup>16</sup>. The first divergences between Ulbricht and Khrushchev emerged from this approach. Ulbricht was in favor of a brutal, radical solution while Moscow favored economic reform as a solution to convince East Germans to remain home. Clashes of ideas continued, especially referring to the denunciation of Stalin's cult of personality. Just like the "New Course", the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress decisions were detrimental to Ulbricht. He learned to rely on himself and instead of implementing economic reform Ulbricht demanded more and more Soviet help.

The basic contradiction regarded, in reality, the future of GDR. Moscow usually saw East Germany as an object of negotiation in its relations with the West. Especially in what concerned East Berlin, the Soviets were open to discussion and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, file 6/1956. *Cuvântarea tovarășului Ulbricht*, p. 30-39.

<sup>16</sup> Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: A Super-Ally, A Super Power and the Building of the Berlin Wall, 1958-61*, "Cold War History" 1 (2000), 1, p. 55-58.

compromise. Ulbricht did not agree to that. He did not agree with Khrushchev's initiatives regarding West Germany, either. When Khrushchev met Adenauer in 1955, Ulbricht understood that if Moscow and Bonn do reach an agreement, it was going to be on his back. This is why Ulbricht was not very favorable to a détente with the West. The détente would have weakened his position. New archival evidences suggest that Ulbricht exerted great pressure upon Khrushchev during the second Berlin crisis, in favor of a radical attitude. He even considered building a wall by himself, without a Soviet decision in this matter<sup>17</sup>.

Ulbricht's radical approach was visible in the fall of 1957, at the Conference of Communist parties in November. In discussing the final statement of the Conference, Ulbricht came in contradiction with Gomulka, regarding ideological approaches to Western imperialism. Polish leader Gomulka, given his country's close economic ties with the West, supported a relaxed attitude towards imperialism. He did not agree to naming sources of imperialism, like the United States or West-German militarism. Ulbricht reacted against this approach, insisting that the source of imperialism is not general, but American in particular, and its main instrument in Europe is West German militarism<sup>18</sup>.

### **Serving each other's Needs**

Romania cooperated well with GDR, as long as there was common interest. Gheorghiu-Dej had ambitious plans of industrialization and any help was welcomed, especially through common projects. The typical example is the partnership between Romania, GDR, Czechoslovakia and Poland for the construction of a large industrial enterprise for reed exploitation. The idea first occurred during the Romanian-German economic negotiations in 1952, when a Convention was signed between the two parties for this matter. According to the Convention, GDR was going to contribute with technology and equipment to the construction while Romania was going to provide reed from the Danube Delta. The German technology was going to be paid by the products of the enterprise, mainly cellulose<sup>19</sup>.

The "New Course", applied both in Germany and Romania, as well as Ulbricht's economic difficulties determined, in the end, the project's postponement because of lack of funding. The postponement was officially agreed upon in Berlin, in September 1953<sup>20</sup>. The project was revived later on, including two more partners. In 1954, Poland raised the question of importing reed from Romania to produce cellulose. The Romanian Government, remembering the former project, came with a different offer: the two countries would contribute to the construction of a new enterprise in Romania, to provide both Poland and Romania with cellulose. In the

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61-64.

<sup>18</sup> ANIC, fond CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, file 1/1957. *Cuvântarea tov. Ulbricht*, p. 56-60.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, fond CAER, dosar de colaborare economică RPR-RDG nr. 2/1952. *Proiect de Convenție nr. 2*, p. 2-5.

<sup>20</sup> AMAE, fond 20-224, Box Germania 1954. *Aide-Memoire. Notă înmănată ambasadorului german în audiență la 13.07.1954*, nepaginat.

end, discussions evolved towards a quadruple partnership, involving: Romania, GDR, Poland and Czechoslovakia, in 1956. In July 1956, in Bucharest, delegations from all four countries signed the Convention and committed themselves to consistent contributions in technology and equipment for the construction of the enterprise, somewhere near the Danube Delta. The investment was going to be paid back in cellulose produced by the factory, as specified in the initial Convention<sup>21</sup>.

In the second half of the 1950s, Romania's relations with East Germany developed progressively. The main favorable factors were the domestic consolidation of both regimes, the détente occurred after Stalin's death, the complementarities in economy and trade. In April 1957 a state and party delegation from Romania visited East Germany, in an attempt to accelerate mutual relations. The delegation was led by party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, as well as other high ranking party members such as Chivu Stoica, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Ștefan Voitec, Grigore Preoteasa, Filip Ghetz and Iosif Puvak. The basic issues in the program were economic cooperation, technological exchanges and consular matters. Officially, leader of the delegation was Chivu Stoica, as prime-minister, since the visit was organized at state level, Gheorghiu-Dej being second on the list<sup>22</sup>. The Romanian delegation was in Berlin from 24 to 28 April 1957 and was very pompously welcomed, by the typical ceremonial of "Communist comrades" at such level.

The first meeting of Gheorghiu-Dej with Walter Ulbricht took place on the first day of the arrival. Unlike Gheorghiu-Dej, Walter Ulbricht had a rich Cominternist biography. After Communist leader Ernst Thälmann was arrested by the Nazis, Ulbricht became one of the competitors for leadership of the German Communist Party. He was accused of organizing various plots, intrigues and denunciations which put most of his adversaries in prison or graves, by the hand of NKVD. After the war, Ulbricht was part of the team sent by the Kremlin to Germany, to rebuild the country by Stalinist patterns. Walter Ulbricht became secretary general of SED in 1950 and he occupied that position until his death in 1971. Gheorghiu-Dej was not very sympathetic towards former activists of Comintern, but he and Ulbricht did share the same Stalinist vision of life.

At their first meeting in Berlin, Ulbricht explained his country's position in foreign affairs, with a special emphasis on West Germany. In his opinion, the most important threat to peace in Europe was the West German militarism, encouraged, as he claimed, by the United States. Ulbricht was not saying anything new, as these were standard topics of the Soviet foreign policy discourse. But he did have a problem with West Germany, especially concerning the workers and their standards of living. About that, Ulbricht bitterly admitted: "we are weaker than them, economically. Their standard of living is higher than ours"<sup>23</sup>. GDR's policy towards

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, Oficiul de Studii și Documentare, Ioan Suci, *Relațiile româno-poloneze de la declanșarea celui de-al doilea război mondial până la ultima întâlnire la nivel înalt dintre reprezentanții celor două țări*, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> ANIC, fond CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, file 60/1957. *Lista membrilor delegației Partidului Muncitoresc Român*, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem. *Note de la convorbirile dintre Delegațiile CC al PMR și CC al PSUG din 24.IV.1957*, p. 2-4.

the Western neighbor, Ulbricht explained, was based on a series of measures meant to attract working and Communist elements with a developed "class consciousness". He was glad that most of the West German intellectuals were against NATO. Ulbricht also told Gheorghiu-Dej that GDR has to be permanently prepared to resist an armed aggression from West Germany. The regime had organized combating guards of workers, in mostly all factories. Their mission was to engage in street and guerilla fights in case of necessity, to protect the "conquests of Socialism"<sup>24</sup>.

During the stay in Germany, Gheorghiu-Dej and the other members of the delegation visited many factories and monuments, met with many East German officials. Specialists from the State Planning Committee negotiated with their German counterparts different issues of economic cooperation, in the field of energy and cellulose. Building of the common cellulose enterprise began only in 1957 and was completed in 1961.

Gheorghiu-Dej met Ulbricht again on April 28 when the Romanian leader informed the Germans on several issues of economic development. Gheorghiu-Dej also explained the party's behavior during the events in Poland and Hungary, in the fall of 1956<sup>25</sup>. He told Ulbricht that debates concerning Khrushchev's "Secret Report" at the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress were strictly controlled, under severe supervision. This is why, as Gheorghiu-Dej put it, the situation did not deteriorate: "at the Central Committee, there were certain outbursts from some members, but they were put in their place; there were only a case or two, completely isolated, among intellectuals. So the debate, it can be said, raised the political level of party members, clarified certain aspects, increased the unity, the discipline. So, in our opinion, the results were positive. No serious defection." Gheorghiu-Dej spoke with pride of the fact that during the turmoil in Poland and Hungary, he assumed a "just" position and took timely measures to prevent the emergence of a similar situation in Romania<sup>26</sup>.

In that context, Gheorghiu-Dej told Ulbricht, the party leadership took consistent measures to improve the standards of living and avert social discontents. One of these measures was increasing salaries and pensions. At the same time, decisions were made to reduce the bureaucratic apparatus and simplify the administration in order to improve the "connection with the masses" and involve the workers in solving political and economical issues. In the country side, the party tried to solve issues which threatened the "workers alliance with the peasants". The system of compulsory quotas for the peasants was liquidated. It had caused, along time, numerous complaints from peasants who accused various administrative abuses: "the economic apparatus who handled this, although instructed to behave carefully, committed abuses. They had the law on their side, they came with the stick, they did not care if the peasant harvested or not. As an immediate effect, except from the discontents, the interest for production decreased, the sowed terrains grew

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, *Ședința din 28.IV.1957*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 9-10.



smaller.”<sup>27</sup> Gheorghiu-Dej was trying to convince the “German comrades” of his party’s wisdom.

At the end, a Common Statement was signed. It reaffirmed the two countries’ willingness to continue and develop economic and scientific cooperation, as well as their commitment to militate against West German militarism. Considering their relative international isolation, the East Germans were always very interested in such statements of support, formal as they were. For Ulbricht’s regime, it created the appearance of international society.

In 1957, a large delegation of the Grand National Assembly visited the GDR and had many meetings with East German state officials, including prime-minister Heinrich Rau. The basic purpose of the visit was to improve political relations and it was well popularized in the East German press<sup>28</sup>. The Romanian delegates visited many factories and received technical explanations regarding installations and production methods. The hosts organized numerous receptions for the Romanian visitors, on different occasions, but Romanian impressions were not quite favorable. The delegates would later blame the “rigidity” of the Germans who did not permit visits at a number of industrial sites. Such negative impressions appeared especially regarding the automobile factory in Eisenach for which engineer Gheorghe Olteanu expressed a particular interest. Also, Dumitru Coliu, high ranking party member, was interested in visiting the Zeiss factories in Jena and the Thalmann factories in Magdeburg. All these requests were denied by the Germans and their attitude was considered by the Romanian delegation as politically “unfriendly”. In the end, though, the visit was considered a success by the Romanians. Their report evaluated the event as a “constructive experience” meant to improve bilateral relations and mutual knowledge<sup>29</sup>.

In discussions with East German officials, the situation of the German minority in Romania was rarely raised, but West Germany was much more interested in the issue. In 1959 the so called “trial of German writers” took place. The *Securitate* had discovered many writings with an obvious anti-Communist character signed by writers of German ethnic origin: Andreas Brikner, Wolf von Aichelburg, Georg Scherg, Hans Bergel, and Harald Siegmund. They were accused of forming a “clandestine anti-revolutionary group” and were sentenced in September 1959 to a few tens of years a prison by the Braşov (Stalin) Military Court<sup>30</sup>. The trial took place in the context of a new wave of aggravated repression which started in 1958 and raised attention, in the party leadership, to the “needs of political work” among the Germans in Romania.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> AMAE, fond 220, Box Germania 1956. *Raport despre vizita delegației Marii Adunări Naționale a Republicii Populare Române în Republica Democrată Germană (4-16 septembrie 1957), atașat la nota Ambasadei RPR din Berlin către MAE Direcția I Relații nr. 7256/12.11.1957.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19-20.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Bergel, *Procesul scriitorilor germani din România în anul 1959. Perversitățile persistă și în ziua de azi*, in *Analele Sighet 8. Anii 1954-1960. Fluxurile și refluxurile stalinismului* ed. by Romulus Rusan), Bucharest, 2000, p. 358-359.

In November 1959 it was decided to analyze party work among Germans within the regional party committees of Timișoara and Stalin. In March 1960, Nicolae Ceaușescu presided a meeting at the Central Committee with the responsible cadres from these regions<sup>31</sup>. The discussions revealed that the leadership was not satisfied with party work among German communities and that religious influence was still strong, mainly among youngsters. It was considered that the intellectuals were under bourgeois and fascist influence<sup>32</sup>. As seen by party organs, the situation was much more problematic in education, where old teachers had not been replaced. In the CC meeting, proposals also appeared aimed at reducing the number of foreign tourists like West Germans and Austrians. They were seen as a source of revanchist propaganda. Decisions have been made to increase the number and circulation of German language publications to combat the “reactionary” influence of the Church<sup>33</sup>.

In November 1960 an East German delegation from the State Council was Romania for a few days and visited several industrial facilities. Also, they had a few meetings with members of the Grand National Assembly<sup>34</sup>. Walter Ulbricht will return Gheorghiu-Dej’s visit only in September 1962. Walter Ulbricht was in Bucharest for a few days in June 1960, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Romanian Workers Party, but his presence in Romania was not considered a state visit. The Romanian – East German cooperation will develop in the following years but GDR was losing its prominent position in Romania’s foreign trade, as Bucharest initiated active relations with Western countries.

The Romanian-East German relations will also be affected by the beginning of the integration dispute at CMEA. GDR was a fervent supporter of the concept. Gheorghiu-Dej explained his opposition arguing that the integration would bring advantages to countries like GDR and Czechoslovakia, and disadvantages to lesser developed countries like Romania. As Khrushchev relaxed the Soviet pressure on the satellites, each country was able to assert its own interests, compromising the rigid Stalinist patterns of intra-camp relations. The absence of contacts in the West made intra-camp relations much more intense, but as relations with the West developed, the satellites’ need of each other became less stringent. Détente with the West brought in more opportunities. Development was no longer conceived as a common task – as Stalin tried to make it appear – but as an individual task of each regime. This way, a gate was opened for competition between peoples’ democracies.

Building the Berlin Wall also changed Ulbricht vision regarding domestic development. Before 1961, he knew that for whatever went wrong in GDR, he could always blame West Germany. After the last brick was put on the wall crossing Berlin, that was no longer possible. Also, escaping to West Berlin was a safety valve for popular discontent. All those unsatisfied with their life under Socialism could simply run to the West, which kept social tension low. Bu that was no longer

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<sup>31</sup> ANIC, fond CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, file 20/1960. *Stenograma ședinței din ziua de 29.III.1960*, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5-7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11-13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, file 49/1960. *Notă de audiență*, p. 264.

possible either. The need for reforms was now critical. The standards of living needed immediate improvement and propaganda could not substitute it. This is why, after 1961, a radical change happens to Ulbricht. The formerly dogmatic Stalinist becomes an active promoter of economic reforms, surrounding himself with young economists and promoting quality indicators in economic management<sup>35</sup>.

### **Specialization: Romanian Corn for German Toys and Cosmetics**

Romania's relations with the GDR developed fast in the previous years because of the German capacity to provide Romania with what it needed for its industrialization. Towards the beginning of the 1960s, though, new providers appeared, just as important for Gheorghiu-Dej's regime. So was the case with West Germany, for example. Romanian-West German relations have developed steadily in the second half of the 1950s and Gheorghiu-Dej was paying special attention to this. Romania had a Trade Agreement with West Germany which contributed to a rapid expansion of mutual trade.

A problem with this Agreement occurred as the second Berlin crisis evolved. GDR intervened in Bucharest requesting certain changes in the document which would fit the political realities of the moment, the way they were seen by Ulbricht. The above-mentioned Trade Agreement specified, among other things, that it was valid for *land Berlin* as well, meaning West Berlin. GDR requested the Romanian government to proceed to modifications in the text excluding West Berlin from its area of validity, given the fact that West Berlin was under dispute at that point. East German authorities made several interventions on this matter along 1961. The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised the party leadership to ignore Ulbricht's call for changes, relying on the Bulgarian experience<sup>36</sup>. The Bulgarians respected Ulbricht's wish and asked the West German government for the necessary changes, but the gesture determined Bonn to annul the Trade Agreement with Bulgaria. The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued that commercial exchanges with West Germany were far too important to justify such a risk. West Germany held the fourth position in Romania's foreign trade and was a very important source of technology and equipment<sup>37</sup>. In the relations with East and West Germany, therefore, Romania placed economic interest above political obligations.

That was precisely the attitude adopted by East Germans too. Despite its much higher level of development, compared to other peoples' democracies, GDR, starting from 1953, had continued to demand support from other Socialist countries. Using Khrushchev's previous arguments, Ulbricht always stressed out the difference in standards of living, between his country and its "imperialist" neighbor. He insisted that raising the material welfare of East German workers was a political imperative, deriving from GDR's position. Such positions were reiterated in June 1961. Nicolae

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946-1973*, [Manchester], 1999, p. 160-161.

<sup>36</sup> ANIC, fond CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, file 100/1961. *Notă MAE*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

Ceaușescu received the East German ambassador in Bucharest on which occasion the diplomat did nothing else but complained about the economic difficulties of his country. He emphasized – during his discussion with Ceaușescu – that GDR was expecting support from the other “Socialist” countries. The East German ambassador mentioned in a discreet manner that Ulbricht requested help from Moscow and was advised at the Kremlin to go asking the same thing from other “friendly” countries, as well<sup>38</sup>. When it came to Romania’s industrial development, the East Germans were not that modest.

Divergences already appeared at CMEA on issues of integration. Romania had great benefits from cooperation within CMEA, in terms of support for its industrial development. The opposition occurred when CMEA became an obstacle to the continuation of this development. The divergences, which later on lead to a near split in Romanian-Soviet relations had their origin in Khrushchev’s proposals regarding CMEA in 1958. Khrushchev initiated a plan for deepening CMEA cooperation in an integrationist direction regarding the so-called “international division of labor”. Romania’s opposition was facilitated by the Soviet reticence in challenging other Communist parties, considering its difficulties with Yugoslavia, Albania and China. Moscow’s efforts to maintain the appearances as well as the more stable and consolidated situation of Gheorghiu-Dej’s regime were the key factors which allowed Gheorghiu-Dej to assert his independence the way he did.

The bone of contention in Romania’s relation with CMEA and the Socialist countries was the principle of specialization and its implications. The basic idea was that each CMEA member should develop its economy according to its possibilities, resources, and traditions. It was first implemented experimentally in 1956 in the machine building industry. GDR and Czechoslovakia demanded that most of the machineries on the production lists be produced by them, considering their expertise and industrial facilities. Romania strongly disagreed to the limited number of machines allocated to her for production. In June-July 1959, in Prague, the CMEA Permanent Commission of machine-building gathered to discuss the lists and Romania demanded radical changes in the allocation<sup>39</sup>. Later on, the Czechs and East Germans also raised the issue of agriculture in the framework of the specialization debates. The CMEA session in April 1959 decided to have the issue debated in the Permanent Commission on Agriculture. The problem reemerged in February 1960 at the Communist parties Council in Moscow, when Romania opposed the principle of specialization in agriculture<sup>40</sup>. The Czechs and East Germans wanted to specialize in animal husbandry, for which they considered to have optimal conditions, but needed fodder. In their view, Romania and Bulgaria should have provided the fodder, given their excellent conditions for wheat and corn cultures. Bulgarians too wanted to specialize in greeneries and vegetables, which would have left Romania as the sole

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, file 30/1961. *Stenograma ședinței Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din ziua de 11 iulie 1961*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Liviu Țăranu, *România și Consiliul de Ajutor Economic Reciproc 1949-1965*, Bucharest, 2007, p. 134-135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

provider of fodder in the camp. Gheorghiu-Dej protested against such an approach. Things did not go far because Khrushchev decided not to encourage the Czech and East German position<sup>41</sup>.

The debates started again, on a harsh tone, in May 1960 in Sofia, in the CMEA Permanent Commission on Agriculture. The meeting was called for discussions regarding a more intense cooperation in the field of agriculture, especially exchanges of experience and drawing the basic lines for the future development of agriculture. But the most interesting discussion by far was the one regarding specialization. The issue was insistently raised by the Czechoslovak and East German delegations and the most fervent opponent was Romania. The East German delegation argued that only through specialization, based on the international division of labor, can the agricultural production be increased. In other words, CMEA was called upon to decide what and how much each country was supposed to produce, to serve the necessities of all member countries<sup>42</sup>. Romanian delegate Ion Cozma put up a terrible resistance to these pressures. His arguments were that firstly, each country had a long-term plan of development for the following years, which could not be abated easily and secondly that it was not in the Commission's attributes to discuss matters of economic policy<sup>43</sup>. Bulgarians agreed that specialization was indeed required, but in the field of agricultural machinery. Poles were skeptical of specialization, being more preoccupied with the practical matters of cooperation<sup>44</sup>. The Soviets tried to mediate without taking anybody's side. In private, though, the Soviet delegate told Cozma that he disagrees with Romania's position. Any problem should be open for discussion, he said, not automatically rejected. In spite the Soviet "advise", Cozma continued to oppose debates on the specialization matter, as instructed in Bucharest<sup>45</sup>.

In the end, a Protocol was signed mentioning a series of generalities for which a unanimous agreement had been reached: intensifying agricultural cooperation through exchanges of experience, seminars etc. The official purpose was to increase agricultural production in the following years<sup>46</sup>. The Protocol mentioned specialization as a long-term objective of CMEA but the document included the text of the separate opinions expressed by the GDR and Romania<sup>47</sup>. According to these, the East Germans stated their belief that only specialization can increase production

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<sup>41</sup> Dan Cătănuș, *Divergențele româno-sovietice din CAER și consecințele lor asupra politicii externe a României, 1962-1963. I*, "Arhivele totalitarismului, 2005, 1-2, p. 73-74.

<sup>42</sup> ANIC, fond CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, file 26/1960. *Stenograma ședinței din ziua de 16 mai 1960, în legătură cu desfășurarea lucrărilor Comisiei Permanente CAER în domeniul agriculturii, care a avut loc la Sofia între 12-14 mai 1960*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24-25.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*. *Protocol 7/60 al ședinței Comisiei Permanente CAER de colaborare economică și tehnico-științifică în domeniul agriculturii, care a avut loc la Sofia între 12-14 mai 1960*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

while the Romanian opinion disregarded the issue as premature. Instead, Romania considered that raising productivity was a much more actual problem<sup>48</sup>.

A few days after the Romanian delegation had returned home, its members were invited to participate in a Politburo meeting in order to explain and describe the way discussions evolved in Sofia. At that meeting, Gheorghiu-Dej poured a rain of criticism over the idea of specialization. Most of these critics were directed against the East Germans. He considered that the idea of specialization was used by Ulbricht only for GDR's sole benefit, that it was an ideological cover for GDR's own interests, pursued on Romania's back: "the Germans want us to provide them with fodder, in exchange for dolls, toys and cosmetics"<sup>49</sup>. Gheorghiu-Dej was infuriated: "in the future, specialization has no chance to succeed because life itself rejects it, it's impossible to accomplish [...] They went so far with this wrong judgment that their minister of agriculture, a Politburo member, advised us, felt sorry for us that we were thinking about developing animal husbandry, that we're making a mistake. So it's a mistake when we develop animal husbandry, but it's correct when they develop it. They think they have excellent conditions for it, but have no fodder. [...] They rely on international division of labor when they need fodder."<sup>50</sup>

Gheorghiu-Dej's revolt was not directed so much at specialization or international division of labor in principle, but against the practical implementation of such principles. To offer a supranational organ power of decision in issues concerning Romania's development bothered Gheorghiu-Dej, especially considering the fact that he saw that power as serving other countries' interests. The problem was brought up in front of the Central Committee Plenum in May 17-18, 1960, when Romania's position at CMEA and the reasons behind it were explained to all participants. The Plenum expressed its agreement and confirmation for this position<sup>51</sup>. This way, Gheorghiu-Dej was seeking cover against the Soviets: the decision was not his own, but it was made by the Plenum of the Central Committee.

Similar frictions continued to appear in the following period. In 1961, Romania participated at the Spring Fair in Leipzig. The Romanian delegation had the chance to meet several East German governmental officials and discuss the specialization. From their very arrival, different East German officials raised the problem of Romania's opposition to specialization, in their conversations with the Romanians, but the answer they received was cautious: Romania does not oppose specialization, it was argued, but it opposes that particular type of specialization which disregards other countries' interests<sup>52</sup>.

In a conversation with the East German minister of agriculture, the head of the Romanian delegation mentioned that Romania has to employ great efforts to catch up with the more developed countries of the "Socialist camp", which caused an

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<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem. *Stenograma ședinței din ziua de 16 mai 1960* cit., p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 44-45.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, file 28/1960. *Stenograma Plenarei lărgite a Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român din 17-18 mai 1960*, p. 6-18.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, file 127/1961. *Informare cu privire la unele discuții și observații ale delegației române la târgul de primăvară de la Leipzig*, p. 91.

amused and ironic reaction from the German. He insisted that Romania had to increase its fodder exports to GDR rather than develop animal husbandry. Meat export is not advantageous, he explained, so Romania is better off not developing animal husbandry, but rely on fodder exports to the GDR<sup>53</sup>. That was precisely the kind of position which had inflamed Gheorghiu-Dej at the above-mentioned Plenum. Another member of the Romanian delegation, V. Steriopol, intervened in the discussion, suggesting that, if the GDR is so interested in fodder imports from Romania, it should at first increase its exports of fertilizers to Romania. East Germany, Steriopol mentioned, was exporting approximately 1 million tones of fertilizers each year, but only 3000 tones were directed to Romania. The East German minister rejected the idea immediately. It was not convenient for the GDR, he said, without explaining why<sup>54</sup>.

In the following days, the Romanian delegation met Heinrich Rau, vice-president of the Council of Ministers, with whom discussions evolved in similar terms. Gherasim Popa, member of the Romanian delegation, spoke about increasing Romanian exports from GDR especially in machinery and tools, but Rau strongly rejected the possibility, explaining that the entire production was contracted already<sup>55</sup>. Referring to mutual trade, Heinrich Rau emphasized again his country's interest in importing corn and fodder from Romania. He also added that according to his information, Romania had promised Czechoslovakia large quantities of such products. Reading the transcript of the conversation, Gheorghiu-Dej annotated: "we do have corn... but we don't sell it on toys and cosmetics"<sup>56</sup>. In the end, the discussion was concluded on a conciliatory note: both sides agreed to study further the issue of mutual commercial deliveries, without making any promises.

Romania's industrialization was not seen well by the more developed members of the "Socialist camp" because their economic necessities dictated large imports of agricultural products and raw materials. Also, large export markets for their industrial products were an imperative. Although Moscow finally took GDR's side in the dispute, Romania's opposition at CMEA was not only an expression of Romanian-Soviet disagreements. It had its sources in the competition which was rising up in the "camp" between industrialized countries (like GDR or Czechoslovakia) and less developed countries (like Romania)<sup>57</sup>. Gheorghiu-Dej understood the need to organize an opposition to integrationist plans at CMEA in 1962, at the CMEA Session which took place in June. At that point though, the dispute became a Romanian-Soviet issue, among Khrushchev and Gheorghiu-Dej.

Gheorghiu-Dej met Ulbricht again after the conflict broke out in June 1962, in the fall of that year. In September 1962 Walter Ulbricht lead an East German delegation in a visit to Romania, in response to the similar visit made by Gheorghiu-Dej in 1957. This time, relations were less friendly. According to Paul Niculescu-

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93-94.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95-96.

<sup>57</sup> Alan H. Smith, *The Planned Economies of Eastern Europe*, Taylor & Francis, 1983, p. 187.

Mizil, the visit was another attempt to exert pressure on Gheorghiu-Dej in order to give up his position regarding integration<sup>58</sup>. The visit was a complete failure, from this point of view, as it will result later. The final Communiqué mentioned how “impressed” the Germans were of Romania’s development and its “remarkable successes” obtained in the previous years<sup>59</sup>. The two countries expressed their common views of international matters and agreed to form common governmental commissions to study the possibilities of further developing economic cooperation<sup>60</sup>. Behind such placid phrases, the fact was that neither side managed to convince the other of anything.

Gheorghiu-Dej continued to pursue his industrialization plans, just as before, while Ulbricht continued his reforms which were going to cost him his position in the party. Khrushchev had tried to reduce the pressure on the satellites so that he could finally rely on stronger allies, in a developed and functional system of Socialist states. In the end, he discovered that he could not count on them at all. His reforms failed because there was an implicit contradiction between the pursuit of national interests and Socialist solidarity in its Soviet interpretation. Gheorghiu-Dej and Ulbricht strongly disagreed with Khrushchev’s reforms. One of the most important flaws of Khrushchevism in Eastern Europe was that Moscow did not consult any of the allies before implementing them. Nevertheless, Khrushchev expected all Communist leaders to follow his course, free-willingly. That was an illusion. Both the Romanian and the East German leaders were negatively affected by Khrushchev’s reforms and their reaction was to rely mostly on themselves. Ulbricht tried to evade the reforms he was required to implement and put pressure on Khrushchev in the Berlin matter. At his turn, Gheorghiu-Dej maintained the appearances of submission in order to consolidate his regime, both politically and economically. Neither Ulbricht, nor Gheorghiu-Dej supported the transformations envisaged by the Soviet leader. Why, then, did they not coalesce against Khrushchev? The answer to that question is visible in the course of the Romanian-East German relations from 1953 to 1962. Each of them conceived his autonomy on his own. Excessive reliance on Moscow had proved to be hazardous. During Stalin, there was no other option, at least. But now that Khrushchev had loosened the reins, none of them was too eager to establish dependence once again. Ulbricht, just as Gheorghiu-Dej, was interested in his country’s domestic development and saw the other peoples’ democracies as competitors. They both betrayed Khrushchev, but separately.

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *O istorie trăită*, Bucharest, 1997, p. 176.

<sup>59</sup> “Scânteia”, September 21, 1962.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.