

# Continuity, Legitimacy and Identity: Understanding the Romanian August of 1968

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that in order to explain why communist Romania did not take part to the crushing of the Prague Spring one should examine the developments in Romanian communism over the years 1956-1968. Second, the present paper examines the legitimacy issue and focuses on perceptions from below of RCP policies in the post-1964 period. The political actions taken by the Romanian communists during the period 1964-1968 resulted in positive actions expressing consent from the part of large segments of the Romanian society. Third, this paper addresses the issue of identity politics under Romanian communism and demonstrates that the year 1968 marked the transition to a comprehensive nation-building project aiming at constructing an ethnically homogenous Romanian “socialist” nation.

**Keywords:** Communism. Romania. 1968. Nationalism.

*Continuidad, legitimidad e identidad: Comprendiendo el Agosto rumano de 1968*

## RESUMEN

El artículo sostiene que para comprender por qué la Rumanía comunista no tomó parte en el aplastamiento de la primavera de Praga han de examinarse los hechos ocurridos durante los años 1956-1968. En segundo lugar, el estudio examina los problemas de legitimidad y se centra en las percepciones desde debajo de las políticas del la República Popular Rumana. Las acciones políticas de los comunistas rumanos durante el período 1964-1968 resultaron en acciones que expresaban un consenso positivo de parte de grandes sectores de la sociedad rumana. En tercer lugar, el artículo se refiere a la política de identidad durante el comunismo rumano, demostrando que el año 1968 marcó la transición a un amplio proyecto de construcción nacional dirigido a la construcción de una nación “socialista” rumana étnicamente homogénea.

**Palabras clave:** Comunismo. Rumanía. 1968. Nacionalismo.

When examining the developments in Romanian national-communism during the period of Nicolae Ceauşescu (1965-1989), one is compelled to address the “charismatic moment” of the supreme leader of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), i.e., his public condemnation of the 1968 Soviet-led military intervention of Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) troops in Czechoslovakia. There are many reasons for considering the year 1968 as a watershed in the history of Romanian communism. The present paper examines three major aspects related to the reaction of the communist leadership in Bucharest to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

First, this paper argues that in order to explain why communist Romania did not take part to the crushing of the Prague Spring —the reform movement initiated by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz), one should examine the developments in Romanian communism over a longer period of time, i.e., 1956-1968. Ceauşescu’s speech of 21 August 1968, in which he condemned in rather strong terms the WTO intervention in Czechoslovakia, was perceived as a bold gesture of disobedience to the Soviet Union both at home and abroad, and therefore needs a thorough examination. At the same time, that gesture has to be analyzed in the larger context of the post-1956 efforts of the communist elite in Bucharest to emancipate their Party from Moscow.

Second, the present paper examines the legitimacy issue and focuses on perceptions from below of RCP policies in the post-1964 period. The political actions taken by the Romanian communists during the period 1964-1968 resulted in positive actions expressing consent from the part of large segments of the Romanian society. Ceauşescu’s refusal to comply with the emerging Brezhnev Doctrine was perceived domestically as a commitment to reform communism and thus numerous Romanian citizens came to believe that Ceauşescu’s discourse of 21 August 1968 only marked the beginning of a period of reforms and even more openness towards the West. In terms of perceptions from below, it may be argued that on a background of timid ideological relaxation and slight economic improvement, Ceauşescu’s discourse created a special state of mind among the Romanian population and brought him a broad popular support, which eventually gave legitimacy to the single-Party rule in Romania.

Third, this paper addresses the issue of identity politics under Romanian communism and demonstrates that the year 1968 marked the transition to a comprehensive nation-building project aiming at constructing an ethnically homogenous Romanian “socialist” nation. To a large extent, Ceauşescu’s chauvinistic nationalism developed as a result of the unconditional obedience of the power elite to the supreme leader of the RCP and the broad popular support he managed to secure for himself that August 1968.

## Consequences of 1956: “Anti-Soviet Stalinists” faced with De-Stalinization

For a proper understanding of communist Romania’s response to the August 1968 WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia one should employ a broader perspective and discuss first the reaction of the communist elite in Bucharest to the challenges posed by the year 1956. Let us examine the developments in Romanian communism prior to the year 1968. The communist rule in Romania was imposed “from above and abroad”<sup>1</sup>. The Communist Party in Romania, which numbered some 900-1,000 members in August 1944<sup>2</sup>, was brought to power by the Soviets and its power was consolidated with the full support of the Red Army. The “revolutionary struggle” of the Romanian communists did not encompass a “first revolution” on the model of the Bolshevik Revolution. Consequently, the Romanian communists were confined to carry out solely a “revolution from above,” which represented the major guiding principle for the relationship between Party and society from the late 1940s onwards. The concept of “revolution from above” is understood in the terms of Robert C. Tucker’s analysis of the “second” Soviet revolution of 1928-41. As Tucker puts it: “The revolution from above was a state-initiated, state-directed, and state-enforced process .... State power was the driving force of economic, political, social, and cultural change that was revolutionary in rapidity of accomplishment, forcible methods, and transformative effect.” Tucker also characterized Stalin as a “Bolshevik of the radical right, who blended his version of Leninist revolutionism with Great Russian nationalism” that coined “the peculiar idea of a forcible revolution from above as the right formula for socialism in Soviet Russia.”<sup>3</sup>

As for the Romanian communists, they proceeded to *their* “revolution from above” by humbly emulating the Soviet model. Simultaneously, a fierce internal power struggle was fought during the period 1944-1954 inside the Party. It should be emphasized that the factions that were so fiercely fighting for supremacy were equally subservient to Moscow, and therefore it was only about which faction would achieve supreme power within the Party-State-in-the-making and not about conflicting visions of “building socialism” in Romania. Eventually, it was Gheor-

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<sup>1</sup> The term has been used by Connor and Płoszajski when addressing the establishment of Soviet type rule in Poland. See CONNOR, Walter D. and PŁOSZAJSKI, Piotr: “Introduction” to Idem, (eds.): *Escape from Socialism: The Polish Route*, Warsaw, IFiS Publishers, 1992, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> During the period 1948-1965, the official name of the communist party in Romania was *Partidul Muncitoresc Român – P.M.R.* (Romanian Workers Party – RWP); from 1965 to 1989 the official name was *Partidul Comunist Român – P.C.R.* (Romanian Communist Party – RCP). Regarding the fluctuation in RCPs membership over the period 1945-1955 and the subsequent steady growth until 1989 see IONESCU-GURĂ, Nicoleta: “Introductory Study” to Florica DOBRE et al., (eds.): *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R., 1945-1989* (Members of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, 1945-1989) (Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 20-22. Hereafter quoted as *Members of the CC of the RCP*.

<sup>3</sup> See Tucker, Robert C., “Preface” to Idem, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941*, W. W. Norton & Co, New York: 1990, xiv-xv.

ghe Gheorghiu-Dej —once a humble railway worker who did not receive political education in the Soviet Union— that managed to silence, or marginalize, his real or perceived rivals from within the Party, of whom Ștefan Foriș, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Ana Pauker were the most prominent. True, Gheorghiu-Dej could not succeed all alone in the total war for power that was fought within the Party. He relied on his “group from prisons,” i.e., a group of communist activists whose loyalty towards Gheorghiu-Dej was due to a significant period of common socialization in interwar Romania’s prisons<sup>4</sup>. Actually, in the aftermath of WWII, the inner circle of the communist power in Romania was composed of militants that, beginning in 1933, stayed in prison together with Gheorghiu-Dej and were part of his “group from prisons,” such as Gheorghe Apostol, Emil Bodnăraș, Iosif Chișinevschi, Miron Constantinescu, Chivu Stoica and Nicolae Ceaușescu. It is important to stress that this group has made of monolithism and emancipation of the Party its most cherished values, which were transformed into the most enduring features of the political culture of Romanian communism after WWII.

In 1956, the victorious faction, i.e., Gheorghiu-Dej and his group of militants, was literally shocked by Nikita Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalin’s personality cult in the front of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPSU, and it is understandable why. By that time, the Romanian society was already tamed through mass repression and the “group from prisons” was in full control of the Party and the state. At that particular moment in time, Gheorghiu-Dej’s personal power was not threatened anymore by domestic factors. However, the change of course by the “Moscow center” and the condemnation of Stalin’s crimes against Party militants created a totally new political context for the relations between Moscow and the Sovietized countries in East-Central Europe. Up to the moment when Khrushchev gave his secret speech, the Kremlin had been the very source of authority for the Romanian communists. De-Stalinization appeared as an imminent and deadly threat for Gheorghiu-Dej and his men, and therefore they had to avoid it at all costs. This called for a rapid adoption of a strategy of political survival, and the Romanian communists managed to devise one in due time. Such a strategy was based on economic development and return to traditional values, as well as on a cautious distancing from Moscow and opening towards the West.

Revolutions are usually unexpected. Nonetheless, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was one of the most unexpected revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. As far as the

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<sup>4</sup> This author follows Tismăneanu’s conceptualization of the three “centers” of power from within the RCP during the WWII period: (1) the underground Central Committee; (2) the center from prisons; and (3) the center in Moscow. For a detailed discussion, see TISMĂNEANU, Vladimir: *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 119-125; page numbers are to the Romanian edition (Iași, Editura Polirom, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> The syntagm “unexpected revolution” belongs to Paul Kecskemeti. See his *The Unexpected Revolution: Social Forces in the Hungarian Uprising*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1961.

present analysis is concerned, the Hungarian revolution and the temporary demise of the communist rule in Romania's neighboring country affected seriously the political culture of Romanian communism. At the same time, the Hungarian Revolution provided an equally unexpected support for Gheorghiu-Dej's efforts aimed at avoiding de-Stalinization and averting losing his grip on power. As numerous archival sources show, the Romanian communists promptly condemned the "counter-revolution" and helped in all possible ways the re-establishment of Soviet type rule in Hungary<sup>6</sup>. Romanian communists' display of loyalty towards the Soviet Union paid off wonderfully: the Soviets eventually decided to withdraw their troops from Romania, a process that came to an end in the summer of 1958<sup>7</sup>.

The Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party, held on 28 November-5 December 1961, was an exercise in adulation of Gheorghiu-Dej's political skill and wisdom. Moreover, the Plenum of November-December 1961 provided what was meant to be the definitive official version of Party's history since the end of WWII. It was Gheorghiu-Dej himself who provided first a sketch of this version of Party history. In his Report regarding the activity of the Romanian delegation at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the CPSU, Gheorghiu-Dej condemned Stalin's personality cult and then affirmed that such a personality cult also occurred in Romania. According to Gheorghiu-Dej, those responsible for propagating Stalin's personality cult within the ranks of the RCP were Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca (Luca Laszlo):

After their return from the Soviet Union, where they stayed for a long period of time, the anti-Party factionalist group Ana Pauker [and] Luca Laszlo, joined afterwards by Teohari Georgescu, actively helped by Iosif Chișinevschi and Miron Con-

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<sup>6</sup> The Gheorghiu-Dej regime provided full support to the re-establishment of the Soviet-type rule in Hungary. Members of the so-called Imre Nagy group were transported to Romania against their will and kept under close surveillance by the Romanian Securitate in villas belonging to the RCP in the Snagov resort, on the shore of Lake Snagov, outside Bucharest (23 November 1956 – 14 April 1957). For more details on the period spent by the Nagy group in Romania, see NAGY, Imre: *Însemnări de la Snagov: Corespondență, rapoarte, convorbiri* (Notes from Snagov: Correspondence, reports, talks) edited by Ileana Ioanid, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2004. For the influence of the Hungarian Revolution on the mindset of the Romanian communists elite see PETRESCU, Dragoș: "Fifty-Six as an Identity-Shaping Experience: The Case of the Romanian Communists," in János M. RAINER and Katalin SOMLAI (eds.): *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet Bloc Countries: Reactions and Repercussions*, The Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution Budapest, 2007, pp. 48-68. For a chronology of the events in Hungary over the period 1953-1963 see BÉKÉS, Csaba; BYRNE, Malcolm; and RAINER, János M (eds.): *The 1956 Hungarian revolution: A History in Documents*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2002, XXXIII-L.

<sup>7</sup> VERONA, Sergiu: *Military Occupation and Diplomacy: Soviet Troops in Romania, 1944-1958*, Duke University Press Durham, 1992, 122-140. For archival documents related to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania see SCURTU, Ioan, ed.: *România – Retragera trupelor sovietice, 1958* (Romania – The withdrawal of the Soviet troops, 1958), Bucharest, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1996.

stantinescu, started to propagate Stalin's personality cult and introduced in the Party life the anti-Leninist methods and practices generated by this cult.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, according to the said 1961 Plenum, the history of the Party was a struggle between two camps: an autochthonous and patriotic one that fought a Soviet-oriented one. Gheorghiu-Dej claimed that the 1952 purge of the so-called group of Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca and Teohari Georgescu, as well as the 1957 purge of the so-called faction of Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi, was the result of a clash between the proponents of two mutually excluding visions of Party-State politics. The local and patriotic group, which was led by Gheorghiu-Dej himself, had a single scope: that of serving Romania's national interests. This group was opposed from the outset by a so-called Muscovite group, which served solely the interests of the Soviet Union. Fortunately —the argument further read— it was the patriotic faction led by Gheorghiu-Dej that won the battle. The truth is that both factions were equally Stalinist and obedient to the Kremlin. For instance, in the context of the Tito-Stalin split, it was Gheorghiu-Dej who at the Third Meeting of the Cominform (Budapest, 16-19 November 1949) presented the report entitled *Partidul Comunist din Iugoslavia în mâna unor asasini și spioni* (The Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the hands of certain assassins and spies)<sup>9</sup>.

In 1964, three years after that carefully staged Party Plenum, it was issued one of the most important Party documents devised under Gheorghiu-Dej's leadership and arguably one of the most relevant documents of Romanian communism. Generally known as the "Declaration of April 1964," the said document proclaimed that all communist parties were equal within the international communist movement and thus they were free to choose their own path towards "socialism." A phrase from the 1964 Declaration is particularly telling with regard to the emancipating strategy of the Romanian communist elite: "There exists no "parent" party and "offspring" party, "superior" and "subordinated" parties, but only the large family of communist and workers parties having equal rights"<sup>10</sup>. Gheorghiu-Dej, however, did not

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<sup>8</sup> See "Stenograma ședinței Plenare lărgite a C.C. al P.M.R. din zilele de 30 noiembrie – 5 decembrie 1961" (Minutes of the enlarged Plenum of the CC of the RWP of 30 November – 5 December 1961) in NEAGOE-PLEȘA, Elis and Liviu PLEȘA, (eds.): *Dosarul Ana Pauker: Plenara Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român din 30 noiembrie – 5 decembrie 1961*, Vol. 1 (The Ana Pauker file: The Plenum of the CC of RWP of 30 November – 5 December 1961), Bucharest, Editura Nemira, 2006, 153.

<sup>9</sup> For a collection of documents related to the position of communist Romania with regard to the Tito-Stalin split, see CONSTANTINIU, Florin and Adrian POP, (eds.): *Schisma roșie: România și declanșarea conflictului sovieto-iugoslav, 1948-1950* (The red schism: Romania and the breaking out of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict, 1948-1950), Bucharest, Editura Compania, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> See *Declarație cu privire la poziția Partidului Muncitoresc Român în problemele mișcării comuniste și muncitorești internaționale, adoptată de Plenara lărgită a C.C. al P.M.R. din aprilie 1964* (Declaration concerning the position of the Romanian Workers' Party with regard to the prob-

live long enough to enjoy the benefits of the independent-path policies he initiated in order to block the de-Stalinization of Romania: he died of a galloping cancer in March 1965.

Quite surprisingly, it was Ceaușescu the one who became the successor of Gheorghiu-Dej and not one of the Party elders. In this regard, post-1989 testimonies by former nomenklatura members seem to agree that Ceaușescu managed to convince the most influential members of the power elite, especially Ion Gheorghe Maurer, that he would be a staunch continuator of the “national line” initiated by Dej<sup>11</sup>. Once in power, Ceaușescu did follow Gheorghiu-Dej policies of industrial development and independence from Moscow. At the same time, he was determined to consolidate his power and employed the Khrushchevite strategy of condemning officially the abuses committed by his predecessor against the Party apparatus.

After a period of “collective leadership,” i.e., March 1965-April 1968, Ceaușescu thoroughly staged a Plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP, which was held on 22-25 April 1968<sup>12</sup>. A key moment of the Plenum was the adoption of the “Decision of the CC of the RCP regarding the rehabilitation of a number of Party activists.” This decision epitomizes Romania’s belated and short-lived de-Stalinization, which lasted from April 1968 to July 1971. The Decision of April 1968 was structured on six points that were in fact six indictments of Gheorghiu-Dej’s policies concerning the Party apparatus: (1) the “post-mortem political rehabilitation” of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu; (2) the “post-mortem political rehabilitation” of Ștefan Foriș; (3) the “post-mortem political rehabilitation” of a number of nineteen other former Party activists; (4) the revoking of the Party sanctions issued against eight Party members: Miron Constantinescu, Ion Craiu, Ioan Demeter, Constantin Doncea, Mihai Levente, Vasile Modoran, Dumitru Petrescu and Aurel Vijoli; (5) the promise that similar cases of other old-timers would be analyzed; and (6) the decision to dismiss Alexandru Drăghici [former head of the Securitate] from the CC of the RCP and to establish the responsibility of those involved in “illegal repressive actions” in order to punish them<sup>13</sup>. The importance of the Plenum of April 1968 is twofold. First, it marked the beginning of the official, although belated, de-

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lems of the international communist and workers’ movement adopted by the enlarged Plenum of the CC of the RWP of April 1964), Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1964, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> See, in this respect, the testimony of MAURER, Ion Gheorghe in BETEA, Lavinia: *Maurer și lumea de ieri: Mărturiile despre stalinizarea României* (Maurer and the yesterday world: Testimonies on Romania’s Stalinization), Arad, Editura Ioan Slavici, 1995, pp.172-77. For more on the prominent political career of Maurer, see DOBRE et al., eds., *Members of the CC of the RCP*, p. 385.

<sup>12</sup> *Plenara Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român din 22-25 aprilie 1968* (The Plenum of the CC of the RCP of 22-25 April 1968), Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1968. Hereafter quoted as *The Plenum of the CC of the RCP of 22-25 April 1968*.

<sup>13</sup> See *Hotărîrea C.C. al P.C.R. cu privire la reabilitarea unor activiști de partid* (The decision of the CC of the RCP regarding the rehabilitation of a number of Party activists), in *The Plenum of the CC of the RCP of 22-25 April 1968*, 64-76.

Stalinization in Romania. True, in the case of Romania de-Stalinization proved to be extremely superficial: it hardly went beyond Ceaușescu's repudiation of Gheorghiu-Dej's political legacy and came abruptly to an end through the issuance of the so-called "Theses of July 1971". Second, it had a major impact on the Party and the Securitate: it showed that the period of "collective leadership" was over and that Ceaușescu had become the undisputed leader of the Party and the one whom the Securitate had to obey absolutely. Nonetheless, Ceaușescu's major achievement in terms of domestic support for his rule was yet to come: the "charismatic" moment that conferred almost overnight legitimacy to the communist rule in Romania.

To sum up, the policy of emancipating the RCP from the CPSU was a constant preoccupation of the communist elite in Bucharest in the post-1956 period and became one of the most salient features of the political culture of Romanian national-communism. Thus, the strategy of political survival aimed at averting de-Stalinization made of the independent-path policy a pivotal political principle of the late Gheorghiu-Dej regime. Ceaușescu followed unabatedly this principle, although he repudiated in April 1968, in a Khrushchevite manner, the abuses of his predecessor against some Party members. As shown below, Ceaușescu had no intention whatsoever to introduce reforms on the Prague Spring model. His only concern was to assert the right of each and every communist party to choose its own way of "building socialism," without any interference from the part of the Soviet Union or other states.

### **Ceaușescu, the Prague Spring, and Home Affairs**

Ceaușescu's condemnation of the crushing of the Prague Spring and his subsequent rejection of the Brezhnev Doctrine were interpreted as a display of reformist stances. However, Ceaușescu and the RCP supported solely the right of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz) to pursue its own path towards "socialism," and by no means the reform program of CPCz. Throughout the period January-August 1968, the reform process that unfolded in former Czechoslovakia was presented to the Romanian public as a version of the independent-path policies communist Romania was engaged in. Not a single reference was made to the significance of the reforms introduced by the regime of Alexander Dubček and nothing was said about the way the Czecho-Slovak society at large reacted to the reforms initiated from above, from the top of the CPCz.

In February 1968, an official delegation of the RCP went to Prague and participated to the festivities occasioned by the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the February 1948 coup that brought the communists in power in postwar Czechoslovakia. On 22 February, in his speech, Ceaușescu referred to the "unshakeable alliance" between the two "social-



ist states” and to the need to strengthen the “cohesion of the international working-class movement”<sup>14</sup>. It is quite difficult to find out what the leadership in Bucharest really thought about the reforms initiated by the CPCz. Ceauşescu officially expressed in Prague his trust in the CPCz, “headed by its First Secretary, comrade Alexander Dubček.” However, according to Dumitru Popescu, the RCP chief ideologue, Ceauşescu expressed unofficially his doubts with regard to the person of Dubček, whom he considered far too lenient and “lacking a clear and firm personal stance”<sup>15</sup>. No matter what were Ceauşescu’s personal opinions about Dubček, it seems that as early as February 1968 the RCP has warned the Soviets that it would not support them in the case of a conflict with the new leadership of CPCz. This information was provided by a former Romanian top Party official, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, in one of his book of memoirs. According to Niculescu-Mizil, the RCP made clear to the Soviet leadership that: “They cannot count on us in the likelihood of a conflict with the democratic line of the Czechoslovaks”<sup>16</sup>.

For ordinary Romanians, it was clear that something was happening in Czechoslovakia and that the Romanian communists were supportive of CPCz’s initiatives. The Party newspaper *Scînteia* wrote constantly about the changes that were taking place in Czechoslovakia. However, no reference was made to official documents of crucial importance, such as the Action Program of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (10 April 1968), which could indicate to a large extent the direction of the reforms envisaged by CPCz. Furthermore, nothing was said about the reaction of the Czechoslovak society in general to the reforms introduced from above. For instance, it is worth mentioning that the “Two Thousand Words” manifesto (27 June 1968) was not commented by the Romanian press<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> CEAUŞESCU, Nicolae: “Cuvînt de salut la festivităţile de la Praga consacrate celei de-a 20-a aniversări a victoriei oamenilor muncii din Cehoslovacia din februarie 1948” (Greeting speech at the festivities dedicated to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory of the working people of Czechoslovakia of February 1948) in Idem, *România pe drumul desăvîrşirii construcţiei socialiste: Rapoarte, cuvîntări, articole: ianuarie 1968-martie 1969* (Romania on the road towards completing the building of socialism: Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968-March 1969), Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1969, pp. 80-84. Hereafter quoted as *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 -March 1969*.

<sup>15</sup> See POPESCU, Dumitru: *Un fost lider comunist se destăinuie: “Am fost şi cioplitor de himere”* (A former communist leader confesses: “I was also a carver of chimeras”), Bucharest, Editura Expres, p. 142. For more on the political biography of Dumitru Popescu, nicknamed “Dumnezeu,” i.e., “the Almighty,” see DOBRE et al. (eds.): *Members of the CC of the RCP*, pp. 480-81.

<sup>16</sup> NICULESCU-MIZIL, Paul: *De la Comintern la comunism naţional: Despre Consfătuirea partidelor comuniste şi muncitoreşti, Moscova, 1969* (From Comintern to national communism: On the Meeting of communist and workers parties, Moscow, 1969), Bucharest, Editura Evenimentul Românesc, 2001, p. 174. On the political career of Niculescu-Mizil, see DOBRE et al. (eds.): *Members of the CC of the RCP*, pp. 432-33.

<sup>17</sup> For a collection of documents related to the Prague Spring and its suppression by the Soviet-led intervention see NAVRÁTIL, Jaromír et al. (eds): *The Prague Spring 1968*, Budapest, CEU Press, 1998.

At the same time, documents from the archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate that the Romanian embassy in Prague was sending to Bucharest timely and comprehensive reports on the pace of changes in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, it may be argued that Ceaușescu was well informed about the situation in Prague. For instance, in a telegram sent to Bucharest on 23 March 1968 it was mentioned that among Czechoslovak students there were signaled “inappropriate manifestations” such as requests for renouncing to the leading role of the CPCz, hostile statements concerning the army or wishes that Czechoslovakia would pursue a policy of neutrality<sup>18</sup>. The Romanian diplomats in Prague did identify, and correctly informed Bucharest about, a crucial aspect of the Prague Spring: the fact that the reforms initiated from above resulted in an unprecedented mobilization of the intellectual circles in Prague.

Time and again, in his public interventions Ceaușescu presented the situation in Czechoslovakia as mirroring the one in Romania. Thus, ordinary Romanians were told that the Czechoslovak communists, supported by a majority of the population, were determined to pursue their own, independent path towards “socialism” and that the communist parties of Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Poland and Soviet Union were not quite happy with that. Beginning in mid-July, however, Ceaușescu referred constantly to the situation in Czechoslovakia and stressed consistently that the CPCz had the right to decide by itself upon its way of building “socialism.” These ideas were expressed on 15 July, during his visit to the Galați Steel Combine<sup>19</sup>, on 11 August, at the celebration of Miner’s Day (*Ziua minerului*) and the Hundredth Anniversary of the establishment of mining industry in the Jiu Valley<sup>20</sup>. On 14 August, Ceaușescu took part to the graduation ceremony at the Military Academy and put forward his views about national armed forces and their role within the Warsaw Treaty Organization framework: “The solving of domestic problems belongs exclusively to the party and people of each country and any kind of interference can only do harm to the cause of socialism, friendship and collaboration among the socialist countries”<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> RETEGAN, Mihai: *1968 – Din primăvară pînă în toamnă: Schiță de politică externă românească* (1968 – From spring till autumn: An outline of Romanian foreign policy), Bucharest, Editura RAO, 1998, pp. 96-97.

<sup>19</sup> CEAUȘESCU: “Cuvîntare la mitingul de la Combinatul siderurgic din Galați – 15 iulie 1968” (Speech delivered at the meeting at the Galați Steel Combine – 15 July 1968) in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, pp. 327-328.

<sup>20</sup> CEAUȘESCU: “Cuvîntare la sărbătorirea Zilei minerului și a Centenarului industriei carbonifere din Valea Jiului – 11 august 1968” (Speech delivered to the celebration of Miner’s Day and the Hundredth Anniversary of the establishment of the mining industry in the Jiu Valley) in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, pp. 353-355.

<sup>21</sup> CEAUȘESCU: “Cuvîntare la Adunarea festivă din Capitală cu prilejul absolvirii promoției 1968 a Academiei Militare Generale și acordării gradului de ofițer absolvenților școlilor militare – 14 august 1968” (Speech delivered at the Bucharest festive meeting occasioned by the graduation of the 1968 con-

Finally, a Romanian delegation led by Ceauşescu himself visited Prague during the period 15-17 August. On 16 August, during a visit to the *Avia* plant, Ceauşescu reiterated that the RCP was fully supporting the CPCz: “As dear friends and comrades, we wish you to completely succeed in your efforts towards the multilaterally development of socialist Czechoslovakia and we assure you with this occasion of the solidarity and the fraternal internationalist support of Romanian communists and the entire Romanian people”<sup>22</sup>. The same day, 16 August, it was signed the “Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic” (*Tratatul de prietenie, colaborare și asistență mutuală dintre Republica Socialistă România și Republica Socialistă Cehoslovacă*). Ceauşescu took the opportunity to express once more his support for the course pursued by the Czech and Slovak communists<sup>23</sup>. Ceauşescu spoke again about the RCP’s full support of CPCz on 20 August, when he inaugurated the Piteşti Automobile Plant (*Uzina de autoturisme Piteşti*), the producer of the most popular car in Romania, *Dacia*. The following fragment of his speech is telling:

During the visit ... we could observe with complete satisfaction that the CPCz, its leadership, the Czechoslovak government, the working class, Czechoslovak peasantry, the intellectuals, the entire people, are unabatedly putting into practice the Party policy of building socialism and of developing Czechoslovakia on the path of socialism.... We have been profoundly impressed. We have returned with an even stronger conviction that the destinies of socialism and of Czechoslovak people are in safe hands, in the hands of the communist party and of its leadership.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that the supreme leader of the RCP was ready to bear witness that the “destinies of socialism and the Czechoslovak people” stayed firmly in safe hands could not change the course of events. On the night of 20 to 21 August 1968, WTO troops under Soviet command invaded Czechoslovakia and put an end to the Prague Spring.

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tingent of the Military Academy and conferring the rank of officer to the graduates of military schools – 14 August 1968) in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, pp. 365-366.

<sup>22</sup> CEAUŞESCU: “Cuvîntare la mitingul de la uzinele Avia din Praga – 16 august 1968” (Speech delivered to the rally at the Avia plant in Prague – 16 August 1968) in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, pp. 385-386.

<sup>23</sup> CEAUŞESCU: “Cuvîntare la solemnitatea semnării Tratatului de prietenie, colaborare și asistență mutuală între Republica Socialistă România și Republica Socialistă Cehoslovacă – 16 august 1968” (Speech delivered to the ceremony of signing the Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, pp. 391-395.

<sup>24</sup> CEAUŞESCU: “Cuvîntare la mitingul organizat la inaugurarea Uzinei de autoturisme Piteşti – 20 august 1968” (Speech delivered at the rally occasioned by the inauguration of the Piteşti Automobile Enterprise) in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, pp. 411-412.

## The Legitimacy Issue

On 21 August 1968, from the balcony of the building of CC of the RCP, Nicolae Ceaușescu addressed the crowds gathered in front of the building. A first thing to say about his discourse is that it was highly patriotic and a majority of the population perceived in it strong anti-Soviet accents. Many came to believe that Ceaușescu's discourse marked only the beginning of a period of bold reforms. Witness accounts speak of a particular state of mind among large segments of the population, which seemed to forget about the open wounds of the past two decades of single party rule in Romania:

The incursion in Czechoslovakia of the troops belonging to the five socialist countries represents a big mistake and a serious threat to peace in Europe and for the destiny of socialism in the world. It is inconceivable in the present day world – when peoples rise to defend their national independence and for equal rights – that a socialist state, that socialist states to infringe on the liberty and independence of another state. There can be no excuse, and there can be no reason to accept, even for a single moment, the idea of a military intervention in the domestic affairs of a fraternal socialist state.<sup>25</sup>

During the period March 1965-August 1968, regime perceptions from below improved gradually due to Ceaușescu's foreign policy of independence from Moscow and opening towards the West, as well as due to his domestic policies of relative economic and ideological relaxation. The slight improvement of the standard of living of the population found an echo in the hearts and minds of a majority of Romania's population. Thus, in August 1968 —ten years after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania— when Ceaușescu gave his famous “balcony speech” in which he condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia by WTO troops, an overwhelming majority of the population supported him without hesitation. The effect of Ceaușescu's discourse on Romania's population at large was enormous. In fact, that speech represented for many Romanians the “proof” of Ceaușescu's charismatic qualifications<sup>26</sup>. One can go further and argue that Ceaușescu's “charismatic leadership,” to use Reinhard Bendix's concept, occurred in the dramatic conditions

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<sup>25</sup> Ceaușescu's speech of 21 August 1968 was published by the Party daily *Scînteia* No. 7802 (Thursday, 22 August 1968), 1. The speech was also published in Ceaușescu, *Reports, speeches, articles, January 1968 – March 1969*, 415-418.

<sup>26</sup> According to Max Weber, charisma is: “A certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities”. Quoted in BENDIX, “Reflections on Charismatic Leadership,” in BENDIX, Reinhard et al. (eds.): *State and Society: A Reader in Comparative Sociology*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973, p. 619.

of that August 1968<sup>27</sup>. However, as David Beetham correctly observed, the use Weberian concept of “charismatic authority” is problematic in the sense that it “assigns far too exclusive an importance to the individual, and leads to fruitless, because unresolvable, disputes about whether particular leaders possess the indefinable quality of ‘charisma’ or not”<sup>28</sup>.

In order to understand the mechanism that provided the Ceauşescu regime with unprecedented mobilizing capacity one should address two major issues: (1) Ceauşescu’s personality and leadership style; and (2) the particular circumstances in which popular mobilization occurred. With regard to Ceauşescu’s personality and leadership style, one has to mention that he was by far less flexible in adopting various policies than his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej. He was also less imaginative and his ideological commitment to the main tenets of Marxism-Leninism remained strong. Nonetheless, he was only 47 when he became secretary general of the RCP and managed to build a positive image of himself as a “man of the people” by proceeding consistently to grassroots consultations. During the period 1965-1968, Ceauşescu’s domestic visits were carefully staged and in many instances he also visited the most relevant historic monuments in the respective area, thus paying respect to the deeds of the ancestors with an emphasis on the medieval rulers of Romanian principalities. This was in sharp contrast with the leadership style of his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, who did not champion such staged domestic visits.

As shown above, Ceauşescu successfully launched a belated and short lived de-Stalinization with the only scope of unmasking the wrongdoings of Gheorghiu-Dej and repudiating his political legacy. The mobilizing power of Ceauşescu’s actions resided in his policy of independence from Moscow and opening toward the West. However, it was Gheorghiu-Dej who initiated the strategy of independence-cum-industrialization and put forward the principles for emancipating the Party, which stayed later on at the basis of the Declaration of April 1964. Therefore, one can argue that Ceauşescu benefited in many respects from the national line inaugurated by Gheorghiu-Dej.

As for Ceauşescu’s bold stance at the news of the WTO intervention in Czechoslovakia, one should mention the opinion of a member of the communist power elite of the time. Alexandru Bîrlădeanu, a prominent nomenklatura member, pointed out in a post-1989 book-length interview to a particular trait of Ceauşescu’s character: when talking to a crowd he used to get excited and speak more than necessary. According to Bîrlădeanu, this happened more than once and this was also the case with Ceauşescu’s discourse of 21 August 1968. As he put it: “After you get out in the open in front of a tiger, it is not the right moment to pull it by its tail. This is

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<sup>27</sup> For more on this see BENDIX: “Reflections on Charismatic Leadership”, pp. 616-29.

<sup>28</sup> BEETHAM, David: *The Legitimation of Power*, London, Macmillan, 1991, p. 156.

what Ceaușescu did. Nevertheless, it worked very well with the people, who were deeply impressed<sup>29</sup>.

Let us turn to some recollections by persons who became later on dissidents or fierce political opponents of the supreme leader of the RCP, which are particularly telling. Writer Paul Goma, the initiator of the 1977 Goma movement for human rights and perhaps the most famous Romanian dissident wrote in August 1985 a perceptive article entitled “August ’68” in which he recalled the “hysterical atmosphere” of those days. Goma correctly points out that it was not Romanians’ special sympathy for the Czechs and Slovaks that mobilized the crowds in Bucharest. As he puts it:

We were not necessarily friends, nor were we foes [of the Czechs] – we had had nothing to quarrel about. After all, what did we know, then, about the Czechs? That they occupied the most Sovietophile “barrack” in the whole Camp ... [and] together with the East Germans, the Czechs had been the most hostile to the Romanians, disapproving their industrialization drive and inviting them to stick to agriculture and shepherding.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, Goma suggests that it was rather the fact that the Soviets dared to invade a “fraternal country” that created a special state of mind among the population of Romania. In this respect, he stressed the mobilizing power of Ceaușescu’s discourse of 21 August:

Ceaușescu’s discourse, from the balcony... Even now, in 1985, I cannot say that at that moment he “acted” as well, that he was insincere.... Then, Ceaușescu appealed not to communists, but to citizens; to defend, not the Party, but the country. By the power of arms. Of course, none of us did imagine that we would defeat the terrible Red Army. Each and every one of us asked ourselves *how many hours* we would resist. And even if that time span was to be counted in minutes, it would have meant nonetheless something [original emphasis].<sup>31</sup>

Journalist Neculai Constantin Munteanu became one of the most acerbic critics of Ceaușescu’s dictatorship as part of the Romanian desk of Radio Free Europe during the 1980s. In a 1977 letter addressed to Ceaușescu, in which he put forward the main reasons that made him decide to leave Romania for ever, he also referred to the strong impression Ceaușescu’s discourse of 21 August 1968 made on him: “In

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<sup>29</sup> See BETEA, Lavinia: *Alexandru Bîrlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu: Convorbiri* (Alexandru Bîrlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu and Iliescu: Conversations), Bucharest, Editura Evenimentul Românesc, 1998, p. 191. For details on Bîrlădeanu’s political career, see Dobre et al., eds., *Members of the CC of the RCP*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>30</sup> GOMA, Paul: *Amnezia la români* (Amnezia to Romanians), Bucharest, Editura Litera, 1992, pp. 53-54.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

August 1968 I was among the thousands of Romanians who listened to you speaking from the balcony of the CC of the RCP. *The vehemence of your condemnation of the armed aggression of some member countries of the WTO against a friendly and allied country made me feel proud of being a Romanian [emphasis added]*<sup>32</sup>. In the same vein, writer Dumitru Țepeneag remembers that Ceaușescu's discourse had an instantaneous effect on him: "For some days, I was a convinced Ceaușescuist"<sup>33</sup>.

There were in fact some simple themes, such as the struggle for independence and return to traditional values that found an echo in the minds and hearts of a majority of the Romanian population. At the same time, there were some things that people could experience on an everyday basis such as: a cautious ideological relaxation, a slight improvement of the living standards and an opening towards the West. In 1968, things seemed to move in the right direction, and many felt that RCP leadership was taking action to improve their situation. Testimonies by Romanian émigrés are also telling. In her book of memoirs, Sanda Stolojan, the official interpreter of the French president Charles de Gaulle during his official visit to Romania (14-18 May 1968), speaks convincingly of the sense of hope the population experienced in those days. Her account, coming from a critical émigré intellectual is all the more remarkable: "In spite of poverty and cramming, the houses, churches, streets were not yet disfigured or destroyed. The heart of the city continued to beat. Hope was in the air, I could feel it that month in 1968 beyond the pallid faces and damaged façades"<sup>34</sup>.

Such a widespread positive perception of the regime permitted the RCP to achieve a "limited legitimation through consent"<sup>35</sup>. Ceaușescu's political gesture of condemning the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia conferred almost overnight legitimacy on the single Party rule in Romania. Moreover, the "balcony speech," which was generally perceived as a "proof" of Ceaușescu's charismatic qualifications, was given at the beginnings of his rule and thus contributed heavily in consolidating his power. This considerably delayed the emergence of critical stances against Ceaușescu's increasingly personalized rule in the following years.

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<sup>32</sup> MUNTEANU, Neculai Constantin: *Ultimii șapte ani de-acasă: Un ziarist în dosarele Securității* (The last seven years at home: A journalist in the files of the Securitate), Veche, Bucharest, Editura Curtea, 2007, p. 120.

<sup>33</sup> See ȚEPENEAG, Dumitru: *Reîntoarcerea fiului la sânul mamei rătăcite* (The return of the son to prodigal mother's breast), Iași, Institutul European, 1993, p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> STOLOJAN, Sanda: *Cu de Gaulle în România* (With de Gaulle in Romania), Bucharest, Editura Albatros, 1994, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> BEETHAM: *The Legitimation of Power*, p. 117.

## Identity Politics

Under Ceauşescu's rule, the RCP engaged in a sustained policy of reinforcing the ethnic ties among the Romanian majority and assimilating the historic ethnic minorities. As shown above, Gheorghiu-Dej initiated after 1956 a strategy of averting de-Stalinization based on industrialization and independence from Moscow, which entailed a return to the local traditions and thus to an ethnic understanding of the nation. Ceauşescu's predecessor, who applied random terror in order to Sovietize the country, only managed to engage in process of "selective community building," aimed at building a political consensus and give a new meaning to relations between the communist elite and the population at large<sup>36</sup>.

While striving to preserve power and prevent de-Stalinization, the Romanian communist elite headed by Gheorghiu-Dej discovered that national identity is a crucial social and political resource and made use of it in order to ensure their political survival. The Romanian Stalinists, however, were not familiar with the language of nationalism and it took them some eight years (1956-1964) to understand fully the extraordinary force of nationalism as an instrument for preserving their absolute power. It was only from 1964 onwards that the process of building selectively a political community was turned into an all-encompassing nation-building process. In 1964, the political prisoners were eventually liberated. Since no major segments of the population were left out anymore, it seemed that the preconditions for engaging in a comprehensive, "socialist" nation-building project were set. But the consent of the ruled was still missing. Gheorghiu-Dej tamed the society through random terror, then distanced himself from Moscow and returned to traditional values in order to avoid de-Stalinization. In 1964, a "declaration of independence" was issued and the political prisoners were liberated, but the RCP had a legitimacy problem, which was solved only in August 1968.

As John Breuilly perceptively points out: "Nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and ... politics is about power. Power, in the modern world, is principally about control of the state"<sup>37</sup>. The societal response to Ceauşescu's speech of 21 August 1968 made clear that nationalism was a most powerful political principle that conferred legitimacy on the RCP rule in Romania. From that moment on, the RCP propaganda machine started to put a much stronger emphasis on ancestors' struggle for independence and their heroic deeds. As George Schöpflin aptly puts it:

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<sup>36</sup> See JOWITT, Kenneth: *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, p. 74.

<sup>37</sup> BREUILLY, John: *Nationalism and the State*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, 1.



Culture embodies a variety of myths ... giving a collectivity a choice of which myth to engage in different circumstances.... What the analysis of myths suggests is that politics is an aspect of the overall cultural system. Every political action is embedded in a wider cultural context.... Mythic and symbolic discourses can thus be employed to assert legitimacy and strengthen authority. They mobilize emotions and enthusiasm. They are a primary means by which people make sense of the political process, which is understood in a symbolic form. Attitudes are, therefore, formed more by symbolic forms than utilitarian calculation, and the potency of symbols in the political process derives from the fact that they are vehicles for conceptualization.<sup>38</sup>

In Ceauşescu's Romania, historians co-opted by the propaganda machine devised an official version of "national" history centered on the four fundamental historical myths of the Romanians: (1) ancient roots; (2) continuity on the present day territory; (3) unity and (4) struggle for independence. *Ancient roots* and *continuity* referred to the ethnic origins of the nation and the related disputes with historians from neighboring Hungary with regard to the contested region of Transylvania, considered as a cradle of their nation by both Romanians and Hungarians. *Unity* and *independence*, however, were intrinsically linked to the RCP policies from 1956 onwards. It was the unity of the Party and the independence from Moscow that permitted the Stalinist elite in Romania to survive de-Stalinization. Therefore, a transfer of such a vision to the Party-State level came almost naturally and was very effective as a propaganda instrument. The medieval rulers of the Romanian principalities had to defend their independence by fighting against the Ottomans; the rulers of communist Romania had to oppose the Soviets in order to preserve the independence of their "socialist" nation-state.

For his part, Ceauşescu wanted to win a place for himself in the heroic tradition of the medieval rulers of the three Romanian Principalities (Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania). A former nomenklatura member, Cornel Burtică, states that Ceauşescu was truly interested in the history of Romania and fascinated by the rulers of the Romanian Principalities, from a distant past to the modern period: "One has to follow Ceauşescu's tenacity ... and his long term action in order to gradually become the absolute ruler of Romania, being convinced that he was the descendant of our great forefathers – Decebal, Ştefan cel Mare [Stephen the Great], Mircea cel Bătrîn [Mircea the Old], Mihai Viteazul [Michael the Brave], Alexandru Ioan Cuza – and was carrying further Romania's glory"<sup>39</sup>. As already mentioned, from the

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<sup>38</sup> SCHÖPFLIN, George: *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe*, London, Hurst, 2000, pp. 88-89.

<sup>39</sup> See CHELARU, Rodica: *Culpe care nu se uită: Convorbiri cu Cornel Burtică* (Misdeeds one cannot forget: Conversations with Cornel Burtică), Bucharest, Editura Curtea Veche, 2001, p. 79. Cornel Burtică, was a member of the CC of the RCP (1969-1982) and of the Executive Political Commit-

very beginnings of his rule Ceauşescu manifested his appreciation for the heroic deeds of those medieval rulers and his leadership style was based on a systematic program of domestic visits<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, it was under Ceauşescu that the myth of Mihai Viteazul, the ruler that realized a short-lived unification of the three principalities under his scepter in 1600, was revived. Thus, in 1969, it was started the production of the movie, also entitled *Mihai Viteazul*, directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu. Released in 1971, the movie proved to be the most watched historical Romanian film production of all time, and the third most watched Romanian movie of all time. *Mihai Viteazul* epitomized the historical myths of *unity* and *independence*, while a previous movie by Nicolaescu, *Dacii* (The Dacians), released in 1967, concentrated on *ancient roots* and *continuity*, and alluded to the Roman conquest of the Dacian kingdom and the formation of the Romanian people as a Dacian-Roman synthesis. *Dacii* was Nicolaescu's first big success and ranks second after *Mihai Viteazul* in the hierarchy of the most watched Romanian historical movies and fourth in the national rankings of the most watched movies of all time<sup>41</sup>. With regard to the revival of historical myths in order to popular support for the RCP rule, it should be mentioned that beginning on 26 August, Ceauşescu engaged in an ample program of domestic visits. Among the numerous mass rallies organized throughout the country, one is particularly important: the rally held on 30 August 1968 in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. That day, Ceauşescu delivered a flamboyant speech in front of a numerous audience in which he referred for the first time to the RCP as the direct continuator of the heroic deeds of the Romanian medieval rulers such as Ştefan cel Mare, Mircea cel Bătrîn or Mihai Viteazul<sup>42</sup>. From September 1968 onwards, the emphasis on independence and unity, as well as the cult of an-

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tee of CC of the RCP (1974-1982). For more on his political career see DOBRE et al. (eds.): *Members of the CC of the RCP*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>40</sup> PETRESCU, Cristina: "Vizitele de lucru, un ritual al Epocii de aur" ([Ceauşescu's] Domestic visits, a ritual of the Golden Epoch), in: Lucian BOIA (ed.): *Miturile comunismului românesc* (Myths of Romanian communism), Bucharest, Editura Nemira, 1998, pp. 229-238.

<sup>41</sup> For details regarding the movies *Dacii* and *Mihai Viteazul*, see MODORCEA, Grid, ed., *Dicţionarul filmului românesc de ficţiune* (Dictionary of the Romanian feature film), Bucharest, Editura Cartea Românească, 2004, pp. 164-65 and, respectively, 198-99. On the process of nation-building in communist Romania, see PETRESCU, Dragoş: "Communist Legacies in the 'New Europe.' History, Ethnicity, and the Creation of a 'Socialist' Nation in Romania, 1945-1989," in Konrad H. JARAUSCH and Thomas LINDENBERGER, (eds.): *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2007, pp. 37-54. On the rankings devised by the National Centre of Cinematography regarding the most watched Romanian movies of all times see "Cele mai vizionate filme româneşti din toate timpurile" (The most watched Romanian movies of all time) in *Cotidianul* (Bucharest), 23 August 2005; Internet; [http://cotidianul.ro/cele\\_mai\\_vizionate\\_filme\\_romanesti\\_din\\_toate\\_timpurile-2116.html](http://cotidianul.ro/cele_mai_vizionate_filme_romanesti_din_toate_timpurile-2116.html); accessed 29 July 2008. *Mihai Viteazul* was watched by 13,330,000 persons while *Dacii* was watched by 13,112,000.

<sup>42</sup> CEAUŞESCU: "Cuvîntare la marea adunare populară din municipiul Cluj – 30 august 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the city of Cluj – 30 August 1968), in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, p. 478.

cestors and the manipulation of national symbols became the main ingredients of Ceaușescuism.

Another proof of Ceaușescu's commitment to pursuing independent policies within the Soviet bloc was his public refusal of the Brezhnev Doctrine. Ceaușescu made his refusal of the Brezhnev Doctrine plain on 29 November 1968 in the front of Romanian Grand National Assembly gathered in a special session to celebrate fifty years from the unification of Transylvania with Romania on 1 December 1918. In his speech, Ceaușescu resolutely criticized the concept of "limited sovereignty" applied to the relations between communist countries:

The thesis that one tries to validate lately, according to which the common defense of the socialist countries against an imperialistic attack presupposes the limitation or renunciation to the sovereignty of a state participating to the [Warsaw] Treaty, does not correspond to the principles characterizing the relations between socialist states and under no circumstances may be accepted. The affiliation to the Warsaw Treaty Organization not only that does not question the sovereignty of the member states, that does not "limit" in a way or another their state independence, but, on the contrary, as the Treaty stipulates, is a means of strengthening the national independence and sovereignty of each participating state.<sup>43</sup>

As a conclusion to this section, it may be argued that the Romanian national-communism reached full development only in the aftermath of Ceaușescu's "balcony speech" of 21 August 1968 and this is due to the fact that in those days the RCP could claim that it was the continuator of the political traditions of the three historic Romanian Principalities and it was perceived as such by large segments of the population. At the time, the national euphoria was high and not many were able to predict that quite soon, i.e., in July 1971, the Ceaușescu regime would return to cultural and economic Stalinism<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> CEAUȘESCU: "Expunere la ședința jubiliară a Marii Adunări Naționale consacrată sărbătoririi semicentenarului unirii Transilvaniei cu România – 29 noiembrie 1968" (Speech delivered at the special session of the Grand National Assembly dedicated to the celebration of fifty years since the unification of Transylvania with Romania – 29 November 1968), in Idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, pp. 745-746.

<sup>44</sup> The so-called "Theses of July 1971" is a rather brief document structured on seventeen points, issued on 6 July 1971, which revealed Ceaușescu's rigid attitude towards education and cultural production. Ceaușescu reiterated the main ideas put forward in the document issued on July 6 at a meeting of the Party active in charge with propaganda and indoctrination, held on 9 July 1971. In short, the "Theses of July 1971" represented a radical attack against the cosmopolitan and "decadent," pro-Western attitudes in Romanian culture, and signaled a return to cultural autochthonism. See CEAUȘESCU, Nicolae: *Propuneri de măsuri pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid, a tuturor oamenilor muncii – 6 iulie 1971* (Proposals of measures aimed at enhancing the political-ideological activity, of Marxist-Leninist education of the

## Concluding Remarks

The present paper has examined three major aspects related to the reaction of the communist leadership in Bucharest to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. First, it has argued that in order to provide a well grounded explanation of communist Romania's official condemnation of the August 1968 WTO intervention in Czechoslovakia one should examine the developments in Romanian communism over a longer period of time, that is, 1956-1968. As shown above, Ceauşescu's speech of 21 August 1968, which was perceived as a bold gesture of disobedience to the Soviet Union, was consistent with the political line adopted by the Romanian communist elite in the post-1956 period and its efforts to emancipate their Party from Moscow.

Second, this paper has examined the legitimacy issue and demonstrated that the political actions taken by the Romanian communists during the period 1964-1968 resulted in positive actions expressing consent from the part of large segments of the Romanian society. Ceauşescu's rejection of the Brezhnev Doctrine was perceived domestically as a commitment to reform communism and thus a numerous Romanian citizens came to believe that Ceauşescu's discourse of 21 August 1968 only marked the beginning of a period of reforms and even more openness towards the West. On a background of timid ideological relaxation and slight economic improvement, Ceauşescu's display of national pride and complete independence created a special state of mind among the Romanian population and brought him a broad popular support, which eventually gave legitimacy to the single-Party rule in Romania. Simply put, the Romanian Communist Party managed to achieve a "limited legitimation through consent"<sup>45</sup>.

Third, this paper has addressed the problem of identity politics under Romanian communism and demonstrated that the year 1968 marked the transition to a comprehensive nation-building project aiming at constructing an ethnically homogenous Romanian "socialist" nation. To a large extent, Ceauşescu's chauvinistic nationalism developed as a result of the unconditional obedience of the power elite to the supreme leader of the Romanian communists and the broad popular support he managed to secure for himself in the aftermath of his August 1968 "charismatic moment."

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Party members and the entire working people – 6 iulie 1971) and *Expunere la Consfătuirea de lucru a activului de partid din domeniul ideologiei și al activității politice și cultural-educative – 9 iulie 1971* (Exposé at the Meeting of the Party aktiv in the field of ideology and the political and cultural-educational activity – 9 July 1971) (Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1971).

<sup>45</sup> As defined by BEETHAM: p. 117.