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NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU PORTRAYED BY THE ITALIAN PRESS (1968-1974)*

Abstract

Il contributo si concentra sui modi in cui Nicolae Ceaușescu e la Romania comunista furono presentati al pubblico italiano dalla stampa nazionale, sia di partito che d'opinione, tra il 1968 e il 1974, periodo in cui il leader romeno godette indubbiamente di un ampio apprezzamento nel mondo occidentale. In particolare, viene messo in luce come gli interessi di diversi gruppi di potere, sia politici che economici, influenzassero in quegli anni l'immagine e il giudizio che della Romania comunista erano offerti dalla stampa italiana. Alcuni giornali, tra i quali soprattutto «l'Unità» e «La Stampa», espressioni di mondi e interessi contrapposti, si distinsero allora nell'opera di manipolazione della verità a proposito di Nicolae Ceaușescu e del suo regime in Romania, omettendo o sfumando le informazioni sui caratteri autoritari del sistema o esaltandone in maniera strumentale i meriti e le "aperture".

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The ways in which Nicolae Ceaușescu and communist Romania have been portrayed in Italian public discourse are various and complex.

They do not follow any kind of ideological coherence, but only political and economical opportunism.

The biggest mistake would be to imagine Nicolae Ceaușescu being praised and appreciated in communist and left wing newspapers and, at the same time, denigrated and criticised in conservative ones.

The main aim of this paper is to demonstrate how ideological distinctions did not always count in the report of Romanian facts and how, behind the articles that

* This paper has been presented at the Session of Scientific Communications held at the Faculty of History of the University of Alba Iulia (Romania) on 16th November 2014. The research is still in progress; the ways in which Nicolae Ceaușescu has been seen by the Italian press represents just the beginning of a wider study, focusing on the economic ties between the Romanian communist regime and Italian businessmen (including Licio Gelli and the P2).

Italians used to read in the 60's and in the 70's, there were deep and complex dynamics, which could be political as well as economical.

1. The left wing press

1.1 «l'Unità»

I am going to start my analysis from the official newspaper of the Italian Communist Party (PCI, Partito Comunista Italiano), «l'Unità» .¹ It is the typical example of a party's official newspaper; its duty was not reporting information and news, but endorsing the political visions and projects of PCI, even if that would have meant falsifying the reality.² Therefore, we cannot read any articles without knowing what kind of relationship intervened between the PCI and the Romanian Communist Party (PCR, *Partidul comunist român*).

The relationship between the two parties changed during the twenty four years of Ceaușescu's regime, depending on the international and political framework: we distinguish a first phase (corresponding to the 60's and to the first half of the 70's) of cordial relationship on both sides, and a second phase (corresponding to the second half of the 70's and to the 80's) of colder connections. Eventually, when Mikail Gorbačëv gained power in the Soviet Union, the PCI started following the *perestrojka*, making any kind of proximity with the Stalinist regime of Ceaușescu impossible.

The cordial relationship of the first phase was born from mutual advantages: for Italian communists, Ceaușescu was a very valuable ally in the fight for the independence of the European communist parties from Moscow. In fact, this issue was an absolute priority for Ceaușescu.

However, it was clearly an ambiguous relationship: the PCI's leaders (especially after Enrico Berlinguer became party's general secretary in 1972) did not have sympathy towards Ceaușescu, because of how he used to act in internal policy. They knew that the liberalism declared by Ceaușescu was only window-dressing and not correspondent to a real democratic policy in his country.

Antonio Rubbi, who was responsible for the PCI's foreign policy between 1976 and 1991, has clarified the features of this relationship:

Our relationship with the Romanian Communist Party was deliberately contradictory. The Romanians really cared about their independence from Moscow, and so did we.

¹ «L'Unità» was founded on February 12th 1924 by Antonio Gramsci, one of the most important communist intellectuals and political leaders. The Italian Communist Party owned the newspaper until 1991.

² See O. Bergamini, *Democrazia della stampa*, Laterza, Bari 2006, p. 317.

Therefore, we saw tactical elements in the relationship with them. However, we were aware of the terrible internal conditions of the Ceaușescu regime; many of our leaders were uncomfortable during the meeting with Ceaușescu. For this reason, the PCI never exalted the regime, as the Italian socialist party or the Italian republican party did, but we instrumentally used it for its positions in foreign policy.³

1.1.2 The Prague Spring

What happened during the Prague Spring in 1968 is a perfect paradigm of Rubbi's words. The PCI was extremely auspicious about the reforms that Alexander Dubček was trying to carry out in Czechoslovakia, and the appreciation is clear even in «l'Unità».⁴

In an article of March 26th, written by Giuseppe Boffa, the historical reporter of «l'Unità» from Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, we read:

The development of a deeply democratic life within the socialist system is a process that goes in a direction we strongly believe in. [...] We believe in an advance towards socialism which is accompanied by an extension of democracy. This is our program.⁵

On August 21st 1968 the Soviets, together with their allies (with the exception of Romania and East Germany) invaded Prague, to stop Dubček's reforms.

Nicolae Ceaușescu, who was strongly opposed to what was happening in Prague, showed his dissent in the famous speech he gave from the balcony of the party's Central Committee in *Piața Palatului*, in Bucharest.⁶

It is not by chance that on «l'Unità»'s third page of August 22nd 1968, great emphasis was given to Ceaușescu's speech, whose most critical parts to the soviet actions were entirely and precisely reported. Together with Ceaușescu's speech, a huge space was given to the words of the Yugoslavian leader Tito, another historical opponent of the Soviet policy.⁷

³ Quoted in D. Pommier Vincelli, *Le relazioni tra PCI e PCR all'inizio degli anni Settanta (1972-1974)*, in G. Altarozzi - G. Mândrescu, *Comunismo e comunismi, il modello rumeno*, Accent, Cluj Napoca 2005, p. 209.

⁴ About the PCI and its attitude towards the Prague's Spring see S. Fedele, *La crisi cecoslovacca e la sinistra italiana*, in S.Fedele-P.Fornaro, *Dalle crisi dell'impero sovietico alla dissoluzione del socialismo reale*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2000, pp. 187-200.

⁵ G. Boffa, *Cecoslovacchia ed Europa*, «l'Unità», 26th March 1968.

⁶ About Ceaușescu's attitude in the days of the Prague's Spring see G. Altarozzi, *Partidul comunist român și primăvara de la Praga*, in G. Mândrescu - G. Altarozzi, *Imagine reflectată. Momente de istorie comparată*, Accent, Cluj Napoca 2010, pp. 212-241.

⁷ S. Mugnai, *Ceaușescu: piena solidarietà al popolo cecoslovacco*, «l'Unità», August 22nd 1968.

Obviously, the aim was to outline that the PCI was not alone in opposition to Soviet policy.

In the following days, «l'Unità» continued to report the condemning words of the PCR's secretary: on August 28th 1968, in an article written by the correspondent Sergio Mugnai, entitled *Ceaușescu exalts the Socialist society, source of freedom*, were reported several speeches by Nicolae Ceaușescu, which emphasized democracy as part of his political project. A common reader of those days received a portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu which did not correspond to the truth. In fact, even though both parties condemned the entrance of Soviet tanks into Prague, the reasons for this condemnation were different: for the Italians, the real problem was the denial of a democratic and liberal way to socialism; for Ceaușescu the most serious issue was the violation of national sovereignty.⁸

He was not willing to experience a similar reform process in Romania, but on «l'Unità» this aspect is not pointed out.

Silvano Goruppi' ambiguous point of view

In 1970 Aldo Tortorella replaced Giancarlo Pajetta as director of «l'Unità». This replacement can be explained by the gradual retirement of the current secretary, Luigi Longo, and the rise of Enrico Berlinguer. In fact, Tortorella was personally and ideologically very close to Berlinguer.⁹ The new leader will definitively place the party on democratic positions, confirming the distance not just from Moscow, but from every anti-democratic leader. We have to remember this aspect analysing the controversial figure of Silvano Goruppi.

He was «l'Unità»'s correspondent from Bucharest during the 70's, but he wasn't just a simple journalist: in fact, he had the task of drawing up secret reports on the real conditions of Romania to send exclusively to the leaders of the PCI.

However, the critical vision we find in the secret reports is completely absent in the articles published in «l'Unità», in which there is only a tiny chronicle of the Romanian facts.

For the PCI's leaders, it was useful to be updated about Ceaușescu's policies, but letting the readers know about them was completely beyond dispute.

Making clear the total lack of democracy and freedom of speech, the bad economic conditions, and the absolute power of the Ceaușescu family, would have

⁸ See S. Santoro, *Comunisti italiani e romania socialista: un rapporto controverso*, <http://storiaefuturo.eu/comunisti-italiani-romania-socialista-rapporto-controverso/>, accessed February 22nd 2015.

⁹ See P. Murialdi, *La stampa italiana dalla liberazione alla crisi di fine secolo*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2003, p.185.

been too dangerous for the PCI, in a period in which the anti-communist and anti-soviet propaganda in Italy was still strong.

By reading the secret reports of the early 70's, we know that Goruppi was deeply concerned about the internal conditions of Romania, characterized by tension and uncertainty. What really worried him, first of all, was the removal of Ion Gheorghe Maurer as Prime Minister, because of his economic strategy, which was completely different from Ceaușescu's, and secondly, the growing importance of Elena Ceaușescu, clearly described as a "fanatical woman", too present in the political life of the country.

In particular, Maurer's removal really worried the PCI's leaders, who considered the former prime minister much more reliable than Ceaușescu.

Furthermore, Goruppi strongly criticized Ceaușescu's economic choices; in particular, in one of these secret reports, he talked about the law that obliged citizens to buy the state-owned house where they lived.

According to Goruppi, there was a concrete risk that the forced purchase increased the cost of living for Romanian workers.¹⁰

Obviously, none of these issues is mentioned on «l'Unità», in which a completely different portrait of communist Romania comes out.

As far as Maurer's removal was concerned, Goruppi wrote in «l'Unità» of March 27th 1974:

The Central Committee accepted the resignation of Ion Gheorghe Maurer; resignation due to his age. Ion Gheorghe Maurer leaves the guide of the Romanian government after thirteen years in charge. He is one of the most important man in Romania, his biography is an integral part of the country's history.¹¹

There is no mention of the different plans that Ceaușescu and Maurer had for economical policy; no mention of the pressure Maurer received to abandon his charge. The only reason for this resignation, according to what is written in the article, is the advanced age of Maurer.

When Goruppi wrote about the Romanian economy, the style of the articles didn't change; just a list of the achievements that, according to Ceaușescu, Romania achieved since he took power:

¹⁰ Goruppi's secret reports are deeply analysed in Pommier Vincelli's study, *Le relazioni tra PCI e PCR, op.cit.*

¹¹ S. Goruppi, *Importanti mutamenti nelle alte cariche romene*, «l'Unità», March 27th 1974.

Ceaușescu mentioned the positive achievements obtained in these years. [...] A modern industrial system has been created in Romania. The average salary has increased by 23% compared to 1970. Pensions have increased by 20% [...].¹²

On the contrary, in the secret reports for the leaders, Goruppi continued to criticize Ceaușescu; this criticism was so strong that the journalist advised the PCI's secretary Enrico Berlinguer not to visit Romania: a visit to Romania, in fact, could have given the impression of too much closeness between the two parties and, above all, between the two leaders.

In 1974, Ceaușescu was very annoyed because Enrico Berlinguer and Aldo Tortorella had not accepted his invitation to visit Romania yet.

The PCR's leaders understood the ambiguity of Goruppi's presence in Romania; Cornel Burtică and Ștefan Andrei ordered all the «l'Unità»'s articles on Romania to be examined, and all Goruppi's correspondence to be controlled.¹³

The PCI tried to settle down the situation by sending to Romania Giorgio Napolitano, one of the most influential member of PCI, with a prestige internationally recognized.

Napolitano wasn't welcomed very warmly by Ceaușescu who was still disappointed by Berlinguer's absence; the Romanian leader, in fact, wanted to set up a meeting on European security, and he had hoped to receive Berlinguer's support. We know that the meeting didn't produce meaningful outcomes.

Once he went back to Italy, Napolitano expressed his disappointment to his party colleagues; it was clear that PCI's values, and political strategy as well, were totally different from those of Ceaușescu.¹⁴

Even though the meeting had been politically almost useless, Goruppi wrote with enthusiasm about it on «l'Unità»:

The wish has been granted to work together for the reinforcement of the friendship, cooperation and solidarity between the PCI and the PCR, for the benefit of the Romanian and Italian people, of the communist's movement unity and of anti-imperialist forces.¹⁵

L'«Avanti!»

Because of this situation, started since Berlinguer became PCI's secretary in 1972, it's not surprising that Nicolae Ceaușescu's visit to Italy in May 1973 wasn't

¹² S. Goruppi, *I successi e le prospettive della Romania socialista nel rapporto di Ceaușescu*, «l'Unità», November 26th 1974.

¹³ S. Santoro, *op.cit*

¹⁴ D.P. Vincelli, *op.cit*.

¹⁵ S. Goruppi, *Delegazione del PCI si incontra a Bucarest con Ceaușescu*, «l'Unità», July 9th 1974.

welcomed very warmly by «l'Unità»; the communist newspaper just reports Ceaușescu's several meetings (including the one with Berlinguer), avoiding any kind of comment on the Romanian leader and his policy.

On the contrary, l'«Avanti!», the official newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI, Partito Socialista Italiano), presents a different attitude towards Ceaușescu, especially during his visit to Italy.

To understand why, we need to know the positions and the features of this party. After the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 it definitively broke the alliance with the PCI and the unity of the leftist side; the socialists did not approve at all the Soviet's intervention in Budapest, while most of the communists, due to communist unity, sided with the Soviet Union. During the 60's the PSI followed an autonomous policy from the PCI, trying to set up a government alliance with the centre party *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) and moving definitively away from the Soviet model and Soviet policy.

When Ceaușescu strongly condemned the facts which had occurred in Prague in 1968 and declared the total independence of Romania from Moscow, for the socialists he became a model of a free and independent leader, and Romania started to represent the image of a country where it was possible to create a socialist structure independently from the Soviets.

We need to outline that the socialists did not have in Eastern Europe the same kind of informers the communists had: a socialist version of Silvano Goruppi did not exist. Therefore, the socialist journalists didn't analysed deeply the Romanian framework, stopping at the surface of the Ceaușescu's regime.

In May 1973, when Nicolae Ceaușescu visited Italy, the «Avanti!» was enthusiastic about the possibility of a stronger relationship between Italy and Romania. On May 20th 1973 we find an article (whose author is not reported), whose title is already emblematic: *Ceaușescu's visit: an opportunity for Italy*. Reading the article, the appreciation of the socialist towards Ceaușescu's clearly emerges:

The Bucharest government, with a coherence and a tenacity which has excited respect and admiration all around the world, fights to create an atmosphere of confidence, cooperation and comprehension among the states and the people of Europe.¹⁶

In the following days the «Avanti!» criticized the Italian government, because of his cold response to Ceaușescu's requests for a stronger collaboration between the two countries. On May 22nd we read:

Our government wants to pursue just an economic co-operation, the Romanian one instead wishes for a more effective cooperation on international policy [...] We think that

¹⁶ *La visita di Ceaușescu: un'opportunità per l'Italia*, «Avanti!», May 20th 1973.

the attitude of the Italian government has been too cautious, maybe disappointing the Romanian's expectations.¹⁷

Actually, it was the Italian Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti, who tried to discuss about international issues, especially the possibility of a more profitable dialogue between the West and China; considering the good relationships of Ceaușescu with Beijing, he hoped to receive his support.

However, Ceaușescu didn't want to focus his attention on this issue; the real goal of his visit was to strengthen the economic connections between Romania and Italy. Eventually, the meeting between the two leaders, didn't produce meaningful outcomes.¹⁸

Conclusions

It would be useless to analyze here the articles of the left wing press during the second half of the 70's and during the 80's.

Nicolae Ceaușescu's absurd policy, especially in the economic field, the clear lack of freedom and the terrible living conditions of the Romanians made impossible for everyone to appreciate the Romanian leader. In the Italian left wing press (as well as in the right wing one) the Romania of the 80's is reported in detail; Italian readers are informed about the construction of the *Casa poporului* (the huge building that Ceaușescu ordered to build in the centre of Bucharest, destroying all the houses nearby and making thousands of Romanians homeless), the plan to eliminate foreign debt and the Brașov uprising of November 1987.¹⁹

The distance between the PCI and Ceaușescu was initially due to Enrico Berlinguer's democratic idea of socialism; this idea made any kind of proximity between him and Ceaușescu impossible. However, the definitive breakdown was due to the international changes.

Obviously, the *perestrojka* started by Gorbačëv isolated Ceaușescu; for Italian communists, there wasn't the need to hide real life in a communist country anymore, while the socialists no longer needed to find "a liberal communist" in the eastern bloc to talk to.

¹⁷ *Più stretti rapporti tra Italia e Romania*, «Avanti!», May 22nd 1973.

¹⁸ See A. Basciani, *Tra aperture e neostalinismo. Italia e Romania negli anni sessanta e settanta*, http://www.academia.edu/8717979/Tra_aperture_e_neostalinismo._Italia_e_Romania_negli_anni_Sessantaseptanta, accessed March 3rd, 2015

¹⁹ A great emphasis was given in the Italian press to the Brașov uprising of 1987. For the first time the violent side of the Ceaușescu's regime emerged in Italy.

2. The right wing press

In this part I'm going to focus my attention especially on «La Stampa», a prestigious Turin right wing newspaper, because it portrays Ceaușescu in the most particular light, especially because of economical reasons.

2.1 «La Stampa»

Before examining some interesting articles published in «La Stampa», we have to remember that several Italian businessmen had a certain sympathy towards Nicolae Ceaușescu. He was, without any doubt, the most appreciated leader of the Eastern Bloc. Probably it is not by chance that for the longest time the only biography of Nicolae Ceaușescu in Italy was the one written by Giancarlo Elia Valori, a man who was distanced from any communist association.

Valori was surely a controversial figure: a mason (he was indeed part of the list of the Propaganda 2, the Masonic society that wanted to take control of the Italian media and country's institutions in the years 1970-1980), but at the same time he was close to the Vatican, he was nominated CEO of the Italian Motorway Society and, in addition, he was very close to the State of Israel.²⁰

In 1974 Valori published an extremely praising biography of Nicolae Ceaușescu, which was the only resource (though a bit unreliable) available in Italy for many years about the life of the Romanian leader.

Just a short text will help us to understand what type of publication it was:

Romania, for those who look at it from the outside, offers today a positive view as a nation that has courageously established itself with a new set of rules, which placed man in the centre together with his material and spiritual evolution. Workers, farmers, Romanian intellectuals, including obviously the Germans and the Magyars, are the true creators of the current progress regarding economic, scientific and cultural fields. And what inspires much admiration is that they all worked together to build the socialist society developed in all sectors.²¹

It's very probable that Valori was one of the principal mediators in the most important businesses between Italy and Romania. A few days after Ceaușescu's death, the deputy Francesco Rutelli denounced the mediation of controversial men, such as Licio Gelli, the leader of the Propaganda 2 Masonic society (of which Valori was member), in the economic relationship between Italy and Romania in a speech that he gave at the Chamber of Deputies.

²⁰ See F. Guida, *Il fenomeno ceaușista, ideologia e politica*, in S.Fedele-P.Fornaro, *Dalle crisi dell'impero sovietico alla dissoluzione del socialismo reale*, Rubbettino Soveria Mannelli 2000, pp. 123,130.

²¹ G.E. Valori, *Ceaușescu*, Bulzoni, Roma 1974, p.83.

In addition, the parliamentary inquiry carried out during the 80's into Propaganda 2 says clearly that Licio Gelli had strong ties with Romania.²²

Unfortunately it is not clear to this day how deep the relationships between Ceaușescu and a particular (and not completely legal) Italian business world were. The only certain fact is the growing economic cooperation between Italy and Romania during the 70's.

Indeed, the Italian investors were very interested in the Ceaușescu's attempt of modernizing and industrializing the country; in 1961 the president of Eni (the main Italian energy company) Enrico Mattei went on a business trip to Romania to start a new collaboration; in 1965 Bernardo Mattarella, minister of Foreign Trade, was in Romania to sign new economic agreements with the Romanian authorities.²³ These agreements favoured the presence of several Italian enterprises in Romania, especially during the 70's, such as *Montedison* (chemistry and energy sector), *Farmitalia* (pharmaceutical sector), *Ansaldo* (iron and steel industry) and, above all, *Fiat*, the most important Italian company, that invested in the tractor factory of Brașov.

The *Fiat's* President, Gianni Agnelli, went on a business trip to Romania in 1973, and had a meeting with Ceaușescu: the aim was to create a big joint venture between *Fiat* and Romanian national car industry, but eventually the project failed and *Fiat* committed just to isolated investments, as it did in Brașov.²⁴

The Agnelli family, the owners of Fiat, owns even one of the most important Italian newspapers, «La Stampa», in which, for a long period, Ceaușescu was always praised and seen as a reliable interlocutor.

Giovanni Agnelli has always been a quite liberal publisher; rarely he called the director to give him orders. He used to choose the director, who was aware of what he could and could not write. Therefore, politically, «La Stampa» could be often placed on anti-government position, but on certain issues, the newspaper's sovereignty remained limited. For instance, it used to hide the brand of cars involved in car crashes, when the brand was Fiat.²⁵

²² Commissione Parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla loggia massonica P2, IX Legislatura - Legge 23 settembre 1981, n. 527. Relazione di maggioranza dell'onorevole Tina Anselmi, <http://www.archivio900.it/it/documenti/finestre-900.aspx?c=1163&p=3>, accessed 9th November 2015

²³ F. Guida, *Le relazioni politiche tra Romania e Italia in età contemporanea* <http://scienze politiche.uniroma3.it/fguida/files/2009/11/Bucarest20091.doc.>, accessed March 1st, 2015

²⁴ A. Basciani, *op.cit.*

²⁵ See O. Bergamini, *op.cit.*

Considering the economic ties between Fiat and Romania, and the Agnelli's will to invest in Romania, it seems clear why Ceaușescu was often praised and rarely criticized on «La Stampa».

Starting my analysis from the year 1968, it's interesting, in my opinion, to analyze the articles of the correspondent Massimo Conti who recognizes the limits of the Romanian economy, though he seemed to sympathize with the *Conducător* and his experiment of innovation.

In an article dated 13th February 1968 and entitled *Nationalism and omnipotence of the party. Characteristics of the regime in Romania*, he describes a really positive picture of the Romanian leader. Here are some salient features:

People consider Ceaușescu as the personification of the regime and even among those who are not keen on politics, his personal prestige is growing. He is also known as incorruptible man, who is demanding not only with himself, but also towards others. Even in his private life – unlike his predecessor Gheorghiu Dej – there is no room for rumors. His wife, a doctor, continues to work in a scientific institute in Bucharest; and his relatives have no relevant positions at work. However, Ceaușescu was able to surround himself with trusted friends. Former guards from the communist party were replaced by men of his generation who were trained in the postwar period. And by sheer willpower his party was also able to gain new followers. [...] There is no doubt about the success of this national politics, after courageously showing its capacity to maintain its independence to China and Russia.²⁶

In this article we can already feel some sort of appreciation to the personality of Ceaușescu; in fact it highlights his righteous life, his ambition and political reform - characteristics that his predecessor Gheorghiu Dej didn't have.

Elena Ceaușescu is described as a doctor who works in a scientific laboratory. We know very well how the wife of the *Conducător* had no academic titles, and how she used to brag about titles and qualifications that she actually did not possess. But the Italian press ignores this aspect, as we later observe, and continues to praise the Romanian first lady for her important scientific activity, until 1989.

Conti continues to praise Nicolae Ceausescu's political reform in an article published on May 3rd 1968, entitled *The period of terror is over also for citizens of Romania*. In this article he also starts to show some faith in the possibility of an economic recovery.

Conti writes:

A new television program is being broadcasted – *Reflector* – which deals with the insufficiency of the economy: writers and intellectuals who had been controlled before (by

²⁶ M. Conti, *Nazionalismo e onnipotenza del partito caratteristiche del regime in Romania*, «La Stampa», February 13th 1968.

the regime), now began to start expressing their thoughts. [...] The period of socialist accumulation is almost over and at the same time the economy is becoming less controlled by the state. The reform that has been started in these months gives peripheral organs more power to decide rather than central ones, and gives industries more autonomy. [...] This reform is very cautious, compared to the ones launched in other socialist countries, such as in Czechoslovakia and Hungary; however, it tries to adjust Stalinist structures to the new needs. The goal is to prevent general malaise, which in other countries comes as a result of a 'crisis of maturity' and eventually, for the future, to try to defend the planning, that has been judged inflexible to resist the changing impulses of the economy.²⁷

As I said, here we can also notice a certain confidence in Romanian capacities in raising its economy. It is the kind of faith that reflected the actual tendencies: in Italy people believed that Ceaușescu could really be the right man who would change everything in the whole Eastern Bloc. But we can also notice a hope; in facts, the development of Romanian economy could have been extremely advantageous for Italian investors.

If we continue with the close examination of some opinions, an article immediately stands out, that one written by Gianfranco Piazzesi on July 8th 1969, entitled *The gaullist of the Balkans*. Even Piazzesi doesn't hesitate to praise and compliment the *Conducător*:

Ceaușescu had already established two records that could hardly be surpassed. He was the only leader of a communist country that could oppose the soviets, strongly expressing his opposition without receiving any excommunication, as had happened to Tito and Mao; and moreover he was not threatened with tanks, sent over to his country, as had happened to Imre Nagy and Dubček. Ceaușescu, who was on good terms with Russia (at least on a formal level), was able to maintain friendly relations also with China. Not satisfied with these two achievements, the leader of Romania wanted to establish a third record: he was the first one to convince a US President to visit a communist country. And something lets us believe that this diplomatic risk will have a happy ending.²⁸

It is clear how, among the articles of «La Stampa» about Romania, a remarkable appreciation towards Ceausescu's politics prevails. If we make a comparison with «l'Unità», it is more surprising how it reports Ceaușescu and his actions in a more discreet and detached way, as opposed to the newspaper of Turin.

Another explanation of what it has been said until now could probably be found in the desire of the Italian conservative press to see a different communist, capable of demolishing the entire Eastern Bloc and resisting Moscow. In other words, an ally in enemy territory.

²⁷ M. Conti, *Anche per i cittadini romeni finisce l'epoca del terrore*, «La Stampa», May 3rd 1968.

²⁸ G. Piazzesi, *Il gollista dei Balcani*, «La Stampa», July 8th 1969.

2.2 Ceaușescu's State visit to Italy (May 1973)

The extreme peak of this flattering attitude is perfectly caught during the Nicolae Ceaușescu's official visit to Italy in 1973.

However, before analyzing these articles, we have to remember some important change in the Italian press occurred at the beginning of the 70s.

In March 1972 the «Corriere della Sera», the most important and prestigious Italian newspaper, changed its director: Giovanni Spadolini was replaced by Piero Ottone, who changed the political position of the newspaper, getting closer to leftist position and abandoning the traditional hostility towards the Italian Communist Party. This important change influenced even other traditionally conservative newspapers, such as «Il Messaggero» and «La Stampa».²⁹

In May 1973, just few days before the Ceaușescu's visit, even the Turin's newspaper changed its director: Arrigo Levi, considered close to Ottone's position, replaced Alberto Ronchey.

This attitude of the Italian press, closer to leftist positions, could be interpreted as another reason of the warm welcome that Ceaușescu received once he arrived in Italy.

On May 20th 1973, the day before the arrival of the Romanian leader in Italy, an article by Michele Tito entitled *The Ceausescu's adventure* was published in «La Stampa». To convey the idea of how Ceausescu was welcomed by Italian conservatives on his arrival, we need to quote several paragraphs from the article, stated here below:

Nicolae Ceaușescu, who will be President Leone's guest for four days, has an exceptional personality, he is the protagonist of an unprecedented political adventure. The beginning of his leadership in Romania occurs at the time of the proclamation of independence from the Soviet Union. Some weak and undefined attempts were previously made by the former Romanian communist party in order to gain freedom from the law imposed by Moscow to its satellite countries, but they resulted in hard defeat and the assassination of famous victims [...].

Romanians have learned to live under Ceaușescu, and Ceaușescu has earned what a leader has never obtained from his people: he doesn't need to explain himself, to be understood, or to make people understand what he is trying to do. Ceaușescu is the man who taught a country, surrounded by the USSR and by its satellite countries, that sometimes hesitation could be a mistake. In August 1968, when Czechoslovakia was invaded, Ceaușescu went to the villages situated at the

²⁹ See P. Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano*, il Mulino, Bologna 2006, p. 244.

borders of the country and told farmers that he had already informed Moscow that Romania would resist in case of invasion. [...]

When Nixon, defeated by Kennedy, was still a politician with no powers and no hopes, Ceaușescu magnificently welcomed him in Bucharest and earned his protection once Nixon was elected President of the USA. He gambled and won and took the maximum advantage from his victory: he started a foreign policy of long trips and great ambitions; he travelled the world, from Washington to Beijing, from Paris to the African capitals.³⁰

With today's mentality and not knowing the situation of the time, reading such a highly celebrative article about a communist leader in a newspaper such as «La Stampa» may seem bizarre.

But the focus of this newspaper, during the state visit of the Romanian leader, doesn't stop with Michele Tito's piece. Among the articles recording Ceaușescu's several visits, the one worth mentioning and reading, in some detail, is the article about the visit of the *Conducător* to the *Fiat's* factories in Mirafiori and *Olivetti's* in Ivrea.³¹ Unfortunately the author of this article is not mentioned; for this reason we have to believe that it reflects the directions of the newspaper. We read in it, among other things:

The meeting with President Giovanni Agnelli has been very friendly and the workers warmly welcomed him. This mild-mannered man of 55, indeed hides great courage and determination, qualities that have been proved in some dramatic moments, of his people's history. Romania owes the industrial development which started a few years ago to this man. [...] At 10.50 Ceaușescu arrived at the Fiat Mirafiori building. He was welcomed by President Agnelli. [...] Agnelli has extended a welcoming address to his guest. He first defined the rate of economic growth of Romania as 'enviable', due to a 'far-sighted policy of industrialization', and then he praised the contribution given by Romania to the 'search for a constructive dialogue between East and West'. Then the head of the Romanian State has visited the plant. He passed through the main sectors of the factory building, riding in an open-roof car with President Agnelli. Workers lined both sides of their route as the procession passed and applauded him. Ceaușescu smiled and greeted them and shook hands with many of them.³²

In other newspapers of the same political tendencies («Corriere della Sera», «Il Messaggero», etc.) we don't find such a panegyric of Ceaușescu and Romanian economic situation. In Agnelli's words that I quoted above, we can read the desire to extend the economic cooperation with the Eastern Bloc and especially with

³⁰ M. Tito, *L'avventura di Ceaușescu*, «La Stampa», 20th May 1973.

³¹ Olivetti, in the 70's, was one of the most important industries of typewriters in the world. The head office was in Ivrea, in the province of Turin.

³² *Alla Fiat calde accoglienze per Ceaușescu alfiere di "pacifica convivenza" tra i popoli*, «La Stampa», May 25th 1973.

Romania. Therefore, the suspicion that there is just an economic strategy underlying this portrait of Ceaușescu on «La Stampa» becomes stronger.

The days of the official visit occurred at the time of maximum consideration by Italian institutions to Ceaușescu and his wife Elena. In fact, the President of the Italian Republic, Giovanni Leone, awarded Ceaușescu's wife with the highest-ranking honor, the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic for her high scientific merits in the polymer chemistry sector.

During those years, even two presidents of the prestigious *Accademia dei Lincei* (the most important cultural institution in Italy), Antonio Carrelli and Giuseppe Montalenti, wrote two enthusiastic introductions to Elena Ceaușescu's books, portraying her as the one who mostly contributed to the development of the Romanian scientific world.

Questioned about this, Montalenti revealed the pressure he received from the Romanian Embassy to publish that eulogistic introduction.

No one in Italy had been ever concerned with verifying the real scientific merits of Mrs. Ceausescu, who could only boast a primary high school diploma.³³

The last aspect to analyze about Ceaușescu's visit to Italy is the meeting he had with Pope Paul VI: obviously, the main issue was the forced absorption of the Romanian Church United with Rome into the Orthodox church, and the treatment of Romanian catholics.

The meeting (just twenty-five minutes) was not decisive: we know that Pope Paul VI gave Ceaușescu a dossier about the issue, but Ceaușescu coldly answered that "the problem is totally solved"³⁴. The Vatican official newspaper, «L'Osservatore Romano», talking about the Ceaușescu's visit, does not mention the issue of the Romanian catholics, but it just emphasizes the atmosphere of cordiality between the Pope and Ceaușescu, nominated as an "eminent visitor" by the newspaper.³⁵

Neither the official press of the Church wants to mention all the controversial aspects that characterized Ceaușescu's regime.

³³ The several tributes paid to Elena Ceaușescu between 1965 and 1989 were denounced in an article of G.M. Pace published on *La Repubblica* of March 17th 1990, entitled *Elena Ceaușescu Accademica d'Italia*.

³⁴ A. Basciani, *op.cit.*.

³⁵ *Visita al Santo Padre di S.E. Nicolae Ceaușescu Presidente del Consiglio di Stato*, «L'Osservatore Romano», May 27th 1973.

2.3 Conclusions

As the years passed by, with the exacerbation of internal Stalinism and after the collapse of the Romanian economy, articles like the ones quoted before are ever rarer, leaving room for strong criticism, especially in the 1980s.

The conditions of Romania are no longer profitable neither for Italian investors; the press stigmatizes the lack of raw materials and outlines the difficulties Italians have in their businesses.

Ceaușescu is no longer a reliable interlocutor for Italian investors, and he is no longer an ally for the critics of the Soviet Union; in fact, while he continued in his despotic government, in the Soviet Union Gorbačëv started his reforms, rendering his mediation between the East and the West useless.

Therefore, what happened in March 1988 was incredible: on March 1st 1988, in fact, an advertisement appeared on *Il Messaggero*, the most important newspaper in Rome, probably paid by the Romanian Embassy in Rome on behalf of the government of Bucharest, to celebrate the scientific and academic merits of Elena Ceaușescu. We may consider it absurd, having talked about the critical attitude the press had during the 80's. The title already shows the content of the article: *We pay homage to the Scholar Engineer Elena Ceausescu*. It's necessary to read some passages to realize what kind of homage was paid to her:

The results achieved by Romania since 1970 have inspired much admiration, especially if we consider that the economy of this country, in the postwar period, was mainly based on agriculture. Now it is a country with a solid and complete industrial economy. This great progress has been achieved thanks to Elena Ceausescu's vision and dedication; she is a well-known scientist on an international level. [...] Mrs. Elena Ceausescu is a visionary programmer and an outstanding scientist on an international level. Her important research, both in theory and technology in the National Institute for Chemical Research, helped to develop Polymer chemistry, which is an important part of the industrial sector in Romanian economy today. [...] The compilers of this short report had the chance to personally verify Romania's great progress, in the fields of science, technology and industry in the last decade. Today, scientific education in Romania is at the same level of the most developed countries in the world.³⁶

Such a commendation was signed by A. P. Zanelli, from the University of Bologna, and L. Biagini, from the *Accademia Tiberina* in Rome. It is accompanied by a picture of Elena Ceaușescu, probably when she was still twenty-five, and not the seventy-two year old woman she actually was in 1988. The choice to write such an article seems paradoxical and extremely questionable, and in opposition to all the news that came almost every day from Romania; obviously it raised indignant reactions among the people.

³⁶ *Omaggio all'Accademico Dr. Ingegnere Elena Ceausescu*, «Il Messaggero», March 1st 1988.

The rector of the University of Bologna immediately verified who was that A.P. Zanelli who had signed the homage, but he discovered that no A.P. Zanelli worked in that University.

It was not really unusual that the Romanian Embassy paid a huge amount of money to promote the regime in newspapers (we have already talked about the pressure that Giuseppe Montalenti received to write the introduction to Mrs. Ceaușescu's book), especially in the 1970s. But it is dramatic that this fact occurred in 1988, after the Brașov uprising, and after many articles that had reported the terrible economic and social conditions of Romania.