

# The London School of Economics and Political Science

## *A Maverick in the Making: Romania's de-Satellization Process and the Global Cold War (1953-1963)*

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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

This research project explores Romania's process of detachment from Moscow from 1953 to 1963 within the context of the global Cold War. Through a multi-archival investigation, the dissertation investigates the first full process of peaceful de-satellization within the Eastern bloc by considering the broader framework of the bipolar international climate. In so doing, it provides both a bottom-up, as well as a top-down analysis.

This project focuses, in particular, on the tenure of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1947-65), Romania's first Communist leader, as it was under his leadership that the country shifted from complete subservience to the Soviet Union to political and economic autonomy. In 1958, Romania negotiated a full troop withdrawal, remaining the only Warsaw Pact country without Soviet military presence until the fall of the Berlin Wall. And by 1963, it also dared to challenge Moscow's plans for economic specialization within COMECON, thereby asserting its sovereign right to pursue national interest over the greater socialist good, and thus stymying the Kremlin's initiative for an integrated bloc economy. This project provides an in-depth investigation into the reasons why Romania was able to boldly confront the Soviet Union without fear of retribution, by tracing the process through which Dej gradually removed Romania's political straightjacket, and exploring those elements within the international climate which allowed him to negotiate Romania's detachment.

*To Andrei Postelnicu, my eternal and most loyal ally*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>ROMANIA'S TROUBLED NEW COURSE (1953-1955)</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>30</b>
FROM ODD KID ON THE BLOC TO POSTER CHILD	31
VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE	42
SHOCK THERAPY ON DE-STALINIZATION	47
THE KREMLIN'S UNFAVORABLE DIAGNOSTICS	53
ECONOMIC FAILURE AS OPPORTUNITY FOR INDEPENDENCE	60
SHOCK THERAPY ON DE-STALINIZATION	47
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>1956: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>70</b>
FAILURES AND LESSONS LEARNED	71
THE EARTHQUAKE	80
THE YUGOSLAV CONNECTION	88
THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIAN POLICY	91
DOMESTIC AFFAIRS: FROM HIGH EMERGENCY TO DAMAGE CONTROL AND BEYOND	93
MILITARY INTERVENTION: MOSCOW'S MOST FAITHFUL ALLY	102
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>WALKING THE TIGHTROPE (1957-1958)</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>111</b>
THE ANATOMY OF SOCIAL DISCONTENT	112
THE TIGHT EMBRACE OF THE SOVIET BEAR	116
STRADDLING THE FENCE	125
THE WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS AND ADVISERS	148
THE TIGHT EMBRACE OF THE SOVIET BEAR	116
STRADDLING THE FENCE	125
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>FROM SURVIVAL TO SELF-ASSERTION (1959-1961)</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>159</b>
IN SEARCH OF A MODEL	162
NEW ECONOMIC PLAN: NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	168
NEUTRAL AS THE NEW BLACK	175
MOSCOW, ABOVE ALL	180

ROMANIA AND THE THIRD WORLD	189
INDIA: A CASE STUDY	198
CONCLUSION	216
<b>BREAKING RANKS (1962-1963)</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>218</b>
“THE DARING RUMANIAN GYPSY” DEFIES MOSCOW	219
THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS AND ITS WARSAW PACT IMPLICATIONS	239
“THE FLIRTATION WITH CHINA”	248
WESTERN PROMISES	253
CONCLUSION	263
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>266</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>276</b>

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AMAE	Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe
ANIC	Arhivele Nationale Istorice Centrale ale Romaniei
CC	Central Committee
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
COMINFORM	Communist Information Bureau
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CREST	CIA Records Search Tool
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
FO	Foreign Office
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Romania)
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRR	People's Republic of Romania
RWP	Romanian Workers' Party (before 1965)
SUTA	Soviet Union Telegraphic Agency
UK	United Kingdom
UKNA	United Kingdom National Archives
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WP	Warsaw Pact

## INTRODUCTION

On the morning of 8 August, 1963, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej – Romania’s iron-fisted Communist ruler for the over a decade and a half – must have surely woken up with the same heady mix of excitement and anxiety a child might experience on Christmas morning. That day he was due to greet Orville Freeman, the US Secretary for Agriculture, at the Otopeni Airport in Bucharest. Accompanied by his wife, an assorted group of experts and a few journalists, the American official descended upon Romania that day to the pomp and circumstance usually reserved for heads of state. Indeed, Freeman’s visit was no ordinary affair. The American politician was the highest-ranking Washington official to visit Romania since the end of World War II. And, as a member of John F. Kennedy’s increasingly open and conciliatory administration towards the Eastern European satellites, he was received as nothing less than the American president’s personal envoy. Dej was therefore extremely keen to make the right impression – not only because a rapprochement with the United States was generally desirable; but also because the future of Romania’s foreign policy depended to a large extent on the American willingness to offer political and economic support precisely at that point.

A few months prior, Romania had openly defied the Soviet Union by blocking Moscow’s efforts to integrate and specialize the Bloc economies within the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). Refusing to abandon its ambitious industrialization plans, instead of adopting the predominantly agricultural role of cereal and raw materials provider imposed by the Kremlin, Bucharest had thus asserted its sovereign right to pursue its national economic interest. And it had done so – much to the irritation of the Soviets - by very publicly invoking the principles of sovereignty and equality among states espoused in the 1960 Moscow Declaration, which the Kremlin had adopted in the hope of co-opting the satellites’ allegiance, and not of inspiring their independence. Bucharest’s almost literal interpretation of this document, however, provided for an ideologically legitimate argument not only against the specialization of the Romanian national economy, but indeed in favor of an alternative path to constructing socialism according to national interest.

Bucharest's bold and very public defiance had been a hard and unpalatable pill for Moscow to swallow. And, indeed, it perhaps would not have quietly done so, had Gheorghiu-Dej not played a very tactically efficient, yet potentially dangerous game: openly flirting with both China and the West - but politically committing to neither - in order to keep the Kremlin in check. By making conciliatory gestures towards Beijing in the context of a worsening Sino-Soviet dispute (and resultant Albanian dissidence from the Bloc), Romania therefore played on Moscow's sensitivity to intra-camp conflicts in order to seek political cover for its defiant gesture. And by convincing the Americans – through Freeman - that its COMECON policy was not a one-off move, but that it indeed reflected a long-term commitment to pursuing an independent path, Bucharest was able to secure the technological licensing and equipment vital to its industrial plans for economic development and autonomy. Throughout it all, Gheorghiu-Dej had also been very much counting on his relationship with the prominent nonaligned countries, which he had been avidly cultivating over the last half-decade by providing of economic aid and political goodwill. By 1963, these ties to the Third World had now become an added layer of insurance for Dej's bold moves against Moscow – surely the Kremlin would not risk tarnishing its image of champion of 'peaceful co-existence' by attacking a fellow socialist country.

The stakes had been high. Throughout the first half of 1963, tensions between Moscow and Bucharest had mounted to such unprecedented levels, Romania's chief economist became concerned about the country's ability quickly and successfully "navigate a pivot" if the Soviets placed an economic embargo on Romania.<sup>1</sup> Not coincidentally, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was studying the same scenario, along with other forms of pressure that the Kremlin could exert on its rebellious satellite in order to bring it into line. By the beginning of summer, 1963 political temperatures were indeed rising, and fast.

And yet Gheorghiu-Dej was able to steer Bucharest's course towards autonomy in these stormy and potentially perilous political waters with unshakable calm and confidence. By

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<sup>1</sup> Conclusions after the last visit to Bucharest of N.S. Khrushchev, 1963, VI, p. 184. In Dan Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965* (Bucharest: The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2011), 298.

the end of that pivotal year, Romania's path to autonomy had been firmly established without the firing of a single Soviet shot, or indeed without incurring any other punitive cost. This turn of events had become blatantly obvious - and perhaps just as surprising - especially to Western observers, who had been keeping a close eye as ever on the Eastern European satellite. In his annual review to London, J.D. Murray, the British Minister to Bucharest, was reporting to London a set of observations that would have a strong and long-term impact on the relationship between the two countries in the years to follow,

*...in 1963 Roumania deliberately took up a new and independent position of her own and... in [the] future she is determined to pursue her own more obviously Roumanian lines of policy within the general framework of Communist collaboration.<sup>2</sup>*

Indeed, Romania had come a remarkably long way since only a decade prior, when Murray's predecessor, D. MacDermot, reported his unequivocally grim conclusions on the Eastern European country before leaving the post he had held for two years,

*In the international sense, there is no such thing as Roumania. She is not merely a satellite, but a province of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.<sup>3</sup>*

The stark contrast between the two diplomats' reports begs the inevitable question: how was Romania able to undergo such drastic transformation over the course of only ten years? What was the process through which one of the poorest and most subservient of the Soviet satellites - whose political apparatus, government institutions, entire economy and defense system were, indeed, subservient to the Kremlin - able to become an autonomous regional player and increasingly more prominent international actor? What were the political mechanisms involved at the national, regional and international levels which allowed Gheorghiu-Dej, Romania's leader over the entire course of this transformation, to gradually but steadily plot a course out of Soviet orbit? What were the tools, tactics and discourses

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<sup>2</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1963). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British embassy, Bucharest, to R.A. Butler, Foreign Office, 13 January, 1963, p. 3. UKNA document FO 371/177614.

<sup>3</sup> Survey of events in Roumania during the past two years. Valedictory telegram from D. MacDermot, British legation in Bucharest to Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Office, 3 July, 1956. UKNA document FO 496/10, p. 18.

that he employed and what elements did he leverage in this process? Conversely, how did changes in the international political climate over the course of this decade, from 1953 to 1963, affect Dej's strategy to obtain more autonomy from the Soviet Union? What developments in the Cold War dynamic, both within the Socialist camp as well as between the two superpowers, allowed the Romanian leader to find opportunities for reaching his objective, or negatively impacted his efforts?

This doctoral dissertation is a detailed investigation of Romania's decade-long process of de-satellization – the first such evolution in the Eastern Bloc to have occurred not only peacefully, but also successfully.<sup>4</sup> It seeks to search answers to the questions above not only in the vast amounts of recently-declassified documents from the country's national archives, but also in the relevant diplomatic and intelligence documents available in the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US). Through this multi-archival approach, which juxtaposes sources from the former East with those in the West, this research project is the first English-language investigation of Romania's process of de-satellization and evolving role in the global Cold War.

The topic of Romania's rebellious tendencies as a satellite is by no means new. In fact, it piqued the interest of Western scholars almost as soon as Bucharest's first signs of dissidence in the early 1960s started to hint toward the establishment of a consistent and long-term Cold War policy. The contribution of these scholars has been valuable not only because they witnessed those events in real time, but also because they had access to primary sources in the West that most Romanian academics could only dream of before 1989. Their insightful observations on Romania's political and economic evolution during the Communist period have remained a valuable frame of reference precisely because of their extensive use of Western (mostly American and British) diplomatic and intelligence documents.<sup>5</sup> Among this body of pre-'89 literature, Sergiu Verona's detailed investigation

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<sup>4</sup> The case of Yugoslavia is generally considered to be exceptional, as the country never belonged to the Warsaw Pact, nor was it fully integrated into the Eastern Bloc.

<sup>5</sup> Ghită Ionescu, "Communist Rumania and Nonalignment (April 1964-March 1965)," *Slavic Review* 24, no. 2 (1965): 241–57, doi:10.2307/2492327; Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Romania, 1944-1962* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Joseph F. Harrington and Bruce J. Courtney, *Tweaking the Nose of the Russians: Fifty Years of American-Romanian*

of the Soviet troop withdrawal from Romania, its origins, implications and consequences stands out for the sheer amount of archival research he employed in US and UK archives, as well as the interviews he conducted with Western diplomats and decision-makers involved in the events of the time.<sup>6</sup>

The opening of the Romanian Communist archives in the late 1990s did not give a real impetus to the declassification of Central Committee documents until the early 2000s. That is when the real academic 'gold rush' began in Romania, though surprisingly few Western scholars have taken advantage of the plethora of newly-available archival materials (a trend that has been slowly reversing over the last years).<sup>7</sup> As a result, most of the contemporary scholarship on Romania's Communist past has been written by Romanians and mostly for the national audience. This was perhaps to be expected in a country with a long and very recent history of dictatorship which needs to be academically investigated, then socially understood and assimilated.

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*Relations, 1940-1990*, East European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985). Robert King, *A History of the Romanian Communist Party* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980). Robert R. King, "Rumania and the Sino-Soviet Conflict," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 373–93. J. M. Montias, "Background of the Origins of the Rumanian Dispute with Comecon," *Soviet Studies* 16, no. 2 (1964): 125–51. David Floyd, *Rumania: Russia's Dissident Ally* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965). Stephen Fischer-Galati, *The New Rumania: From People's Democracy to Socialist Republic*, Studies in International Communism (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1967); Stephen Fischer-Galati, *20th Century Rumania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Stephen Fischer-Galati, *Eastern Europe and the Cold War: Perceptions and Perspectives* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1994). Kenneth Jowitt, "The Romanian Communist Party and the World Socialist System: A Redefinition of Unity," *World Politics* 23, no. 1 (1970): 38–60; Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development. The Case of Romania: 1944-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Sergiu Verona, "The Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Romania in 1958: An Analysis of the Decision," Final Report to the National Council for Soviet and East European Research (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University, December 1989); Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy: Soviet Troops in Romania, 1944-1958* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> The most notable/prolific to date are Dennis Deletant, Tom Gallagher, Vladimir Tismaneanu and Larry Watts, among others.

In fact, in 2006 then-President Traian Basescu appointed a special Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, which was assigned to investigate all criminal, repressive and immoral aspects of the country's two communist regimes (i.e. Gheorghiu-Dej, 1947-1965; and Nicolae Ceausescu, 1965-1989). The commission, headed by Romanian-American political scientist and sociologist Vladimir Tismaneanu<sup>8</sup>, presented its incriminatory findings in a 660-page report to the Romanian Parliament in December of the same year.<sup>9</sup> Alongside this official investigation, a robust body of research focusing primarily on the national history of Communism – its socio-economic impact, evolving system of surveillance and repression, political evolution, oppression of minorities, etc. – has flourished over the last two decades in an effort to bring to light the details of previously hidden – yet significantly traumatic - aspects of Romania's communist regimes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tismaneanu is best known for his work on Stalinism and Marxist ideology in Eastern Europe, particularly in Romania, and their application and developments through national regimes, as well as their impact on civil society. See Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe*, First Edition edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 1988); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe* (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Comisia Prezidentiala pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din Romania, "Raport Final" (Bucharest: Administratia Prezidentiala, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> See, among others, Betea, Lavinia, *Partea Lor de Adevar (Their Version of the Truth)*; Boia, Lucian, *Romania, Tara de Frontiera a Europei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012); Stefano Bottoni, "Reassessing the Communist Takeover in Romania," *East European Politics & Societies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 59–89, doi:10.1177/0888325409354355; Deletant, "New Light on Gheorghiu-Dej's Struggle for Dominance in the Romanian Communist Party, 1944-49"; Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*; Dennis Deletant, "The Securitate and the Police State in Romania: 1948–64," *Intelligence and National Security* 8, no. 4 (1993): 1–25, doi:10.1080/02684529308432223; Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965*; Tom Gallagher, "Romania's Communist Dystopia," *Journal of Communist Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 1991): 552–57, doi:10.1080/13523279108415120; Mihai Iliescu, "Impactul Destalinizarii Asupra Regimului Penitenciar in Romania Intre 1954-1960," in *Anii 1954-1960: Fluxurile Si Refluxurile Stalinismului*, ed. Ioana Boca (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 2000); Elis Neagoe-Plesa, "Problematica Cultului Personalitatii in Mediul Literar Din Romania. 'Cazul' Alexandru Jar," in *Ungaria 1956: Revolta Mintilor Si Sfarsitul Mitului Comunist*, ed. Doina and Tismaneanu Jela Vladimir (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006); Elis Neagoe-Plesa, "„Camarila” lui Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej," *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica* 10, no. 1 (2006): 147–63; Dragos Petrescu, "Community Building and Identity Politics in Gheorghiu-Dej's Romania (1956-64)," in *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes*

In this context, a perhaps unsurprisingly stronger emphasis has been placed on the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu - both in the media as well as within academic scholarship – not only because of the regime’s more immediate impact on recent generations, but also because of Romania’s troubled transition to democracy after the events in 1989.<sup>11</sup> However, it has not only been Ceausescu’s controversial internal policies, that have received much academic and popular attention. Dubbed by the Western intelligence as a ‘maverick’<sup>12</sup> for his policy of opposing and criticizing the Soviet oppression of the Prague

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*in East-Central Europe*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University, 2009); Dragoş Petrescu, “Building the Nation, Instrumentalizing Nationalism: Revisiting Romanian National-Communism, 1956–1989,” *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 4 (2009): 523–544, doi:10.1080/00905990902985728. Alina and Catanus Tudor Dan, *O Destalinizare Ratata. Culisele Cazului Miron Constantinescu-Iosif Chisinevschi 1956-1961* (Bucharest: Elion, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> See, among others, Pavel Campeanu, *Ceausescu: The Countdown: From the End to the Beginnings* (Boulder : New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Tom Gallagher, *Theft of a Nation: Romania since Communism* (London: CHurst, 2005); Tom Gallagher, *Romania After Ceausescu* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); Charlotte Hord et al., “Reproductive Health in Romania: Reversing the Ceausescu Legacy,” *Studies in Family Planning* 22, no. 4 (1991): 231–40, doi:10.2307/1966479; Rudolf Joo, *The Hungarian Minority’s Situation in Ceausescu’s Romania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Ion Iliescu and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Communism, Post-Communism and Democracy: The Great Shock at the End of a Short Century* (Boulder: Columbia University Press, 2006); Nestor Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution* (Washington, D.C. : New York: Praeger, 1991); Stephen D. Roper, *Romania: The Unfinished Revolution* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Routledge, 2000); Cezar Stanciu, “Nicolae Ceauşescu and the Origins of Eurocommunism,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48, no. 1 (March 2015): 83–95, doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2015.01.006; Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania*, First Edition edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Larry Watts, *Extorting Peace: Romania, the Clash Within the Warsaw Pact and the End of the Cold War, 1978–1989* (Bucharest: RAO, 2013); Ilarion Tiu, “Ceausescu si problema sistematizarii rurale,” *Sfera Politicii; Bucharest* 22, no. 2 (April 2014): 9–15,150; Ilarion Tiu, “Achitarea datoriei externe. Ultimul proiect grandios al lui Ceausescu,” *Sfera Politicii; Bucharest* 22, no. 3 (June 2014): 101–107,134. Duncan Light and David Phinnemore, eds., *Post-Communist Romania: Coming to Terms with Transition*, 2001 edition (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, N.Y: 2001). Dragoş Petrescu, “Closely Watched Tourism: The Securitate as Warden of Transnational Encounters, 1967–9,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 2 (April 1, 2015): 337–53.

<sup>12</sup> Rumania: the Maverick Satellite. CIA Report, 1 October, 1968. General CIA Records, CREST (FOIA) document CIA-RDP78-03061A000400030017-8.



Spring in 1968, Ceausescu also gained significant notoriety for his consistently non-conformist foreign policy for the rest of his 35-year tenure.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, the amount of recent scholarship on Ceausescu has largely overshadowed that on Gheorghiu-Dej, comparatively speaking – especially on issues relating to foreign policy. For the reasons above, this is perhaps unsurprising. But also because of historical relativism: as any self-respecting, long-lasting dictator would, Ceausescu rewrote Romania's Communist history by minimizing – and, at points, even criminalizing – many aspects of Dej's legacy. This strategy has been effective not only in Romania, where the former is still considered a political hero by some; but also in the West, where the young new dictator was for a long time certainly perceived as 'the maverick' champion of the country's new independent policy, while his predecessor was seen as the staunch Stalinist who aided the Kremlin in crushing the Hungarian Revolution. These images are, of course, reductionist. But they have informed scholarship in the West to some extent – and the relative lack of interest in Dej perhaps does echo this perception at least partially. By exploring in detail the foreign policy of Gheorghiu-Dej, however, this dissertation will indirectly highlight the

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<sup>13</sup> See, among others, Orna Almog, "Unlikely Relations: Israel, Romania and the Egyptian–Israeli Peace Accord," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 881–96, doi:10.1080/00263206.2016.1186015; Patricia González Aldea, "The Identity of Ceausescu's Communist Regime and Its Image in the West," *Revista de Stiinte Politice; Craiova*, no. 33/34 (2012): 14–28; Dennis Deletant, "'Taunting the Bear': Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1963–89," *Cold War History* 7, no. 4 (November 2007): 495–507; Eliza Gheorghe, "Atomic Maverick: Romania's Negotiations for Nuclear Technology, 1964–1970," *Cold War History* 13, no. 3 (August 1, 2013): 373–92, doi:10.1080/14682745.2013.776542; Mircea Munteanu, "When the Levee Breaks: The Impact of the Sino-Soviet Split and the Invasion of Czechoslovakia on Romanian-Soviet Relations, 1967–1970," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 1 (June 9, 2010): 43–61; Paschalis Pechlivanis, "Between Détente and Differentiation: Nixon's Visit to Bucharest in August 1969," *Cold War History* 0, no. 0 (January 26, 2017): 1–18, doi:10.1080/14682745.2016.1267144; Mark Percival, "Britain's 'Political Romance' with Romania in the 1970s," *Contemporary European History*, March 1995, /core/journals/contemporary-european-history/article/div-classtitlebritainandaposs-political-romance-with-romania-in-the-1970sdiv/AFFD7267C3A93C0CFE43D6F122D50D28; Cezar Stanciu, "Autonomy and Ideology: Brezhnev, Ceaușescu and the World Communist Movement," *Contemporary European History*, February 2014, /core/journals/contemporary-european-history/article/div-classtitleautonomy-and-ideology-brezhnev-ceausescu-and-the-world-communist-movementdiv/CC03C46770BC22930E2AF17846663991; Stanciu, "Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Origins of Eurocommunism"; Steven Casey and Jonathan Wright, *Mental Maps in the Era of Détente and the End of the Cold War, 1968-91*, 2015.

continuities, rather than discrepancies, between the two dictators, as it will show that Dej essentially build the foundation on which Ceausescu's famously rebellious policies were later carried out.

In this context, a small but growing number of researchers have been revisiting the topic of the country's detachment from Moscow in light of new archival evidence, thereby helping trace the roots of this process to the regime of Gheorghiu-Dej. However, the focus of this literature has been largely topical rather than global, placing emphasis on milestone events and their impact for Romanian foreign policy. A large body of work has therefore focused on 1956 – the year when two major events strongly impacted the communist camp: Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" during the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and the Hungarian Revolution.<sup>14</sup> Dubbing it "the beginning of the end"<sup>15</sup> and "a turning point in the history of world communism"<sup>16</sup>, most Romanian-speaking scholars have understandably focused their analyses on the ideological aspects of 1956 and its domestic impact, identifying it as the year of departure in Gheorghiu-Dej's strategy to distance his regime from Moscow.<sup>17</sup> Fewer

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<sup>14</sup> The Polish Revolt of 1956, while undoubtedly one of the major consequences of the Secret Speech (together with the Hungarian Revolution), has been largely overlooked as a factor of influence in Romanian foreign policy. This blind-spot in Romanian historiography may have an explanation in the fact that, from the Romanian perspective, the events in Hungary were seen to have higher priority due to 1) geo-strategic considerations – the "spill-over effect" of the revolution into neighboring Romania 2) socio-political considerations – the large segment of ethnically Hungarian population living in Romania that was seen as a potential threat and 3) the ensuing Soviet military intervention in Hungary, through Romanian territory.

<sup>15</sup> Doina Jela and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Ungaria 1956: Revolta Mintilor Si Sfarsitul Mitului Comunist* (Curta Veche, 2006), 99.

<sup>16</sup> Catanus, Dan and Buga, Vasile (eds.), *Lagarul comunist sub impactul destalinizarii: 1956* (The Communist Camp under the Impact of De-Stalinization: 1956), Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, Bucharest, 2006, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Dan Catanus, "The Impact of the Secret Speech on the Romanian Workers Party Leadership. The Process of Destalinization in Romania," in *Power and Society. The Soviet Bloc under the Impact of De-Stalinization 1956*, ed. Dan Catanus (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006), 109–51; Florin Constantiniu, "1956: De La Budapesta La Bucuresti," in *Power and Society: The Soviet Bloc under the Impact of De-Stalinization 1956*, ed. Dan and Buga Catanus Vasile (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006), 442–50; Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, *The Soviet Bloc under the Impact of De-Stalinization 1956*, Colectia Studii (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006); Johanna Granville, "Dej-a-Vu: Early Roots of Romania's Independence," *East European Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 365–

but equally important texts have focused on Romania's non-conformist policies within the frameworks of the Warsaw Pact<sup>18</sup> and COMECON<sup>19</sup> in order to shed more light onto Bucharest's deviant behavior within Eastern Bloc institutions. Similarly, investigations into Romania's bilateral relations with important actors during Dej's regime, such as China or Yugoslavia, have brought to light interesting aspects of those relationships; however, such accounts have mostly been carried out without taking into consideration larger currents of international history or the broader context of Cold War developments.<sup>20</sup>

Within this new body of literature on Romania's Communist past, two monographs stand out for their effort to place the process of the country's detachment from Moscow in the broader context of international history. Mioara Anton's *Iesirea din Cerc*<sup>21</sup> (Exiting the Circle) offers a broad, but valuable account of this process in light of newly-declassified

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404; Johanna Granville, "'If I Don't Do a U-Turn Now, All Is Lost': Gheorghiu-Dej's Gambit for Romanian Independence from Moscow," *Etudes Balkaniques*, no. 1 (2009): 29–68; Johanna Granville, "Hungary, 101: Seven Ways to Avoid a Revolution and Soviet Invasion of Romania," *Cold War History* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 81–106, doi:10.1080/14682740902978938; Johanna Granville, "Forewarned Is Forearmed: How the Hungarian Crisis of 1956 Helped the Romanian Leadership," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 4 (June 2010): 615–45.

<sup>18</sup> Deletant, "'Taunting the Bear': Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1963-89"; Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, "Romania and the Warsaw Pact: 1955-1989," Cold War International History Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2004); Larry Watts, *Extorting Peace: Romania, the Clash Within the Warsaw Pact and the End of the Cold War, 1978-1989*; Laurien Crump, "The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: Inquiries into the Evolution of an Underestimated Alliance, 1960-1969" (Utrecht University, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Elena Dragomir, "Romania's Participation in the Agricultural Conference in Moscow, 2-3 February 1960," *Cold War History* 13, no. 3 (2013): 331–351, doi:10.1080/14682745.2013.768068; Liviu Taranu, *Romania in Consiliul de Ajutor Economic Reciproc, 1949-1965 (Romania in the Council of Help and Mutual Assistance)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Vasile Buga, "Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 I," *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 42–43, no. 1–2 (2004): 1–40; Vasile Buga, "Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 II," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 44–45 (2004): 46–71; Dan Cătănuș, "Evoluția relațiilor sovieto-chineze după Congresul XX al P.C.U.S., I," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 1–2 (2007); Dan Cătănuș, "Evoluția relațiilor sovieto-chineze după Congresul XX al P.C.U.S., II," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 3–4 (2007): 69–84; Petre Opris, "Indian-Soviet-Chinese Relations in Bucharest's Perspective, 1955-1964 I," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 3–4 (2011): 164–72; Petre Opris, "Indian-Soviet-Chinese Relations in Bucharest's Perspective, 1955-1964, II," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 1–2 (2012): 86–95.

<sup>21</sup> Mioara Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007).

archival materials. Dan Catanus's *Tot mai departe de Moscova*<sup>22</sup> (Further and further away from Moscow) not only provides an exceptionally detailed analysis of the same topic, but also brings into a comprehensive discussion China's important role in the process. The author of this thesis owes a great academic debt to this text, which has served as one of the main frames of reference for the research conducted.

The present research project brings three main contributions to the existing literature on Bucharest's path to autonomy from the Kremlin. First, by placing Romania's process of de-satellization within the broader context of the global Cold War, it provides a deeper understanding of the forces at play beyond the constraints of the Bloc or bi-polar dynamic. In this context, while the analysis considers the important factors of influence within Romania's immediate political and economic environment – i.e. the impact of de-Stalinization, the Secret Speech and the Hungarian Revolution, or infrastructural changes within COMECON, etc. – it has also taken into account the global climate to consider how events, developments or processes impacted Bucharest's process of detachment. It therefore considers Romania's evolving relationship with the leading countries of the non-aligned movement (NAM) and the European neutrals, for example, in order to understand how Bucharest's efforts to gain political influence in or economic advantage from these non-committed political spheres enhanced its detachment strategy. This analysis is very much aided by the project's structure: by breaking up the ten-year period critical to Romania's de-satellization process under Dej into five, chronologically-ordered chapters, this thesis integrates topics previously discussed on an individual basis into a broader and multi-layered investigation that allows for the identification of policy/tactical patterns and continuities.

This same kind of approach also allows for a converse, bottom-up perspective. By analyzing Bucharest's interactions with the big players in its political game – first within the camp and, later, with the West – this investigation sheds light into how it shaped their perceptions of one another. This is not by any means to say that Romania might have decisively changed any aspect of the relationship between the big players over the course of its ten-year bid for

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<sup>22</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*.

autonomy. However, it did have an impact on how they saw each other. This doctoral thesis therefore leans very much on Tony Smith's theory of pericentrism – which aims to understand how “the role of junior actors in the international system contribut[ed] to blocking, moderating or extending the [Cold War] struggle”<sup>23</sup> – in order to help explain how Romania's struggle for independence impacted the big player dynamic. Bucharest's efforts at triangular diplomacy in its efforts to mediate intra-camp conflicts, for example – at first between Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing and, later, between Moscow and Beijing – did shape how these heavyweights of the Socialist camp viewed each other. And later, when Romania would finally establish a firm relationship with the United States in the aftermath of its dissidence within COMECON, it would also inadvertently shape the way Washington viewed Moscow.

A second contribution of this investigation into Romania's de-satellization process to the current relevant literature is to detail aspects of Bucharest's tactics that have thus far been completely overlooked. One of the running themes of this dissertation will therefore be Gheorghiu-Dej's use of oil products and extractive know-how – Romania's only comparative advantage to the rest of the Bloc countries – as a currency for both, economic advantage and political capital. A second tactic employed by the Romanian leader – and detailed in this thesis – is the use of triangular diplomacy for intra-camp feuds (as mentioned earlier) in order to gain notoriety and political credibility among the camp. Last, but certainly not least, Dej launched the initiative for a de-militarized and, later, denuclearized zone in the Balkans as a way to improve his regional position and international brand as conciliator and/or potential mediator of future conflicts. The details of these tactics, which seem to have been largely omitted by current historiography, provide a valuable insight into the potential for a junior actor to leverage competitive advantages or circumstantial developments in order to gain the necessary political and economic strength to propel it away from the superpower orbit.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that this research project does not claim - nor does it aim to prove - that Gheorghiu-Dej might have had some grand strategy for

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<sup>23</sup> Tony Smith, “New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 596.

Romania's detachment from Moscow, given the volatile and overpowering international climate. Instead, he clearly possessed an objective, as well as strategic adaptability – the aptitude towards recognizing the potential pitfalls and advantages offered by the changes in the international climate, and the skill to quickly pivot, negotiating the best possible (or least harmful) outcome for his country. To borrow from Dennis Deletant's explanation of Romania's process of autonomy, Dej's policies were therefore both "active" and "reactive", in the sense that while the Romanian leader took initiatives to pursue his long-term goal, he could only do so according to the ebbs and flows in the Cold War dynamic. While Deletant's characterization only refers to Bucharest's policies from the early 1960s onwards, however, this thesis argues that Dej had pursued the quest for Romania's autonomy, albeit in more subtle ways and behind the scenes, since at least the mid-1950s.

The final contribution of this multi-archival investigation is offer an innovative perspective on Romania's foreign policy by building a bridge between the pre-1990s historiography, which was mostly reliant on Western archival material, and the contemporary body of literature based on recently-released Romanian documents. The resulting juxtaposition of primary sources from the West with those from the former East allows for an extremely valuable insight into Bucharest's otherwise opaque decision-making process, its echoes in the West, and its impact on the ground.

Such investigation would not have been possible without the continued declassification of the RWP's Central Committee documents – a process which, perhaps surprisingly, has only gained serious impetus over the last ten years. The fall of Ceausescu's regime in 1989, in fact, did not necessarily imply the opening of the Romania's Communist archives. During the country's slow and awkward transition to democracy in the years that followed, those documents especially relating to country's more recent communist past were taken into the joint custody of the Romanian Army and Secret Services (SRI) at a safeguarded location outside Bucharest. Open access to researchers was severely restricted, if not altogether inexistent. In fact, even those researchers especially appointed by the President to lead the official investigation into the crimes of Romania's Communist dictatorships in 2006 complained of restricted access to the documents and a sustained interference with their

archival investigation, despite the President's special intervention on their behalf.<sup>24</sup> After nearly a decade and half since Ceausescu's demise, Romania was therefore still the only European Union candidate without an open access archive. This was a situation that began to change the next year, precisely because of EU norms, and thus not necessarily out of internal initiative. Since 2007, however, not only have large numbers of Central Committee documents been transferred from the armed and secret services back into the civilian custody of the National Archives (ANIC), but the declassification process has been ongoing. Perhaps because of the early – and thus less politically sensitive – period of Romania's Communist history that this project investigates, it has benefitted from a relatively less restricted access to Central Committee documents, which have been made available sooner and in larger quantities for the 1950-1960s.

While the Romanian documents are now shedding more light into the behind-the-scenes discussions on policy-making at the top echelons of Romania's government, it is important to be reminded that such insight is a privilege very few would have dreamed of until recently. In fact, Romania in the fifties very closely resembled current-day North Korea in terms of political secrecy, the widespread use of propaganda for social control, and the extremely restrictive access that any foreigners had to information or travel throughout the country. At the end of 1957, Alan Dudley, the British minister to Bucharest very aptly described the informational vacuum he was confronted with,

*...even after an attempt has been made to isolate those which are significant the identifiable events of Roumanian political life are superficial and on the whole unimportant: in many instances they are mere reflections of happenings elsewhere in the Communist world, or mere responses to the policy or dictates of the Soviet Union. The political developments and trends which have a specifically Roumanian character and importance take place underground, are formless, find no spokesman, and are*

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<sup>24</sup> Romania, "Raport Final," 642–43.

*difficult to apprehend and express. Yet I believe that they are important: they cast shadows and they cause reactions.*<sup>25</sup>

It is indeed those shadows and reactions cast by the government's policies and perceptible to the foreign diplomats in Bucharest that allow us to gain some insight into their real impact when widespread propaganda might otherwise obscure the truth. In this context, the reports of those Western diplomats posted in Romania throughout the 1950s and 1960s offer a unique and very valuable perspective of the situation in the eastern Bloc satellite at the time, despite the government's best efforts to keep them in the dark, as Dudley again underscored in his valedictory telegram in January 1959,

*The mania for secrecy, the morbid fear of espionage, and the desperate suspicion of external influence which in Romania seem to be more extreme than in the other Satellites, all makes the collection of useful information difficult, tiresome, dangerous for those with whom we are in contact, and often impossible. The isolation of the Western diplomatic community within the Romanian state is if anything greater than it was when I first came here, during the brief relaxation of 1956. It has, indeed, progressively increased since the Hungarian revolution.*<sup>26</sup>

It is important to bear in mind both this isolation of Western diplomatic community, as well as the oppression of the general population at the time when not only had the Soviet troops withdrawn from Romania (1958), but indeed Dej was already making subtle, but perceptible efforts to gain at least economic, if not yet political autonomy for the country. And, indeed, this is yet another reason why Western sources are critical to the purposes of this investigation: they provide a more accurate depiction of the socio-economic situation in the Romanian society and its evolution than any government pamphlet at the time.

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<sup>25</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1957). Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 7 January, 1958, p2. UKNA, file FO 371/135151.

<sup>26</sup> Telegram No.9 from Alan Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 13 January, 1959. UKNA, file FO 371 143328, p 2.



The fluctuating levels of oppression, the standard of living of the general population, and Dej's foreign policy were all intimately related – the Romanian leader could not relax state control until he gained internal legitimacy by raising the standard of living; and he could not truly achieve this without seeking the level of economic autonomy from Moscow that would have allowed him to fully industrialize Romania through a very well-calculated foreign policy. Keeping a pulse on the levels of oppression and standard of living, was to keep an eye on how his foreign policy was faring.

One last word on the reports by – the mostly British – diplomats in Bucharest: to a very large extent, they represented the Western perspective in the broader sense. Right up until the end of 1962 – that is, a few months before the Romanian-Soviet dispute became public and Bucharest's relationship with London and Washington started to rapidly improve – the foreign diplomats were still reporting that they “cannot easily have informal contacts with Roumanians, most of whom are in any case afraid to be seen associating with foreigners.”<sup>27</sup> This restrictive access to information brought the Western diplomatic community closer together. The French, American and British diplomats, especially, shared a lot of the information they gathered; throughout the 1950s, the British and American legations even shared translators.<sup>28</sup>

The access to the British Foreign Office documents have also provided this investigation with an invaluable perspective on Romania's 'oil diplomacy' policies in the Third World, and especially India, which provided for the ideal case study on this topic. In this context, they were critical to illustrating just how pervasive the clash between Communism and Capitalism was, especially in the self-declared non-aligned Third World. Here, this global conflict found its most awkward, yet powerfully telling expression: in a remote Indian province, where a bunch of Romanian oil engineers had to find nearly impossible ways of drilling the hard rock at the foothills of the Himalayas in order to prevent the Western monopolies from taking over to do the same thing. The Foreign Office documents were

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<sup>27</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1962). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British legation, Bucharest to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 1 January, 1963, p. 4. UKNA document FO 371/171881.

<sup>28</sup> (see for ex. 1956 army report FO 371 128937)

critical to understanding just how fierce the battle over India oil resources was, and how active the oil monopolies were in campaigning to preserve their foothold in the industry, almost to the point of sabotaging the country's national oil sector, which the Romanians were helping to develop.

Finally, a note on the CIA archive, which became digitally available in mid-January 2017. Although extensive efforts were made to sort through the nearly 15,000 CREST (FOIA) documents pertaining in the broader sense to the topic of this dissertation, the immensity of the task would have jeopardized the author's ability to finish this project on time. A select few of the most pertinent documents are included in chapters 1, 3 and 5. The rest will be included over the course of the next year, when this dissertation will be edited into a monograph.

This dissertation is structured into five chronological chapters. The first deals with the impact of de-Stalinization in Romania, from 1953 and 1955. Before delving into this process, however, this chapter offers a background on the imposition of the communist regime in Romania after World War II, and a brief overview on how the country became, in fact, Stalinized to begin with. As a result, the first part of this chapter relies more on secondary, rather than primary sources. For the most part, however, it focuses on de-Stalinization as a process very much imposed by the Kremlin, as well as its influence on Romania's economic plans and political ambitions. By placing the impact of Stalin's death in March 1953 within a regional perspective, this chapter highlights Gheorghiu-Dej's rude awakening to the political and economic implications of this event, as well as the challenges and opportunities arising from it. Importantly, this chapter also brings into discussion previously uncharted aspects of the Kremlin's policies after Stalin's death, by showing that the decision to condemn the dictator's promotion of 'the cult of personality' and also to seek a rapprochement with Yugoslavia – both policies which are commonly associated with the Khrushchev's Secret speech in 1956 – had, in fact, been promoted by Moscow since early 1953. It is within this context that Dej's process of seeking internal legitimacy is discussed, as well as Romania's economic development plans based, to some extent, on a rapprochement with Yugoslavia. Overall, however, this chapter emphasizes the drive for economic development – mandated by the Kremlin, yet ultimately desired for

gaining internal legitimacy – as Dej’s main motivation not only for ‘unfreezing’ Romania’s relationships with the West, but also for reaching out to the Third World.

The second chapter deals with the year 1956 exclusively. It thus places the issue of Soviet troop withdrawal (an issue of top priority to the Romanian leadership) within the context of that year’s dramatic events - Khrushchev’s Secret Speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in February; and the Hungarian Revolution in the Fall – in order to bring to light how events in the international scene as well as within Romania impacted Dej’s strategy on the issue. This chapter also discusses the opportunities conferred by the Secret Speech to consolidate the Romanian leader’s political position internally, and to establish Romania’s vital relationship with Yugoslavia externally. Finally, the Hungarian revolution will be discussed at length, both with respect to its impact on the socio-political situation within Romania, as well as to its effect on Romania’s rapidly shifting foreign policy, according to developments beyond its control. In this context, the role of China will be highlighted as an important factor in the Kremlin’s decision-making process, and, as a result, as an increasingly relevant future partner for Romania.

Chapter three (1957-1959) discusses Romania’s position within the Socialist camp the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution. As Moscow’s most actively supportive ally during the uprising, Romania was rewarded with a generous and much-needed economic aid package. However, the Soviet Union’s efforts to close ranks within the camp, re-assert its position of leadership and seek international credibility after its intervention in Hungary would only pull Romania closer to the Kremlin. Not only did Romania have to pay faithful lip-service to legitimizing the Soviet intervention, but it also had to quietly accept the prolonged stationing of the Soviet troops on its territory, as well as a delay in the negotiations to withdraw. In the meantime, however, Bucharest took advantage of the trust earned with Moscow in order to consolidate its relationships with the Kremlin’s rivals within the camp – Yugoslavia and China. In fact, Dej used his newly earned position in order to increase his regional relevance – by launching his initiative for a Balkan Understanding – as well as his international role as conflict mediator. The Romanian leader would thus employ a sort of triangular diplomacy in order to allay the growing disputes between Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing and, in so doing, raise his profile as arbiter of intra-camp

conflicts, while consolidating Romania's bilateral relationship with all three Communist heavyweights. Such tactics not only helped to significantly differentiate Romania from other Bloc satellites, but indeed it later helped it make significant strides towards a more autonomous position. In the short term, it may have also positively influenced Moscow's decision to withdraw its troops from Romania in 1958, as it is believed that Bucharest's increasingly warmer relationship with Belgrade and Beijing might have prompted either Tito or Mao to intervene on its behalf in convincing the Soviets to withdraw. Whether or not that is the case, the truth remains that by the end of 1958 Dej had forged good enough relationships with both to prompt these speculations; and that both the Soviet troops and advisors had effectively left Romania, thereby making the Eastern European country an increasingly attractive partner to the West.

The fourth chapter (1960-1) discusses the reasons for, influences on and development of Romania's new economic plan, at the core of which stood the drive for rapid industrialization – Dej's secret weapon for gaining internal legitimacy and external independence. This chapter will also pick up a running theme throughout the last chapters and discuss in more detail how by leveraging Romania's only comparative advantage to the rest of the Bloc countries – its oil and extractive know-how – Dej was able not only to acquire much-needed technology and consumer goods from the West, but to also reach out to the non-aligned countries of Asia in a bid to gain recognition and prestige. In order to achieve this, Dej chose to take a cautionary step back from the mediating role he had previously adopted within the Socialist camp, and silently distance himself from the conflicts between Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing. This allowed the Romanian leader to align himself more closely to the Kremlin's foreign policy towards the neutral and the non-aligned countries, thus effectively 'piggybacking' in order to maximize political and economic benefits. By adopting and championing Moscow's 'peaceful co-existence' campaign within the framework of the UN, Bucharest would also thus emerge onto the world stage, asserting its relevance and signaling a continued and increasing engagement within global politics. Finally, this chapter will use India as a detailed case study to show the dynamics, challenges and opportunities conferred by Dej's practical application of the peaceful co-existence campaign in the Third World.

Chapter five (1962-3) explains how Romania's plans for industrialization came into conflict with the Soviet Union's new campaign to integrate the Bloc economies within COMECON, eventually leading Romania to publicly defy Moscow over this issue. It thus delves into Dej's strategy to successfully assert Romania's national economic interest, while carefully avoiding Moscow's retaliation by flirting with both, the United States and China. This chapter also explains how the Cuban Missile Crisis affected the Romanian leader's plans for de-satellization, while touching on the way in which Romania's allies in the Third World acted as an additional insurance against Moscow's retaliation in the process.

## Introduction

It is difficult to overestimate the impact of the New Course<sup>29</sup> as an incipient stage in Romania's evolution towards relative independence from the Soviet Union. Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 was a momentous occasion, making available opportunities to achieve Bucharest's detachment from Moscow even if they were not immediately apparent.

The initial awkwardness with which Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Romania's Stalinist leader, received instructions on implementing the New Course stemmed from his reticence to shift gears in a context of political survival. Indeed, up to that point Dej had been one of the staunchest adherents of Stalin's policies. His quest to obtain and maintain leadership in Bucharest had been based, in large part, on helping Moscow transform Romania from an anti-Communist and anti-Soviet neighbor into one of Eastern Bloc's most obedient "geographically contiguous replica states"<sup>30</sup>, as Tony Judt aptly described the region within Moscow's sphere of influence.

This task was accomplished through the blatant employment of crudely heavy-handed tactics, both by Moscow, as well as by Dej. This consequently brought Romania, like most other states within the Bloc, not only to the verge of economic ruin, but also to the precipice of popular revolt shortly after Stalin's death. Faced with the prospect of losing both legitimacy and power, Dej had no other option but to once again follow Moscow's directives – this time coming from the collective leadership within the Kremlin – on de-Stalinization and implementing the economic policies of the New Course. This brought Dej the perhaps unexpected opportunities, modest at first, to carefully place Romania on a path of slow detachment from the Soviet Union.

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<sup>29</sup> Otherwise known as de-Stalinization, the New Course was the policy adopted by the Kremlin after Stalin's death in relation to its satellites, imposing sweeping economic reforms, among other things.

<sup>30</sup> Judt, Tony, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010). Pg. 167

### **From odd kid on the Bloc to poster child**

The humble beginnings of Romania's Communist history stand in the sharpest of contrasts to the country's Stalinist transformation over the span of less than a decade. Indeed, in the wake of World War II, as the Soviet Union was consolidating its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, it had had to adopt special tactics to ensure Communist dominance in the country's political scene. This had proved to be a complicated and time-consuming task.

On the one hand, Romania's strategic location on the southwest border of the USSR and right across the Black Sea from Greece and Turkey required no less than a full guarantee that the satellite would become one of the most subservient and easily-controlled among the Bloc members. On the other hand - similarly to the Kremlin's other 'problem child', Poland - Romania's elites were historically known to be anti-Communist and anti-Soviet, in a country generally leaning towards the Right.<sup>31</sup>

If a top-down approach to gain political control of Romania would have been difficult, a grassroots strategy to increase the Kremlin's popularity was going to be next to impossible. By the end of the World War II, Romania was one of the most rural and uneducated countries in Europe. In 1930 a mere 20% of Romanians were living in cities, while only 57% were literate (compared to 84.8% in neighboring Hungary, 60.3% in Bulgaria and 92.6% in Czechoslovakia).<sup>32</sup> The figures after 1945, if not the same were probably even lower, as Romania's already modest urban and institutional infrastructure was severely damaged during the War. Under these rather bleak circumstances, the Kremlin had little choice but to opt for a robust - if exceptionally difficult - effort at obtaining monopoly of power over Romanian politics by ensuring an unchallenged victory for the weak and unpopular national Communist Party.

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<sup>31</sup> Norman Naimark, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. M P. Leffler and O A. Westad, vol. 1—Origins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 180–85.

<sup>32</sup> Boia, Lucian, *Romania, Tara de Frontiera a Europei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012). Pg. 102

At the end of the World War II, the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) was little more than a marginalized legal non-entity on the fringes of the country's political life. Before the War, it had been considered a tool of foreign influence due to its links to the Comintern. As a result, it had been outlawed on 11 April 1924, thus remaining an underground, clandestine organization for nearly twenty years.<sup>33</sup> By the time it was legalized in August 1944, the Party barely had around 1,000 members<sup>34</sup> (in comparison with Romania's much smaller neighbors, Bulgaria, whose Party boasted 8,000 members; and Hungary, where the Party had 30,000).<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, the post-War social and political climate in Romania was certainly not conducive to the victory of a party with strong links to the Soviet Union. Far from seeing the Red Army as a liberating force, the Romanian population – which, confused and largely unaware of the high power international politics at the end of the War, was still eagerly hoping to be liberated by the Americans - considered it instead another brutal occupation force who raped, plundered and pillaged on its way towards the Western front. In some Romanian villages, not a woman or girl had been spared the assaults of the Soviet soldiers. As Bucharest and Moscow were preparing to sign the Armistice, the Romanian authorities were uncomfortably raising the problem that the document contained no clause on the jurisdiction of the Red Army soldiers who had committed 'offenses' on Romanian territory.<sup>36</sup> The issue, however, remained unaddressed throughout the Cold War and since.

Nor was the Red Army making special efforts to ingratiate itself with the locals or authorities even after Romania's 'liberation'. In mid-November 1944 the Romanian Prime Minister was explaining to Andrey Vyshinsky, the Soviet special envoy to Bucharest, that Romania had problems honoring an 850 million lei request the Red Army had put in for the purchase of

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<sup>33</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist* (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 2010). P. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Misiunile lui Vashinski in Romania: din istoria relatiilor romano-sovietice, 1944-1946, p 34

<sup>35</sup> Boia, Lucian, *Romania, Tara de Frontiera a Europei*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Excerpts from the Vishynsky dialogues (Original: AVP RF, F6. Op.6, mp. 43. D. 580, p. 12-14), Document 5 (Secret), in Ioan Chiper, Florin Constantiniu, Vitalie Varatec. *Misiunile Lui A. I. Vasinski in Romania (Din Istoria Relatiilor Romano-Sovietice, 1944-1946) Documente Secrete*. Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 1997.



coffee, chocolate and silk.<sup>37</sup> In a country ravaged by war and famine, these items were surely seen as nothing less than the most ostentatious form of luxury. And yet, perhaps, in the larger scheme of things they were still considered trifles. The Soviets were not only requiring Romania to pay huge reparations in the form of money, industrial, agricultural and oil products for the privilege of having been 'liberated'; but, just as in Poland, Slovakia and Germany, the Red Army was charged with confiscating grain from farmers and physically dismantling entire factories for their transplant to the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup> When it became obvious how cumbersome and inefficient such a task proved to be, the Soviets opted instead to obtain long-term control of the Romanian economy by setting up joint enterprises spanning the whole range of the country's main economic activity. By establishing these Soviet-Romanian ventures (SovRoms), the Kremlin thus guaranteed a much more effective and long-term strategy of syphoning a substantial part of the Romanian economic production into the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

Given the pervasive unpopularity of the Soviet forces and the undeniable feebleness of the Romanian Communist Party, the Kremlin's role in establishing a Communist regime in Romania became "absolutely central"<sup>40</sup>. So critical was the task that Stalin entrusted none other than Andrey Vyshinsky - Soviet State Procurator and the legal mastermind behind Stalin's terror trials in the 1930's – as special envoy to post-War Romania. In this capacity, Vyshinsky essentially orchestrated the rise of the Romanian Communist Party from the

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<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the conversation between A. I. Vyshinsky and Romanian Prime Minister C. Stanescu (Original: AVP RF, F. 07, op. 5, mp. 47, d. 133, p. 1-5), Document 15 in Chiper, Constantiniu, Varatec et. al, 1997.

<sup>38</sup> Naimark, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953," 183.

<sup>39</sup> In the years after World War II, 16 such joint ventures were established across the spectre of the Romanian economy, and named after each sector of activity. The first, and perhaps most strategic, was SovRom Petrol, which dealt with the oil extraction, was established in July 1945. It was followed by *Sovromtransport* and *Tars* (transportation), *Sovrombanc* (banking and commercial monopoly), *Sovromlemn* (wood processing), *Sovromgaz* (natural gas), *Sovromasigurare* (insurance), *Sovromcărbune* (coal exploitation in the Jiu Valley and other areas), *Sovromchim* (chemical industry), *Sovromconstrucții* (construction materials), *Sovrommetal* (iron extraction), *Sovromtractor* (future farm machinery producer Tractorul), *Sovromfilm* (charged with importing Soviet cinema productions), *Sovrom Utilaj Petrolier* (producing oil refining equipment), *Sovromnaval* (shipbuilding on the Black Sea main ports in Constanta, Giurgiu and Braila) and, most strategically, *SovromQuartz* (which dealt with uranium extraction).

<sup>40</sup> Naimark, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953," 177.

fringes of the Romanian political life to the unchallenged leading force within less than three years.

Such feat was only possible through shrewd and often heavy-handed tactics. In order to ensure that the RCP had a healthy core, he guaranteed that the 'Muscovite' faction of the Party (i.e. those that had spent the War years in Moscow) had an upper hand over the local factions. Vyshinsky pressured Romanian King Michael to appoint a Communist government on 6 March 1945. Ahead of the November 1946 elections, dissenters and opposition members were intimidated, blackmailed and jailed. Due largely to coercive tactics, by 1947 the RCP membership had reached an astounding 710,000, which represented an increase of over 700% from 1944.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, sustained pressure on the King was reinforced by the deployment to Bucharest of two additional NKVD divisions, as provision for the possibility that backstage politics would eventually erupt into a civil war. Faced with this threat, King Michael abdicated on 30 December 1947. Later that day, the Romanian Popular Republic (RPR) was declared, after only a forty-five-minute meeting to consider the matter. Given the conditions of extreme duress under which the King abdicated, as well as the brevity of the decision-making process in declaring the Republic, there remains little doubt, as Dennis Deletant points out, that this process did not in any way reflect the will of the Romanian people, but that of a political group subservient to the interests of the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup>

Only three months later, the Communists 'won' a staggering 100% of the votes in the general elections.<sup>43</sup> Throughout this process, the Soviet troops stationed in Romania were not only ostentatiously visible, but also often involved in restoring order. There therefore remains little doubt that without the Kremlin's direct and sustained involvement, the Communists would not have arrived to power in Romania.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Boia, Lucian, *Romania, Tara de Frontiera a Europei*, 109.

<sup>42</sup> Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*, 85–86.

<sup>43</sup> Svetozar Rajak, "The Cold War and the Balkans, 1945-1956," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. M. P. Leffler and O. A. Westad, vol. 1—Origins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 209.

<sup>44</sup> Naimark, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953," 177–81.

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Once complete domination of the Romanian political system was secured through the ascension of the Communist Party to power in 1948, Moscow's next priority was to impose the full emulation of its own socio-economic system onto the country. While this was a policy that was applied almost uniformly to all Bloc countries, Romania's Stalinization process was considerably more pronounced for three main reasons. First, Romania's Latin cultural roots were at odds with Soviet efforts to create a common Bloc identity through pan-Slavism. Second, Gheorghiu-Dej's rise to power in Bucharest after an intense internal power struggle heavily owed its legitimacy and continuity to the Kremlin. And third, the Soviet-Yugoslav split in mid-1948 and the resultant move of the Cominform headquarters to Bucharest transformed Romania into an ideological frontline – and one of the most obedient mouthpieces and sycophantic followers of the Kremlin.

The Stalinization process in Romania was as swift as it was efficient. The complete overhaul of the country's entire system and institutional infrastructure was initiated through a series of treaties, laws and measures adopted throughout 1948. Their implementation was not only guaranteed by a heavy Red Army presence throughout the country, but it was carefully overseen and managed by Soviet 'advisors' who had been dispatched to every governmental institution in Romania.<sup>45</sup> The manner in which these policies were applied through the first half of the year had been so forceful and rapid, that Western intelligence started picking up reports that Romanians believed that "a major step" would soon be taken to incorporate Romania into the Soviet Union.<sup>46</sup> This would even take place, rumor had it, on a specific date: 26 June. Although such a thing never happened, of course, other measures were taken to ensure Romania's full and complete subservience to the Kremlin.

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<sup>45</sup> See Dan Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965* (Bucharest: The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2011); Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*.

<sup>46</sup> Possible incorporation of Rumania with USSR. Information Report, Office of Current Intelligence, 21 June, 1948. General CIA Records, CREST (FOIA) document CIA-RDP82-00457R0016004300007: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82-00457R001600430007-3.pdf>

The first major step towards the institution of a totalitarian state was the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Romania and the Soviet Union, which largely implied that the Romanian army would be fashioned on the model of and become de facto subservient to the Soviet defense system.<sup>47</sup> The adoption of a new constitution followed in April 1948. Carefully modeled on the Soviet constitution of 1936, the document also decreed the root and branch reform of the judicial system along Soviet lines.<sup>48</sup> In June all major industrial, mining, banking, insurance and transport companies were nationalized. A new education law passed in August mandated the closure of all foreign schools; the implementation of new history and philosophy curricula that strictly adhered to the teachings of Marxism-Leninism; the introduction of new school manuals at all levels based on the same ideology; and - most importantly in Romania as a non-Slavic country – the start of mandatory Russian language instruction for the same amount of hours as for Romanian itself.<sup>49</sup> Finally, in March 1949 the government nationalized most of Romania’s arable land. In a country that was predominantly agricultural at the time, this meant dispossessing everyone, from small land owners to wealthy landed gentry, of a total of nearly 1 million hectares of private property.<sup>50</sup>

Such measures were, of course, not only meant to facilitate the implementation of a Soviet style state with a centrally-run economy, but also to eliminate entire social groups considered “class enemies”, such as the nobility or heretical intellectuals, among others. In order to facilitate these purges, as well as to ensure that all dissent and opposition were eliminated, the Romanian state developed a brutal system of prisons and labor camps. Among the most notorious of these was an ambitious and nearly illogical infrastructure project meant to link the Danube to the Black Sea. Known as ‘the Canal’, it contained 8 camps in which 40,000 people were sent to toil; another 20,000 working there were

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<sup>47</sup> Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*, 86.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

considered 'volunteers'.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to estimate how many thousands died while working there, in the most deplorable and dangerous of conditions.

In the midst of the lightning speed Stalinization process Romania was undergoing throughout 1948, the RCP dealt a final blow to whatever remained of a multi-party system by outlawing the opposition parties<sup>52</sup> and consolidating all left-leaning factions into a newly-founded umbrella: the Romanian Workers Party (RWP). The new million-member strong Communist entity, which now stood unchallenged on the Romanian political scene, elected Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej as Secretary General at its first plenary in November 1948.<sup>53</sup>

Gheorghiu-Dej's ascension to the RWP leadership had been gradual but steady. His humble family background and limited formal education - which he only received until the age of 11- provided him with the ideal characteristics for the archetypal Stalinist leader: he belonged neither to the 'depraved' bourgeoisie, nor to 'elitist' intellectual groups. As a true 'man of the people', Gheorghe Gheorghiu (as was named at birth) joined the workers' movement as a young man and rose to notoriety for mobilizing the railway workers' union, demanding better pay and conditions. This activity ultimately ran him into trouble with the authorities, and he was transferred to the city of Dej as a disciplinary measure in 1931 – a punishment he would wear as a badge of honor for the rest of his life by incorporating the city's name into his own, otherwise very common, surname. By 1933 Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej – as he was now widely known within the Party – was arrested for his role in organizing the massive railway workers' strike in Grivita. He remained in jail until 1944, where he earned the leadership of the 'national' Communist faction by mobilizing and organizing the political prisoners. Indeed, as a blue-collar worker with substantial union leadership credentials, he was considered "a local product with a measure of genuine personal popularity in the party and in the country at large"<sup>54</sup>, as he was considered more of a nationalist compared to the members of the 'Muscovite' faction of the party.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>52</sup> The National Liberal Party and the National Peasants' Party.

<sup>53</sup> Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Personalities report. Dispatch no. 77 from J.D. Murray, British Legation, Bucharest, to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 11 October, 1962. UKNA document 371/166162, p. 11.

Some of these, having spent most of the War years in Moscow, initially enjoyed privilege and influence after returning to Bucharest. The most prominent amongst them was Ana Pauker. Upon returning to Romania in 1944 she almost instantaneously became the unofficial leader of the Party, holding the government role of Foreign Minister throughout the late 40's and early 50's. By 1948, when she was elected to the RWP Secretariat alongside Dej, she had become so prominent that *Time* magazine ran a 3-page article, placing her on the 20 September cover. Despite her overwhelming success, however, she was never able to overtake Dej in the Party leadership. One possible explanation is that, although Stalin clearly favored her initially, his rabid anti-Semitism in the last years of his life placed Pauker (who was of Jewish extraction) at a disadvantage. Another explanation could be that Stalin avoided the potentially dangerous tactic of visibly propelling a 'Muscovite' leader to power in the historically anti-Soviet country. In any case, Ana Pauker was eventually marginalized and driven off the political scene to a sort of social gulag (a tiny apartment in Bucharest, working as a translator), where she died in 1960 after years of imposed silence and obscurity.

In the meantime, the Soviet-Yugoslav split in June 1948 provided Dej with a golden opportunity to prove his loyalty to the Kremlin, thus further consolidating his leadership position. This was helped, in large part, by Stalin's decision to move the Cominform headquarters from Belgrade to Bucharest, thereby not only transforming Romania into a 'buffer' zone between the Kremlin and its new enemy, but also the epicenter of the anti-Tito campaign. From the Romanian capital – and only 450km from Belgrade – Dej eagerly masterminded and carried out the most orthodox political crusade against his neighbor, in an almost comical effort to prove his loyalty to Stalin. In order to facilitate this, a special Yugoslav Sector was set up in Bucharest charged with monitoring all activity in Belgrade and with coordinating all propaganda against the Yugoslav leader. Romania – and now, by extension, Dej – had become one of Stalin's staunchest allies.

The Soviet-Yugoslav split had two major internal consequences for Romania. First, it allowed Dej to eliminate some of his main political rivals by accusing them of being right-wing, 'cosmopolitan' deviationists. Secondly, it also allowed him to further crack down on popular dissent, this time specifically targeted towards ethnic minorities. In November 1950

the Romanian government adopted a deportation order for an area of 25km along the Danubian frontier with Yugoslavia; 39,462 people – predominantly of Serbian and German ethnicity - were deported as a result, thus further exacerbating an already tense relationship with Belgrade.

The vitriolic campaign against its south-western neighbor was, sadly, one of the very few diplomatic channels that Romania could still pursue by 1948. By signing the Treaty of Friendship, Collaboration and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union earlier that year (in February), which contained a clause requiring Romania to consult the Kremlin on all issues concerning its external relations, Bucharest essentially entrusted all its foreign policy to Moscow. From that point forward Romania became almost completely isolated. The only diplomatic relationships Bucharest could still seriously pursue, as dictated by the Soviet Union, were predominantly with the other ‘fraternal’ socialist countries within Eastern Europe.

By 1949, however, a shift on the international scene would reconfigure the Kremlin’s priorities and, by extension, those of the Bloc countries as well. Mao Zedong’s victory in the Chinese civil war provided Stalin with the unique opportunity to exponentially increase and consolidate the global Communist camp. Although initially perceived as a junior partner to Moscow, through its sheer size – in both area and population - China undeniably provided a critical mass to the Socialist cause.

Within only two days of the proclamation of the Chinese Popular Republic on 1 October, Ana Pauker, who was Foreign Minister at the time, was informing her Chinese counterpart, Zhou Enlai about her country’s intention to establish diplomatic relations. Pauker was keen to underline to Zhou Enlai that the Romanian government had taken this initiative in the conviction that Sino-Romanian ties would “strongly contribute to the consolidation of the democratic camp, of peace and Socialism.”<sup>55</sup> Determined to underline China’s junior role as

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<sup>55</sup> Telegram from Ana Pauker, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of Romania (PRR) to Zhou Enlai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Popular Chinese Republic (PCR) saluting the proclamation of the People’s Republic and announces Romania’s decision to establish diplomatic relations with the RPC. *Scanteia*, 4 October, 1949, in Romulus Ioan

a newcomer to this camp, however, Pauker was intent on adding that the alliance was unmistakably “led by [our] common friend, the Soviet Union.”<sup>56</sup> The perception of the Kremlin as the benevolent leader within the Communist camp, welcoming the “immense” but enfeebled new member, was further reinforced within the Eastern Bloc after Moscow provided Beijing with a significant aid package after signing the Treaty of Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in February 1950.<sup>57</sup>

However, while the Bloc countries rushed to follow Moscow’s lead in fostering relations with Beijing, Bucharest seemed initially less enthusiastic to do the same. Within the first trimester of his tenure as Ambassador to Beijing, Teodor Rudenco was already complaining that Romania was falling behind Poland and Czechoslovakia in establishing economic ties with China. In fact, he reported that the Chinese had been “surprised” that Bucharest sent no economists among its diplomatic staff to Beijing.<sup>58</sup> Working on the basis of extremely limited information available about China at the time, as well as under the likely assumption that an undeveloped and war ravaged country had little to offer industrializing Romania, Bucharest took more than two months to send the economic profile information that Beijing had been eagerly requesting.<sup>59</sup>

Within the first year of having established diplomatic relations with China, Romania had only made a couple of visible token gestures of friendship, such as establishing a modest student language exchange program, and receiving the Chinese diplomatic staff to Bucharest with an exceptionally ceremonious welcome.<sup>60</sup> This humble and rather non-

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Budura, *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, Arhivele Nationale, 2005), 197.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Draft decision of the CC of the RWP Secretariat regarding calling a meeting to discuss The Treaty of Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the USSR and the PRC, 16 February, 1950. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, Document 7/1950.

<sup>58</sup> Telegram from Teodor Rudenco, Romanian Ambassador to Beijing, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) regarding the celebration of the Romanian national day in China, 25 March, 1950. AMAE, fond Telegrams, Peking, January-April, 1950 in Romulus Ioan Budura, *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974*, 1:204.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Telegram from Teodor Rudenco, Romanian Ambassador to Beijing, to the MFA, regarding the note from Zhou Enlai, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, regarding the proposal of the



committal incipient phase of the Sino-Romanian relations, however, may reflect more about Stalin's own struggle with his relationship with Mao than Dej's reticence to foster ties with Beijing. Despite such modest beginnings the Sino-Romanian relationship would eventually develop into one of the strongest alliances that Bucharest would build to counter Moscow's influence.

In the meantime, however, Dej still had to prove his unwavering loyalty to the Kremlin. Eager to follow Stalin's anti-Titoism and "anti-cosmopolitanism" to the letter, Romania not only avoided constructive engagement with Western governments, but actually exerted substantial pressure on foreign embassies in Bucharest. This was true especially with respect to the British and American legations, whose diplomats and staff were constantly intimidated and sometimes arrested; and whose visas were oftentimes severely delayed, if not denied altogether. By early 1950, Rudolf. E Schoenberg, the American ambassador to Bucharest was reporting that "the progressively severe restrictions" imposed by the Romanian government on the cultural and informational activities of the Legation over the last three years had already reduced them to the "barest minimum", rendering the US Information Service (USIS) "virtually confined to premises (of the Legation)." <sup>61</sup>

Dissatisfied with even a symbolic presence of the USIS in Bucharest, on 2 March 1950 the Romanian government dealt a final blow to its activity by not simply requesting, but strongly demanding that the USIS cease its activities altogether. The US government could do little else but express its "astonishment" at this initiative, noting that it was "lacking all elements of customary dipl (sic) practice and courtesy." In his report to Washington, Schoenberg concluded that "the uncooperative attitude of the Rumanian Government and the progressive restrictions over a wide area imposed upon the American Legation have

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PRC to send five Chinese students to Romania for language instruction in exchange for five students from Romania, 6 July 1950; and Telegram from Teodor Rudenco to MFA regarding the preparations for the site of the Chinese embassy in Bucharest, 11 July, 1950. In Romulus Ioan Budura, *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974*, 1:210–12.

<sup>61</sup> Telegram from Schoenfeld, Minister in Romania to the Secretary of State, 2 March, 1950. FRUS, 1950, volume IV, Central and Eastern Europe; Soviet Union, Document 889, p. 1053.

indicated clearly that the Rumanian (sic) government is not interested in open and friendly contact.”<sup>62</sup>

And so it was that the country that in 1944 was still waiting to be liberated by the Americans; which had stronger cultural and political ties to Paris than to Moscow; and which had been deeply anti-Communist and anti-Soviet, had now become one of the most Stalinist within the Soviet Bloc. So swift and efficient had been Stalin’s plan to gain control over this most atypical country within his sphere of influence, that by mid-1948 both Romanian citizens and Westerners alike started believing that the country might even become a Soviet republic.<sup>63</sup> And so determined was Dej to obtain and maintain the primordial leadership role in Romania, that he leveraged these plans to fashion himself – and by extension, his country – into one of the most faithful satellites orbiting the Kremlin.

### **Victim of circumstance**

Few episodes of the Cold War were as pivotal as Stalin’s death on 5 March, 1953. For the Soviet satellites, in particular, the immediate aftermath of the Kremlin leader’s demise was colored by confusion, uncertainty, and social upheaval. The “little Stalins” within the Bloc, who had been vetted by the iron-fisted leader and pushed into the uniform application of his policies for half a decade, certainly had reason to be nervous. The carbon-copy application of the Stalinist model had not only failed to bring the promised prosperity, but the brutal force it had been applied with had brought the satellite economies to their knees.

Within weeks of Stalin’s death, social unrest in some of the ‘fraternal’ countries was signaling the beginning of an impending Bloc-wide crisis.<sup>64</sup> The flood of East Germans

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 1056

<sup>63</sup> Possible incorporation of Rumania with USSR. Information Report, Office of Current Intelligence, 21 June, 1948; Mioara Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007), 31.

<sup>64</sup> For a detailed account of these crises, their effect on Soviet decision-making and on the shaping of the New Course see Mark Kramer’s three-part article, Mark Kramer, “The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 1),” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 3–55. Mark Kramer, “The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 2),” *Journal of Cold War*

pouring into the neighboring Federal Republic of Germany was gaining alarming proportions. Under Walter Ulbricht's 1952 plan for the 'construction of Socialism' (*Aufbau des Sozialismus*), East German citizens had suffered the brutal consequences of land collectivization and massive crackdowns on the Protestant Church and all real or imagined 'class enemies.' The plan's economic policies had also resulted in a widespread lack of consumer goods (which would be sold at hugely inflated prices even if miraculously found), the rationing of basic foods, and shortages of heat and electricity at the height of winter. As a result, by mid-June 1953 an average of ten thousand East Germans were crossing the border into West Germany per week. Among the refugees were also numerous soldiers; the lack of food and uniforms had brought the desertion rates among the armed forces to an all-time high.<sup>65</sup> Not only was the construction of Socialism failing in East Germany, but so too was its ideological legitimacy.

In Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria rebellions were also erupting. Crude living standards coupled with a drastic currency reform brought more than 32,000 blue-collar Czechoslovak workers into the streets throughout April and May. On 1 June, a rally initiated by Skoda factory employees in Plzen quickly gained momentum as thousands of other workers joined in solidarity, despite the authorities' best efforts to erect barricades. The more the number of protesters grew, the bolder their political demands became. As they started gaining control over the city, not only did they begin to burn Soviet flags and to tear down Soviet propaganda posters, but they also boldly demanded the end of Communist rule, the overthrow of the central government, and the implementation of free elections.<sup>66</sup> Such outright defiance on the part of the blue-collar workers, who were in theory considered the backbone of the Communist parties across the board, no doubt signaled to the Kremlin that the crisis was deepening, and fast.

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*Studies* 1, no. 2 (1999): 3–38. Mark Kramer, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 3)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 3 (1999): 3–66.

<sup>65</sup> Kramer, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 1)," 12–13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18-19.

It was the riots of the Bulgarian tobacco workers, however, that probably came as the biggest surprise to the Kremlin leadership. The country had been considered the most docile within the Bloc, and for good reason. Its leader, Vulko Chervenkov was a devout Stalinist and, as such, one of the most subservient satellite leaders. The brutality of his regime, however, was only matched by the asperity with which he applied the Stalinist economic model. Crash-speed industrialization resulted in the near-annihilation of the small and medium scale agriculture sectors, which had accounted for up to 85% of the Bulgarian economy.

Chervenkov's ruthlessness and his abrasive policies have led some scholars to claim that during his regime "violent repression and mass terror in Bulgaria reached greater heights than in any other East European country."<sup>67</sup> So brutal were his policies, in fact, that the families of anyone who dared flee the country into neighboring Greece or Yugoslavia were automatically incarcerated. A government bid for higher workers' norms finally proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. On 3 May workers in tobacco factories near Plovdiv and Khaskovo started striking and rioting. This explosive situation startled not only Chervenkov, who had ruled unchallenged up to that point, but also Moscow.

Although the crises in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria came as a surprise to the Kremlin, they did represent the peak of smaller scale disruptions reported by Soviet intelligence even before Stalin's death. Cables from the Soviet ambassador to Czechoslovakia at the end of 1952 were reporting the fact that the country's industry had been in "a state of chaos", while Soviet officials in Hungary were noting "severe deficiencies" and "discontent" among the people. Similarly, Soviet intelligence from Romania reported "extremely detrimental conditions and disruption" in the economy, as well as "political confusion" in the areas bordering Yugoslavia.<sup>68</sup>

Despite these alarming signals, however, no policy shifts took place while Stalin was still alive, which might have prevented the uprisings. Such shifts would have perhaps implied a tacit acknowledgement on the Soviet leader's part that his signature economic plan, carbon-

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p 5-6.

copied from the Soviet model and mercilessly imposed on every satellite state, was a mistake. Yet, so it turned out to be. First, because not only did the satellite countries have different economic profiles (in terms of capacity, resources, etc), but there were also regional considerations at play; and secondly, because none of the satellite states really closely resembled the Soviet profile to begin with.<sup>69</sup> After almost five years under the burden of such a radical and austere economic plan, the Bloc was now beginning to cave in under the pressure.

The social upheaval in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria within the first months of Stalin's death alerted the Kremlin that a serious crisis was imminent, threatening Soviet hegemony within its sphere in influence. The severe economic conditions were not only fueling widespread popular discontent, but they were also discrediting the ideological core on which the system had been built. Whatever their difference of opinion over internal policy may have been, and acerbic power struggles aside, Georgy Malenkov, Vyacheslav Molotov and Nikita Khrushchev – Stalin's triumvirate of successors - surprisingly found common ground on the policy towards the Soviet satellites. It had become all too clear that change was needed – and rapidly – to ensure stability (and, by extension, to consolidate Soviet hegemony) in the region.

In order to “prevent a catastrophe”<sup>70</sup> the Soviet leaders decided that a new economic course was to be implemented in each fraternal country, this time tailored specifically to its profile in terms of capacity, resources and necessities. Moscow thus decided that not only were a set of widespread and comprehensive reforms needed across the Bloc, but that strong pressure would be exerted on any satellite member that resisted such reforms.<sup>71</sup> Throughout June, the leaders of the satellites were summoned to the Kremlin in order to receive an evaluation of their countries' current state and to obtain (strong) recommendations on reforms towards the New Course. Those meetings focused especially on East Germany, where the situation was most critical. Another set of meetings scheduled

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<sup>69</sup> Mark Gilbert, *Cold War Europe : The Politics of a Contested Continent* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 39.

<sup>70</sup> Kramer, “The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 1),” 21.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

for July with leaders from Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland were thought, until recently, not to have taken place.<sup>72</sup> Recently declassified material in the Romanian archives, however, not only proves that they did, but reveal a tone and dynamic for the imposition of the New Course that surely must have appeared alien and surprising - certainly to Romanian leader Gheorghiu-Dej, but most likely to the other leaders as well.

On his way to the Kremlin in the first days of July 1953 Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej must have felt ill at ease, to say the least. During Stalin's reign, he had managed to brutally suppress any form of popular opposition to the application of the Soviet-style system. As one of the most Stalinist countries within the Bloc, Romania had managed to quiet any dissent to the widespread collectivization of farmland, the exorbitant costs – both monetary and human – of rapid industrialization, and the unrealistic demands of the five-year plan on a population already enfeebled by the destruction of World War II through a sophisticated state surveillance and security system.

Within less than a month after Stalin's death, however, social unrest in cities like Cluj and Târgu Mureş were signaling that the system was starting to shake. Dej responded the only way he knew how: after brutally crushing the incipient uprisings, he offered a token gesture of political relaxation. On 5<sup>th</sup> April the Romanian leader announced a partial amnesty to "rectify the mistakes, excesses, and abuses committed by local state authorities and judicial organs."<sup>73</sup> This promise, however, turned out to be a bluff, as the policy was never implemented.<sup>74</sup>

If the Romanian population might have been easily duped, however, the Soviets turned out to be harder to fool. Despite Dej's assurances to Anatoli Josifovich Lavrentiev, the Soviet ambassador to Bucharest, that "although in a few places the enemies have reared their heads after comrade Stalin's death, the political situation in the country and in the Party is

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<sup>72</sup> Kramer, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 3)," 31.

<sup>73</sup> "Decret pentru gratierea unor pedepse" *Scânteia*, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1953. In *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

generally good”<sup>75</sup>, the Kremlin acted decisively. After dealing with the more threatening uprisings in East Germany, the Kremlin swiftly arranged for talks with Dej for talks in the first half of July.

### **Shock therapy on de-Stalinization**

Ahead of his meetings with the Soviets, Dej was probably uncomfortably aware that his position of leadership was in jeopardy; and that the manner in which he would handle the talks with Stalin’s successors – Malenkov, Molotov and Khrushchev- would determine his political fate. Like most other fraternal countries within the Bloc, it was now becoming increasingly obvious that Romania was teetering on the edge of economic collapse. And, although the uprisings in Cluj and Targu Mures had not quite reached the same magnitude as those in East Germany, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, they did send the clear signal that the current structure was losing support and legitimacy. A shrewd politician and skillful tactician, Dej was keen to avoid the same fate as his colleagues within the Bloc<sup>76</sup> and to maintain power at all costs. His performance in Moscow over the next two weeks would be critical to this objective.

The July meetings came at the tail end of two very important events that would leave an indelible mark on Moscow’s relationship with its satellites for the rest the decade, and arguably much thereafter. First, the crisis in East Berlin and Walter Ulbricht’s response to it taught the Soviet triumvirate an important lesson not just on the urgent need to implement the New Course, but also on how to avoid certain pitfalls. Second, the arrest of Lavrenti Beria (one of Stalin’s most ruthless and faithful successors) on June 26<sup>th</sup> had left his rivals with some explaining to do.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Following the unrest and eventual uprisings in Berlin, Walter Ulbricht eventually lost both power and influence within the government. In Hungary, hardliner Matias Rakosi was replaced by a more moderate and reform-oriented Imre Nagy; similarly, Vulko Chernenkov was replaced by a more moderate Todor Zhivkov in Bulgaria, while in Czechoslovakia Antonin Novotny took over after Klement Gottwald died in office earlier that year.

The lightning-round of July consultations in Moscow began with an extended group meeting on the political issues surrounding Stalin's death, including Beria's arrest. Over the next few days, a series of bilateral consultations followed, focusing on the economic implementation of the New Course in each fraternal country.

It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of Dej's conversations with the Soviets in July 1953. Politically, what the new Kremlin leadership was expounding only a few short months after Stalin's death was nothing less than the normalization of relations with Yugoslavia; the near criminalization of Stalin's abuse of power; and an indictment of his cult of personality. Simply put, the Kremlin triumvirate – but mostly Malenkov and Molotov – were promoting the very same principles more commonly associated with Khrushchev's Secret Speech of 1956.

It was during those intense July days three years earlier, however, that Gheorghiu-Dej must have been more shocked to learn the implications of Stalin's death. The first meeting, during which the Soviets intended to justify Beria's arrest, took a turn towards the unexpected. After a rather brief explanation of Beria's alleged espionage activities and blackmail plans, Malenkov declared point blank that "it's necessary to establish normal relations with Yugoslavia, as well as with other capitalist countries."<sup>77</sup> In order to dispel any doubt about the importance of this policy or about the how optional it might be for the satellites, Malenkov explained that "the USSR has already taken some steps [towards this]...and the popular democracies should do the same."<sup>78</sup>

After this brief, yet powerful foreign policy enunciation, the new Kremlin leadership swiftly turned to the sacrosanct figure of Stalin, whose regime had been Dej's ultimate guarantor of power. The criticism by the Soviet comrades of their recently defunct leader started mildly, noting that although "Stalin was a great man... he also had weaknesses that had an impact

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<sup>77</sup> Note regarding the conversations on 8-13 July, 1953 between a delegation of the CC of the RWP and a delegation of the CC of the CPSU composed of: Malenkov, Molotov, Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Perhuvyn and Lavrentiev regarding the economic situation and the social atmosphere in Romania, 14 July, 1953. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 27/1953, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



on Party and state affairs, especially in the last years of his life, when he was suffering and could not deal directly with all the problems.”<sup>79</sup>

The triumvirate’s criticism of Stalin gathered strength as the discussion progressed. Stalin’s failure as a leader in his later years, according to his former disciples, manifested itself in a fractured “collegiality among the leadership – its very foundation – [which was] missing.”<sup>80</sup> According to them, the government apparatus had become so dysfunctional in the last few years of Stalin’s life that Central Committee sessions and Politburo meetings were no longer being held. This would oftentimes allow the leader to make decisions that were “inevitably unilateral and sometimes just plain wrong.”<sup>81</sup> Finally, Molotov concluded, “what Lenin said in his testament came true – that Stalin is mortal and has the tendency to abuse power”<sup>82</sup>.

Indeed, Molotov continued, Stalin’s monopoly of power in the Party had become so strong that “the opinions of other members of the government were not being taken into consideration; it had become impossible to express (one)self... but we don’t have slaves and masters in our Party. We are no one’s slaves.”<sup>83</sup>

Poignant resentment aside, this argument clearly stands as the root of the Soviet leadership’s implementation of a ‘shared power’ structure shortly thereafter, by separating the Party and government leadership roles. True to form, they later instructed the satellite governments to follow suit.

The criticism of Stalin, however, would have been incomplete without linking the leader’s tendency to abuse power with his weakness for a cult of personality, which was “...always avoided in our Party... J.V. Stalin wrote countless times about this...but, unfortunately (...) he did not apply in practice that which he wrote.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Molotov explained that by the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress things went so far that everyone was forced to pledge “devotion until the end towards Comrade Stalin.” Although it was in Stalin’s power to put an end to this sycophantic behavior with just a simple phone call, he chose not to, Molotov complained, leading him to conclude that,

*The cult of Stalin’s personality went so far, that he was beginning to rise above Lenin. That is wrong. Marx was a great genius. Engels was smaller than Marx. Lenin was a great genius. And Stalin was smaller than Lenin.*<sup>85</sup>

Towards the end of the meeting, the Soviets stated that they were taking “decisive measures to strengthen the collegiality among the leadership and to combat the cult of personality”. As a (not optional) recommendation they urged their Romanian and Hungarian counterparts “also to draw the right conclusions because this thing is contagious and it has manifested itself among the fraternal parties.”<sup>86</sup>

Despite Dej’s cool assurances to the Soviets that there are “important lessons to be learned” and that he would “most definitely take into consideration” all that had been discussed, it would be safe to assume that inwardly he was less calm. Both the rehabilitation of Yugoslavia in the socialist camp, as well as the implications the denunciation of Stalin’s power abuses were particularly problematic for Dej.

The announcement of an impending rapprochement with Belgrade must have come as a shock to the Romanian leader. Since Stalin’s break with Tito in 1948 and the move of the Cominform to Bucharest, the Romanian capital had been leading the most acerbic and vociferous anti-Titoist campaign within the Bloc through a specially-assigned task force. Only a three months before the Moscow consultations, it had released a detailed propaganda strategy against the ‘cosmopolitan Titofascists’ leading Yugoslavia, detailing the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

lessons learned from previous campaigns and the way forward to an improved, more focused and efficient strategy against them.<sup>87</sup>

In the months following the meeting with the triumvirate, however, Dej, was quick to adapt to Moscow's new line by taking a few calculated and subtle steps to prepare for the Kremlin's official rapprochement with Yugoslavia. Before reaching out to Belgrade, he started improving relations with the Serbian minority in Romania. By September 1953, he had already made proposals to offer compensation to some 10,000 ethnic Serbs who had been forcefully displaced from the border areas during a particularly tense period with Belgrade.<sup>88</sup>

In Moscow, the Romanian ambassador received instructions to 'warm up' to his Yugoslav counterpart once Belgrade and Moscow finally re-established diplomatic relations in spring 1954.<sup>89</sup> By September, therefore, Bucharest and Belgrade had already exchanged diplomats; and by the end of the same year they signed an agreement on extensive Danube transit and railway traffic cooperation.<sup>90</sup>

Dej's move towards warmer relations with Belgrade had been so subtle, that by the time official ties were established local RWP members were baffled by the complete turnaround. Such had been the extent of the surprise of this move within the RWP ranks that the government actually had to release an explanatory statement in answer to "...those

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<sup>87</sup> Note regarding the anti-Titoist propaganda carried out in the capital's newspapers between 1 December, 1952 – 10 March, 1953. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 21/1953.

<sup>88</sup> Mihai Croitor, Sandra Borsa, *Triunghiul Suspiciunii: Gheorghiu-Dej, Hrusciov și Tito (1954-1964) (The Trangle of Suspicious: Gheorghiu-Dej, Khrushchev and Tito, 1954-1964)*, vol. I, II vols. (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2014).

<sup>89</sup> AMAE, Telegrams from Moscow, 1954

<sup>90</sup> Note regarding the talks between the Minister of Air and Naval Transportation on 6 April, 1954 with the delegations of the Yugoslav River Transport Enterprise regarding the transit of goods through the ports of Braila and Galati, originating from the exchange of goods between Yugoslavia and Turkey, 12 April, 1954. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 13/1954.

questions asked by many Party members about the relationship between (Romania) and Yugoslavia.<sup>91</sup>

Through it, the government explained that it had “become clear that both the Romanian and Yugoslav nations are interested to build good friendship and neighborly relations, to establish economic ties and cultural exchanges between the two countries.”<sup>92</sup> The RWP members were also advised to draw the conclusion that it was imperative “to create a climate favorable to mutual understanding and friendship... avoiding any manifestation that would damage the establishment of normal relations and friendship between the two countries.”<sup>93</sup>

In other words, the acerbic propaganda had to stop immediately. After nearly half a decade of portraying their neighbors across the Danube as nothing less than enemies of the Romanian state, the Party employed a brief communiqué to assure the RWP faithful that Yugoslavia was now fast becoming a good friend.

If the change in the relationship with Tito’s Yugoslavia might have seemed relatively easy to manage, however, the remaining political issues that the Kremlin seemed keen to address – the division of power and a reining in of the cult of personality – proved to be more delicate for Dej. The most problematic issue here was the denunciation of Stalin’s abuses of power and his policies in the last years of his life. Dej, who had until then been a staunch Stalinist, and who had relied on the Kremlin in order to consolidate his power, suddenly found himself on unstable political ground.

Although he had managed to dispose of two of his most prominent rivals in the 1952 purges, Ana Pauker and Teohari Georgescu, Dej still had one major political adversary- Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu - who, somewhat inconveniently for Dej, was still very much alive. In

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<sup>91</sup> Talks of the CC of the RWP with the regional committees regarding the dissolution of the Greek Communist Party committees and organizations, as well as the relations between our country and Yugoslavia, following the questions asked by many members of the Party, 1-9 November, 1954. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 33/1954.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

the new context of destalinization, Pauker and Georgescu did not stand a chance of being rehabilitated since they belonged to the 'Moscow' faction that had spent the war years in the Soviet capital and that returned to take over power in Romania by brutally applying the Stalinist model. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, however, could have been seen as a moderate communist and a potential reformist leader – precisely the kind that the Soviets now seemed to favor. The Hungarian model was a case in point, where just next door to Romania, moderate and reformist Imre Nagy had been recently reinstated by the Kremlin. Dej could certainly not risk keeping such reformist alternatives around in Bucharest.

Unsure about what the next step should be, Dej consulted the Soviet authorities on many occasions about a trial for Pătrășcanu, who had been jailed since 1948. Despite his many inquiries<sup>94</sup>, however, the Soviets failed to provide Dej with clear instructions or even opinions about the case. Dej took advantage of this perceived Soviet ambivalence towards Pătrășcanu to arrange for a secret trial and his immediate execution in April 1954. Only two days later, Gheorghiu-Dej finally implemented the stalled policy of separating state and Party leadership functions, by appointing himself President of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister) and his trusted ally, Gheorghe Apostol, as Party Secretary. This change came a full eight months after the Soviets had adopted this measure, in August 1953 (presumably because Dej needed to first consolidate his position by eliminating his adversary).

### **The Kremlin's unfavorable New Course diagnostics**

On July 8<sup>th</sup> 1953, the day after the Soviet triumvirate privately denounced Stalin, the Romanian delegation met a second time with the Kremlin leadership.<sup>95</sup> This time, however, the agenda was dedicated exclusively to Romania's implementation of economic reforms.

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<sup>94</sup> Note regarding the conversations on 8-13 July, 1953 in Bucharest between a delegation of the CC of the RWP and a delegation of the CC of the CPSU composed of: Malenkov, Molotov, Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Perhuvyn and Lavrentiev regarding the economic situation and the social atmosphere in Romania, 14 July, 1953. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 27/1953.

<sup>95</sup> The CPUS members present were Georgy Malenkov, Vyacheslav Molotov, Nikita Khrushchev, Anastas Micoyan and Anatoli Josifovich Lavrentiev, the USSR ambassador to Romania.

The Romanians had come prepared with a set of proposals, on which their Soviet counterparts were expected to provide feedback and further recommendations. The tone, dynamic and general tenor of these discussions not only provide a deeper insight about Soviet policy-making at the time, but could also be instructive with respect to its implementation elsewhere in the Bloc.

The meeting was short, but very intense. Out of courtesy, Dej was invited to offer a brief presentation of Romania's economy, focusing especially on the availability of goods and the general spirit of the working class.<sup>96</sup> During the presentation, however, Malenkov and Molotov interrupted by asking whether "...the situation is beautified (and) whether deficiencies are being swept under the rug." They clearly had been already well informed by the Soviet advisors operating in Romania and by the detailed reports sent by Lavrentiev, the Soviet ambassador to Bucharest. As a result, they told Dej that they were well aware that "the population is dissatisfied with the availability of consumer goods, that there are cases in which the peasants sack the cereal silos."<sup>97</sup>

Without wasting time, the Soviet leadership then proceeded to present its own version of the state of the Romanian economy: the country did not import consumer goods, but it imported heavy machinery which remained largely unused; although Romania was an agricultural country, it did not possess any cereal stockpiles; and although it was an oil producing country, no petrol was made available for sale in rural areas. All this, coupled with the fact that military spending was "excessively large" (a policy that the Soviets admitted to have encouraged), as well as the fact that the Romanians had spent more than half of their gold reserve, had resulted in an economic policy that was "flawed, stupid, and even dangerous," according to Malenkov.<sup>98</sup>

One of the most salient problems, according to the Soviets, was Romanian expenditure on large infrastructure projects, and especially on the canal linking the Danube to the Black

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<sup>96</sup> Minutes of the meeting between Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej and comrades Malenkov, Molotov, Khrushchev, Mikoyan and Parhuvyn. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 26/1953, p.1.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

Sea. The Soviets were pointing out that it was part of yet another paradox of the Romanian economy – amid a widespread shortage of labor throughout the country, tens of thousands of people were working on a useless project.<sup>99</sup>

According to Khrushchev, the Canal was unnecessary because it had been a German idea, born out of the necessity to access the sea without passing through the Soviet part of the Danube. Malenkov, however, conceded that “the construction of the Canal was a gross mistake, which we also pushed you to make”<sup>100</sup>, referring probably to the fact that the project had been the only major infrastructure venture that the Soviets helped fund in Romania.<sup>101</sup> Whatever its true genesis, Khrushchev decisively placed the last nail in the project’s coffin by concluding that “the Canal doesn’t unite us; it separates us; it’s a shameful idea.”<sup>102</sup>

Without mincing any words, Malenkov admonished the Romanians that they “worry too much about prestige. It’s not a question of prestige. You can lose power, you can lose everything, not just your prestige. The greatest danger is smugness (and) sweeping deficiencies under the rug.”<sup>103</sup> Malenkov unequivocally instructed the Romanians to “correct this mistake because otherwise the people will correct it for [them].”<sup>104</sup>

Agriculture and the lack of consumer goods, which were both “in a catastrophic situation” according to the Kremlin, were the overarching deficiencies of the Romanian economy. “A sharp turnaround in economic policymaking” was therefore needed if the Romanian population, and especially the peasants, were not to be further alienated.<sup>105</sup>

Malenkov, who dominated the talks, left no room for misinterpretation, chiding Dej on the fact that,

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*, 115.

<sup>102</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 26/1953, p4.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p3.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p.4

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

*...The peasant unrest has not worried you and you haven't learnt the necessary lessons; you're confused by your own smugness. A radical change in economic policymaking is necessary... the most serious thing is your attitude of ignoring existing deficiencies.*<sup>106</sup>

In a moment of heightened tension, Molotov addressed the Romanian delegation with something more akin to a threat than to advice:

*You feel secure under the wing of the Soviet Union. The Soviet nation has shed a sea of blood for your liberation. What would you do in a potential World War III? Your army is made up largely of peasants. If you don't endear yourselves to the people, not even we will be able to help you. Who respects your power? Without our support, you wouldn't last even two weeks.*<sup>107</sup>

While the above quote is almost exclusively cited as an illustration of Soviet dominance over a victimized Romania<sup>108</sup>, the context in which it was enunciated begs for a different interpretation of its meaning.

After having weathered the crisis in East Germany and quelled the uprisings in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, the Soviets had drawn a few vital lessons in leadership. They had witnessed how poor (i.e. collapsing) economies had led to social disenchantment, delegitimization of power and, ultimately, unrest.

The Soviet leadership had therefore well understood that weak Bloc economies created a cycle of dependency that was not only unsustainable for the Soviet Union, but it was also damaging to its image. It had also understood that collapsing satellite economies were a

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*; Vasile Buga, "Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 I," *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 42-43, no. 1-2 (2004): 1-40; Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*.



question of national security if they lead to social unrest. In other words, a superpower surrounded by weak and unstable satellites was less 'super' and had less power.

The Soviets were therefore unwilling to take any chances. By aggressively pushing for economic reform, they aimed to strengthen their satellites. The goal was to bolster the legitimacy of satellite leadership by breaking the cycle of dependency on the Soviet Union once the satellites' economies became stronger and more efficient.

The approach taken with the Romanian leadership illustrates the Kremlin's main objective for holding the July meetings with some of its satellites, which was to prevent the crises seen in the GDR, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia from spreading. As the Romanian case shows, they appeared to have decided that the best way to achieve this goal of regional stability was to push for reform – as aggressively and authoritatively as needed – in order to avoid similar situations in the future. This is best illustrated by Malenkov's advice to Dej to

*...draw serious conclusions from all this, but calmly and without panic and noise. The GDR was reformed under fire, with noise. We also gave them advice, but we were a little late in doing so. You can still right your wrongs because your country hasn't yet arrived to a boiling point. But you must hurry... People have to live well."*

The July meetings were therefore not simply an exercise in intimidation in order to obtain blind submission. The aggressive arm-twisting was simply the tactic they used – probably the only one they knew – to achieve a more significant goal: to push the satellites into finding their own solutions to acute economic problems. It would be a mistake to assume from all this that the Soviets were pushing for each satellite to aim at full economic independence. After all, the New Course was their plan; but it was a plan they wanted to see applied based on national particularities and variations. This was a fact initially difficult to understand for staunch Stalinist leaders such as Dej.

The Soviet leaders did indeed try to explain that this discussion was meant as a "friendly criticism." After all, they conceded that "similar mistakes (had) been made in Bulgaria and Hungary"; and, more importantly, they admitted that the Soviet Union had made similar

mistakes in the past. Dej was encouraged to right his wrongs for the sake of his legitimacy, the stability of his country, and the welfare of his people - probably in that order. The bottom line for the Soviet leadership, however, was the protection of its strategic interests. The Soviet Union could simply not afford social and political upheaval on its borders; it needed Romania "to be a solid base for (its) front."<sup>109</sup>

At the end of the meeting, the Romanians were given five days to rethink their proposals for economic reform and to elaborate a better (and more realistic) plan. Dej, who could not shake off his subservience to Stalinism overnight, committed the impudence of asking for a couple of Soviet advisors to "help" with the endeavor. The Soviet leadership flatly refused, declaring that the Romanian proposals for reform would "have to be elaborated... independently."<sup>110</sup>

Five days later, on July 13<sup>th</sup>, the Romanian delegation met again with the Soviet leadership to review and discuss Romania's improved proposals for implementing the New Course. The shock of the previous meeting must not have been enough to convince Dej that much had changed since the dictator's death and his revamped proposals again came up short. They were only slightly improved, but not enough to impress the Soviets, who were indeed looking for a genuinely New Course in the Romanian economy. Seemingly still very much used to Stalinist forms of leadership, the Romanian leader had chosen to play it safe, willing to take his chances at being criticized for being too subservient rather than too daring. After all, an independently drawn plan for economic reform could have been interpreted as the highest form of disobedience during Stalin's dictatorship.

Malenkov's initial assessment was that the proposal was going "in the right direction", but he bluntly pushed Dej not to be shy and to feel free to make his own proposals. More importantly, the Soviet leader advised that Dej shouldn't "consider the recommendations of the Soviet advisors to be mandatory."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 26/1953, p. 3

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

It would be reasonably safe to assume that such a statement coming from a Soviet leader must have come as a complete surprise to Dej, to say the least. But Malenkov was keen on making it understood that he wanted the solutions to the Romanian economy to come from the Romanian leadership, and that the Kremlin was a willing partner in the discussions and negotiations. He was also intent on letting his counterparts know that he was well aware that some of these solutions would entail significant concessions on the part of the Soviet Union, and that he was willing to make concessions in consultation with the Romanians,

*Why have you held back? Don't be shy; write down everything you propose with respect to exports, technical assistance, currency exchange, military expenditures, the SovRoms, and we will analyze it together. You have to say everything sincerely and openly, even when you have the impression that a certain policy might affect the economic interests of the USSR. Our interests and your interests overlap.*<sup>112</sup>

A more explicit encouragement for national initiative, limited in range though it might have been, could hardly have been made. Indeed, after full political economic and military subservience to the Soviet Union, any such concession must have seemed like a genuine leap towards freedom. This would explain Dej's almost comical reluctance to accept the new directives coming from the Kremlin, no matter how blunt.

Despite the friendlier tone of this meeting, however, Malenkov still felt the need to warn Dej that without a complete turnaround, especially in agriculture, he will "be left without bread... (and) that will be the slogan of those who won't want to fulfill their quota. This will undermine discipline."<sup>113</sup>

Before returning to Bucharest, and after what had been one of the most intense weeks in Dej's career to that point, Malenkov issued him a set of instructions. They represented the Kremlin-mandated framework within which Dej was expected to initiate economic reform:

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p.16

*You have to rectify and improve the relationship with the peasants. You have to eliminate the politics of stupidity. Don't take any hasty measures. Don't rush. Don't change everything at once, but gradually, systematically, after significant preparation. You have to ensure the strength of the alliance, to take care of the working class, to ensure the availability of goods. You have to develop the economy and strengthen the proletarian state. There's absolutely no rush. And the Canal, too [must be analyzed] – calmly, without noise.*<sup>114</sup>

### **Economic failure as opportunity for independence**

It would be hard to overestimate the effect of Dej's sojourn in Moscow in the summer of 1953. The three meetings he had held with the Soviet leadership over the course of one week would inspire a new stage of his career – and for Romania, a new phase of its Communist history.

Dej had been genuinely astounded by the new approach to leadership on the part of Stalin's successors. In a private meeting with Leonid Melnikov, the new Soviet ambassador to Bucharest, Dej would confess shortly after returning from Moscow that he had "felt a little bit uneasy when the Soviet leadership talked to [the Romanian delegation] as equals." The new brand of Soviet leadership was stunning to him – and Dej appreciated its full significance, intimating to Melnikov that "in my life and work, this conversation signifies a great event." For his part, the Soviet diplomat noted in his journal that "after this conversation (in Moscow), as Dej put it, he grew taller by one head."<sup>115</sup>

A keen observer and shrewd politician, Dej was quick to recover from the initial shock of the meetings and to astutely identify the opportunities they conveyed. A more contented working class would mean more legitimacy; and more legitimacy would mean a stronger hold on power. The economic reforms 'suggested' by the Kremlin - as much as they were

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Op. cit. in Buga, "Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 I," 8.

meant to safeguard Soviet hegemony in the region - could also play in his favor. He did not waste a minute in implementing them.

The first – and perhaps easiest – step he took immediately upon his arrival to Bucharest was to cease all work on the Danube-Black Sea Canal. This measure he reported to the Soviet ambassador within two weeks of his return from Moscow, along with assurances that all resources, including labor, heavy machinery and construction materials formerly employed in the project had been re-allocated to more productive sectors of the Romanian economy.

The more substantial economic reforms, however, would take time, effort and a not insignificant amount of readjustment. A hard look at the state of the Romanian economy provided a rather bleak starting point, revealing how challenging it would be to implement changes when there were simply no facilities, resources or infrastructure to do so. A larger labor force was needed in the cities, yet there was no urban housing to accommodate working families. An improvement of cultural life was needed for the working class, yet there was no infrastructure for it.<sup>116</sup> As one Politburo member put it, “we just can’t say that we will continue to build cinemas when we haven’t built a single one over the last several years.”<sup>117</sup>

The most pressing and potentially explosive issue, however, was the sore lack of the most basic of alimentary products. By mid-1953, Romanians had problems purchasing bread and eggs. Meat was considered the epitome of luxury, as most of the national production had been earmarked for export over the last years. Keenly aware of the Soviet warning that the working class could never be motivated to construct Socialism on an empty stomach, Dej openly concluded that it was time “to make a complete turnaround.”<sup>118</sup> Such a task, however, would be titanic, as there was almost no structure to accommodate the needs of the domestic market. In order to redress the meat scarcity over the short-term, it was

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<sup>116</sup> Minutes of the Politburo meeting of 3 August, 1953. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 43/1953.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 12

<sup>118</sup> Minutes of the conversation between Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej and comrades A. Barladeanu, E. Fleischer, and Cristina Ionita on foreign trade, 9 September, 1953. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 50/1953.

decided that priority should be given to raising animals that reproduced quickly, such as pigs, chicken and sheep.<sup>119</sup> However, there was not enough corn production to feed them; not enough gasoline (paradoxically, for an oil producing country) to transport them; and not enough slaughterhouses to process them.<sup>120</sup> Even by stopping most of the meat exports altogether, Dej reckoned it would take at least 2-3 years to redress the situation.<sup>121</sup>

The task ahead was arduous; but the Soviets were willing concede a few important tokens of goodwill to encourage the process. The most significant of these would be allowing the Romanian government to buy out the Soviet shares of the SovRoms, and thus fully 'return' them to the national economy. By 1953 they had become a thinly veiled source of exploitation, with most output (i.e. natural resources, manufacturing products, etc.) benefitting Moscow.

The negotiation process for the SovRom buyout was relatively painless. By the end of 1954, 14 out of the 16 SovRoms had been fully nationalized. The remaining two, which incidentally benefitted Soviet economic interests the most – SovRomQuarz (which ostensibly focused on the extraction of quartz, but in reality was an uranium-mining enterprise) and SovRomPetrol (which dealt with the extraction and oil) – would not be nationalized until two years later, in 1956.

By buying the Soviets out most of these vital 16 sectors of the economy, Dej had won Romania an important first step towards economic independence. Careful not to seem too keen on asserting Romania's independence, however, Dej was careful to publicly exhibit Romania's gratitude for the constructive help these enterprises had represented over the last years. This, of course, implied a drastic change of the historical narrative. While up to that point (and since) it had been an acknowledged fact that the institution of the SovRoms had represented a punitive measure for Romania's alignment with the Axis powers during World War II, on the eve of their dissolution Dej was now claiming that their purpose had

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 43/1953.

<sup>121</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 50/1953.

been to help “rebuild and develop the Romanian economy, which suffered great losses after the country’s German-Fascist occupation.”<sup>122</sup> This strategy of publicly exhibiting subservient gratefulness for a punitive or controlling policy on the eve of its expiration would set the tone for later, similar steps towards Romania’s independence. (In a similar fashion, just four years later, Romania would proclaim a similar gratitude for the ‘protection’ of the Red Army troops, on the eve of their withdrawal.)

While publicly proclaiming eternal gratitude to Moscow, Dej was, however more keen to assert his appreciation for the important new step towards Romanian sovereignty, claiming that “the SovRoms are under the jurisdiction of the country in which they exist; this is law and it would be a mistake if it weren’t so.”<sup>123</sup> It would take a decade of subtle strategy and negotiations, but Dej would not only achieve economic independence for Romania, but he would also do so to an extent that would allow him to publicly defy Moscow, while bringing Romania closer to the West.

A large part of this strategy relied on cultivating economic (and increasingly political) ties with foreign partners outside the Bloc as alternative sources of income and influence to Moscow. Once the autonomy of the national industry was secured through the nationalization of the SovRoms, Dej immediately started looking to diversify Romania’s trading portfolio. The deplorable state of the Romanian economy had revealed that two critical issues needed to be urgently addressed if any amount of progress was to be made. On the one hand, assuring basic alimentation for the Romanian population required the modernization of agricultural production. Such feat, by the Soviets’ own evaluation and recommendations, would lead to an improvement in corn production, which in turn would increase both bread and animal production.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, in order to provide more

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<sup>122</sup> Report of the issues discussed in the mixed commission for Soviet-Romanian cooperation in April 1954, and which will be submitted for approval by the Council of Ministers. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 18/1954.

<sup>123</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 53/1953, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Minutes (handwritten) of the first meeting at the Kremlin, Tuesday, 26 January, 1954; and the second meeting, 29 January, 1954. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 36/1954.

consumer goods to the domestic market, raw materials such as cotton, leather, coffee, citrus, etc., were not only sorely needed but also pervasively lacking.<sup>125</sup>

Taking full advantage of the Kremlin's détente with the West, Dej moved quickly to reverse Romania's antagonistic relationship with some Western countries, especially Britain and the United States. By the end of 1953 Romania was already considering restarting its economic relationship with the United Kingdom, which had been essentially frozen since 1946. Noting that the UK and Commonwealth economy boasted a "fecund" agricultural sector, but that oil was "completely lacking", the Romanian government saw the perfect opportunity to sign a new treaty with London, exchanging one for the other. This policy, in fact, signals the beginning of a strategy that Dej would use for the next decade to improve the Romanian economy and modernize its infrastructure: using the country's rich oil reserves – the only significant ones within the Socialist Bloc – as a currency for much needed products, technological licenses and know-how, as well as industrial equipment. This initiative would later also help settle Bucharest's "thorny issue" of old accounts with the UK (i.e. blocked accounts, nationalized businesses, etc.).<sup>126</sup>

The reconciliation efforts with the United States were as blunt and straightforward as the initial fallout had been just three years before. While in 1950 the Romanian government was tactlessly "demanding" the closure of the USIS office within the American embassy in Bucharest and making substantial efforts to make life difficult for its diplomatic staff, within a few short months of Stalin's death Romania was now declaring its "stringent need" for American agricultural machinery.<sup>127</sup>

So keen was Bucharest in asserting its newfound diplomatic freedom from Moscow, that it took great pains to explain to the American ambassador that Romania was now an "independent country, despite the fact that it is supported by the USSR in many respects." In fact, it would be a great mistake to think of Romania as an "appendix of the USSR," the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 25/1953.

<sup>127</sup> FRUS, 1955-1957, vol XXV, Eastern Europe, Document 38.



Romanians claimed.<sup>128</sup> In light of this complete turnaround in Bucharest's attitude, the US State Department recommended that the two countries exchange economic agents through their respective embassies, should a few token conditions be met.<sup>129</sup>

While Dej turned to the British and the Americans for help to modernize the rather primitive Romanian technology, he also discovered, through Tito, generous sources of raw materials in the Third World. Within the first months of 1954 Bucharest was already signing important contracts with Egypt and India, among others, securing the exchange of cotton, leather, coffee, etc. for Romanian oil derivative products.<sup>130</sup>

Tito, in fact, did not prove to be only a facilitator for such advantageous commercial exchange but, more importantly, he represented a solid political bridge to the Third World, and especially to Cairo. After the Yugoslav leader vouched to the Kremlin for Gamal Abdel Nasser's "completely independent" policy and his "good intentions"<sup>131</sup>, thus receiving the Kremlin's stamp of approval, Romania immediately jumped at the opportunity to invite the Egyptian leader to Bucharest at his "earliest convenience,"<sup>132</sup> thus establishing a solid relationship with Cairo. Over the next decade, in fact, Romania's acute need for raw materials - but also for international prestige - would also push it to establish lucrative economic relationships with the Asian leaders of the Third World, especially India and Indonesia. By using oil equipment and extractive know-how, Dej would thus build important political bridges to these countries, by helping them develop their national oil sectors. These political links would ultimately prove to be extremely beneficial, as they will provide an important insurance cover against Moscow's potential retaliation once Romania defied the Kremlin in the early 1960s – a move that was perhaps very much desirable, yet completely unimaginable to Dej in the first years after Stalin's death.

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> These included the free broadcast of Voice of America in Romania, as well as providing adequate housing for American diplomatic staff in Bucharest. In FRUS, 1955-1957, vol XXV, Eastern Europe, Document 42.

<sup>130</sup> Report on the economic relations between East and West. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 1/1954.

<sup>131</sup> Minutes from the conversation with the Soviet delegation, 4 June, 1955. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 21/1955.

<sup>132</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 1/1954.

Romania's weaknesses therefore turned out to eventually work to its advantage. The initial economic motivations that were the main driving force behind Romania's keenness to establish strong relationships with partners in the West, and especially in Asia and the Middle East – would eventually turn out to be important sources political and economic capital to later counter Moscow as a center of gravity. If a Romanian popular saying is to be believed, that every kick in the rear end is a step forward, then certainly the deplorable state of the Romanian economy provided an incentive for Dej to establish ultimately beneficial ties with international partners.

The drive to expand Romania's economy to foreign markets impacted the country's long-term strategy in two important ways. First, it led to Romania's differentiation from other countries within the Eastern Bloc as the only oil producing – and soon-to-be independent – economy. The full nationalization of SovRompetrol in 1956 would be a major step in this direction. Within the first couple of years after Stalin's death, however, Romania learned that it could leverage its precious natural resource to obtain much-needed raw materials from the Third World. This incipient phase of its oil trade would eventually lead to a more developed form of petro-diplomacy, allowing Romania to provide not only products, but also expertise and technology to underdeveloped countries in exchange for raw materials, consumer goods and, ultimately, political favor.

Second, Bucharest's critical objective to internationalize trade led to the first important wave of institutional professionalization. A robust presence on international markets entailed a well-trained team of commercial agents to represent Romania's economic interests abroad – human resources that the country sorely lacked in 1953. Dej took a personal interest in studying the short list of young professionals who had already studied abroad – mainly in Moscow – in order to identify the first candidates for the task. He also micro-managed to an almost obsessive degree the process of selection and training of new recruits. He thus personally reviewed their profiles to ensure they would have a “healthy background” and that they came from wholesome and closely-knit families, believing that

“if there’s love for the family, there’s also love for the country.”<sup>133</sup> He also helped develop the training curriculum to ensure that each agent would be thoroughly trained for specific countries or regions; not only by learning the local language, but also its culture and traditions, history, political scene, and everything else relevant to conducting a lucrative commercial exchange.<sup>134</sup>

This scarcity in human resources would also lead Dej to found the first important center for training professionals in the field of international trade and commerce. A few years later in 1960, after the Soviets ‘advisors’ had left the country and had therefore ceased to be embedded within Romanian government institutions, Dej would also initiate a fundamental reorganization and professionalization of the Romanian diplomatic corps.

Not all of Dej’s tactics to slowly detach from Moscow, however, were initially as successful. Being perhaps a little too confident in the Kremlin’s intentions to allow its satellites a wider range of national freedom, Dej maladroitly petitioned Khrushchev in 1955 for a pull-out of Soviet troops from Romania. Though the Soviet leader flatly refused, causing a brief spell of tension within the relationship, the idea was kept on the table. After a more successful round of negotiations three years later (which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter), the Soviet troops pulled out of Romania in 1958, leaving it the only country within the eastern Bloc free of Soviet troops for the rest of the Cold War.

## **CONCLUSION**

By 1955 Romania had evolved from being a country in which the Soviet system and its Communist ideology found no support, to being one of the most staunchly Stalinized members of the Eastern Bloc; and, finally, to a Warsaw Pact member that would audaciously request the Kremlin to withdraw its troops from Romanian territory. In just a little over a decade, this process happened at an impressive speed, ultimately placing the country on a path of slow detachment from Moscow in an era in which most other Bloc countries were still strictly adhering to Kremlin policies.

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<sup>133</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 53/1953, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 50/1953.

Romania's right-leaning, non-Slavic and anti-Soviet profile did not perhaps predestine it for such heresy. But it did initially guarantee it a 'special' treatment from Moscow to ensure that, as a geostrategic neighbor, the country could be safely converted into a most subservient of satellites. Throughout this process, Romania can be said to have been both Stalinized, as well as to have *self*-Stalinized. While the Kremlin's involvement was absolutely critical to the rise of the Communists in Bucharest, and to their subsequent possession of near total control of the country's socio-political system, Gheorghiu-Dej's political ambitions certainly contributed to this process. By adhering to the most orthodox application of Stalin's policies, Dej not only steered his country deep into the Socialist camp, but nearly caused its economic collapse in doing so.

Stalin's death in March 1953 and the ensuing policy shift adopted by the Kremlin in the aftermath of Bloc-wide upheaval left an indelible mark on Dej's political agenda. While it would be erroneous to assume that after his meetings at the Kremlin in July 1953 Dej instantaneously devised a grand strategy to detach Romania from the Soviet Union, the New Course did provide him with previously unimagined opportunities to start doing so.

First, it allowed Romania the opportunity to gain full autonomy over its economic production after the joint-venture SovRoms were dissolved. Second, and almost simultaneously, the New Course provided the country with the prospect to not only redress its frozen relationship to the West, but also to establish and cultivate its relationship to key players in the Third World. In this context, Romania would learn to leverage its profile as the only oil-producing self-sufficient country within the Eastern Bloc in order to develop a valuable, even if comparatively modest strategy for petro-diplomacy. Thirdly, as will be developed in next chapters, the New Course (coupled with Khrushchev's ascension to power in Moscow) allowed Dej to begin considering a strategy for negotiating a Soviet troop withdrawal from Romanian territory.

The road away from Moscow would be long, tortuous and riddled with many obstacles along the way – most of which had more to do with the larger international context of the Cold War than with Romania's own strategy. A seasoned politician, Dej would, however,

learn to identify opportunity situations arising within the international climate, and pivot in such a way as to allow him to take advantage even from those circumstances beyond his control.

There is no question that throughout this whole process Dej's first port of call would always be Moscow, which he made considerable effort to convince he was a trusted partner. On the other hand, however, he also looked to develop a more independent national economy and stronger ties with partners that could provide an alternative source of 'protective' power, such as China. Ironically, the Soviets' advice in July 1953 to do everything "quietly and without noise" was taken to heart by Dej – and aptly applied even in his relationship with the Kremlin itself. Thus, by 1964, Dej had quietly harnessed enough economic independence and political capital so as to no longer have to be quiet, and instead be able to defy Moscow quite noisily and publicly.

## 1956: Challenges and Opportunities

### INTRODUCTION

One of the few things that made everyday life under Communism more palatable in the Soviet Bloc was a healthy, albeit oftentimes very dark, sense of humor. The shared experience of living under the oppressive hand and watchful eye of the Kremlin made humor not only a reliable self-defense mechanism, but also an intercultural bridge among the satellite countries. Since the situation was uniformly grim throughout the Bloc, jokes were often interchangeable. One such joke was about a guy – a Pole, Hungarian, Bulgarian – who was sorrowfully telling his work colleague that the previous night he had caught his own wife in bed with a Soviet soldier. “What did you do?” asked the co-worker horrified. “Nothing. I slowly closed the door and tiptoed out of the house. I was lucky he didn’t see me.”

Cloaked under the veil of humor was of course a stark reality; for like the soldier in the anecdote, his real life counterpart evoked fear, intimidation and a general sense of helplessness. He was the symbol of the strained relationship between the Soviet Union and its subjects, who were often economically, politically and socially coerced to suit the superpower’s interests. The Soviet troops stationed throughout the territories of its satellites under the auspices of the Warsaw Pact were an all too present reminder of the Kremlin’s far-reaching and heavy-handed arm. As such, they embodied what Stephen Krasner has referred to as the “sanctioning” violations of sovereignty – coercion and imposition – both of which leave the subordinate player worse off if they do not comply.<sup>135</sup> 1956 was the year in which Hungary experienced the practical application of this theory with a fierce brutality. Poland came close to suffering the same fate. The rest of the satellites thus learned the limits of Moscow’s new policy of increased tolerance and flexibility for its sphere of influence, declared with much pomp at the 20th Party Congress earlier that year.

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<sup>135</sup> Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty. Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 26–27.

If 1956 was an eventful year for the countries within the Socialist Bloc and beyond, it was particularly so for Romania. Behind the scenes of shock at the Secret Speech of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the impressive Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, and the shocking Hungarian Revolution, Gheorghiu-Dej was slowly consolidating his position and furthering his plans for an eventual detachment from Moscow. Critical to this process would be the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romanian territory, something which no other member of the Warsaw Pact would manage during the Cold War. The events of 1956, although far above and beyond Gheorghiu-Dej's control, conferred him with opportunities that, as an increasingly able strategist on the regional stage, he would be able to bend to his advantage.

### **Failures and lessons learned**

The issue of the Soviet troop withdrawal was first brought up with the Soviets sometime in the second half of 1955, in an awkward episode whose full details may never come to light. The Romanians had good reasons to believe, however, that the moment was ripe for such a bold move – even if only two years after Stalin's death. It was obvious from Khrushchev's approach to the West that he was more open for dialogue and negotiation than his predecessor had been. One of the main results of this more conciliatory approach was the signing on 15<sup>th</sup> May of the Austrian State Treaty, whereby the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from the country. In exchange, the Western powers had promised that Austria would remain neutral; and also that they would allow any Eastern Bloc country not yet a member of the United Nations to join the organization.

The signing of the peace treaty with Austria was a most stunning development for the Romanian elites, both in Bucharest and in exile. The presence of Soviet troops in Romania and Hungary had hitherto been justified by logistics – their presence in these two countries was meant to ensure communication and coordination with the troops in the Soviet occupied part of Austria. As Austria now became neutral and troop-free, the legal basis for Soviet military presence in Hungary and Romania was automatically challenged, as well.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Petre Opris, "1958: Plecarea armatei sovietice din Romania - intre mit si realitate," *Anuarul Muzeului Marinei Romane*, 2002, 391–98.

The golden opportunity to campaign for troop withdrawal from those two countries was first seized by two of their former politicians, living at the time in exile.<sup>137</sup> Weeks before the treaty was signed, Paul Auer, former Hungarian ambassador to France and Grigore Gafencu, former Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, approached the British embassy in Paris. In their expatriate capacity as vice presidents of the Central and East European Commission, an émigré organization, they requested London's help to urge the Kremlin to withdraw its troops from Hungary and Romania.<sup>138</sup> The Foreign Office was quick to reply with a token gesture of "a polite acknowledgement" of this request, in a not so veiled effort to remain distanced from the issue.<sup>139</sup>

Indeed, as an internal document reveals, London was well aware that publicly contesting the Kremlin's right to station troops in Hungary and Romania "might lead to embarrassment at some future date over the position of [British] troops in the German Federal Republic."<sup>140</sup> Avoiding diplomatic awkwardness appears to have been only a superficial reason why London opted to remain silent on the issue and thus avoid "a pointless argument" which not only would have placed the Foreign Office "at a disadvantage"; but which might have also drawn the British government into an undesired negotiation process. According to Foreign Office correspondence, publicly contesting the Soviet right to station its troops in Hungary and Romania would also "provide the Soviet government with a splendid opportunity of offering to withdraw their troops from Eastern Europe, if the Americans withdrew theirs from Western Europe."<sup>141</sup> The implications of this kind of trade-off would have been completely disadvantageous, if not dangerous: while the Soviets would have withdrawn their troops within easy re-deployment range in Europe, Washington would have had to recall its troops across the ocean – a very long way away from any European military theater where they might be needed if conflict arose. It would have clearly been an imprudent

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<sup>137</sup> Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy: Soviet Troops in Romania, 1944-1958* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 71.

<sup>138</sup> Letter by Paul Auer and Grigore Gafencu to Harold MacMillan, Foreign Office, 25 April, 1955. UKNA document FO 371/116121.

<sup>139</sup> Internal minutes on the letter by Paul Auer and Grigore Gafencu to Harold MacMillan, Foreign Office, 25 April, 1955. In *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Internal note from H.A.F Hohler to Mr. Pink, Northern Department, Foreign Office, 19 August, 1955, p2. In *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*



initiative for London to throw its skin in the game for the two Soviet satellites at the high risk of embroiling its main ally in an undesirable and extremely delicate situation.

If the Western governments had decided to remain silently distanced on the issue, however, Bucharest had fewer reasons to remain calm in the face of the opportunity to rid Romania of Soviet troops. According to US legation reports from the Romanian capital, even the general population was cognizant of the implications of the Austria Peace Treaty. On the eve of the signing, the American minister there was reporting to Washington that the “Bucharest populace [was] anxiously speculating on whether Austrian treaty may result in departure of Soviet troops from Romania.”<sup>142</sup>

Indeed, on the same day that the Austrian Treaty was signed, Gheorghiu-Dej summoned the senior members of the Politburo to his villa in Bucharest. According to Georghe Apostol, one of Dej’s trusted allies, the Romanian leader excitedly broke the news, explaining the implications – the Treaty of Paris signed at the end of World War II stipulated that Soviet troops could only lawfully be stationed in Romania, for security and communication purposes, until Austria became neutral. That moment had arrived. It was immediately decided that the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania was to be requested as soon as possible.<sup>143</sup>

A second major factor that may have encouraged Dej to implement this hasty decision was the indication that Khrushchev was taking the Geneva Summit commitment on disarmament seriously.<sup>144</sup> On August 12 Khrushchev requested the Romanian government to reduce the number of troops in its army from 250,000 to 210,000, in accordance to the

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<sup>142</sup> Bucharest to Secretary of State, 14 May 1955, no. 290, RG 59, Decimal File 766.00 (W)/5 – 1455, NA. Op. cit in Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy*, 79.

<sup>143</sup> Fragment from the interview by Gheorghe Apostol to Ioan Scurtu and Virginia Calin on 20 October, 1994 on the issue of Soviet troop withdrawal. Document 41 in Ioan Scurtu, *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice 1958* (Bucharest: Editura Didactica si Pedagogica, 1996), 224–27.

<sup>144</sup> The Geneva Conference took place on July 18-23, 1955.

Geneva protocol, which had been signed only 3 weeks prior.<sup>145</sup> This news clearly encouraged Dej to hope for a withdrawal of the Soviet troops, since heightened security measures were no longer needed. Contacted by the vice-president of the United Press agency, to whom the contents of Khrushchev's letter had been leaked, Dej cautiously argued that, should the West dissolve its military alliance by recalling troops within national borders then the necessity for the Warsaw Treaty would also be eliminated. In such case, Dej declared, "it would be obvious that also the presence of Soviet troops in Romania would be eliminated, and these troops would be withdrawn from Romania."<sup>146</sup> Ten days later, during an official visit to Romania, Khrushchev publicly announced the intention to reduce the total number of soldiers in the Soviet army by 640,000.<sup>147</sup>

These were encouraging signs for the Romanian leadership, who were cautiously hopeful that the right approach on the issue of a complete troop withdrawal might fare favorably with Khrushchev. The meeting to discuss the subject was prepared down to the most minute of details. Sometime in the second half of 1955, while the Soviet leader was on an official visit to Bulgaria, the Romanian ambassador to Sofia approached him with an invitation to stop over in Bucharest on his way back to Moscow.<sup>148</sup> There, the Romanian authorities ensured that he would be received especially well, taking the customary pomp and public displays of adulation up a few notches. It was agreed that the delicate topic should be discussed privately at Dej's house, in a gazebo by the nearby lake – probably to avoid recording devices. Most importantly, however, Emil Bodnăraș (then Minister of the Armed Forces) was designated to bring up the subject with Khrushchev, not only because he

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<sup>145</sup> Letter from N.S. Khrushchev, First Secretary of the CC of the CPUS to Gheorghe Apostol, First Secretary of the CC of the RWP, requesting a reduction in the Romanian army., 12 August, 1955. Document 36 in Scurtu, *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice 1958*.

<sup>146</sup> Reply of the President of the Council of Ministers, Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej to the telegram sent by the United Press agency concerning the Soviet troop withdrawal after the signing of the Austria Treaty, 12 August, 1955. Document 37 in *Ibid.*, 217–18.

<sup>147</sup> Excerpt from the speech of N.S. Khrushchev, First Secretary of the CC of the CPUS at the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Romania, 22 August, 1955. Document 38, in *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>148</sup> Excerpt from interview by Gheorghe Apostol to Lavinia Betea in 1995. Document 39 in *Ibid.*, 221.

spoke Russian fluently, but also because he was known to have made “a good impression” on the Soviet leader over the years.<sup>149</sup>

When the moment finally arrived, Bodnăraş’ question on the possibility of Soviet troop withdrawal from Romania certainly left the Soviet leader “taken aback”. Contrary to the impression in Bucharest, Khrushchev was “far from thinking” about weakening the Soviet position within the satellites; to the contrary, as he later explained, his policy was “fairly solidly fixed on the concept that defenses needed to be strengthened and that the strengthening of defenses was inseparably linked with the continuing presence of our (Soviet) troops on the territories of the fraternal countries.”<sup>150</sup> Such an unequivocally divergent opinion on the part of the Soviet leader clearly showed that Dej’s initiative was both ill-timed and miscalculated.

Facing what must certainly have been a rather tense moment, Bodnăraş awkwardly tried to argue that Romania, flanked on all sides by socialist countries, was relatively safe from an enemy attack; and even if such an unlikely event were to occur, Bodnăraş insisted, the proximity to the Soviet Union would allow for a quick troop deployment across the border. With a firmness of argument that hinted more towards irritation rather than a possible inclination to negotiate, Khrushchev flatly declared that Romania’s vulnerability was its shoreline on the Black Sea, leaving it exposed to potential NATO assaults launched from Turkey.<sup>151</sup> Given such a categorically uncooperative reaction, the Romanians knew better than to insist.

According to Gheorghe Apostol, who was present at the meeting, Khrushchev got so angry about the request made by Bodnăraş that he stormed out, accusing the Romanian leadership of being “nationalist” and “anti-Soviet”<sup>152</sup>. He immediately left for the airport,

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<sup>149</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume III: Statesman (1953-1964)*, vol. 3, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 704.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid. op cit*, p 706.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Excerpt from interview by Gheorghe Apostol to Lavinia Betea in 1995. Document 39 in Scurtu, *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice 1958*.

leaving a bewildered Gheorghiu-Dej behind, without even an opportunity to accompany him there, as was customary. According to the same source, however, Khrushchev allegedly made a complete turn-around only a few weeks later, announcing on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1955, his intention to pull the Soviet troops out of Romania. This decision, Apostol claims, was communicated to Emil Bodnaras in Moscow, in a private meeting with Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin, then Minister of Defence.

It is highly unlikely, however, that the Soviet leadership would decide to withdraw its troops out of Romania or Hungary as early as 1955, although internal British government assessments argued that the Kremlin had good reasons to do so. According to the Foreign Office, Moscow would have had “much to gain” from troop withdrawal, if not strategically, then at least in terms of political capital. First, the withdrawal could have been prime propaganda material, allowing the Soviets to “contrast their conciliatory behavior with that of the Americans, who insist on having ‘bases of aggression’ in Western Europe.”<sup>153</sup> Secondly, the appearance of a more peaceful superpower could have helped sway Non-Aligned member opinion, which would be “suitably impressed particularly in Asia.”<sup>154</sup> Finally, such an international public relations tactic would have come at a minimal security cost for the Kremlin, since “Soviet garrisons amount to only two divisions in each country, both within a 150 mile radius from Budapest or Bucharest to the Soviet border”.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, the removal of the troops would not have resulted in any loss of effective control over the two satellites as “the administrations of both countries [were] thoroughly penetrated” by Soviet agents.<sup>156</sup>

Despite the Western governments’ expectations or Romanian officials’ claims, it appears that even if Khrushchev might have considered this decision, he certainly did not communicate it at the time. First, there is no archival evidence to support this claim. Surely the announcement of such an important decision would have reverberated in all top Party meetings in Bucharest and would have been likely followed up by policies on carrying out

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<sup>153</sup> Internal note from H.A.F Hohler to Mr. Pink, Northern Department, Foreign Office, 19 August, 1955, p2. UKNA Document FO 371 116121.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

the negotiations and logistical plans necessary to withdraw the troops? Second, it is improbable that Khrushchev would have made such an important concession only two months before his Secret Speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. A keen strategist, the Soviet leader was probably aware of the implications of his radical de-Stalinization policy and would have waited to see its impact on Romania before deciding it was safe to withdraw the troops. Finally, evidence clearly shows that Dej's initiative in the summer of 1955 was unanimously considered not only a failure, but also a significant political blunder; one important enough for his rivals to use against him in their later effort to discredit his leadership skills. Had Khrushchev expressed his willingness to withdraw Soviet troops in 1955, the initial failure would not have been an issue.

Khrushchev's own account of the Romanian initiative in 1955 points to a strong negative reaction unlikely to have changed over the course of only a few weeks. In his memoirs, Khrushchev admits that he reacted "in a very touchy way at the time ... and even got hot under the collar."<sup>157</sup> Reflecting on the episode, he explains that his reaction was based on a "misunderstanding," concluding that he "had not correctly understood their [the Romanians'] proposal back then. We assumed that the aim they were pursuing was to free themselves from our influence, and that they were displaying a lack of understanding of the imperialist threat against socialist countries."<sup>158</sup> Clearly, Bodnaras' request was seen as nothing less than an attempt by the Romanians to break away from the Soviet Bloc. Such a firm stance on the geo-strategic importance of Soviet troop presence could not possibly change within a few weeks.

What is certain is that Dej's approach had not only completely misfired, but his tactlessness caused a major setback in Romanian-Soviet relations. While perhaps he may not have completely misread Khrushchev's signs of being open to negotiate, he certainly overestimated them. The Kremlin's interest in maintaining the status quo should have been apparent in the fact that it orchestrated the formation of the Warsaw Pact the very day before signing the neutrality treaty with Austria – a detail that certainly hinted (if not outright spelled out) the Soviet Union's reassertion of its hegemonic position within the

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<sup>157</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume III: Statesman (1953-1964)*, 3:672.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:707.

Bloc. More importantly, what Dej failed to take into account was the fact that Austria's neutrality had been brokered and agreed upon with the Western Powers, not in direct negotiations with the national leaders. The Soviet Union was willing to negotiate, but only on a limited range of issues and not with junior partners.<sup>159</sup> Dej's mistake of placing himself on an equal footing with Khrushchev at the negotiating table – and to delegate a subordinate to lead the discussions, no less – must have surely been interpreted as the ultimate sign of arrogance. Seething with rage, the Soviet leader made an obvious effort to put Dej in his place by ominously reminding him of Romania's subordinate status, "until now you've fared well under the wing of the Soviet Union, and now you're kicking us to the side."<sup>160</sup> Dej managed to get off with a warning; but the leaders of the Hungarian revolution who would make similar demands only a year later, were not as lucky.

In the short term, the episode was indeed considered a complete failure. The subject of Soviet troop withdrawal was carefully avoided, having added a not insignificant amount of tension to the Soviet-Romanian relations, which "cooled" for a while.<sup>161</sup> Dej's blunder with Moscow would also be invoked by two of his adversaries a year later, in a failed attempt to oust him by proving his inadequacies as a leader.

In the long run, however, this failure would prove to have been an invaluable experience, from which Dej was able to draw three key lessons. First, he most likely understood that if his goal of a Soviet troop-free Romania were to be ultimately achieved, he would have to take charge of the negotiating process by devising his own approach – clearly, delegating had been a mistake; and this point would later be made by his adversaries in a weak effort to discredit him. In this context, it must have been apparent that taking personal responsibility for a future negotiation process would require more strategy, better timing and some bargaining power.

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<sup>159</sup> Csaba Bekes, "The 1956 Revolution and World Politics," *Cold War History Project*, 1996, 4–7.

<sup>160</sup> Excerpt from interview by Gheorghe Apostol to Lavinia Betea in 1995. Document 39 in Scurtu, *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice 1958*.

<sup>161</sup> Excerpt from interview by Gheorghe Apostol, 20 October 1994. Document 41 in *Ibid.*, 224–26.

It would then follow that the second lesson that Dej must have drawn from his mistake was doubtless the virtue of patience and strategy in the face of an apparently immediate opportunity. The failed “negotiation” attempt was thus a lesson hard learned that any direct bilateral concessions Romania could receive from Moscow would always have to be weighed against and subordinate to the Kremlin’s internal/national interests first, and their role within the greater international context, second. It is yet unknown whether Khrushchev decided against withdrawal at the time out of concern for his yet to be fully secured leadership position within the Kremlin, or if he decided to keep troop withdrawal as a bargaining chip for negotiations with the Western powers at a later point.<sup>162</sup>

In either case, Dej’s premature initiative revealed that, while he was an enviably adept leader, and quite unmatched at internal Romanian politics, he still very much lacked the experience and finesse required for foreign policy. This is perhaps unsurprising for the leader of a country that had been completely subordinate to Moscow until just two years prior - foreign policy had consisted solely of executing orders. And while Romania did take some steps towards opening up after Stalin’s death, as discussed in the last chapter, these were comparatively shy, at best, and awkwardly amateurish at worst. They certainly were almost imperceptible to Western observers, since they seemed little more than efforts to tow the Moscow line. As the British minister in Bucharest was reporting to London at the end of 1955, Romanian leadership still very much seemed a “wholly compromised creature of the Kremlin.”<sup>163</sup> In this sense, Dej must have quickly realized that if he wanted to detach himself from Moscow, he could not simply just jump at the first opportunity to ask for concessions. He would have to play a better – and more subtle and strategic – diplomatic game, both bilaterally, as well as regionally.

Finally – and perhaps most importantly - Dej needed to accept Romania’s subordinate position to the Soviet Union and to adapt his strategy assuming this role in order to obtain any major concession from Moscow. As Khrushchev himself had shown Dej in no uncertain terms, the Romanian leader’s place was not at the “big boys” negotiating table. And, as it

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<sup>162</sup> Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy*.

<sup>163</sup> Telegram Nr 1071/3 from Mr MacDermot, British legation in Bucharest to Sir Anthony Eden, Foreign Office, 23 June, 1955. UKNA document FO496/9

had become apparent even to foreign observers, Dej must have surely become very aware that the Kremlin wanted “at least to extract a price for the withdrawal of their troops instead of simply acquiring [international] merit.”<sup>164</sup> Dej would have to prove his loyalty and bring something significant to the negotiating table in order to gain the concession necessary for an eventual detachment.

These critical lessons were applied by Gheorghiu-Dej to reach his objective only three years later. This achievement, however, would not have been possible without the opportunities granted by the major shifts in the tectonic plates of international communism which took place in 1956.

### **The Earthquake**

If 1956 brought many things to the landscape of international communism, stability was certainly not one of them. Nikita Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the CPSU in February of that year left the leaders of the “fraternal” socialist states within the Eastern Bloc surprised and vulnerable. The Soviet leader’s harsh criticism of Stalin’s abuses automatically placed the very core of most Bloc dictatorships – all of them diligently tailored on the Stalinist model – under a question mark. Khrushchev’s assertion that his predecessor should have encouraged socialist models based on national characteristics as opposed to his ‘one size fits all’ policy not only rehabilitated Josip Broz Tito, but also implicitly encouraged reformist movements throughout the Bloc. Furthermore, Khrushchev’s accusation that Stalin had fallen victim of his own cult of personality, which clouded his judgment and impaired his political decisions, no doubt sent shivers down the fraternal leaders’ spines, for it implied a direct blow to their own legitimacy after having been hand-picked, supported and encouraged by Stalin to emulate him.

Contrary to what some historians have claimed,<sup>165</sup> it is unlikely that the Secret Speech threw the satellite leaders, and especially Dej, “completely off balance”<sup>166</sup>. The broad concepts of

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<sup>164</sup> Internal note from H.A.F Hohler to Mr. Pink, Northern Department, Foreign Office, 19 August, 1955, p2. UKNA Document FO 371 116121.

<sup>165</sup> There seems to be a consensus among some scholars on Romania that the secret speech came as an element of extreme shock to Dej. Vladimir Tismaneanu, for example, posits that



the speech might have been shocking, but they were not entirely new. As was discussed at length in the previous chapter, the Kremlin had already expounded the main concepts of the speech as early as 1953. In order to avoid the contagion of the civil unrest in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, after Stalin's death on 5 March, his successors had summoned the rest of the Eastern Bloc leaders to Moscow in order to explain new perspectives on the recent past and mandate the substantial policy shifts that would follow. The leaders at the Kremlin had criticized their recently defunct leader for indulging in the cult of personality, and had warned the rest of the Bloc leaders against continuing the public adulation of Stalin. At the time, they had also criticized Stalin's "excommunication" of Tito from the socialist camp, and had announced the beginning of normalization of relations with Yugoslavia. Finally, they had acknowledged that national characteristics within the Bloc had to be acknowledged in economic terms, and had therefore imposed new economic policies, tailored to each country.

Although the main ideas of the Secret Speech were essentially the same three years later, what had changed was the audience: de-Stalinization had now gone public. While the meetings of 1953 in Moscow took place among the Kremlin triumvirate and Bloc leaders separately, and in the strictest of secrecy, now Khrushchev was broadcasting the 'new' policy line to the entire 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. It is unclear exactly how confidential the

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because of the principles it expounded (i.e. denouncing Stalin, the rehabilitation of Tito/rapprochement with Yugoslavia, etc), Khrushchev's speech provoked "a formidable shock" and "a real earthquake" for Dej and his allies. Ioana Boca also characterizes the event as a "shock", while Cristian Vasile also describes it as "an earthquake" in the Communist world. See, Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Prima Lovitura. Anul 1956: Inceputul Dezagregarii Comunismului," in *Ungaria 1956: Revolta Mintilor Si Sfarsitul Mitului Comunist*, ed. Doina Jela and Vladimir Tismaneanu (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), 99–119; Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej (the Ghost of Gheorghiu-De)*, trans. Alina Ghimpu Mircea Mihaies Ioana Ploesteanu, Diana Rotcu, Laura Sion, Bogdan Cristian Iacob (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 133; Ioana Boca, "1956 in Romania," in *Ungaria 1956: Revolta Mintilor Si Sfarsitul Mitului Comunist*, ed. Doina and Tismaneanu Jela Vladimir (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), 169–95; Cristian Vasile, "PMR so 'Domesticirea' Tinerilor Scriitori La Sfarsitul Anului 1956," in *Ungaria 1956: Revolta Minitlor Si Sfarsitul Blocului Comunist* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), 222–27. Dennis Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist* (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 2010).

<sup>166</sup> Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, "Romania and the Warsaw Pact: 1955-1989," Cold War International History Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2004), 7.

'Secret' Speech was intended to be; within weeks its contents were leaked to the West; and Bloc leaders, who had to report to their home governments on the events in Moscow, would now have to be careful about calibrating the message on past crimes and mistakes, as well as plans for future reforms. Unlike its more discreet, 1953 incarnation, the Secret Speech had now cracked Pandora's Box open: Bloc leaders became accountable for past crimes and policies modeled on Stalin's, while also threatened by the potentially reformist movements within their respective countries.

This shift from a 'quiet' form of de-Stalinisation to publicly mandated Kremlin policy therefore left Gheorghiu-Dej in a particularly vulnerable position, both within the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP), as well as with regard to his relationship with Moscow. Having made his way to the top of the RWP by employing the most Machiavellian of tactics to eliminate his competitors and to gain Stalin's approval, his leadership had neither popular support nor a solid base for legitimacy within the Party.<sup>167</sup> One of the most outstanding examples of his political manoeuvrings had been the 1952 show trials of his political rivals – Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca and Teohari Georgescu – in which Dej had manipulated Stalin's fervent hatred of Tito by concocting the most deadly cocktail of accusations, including "Titoism" and "cosmopolitanism", to ensure their demise.<sup>168</sup>

Dej's hold on power had therefore largely been maintained up to that point by cunningly alternating tactics of deceit, intimidation, and heavy-handed oppression internally, while seeking to attract legitimacy mostly externally, from Moscow, thus transforming Romania into one of the most ruthless and proudly Stalinist regimes within the Bloc.<sup>169</sup> As a result, Khrushchev's Secret Speech now represented a double menace for Dej's legitimization

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<sup>167</sup> Although he had spent 14 years in jail while the Communist party was illegal, and was therefore considered a "veteran" within the Party, there were other potential leaders within the Communist faction that were not only more rigorously "trained" by Moscow, but had also gained more credibility both in the Soviet Union, as well as in Romania – Vasile Luca, Ana Pauker and Lucretiu Pătrășcanu.

<sup>168</sup> Tismaneanu, "Prima Lovitura. Anul 1956: Inceputul Dezagregării Comunismului"; Boca, "1956 in Romania."

<sup>169</sup> For further analysis on the tenure of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej see Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*; Victor Frunza, *Istoria Stalinismului în România (The History of Stalinism in Romania)* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990); Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Romania, 1944-1962* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Tismaneanu, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej*.

construct. On the one hand, the official rehabilitation of Tito automatically rendered the 1952 show trials invalid, therefore severely undermining Dej's authority within the Party; and on the other hand, it further exacerbated his uncomfortable relationship with Moscow, which had already been strained since Stalin's death, and which had gone through a particularly rough patch only six months prior. Dej's precarious position after the Secret Speech did not escape the British Minister to Bucharest, Dermot MacDermot, whose report to London most clearly reflected the paradoxical political situation in the Romanian capital,

*...so far as those present in power is concerned, speculation concentrates mainly on the position of Gheorghiu-Dej, First Secretary of the Party. He was the mouthpiece of the Cominform at the time of the condemnation of Tito and has been associated with Stalinist policies. He is also the principal Roumanian offender so far as the cult of personality is concerned. However, there are no signs at present that his position has been seriously affected. He is the most able of the leaders of the present regime, is personally popular with his colleagues and would clearly be difficult to replace. It seems likely therefore that he will weather this particular storm.*<sup>170</sup>

If foreign observers were strongly confident about the stability of Dej's position, the Romanian leader himself seemed less so. It took Gheorghiu-Dej a full month after returning from Moscow to regain his composure and devise a strategy before reporting on the activities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to the RWP elite in Bucharest. Being privately aware of the Kremlin's pivot since 1953 was one thing; publicly announcing adapting to these new policies was an altogether different thing. In an effort to play down the dramatic implications of Khrushchev's new policies, he presented a significantly diluted version of the Secret Speech, excluding all the examples from which the original text had derived all its mighty acerbity.<sup>171</sup> Pre-empting any accusations that he might have wrongfully persecuted party members, Dej took the liberty of revising Party history by changing the crimes they

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<sup>170</sup> Telegram from British legation, Bucharest, to Northern Department, Foreign Office, 29 March, 1956. UKNA document FO 371 122703.

<sup>171</sup> Dan Catanus, "The Impact of the Secret Speech on the Romanian Workers Party Leadership. The Process of Destalinization in Romania," in *Power and Society. The Soviet Bloc under the Impact of De-Stalinization 1956*, ed. Dan Catanus (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006), 120.

had been accused of, by claiming now that his former rivals had been “right-wing deviationists”, who had not only fallen victims to the sort of cult of personality that Khrushchev was now denouncing, but were guilty of encouraging it. Concluding, thus, not only that the trials had been fair, but also that they had kick-started the process of de-Stalinisation in Romania as early as 1952 by combatting promoters of the cult of personality, Dej went so far as to boldly proclaim that there was now “no one to rehabilitate.”<sup>172</sup>

Only two people dared to take this unprecedented opportunity to challenge Dej’s authority – Iosif Chişinevschi and Miron Constantinescu –, both senior members of the Party’s elite. During an unusually long Politburo session on April 5-12, throughout which members had to take notes themselves because no stenographers were allowed, the two mounted an attack on Dej that centered on three main arguments. The first dealt with the abuses committed by the Secret Police (Securitate), which operated within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and was directly subordinated to Dej’s authority. The second criticism referred to Dej’s cult of personality, particularly his attachment to praise and his contempt for dissenting opinions, which he viewed as a threat to party unity.

Finally, in an attempt to discredit Dej’s leadership skills by portraying him as weak and cowardly, Miron Constantinescu referred to Dej’s decision to delegate Emil Bodnăraş “against his will” to bring up the issue of the Soviet troop withdrawal with Khrushchev in 1955, despite an alleged Politburo decision that had especially designated Dej to carry out the task.<sup>173</sup> In order to emphasise how damaging the episode had been for the Romanian-Soviet relations, Chişinevschi underlined that Dej had taken “a rash decision”, which would have never happened if the RWP had had “serious leadership.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Tismaneanu, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej*.

<sup>173</sup> Excerpt from the minutes of the Politburo of the CC of the RWP meeting on 3 April, 1956. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, document 32/1956. In Scurtu, *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice 1958*, 236–37.

<sup>174</sup> Alina Tudor, “Lupta Pentru Putere in PMR: Cazul Miron Constantinescu - Iosif Chisinevschi,” in *Analele Sighet: Fluxurile Si Refluxurile Stalinismului (Anii 1954-1960)*, ed. Fundatia Academia Civica, vol. 8 (Bucharest, 2000), 71.

These serious accusations, which started out as a dramatic and concerted offensive, eventually dwindled to only a few minor complaints in the face of growing Party solidarity with Dej.<sup>175</sup> In spite of the overwhelming support he received from the Politburo members, who took turns defending the leader by pointing to the accusers' own disreputable political history, Dej still chose to handle the last accusation with particular care. Conceding the point to his rivals, he admitted that it had been a mistake not only to delegate the responsibility of talking to Khrushchev about a Soviet troop withdrawal to Bodnăraș, but to have brought up the issue at all.

According to Paul Sfetcu, Dej's then chief of staff, the RWP leader was convinced that Iosif Chișinevschi, who had placed particular emphasis on the 1955 episode, was acting under the influence of the Soviet KGB.<sup>176</sup> By admitting that bringing up the issue of Soviet military withdrawal had been a mistake, Dej was thus indirectly seeking to reassure Moscow that the regrettable episode did not represent a matter of high priority for Romania, and was now recanting the proposal. There is no mention of how Dej might have known about Chișinevschi's relationship with the KGB, and – not surprisingly – there is also no record proving such a link. Yet whether or not Chișinevschi was, indeed, working for the Soviet authorities is irrelevant in this context; what is far more revealing is Dej's behavior under the mere assumption that such a possibility could be true.

The deliberations of the Romanian Communist elite in the aftermath of Khrushchev's Secret Speech revealed two critical aspects about Romania's process of de-Stalinization. First, they clearly showed the country's lack of an influential reformist elite, who could have seized the opportunity conferred by the speech to initiate movements similar to those in neighboring countries.<sup>177</sup> Despite the efforts of Constantinescu and Chișinevschi to come across as such, they were largely dismissed as having been motivated by opportunistic, rather than

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<sup>175</sup> Tudor, "Lupta Pentru Putere in PMR: Cazul Miron Constantinescu - Iosif Chisinevschi."

<sup>176</sup> Catanus, "The Impact of the Secret Speech on the Romanian Workers Party Leadership. The Process of Destalinization in Romania," 138.

<sup>177</sup> In Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the impact of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was almost immediate in initiating reformist movements to de-Stalinize the system. Romania, however, lacked such vocal and cohesive reformist elements – like the Catholic Church, in Poland; or the Petofi club in Hungary.

reformist ambitions to depose Dej.<sup>178</sup> As MacDermot reported to London in his valedictory telegram to London within a few months of the Secret Speech, in July 1956,

*..there may be very few convinced communists in Romania but there are probably equally few anti-communists in any militant sense. The general attitude of the people is one of apathetic resignation to inefficient government... and there are no signs of active element of opposition. The two potential resistance groups, the Christian churches and the intellectuals, have been effectively seduced by patronage and favours.*<sup>179</sup>

Second, the immediate and unconditional support that the Politburo members showed Dej in the face of the attacks mounted by his rivals categorically proved his unchallenged position as leader of the party. Clearly, the Stalinist model was not only deeply rooted in the Romanian body politic, but it was also staunchly defended against any potential threats. This fact remained obvious even to foreign observers, who had no access to or information about the internal RWP deliberations following the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. As MacDermot, observed,

*“as political heads have fallen in other satellite countries, rumours have from time to time excited the Western diplomatic corps about political factions in opposition to Gheorghiu-Dej. I have never attributed great might to these. Gheorghiu-Dej has remained comfortably on top of any opposition, if it ever existed...He is conspicuously more able than the other members of the Politburo who can all be described only as second-rate and his personal relations with his team appear uniformly good.”*<sup>180</sup>

If Dej's internal position proved to be firm and unchallenged in the face of adversity, however, his standing with the Soviet Union was far more problematic. On the one hand,

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<sup>178</sup> Both Constantinescu and Chisinevski had been staunch Stalinists in the 1950's, working closely together with Ana Pauker, as well as with the secret service to help consolidate the police state.

<sup>179</sup> Valedictory Telegram from D. MacDermot, British minister to Romania, to Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Office, 3 July, 1956, p. 1-2. UKNA document FO 371 122699.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

if de-Stalinization had been perceived as only an optional policy since 1953, with varying degrees of application throughout the Bloc, the Secret Speech now unequivocally mandated it as a new course of the socialist camp. Aside from a direct Soviet intervention to depose him, few things could have been more threatening to a ruler like Dej, who had consolidated his power by applying the Stalinist principles with more orthodoxy than most other leaders within the Bloc. As a strategy for political survival, he therefore saw himself forced to implement a policy which might best be described as ‘controlled de-Stalinization’ or the first half of 1956, which was meant to prove alignment with Moscow’s new directives externally, while maintaining his unchallenged authority internally.

The mere fact that Dej’s rivals had chosen to bring up the issue of failed negotiations for Soviet troop withdrawal to discredit him revealed some uncomfortable truths about the delicate nature of Soviet-Romanian relations. To begin with, Dej’s hasty and ill-calculated eagerness to begin negotiations in 1955 had already pointed to a national self-assertion that the Soviets had been none too happy about, and which had already strained the relationship with the Kremlin. That this failure was now used by members of Dej’s own party to discredit his leadership only confirmed that withdrawal of the Soviet army was, in fact, regarded as a vital issue of national interest by the Romanians themselves. It would have to be resolved, and soon.

For the time being, however, Dej overcame the impasse by implementing a strategy that incorporated at least two of the lessons learned in the aftermath of the 1955 episode. He granted his rivals “a major concession” by assuming responsibility for his 1955 initiative and admitting it was a mistake to have implemented it at all.<sup>181</sup> In light of his suspicions that Chisinevski was a KGB agent, Dej thus indirectly trying to reassure the Kremlin that he embraced his (and Romania’s) secondary status in the relationship with the Soviet Union by fully recanting his bold initiative. His public admission of guilt was also a tactful way of buying himself time to better gauge the situation in Moscow, preferring caution to risk at a time of uncertainty. This also helps explain why Dej, an otherwise ruthless leader, avoided the immediate implementation of any kind of punitive measure towards his attackers – he

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<sup>181</sup> Catanus, “The Impact of the Secret Speech on the Romanian Workers Party Leadership. The Process of Destalinization in Romania,” 137.

would have to wait a full year before feeling secure enough to orchestrate their political demise.<sup>182</sup>

### **The Yugoslav Connection**

If the turmoil of 1956 presented new challenges for Dej, it also presented new opportunities; and nothing could reflect this dichotomy better than Romania's new bilateral relations with Yugoslavia. Khrushchev's public reconciliation with Tito, symbolized by their 1955 meeting and announced by the Soviet leader in his 20<sup>th</sup> Congress speech, initially placed Dej in an uncomfortable position. Up until Stalin's death, he had certainly built a reputation as "the mouthpiece of the Cominform at the time of the condemnation of Tito"<sup>183</sup>. And while since then Dej had made efforts towards reconciliation<sup>184</sup> there were still concerns that the Yugoslav leader "might ask [Khrushchev] for Dej's head" as a price for warmer relations with the Kremlin.<sup>185</sup>

Such apprehensions, however, quickly dissipated when Tito chose to stop in Bucharest on his way to Moscow for a 3-week stay in the Soviet capital at the end of May. Transiting through Romania had been deliberate. According to Veljko Micunovic, the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow, Tito "chose a good route – through Romania and not through Hungary, which is the usual route from Belgrade to Moscow."<sup>186</sup> The symbolic meet-and-greet with Dej, which was scheduled for thirty minutes, lasted two hours.<sup>187</sup> The results of this encounter, brief as it may have been, seemed to please Tito. Returning from Moscow three weeks later, he made another unscheduled stop in Bucharest on his way back to Belgrade. This visit, considerably longer than the previous one, took on an official tone, as

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<sup>182</sup> Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chisinevski were relegated to minor posts in April, 1957 and eventually eliminated from any important aspect of Romanian political life.

<sup>183</sup> Telegram from British legation, Bucharest, to Northern Department, Foreign Office, 29 March, 1956. UKNA document FO 371 122703.

<sup>184</sup> Please see Chapter 1 for details on Romania's policy of reconciliation with Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1956.

<sup>185</sup> Valedictory Telegram from D. MacDermot, British minister to Romania, to Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Office, 3 July, 1956, p. 1-2. UKNA document FO 371 122699.

<sup>186</sup> Micunovic, Veljko, *Moscow Diary* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), 59.

<sup>187</sup> Dan Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965* (Bucharest: The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2011), 137.



the Yugoslav leader also chose to publicly address crowds in Bucharest and other parts of Romania. Apart from the token phrases of reconciliation and renewed friendship, Tito was also keen on exonerating Dej for the deterioration of Romanian-Yugoslav relations in 1948 by affirming that it was caused by “only one man with monstrous conceptions about relations among socialist countries”.<sup>188</sup> In the context of Moscow’s recent denunciation of Stalin, his crimes and his obsession with the cult of personality, Tito could have only been referring to him. In yet another gesture towards reconciliation, Tito assured the ethnic Serbs in Timisoara, some of whom had previously been deported and mistreated, that things were now “resolved”, and asked them to show “loyalty” towards Romania, who from now on would be “a friend” of Yugoslavia.<sup>189</sup>

Tito’s apparently spontaneous and publicly warm attitude towards Dej had less to do with feelings of genuine appreciation for the Romanian leader and everything to do with strategy. With the formal dissolution of the Cominform only a few weeks prior, on 16 April, the Kremlin not only sought to symbolically bury the hatchet with Belgrade; but also to give Tito the green light to resume relations with his Eastern neighbor, who had until then hosted the headquarters of the organization that had campaigned against him. And while Tito could have chosen to ignore his former enemy or, worse, to negotiate with Khrushchev a regime change in Romania as part the reconciliation terms with Moscow, he chose instead to seek a truce. According to British documents, the Yugoslavs did indeed believe that

“the Gheorghiu-Dej regime was the best that could be expected, given the weakness of most of his subordinates, and ... they would not wish for any change. [They] thought that Gheorghiu Dej (unlike Chervenkov) had not been a convinced Stalinist and would probably be glad of the opportunity to carry out more “moderate policies.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Dan Catanus, “Reluarea Relatiilor Romano Iugoslave. Vizita Lui Tito La Bucuresti, 23-26 Iunie 1956,” *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 3–4 (2004): 72–86.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>190</sup> Telegram from British legation, Bucharest, to Northern Department, Foreign Office, 29 March, 1956. UKNA document FO 371 122703.

Tito's decision to stop in Bucharest, on his way to and from his first visit to Moscow since the Soviet-Yugoslav split, therefore not only signaled his wish to resume talks with Dej, but indeed placed Romania center stage in the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation. According to Dan Catanus, Tito's visit to Moscow had superseded the bilateral framework, as most observers expected Tito to negotiate with Khrushchev a larger degree of freedom for the Soviet satellites. As a result, the Moscow-Belgrade relationship was seen as "a barometer" for the level of independence of the Soviet satellites – the warmer it was, the more freedom of action the rest of the Bloc members would have.<sup>191</sup> This assessment seemed to be especially true for Romania.

In this context, Dej now found himself strategically placed between the two socialist powers. On the one hand, he was perceived by Tito to be a "moderate", and therefore perhaps a reformist who could be swayed from the Kremlin's gravitational pull. Certainly, as Dej assumed responsibility for "some mistakes" in the past vis-à-vis Yugoslavia, he had also declared to the plenary of the RWP that there could be "different templates for socialism."<sup>192</sup> On the other hand, he was seen by the Kremlin as loyal and trustworthy enough to be entrusted with hosting Moscow's former mortal enemy, and perhaps even attracting Tito closer to the Soviet capital. Such a dynamic certainly did not go unnoticed by the British Minister in Bucharest, who reported at the time of Tito's visit to Bucharest that

*The Yugoslav government may hope that by linking Romania more closely to themselves in the economic field they increase the chances of detaching her from the Eastern Bloc, but the Soviet Union must be confident of their control over Romanian policy and may well believe that such links would have precisely the opposite effect of drawing Yugoslavia more closely into their orbit.*<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Catanus, "Reluarea Relatiilor Romano Iugoslave. Vizita Lui Tito La Bucuresti, 23-26 Iunie 1956."

<sup>192</sup> *Op. Cit.* in Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Report of the Visit of President Tito to Roumania. Telegram Nr. 10392/3 from D. MacDermot, British Legation, Bucharest, to Sir Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Office, 28 June, 1956. p. 16. UKNA document FO496/10.

Doubtless, Dej's advantageous position as a trustworthy partner to both Belgrade and Moscow helped better gauge his foreign policy strategy, especially with respect to his formerly unsuccessful effort to negotiate a Soviet troop withdrawal. Indeed, throughout the first half of 1956, as the Soviets were trying to woo Tito, they had been shifting their troops away from the Romanian border with Yugoslavia. This maneuver had even led to rumors among the foreign diplomatic community in Bucharest that Tito's visit to the Romanian capital might be followed by a complete troop withdrawal.<sup>194</sup> Although such policy did not materialize, for Dej it must have seemed increasingly feasible, now that he understood what an important role Belgrade could play in the matter.

Indeed, the Romanian-Yugoslav relationship was warming up, and quite rapidly. During Dej's meetings with Tito in May/June, they had agreed on a joint hydroelectric plant on the Danube, which gave significant impetus to the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Only a few months later, Dej was invited to Yugoslavia, where the Romanian-Yugoslav Declaration was signed in Brioni, at Tito's personal residence, on October 27<sup>th</sup>. The document not only symbolized the official normalization of relations between the two countries, but specifically recognized the fact that "in different countries and under different conditions, the forms through which Socialism can be built, can also be different."<sup>195</sup> An alternative path to building socialism in Romania was starting to be paved.

The events of October 1956 in Hungary, however, which started unfolding while Dej was still in Yugoslavia, would bring these opportunities to an abrupt stop for a short while. The Hungarian Revolution would not only complicate the relationship between Bucharest and Belgrade, but it would also confer Dej the opportunity to further prove his loyalty to Moscow, even if at the cost of his newly minted image of an emergent reformist. This high cost, however, would ultimately prove worthwhile.

### **The Hungarian Revolution – Implications for Romanian policy**

The Hungarian Revolution, which was sparked by a small group of student protesters on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1956 evolved in only two short weeks to become "the ultimate crisis of the

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<sup>194</sup> UKNA document FO 371/122703

<sup>195</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 145.

process of de-Stalinization”<sup>196</sup>, provoking the armed intervention of the Soviet Union. Throughout the crisis, Romania’s involvement earned it the title of Soviet Union’s “most active ally”<sup>197</sup>, in light of its unconditional support of Moscow’s actions. This description of Romania’s role, however, is accurate but incomplete. While the prevalent tendency within the literature on this subject is to view Romania’s role in the Hungarian Revolution as driven purely by loyalty to Moscow<sup>198</sup>, a more detailed analysis of Dej’s decision-making process reveals two clear stages in his approach to the crisis, which was shaped by the unfolding international events beyond his control as well as national interest.

The first stage can be characterized by Dej’s focus on the short-term issue of domestic crisis management. This was motivated by concerns over a potential spill-over effect through Romania’s shared borders with Hungary, as well as through potential unrest among Romania’s ethnic Hungarian population<sup>199</sup> – its largest minority – which at the time accounted for 9% of the total population and as much as 24% of the population in the Transylvania region. With regards to foreign policy, Dej adopted the role of intermediary between Budapest and Moscow during this initial stage, in an effort to find a peaceful solution that would prevent the reformist government from taking over (and therefore also prevent potential territorial claims on Romania).

The second stage in Dej’s approach to the Hungarian Revolution is marked by a dramatic shift in focus from internal affairs to foreign policy. The underlying reason for the shift was the clear but secret long-term objective in mind: the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania. The decision that this issue should become a top foreign policy priority on October 31<sup>st</sup>, at the height of the crisis in Hungary, hinged on two major factors. The first was the unexpected – if short-lived - declared willingness of the Soviet Union to reassess the

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<sup>196</sup> Andor Hovráth, “Budapesta, 1956,” in *Ungaria, 1956: Revolta Mintilor Si Sfarsitul Mitului Comunist*, ed. Doina and Tismaneanu Jela Vladimir (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), 122.

<sup>197</sup> Dennis Deletant, “Impactul Revoltei Maghiare in Romania,” in *Fluxurile Si Refluxurile Stalinismului (Anii 1954-1960)* (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 2000), 602. Deletant in *Fluxurile si Refluxurile Stalinismului*, p602

<sup>198</sup> Tismaneanu, “Prima Lovitura. Anul 1956: Inceputul Dezagregarii Comunismului”; Boca, “1956 in Romania.”

<sup>199</sup> Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*, 165.

stationing of its troops in the Warsaw Pact countries<sup>200</sup>. The second factor was the Kremlin's decision to intervene in Hungary only a few days later. Taking advantage of the opportunities granted by these policies on Moscow's part, Dej quickly shifted his role from intermediary to staunch Soviet ally in an effort to gain the necessary credibility to be able to begin negotiations on troop withdrawal at a later point.

### **Domestic affairs – from high emergency to damage control and beyond**

Before the leadership in Bucharest could even imagine the long-term opportunities eventually created by events in the neighboring country, however, it first had to make frantic efforts to ensure the crisis would not spread to Romania. The onset of the Hungarian revolution caught the Romanian authorities by surprise, provoking a heady mix of panic and confusion. Still uncertain about the exact nature of the events unfolding in Budapest, the RWP Politburo's top priority in the first days of the crisis was to devise a strategy in order to find out, exactly, what was happening in the neighboring country.<sup>201</sup> Regardless of what the details of the situation there may have been, however, what was immediately clear was the fact that civil unrest in Hungary automatically represented a threat to Romanian national security. The shared borders represented a geostrategic threat, while the shared cultures – Romania's substantial ethnic Hungarian population plus a contested region that to this day represents a thorn in the side of Romanian-Hungarian relations – posed a direct political threat; so Bucharest could take no chances.

Even before the first detailed reports on the situation in Hungary arrived, a series of emergency measures had already been taken in an effort to prevent the unrest from spilling across the border, while at the same time maintaining tight internal control. The border traffic between the two countries was significantly restricted, and all incoming and outgoing correspondence with Hungary was severely censored, as was the Romanian press. While

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<sup>200</sup> Declaration by the Government of the USSR on the Principles for Development and Further Strengthening the Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist Countries, October 30, 1956. Document No. 50 in Csaba Bekes, Malcolm Byrne, >. Janos Rainer (eds.), *"The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents"*, c2002., 300–303.

<sup>201</sup> Minutes of the Politburo of the CC of the RWP meeting on 24 October, 1956. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 170/1956.

these measures might seem to resemble standard procedure, the orders given to the armed forces certainly reveal the Romanian leadership's panic in the face of the events unfolding – the army was placed on high alert, while all leave and vacations were suspended and soldiers recalled to their posts. An emergency review was ordered of all munitions and armaments, as well as of aircraft and airspace<sup>202</sup>, indicating that Bucharest was bracing itself for the worst.

The contradictory measures taken with respect to the civilian population, however, clearly reveal that the authorities were extremely unsure how to handle this aspect of the situation. On the one hand, it was ordered that “counter-revolutionary actions should be eliminated with all firmness”, while at the same time the arrests were to be “very tactful”, so to not “needlessly irritate the population.”<sup>203</sup> The level of ambivalence that these orders reveal could be explained by two factors. The first is a real sense of confusion as to what the right course of action might be in such an unprecedented situation – too much leniency could have potentially degenerated into chaos, while too heavy a suppression could ironically have provoked a situation not unlike the one in Hungary. In the initial days of the crisis the Party leadership was awkwardly trying – and miserably failing – to strike a delicate balance. The second factor that explains such erratic behavior was Dej's absence from Bucharest and, indeed, Romania, leaving the rest of the Politburo members to take care of the crisis.<sup>204</sup> Dej would have to cut short his trip to Yugoslavia and return to Bucharest on October 28 in order to handle the situation.

In the meantime, however, the Politburo seemed to gain slightly more control, as their policies shifted in character, from emergency measures to damage control. In the oncoming days they devised an extensive propaganda campaign disguised as what today would be called an “outreach program” within factories and universities, where the workers and students were to be “informed” about the events in Hungary. These informative sessions

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<sup>202</sup> Minutes of the Politburo of the CC of the RWP meeting on 26 October, 1956. ANIC, fond CC al RWP, Chancellery, Document 169/1956.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Gheorghe Apostol, Emil Bodnaras, Nicolae Ceausescu, Iosif Chisinevschi, Miron Constantinescu, Alexandru Draghici, Alexandru Moghioros, Constantin Parvulescu, Dumitru Coliu, Leontin Salajan, Stefan Voitec, Ianos Fakezas.

were to be carried out by Party activists who would publicly condemn “the counter-revolutionary movement and the fascist reactionary forces” at work in the neighboring country.<sup>205</sup> These propaganda sessions were concomitantly paired with practical measures in order to prevent unrest. Having seen how a small spark could flare up into a revolution in Budapest, the Romanian authorities took pre-emptive measures to allay any potential discontent among the population by making sure that the stores were well-stocked with foodstuffs, salaries were paid on time, and that the peasants were paid on the spot for their products.<sup>206</sup> These were not insignificant measures at a time when the better part of the Romanian population was struggling to make ends meet.

Among the general quiescence of the Romanians, the student protests that took place at the end October within major university centers – Bucharest, Cluj, Iași and Timișoara – were the only organized, coherent and dynamic manifestation of social unrest inspired by the events taking place in Hungary.<sup>207</sup> By far the most significant among these, both with respect to the level of organization and participation, as well as the massive ensuing crackdown, took place in Timișoara on October 30<sup>th</sup>. Given the government’s high level of alert and surveillance, it was no small feat that a staggering 3,000 students managed to stage a protest<sup>208</sup>, shouting slogans like “Out with the Russians from our country!” and “We want freedom!”<sup>209</sup>

Adding a formal dimension to their actions, the students presented a 12-point list of demands, which ranged from student concerns (fewer Russian language and Marxism-Leninism courses, higher scholarships, less crowded dorms, etc) to workers’ conditions and

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<sup>205</sup> ANIC, fond CC al RWP, Chancellery, Document 170/1956.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Boca, “1956 in Romania,” 172.

<sup>208</sup> Boca, “1956 in Romania”; Johanna Granville, “Temporary Triumph in Timișoara: Unrest among Romanian Students in 1956,” *History* 93, no. 309 (January 1, 2008): 69–93; Johanna Granville, “Forewarned Is Forearmed: How the Hungarian Crisis of 1956 Helped the Romanian Leadership,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 4 (June 2010): 615–45.

<sup>209</sup> Boca, “1956 in Romania,” 176.

political issues.<sup>210</sup> Among the latter, was “the immediate withdrawal of the Soviet troops stationed on [Romania’s] territory, since the threats of a capitalist incursion and an eventual aggression are non-existent, rendering their presence unjustified.”<sup>211</sup> This issue had also been present, to various degrees, in the protests staged throughout the rest of the country.<sup>212</sup> In this particular case, however, the fact that it was a clearly stated concern on the students’ list of demands from the government makes it stand out as the most official enunciation of collective desire on the part of the Romanian civilian population.

The issue of Soviet troop withdrawal, in fact, ranked among the demands of highest priority for the students in Timișoara. As one of the participants in the protests, Heinrich Drobny, would later explain, university-related issues were important for the students, but not the main concern,

*...of course, we demanded that the Russian language shouldn’t be mandatory, since we were fed up with it, and some of us didn’t have room in the dorms, but to get rid of the Soviet occupation and to open up to the West – this is what interested us!*<sup>213</sup>

The fact that the stationing of Soviet troops in Romania was being perceived as an oppressive act of subordination was inescapably salient among the protesters. Stela Tașcă, another participant, later revealed that the students “were beginning to see the Russians as occupiers... Little by little, you begin to open your eyes...There was beginning to be a difference between what we were taught at home and what we were asked to say or do.”<sup>214</sup> Finally, Teodor Stanca, one of the leaders of the protesters mentions “the grave situation of

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<sup>210</sup>Mutiu, Caius, Stanca, Teodor and Baghiu, Aurel, *Miscarile studentesti anticomuniste din octombrie 1956 din Timișoara, vazute si prezentate de initiatorii si principalii oraganizatori in Fluxurile si Refluxurile stalinismului*, pp. 689-690.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> In Cluj, Bucharest and Iasi, protesters intermittently used slogans calling for withdrawal of the Soviet troops, but did not become a formal request from the government.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Heinrich Drobny in Mihaela Sitariu, *Oaza de Libertate: Timisoara, 30 Octombrie 1956* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2004), 61.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Stela Tascu in Ibid., 27.



our country's loss of independence through the stationing of the Soviet troops"<sup>215</sup> as the one of the main concerns for the organizers of the protests.

There are several important reasons why the issue of Soviet troop withdrawal had become a top priority for these students. The first simply related to the quality of their university life: Timișoara was host of the largest Soviet garrison (9,657 men), whose troops were housed in the best public buildings throughout the city, thereby literally "occupying" space that could have otherwise housed the students.<sup>216</sup> The crowded dorm rooms to which the latter were relegated as a result inspired resentment, while the central location of the campus made encounters with the Soviet soldiers a permanent fixture of daily life. While this practical aspect did represent a concern, it should be underlined, however, that there was also a heightened sense of political awareness among the students in Timișoara. The city's proximity to the Yugoslavian and Hungarian borders (30 km and 100 km, respectively) allowed for better access to information from these countries, as well as a clearer observation of Soviet troop movements. Having learned from their Hungarian-speaking colleagues (who translated radio broadcasts) what was happening across the border, the students could not only better understand the government's contradictory propaganda efforts, but they could also better assess the level of the Soviet military aggression in the neighboring country.<sup>217</sup>

These particular circumstances, most of which were facilitated by Timișoara's geostrategic location, certainly explain why these young students were better informed, more politically aware and civically active than rest of the country, which had been mostly subdued by a shroud of propaganda and fear. They also help explain why the students were immediately perceived as an imminent threat by the government. This fact is best illustrated by Axente Tebea, one of the main organizers of the demonstrations, who finally hints at the bottom line,

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<sup>215</sup> Interview with Teodor Stanca in *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>216</sup> Granville, "Temporary Triumph in Timișoara."

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

*...then there was the issue with the Russians, all the buildings were occupied by them, and their stationing was seen as subordination. Theoretically, we [the Romanians] were independent. As a result, the Russians had no business in our country! I think that if there had been only student-related claims on our part, there wouldn't have been the same consequences.*<sup>218</sup>

The consequences were, in fact, dramatic for the people involved. Of the 3,000 protesters, approximately 2,000 were arrested and held in detention for days in a village 18 km outside of the city in appalling conditions. It took the armed forces many more days to fully control the situation, as other protests erupted in solidarity with those already arrested.<sup>219</sup>

Although only 30 people were indicted, their sentences, ranging from 3 to 7 years or prison were later arbitrarily extended. Upon being released from incarceration, the prisoners immediately learned that the Interior Ministry had suddenly added a completely separate sentence to the court's initial decision, extending their punishment with hard labor for up to 5 years.<sup>220</sup>

For Gheorghiu-Dej, the student protests represented the height of the internal crisis and a serious threat to his political survival. While the crackdown on the unrest was in full swing, Dej was also receiving reports from the fact-finding mission he had especially sent to Hungary in order to determine the causes of the revolution and assess the situation there.<sup>221</sup> The conclusions were not encouraging, for they revealed some rather uncomfortable similarities between the socio-political situations in the two countries. Still nervous about the student unrest and keen to avoid Hungarian history repeating itself in Romania, he took every precaution to steer clear of the mistakes his neighbors had made.

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<sup>218</sup> Interview with Axente Tebea in Sitariu, Sitariu, *Oaza de Libertate: Timisoara, 30 Octombrie 1956*, 46.

<sup>219</sup> Boca, "1956 in Romania," 178.

<sup>220</sup> Sitariu, *Oaza de Libertate: Timisoara, 30 Octombrie 1956*, 163.

<sup>221</sup> Valter Roman and Aurel Malnasan were sent to Budapest to assess the situation. Their full report was presented to the RCP Permanent Bureau on November 2, 1956. See ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 171/1956.

The rapporteurs that Dej had sent to Hungary – Valter Roman and Aurel Almasan - outlined three important characteristics of the Hungarian crisis that could have found their parallels in Romania as well. The first was of a political nature and described the cohesion – or lack thereof – of the ruling political party. According to Valter Roman, the Hungarian communist party had lost its unity prior to the revolt.<sup>222</sup> The recent reprisals on some of the party members “had demoralized people and they lost trust in the Party, they became disoriented.”<sup>223</sup> What this probably meant for Dej was that, aside from working to maintain the allegiance of the RWP members, which he already seemed to have, it was also crucial to keep his enemies near. This may help explain why, in the midst of a crisis of which his rivals could have taken advantage, Dej chose to closely involve rather than alienate Iosif Chişinevschi and Miron Constantinescu, who had attempted to oust him just six months before. While Chişinevschi was sent to Transylvania, a region of major concern due to its substantial Hungarian minority, to help control potential unrest and coordinate propaganda, Constantinescu was suddenly promoted to Minister of Education. In this capacity he immediately travelled to Timișoara in order to negotiate with the students and defuse the tensions. What this decision confirms, aside from Dej’s strength as a strategist, is also his rivals’ opportunism; for had they truly believed in the causes they had championed during the April debates – de-Stalinization and reform of the Party – they surely would have chosen to fight on a different side of the political fence during the crisis.

A second cause for the Hungarian revolution, according to the rapporteurs, had been that the Party had “isolated itself from the people and the cadres;” the higher echelons of the Party “had no authority because it didn’t endear itself with the people.”<sup>224</sup> This alienation had mostly to do with the imposition of a low quality of life, on the one hand – low salaries,

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<sup>222</sup> Yuri Andropov, then Soviet ambassador to Hungary, had complained to the Romanian ambassador in Budapest as early as May 1956, of a divisive element that had plagued Hungarian politics since the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. The factions, according to Andropov, fell into three categories: those supporting Rákosi; the group of “noisy writers”, and a group that oscillated in between. Source: Romanian AMAE Archives, fond Budapesta, Dosar Nr. 7, Volum 1, #10693, “Telegrama cifrata nr. 180. Trimisă de Popescu de la Ambasadă României din Budapesta”.

<sup>223</sup> Minutes of the meeting with Aurel Almasan and Valter Roman in which they report on the events from November 1956 in Hungary, 2 November, 1956. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 171/1956, pp 8.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p 10.

extended working hours, unavailable foodstuffs and consumer goods, etc – and a heavy-handed rule, on the other – chosen party members sent to govern locally were seen as swindlers and profiteers.<sup>225</sup> Dej had already taken emergency measure in the beginning of the crisis to ensure that salaries were paid on time, the peasants were paid promptly for their products and that stores were well-stocked with otherwise rare products like meat, oil and flour. He now decided to soften his image by making small concessions. The first and most revealing such initiative was mandating Constantinescu to negotiate with the students in Timișoara in an effort to quell their revolutionary spirit. Although it was made clear that political concessions were categorically excluded from the negotiations, Constantinescu did allow for some minor and cosmetic compromises, ensuring that scholarships were raised, and cafeteria food and dorm conditions were improved.<sup>226</sup>

According to the emissaries' report, however, one of the most outstanding characteristics of the civil unrest in Hungary had been the rampant anti-Soviet sentiment. This was clear from the first moments of the revolution, when Stalin's statue in the center of Budapest was dragged down "with hate and barbarity" – an episode that was reported by Romanian citizens who chanced to be there during the events,<sup>227</sup> and that was underlined by Dej's emissaries later, as well. The latter, in fact, made no effort to conceal that at the core of the Hungarians' discontent was their country's servile position to the Soviet Union, who had imposed economic policies that were detrimental to the country's economy and a system that had erased all aspects of its past, "including the good things." To illustrate the level of anti-Soviet feeling encountered in Hungary, the rapporteurs underlined that everyone they had talked to in Budapest "were dead set against" and "throwing mud at the Soviet Union."<sup>228</sup>

The anti-Soviet feeling in Romania was certainly the most problematic issue for Dej - one that he could find no easy solutions to. The students in Timișoara had made perfectly clear not only their discontent with the Soviet Union and its stationed troops, but certainly also

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid, pp 2-3.

<sup>226</sup> Boca, "1956 in Romania," 280.

<sup>227</sup> Minutes of the Politburo of the CC of the RWp meeting on 1 December, 1956. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 74/1956, pp 5.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

their disapproval of Romania's – and by extension Dej's – subservient role to Moscow, which was seen as "oppressive" and as "an occupier". The strong reactions that this perception had inspired, both in Hungary, as well as in Romania to a certain extent, must surely have evoked a significant amount of anxiety for Dej. Being perceived as a puppet dancing faithfully to Moscow's tune could potentially have led to his downfall.

The student protests in Timișoara had been stifled, but it took an unexpected amount of effort and brutality to do so.<sup>229</sup> This led Dej to believe that it was a temporary solution to what was likely to be a long-term problem. Khrushchev, who had kept a very close eye on the student unrest in Timișoara, made it a point to allude to this situation at an international meeting in Moscow, where he mentioned the existence of "an unhealthy spirit" among the students "in one of Romania's education institutions".<sup>230</sup> Not even Khrushchev's praise of how well the situation had been handled, however, could allay Dej's anxiety with respect to the problem. It was essential that the right balance was struck between internal discontent and Moscow's sensibilities – an almost impossible feat. This guiding principle is clearly reflected in the government's efforts to handle the situation in Timișoara after the student protests by making small concessions. Issues such as scholarship money, cafeteria food and dormitory space were considered negotiable issues that were immediately agreed upon. The students' demands for the elimination of Russian-language and Marxism-Leninism classes, however, were considered nothing less than "provocations" of a "counter-revolutionary" nature.<sup>231</sup> The Romanian government would evidently take no chances that the Kremlin could interpret even the most symbolic measures as signs of provocation.

The tension between potentially explosive social discontent and the necessary allegiance to Moscow endangered Dej's political survival. The only possible way to promote the image of independence was to successfully negotiate the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, an initiative that had been already tried – and had quite miserably failed. Certainly within the context of the Hungarian Revolution, when security concerns were at the top of Moscow's agenda, this issue was the least likely to offer itself as a future possible solution. Events that

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<sup>229</sup> Boca, "1956 in Romania," 177–81.

<sup>230</sup> Dennis Deletant, "Impactul Revoltei Maghiare in Romania," 599.

<sup>231</sup> Boca, "1956 in Romania," 180.

were closer related to international geo-strategic politics, however, rather than Romania's bilateral relations to the Soviet Union, provided an unexpected opportunity for Dej to crystallize his plan. The result of the compromise between the Communist powers – China and the Soviet Union - on the possible solution to the Polish and Hungarian uprisings opened an unexpected window of opportunity for Romania.

### **Military Intervention – Moscow's most faithful ally**

A brief episode in the Soviet's decision-making process vis-à-vis Hungary conferred a long-term opportunity to the Romanian leadership. If on the first days of the revolution, the Kremlin did not hesitate to use its troops already present in Hungary and Romania under the tenets of the Warsaw Pact, the developments that unfolded until the end of October encouraged the Kremlin to examine the situation more closely before taking further steps. Recent scholarship has shown that between the initial Soviet intervention in the first days of the crisis and the definitive military occupation on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the position of the Soviet Union shifted several times, under the influence of internal debates within the Kremlin.

The Soviet leadership “had reached the apogee of its tolerance and rationality”<sup>232</sup> at the meeting on October 30<sup>th</sup>, where the discussion was dominated by the stationing of the Soviet troops in the Warsaw Pact countries. Invoking the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (*Panchsheel*) promoted by the Chinese Communist Party, Khrushchev decided to enter negotiations on Soviet troop withdrawal with the socialist countries at the next Warsaw Pact meeting. This major concession on Khrushchev's part had not only been influenced ideologically by the Chinese philosophy; it had been arrived at after two days of intense negotiations with a delegation led by Liu Shaoqui, in an effort to help solve the crises in Poland and Hungary. During these talks, the Chinese strongly promoted Mao's concerns that the Soviet Union should treat the socialist countries on a more equal basis, both politically and economically, and that withdrawal of the troops would be the first step towards building a more equitable relationship. This idea was supported by the principle that if the socialist countries were given “a free hand and... independence and equality, they

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<sup>232</sup> Hovráth in Jela & Tismăneanu, eds., pp. 126

will get closer [to Moscow] and more willingly support the Soviet Union.”<sup>233</sup> For the moment, Khrushchev was convinced by the argument, considering it might quell the unrest in Poland and especially Hungary.

The Chinese therefore played a crucial role in Khrushchev’s decision-making process. According to evidence, Liu Shaoqi insisted that the informal conclusions arrived at during the talks should take the form of a declaration that clearly underlined the principles of equality and sovereignty among the socialist countries.<sup>234</sup> Both Khrushchev and the Chinese politician worked together on the draft of the declaration “On Developing and Further Strengthening the Foundations for the Friendliness and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist Countries.” The document, approved on October 30<sup>th</sup>, specifically mentioned the need for negotiations on the issue of the Soviet troops stationed in Romania and Hungary (on the basis of Warsaw Pact and governmental agreements), as well as Poland (on the basis of the Potsdam Accord and the Warsaw Pact). Aside from underlining the idea of mutual agreement between governments with respect to the stationing of the troops, the document explicitly extended (planned) negotiations to include the presence of Soviet advisers present at the time throughout the institutional frameworks of the Eastern Bloc countries.<sup>235</sup>

It is evident that the small window of opportunity conferred by this declaration had been the result of joint efforts and negotiations by the superpower duo within the Communist world: the Soviet Union and China. That the Chinese would so adeptly use their position to influence the Soviet Union’s policy with respect to its satellites is unlikely to have gone unnoticed by Dej, who was already planning his detachment from Moscow. Within the Bloc, Beijing was probably already considered the best alternative to the Kremlin. Evidence suggests that, in light of the threat to his position caused by the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Dej had

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<sup>233</sup> Liu Shaoqi op. cit. in Chen Zhihua, “China’s Role and Influence in the Revolts in Poland and Hungary in 1956,” in *The Soviet Bloc under the Impact of De-Stalinization 1956*, ed. Dan Catanus (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006), 350. Zhihua in Cătănuș & Buga (eds) p. 350.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 350–51.

<sup>235</sup> Vasile Buga, “Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 II,” *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 44–45 (2004): 50.

already been looking to China as a potential ally, constantly reasserting the validity of the “relations of a new type” in his communications with Beijing throughout 1956.<sup>236</sup>

Dej was unsurprisingly quick to reap the results of the Sino-Soviet negotiations. In a special emergency meeting convened on October 31<sup>st</sup> at 6pm, the Politburo Members adopted the decision to bring up the issue of the Soviet troop withdrawal at the next Warsaw Pact meeting.<sup>237</sup> Making sure that the decision would not in any way be misconstrued as a gesture of defiance, the Politburo insisted on underlining their commitment to “strengthening the unity among the socialist countries”, and to “the unshakeable friendship” between Romania and the Soviet Union. With all necessary adulation out of the way, however, the declaration clearly stated that the Romanian government “does not consider the stationing of the Soviet troops necessary” on the country’s territory. Quick to twist the events in Timișoara to serve current objectives, the government argued that the withdrawal of the troops would eliminate the internal and external enemies’ possibility “to create anti-Soviet agitation”. Finally, in an even bolder push for Soviet concession, the declaration requested the recall of the Soviet advisers from Romanian governmental institutions.<sup>238</sup>

The pace of the events unfolding in Hungary, however, determined the fate of the RWP Politburo declaration, and, consequently, Dej’s negotiation strategy for troop withdrawal. With the crisis worsening in Budapest, Khrushchev made a complete about-turn and decided to invade the fellow socialist country whose sovereign equality had been formally recognized only two days before. The decision to intervene, taken sometime between the 30<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, was communicated to Dej on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. He acted quickly to cover his tracks and avoid coming across as too keen to get rid of the troops, for he had already experienced the consequences of the ill-timed proposal in 1955. The formal decision of the RWP Politburo to begin Soviet troop withdrawal negotiations, which had been taken only the day before, was thus immediately buried in secrecy. The protocol of

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<sup>236</sup> Stephen Fischer-Galati, *20th Century Rumania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 147.

<sup>237</sup> Minutes of the Politburo of the CC of the RWP on 31 October, 1956. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 126/1956 (Strict Secret).

<sup>238</sup> Ibid



the October 31<sup>st</sup> meeting, in which the minutes had been recorded, was immediately annulled. Although Dej officially ordered the original copy of the declaration to be destroyed, he secretly kept it in his private records until his death in 1965. It remains unsigned to this day.<sup>239</sup>

The window of opportunity conferred by the Sino-Soviet negotiations had only lasted twenty-four hours. Within this timeframe, the Soviet Union's policy shifted from the promotion of equality among the socialist states and an open encouragement to begin negotiations for troop withdrawal, to massive aggression through military intervention. The high volatility of this context automatically imposed a radical shift in Dej's strategy, as well. The initial Soviet declaration had shown that the Kremlin was at least open to the idea of negotiating troop withdrawal; the intervention in Hungary was seen in this context as both an obstacle and an opportunity. In the short term, it obviously nullified all intentions of negotiation on the part of the Soviet Union. However, the crisis afforded Dej the opportunity to prove his loyalty as faithful ally, not only to dispel the past suspicion he might have aroused when he prematurely asked for withdrawal in 1955, but also to gain credibility for any potential future negotiations. In other words, he came to the paradoxical conclusion that in order to distance himself from Moscow, he first needed to prove unconditional allegiance.

From November 1<sup>st</sup> onwards, an almost suspicious layer of enthusiasm can be noticed in Dej's policies to help the Kremlin crush the Hungarian Revolution, characterized by sycophancy in both action and rhetoric. Ignoring message from Imre Nagy, who was "going through a difficult moment and did not know what to do" but to appeal to Dej as a potential ally,<sup>240</sup> the Romanian leader turned instead towards Moscow, determined to obtain Khrushchev's trust through any means possible.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid, annotations on p 1, 2 and 5 of the document.

<sup>240</sup> Telegram from Ion Popescu-Puturi, Romanian ambassador to Budapest, sent to Bucharest on November 2, 1956, op. cit. in Buga, "Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 II," 52.

In lieu of contributing to the Soviet military efforts with participating Romanian troops<sup>241</sup>, Dej decided to do the next best thing and provide as much practical support as possible for the operation. His first order of business was to appoint Emil Bodnăraş, his trusted ally who also happened to enjoy Khrushchev's highest regard, as Minister of Transport and Communications. In this capacity, Bodnăraş facilitated the Soviet intervention in Hungary through Romania, ensuring that roads were widened and traffic was stopped for the transit of the Soviet tanks, while the trains were diverted to clear the passage for the railway transportation of arms and ammunition. This massive logistical operation was essential to the success of the Soviet intervention, which counted on the element of surprise – and 6,000 tanks – being able to occupy Hungary almost overnight.

Aside from these practical considerations, Dej also made sure to seize the opportunity to make political contributions to the Soviet Union's efforts to crush the spirit of the Hungarian Revolution. Under the pretext that he was travelling to Budapest to provide much-needed food and medicine, Dej took it upon himself to help reconsolidate the ÁVH (Hungarian secret police), which had been decimated during the Revolution, by "exporting" ethnically Hungarian agents from Transylvania.

Involving Romania to a higher degree still in the Soviet intervention, Dej agreed that Imre Nagy, who had been kidnapped outside Yugoslav embassy where he had taken refuge during the occupation, should be brought to Romania. There, he was held in captivity for several months just a few kilometers outside of Bucharest, where he was interrogated by

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<sup>241</sup> There are contradicting accounts as to why Romanian troops did not participate in the military intervention. In his memoirs, Khrushchev claims that Dej offered military participation but was refused, on the grounds that Khrushchev did not want to add an international dimension to the conflict. Romanian officials – Gheorghe Apostol and Ion Gheorghe Maurer – claim that Khrushchev had asked Dej for contributions but was refused on the grounds that such a measure might stir unrest among the large Hungarian minority in Romania. Similarly, dispatches from the British embassy in Budapest reported rumors that the Romanian and the Czechoslovak governments were asked to contribute troops for participating in a Warsaw Pact invasion; the Romanians had allegedly refused on the grounds that their armed forces were unreliable, to the point that their heavy armament had to be confiscated.

both the KGB and formerly close Romanian associates.<sup>242</sup> This decision, which was interpreted as a token of the Kremlin's newfound trust in Gheorghiu-Dej, also placed the Romanian leader in a particularly delicate position with Tito. While the Yugoslav leader understood why the Kremlin would not want a potential Hungarian government in exile, especially in Yugoslavia, he made his approval of Nagy's presence in Romania conditional on Nagy's own consent.<sup>243</sup> This consent, of course, never came thus dampening relations between Bucharest and Belgrade for a while.

Dej decision to 'host' Imre Nagy on behalf of the Soviets also placed him in a delicate position with the international community; this especially after he denied UN experts previously promised access to visit Nagy at the villa in Snagov, where he was held under a peculiar form of house arrest. In the face of an impotent international community, however, whose ability to take any serious measure was limited – if inexistent – anyway, what mattered most to Dej was the accrual of political capital in Moscow. And this, he seems to have achieved, for “after crushing the Hungarian Revolution, Dej appeared [even] to the most conservative [faction] within the Kremlin as a trustworthy comrade.”<sup>244</sup>

Indeed, the Kremlin's newfound trust in Dej was not based on the latter's diplomatic skills alone, but also on the information that the Soviet “advisers” in Bucharest were sending to Moscow. In a report “on the internal political situation in Romania during the events in Hungary”<sup>245</sup>, the Soviet observers reported to Moscow that throughout the crisis, the situation in Romania had been maintained “stable and healthy”. The detailed report then

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<sup>242</sup> Valter Roman, who had been a close associate of Imre Nagy after they both received training in Moscow, later used his personal friendship with the leader of the Hungarian Revolution to help the interrogation process.

<sup>243</sup> Catanus, “The Impact of the Secret Speech on the Romanian Workers Party Leadership. The Process of Destalinization in Romania.”

<sup>244</sup> Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Gheorghiu-Dej and the Romanian Worker's Party: From De-Sovietization to the Emergence of National Communism,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 2002, 26.

<sup>245</sup> SUTA – Soviet Union Telegraphic Agency, Document Nr. 241, 12. III. 1957 in Vasile Buga, “TASS Correspondents: October 1956. The Situation in Romania Was ‘Stable and Healthy,’” in *Power and Society. The Soviet Bloc under the Impact of De-Stalinization 1956*, ed. Dan Catanus and Vasile Buga (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006), 462–71.

proceeded to enumerate all the potentially “dangerous elements” in Romania that could have instigated unrest, but which had been effectively suppressed – the intellectuals, the landowners, the right-wing social democrats, etc. The student unrest in Timișoara received special mention, explaining that the protests were “firmly curbed... even with physical force, when it was necessary.”<sup>246</sup> It was also especially mentioned that during the events in Hungary,

*...a part (of the Romanian) population manifested a hostile attitude towards Soviet military officers, the latter having even received threats...**Not far from Bucharest, on a Soviet train heading from Moscow to Sofia, all the windows were broken. Flyers were distributed requesting the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania.***<sup>247</sup>

Dej had clearly proved his trustworthiness not only by providing a significant amount of help with the intervention, but also by handling the internal situation in Romania “correctly.” It had also become clear to the Soviets, however, especially in the context recent events, that the Soviet troops were becoming an element of potential social unrest. If Romania was to be rewarded for its “healthy” behavior during the Hungarian crisis, the idea that the withdrawal of the Soviet troops could be a potential concession had been planted.

Indeed, at a meeting that took place in Moscow on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Soviets leadership mentioned that “due to the current international situation” and the “recent Western aggressions” (in the Suez Canal crisis), the issue of the Soviet troop withdrawal from Romania could not yet be considered. The door was officially open, however, for future discussions, “depending on international developments.”<sup>248</sup> This extremely guarded, yet ultimately positive message from the Kremlin gave Gheorghiu-Dej reason to be cautiously hopeful. Indeed, only six months later, the negotiations for the troop withdrawal began; by May 1958, the last 30,000 Soviet troops were recalled to Moscow.

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid. p 469.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. p 470. The underlining of the text belongs to Dmitri Shepilov, then USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>248</sup> Op. cit. from Scanteia in Buga, “Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 II,” 58.

## Conclusions

For Romania, 1956 presented both challenges and opportunities. While Khrushchev's Secret Speech during the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress initially placed Gheorghiu-Dej in a vulnerable position within his own party, he managed to not only "weather the storm", as a British diplomat put it, but also consolidate his position both internally and regionally. Indeed, the Soviet-Yugoslav formal reconciliation placed Romania in the particularly strategic position as an intermediary between the two socialist powers. The unexpected events of October of that year in Budapest further provided Dej with the opportunity to prove his unwavering loyalty to Moscow – an absolutely crucial step towards reaching his objective of negotiating a Soviet troop withdrawal from Romania at a later point.

The issue of Soviet troop withdrawal from Romanian territory had been on the foreign policy agenda of the Dej regime as early as 1955, pointing to an inclination towards detachment from Moscow starting that year. Records proving the existence of a secret and informal meeting between Nikita Khrushchev and senior members of the Romanian government, who brought up the issue for discussion, prove that Romania's feeble attempt at national self-assertion was then adamantly refused by the Soviets. Despite the failure of a hasty and premature attempt at negotiations, however, Gheorghiu-Dej was able to draw valuable lessons that were cautiously implemented over the next three years, ultimately achieving his goal in 1958.

The fulfillment of Dej's objective, however, would not have been possible without the opportunities conferred by the Hungarian Revolution and the ensuing Soviet intervention in October 1956. Taking advantage of the Sino-Soviet compromise on finding peaceful solutions to the crisis, Dej drew the first concrete and formal plan for negotiations on Soviet troop withdrawal from Romania in the midst of the Hungarian crisis. This short-lived opportunity for negotiations would not have been possible without the strong influence exerted by the Chinese leaders on Khrushchev – a fact that did not go unnoticed by Dej, who had already started timidly courting Beijing's patronage. This development sheds new light on Romanian-Chinese relations, as well, which are generally thought to have strengthened only in the 1960's, in the context of the Sino-Soviet split.

The Soviet intervention in Hungary momentarily delayed the implementation of Dej's plan, yet it ultimately improved its chances for success significantly. Luckily, his October 31<sup>st</sup> decision to formally seek withdrawal of the troops was never leaked, thus proving that, by the end of 1956 Dej had managed not only to fully consolidate his position, but also to surround himself only with the most loyal political subjects within the Politburo. Had the Kremlin gotten word of this intentions, they would have most likely perceived him as a ruthless opportunist instead of a trusted partner.

Through his unconditional support of the Soviet effort to crush the Hungarian Revolution, Dej was therefore able to prove his allegiance to the Kremlin and gain the political capital necessary for reaching his objective. As Moscow's "faithful ally" he was therefore able to reap the benefits of his loyalty within as little as six months, when the official negotiations for withdrawal of the Soviet troops started.

The year 1956 represents a key moment in Romania's strategy to detach itself from Moscow's influence. Cunningly maximizing the opportunities granted by the power play between China and the Soviet Union, Gheorghiu-Dej drew Romania's first formal plan to start negotiations on Soviet troop withdrawal and thus start asserting its sovereign rights. The secret plan, kept unsigned by Dej until his death, points to the brazen nature of the initiative, on the one hand, while it attests to Dej's strategizing skills, on the other, for it was successfully achieved in 1958.

## Walking the Tightrope (1957-1958)

### Introduction

Shortly before leaving his post in Bucharest in January 1959 Alan Dudley, the British Minister to Romania, concluded in his valedictory telegram,

*...“I think that [the Romanians] may in the future play a larger part in Eastern Europe than we have hitherto imagined to be likely, and they may prove, in the long run, a very indigestible meal for the Soviet giant.”<sup>249</sup>*

Written just a few short months after Soviet army boots had left Romanian soil, this assessment stood in sharp contrast to the reports he had sent London throughout his two-year tenure in Romania. Indeed, no foreign observers could have predicted at the end of 1956, when the country seemed more nestled than ever in the embrace of the Soviet bear, Romania’s slow but steady path away from Moscow. High chances are that Gheorghiu-Dej himself did not possess a clear strategy for this goal at the time.

As 1957 dawned on the Socialist camp, littered still with the bullets of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Bucharest was finding itself economically and politically more bound to Moscow than it had been than any other time since Stalin’s death. Careful to contain the levels of social discontent that could have sparked a disastrous internal upheaval –and thus avoid that his country should become “another Hungary” – Gheorghiu-Dej was forced to postpone capitalizing on the trust earned during the Hungarian Revolt by choosing instead to move closer to the Kremlin.

However, the ideological fault lines that were exacerbating between the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and China provided the Romanian leader with an opportunity to stand out to Moscow’s rivals. With Moscow’s approval – and perhaps at the Kremlin’s suggestion – he launched the initiative for a Balkan Conference, meant to demilitarize the zone, thereby augmenting his regional role and further strengthening his cooperation with Belgrade. Within the context of the incipient Sino-Soviet dispute, Dej also leveraged Romania’s only

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<sup>249</sup> Telegram No.9 from Alan Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 13 January, 1959. UKNA, file FO 371 143328, p 2.

economic competitive advantage among the satellites – oil – in order to not only ingratiate himself with Beijing, but also to advocate for a more lenient approach towards Belgrade’s unpalatable heresy. Dej’s perilous yet masterfully subtle tightrope walk between Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing established the incipient stages of Romania’s role as mediator among these powers, as well as the path to a “third way”, which it later pursued in the quest to break from Moscow to the largest extent possible. Last, but certainly not least, Dej was keen eventually to take advantage of Khrushchev’s newly-proclaimed peace offensive policy in order to finally reach his goal of the last three years: the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romanian territory. By the end of 1958, when this objective was finally achieved, Romania was indeed well on its way to becoming the “indigestible meal for the Soviet giant” that Dudley described.

### **The anatomy of social discontent**

If 1956 had initially brought a general feeling of relaxation and liberalization to Eastern Europe, the year that followed shattered most hope that things would change. After the dust settled in Budapest in the wake of the Soviet invasion, the ‘fraternal’ countries within the socialist camp struggled to redefine not only the relationship amongst themselves, but also their position in the world. Indeed, the Kremlin’s leadership was now facing unprecedented challenges. Not only was Khrushchev’s – and, by extension, Moscow’s – image as a promoter of peaceful coexistence, disarmament and détente now suffering from a substantial credibility deficit; but Yugoslavia was still vociferously protesting against the detention of Imre Nagy, while Poland was quietly but firmly still negotiating its relationship with Moscow following its own uprising a few months earlier. On the eve of the new year, Khrushchev was not likely to look forward to 1957 - the proverbial cookie had partially crumbled, and putting it back together would be no easy task. This feeling of malaise and uncertainty had permeated throughout the Eastern Bloc.

For Romania, however, the future –at least in its immediate stage – seemed relatively less uncertain. The country’s position as Moscow’s most loyal and active ally during the Hungarian uprising had earned it significant political capital with the Soviets. Needless to



say, this was achieved at the cost of the hard-earned, even if very modest, progress that Bucharest had made towards endearing itself to the West up to mid-1956. In such a clear cut position, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej decided perhaps the most logical course of action with respect to his short-term political strategy: optimise Romania's new and privileged position as an ally of the Soviet Union by further cultivating the relationship and maximising the benefits. He could worry about the West later.

Dej was quick to reap the fruit of his foreign policy during the Hungarian uprising. The Soviet tanks had barely taken their menacing position into Budapest when Dej sent his envoys to Moscow in order to negotiate Romania's economic aid package for 1957. Although he had called for this meeting earlier, in September, as reports of a bad harvest were threatening to impose a difficult winter, the events in Poland and Hungary had intervened to postpone the talks. The delay ultimately proved to be to Dej's advantage, as his representatives could now negotiate from a more privileged position following Bucharest's staunch support of Moscow's interventionist policies. Yet the Romanian leader certainly had cause to worry about the results of the talks.

The mood in Romania in the aftermath of the Hungarian crisis was rather dark, to say the least, as a deep feeling of discontent seemed to prevail throughout the country. This was due, according to Dudley, "to the realisation that the hopes of greater liberalisation formed in 1956 [were] not going to be fulfilled."<sup>250</sup> At the root of this sentiment stood the "disappointment" over the West's failure to intervene and "save Hungary", which "was profound and created widespread disillusion."<sup>251</sup> Although any show of protest during the Hungarian crisis had been quickly muffled in Romania in order to avoid the contagion of violence, the people still seemed to feel a measure of solidarity for their neighbors, as well as the hope that the revolutionaries might have prevailed and triggered a more robust

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<sup>250</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1957). Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 7 January, 1958, p3. UKNA, file FO 371/135151.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

change in the region. The Soviet invasion had crushed that hope and now “to people everywhere in Romania Hungary is a symbol of their own situation.”<sup>252</sup>

The American Minister in Bucharest, R. Thayer, was also signalling to Washington the strikingly similar impression that after the crushing of the Hungarian revolt, “a period of disillusionment set in” Romania.<sup>253</sup> The deep disappointment felt by the population manifested itself in a rather potent mix of emotions, alternating between depression and exhilaration:

*The people as a whole passed through one of their many periods of depression after a few weeks of wild hope, and resumed their normal status of waiting for the next event that would send their wishful-thinking spirits soaring to the skies again.*<sup>254</sup>

This same see-saw pattern of extreme emotions is mirrored in Dudley’s reports to London, who observed that,

*...the very fact that hopes had risen and have been dashed makes the future harder to contemplate... Feelings and opinions are mixed. ... more and more people seem ready to say that the only way out is a world war, however destructive... Hopes spring up on the smallest justification, and rumours run about this or that relaxation is to occur.*<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Letter From the Minister in Romania (Thayer) to the Secretary of State. FRUS, 1955–1957, EASTERN EUROPE, VOLUME XXV, Document 230. Department of State, Central Files, 766.00/2–657. Confidential; Official–Informal. (Source: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d230#fn:1.3.2.6.16.73.4.5> )

<sup>254</sup> Ibid

<sup>255</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1957). Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 7 January, 1959. UKNA, file FO 371/135151, p 3.

The “endemic economic discontent”<sup>256</sup> reported by the British diplomat was described in more detail by his American counterpart, concluding with a rather ominous observation,

*The plight of the ordinary Rumanian today is pitiful. He cannot earn for himself and his family enough to survive, and even wholesale stealing on the part of all members of industry, from the worker up to high officials, does not furnish him with nonexistent consumers' goods or a decent place to live. The peasant and the worker lead lives of misery, and their willingness to endure this existence without rising in revolt is a constant source of wonder.*

Surely, Gheorghiu-Dej must have been painfully aware of the potentially explosive socio-economic situation on his hands. The widespread malaise, coupled with the prevalent social instability and the winter hardships after a poor harvest could have potentially led to an impending revolt, as Thayer had predicted in his telegram to Washington.

An added liability was the government's decision to aid the Soviets, who in Romania inspired no strong sympathies among the population, in crushing the Hungarian revolt. Already considered oppressors and exploiters by the vast majority of the Romanian population, the Soviets would have been an easy target, alongside Dej's government, for all their discontent. As the American ambassador reported,

*The average Romanian is convinced that his country is being milked by the USSR. The peasant is seething because he believes that his crop has been stolen, and that a good part of his crop is being exported. Second, the average Romanian believes that his country does not get world market prices for raw materials, including uranium, that it ships to the USSR.*<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> American Legation, Bucharest, to the Department of State, 13 December 1956, RG 59, Decimal File 661.66/12-1356 HBS,NA op cit. in Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy: Soviet Troops in Romania, 1944-1958* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 112.

It would therefore be reasonably safe to assume that, despite his newly improved position in Moscow's regard, Dej was still nervous about the outcome Prime Minister Chivu Stoica's talks with the Soviets in early December 1956. His hopes of avoiding a domestic crisis were pinned on the generosity of the Kremlin.<sup>258</sup>

### **The tight embrace of the Soviet Bear**

Nothing could reflect more clearly Romania's position on the international stage at the time than Chivu Stoica's week-long visit to Moscow from 27 November to 3 December, 1956. Most Western diplomats from both capitals refused to participate in the welcoming ceremonies, customary for the visits of high-ranking officials, once he arrived in Moscow as well as upon his return to Bucharest.<sup>259</sup> Despite this symbolic, yet very telling gesture of the Western governments, the visit to Moscow was a great success. Not only had the results<sup>260</sup> of the talks with the Soviets exceeded expectations, but the Romanians had been genuinely

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<sup>258</sup> Romania's high economic dependence on the Soviet Union was duly noted by the British Minister in Bucharest, who upon Chivu Stoica's departure to Moscow was reporting to London that "an important objective from the Romanian point of view will be to try to secure substantial economic help from the Russians, particularly over food supplies. Unless help is available from the outside, the Romanian authorities are likely to have a very difficult winter ahead of them, and they may be expected to point out how much easier it will be for them to avoid popular discontent and make soviet policies more acceptable to the general population if they are able to point to a tangible benefit of Rumano-Soviet friendship in the shape of generous supplies of food." In Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 5 January, 1956. UKNA, file FO 371/122703.

<sup>259</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 5 January, 1956. UKNA, file FO 371/122703.

<sup>260</sup> The Soviet Union agreed to provide Romania with 450,000 tons of wheat and 60,000 tons of feed against credit in the first half of 1957. Moscow also offered technical help for building some petrochemical plants across Romania, agreeing that payment would come out of the plants' future production, and cancelling some credit payments due in 1957-1959. Most importantly, however, the Kremlin agreed to re-evaluate the buyouts for the SOVROMS (the Romanian-Soviet joint ventures that had spanned across Romanian industry until 1956), which had been previously inflated. This provision alone reduced Romania's payments to the USSR by 4.3 billion lei. In Vasile Buga, "Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 II," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 44-45 (2004): 58-59.

impressed by the warm and ceremonious welcome to Moscow.<sup>261</sup> While the West was turning its back on Bucharest, the Kremlin was welcoming it with open arms.

Within two days of the delegation's arrival back to Bucharest, on 5 December, a special Politburo meeting was called to discuss the outcome of the talks in Moscow. Among this small circle of the Party's trusted elite, Dej would allow himself the enthusiastic appreciation that "the results... are particularly good, advantageous... the wish (of the Soviets) to get rid of all that has been unfair in our relations was apparent, as (they) looked for solutions that brought us a big help."<sup>262</sup> Indeed, even by Western standards the economic aid Romania would receive in the first half of 1957 was considered substantial. As the results later became public, the British legation in Bucharest was informing London that "the Romanians have come out of this well, and the breathing space they have been given is a generous one."<sup>263</sup>

Of course, such spectacular results could only have the impact that Dej hoped for if they were properly communicated to the masses. The propaganda campaign immediately launched after Stoica's auspicious visit to Moscow had therefore two main objectives. The first, was to ensure that popular discontent would be safely kept below the general tolerance levels by highlighting the robustness of the economic aid Romania was receiving. The second was to promote the image of the Soviet Union as a benevolent friend and benefactor, willing to help the country in a time of dire need.

The party elites therefore almost immediately decided that the most effective way to communicate the outcome of the negotiations with the Kremlin was through a special radio broadcast by Chivu Stoica, the delegation leader himself. Despite Stoica's central position as leader of the delegation to Moscow and messenger to the entire country about the results

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<sup>261</sup> Upon his return Chivu Stoica reported to Dej how, unlike previous times when he had been received in Moscow by local authorities, this time he was welcomed with great pomp and fanfare by the Soviet Vice-President of the Council of Ministers. In Minutes of the meeting of the CC of the RWP on 5 December, 1956. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 135/1956, p 4-5.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p22.

<sup>263</sup> Minutes on telegram no 10310.9/56 from A Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Foreign Office, Northern Department, 13 December 1956. UKNA document FO 371/122703.

of his visit, it was Dej, who orchestrated the entire campaign from behind the scenes. Throughout the especially lengthy Political Bureau meeting of 5 December, Dej went to great lengths to micro-manage the content, tone and tenor of the radio broadcast. His directives started with the general statement that

*comrade Chivu should bring to the attention of the people all these results... to highlight what they mean for our economy in general, and what favorable conditions they create for our future (economic) activity... and, in the first place, for the creation of those conditions necessary to improve the standard of living of the population. This should be emphasised.*<sup>264</sup>

Dej was not only keen to reassure the people that their basic needs would be covered for the winter<sup>265</sup> by highlighting that “the bottom line (is) that the bread of our people is fully ensured”<sup>266</sup>; but he also sought to emphasise that the Soviet Union was a friend of Romania, helping the country in a time of need. With an admirable, if not almost comical attention to detail, Dej painstakingly directed the tone and message of the radio broadcast while, ironically, denouncing Western propaganda

*We have to talk about the general atmosphere during the talks, what we felt while we were carrying out the discussions, that we felt warm friendship (and) a profound understanding of our needs. What stood at the basis of the talks between... our two governments: equality of rights. We have to formulate this nicely and to show that we didn't go there the way these sinners (Westerners) claimed in their propaganda; that we were well received and that these talks were important. How important it*

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<sup>264</sup> In Minutes of the meeting of the CC of the RWP on 5 December, 1956. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 135/1956, p23.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, pp 24-25. During this meeting, Dej was insisting that the only way to maximise political advantage was to show how the Soviet gesture of friendship could be translated into facts and figures relating to the economic aid: “I personally don't think it would be harmful if we refer to these things. It would only be to our political advantage... I think we have to exploit this to the maximum, then (emphasize) all the other aid.... After all, this is a credit of over one billion rubles. We have to say that... We have to show this concretely (with numbers), not with general and abstract formulas”

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 24. Literally translated, this passage refers to “the conclusions of the big picture”, which in English would be more effectively translated as “the bottom line”.

*was to have an exchange of ideas on the international situation... We should express the conviction that any honest man of good faith... any true patriot, the largest part of our population would receive these results with joy and satisfaction; and that this will lead to a closer friendship with the Soviet Union, our faithful friend. It (the speech) has to be ... mobilizing and agitational.*<sup>267</sup>

It is difficult to assess the effect of Stoica's radio broadcast. Apart from the factual information on the economic aid, Western audiences largely dismissed its content, which contained "a sickening adulation of the Soviet Union."<sup>268</sup> It was mostly the national audience that Gheorghiu-Dej was concerned about, however. His hope was that the carefully calibrated (and propagandistically inflated) news of generous Soviet aid, coupled with a few domestic concessions would assuage social tensions. This especially in a context in which general malaise was likely to be exacerbated not only by Dej's need to fully align himself to Soviet policy, but also to officially accept the presence of Soviet troops on Romanian territory for a longer period of time.

The Kremlin's generosity, as it turned out, had not been entirely disinterested. Upon arriving in Moscow, Chivu Stoica had been rather surprised to learn that, before the talks on the economic aid were to start, the Kremlin expected to release a joint statement of the two governments. The first part of the document was meant to reinforce the justification for the Soviet intervention in Hungary. The Soviets, keen to recover some of the credibility lost in the aftermath of the intervention, were summoning their faithful satellite to publicly demonstrate the solidarity within the Bloc with respect to the intervention. In exchange for the desperately needed economic aid, Stoica readily agreed to the joint statement. This action, however, proved to be largely ineffective. Western observers, such as the British Minister in Bucharest were quick to dismiss Stoica's gesture, reporting that "(he) has had no hesitation in putting his signature to the usual statements about the 'international duty' of the Soviet Union in using its forces 'to put a stop to the bloody orgy of the reactionary

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>268</sup> Telegram no 10310.9/56 from A Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Foreign Office, Northern Department, 13 December 1956. UKNA document FO 371/122703.

forces.”<sup>269</sup> Alas, having Romania – a country that had actively supported the intervention in the first place, and as a result was already seen by the West as little more than the Kremlin’s vassal – justify the invasion proved to be the wrong public relations move for Moscow. Instead of proving self-righteousness to the world, the Soviet Union seemed in fact to be grasping at straws.

Romania’s readiness to sign such a statement was unsurprising, given not only its share of responsibility in the military intervention, but also Dej’s newly increased levels of subservience to the Soviets. Indeed, another section of the statement, relating to the status of the Soviet troops on Romanian territory, further confirmed Bucharest’s status as one of Moscow’s most submissive allies. Both the Romanian leadership as well as foreign observers<sup>270</sup> had expected the topic to be discussed at the Kremlin during the high profile negotiations. Neither, however, anticipated that the Soviets would make any significant concessions on the matter less than a month after the invasion of Hungary. Indeed, the draft statement that the Romanian delegation had been presented with prior to the talks on economic aid was clear on the matter: the Soviet authorities refused to withdraw their troops from any of the satellites, on account of external threats such as the military alliance in Western Europe and the remilitarization of West Germany.<sup>271</sup> Under these circumstances, the statement claimed, the Soviet and Romanian governments (presumably mutually) agreed on “the temporary stationing of Soviet military units on Romanian territory, in accordance with the Warsaw Treaty.”<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Telegram no 261 from William Hayter, British Embassy in Moscow to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 6 December 1956, p 2. UKNA document FO 371/122703.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. At the time of Chivu Stoica’s departure to Moscow, the British Minister in Bucharest was reporting to London that “according to a member of the Soviet embassy here the future of the Soviet troops in this country is one of the items to be discussed. But in the present world situation it seems unlikely that the Russians can be contemplating any withdrawal of their troops from Romania and the absence of any military adviser from the delegation does not suggest that this will be a serious subject for discussion.”

<sup>271</sup> Dan Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965* (Bucharest: The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2011), 168.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, op cit from the *Declaration Regarding the Talks between the Governmental Delegations of the RPR and the Soviet Union*, in Scanteia, year XXVI, nr 2769, 4 December.



Alas, the generous economic aid package offered by the Kremlin seemed to come at the price of the prolonged Soviet military presence in the country. In this context, the historian Dan Catanus posits that the official acceptance by the Romanian leadership to further host the Soviet troops represented “an important failure with respect to regaining national sovereignty.”<sup>273</sup> This assessment reflects the general opinion within the Romanian historiography that the December 1956 negotiations in Moscow were yet another missed opportunity for Romania to successfully convince the Kremlin to withdraw its troops.<sup>274</sup> From a narrow perspective, considering Romanian national interest exclusively, this appraisal may hold some merit. This issue, however, needs to be examined within the broader context of Soviet interest, especially within a particularly delicate international situation in the aftermath of the Hungarian and Suez crises.

Indeed, the Kremlin was finding itself on the defensive and it was protecting, as always, its own national and regional interests. Even the financial and economic help that Romania was receiving in December 1956 was more than a simple reward for the country’s help and support of the Soviet intervention in Hungary; from Moscow’s perspective, it was also an important stabilising factor for a neighboring satellite where social tensions ran dangerously high. The Romanian government needed to prove its ability to manage this aid effectively and assuage a potentially volatile internal situation before any idea of troop withdrawal could be seriously entertained by the Soviets, even at a later time when the international situation would have allowed for it. In this context, both the stabilising quality of the economic aid as well as the assurance of domestic peace that the Soviet troops can be considered to have provided, served the interests of Moscow, not Bucharest.

Moreover, Dej had likely expected the outcome of the Moscow talks and had resigned himself to the fact that, once more, he would have to practice caution and patience over self-harming enthusiasm. Drawing on the lessons learned in 1955, he opted to bank the political capital he had just earned during the Hungarian revolt instead of immediately

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, p 169.

<sup>274</sup> Mioara Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007); Buga, “Relatiile Politice Romano-Sovietice, 1953-1958 II.”

cashing out. Insisting on a troop withdrawal at such a delicate time for the Kremlin would not only have been ineffective, but also potentially dangerous. Dej's caution was also observed by Dudley, who reported to London that the Romanians "agreed not to make any difficulties over the continued presence of the Soviet forces in their country (not that they were likely to do this anyway) and will be able to explain this to their people as being due to the threat of aggression from the Western militarists."<sup>275</sup> The British diplomat's intuition proved right.

In the aftermath of the Suez crisis, Romania's wholesale alignment to Soviet policy also implied the adoption of Moscow's renewed aggression towards the West, at least rhetorically. As a result, both the economic agreement as well as the joint declaration between the Romanian and Soviet governments were presented to the public as nothing less than a common effort on the front against Western sabotage and dominance. "The agreement", the British minister reported, "has of course been hailed by the Romanian press as a demonstration of the great brotherly friendship (*big-brotherly?*) between the two countries and much is made of the deep satisfaction and joy of the Romanian people at the benefits received, by comparison with the exploitation and misery which was their lot when the American, British, French and German trusts ruled in Romania."<sup>276</sup> With the tone often characteristic of British diplomats, Dudley sardonically concluded his report by adding that "gatherings are being organised in various parts of the country to enable workers to demonstrate their delight" with the Soviet help.<sup>277</sup>

If Romania's public and very enthusiastic adulation of the Soviet Union proved insufficient in convincing the West of Kremlin's righteous benevolence, Moscow resorted to legal devices to get the job done. On 15 April 1957 the joint statement signed just a few months prior was elevated to the status of a bilateral agreement between the two governments, thereby legally codifying Soviet military presence in Romania, and justifying it through "the

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<sup>275</sup> Telegram No 10310/56 from Alan Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest, to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 6 December 1956. UKNA document FO 371/122703

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. Italics added by the author to highlight that, while the Romanian government sought to emphasize the element of equality in its relationship with the Soviet Union throughout the campaign, the West was indeed evaluating the relationship to be unequal.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

assurance of mutual security.” Its publication in *Scanteia*<sup>278</sup>, which represented a departure from the norm, was doubtlessly meant to publicly emphasize the willingness of Romanian authorities to host the troops, contrary to Western propaganda.<sup>279</sup> Despite its emphasis on the concept of equality, however, the agreement was seen by the West less as an affirmation of sovereign cooperation, and more as a confirmation of Soviet domination, as the British Minister in Bucharest would point out:

*...the fact that no time limit has been laid down, that there is no provision for the Agreement to be terminated by one of the parties, and that it can be amended only with the consent of both parties, means the Soviet government will in practice be able to keep their troops in Roumania (sic) as long as they wish. Moreover the provision exempting Soviet troops from Roumanian (sic) jurisdiction when on duty will enable the Soviet forces, if they so wish, to ignore Roumanian law more or less at will.*<sup>280</sup>

Once more, it seemed, the Soviets had failed to produce the desired impression. In the aftermath of the Hungarian and Suez crises, Moscow was not only trying to regain its credibility as a regional power, but also making efforts to show to the West that, unlike the British and Americans, the Soviet troops were actually welcomed in allied countries. At the elaborately planned reception to celebrate the signing of the agreement in Bucharest, Gyorgy Zhukov, the Soviet Defense Minister, unceremoniously referred to “the very hostile attitude, often inimical, of many imperialist states” during his toast.<sup>281</sup> All Western diplomats present, including the British and the American, walked out in protest.<sup>282</sup> Alas, Romanian national interest seemed to be caught in the great power crossfire following the two major crises of 1956.

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<sup>278</sup> The Romanian version of *Pravda* and Communist Party mouthpiece.

<sup>279</sup> Minutes on the report sent by A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 18 April, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128904.

<sup>280</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 18 April, 1957, p. 2. UKNA document FO 371/128904.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

Within this context, what seems less surprising than the West's dismissal of the Soviet gestures towards Romania, is the satellite's acceptance of Moscow's full dominance, despite its best interests. Indeed, after setting Soviet troop withdrawal as a foreign policy priority during the crisis in Hungary, and faithfully aiding the invasion in the hope of meeting this goal, Gheorghiu-Dej was now paradoxically seeming to invite the troops to remain in the country legally and indefinitely. And yet, he had no other choice. Caught between Khrushchev's need to reassert his regional leadership as well as his international credibility, and the West's renewed distrust of the Bloc, Dej seemingly intensified his allegiance to the Kremlin. Winning and maintaining Moscow's trust would be crucial if any degree of independence were to be gained, and Dej was keenly aware of the fact. After the events just a few months prior, even the West was aware that "the Soviets can be trusted to be watching Rumania (sic), at least for the present, with the same watchful eyes that they are casting upon all the satellites."<sup>283</sup>

Caution was essential; and proving loyalty was equally important. Through the military and economic agreements it signed with Moscow, Bucharest was now "so tightly tied" to the Soviet economy, that Washington saw no point in developing the already modest ties with the country, choosing instead to keep trade to a minimum. This, especially after Romania had "joined the Soviets in virulent attacks against the United States, its foreign policy, its economy and its political institutions."<sup>284</sup> Similar policies were followed by the United Kingdom.<sup>285</sup> Seen from Washington and London, by mid-1957 Romania indeed seemed to be fully and willingly resigned to the embrace of the Soviet bear.

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<sup>283</sup> Letter From the Minister in Romania (Thayer) to the Secretary of State, 6 February, 1957. FRUS, 1955–1957, Eastern Europe, Volume XXV, Document 230, p. 564.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1957). Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 7 January, 1959. UKNA, file FO 371/135151.

### **“Straddling the fence”<sup>286</sup>**

The Western impression of Romania as a more faithful-than-ever Soviet satellite was accurate, but incomplete. With the deterioration of the relations between East and West in the aftermath of the Hungarian and Suez crises, the Kremlin was defensively closing ranks; and Romania obediently followed orders. However, Moscow’s efforts to re-assert its leadership within the Socialist camp, on the one hand, while seeking to recalibrate its ideological tenets in the wake of the Secret Speech, on the other, was being met with increasing opposition from China and Yugoslavia. Behind the scenes of the Communist Bloc, Gheorghiu-Dej sought an opportunity within the power interplay between its main actors, gaining significant – if still imperceptible to the West – ground in his quest to loosen Romania’s ties with the Soviet Union.

Throughout 1957-1958, this strategy followed three main avenues. First, the Romanian leader fully embraced the Kremlin’s new ideological orthodoxy not only to show unwavering loyalty to Moscow, but also to instrumentalize its rhetoric in order to eliminate his main rivals, thereby fully consolidating his leadership internally. Second, he began utilizing his new position as a trusted ally of the Kremlin to act as emissary – and even at times as intermediary – between Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing, thereby raising his profile within the camp. Third, Gheorghiu-Dej adopted Moscow’s policies towards the Third World in order to establish and consolidate economic ties with members of the non-aligned movement by leveraging Romania’s only asset, comparative to its Eastern Bloc brethren: oil.

By the beginning of 1957, Moscow began an intense and sustained campaign to consolidate unity within the Bloc, in part to prove to the West that its relationship with its satellites was based on full consensus, and in part to re-establish its now shaken leadership position in the Communist world. On New Year’s day, 1957 Moscow’s most faithful allies – Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania - met in Budapest with Hungarian and Soviet authorities for a

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<sup>286</sup> Phrase used by the American Minister to Bucharest, Robert Thayer, to describe Romania’s willingness to engage in trade and economic cooperation, while at the same time towing the Moscow line in denouncing the aggression of the West: “The Rumanian Government is as usual straddling the fence with its customary skill.” In Letter From the Minister in Romania (Thayer) to the Secretary of State, 6 February, 1957. FRUS, 1955–1957, Eastern Europe, Volume XXV, Document 230, p. 563.

three-day meeting to discuss the Hungarian crisis two months prior, and to assess the current situation in the country. The resulting report signalled the “unanimous decision” that the Soviet Union had been completely justified in “helping” the Hungarian working class to remove “the danger of a fascist dictatorship being established” in Hungary. It had done so, according to the document, by disabling the efforts of “the internal counter-revolutionaries and of the aggressive imperialist forces to transform Hungary into a dangerous theater of a new war in Europe.”<sup>287</sup> In an unabashed show of support for the newly installed (and conveniently loyal) Kadar regime, the observers seemed thrilled to note that “the Hungarian working class, peasants and intelligentsia appreciated the situation in their country and the tasks that lie ahead fairly,” and that they now understood “better the normalization of production, restarting economic production, etc.”<sup>288</sup> In other words, thanks to the Soviet intervention, the situation in Hungary was well under way to normalization, and all levels of society were happy to make their contribution towards that end.

The Soviet satellites were keen not only to underscore the fact that Moscow’s intervention had been completely justified, but that it was, indeed, entirely legal and in line with the principles guiding the relationship among the fraternal countries. They therefore not only reiterated, but also expressed their “unanimous conviction” that Moscow’s 30 October (1956) Declaration, was “fully aligned with the principles of international communism.”<sup>289</sup> The Declaration, which ironically had been published at the height of the Hungarian crisis, underlined the guiding principles for the relations among the Bloc countries: full equality among states, respect for territorial integrity, independence and state sovereignty, as well as non-intervention in internal affairs. At the time of its publication by Moscow, it was meant to show that the relationship between the Kremlin and its satellites was based on full consensus. Now, just a couple of short months after the Soviet intervention, the satellites were loyally raising their voices in solidarity with the Kremlin’s dictates.<sup>290</sup> At the same time, Mikhail Suslov, the chief Soviet ideologue, began an aggressive campaign against the idea of national communism, claiming that the different paths to building socialism could only be

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<sup>287</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the CC of the RWP on 5 January, 1957. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 1/1957, p. 1-11.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 102.

carried out in accordance with the Leninist principles of international Communism.<sup>291</sup>

Moscow was therefore revisiting some of the principles outlined in the Secret Speech by returning to a new brand of ideological orthodoxy promoting unity over diversity within the Socialist camp.

A keen tactician, Gheorghiu-Dej sought to maximise his political advantage even in the most constraining of circumstances. Just as he waited two full months after the Secret Speech to discuss it during the RWP plenum of March 1956, the Romanian leader patiently waited to ascertain which way the ideological winds would blow from the Kremlin before calling the 1957 plenum in late June. Unsurprisingly, Dej used the opportunity to reiterate how just the Soviet intervention in the Hungarian uprising had been, using the same language and rhetoric used in the January report. In so doing, of course, he not only justified to the Party his own policy to aid the intervention, but raised his own profile as promoter of peace and faithful ally of the Soviet Union.

Most importantly, however, Gheorghiu-Dej took the opportunity to revisit the Secret Speech and its consequences, claiming that, although its principles had been correct, they unfortunately opened the door for instability in those “fraternal” countries where the Party had been fragmented. He therefore cunningly employed the principle of unity and solidarity that Moscow was now promoting in order to launch an all-out campaign against his main opponents, Iosif Chishinevschi and Miron Constantinescu, who had challenged him during the 1956 Plenum. According to Dej, the two Party members had not conducted their criticism in a constructive way, with a view to strengthen the Party, at the time when the results of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress were being discussed. Instead, he claimed, their “liberal” interpretation<sup>292</sup> of the Secret Speech promoted the same kind of potential instability that had been present in Poland and Hungary. As a result, they were now seen as little less than enemies of the State, since their behavior had “represented a great danger and could have

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 172.

led to stimulating the spirit of anarchy... attacking at the same time the idea of unity of action within the Party.”<sup>293</sup>

The Party therefore adopted a Resolution accusing of Chisinesvchi and Constantinescu of “fractionism”, of “unjustifiably attacking the leadership of the Party”, and of harbouring “liberal tendencies, contrary to a Marxist-Leninist party.”<sup>294</sup> The severity of these accusations, however, was not really matched by their sanctions. Unlike Dej’s previous rivals - who had been executed, jailed or completely isolated - Chisinevchi and Constantinescu were simply pushed out of the Politburo and the Secretariat being relegated to lower ranks within the Party. Constantinescu also had his functions as Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Education and Culture revoked.<sup>295</sup>

Although the Soviets seemed largely indifferent to these internal developments,<sup>296</sup> Josip Broz Tito was likely very pleased, if not necessarily for political reasons, then at least for personal ones. “The improvement of Roumanian (sic) relations with Yugoslavia seems likely to gain impetus with the recent expulsion of Constantinescu and Chisinevschi from the

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<sup>293</sup> Statement of the CC of the RWP presented by comrade Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej regarding the activities of the RWP on the duties outlined at its second Congress and the conclusions drawn from international events and from the activities of the Communist parties in light of the teachings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the CPSU. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 62/1957.

<sup>294</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 180.

<sup>295</sup> Minutes of the plenary meeting of the CC of the RWP on 13 July, 1957. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 33/1957.

<sup>296</sup> Notes regarding the activity of the Malenkov-Molotov-Shepilov group in the Soviet Union, 21-26 August, 1958. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 23/1958. The Romanian ambassador to Moscow, M. Dalea reported to Bucharest that in June 1957 he was summoned to the International Department of the SUCP to report on the demotions of Constantinescu and Chishinevshi to Lesacov, who was in charge of the Party relations with Romania. Although Lesacov seemed satisfied with the explanation regarding Constantinescu, he was more sceptical about Chishinevschi, whom he considered to be “fair” and a “pro-Soviet”. Throughout the rest of 1957, Lesacov sought more detailed explanations on Chisinevschi from several other Romanian sources, including Gheorghiu-Dej, who refused to see him. Lesacov’s superior however, Vinogradov (Adjunct Chief of the Foreign Relations Department of the SUCP), “was very pleasantly impressed” by the explanations regarding the demotion of Constantinescu and Chishinevschi, and largely dismissed Lesacov’s opinions, claiming that no one else within the Central Committee of the SUCP shares his opinions on the issue.



Politburo”<sup>297</sup> the Yugoslav ambassador to Bucharest confessed to his British counterpart. “The presence of Constantinescu on his train ... annoyed President Tito during his visit to Romania last year, and their fall from grace will doubtless give him pleasure.”<sup>298</sup>

In a ruthless move to eliminate his rivals, Dej seemed to have also pleased his neighbor. And although this added bonus had not been intended, it was certainly welcomed. The ground that Gheorghiu-Dej had gained the previous year towards normalizing the relationship with Yugoslavia, as well as augmenting his position as a mediator between Moscow and Belgrade, was now dangerously close to being lost. Not only had the relationship between Tito and Khrushchev soured as a result of the Nagy affair, but the Kremlin’s return to ideological orthodoxy by recanting the idea that different paths to socialism were possible was now aggravating the already strained dynamic between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

By the beginning of 1957 Moscow and Belgrade returned to fighting words; and most satellites had joined Moscow in their attacks against the Yugoslavia. Romania, however, chose to be more cautious adopting “a relatively mild and even friendly approach” towards its neighbor after the Hungarian uprising.<sup>299</sup> This policy, however, was not expected to last long. Veljko Micunovic, the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow was reporting to Belgrade that “it should be expected that [the Soviets] would force the Rumanians and the Chinese to wake up from their “neutralist” stance towards [the ongoing Yugoslav-Soviet confrontation], which they occupy at the moment.”<sup>300</sup> As tensions heightened between Moscow and Belgrade, the Yugoslav ambassador to Bucharest was echoing a similar concern

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<sup>297</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Foreign Office, Northern Department, 10 July, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128912.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1957). Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 7 January, 1958, p. 8. UKNA, file FO 371/135151.

<sup>300</sup> *op cit* Report by V. Micunovic on his conversation with N. S. Khrushchev on 12 December, 13 December 1956; SMIP, Ambasada u Moskvi, 1956, FI / Strogo pov. -166 in Rajak, Svetozar, “YUGOSLAV-SOVIET RELATIONS, 1953- 1957: Normalization, Comradeship, Confrontation” (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004), 317, <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/2525/1/U615474.pdf>.

in February that, although his “personal relations with the Romanian leaders remained good”, he was sceptical about “how long this will go on... The East Germans [have] joined the chorus of condemnation of Yugoslavia and the Bulgarians, Albanians and others are [also] becoming unpleasant.”<sup>301</sup>

Indeed, the pressure was mounting for Dej to join this chorus, and as the Kremlin’s staunchest of allies, he had to display at least some measure of solidarity with Moscow. On 3 March, 1957 *Scanteia* published a critical article on Yugoslavia. Although the tone was not aggressive, it was enough to irritate Romania’s neighbors and to provoke the Yugoslav ambassador in Bucharest to say that the references made to his country in the article were “vulgar.”<sup>302</sup> Despite these comments, the British Minister reported to London that “the tone and manner (of the article) suggest to me that the Roumanian (sic) government is still attempting to remain closer and in more friendly relations with Yugoslavia than some of the other satellites... the whole attitude seems to me remarkably defensive.”<sup>303</sup>

Indeed, Gheorghiu-Dej was trying to maintain a delicate balance between showing solidarity with the Kremlin, while at the same time actively pursuing improved relations with Tito. Throughout the spring of 1957, Romania tried to maintain an intense albeit low-key exchange with Belgrade. At the end of March, a Yugoslav parliamentary delegation was received for a two-week stay in Bucharest. Behind the scenes, even the minutest of details pertaining to the visit – including the number of people in the welcoming committee, how to decorate the streets through which the delegation would pass, and even the wording of the slogans that specially-instructed people would shout “joyfully” etc. – was presented, discussed and approved by the highest echelons of the Party. Instead of delegating such details to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as was normally the case, the details to host the Yugoslav parliamentary delegation were instead discussed within the Politburo, with the

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<sup>301</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Foreign Office, Northern Department, 10 July, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128912.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

clear intention of impressing the guests.<sup>304</sup> The welcoming speech during dinner on arrival day was especially tailored to strengthen the ties between two countries by focusing on commonalities rather than differences. "At the basis of our friendship are ancient ties of brotherhood, of joint struggles against common enemies"<sup>305</sup>, the Yugoslavs were told with adulation. The effusive energy with which the delegation from Belgrade was received, however, stood in stark contrast with how it was publicly portrayed - both Romania and Yugoslavia downplayed its importance. While the Romanian government kept the affair quiet, refraining from the usual propaganda, the Yugoslav ambassador was explaining to his Western counterparts that although the visit gave him a great deal of work, "no political significance can be read into it."<sup>306</sup>

Over the next couple of months, while the other Satellites openly criticised Belgrade, Romania was engaging instead in an extensive, albeit low-level exchange of delegations with its neighbor. Those included mutual visits of several groups, ranging from women's groups to religious and youth organizations, to forestry experts and writers' unions. More importantly, the work on the Iron Gates hydroelectric plant on the Danube, straddling the borders of both countries, continued to develop. This quiet, yet significant exchange was sustained "while refraining from any move which could be thought to be politically provocative."<sup>307</sup> In the meantime, as detailed in the last section, Romania was also legally and indefinitely inviting the Soviet troops to remain on its territory while virulently attacking the West, towing the Moscow line.

Dej's intricate dance between a Kremlin hostile to the West and the Communist "heretic" who dared maintain close political and economic ties to it confused most observers. By early 1957, the Western diplomatic community in both Moscow and Bucharest was beginning to suspect that "the Romanians have been instructed by [the] Russians to keep

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<sup>304</sup> Notes, speeches during the visit of the Yugoslav parliamentary delegation to Romania, and other Romanian-Yugoslav meetings 6 May-26 October, 1957. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, External Relations, document 35/1957, p. 1-24.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p3.

<sup>306</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Foreign Office, Northern Department, 10 July, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128912.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

the door open between Bucharest and Belgrade for their own ends.”<sup>308</sup> This idea was being considered by the Foreign Office after Dudley reported from Bucharest that he “is inclined to agree that the Roumanians (sic) may have been licensed by the Russians to pursue somewhat better relations than the rest of the Bloc with Yugoslavia.”<sup>309</sup>

Although this theory seems to have been largely dismissed by the Foreign Office at the time, in retrospect it should not have been as readily discounted. There is certainly merit to considering Romania’s position as an informal bridge of influence between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, especially at a time when the relationship between those two countries was at its worst. It remains unclear whether this role was specifically assigned to Bucharest by the Kremlin (for which, of course, no written evidence has been declassified to date); what is important to underline, however, is that Tito was basing some of his decisions on this assumption, as will be shown below.

One of the more significant points of tension between Moscow and Belgrade at the time was Yugoslavia’s membership of the Balkan Pact<sup>310</sup>, in which it had been actively pursuing military cooperation with Greece and Turkey since 1954.<sup>311</sup> This direct link to NATO, as well as Belgrade’s acceptance of American military aid was, understandably, an “aspect of [Yugoslavia’s] foreign policy, which pleased the Russians least.”<sup>312</sup> In a meeting on 17 June, Marshal Zhukov “clearly urged [the Yugoslavs] to refuse American military aid and to quit the Balkan Pact.”<sup>313</sup> Tito’s explanation that Belgrade was no longer in need of the American aid, which could be stopped at any time, pleased the Soviets who “appeared to be relieved.”<sup>314</sup> No such assurance, however, was given about quitting the Balkan Pact.

According to Veljko Micunovic, “if Yugoslavia were to change policy in that way, it would

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<sup>308</sup> Internal review of Yugoslav-Roumanian Relations in Yugoslavia, Northern Department, undated, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128912.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> Also known as the Balkan Entente, the Balkan Pact was signed by Greece, Turkey, Romania and Yugoslavia on 9 February, 1934 to prevent expansionist claims in the region. Bulgaria joined the Pact in 1938.

<sup>311</sup> Lykourgos Kourkouvelas, “Denuclearization on NATO’s Southern Front: Allied Reactions to Soviet Proposals, 1957-1963,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (2012): 197–215.

<sup>312</sup> Micunovic, Veljko, *Moscow Diary* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), 63.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, p.250.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

[have found] itself in the lurch between two Blocs and on bad terms with both of them.”<sup>315</sup> Instead, Belgrade chose to pursue a policy of equidistance between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, much to the discomfort of the Kremlin.<sup>316</sup> Not only had the Pact historically been a thorn in Moscow’s backside, as it represented “a hindrance to [its] central leadership”<sup>317</sup>, but now that it contained two countries that were also NATO members, it was becoming potentially dangerous. Having failed to convince Yugoslavia to withdraw from it, Moscow would have to find a way to influence it.

Coincidentally, Romania’s role within the Balkan Pact started to gain considerable impetus in 1957, after it had been relatively dormant over previous years. In a late March – early April meeting with Todor Zhivkov, his Bulgarian counterpart, Gheorghiu-Dej strongly championed a renewed engagement with the alliance, setting this objective as the key priority for the visit.<sup>318</sup> Recruiting the only other like-minded Communist Bloc satellite that was member of the Pact was a good first step towards gaining a more influential role within the coalition. Together, Romania and Bulgaria publicly emphasised their appreciation of the Pact as a promoter of

*peaceful coexistence, which constitutes an element of the greatest significance for the collaboration among countries in [the] region, **which [had] oftentimes been plagued by conflicts inspired and used by imperialist powers to promote their own aggressive objectives.***<sup>319</sup>

With their clear position against Western influence within the alliance established, the two satellites specifically targeted Yugoslavia as a partner of interest within the Pact. After mentioning that their relations with Belgrade had already “significantly improved and developed”, they went on to underline their commitment to further strengthening their link

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 250.

<sup>316</sup> Kourkouvelas, “Denuclearization on NATO’s Southern Front.”

<sup>317</sup> Zbigniew K Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 124.

<sup>318</sup> Statement regarding the negotiations between the RWP and the Bulgarian Communist Party, 12 April, 1957. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 13/1957, p 3.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, p. 22. bold italics added by author to highlight the aggressive discourse towards the West.

to Yugoslavia on the basis of the principles outlined by Moscow: peace, equality of rights, mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-intervention in internal affairs, and mutual advantage.<sup>320</sup> With this initiative, Dej began a sustained effort within the Balkan Pact of not only countering Western and NATO influence with Moscow's rhetoric in order to 'neutralize' it, but also – and more importantly – trying to influence Yugoslavia by pulling it closer to the Bloc (or at least be seen to be doing so).

By June 1957, while animosity towards Belgrade was reaching new heights within the Bloc, Dej was publicly referring to Yugoslavia (and Albania) as “socialist countries in this part of the world who represent a powerful peace factor.”<sup>321</sup> By the beginning of August, Romania was once again acting as host and middle ground for a meeting between Khrushchev and Tito. According to Nikola Vujanovic, Romania was “a good halfway house for a meeting which could not take place in either country.”<sup>322</sup> Indeed, the encounter between Tito and Khrushchev in Snagov, a sleepy but picturesque community 9 km outside of Bucharest, carried a deep symbolism for Soviet-Yugoslav relations. Nine years earlier, on 28 June 1948, Snagov had been the place where, at a special Cominform meeting the infamous resolution to expel Yugoslavia from the “family of fraternal parties” had been passed on Stalin's orders.<sup>323</sup> According to Veljko Micunovic, who had accompanied Tito to Romania, “all the participants in the meeting were well aware of [these] associations... they all appeared to be very pleased that the meeting had taken place in Snagov.”<sup>324</sup> This was especially true for Dej, who despite only taking part in the lunches and dinners between the two delegations, was nonetheless happy that they met in Romania, placing the country once more center-stage in the process of Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation.

Indeed, it was not only the place that had been carefully picked for this encounter, but also the timing. After the failed coup to depose Khrushchev at the end of June, and the

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Telegram from the British embassy in Belgrade to Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Office, 19 June, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128912.

<sup>322</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 21 August, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128904.

<sup>323</sup> Micunovic, Veljko, *Moscow Diary*, 289.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

consequent removal of the masterminds behind it - Molotov, Malenkov and Kaganovich – the conditions to have such a meeting dramatically improved. First, the “Stalinist” group within the Soviet leadership had been a significant obstacle to the improvement of relations between Moscow and Belgrade<sup>325</sup>; and second, now that Khrushchev had successfully weathered the attempted the coup and consolidated his position at the Kremlin, he wanted to organize in Moscow an all-Party plenary to do the same within the camp.<sup>326</sup> Yugoslavia’s participation in this meeting would be essential to Moscow’s self-reappointed role as the epicenter of the Communist world.

During the two-day meetings from 1-2 August, Khrushchev and Tito discussed their ideological differences and agreed on a document outlining their points of agreement “concerning the international situation”. Tito requested that the document - which would later become another point of contention between Moscow and Belgrade - be kept confidential, explaining that its publication would endanger his relationship to the West.<sup>327</sup> Little else is known about the deliberations between the two leaders in Romania, except that they carried on in good terms. According to Micunovic, “the talks ... were smoother and more friendly than any we had so far.”<sup>328</sup>

The positive outcome of the meeting in Snagov was good news for Gheorghiu-Dej. After having gained preferential status with the Soviets during the Hungarian crisis, he was now also making considerable progress towards ingratiating himself with Belgrade. On 23 August, the Romanian national day, both main newspapers in Yugoslavia, *Borba* and *Politika*, ran “most fulsome” leaders after “word clearly went out... that the Romanian National Day should be made the occasion of extra special outburst of camaraderly and good-neighborly sentiment.”<sup>329</sup> The article in *Borba*, especially, appreciated the “Romanian specific path of socialist development in which she has made full use of experience made by

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 183–85.

<sup>327</sup> Mihai Croitor, Sandra Borsa, *Triunghiul Suspiciunii: Gheorghiu-Dej, Hrusciiov so Tito (1954-1964) (The Trangle of Suspicions: Gheorghiu-Dej, Khrishchev and Tito, 1954-1964)*, vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2014), 64–65.

<sup>328</sup> Micunovic, Veljko, *Moscow Diary*, 288.

<sup>329</sup> Telegram from F. Roberts, British Legation in Belgrade to Foreign Office, Nothern Department, 24 August, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128912.

other countries.”<sup>330</sup> Belgrade was not only trying to show the rest of the Camp as well as the West that relations with Bucharest were now friendly and strong, but was also hinting to the same audience that Romania was perhaps also gently seeking an independent path to socialism.

While Bloc members seemed unresponsive to this gesture, Western audiences ascertained that “the Yugoslavs seem to be showing an excess of gratitude for what is, after all, only an absence of hostility on the part of the Roumanians (sic).”<sup>331</sup> In fact, the British legation was reporting to London that the friendly attitude was not even mutual, given that “there has been no evidence of similar enthusiasm for Yugoslavia. If Gheorghiu-Dej has sympathy for and envy of Tito’s independence, he would, of course, be too wise to show it.”<sup>332</sup>

Indeed, while Dej’s new position was certainly privileged, he now had to practice extra caution concerning his relationship with Yugoslavia, lest he should jeopardize the trust he had earned from the Kremlin. During the RWP Congress, which was attended by Soviet observers, the Romanian leader was keen to emphasise that, during a meeting with Tito

*we expressed our opinion that some Western reactionary political and journalistic circles might interpret our meeting [with Tito] as a sign that our proximity to Yugoslavia has been won at the cost of ... the relationship with the other countries within the Socialist camp, led by the Soviet Union. If that is the case, we will take a public position. Our clear and categorical position regarding this issue is widely known. **We consider that nothing and no one can damage in the slightest the friendship and collaboration with the countries within the Socialist camp and with the Soviet Union.***<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Account of the CC of the RWP, presented by Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, regarding the activities of the party and its objectives following the second congress of the RWP and the conclusions following international events in the fraternal parties. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 62/1957, p. 18. Bold italics added by author to emphasise Dej’s keenness to reassure Moscow of his loyalty.



While publicly and vociferously claiming his unshaken allegiance to Moscow and the rest of the camp, Gheorghiu-Dej was also taking bolder steps towards launching a regional initiative to replace or significantly reshape the Balkan Pact. On 29 August, less than three weeks after the Khrushchev-Tito meeting in Romania, Dej sent his most trusted, high-ranking emissaries to Belgrade to discuss the proposal for a Balkan Understanding. Broadly understood, the Romanian initiative was meant to build a peaceful, neutral and non-military alliance in the Balkan region, meant to include the former signatories of the Pact, as well as Albania.

The plan was received with enthusiasm by Tito. From a national perspective, he considered that “it would help [Yugoslavia] to get rid of the Balkan Pact, to eliminate the military clauses, while at the same time maintaining a framework of friendly collaboration”<sup>334</sup> in the region. Within the broader context of international alliances, the Yugoslavs also considered the merits of a non-military and peaceful small-country alliance, since large countries had tried and failed to effectively form such coalitions. With a level of interest and conviction that might have even surprised the Romanian delegation, the Yugoslavs declared not only their support for such a plan, but also their commitment to it

*...the proposed action is important and necessary. It will show that not only the large countries, but the small ones as well can actively contribute to the strengthening of peace. This action is not just a simple gesture, but a real action; there are real possibilities for its success. Of course there will be resistance, so this task should be seen as a long-term task. We have to find the best tactics to initiate it. From the beginning, it shouldn't be given a propagandistic character, we shouldn't make too much noise; we have to pursue real results.*<sup>335</sup>

Concerned about how Romania's initiative would be seen by the other Balkan countries, Tito offered his full support the plan “on principle.” “It is expected that you'll be suspected to have initiated this at the suggestion of the USSR,” he explained. “From this perspective,

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<sup>334</sup> Programs, speeches, reports relating to the visit of the Yugoslav parliamentary delegation, May 1957. ANIC, fond CC al PCR, Foreign Relations, document 35/1957, p 21.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

and keeping in mind how Yugoslavia is presently seen, it will be important that your action should be supported by Yugoslavia in the beginning.”<sup>336</sup> He also advised the Romanians to inform the Kremlin of Belgrade’s support, and to ask Moscow to publicly declare itself in favor of it, “in order to avoid it being seen as a camouflaged Soviet action.”<sup>337</sup>

As a step forward, Tito offered not only offered to approach each potential member of the Balkan Understanding in support of the plan, but also to leverage his influence with both, the West and the non-aligned countries in order to prepare the ground. He therefore estimated that the UK would be “more neutral” about the proposal than the United States, while he hoped that by enrolling Nasser in his efforts, he might be able to persuade Turkey to participate, which he thought would otherwise be “hard.”<sup>338</sup> Tito also offered that when the Romanians brought their plan to the UN, the Yugoslav press would publish articles in its favor. Before the talks came to an end, however, Tito was keen to underline that he wanted the initiative to be seen strictly as a regional alliance, and not as common initiative of all Socialist countries. He therefore proposed that all non-Balkan Socialist members of the camp be informed of the plan on a strictly confidential basis.<sup>339</sup>

The high-level visit of the Romanian delegation to Belgrade had been seen “as an enigma” by foreign diplomats, as it was described by authorities on both sides of the border as “private.” The mystery dissipated on 7 September, when the news about Romania’s invitation to Yugoslavia and other Balkan countries to join Balkan Conference, “was met by Tito’s enthusiastic acceptance”.<sup>340</sup>

Despite such promising beginnings, the plan to instate the Balkan Understanding was stalled in large part because of renewed animosity between Belgrade and Moscow. By the end of the year, although the plan “remained on the table”, it did not “seem to be actively pursued” and no concrete steps had yet been taken towards establishing the regional

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid, p 20.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid, p22.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Minutes on telegram from British embassy, Belgrade, to Southern Department, Foreign Office, 7 September, 1957. UKNA document FO 371 128912.

alliance. At the same time, “in foreign policy, Roumanian (sic) public statements... followed Moscow as closely as ever.”<sup>341</sup> Despite such setbacks, however, the Yugoslavs still seemed to hold the Romanian initiative in high esteem, even if they suspected that it could have very well have been prompted by the Kremlin, as the Yugoslav ambassador in Bucharest explained to his British counterpart before leaving the post in January 1958,

*[the Yugoslavs] were satisfied that Romanian intentions towards them were reasonably good. So far as the proposed Balkan Pact was concerned the Roumanians (sic) were not going to press forward in an unreasonable or unrealistic way, but they did intend to do bit by bit what they could to improve relations in the Balkans along the lines proposed. It did not matter much whether the initiative came originally from Moscow or from Bucharest. Certainly Moscow and perhaps some of the other Communist countries must have been consulted before the proposal was made. But attempts to create better relations in the Balkans were an old Romanian tradition, and were not confined to the present Government. What really mattered in any event was the content and intention of the proposal. The Yugoslav Government found them good, and believed that the project would be pursued in a realistic way and not as a means of attempting to separate Greece and Turkey from their Western friends.*<sup>342</sup>

It remains unclear whether it was indeed Khrushchev who prompted Dej to take this initiative in the hope of using Romania to gain influence within the Balkan Pact and with Belgrade; or whether Dej proposed the plan after consulting the Kremlin. For the purpose of this thesis, however, this question is less relevant. What remains important is the fact that Dej was willing – and at least partially able – to undertake a leading role in the regional politics, and to gain Tito’s support for doing so. Working under the assumption that the initiative for the Balkan Conference could have originated at the Kremlin, Tito still appreciated Romania’s role as an indispensable bridge to Moscow, as well as Gheorghiu-

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<sup>341</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1957) from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 7 January, 1958, p. 8. UKNA, file FO 371/135151.

<sup>342</sup> Telegram 1032/1/58 from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 13 January, 1958. UKNA document FO 371/136168.

Dej's potential for relative independence from the USSR, despite his public image of servility to it. This duality within Romanian foreign policy was obvious not just to Tito, but indeed to all upper diplomatic levels in Belgrade. In a confidential meeting between Nikola Vujanovic and his British counterpart, the Yugoslav ambassador noted that "the steady but unspectacular Roumanian (sic) cooperation with Yugoslavia argues some sympathy with the idea of separate paths to communism... although it is too much to believe the Roumanians (sic) capable of such independence."<sup>343</sup> Indeed, with the Soviet boots firmly and legally planted on Romanian soil, while at the same time making overt friendly gestures towards Yugoslavia, Dej was somewhat precariously walking a tight rope. And throughout this adventure, the last thing he wanted to seem capable of or willing to strive for was independence.

Nothing better reflects this apparently ambivalent dimension of Romanian foreign policy in late 1957 than the country's participation in the Moscow Conference in November of that year. While publicly advertised as a celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, the real purpose of the meeting, to which the leaders of all countries within the camp were invited, was in fact to re-assert the role of the Soviet Union as its undisputed leader. As a result, Moscow faced several levels of resistance – some visible to the Western world, and others not. Tito refused to participate in the meeting, sending a high-level delegation instead. Poland vociferously objected to several proposals for camp-wide cooperation – including the publication of a common, periodic journal – until a compromise was reached at the end of the meeting. Most importantly, however, the Moscow Conference turned out to be of "pivotal importance"<sup>344</sup> to the Sino-Soviet conflict, as already brewing ideological differences started to make their presence known. During the preliminary discussions to prepare the joint Declaration that all participating members were later expected to sign, China set aside the theoretical nuances of the divergence, however, and chose instead to directly contest the leadership of the Soviet Union within the camp. The Chinese delegation therefore protractedly challenged the wording "led by" (when

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<sup>343</sup> Internal minutes on telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 21 August, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128904.

<sup>344</sup> Donald S. Zagoria, "The 1957 Moscow Conference and the Sino-Soviet Dispute," *The China Quarterly* 7 (September 1961): 34, doi:10.1017/S0305741000024991.

referring to the Socialist Camp) and “convened by” (when referring to the Conference) the Soviet Union.

Although this closed-door dispute was so intense that it delayed the conference itself, Mao eventually not only agreed to the wording, but also publicly seemed to acknowledge Moscow’s leadership role. In his statement during the Conference, Mao was keen to emphasise that, because the Soviet Union’s level of communist experience and economic strength could not be matched by any other country, it therefore deserved its position at the helm of the Communist camp. Through these quantitative rather than qualitative assessments, however, Mao was subtly implying that this role was temporary. Once another member of the camp reached the same level of experience or economic growth – say, for example, China – it would also be considered a viable candidate for the role.<sup>345</sup>

Although the West was not yet privy to the incipient schism between Moscow and Beijing, the members of the Bloc were already starting to notice China’s rising profile as a leadership contender. During the Polish uprising and Hungarian crisis, Zhou Enlai’s shuttle diplomacy between Warsaw, Budapest and Moscow had been instrumental in the Kremlin’s differentiated approach to the two crises.<sup>346</sup> This visibly influential role, along with heightened even (if still discreet) ideological tensions with Moscow throughout 1957, was beginning to underline Beijing’s growing influence within the camp.

Possibly aware of most, if not all these tensions, Dej chose to approach the Conference very carefully. Alongside Tito, he was the only other Communist head of state not to attend the grand gathering in Moscow, officially for health reasons. His directives for the Romanian delegation that was sent to participate was clear: “do not stand out” and “do not highlight

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<sup>345</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 190.

<sup>346</sup> While both crises erupted at roughly the same time, the Soviets were able to negotiate a political solution with Warsaw before the uprising turned into a revolt, which was the case in Hungary. See Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (1998): 163–214; Johanna Granville, “Poland and Hungary, 1956: A Comparative Essay Based on New Archival Findings,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 48, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 369–95, doi:10.1111/1467-8497.00266.

the tensions and divergences.”<sup>347</sup> Despite such clear instructions, the Romanian delegation could not keep a low profile even if it tried: on its way to Moscow, its plane crashed, killing Grigore Preoteasa, the Foreign Minister, and injuring several other members of the delegation, who only narrowly escaped the same fate. During the Conference, however, the Romanians did their best to maintain not only their composure after such a traumatic event; but also the most neutral of positions in the face of growing Sino-Soviet divergences. Alongside the usual adulatory remarks towards the hosts, they agreed to most proposals made for cooperation and criticised none. Interestingly, however, while Chivu Stoica’s speech - which had to be entirely re-written as the original had burned during the accident – did repeatedly refer to the “leading role” of the Soviet Union, it also included an acknowledgement of China’s equal position

*One of the main tasks ahead of the working class and all nations today is the struggle for peace. The unity of the socialist countries, **led by the strong Soviet Union and the great Popular China**, constitutes an invincible force against the imperialist plans for war.*<sup>348</sup>

With his characteristic subtlety and tact, Gheorghiu-Dej was once again trying to position himself strategically, in the middle ground of the conflict between two major Communist players, seeking to maximise benefits. Indeed, Dej had identified China’s growing importance as an economic partner long before Beijing debuted on the Communist stage as a contender for its leadership.

Since establishing diplomatic relations with the newly minted Republic of China in 1948, the economic dimension of the exchange between Bucharest and Beijing had occupied a central role of the bilateral relations. Although initially these economic ties were slow to materialise, modest, and oftentimes dysfunctional, by 1956 they had become a priority for Gheorghiu-Dej. In a meeting with Mao in September 1956, the Romanian leader made

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<sup>347</sup> *Op cit.* in Mihai Croitor, *Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (1956-1971)*, Second Edition (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2014), 169.

<sup>348</sup> Speech by Chivu Stoica at the Conference of the Workers’ and Communist parties from the Socialist countries. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 6/1957, p3.

efforts to impress his counterpart by revealing that, despite an American interdiction to sell industrial and technological equipment to the Bloc countries, Romania had managed a way to obtain these products through a West German “progressive capitalist”, who served as intermediary.<sup>349</sup> Although Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary had also managed to obtain American machinery (presumably through similar channels), Dej wanted China to consider Romania as its main point of access to this technology

*Dej: If China is interested, we can exchange information so that the Chinese Popular Republic can understand the way we import machinery from capitalist countries*

*Mao: Very well. If you have any leftover imports, you can sell us some.*

*Dej: Of course we can, without a doubt. We have many samples of their [American] machinery. You can send people (experts) to see them, and if you need a specific machine, you can buy it through us.<sup>350</sup>*

While Romania was in competition with three other Bloc countries as intermediary for industrial technology between China and the United States, it had no virtually no competitors among the satellites when it came to one natural resource: oil. Being one of the few countries in Europe and the only within the Bloc (outside Russia) to be entirely self-sufficient, Romania had played a historical role on the continent. In World War II, it had been one of the largest producers of oil, providing Germany with a critical resource for its campaigns. As a result, American B24 bombers carried out Operation Tidal Wave, which almost completely destroyed the Romanian petrochemical infrastructure near Ploiesti through heavy bombing in August 1943. By 1944, only 26-30% of its oil industry belonged exclusively to Romania. After the Soviet liberation, Lucretiu Patrascanu, then Minister of Justice, invited the Kremlin to help rehabilitate the country’s oil industry by buying some of its shares. As a result, the Romanian petrochemical industry was quickly absorbed into the

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<sup>349</sup> Document from the Archive of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, obtained through the Ministry of Foreign Relations of P.R. China and translated from Chinese to Romanian by Romulus Ioan Budura in *Politica Intependenta a Romaniei si Relatiile Sovieto-Chineze*, p. 96.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

infamous Soviet-Romanian ventures (SovRoms), which were used by Moscow to extract 'reparations' from Romania after the end of the War. Alongside SovRomQuartz - which claimed the extraction of quartz, but was in fact a uranium extraction venture – SovRomPetrol was the most strategic (and, therefore, most exploited) of the joint ventures. While most of the 17 other SovRoms had been fully nationalised after Stalin's death, SovRomQuartz and SovRomPetrol were not returned to Romanian tutelage until early 1956, as discussed in the previous chapters.

Once sovereign control of such a valuable industry was gained, Gheorghiu-Dej immediately prioritised not only its rehabilitation, but also its potential as a competitive advantage among the Bloc countries to open the Romanian petro-economy to China and beyond. Within months of SovRomPetrol's nationalisation (and within only weeks before the Hungarian crisis), Dej was outlining to Mao his goals for the oil industry

***Dej:** Currently, our main efforts are focused on assimilating new technologies, so that our production can be more efficient, our products cheaper, and the quality higher... From now on we will predominantly focus on developing our petrochemical industry, because we have rich natural resources, like oil and natural gas. We have already sent a few technicians to America... They are there to sign a few contracts for some chemical manufacture machinery...such as synthetic rubber...*

***Mao:** and the United States are willing to sell them?*

***Dej:** In the beginning they were somewhat cold, but their attitude has improved. Right now our technicians have infiltrated deep inside each of the chemical factories in America. If they ask us for gold, we will give them gold. The Soviet government... is willing to help us buy as much American machinery as possible.<sup>351</sup>*

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<sup>351</sup> Document from the Archive of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, obtained through the Ministry of Foreign Relations of P.R. China and translated from Chinese to Romanian by Romulus Ioan Budura in *Politica Intependenta a Romaniei si Relatiile Sovieeto-Chineze*, p. 95.



Mao's interest in Romanian oil, petrochemical manufacturing and technological know-how soon translated into an intense bilateral exchange between Bucharest and Beijing. By 11 March 1957 Romania installed the first of eleven thermo-electrical plants across China, requiring its specialists to provide on-site theoretical courses and practical training to their Chinese counterparts.<sup>352</sup> By September, Romania and China signed a special protocol on scientific and technical cooperation, through which Romania was to "transmit to China miscellaneous technical documents and samples referring to the oil industry, oilfield equipment industry, agriculture and microbiology."<sup>353</sup> The Chinese delegation that visited Romania to sign the protocol, and which included experts in the field also "visited factories and institutes of the petroleum, chemical and steel industry."<sup>354</sup> By the end of 1957, Romania's much-needed import of cotton from China nearly doubled those from that of the previous year.<sup>355</sup>

The intense economic exchange between Bucharest and Beijing was due, to a large extent, to China's objective to accelerate the industrialization of its mostly agricultural society, and to grow an economy still massively impacted by the civil war. With customary Chinese modesty, Zhou Enlai was confessing to a Romanian parliamentary delegation in May 1957 that China still needed 20 years to reach the levels of the Soviet economy, 50 years to reach to reach that of the developed capitalist countries, and even "some" years to reach the level of the Romanian industry.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Note from the Romanian embassy in Beijing to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the installation of the first Romanian thermos-electrical plant in Xinwen, the Chinese Popular Republic, 11 March, 1957. AMAE, fond China, document 20/1957, Document 149 in Romulus Ioan Budura, *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, Arhivele Nationale, 2005), 324–26.

<sup>353</sup> Telegram 10317/2/57 from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to Foreign Office, Northern Department, 14 September, 1957. UKNA document FO 371/128899.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid

<sup>355</sup> Minutes on the conversation between Teodor Rudenco, Romanian ambassador to Beijing, and Peng Zhen, member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Mayor of Beijing, concerning the elements of the Right, 26 November, 1957. AMAE fond China, problem 20/1957. Document 154 in Romulus Ioan Budura, *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974*, 1:342–44.

<sup>356</sup> Note regarding the visit of the Romanian parliamentary delegation to China, 24 May, 1957. ANIC, fond CC of the PCR, Foreign Relations, document 41/1957.

Despite this economic disparity, Romania's willingness to contribute to China's economic growth by providing petrochemical technology and know-how was, of course, not entirely disinterested. Beijing's growing political influence within the camp had already become apparent during the Polish and Hungarian uprisings, when Mao's consultative role impacted the Kremlin's approach to both crises. The Chinese leader's ideological orthodoxy, which was beginning to represent a point of tension with Moscow, was already apparent in his perception of Tito, whom he considered an "interventionist provocateur [who] played a shameful role in the Hungarian counter-revolutionary rebellion."<sup>357</sup>

Mao's impression of the Yugoslav leader was neither subtle nor a secret. In a meeting with representatives of the Romanian government in May 1958, the Chinese leader sarcastically explained Tito's didactic role in the ideological mobilization of the Chinese society

*We have another good teacher – Tito. Yugoslavia didn't sign the Moscow Declaration and it can't be part of our camp. They published anti-Marxist Leninist texts. Tito is useful to the Chinese nation. He educates our nation well. He is the representative of revisionism. In the past, we have underestimated him. ... his role is more important than that of Chiang Kai-Shek's, because it is international.*<sup>358</sup>

Beijing's stanchly critical and unambiguous position against Yugoslavia could have understandably placed Gheorghiu-Dej, who was delicately pursuing a closer relationship with Belgrade purportedly for Moscow's benefit, between a rock and a hard place. This was especially the case since Beijing expected nothing less from Bucharest than to join the chorus of vocal criticism against Belgrade. According to an internal report of the Romanian Foreign ministry, the embassy staff in Beijing was "very confused about [Bucharest's] relations with Yugoslavia" since the Chinese Foreign Ministry was summoning the ambassador or next in command on an almost daily basis to ask how many articles were

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<sup>357</sup> *Op cit* in Mihai Croitor, *Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (1956-1971)*, 163.

<sup>358</sup> Note regarding the visit of the Romanian military delegation to China, 29 September-25 October, 1958. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 28/1958.

being published in the Romanian press about the “Yugoslav revisionism.”<sup>359</sup> Mao’s intensity when it came to the Yugoslav question was proving to be slightly problematic especially for Moscow. According to Mihai Dalea, the Romanian ambassador to the USSR, the Soviet authorities were already complaining that “the Chinese have gone a bit off the rails regarding Yugoslavia, always pushing for a complete break of relations [with Belgrade].”<sup>360</sup>

As Moscow’s semi-official bridge to Belgrade, Bucharest’s diplomatic strategy reoriented towards softening Mao’s categorical position. The tactic involved expressing full agreement with Beijing that Yugoslavia’s position “on the fence” between the two camps was “unstable”. Using the argument that the Balkan Conference was a potential pathway to attract Belgrade closer to the camp, however, the Romanians stressed the benefit of quiet persuasion over uncompromising exclusion to deal with Yugoslavia.<sup>361</sup> In so doing, Bucharest once again placed itself in the position of mediator, this time between Beijing and Belgrade

*the interests of the struggle for peace and socialism require that the differences with Yugoslavia should not be further exacerbated, but to continue to develop those things that unite us; our party pursues a consequential policy to draw Yugoslavia nearer, combating without noise those divergences that separate us. We hope... that Yugoslavia will abandon this middle ground, which cannot be pursued endlessly, and will join the socialist camp.*<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Note regarding the meetings between M. Dalea, Romanian ambassador to Moscow and members of the International Department of the CPUS, June 1957. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 23/1958.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid, p5. author’s note on translation: the Romanian expression “au luat-o putin razna”, which means to deviate in an exaggerated way, can best be translated to English as “to go off the rails.”

<sup>361</sup> Report regarding the visit of the Romanian parliamentary delegation to China, 30 April – 13 May, 1957. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 41/1957.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

Mao seemed convinced, “underlin[ing] that the Chinese Party agrees with Romania’s entire position on the Yugoslav question.<sup>363</sup> As a result, the Chinese leader decided to publicly support the Conference by declaring in a joint Sino-Romanian statement that

*...the Chinese government declares that it completely approves the initiative of the Romanian government to convene a Conference at the highest levels between the Balkan countries and the realization of an understanding among the Balkan countries that would ensure the peace, prosperity and progress of the countries in this region. If these proposals will be carried out, they will have, without a doubt, a great importance to the defense of peace in Europe and the world.<sup>364</sup>*

For the time being, Gheorghiu-Dej achieved a small victory in gaining Chinese support for his Balkan initiative, and convincing Mao that more could be gained from gentle cooperation than from acerbic alienation. This strategy allowed him not only to raise his regional profile, but also to take advantage of the rifts between the major players within the Socialist camp in order to position himself as a mediator and gain political capital with Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing.

### **The withdrawal of the Soviet troops and advisers**

For all the intrigue, rumours and backdoor machinations regarding the Soviet troop withdrawal from Romania, which had started in 1955 with Dej’s uninspired initiative to bluntly request it from Khrushchev, the Kremlin’s actual decision to pull out appears in the literature unexpectedly sudden and surprisingly anti-climactic.

On 17 April, 1958, Gheorghiu-Dej received a letter from Khrushchev in which the Soviet leader declared his intention to “consult [him] on the question of the stationing of the

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> The common declaration of the Government of the Popular Republic of Romania and the Government of the Chinese Popular Republic, 7 April, 1958, Ministry of Foreign Relations, Department of International Law and Treaties, Archive in Romulus Ioan Budura, *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974*, 1:354.

Soviet troops on Romanian territory.”<sup>365</sup> According to the text, the decision to temporarily keep them there had been previously reached “unanimously” between the two countries, in a situation in which such a policy was not only necessary, but mutually beneficial, as it served the interests of both countries. Now that Romania had made such “great progress in the construction of socialism”, and because the country relied on its own “trustworthy” armed forces, “the stationing of the soviet troops on Romanian territory was no longer necessary.”<sup>366</sup>

Not wanting perhaps to seem too keenly enthusiastic about the decision, which had been more than three years and much circuitous planning in the making, Dej waited five days to reply. On 23 April the Romanian leader sent a brief and unassuming letter to Moscow dryly expressing the fact that “we agree with your proposal about the stationing of the Soviet troops in the RPR.”<sup>367</sup> By the end of August, all Soviet ground troops had promptly left the country.

The abrupt, brief and lacklustre exchange between the two Communist leaders continues to baffle historians to this day. As a documented prelude to Khrushchev’s decision has yet to be declassified,<sup>368</sup> researchers have relied mostly on circumstantial or memorialist evidence to explain how the Soviet leader arrived to his decision.

Khrushchev’s own reflections on the issue shed a modest light onto what was perhaps at the time a far more sophisticated decision process

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<sup>365</sup> Letter from N.S. Khrushchev, First Secretary of the CPSU to the CC of the RWP, concerning the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romanian territory, 17 April, 1958. . ANIC, don CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, Document 6/1955 in Scurtu, Ioan. *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice, 1958*, Editura Didactica si Pedagogica, Bucharest 1996, p 273.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid

<sup>367</sup> Letter of reply from Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, First Secretary of the CC of the RWP addressed to the CC of the CPSU confirming its approval of the Soviet proposal to withdraw troops from Romania, 23 April 1958. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 6/1955, p. 470. In Ibid, p 275.

<sup>368</sup> Most declassified to date pertaining to the Soviet troop withdrawal from Romania are in the form of official correspondence between the two governments and some military reports revealing logistical information. There is therefore no insight into how the policy was discussed, or, indeed how the talks on the issue really came about.

*I don't remember how much time went by, but that conversation with the Romanians stuck in my head... In my thoughts, I returned to this problem many times. It seemed that Dej was a sincere person; he was not trying to pull a fast one on me – no trying to use cunning or stratagems with me... After prolonged reflection the opinion ripened in my mind that the Romanian comrades were right. We should accommodate them and withdraw our troops... I had an exchange of opinions with [the defence minister], and he agreed with me. Defence Minister Malinovsky ... confirmed that the withdrawal of troops would not weaken our positions... We decided the matter and announced our decision to the Romanians. They were, of course, very pleased. Their idea had triumphed, along with the realization that we treated them with confidence and respect.<sup>369</sup>*

The Soviet leader's personal account is valuable in that it confirms the idea, consistent throughout the historiography, that it was the Romanian side that had initiated the talks. It is therefore highly likely that, after Dej's awkward attempt to request the withdrawal in 1955, Bucharest had waited until the appropriate moment to bring up the topic again.

Khrushchev's account, however, also highlights a decision-making process that seems to have been extremely personal and contained only to the highest echelons of the Kremlin. In contrast, some researchers have pointed out the very likely possibility that a third party – either Yugoslavia or China - may have been involved in swaying the Soviet leader's opinion in favor of a troop withdrawal from Romania.

Sergiu Verona, whose detailed analyses<sup>370</sup> on the issue still remain a reference point for scholars of Romanian Cold War history despite his lack of access to Romanian documents,

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<sup>369</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume III: Statesman (1953-1964)*, vol. 3, Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 707–9.

<sup>370</sup> Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy*; Sergiu Verona, "The Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Romania in 1958: An Analysis of the Decision," Final Report to the National Council for Soviet and East European Research (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University, December 1989).

has strongly argued in favor of the theory that the Soviets decided to withdraw their troops from a country bordering Yugoslavia as “an impressive gesture of goodwill” towards Belgrade.<sup>371</sup> According to Verona, the Soviet troops along the Yugoslav border had always been an indicator of the status of the Soviet-Yugoslav relationship, as they often fluctuated in number and position according to the level of friendliness or animosity of the dynamic.<sup>372</sup> With regards to the decision to withdraw, the American scholar goes further in asserting that the meeting between Khrushchev and Tito in Romania in August 1957 would have likely been the opportunity taken by the Soviet leader to communicate his decision to Tito and Dej, and even possibly offer a timetable for the pull-out.<sup>373</sup>

Since the talks between Khrushchev and Tito in Snagov still remain classified, it is unknown whether the Yugoslav leader was an active or passive part of the Kremlin’s decision to withdraw. Furthermore, Verona’s assessment about the Kremlin’s gesture of goodwill was contradicted by the British legation in Bucharest, who also considered this theory at the time, concluding that “Yugoslav anxiety is not much relieved while so many Soviet divisions remain in Hungary and presumably in Bulgaria.”<sup>374</sup>

Some Western researchers have made the case for China as an advocate, on behalf of Romania, for the Soviet withdrawal.<sup>375</sup> Their conclusions are based mostly on the link between the high-level Romanian visit to Beijing, during which the Chinese openly endorsed Romania’s initiative for the Balkan Conference, and the Kremlin’s almost immediate announcement of the pull-out. While this evidence is, of course, circumstantial, there may

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<sup>371</sup> Sergiu Verona, “The Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Romania in 1958: An Analysis of the Decision,” 45.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid*, p 17.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, p 45.

<sup>374</sup> Internal minutes on the telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to M. G. Joy, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 29 May, 1958. UKNA document FO 371 135163.

<sup>375</sup> Donald R. Falls, “Soviet Decision-Making and the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Romania,” *East European Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 489–502; Mark Hunter Madsen, “The Uses of Beijingpolitik: China in Romanian Foreign Policy since 1953,” *East European Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 277–309; David W. Paul, “Romania’s Special Diplomatic Position A Case Study of China’s Role,” *East European Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 311–329.

be reasons to think that China could have influenced the Kremlin's decision on this issue, as it had done on similar matters.

Declassified Chinese documents show that in 1956 China had played an instrumental role in convincing the Soviets to withdraw their advisers from Poland. The Soviet advisers, who generally infiltrated every key governmental institution and industry sector of the satellites, represented another control mechanism through which the Kremlin not only ensured that 'fraternal' governments were compliant with its policies, but also received important intelligence on its subordinate allies. In a conversation with P.F. Yudin, the Soviet ambassador to Beijing, the Chinese not only outlined their role in convincing the Soviets to withdraw their specialists from Poland, but also started raising complaints and conditions regarding the ones operating in China

*We did not speak out on some [controversial] issues because we did not want to cause problems in the Sino-Soviet relations. This was particularly true when the Polish Incident broke out. When Poland demanded that all of your specialists go home, Comrade Liu Shaoqi suggested in Moscow that you withdraw some. You accepted [Liu's] suggestion which made the Polish people happy because they then tasted some freedom. At that time we did not raise our problems with your specialists [in China] because, we believe, it would have caused you to be suspicious that we took the advantage [of your crisis situation] to send all the specialists home...*

*Although we shall learn from the Soviet Union, we must first of all take into account our own experiences and mainly rely on our own experiences.*

*There should be some agreed limits on the terms of [Soviet]specialists. For instance, there have never been restrictions on your chief advisers in [our] military and public security branches, who can come and go without even notifying or consulting with us in advance.<sup>376</sup>*

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<sup>376</sup> "Bulletin No. 6/7 -- Winter 1995," *Wilson Center*, July 13, 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/bulletin-no-67-winter-1995>.



The Chinese growing influence on Soviet policies with respect to the Satellites was starting to become noticeable. Not only did Beijing advocate the withdrawal of Soviet advisers from Poland as a means to mediate the uprising in 1956, but shortly after the presence of Soviet specialists assigned to China was clearly starting to become a point of contention between the two socialist countries.

Coincidentally, on 13 February 1957, within only a few months of the Polish uprising, Romania was notified by the Kremlin of its intention to withdraw its advisers from Bucharest. Heeding, perhaps, the Chinese complaint that their presence was essentially intrusive, Moscow was, however, offering Bucharest the possibility to host Soviet specialists in the future “according to need.”<sup>377</sup> Only one month later, the Soviets were also notifying Gheorghiu-Dej of their decision to withdraw the Soviet troops.

It would be reasonable to assume that if Beijing convinced Moscow to withdraw its advisers from Poland, it could have done so on behalf of Romania as well, especially given its own views on the matter. By extension, the theory that China could have championed Romania’s cause on troop withdrawal cannot be entirely dismissed, first because of the increasingly warm relationship between Beijing and Bucharest at the time; and second because the decisions to withdraw both advisors and troops were communicated within only a month of each other.

It still remains unclear whether it was the Yugoslavs or the Chinese who might have exerted some influence on Moscow to pull its troops out of Romania. It is entirely feasible that it could have been neither. What the historiographical debate reflects, however, is that Western specialists who kept a close eye on Romania were starting to notice the growing intensity with which Bucharest was now courting both Belgrade and Beijing. In this context, what is perhaps more important than who it was, or whether it was neither, China or Yugoslavia to have convinced Khrushchev, is the fact that, by 1958, Romania had

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<sup>377</sup> Letter of reply of the central Committee of the RWP to the Central Committee of the CPSU which expresses the agreement to the Soviet proposal to withdraw its counsellors from Romania, 13 February, 1957. ANIC, CC of the RWP, fond Foreign Relations, document 6/1955, Document 47 in Ioan Scurtu, *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice 1958* (Bucharest: Editura Didactica si Pedagogica, 1996), 243.

presumably gained the favor of both, in a bid against the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops. The signs for Bucharest's de-satellization were beginning to show for the more discerning observers.

Whatever its last steps were, the process to obtain the withdrawal had been long, circuitous and politically perilous for Gheorghiu-Dej. He must certainly have been delighted with the outcome. On the eve of the troops' withdrawal, he is reported to have said to Paul Niculescu Mizil, a member of the Politburo, "Give them what they want, I just want them out!"<sup>378</sup> In public, of course, he had to be more guarded. "The press here handled the matter cautiously... the Roumanians (sic) were playing the subject down, presumably to avoid any unseemly manifestations of joy at the departure of their Soviet friends" reported the British legation to London.<sup>379</sup>

Dej's eagerness to see the troops leave therefore stood in sharp contrast to the lavish public display of adulatory gratitude he organized for the send-off. Most officers were ceremoniously decorated. Soldiers were presented with gifts. Receptions and dinners were organized for the Soviets and their families. Parades were organized with thousands of Romanian men, women and children mobilized and coordinated to wave flags and chant friendly slogans - an effusive display of affection that vastly differed from just over a decade earlier, when the Soviet troops had arrived to 'liberate' the country, raping, pillaging and plundering at will.

The Romanian population, however, was not to enjoy the celebratory atmosphere for long. The jubilatory activities were almost instantaneously paired by the government with an intense, albeit short, terror campaign. Keen to prove his ability to maintain internal order without the help of the Russian presence, Dej immediately orchestrated a new wave of political crackdowns in order to eliminate even the minutest possibility of unrest. His main legal instrument in doing so was the penal code, which he modified to suit his objectives.

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<sup>378</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 202-3.

<sup>379</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 24 June, 1958. UKNA document FO 371 135163.

As the Soviet troops were crossing Romania by train on their way to Moscow, on 21 July Dej approved Decree 318 which redefined and substantially added to the list of crimes punishable by death. In an effort to prevent any situation similar to that of the Hungarian Revolution (in which Imre Nagy had declared the country's neutrality and his intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact), Article 9 imposed capital punishment on anyone caught contacting foreigners to commit an act "which could cause the Romanian state to become involved in a declaration of neutrality or declaration of war." The definition of 'economic sabotage' expanded to include theft and bribery – both of which had thus far been 'hooligan' offences attributed to the student protesters in the autumn of 1956. The numbers of prisoners arrested for 'state offences' swelled – if in January 1958 there had been 6211 prisoners in state penitentiaries, by December that number grew to 10,125; and by 1960 to 17,613.<sup>380</sup>

In order to 'effectively' deal with the rapidly growing number of offenders, labor camps were reinstated. The most notorious of these was hidden deep within the delta of the Danube, where prisoners were sent to work relentlessly and in appalling conditions, cutting reeds for cellulose manufacturing. Hundreds died in this camp, where dysentery and cholera were rampant.<sup>381</sup>

Dej's strategy to tighten internal control as a short-term insurance for proving to the Kremlin it had not made the wrong decision in pulling out its troops was effective. A Soviet delegation sent to Romania a few months after the withdrawal, presumably to check on the state of affairs in the country, reported nothing but the most positive impressions on "the cohesion of the party around its central committee" and "the spirit of the people, which is very good."<sup>382</sup> Observations on the stellar performance of the Romanian government were made even in those places where the Russians chose to pay impromptu visits, noting nothing but "the warm welcome...sincere and from the heart" of the people they

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<sup>380</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist* (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 2010), 149.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–53.

<sup>382</sup> Program of the visit in Romania of the PCSU delegation and the presentation by Scolvicov, the head of the Soviet delegation, in his talk with the leadership of the RWP. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 22/1958, p 10-14.

encountered.<sup>383</sup> The Soviets were “sincerely happy” with “all they saw “in the economic, political and cultural fields” in Romania,<sup>384</sup> thus presumably vetting Gheorghiu-Dej as a trustworthy ally, even after receiving such large political concessions.

Moscow’s decision to withdraw its troops from Romania was meant to have many benefits for the Soviet Union. Economically, it reduced the burden of keeping troops abroad, which according to Khrushchev was double the cost of maintaining domestic troops.<sup>385</sup> Geopolitically, it meant to earn political capital without reducing effective military control. Not only did additional troops stationed in Hungary make up the balance for the ones withdrawn from Romania, but in the unlikely event that unrest were to ignite, the Soviet troops could have easily moved across the Hungarian border from the West and the Russian border from the North. Most importantly, the troop withdrawal was a propagandistic tactic, meant to prove to the world that Khrushchev’s peace offensive policy was being practiced, not just advertised.

In his telegram to Dej announcing the decision for the withdrawal, Khrushchev had been keen to underline that such an action represented “concrete and convincing proof of the Soviet Union’s peace-loving policy...and of our common tendency to obtain, not just in words, but in deeds, a détente in international tensions.”<sup>386</sup> Despite Dej’s best efforts to express Romania’s undying gratitude for the help, peace and security its troops had provided as they were preparing to leave, however, Western observers were dismissing the antics as “the sort of propaganda we can expect from Moscow.”<sup>387</sup>

While the troop withdrawal did not seem to have its intended effect on the West, nor did it tilt the regional balance of power, it did turn out to have, instead, a significant impact on Romania’s further de-satellization. As the American ambassador to Bucharest was later to

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume III: Statesman (1953-1964)*, 3:709.

<sup>386</sup> Letter from N.S. Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, addressed to the Central Committee of the RWP, concerning the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romanian territory, 17 April, 1958. ANIC, CC of the RWP, fond Foreign Relations, document 6/1955 in Scurtu, *Romania: Retragerea Trupelor Sovietice 1958*, 274.

<sup>387</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British Legation in Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 24 June, 1958. UKNA document FO 371 135163.

recall,

*I kept telling the State Department all the time , 'You've got to play with the Rumanian (sic) government in certain respects in order to do this, because [the Romanians] dislike the Soviets . They want to get out from under, but they need some help from us in the way of business , trade, other ways, because they're now completely dependent on the Soviets . You've got to give them a reason for independence before they'll do it.' We were able to help them, so as soon as the Soviet Army pulled out.*<sup>388</sup>

And, indeed, Romania's relations with the West started to show marked improvements by the end of the 1950s. While the Soviet troop withdrawal did not appear to have an immediate effect on the country, it did in the long run signal to the West that Bucharest was slowly coming out of Moscow's orbit – and it needed help in this endeavor. By the time Romania would be ready to make more decisive moves in this direction in the beginning of the 1960s, the West was certainly more responsive, and willing to aid the process (as it will be discussed at length in Chapter 5).

## **Conclusion**

In the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution, Romania was forced by circumstance to allow itself to be pulled – even if temporarily – even closer into the Kremlin's orbit. Bucharest's objective to negotiate a Soviet troop withdrawal in the beginning of 1957 were cautiously set aside, not only because of Moscow's increased efforts to close ranks within the Bloc, but also because of Romania's own precarious economic situation, which very much depended on Soviet aid.

Forced to remain staunchly aligned to Bloc policies, yet still eager to raise its international profile, Bucharest launched the initiative for a Balkan Pact, aiming for a de-militarized zone in the region. This not only allowed Bucharest to consolidate its position as a 'bridge' between Moscow and Belgrade, but also to improve its relationship with Belgrade at a time when the rapport between Yugoslavia and the rest of the Bloc countries was deteriorating.

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<sup>388</sup> Robert Thayer, oral history interview, 24-28, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, op. cit in Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy*, 155.

The regional initiative also allowed Bucharest to further increase its profile as mediator within the Socialist camp by serving as a platform for triangular diplomacy when the tensions between Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing heightened. Within the context of deepening rifts between the camp's big players, Romania thus found an opportunity to increase its political relevance and regional/international importance as arbiter and conflict mediator – a role that will become increasingly more important in its future efforts for detachment from Moscow.

By 1958, Romania was finally able to manage a Soviet troop and advisor withdrawal from its territory and institutions. While such a development may not have had any immediate positive impact on the country's policies, it did contribute to Dej's longer-term, interrelated objectives of gaining internal legitimacy and external detachment from Moscow (which will be detailed in the next chapters). The path to managing the withdrawal had been long and arduous, beginning with Dej's fumbling attempt to approach Khrushchev on the topic in 1955, much to the Soviet leader's annoyance and dismissal. It was thus that Dej learned that timing and strategy would be crucial, not only in reaching this objective, but perhaps also in his longer-term goal of pulling Romania away from the Kremlin. The tactic he employed over the next three years would also be one he will employ in the future – that of proving his unshakeable alliance to Moscow, and loudly following all of the Kremlin's policies, in order to obtain political concessions (such as the troop withdrawal) and an increased relevance within the camp. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, by championing Moscow's international campaigns and following closely its foreign policies will allow Bucharest to prove itself as the Soviets' closest allies while at the same time gain much-needed political and economic advantages.

## From Survival to Self-Assertion (1959-1961)

### **Introduction**

“The bottom line is that economics determine everything”, declared Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej decisively in 1960.<sup>389</sup> Indeed, few phrases would better encapsulate the mentality of the Romanian regime at the turn of the new decade, when a general sense of political self-assurance was fuelling Bucharest’s newfound drive for accelerated development. Fifteen years after the end of the War, Communist Romania was looking not only to consolidate its economy, but also to emerge and re-assert itself onto the world stage. This optimism was not entirely unjustified.

If the 1950s had been marred by the uncertainties of de-Stalinization, the violence of the Hungarian uprising, political insecurity, and by a general sense of Soviet domination, they had also crowned by a few significant achievements. By 1959, the Soviet troops had effectively left Romanian territory; after being recalled to Moscow, most of the Kremlin’s advisers had been extracted from key governmental institutions; and internally, Gheorghiu-Dej had managed to fully consolidate his leadership position, which had remained virtually unchallenged since the otherwise feeble and inconsequential attempt of Miron Constantinescu and Iosef Chisinevski to oppose him in 1956.

At the dawn of the new decade, the Romanian leader was therefore preparing to shift gears from a policy of survival to one of legitimization.<sup>390</sup> At the national level, this process entailed the adoption of an ambitious 6-year plan, along with a 15-year long-term perspective plan for economic achievements. These were inevitably coupled with a

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<sup>389</sup> Statement made to Bejoy K. Acharya, the Indian ambassador to Bucharest in a meeting on 1 March, 1960. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 14/1960, p. 2.

<sup>390</sup> Mioara Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007), 114; Dan Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965* (Bucharest: The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2011), 208–12.

commitment to a new social contract, which was necessary for co-opting the ‘masses’ in effectively supporting these economic ambitions and help ensure their success.<sup>391</sup>

The tenacious drive for rapid internal development was inextricably linked to an active and robust international campaign to obtain much-needed technological and scientific equipment and know-how and raw materials on the one hand; and to secure markets for Romanian exports, on the other. Thanks to an international climate of détente, Bucharest was able to reach far beyond the socialist camp in order to achieve these objectives.

In fact, with the Sino-Soviet rift further deepening and the Soviet-Yugoslav disagreements renewed, Romania would choose to temporarily step back from its mediating position, discussed in the last chapter, adopting instead a more cautious and less active – though never really antagonistic – attitude towards both Belgrade and Beijing. By staying safely distanced from intra-Camp feuds, yet comfortably close to Moscow in both rhetoric and practice, Bucharest could consequently better focus on furthering its own interests by forging stable and lucrative relationships with countries outside the socialist sphere. Under the banner of peaceful coexistence, a concept which had been at least partially internalised, Bucharest set as an unwavering priority its relationship with those countries least committed to either side of the bipolar struggle.

As a result, it would make significant efforts to re-establish and develop its ties with the neutral countries in Europe (mostly in Scandinavia)<sup>392</sup>, while at the same time going to great lengths to woo the newly decolonised and non-aligned<sup>393</sup>. Using oil products, equipment and know-how as its primary vehicle for developing these relationships, Romania would obtain in exchange not only the sorely needed technology and training from Scandinavia and raw materials from Asia; but also the added prestige of helping develop the recently nationalised oil industries of Asian non-aligned countries.

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<sup>391</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 209–11.

<sup>392</sup> Finland and Sweden

<sup>393</sup> For this purpose of this research, India and Indonesia will be highlighted as case studies.



From a historiographical perspective, the topic of Romania's relations with the members of the non-aligned movement (NAM) during the tenure of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej has remained largely unexplored. This could be due, at least in part, to the fact that although Romania's outreach to these countries began as early as the mid-1950s, it peaked at almost the same time as the country's re-opening to the West in the early 1960s. As a result, the researchers concerned with Romania's foreign policy during this period have almost exclusively focused on its relations with the West – primarily France, the United Kingdom and the United States – to illustrate its re-emergence onto the world stage in the context of the *détente*.<sup>394</sup>

Bucharest's almost concomitant process of forging relationships with the neutral and non-aligned members of the Cold War dynamic has therefore remained a historiographical blind-spot, despite the fact this was very much a foreign policy priority at the time.<sup>395</sup> To the best of the author's knowledge, there has been no comprehensive analysis of these relations for the period under study. A single, two-part article on Romania's perspective on the relations between India, the USSR and China by Petre Opris, a lieutenant-colonel and military historian, reveals the general chronology pertinent to these relations, as well as some interesting military observations.<sup>396</sup> Similarly, the particulars surrounding Bucharest's normalisation of relations with the neutrals in Europe, and especially Finland and Sweden, have also largely escaped historical investigation.

Apart from these mostly uncharted dimensions of Romania's diplomatic past, another important aspect of the country's economic history during this time has been ignored: its oil resources and their diplomatic potential. As briefly explained in the last chapter, Romania's competitive advantage as the only oil-producing country within the Bloc, save for the USSR,

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<sup>394</sup> Joseph F. Harrington and Bruce J. Courtney, *Tweaking the Nose of the Russians: Fifty Years of American-Romanian Relations, 1940-1990*, East European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

<sup>395</sup> The government of Romania mutually agreed with India and Indonesia to raise the status of diplomatic representations from legation to embassy in 1959 and 1960, respectively. The same agreements would not be reached with France and Great Britain until 1963.

<sup>396</sup> Petre Opris, "Indian-Soviet-Chinese Relations in Bucharest's Perspective, 1955-1964 I," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 3-4 (2011): 164-72; Petre Opris, "Indian-Soviet-Chinese Relations in Bucharest's Perspective, 1955-1964, II," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 1-2 (2012): 86-95.

provided Bucharest with substantial leverage in its bilateral relations within the socialist camp as well as beyond. With the exception of a few and brief references in journal articles<sup>397</sup> or some books published before the archives opened<sup>398</sup>, this topic, too, remains unmapped.

This chapter will offer a first look at Romania's establishment of relations with the neutral and non-aligned countries within the Cold War context, mainly by using what in today's terms would be best labelled as 'oil diplomacy'. It will therefore explore Bucharest's quest for technological and scientific equipment and know-how in Scandinavia, while similar negotiations stalled with London and Washington (as will be explored in the next chapter). At the same time, Romania's efforts to seduce the principal Asian members of the non-aligned movement will be detailed by linking these countries' efforts to control their own economies to Bucharest's role as a provider of assistance for the task. Based on very recently declassified archival material from the Romanian Diplomatic Archives (*Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, AMAE*), this chapter will highlight Romania's role in developing the newly nationalised oil industries of India and Indonesia, as well as its relevance and challenges within the bipolar dynamic.

### **In Search of a Model**

The roots of Romania's drive for international assertion were shaped not only by the desire to seek autonomy from Moscow, but also by the inextricable domestic need for economic development. Paradoxically, however, in order to achieve these interrelated goals Dej was forced to make the distinction between the Soviet model, which seemed appealing both

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<sup>397</sup> David S. Painter, "Oil, Resources, and the Cold War, 1945–1962," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 486–507,

<http://universitypublishingonline.org/ref/id/histories/CBO9781139056113A027>.

<sup>398</sup> Harrington and Courtney, *Tweaking the Nose of the Russians: Fifty Years of American-Romanian Relations, 1940-1990*; Sergiu Verona, "The Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Romania in 1958: An Analysis of the Decision," Final Report to the National Council for Soviet and East European Research (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University, December 1989).

politically and economically; and the Kremlin, whose far-reaching and oppressive arm he was keen to evade.<sup>399</sup>

The result was a policy of mimicking for the purpose of distancing: the close adoption of the Soviet economic model and foreign policy principles in order to further national interest, while at the same time simulating unwavering allegiance to Moscow. Although this tactic had been selectively applied since Stalin's death in 1953 to reach domestic (i.e. Soviet troop withdrawal) or regional (i.e. rapprochement with Yugoslavia) goals, by the end of the decade it had become necessary to adopt in almost every aspect of foreign policy. First, within the context of the Sino-Soviet split and the emergence of an alternative Socialist model championed by Beijing, Romania actually had to make the choice – even if implicit – to stand aligned with the Soviet Union; at least for the time being. And second, while the absence of the Kremlin's political and military personnel<sup>400</sup> in Romania provided Dej with more room for manoeuvre, it also required more carefully measured efforts to assure Moscow that Bucharest remained its most subservient of allies. This approach allowed Gheorghiu-Dej to take full advantage of Moscow's détente policies in order to establish new relationships with countries outside the socialist camp, while at the same time paving the alternative avenues of political and economic cooperation necessary for his later bid for autonomy.

It is difficult to determine whether Dej's new and ambitious economic plans were inspired by the disappointment of his previous two, or by the enthusiasm for accelerated development emanating from both Moscow and Beijing at the turn of the decade. It was most likely a combination of both. Indeed, although Romania's previous two 5-year plans (1951-1955 and 1956-1960) had brought about small, yet significant improvements in the standard of living – alas, the bar had been quite low to begin with- they had largely failed to deliver the goals set.<sup>401</sup> By contrast, both giants of the Socialist camp were seeking to

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<sup>399</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist* (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 2010), 153.

<sup>400</sup> Embodied by the Soviet advisors and troops which had just been recalled

<sup>401</sup> Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 120.

intensify their development by adopting new and innovative – even if very different - economic approaches to reaching new stages of Communism.

In 1958, Mao Zedong ceremoniously launched his second five-year plan in conjunction with the Great Leap Forward campaign, meant to accelerate development through mass collectivization and rapid industrialization. Similarly, at its 21<sup>st</sup> Congress in 1959, the Kremlin was grandiosely proclaiming the full victory of socialism in the USSR. And despite its criticism of China's economic policies, it began promoting its own ambitious plans, which set aside the conventional 5-year model in favor of a more comprehensive 7-year scheme (1959-1965), along with an unprecedented 20-year long-term perspective plan by the end of which Communism was supposed to have been reached.<sup>402403</sup>

Such bold aspirations were appealing for Gheorghiu-Dej, whose recently consolidated regime was now in need of legitimization. Mao's Great Leap Forward plans had been initially extremely attractive for Bucharest. Shortly after its launch, Chivu Stoica who had recently headed a delegation to China in April 1958, was reporting back to his colleagues within the Council of Ministers on the impressive goals of Beijing's campaign. Not only did China want to surpass Great Britain on the production of steel by 1970, Stoica was admiringly relating, but the plan was accelerating "at an extraordinarily rapid rhythm": the country was reported to build 2,500km of railway each year, and opening two factories per day.<sup>404</sup> Emil Bodnaras, who had been part of the same delegation, seemed equally astonished by the fact that over the next two years, the Chinese wanted to irrigate a massive 110 million hectares of land (an area almost five times the size of Romania) and to thus increase cereal

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<sup>402</sup>Vladimir Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 208.

<sup>403</sup> The ideological aspect of this policy is based on the staged achievement of socialism proposed by Karl Marx, according to which communism (the obtainment of which is supposed to create a prosperous and homogenous material basis in society) precedes socialism – the last stage.

<sup>404</sup> Minutes from the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 23 April, 1958, ANIC, fond Council of Ministers, Minutes 1944-1959, document 4/1958, p 28 in Catanus, *Tot mai departe...*, p.229-30.

production to 4,000kg per hectare.<sup>405</sup> Such astounding results were all the more impressive, according to Stoica and Bodnaras, because they were to be achieved through the volunteerism of the “enthusiastic” Chinese workforce, and not just through massive state investments.<sup>406</sup> Mao’s quixotic quest of reaching such astonishing economic feats, through popular support and mobilization of the masses, no less, was doubtlessly Dej’s ultimate political fantasy. He studied with keen interest the framework and projections of China’s economic plan.<sup>407</sup> The reality of the Great Leap Forward, however, was soon to depict a different story, once theory was more robustly put into practice.

Only a year and a half later Emil Bodnaras, who headed Romania’s delegation to the grand celebration of China’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Republic in October 1959, returned to Bucharest with a radically different impression than the one conveyed earlier. While he was fascinated by the imposing buildings that had mushroomed in the center of the Chinese capital since he had last been there, he was less impressed with what he saw in the provinces, where Mao’s Great Leap experiment was already in full swing.<sup>408</sup> His most poignant observation on the Chinese work environment and ethic struck right at the core of the presumed ‘enthusiasm’ Mao claimed to have galvanized among the masses,

*In China there isn’t any rest day during the week, either in the factories or agriculture. There is no holiday break... Can you imagine that a person who works all week and has no holiday at all would work the land well? I think this is a big problem and if they don’t take any measures [to correct], it can cause trouble... What a big discovery it would be for 600 million people to have rest. **The people are exhausted, tired and stressed. I saw them on the fields: no one is killing himself with work. On the other hand, they have meetings on a daily basis. Maybe this is how they rest...***<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Report concerning the military organization and civic activity of the Chinese military, ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 33/1958, marginalia; Report concerning the Chinese economy, ANIC, fond CC prf the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 69/1958, marginalia.

<sup>408</sup> Minutes of the CC of the RWP Politburo Meeting, 10 October 1959. ANIC, CC of the RWP, fond Chancellery, Document 37/1959.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, p 13-14 (bold italics by author).

This less than stellar appraisal of the Chinese economic experiment continued with an unflattering analysis of the dynamic between the cult of personality and economic development,

*...things are being talked about in a very formal and mechanical way: everything is thanks to Mao and the Great Leap Forward. It seems there is a parallelism [between grand achievements] and forms of parasitism that have nothing to do with the seriousness and responsibility that can solve a problem. And people tolerate that.*<sup>410</sup>

Only eighteen months into the Great Leap Forward campaign, its flaws were visible, deep and now becoming potentially dangerous. While the Romanians seemed surprised at what they saw, the Soviets already seemed keenly aware that China was “worse off than two years ago.” They also “seemed worried” about the situation.<sup>411</sup> In fact, a high-ranking member of the Soviet delegation, who also participated in Beijing’s anniversary festivities, was already ominously intimating to Bodnaras the likelihood of an impending disaster,<sup>412</sup>

*See, if you make a mistake building socialism in a small country, and there is a famine as a result of this mistake, if there’s no bread being produced, [others] can still jump in and help. But if you make a mistake in a country with 600 million people, who is in a position to help you? All the socialist countries put together wouldn’t be able to feed 600 million people. That is why the popular communes and the issue of food production is a fundamental problem for our Camp in its relations with China.*<sup>413</sup>

The risk which Mao was willing to take for the sake of highly accelerated development was not only seen as perilous for China’s national economy, but indeed as a liability to the entire

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid, p 15.

<sup>412</sup> There are conflicting accounts on the number of people that perished as a result of the famine. The numbers range from 16.5 million, according to Chinese government sources, to 38 million. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that even the most conservative estimate amounts to roughly the population of current-day Holland.

<sup>413</sup> Minutes of the CC of the RWP Politburo Meeting, 10 October 1959. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 37/1959, p 15.

socialist cohort. So, although Beijing's meteoric rise to political prominence within the Camp had come to require Bucharest's diplomatic courtship, its feeble and precarious economy disqualified it as a model for emulation, despite Dej's initial and brief appreciation of the Chinese shock experiment.

At the time, moreover, Beijing was still finding itself at a stage of (under) development that Romania had been desperate to surpass not so long before; and it did not look like the Great Leap was going to succeed in overcoming it. Among his impressions of China's economic situation, Bodnarus was also keen to report in Bucharest on the "huge waste" of both labor force and materials widespread throughout the country.<sup>414</sup> Furthermore, the Romanian dignitary commented on the "very low" standard of living of the Chinese workers, who used "primitive" ovens and wooden ploughs, drawn by horse and donkey for working the fields – hardly the model for modernization Bucharest was seeking at the turn of the decade.<sup>415</sup>

By contrast, the 7-year economic plan drawn up in Moscow was seeking precisely to induce economic growth through increased efficiency of widespread mechanized production and further modernization through the development of heavy industry and technological advancement. This ambition was inspired in part by a historical drive "to overcome backwardness", which the Soviets considered nothing less than "a direct threat to Russia's sovereignty and geopolitical interests"<sup>416</sup>; and in part by a growth spurt in the Kremlin's self-confidence following the launch of the Sputnik just two years prior. The ambitious seven-year economic plan that was adopted by the Soviet Union in 1959, along with the 20-year perspective plan for reaching Communism, were therefore a projection of Khrushchev's idea of modernity<sup>417</sup>, at the core of which was the drive for technological advancement.

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, p 20.

<sup>416</sup> Sari Aution-Sarasmo, "Khrushchev and the Challenge of Technological Progress," in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1960* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 133.

<sup>417</sup> According to Sari Aution-Sarasmo, during Khrushchev's tenure "Bolshevik utopian beliefs in the omnipotence of technology from the 1920s converged with the cosmic utopianism created by the space age of the 1960s". As a result, technological progress became the main

It is not hard to see why this extremely ambitious, yet more staged and less precarious Soviet plan was attractive to Gheorghiu-Dej. Khrushchev had personally gone over the twenty-year perspective plan with him, discussing in detail some of the particulars. “The numbers were interesting”, Dej confessed to his Politburo colleagues later.<sup>418</sup> In fact, he was so impressed with what the Kremlin was seeking to achieve, that he immediately decided to adopt a similar scheme, and to ask for “all necessary help” from Soviet experts with drawing up one bespoke for Romania.<sup>419</sup> For this purpose, Dej was keen to send Romanian economists to Moscow for consultations and training from their Soviet colleagues, after which they would return to Bucharest to be assigned to different ministries or departments in order to ensure the plan’s smooth execution across all branches of the economy.<sup>420</sup>

“Comrade Khrushchev was very happy that we were asking the Soviet Union for help”, gushed Dej, pleased to receive the extra bonus of higher appreciation from the Kremlin on top of the blueprint for a sturdy economic plan. “...He likes the way things are going with [Romania]; not in a spectacular or noisy way, but always forward”, he reported to the Politburo, alluding in a not-so-thinly veiled way to the fact that Khrushchev had appreciated Romania’s choice to eschew the more ‘spectacular’ Chinese model. This insinuation became even more obvious when, at a later point during the meeting on economy, Khrushchev had warned Dej to avoid taking any “leaps.”<sup>421</sup>

### **New economic plan: new challenges and opportunities**

Emulating Moscow, Romania therefore also chose to set aside the traditional five-year plan, though in favor of a six-year one, not seven; and, just like the Kremlin, it also espoused a

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feature of the “Khrushchevian” vision of modernity in Sari Aution-Sarasmu, “Khrushchev and the Challenge of Technological Progress.”

<sup>418</sup> Minutes of the Politburo meeting of 8 February, 1960. ANIC, fond CC of RCP, Chancellery, document 9/1960, p. 6.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid

<sup>420</sup> Ibid

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p 7.



long-term perspective plan, though for fifteen years, not twenty. Tasked with their conception, coordination, and negotiation with the Kremlin was Alexandru Barladeanu, perhaps the only qualified member of the Politburo for the job. Born in Iasi, the most prominent city in northern Romania, to parents who were both school teachers (and thus educated, which was not the case with most other families from which Politburo members hailed), Barladeanu had studied, and later taught, political economy at Iasi University. Because of his left-wing inclinations, during the War he had fled Romania for the Soviet Union, where he became actively involved with the Romanian-speaking diaspora. Upon his return in 1946, Barladeanu was appointed Secretary General within the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and until 1954 he had held several posts connected to trade. He had negotiated Romania's 1949 and 1950 trade agreements with the USSR, and was "generally regarded as the most competent member of the Ministry of Foreign Trade" even by foreign diplomats.<sup>422</sup>

Despite his experience and qualifications, however, it is possible that not even Barladeanu initially understood how ambitious Dej wanted the new economic scheme to be. On a draft he submitted to his boss, he had apparently underestimated the growth projection for consumer goods. "This is good", annotated Dej, "but we have to accelerate so that others don't get ahead of us."<sup>423</sup> The new plans were meant not only to usher in a new age of modernity and economic growth for Romania, but indeed to raise the country's profile among its socialist brethren, with whom it now saw itself to be in competition. This philosophy would later place Bucharest at such odds with the Bloc's new economic integration plans within the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), that it would eventually seek autonomy – a process which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The adoption in 1960 of the two plans engineered by Barladeanu marked a turning point in Gheorghiu-Dej's tenure. They reflected the confidence of a fully established leader, with a

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<sup>422</sup> Personalities Report, Telegram No. 77 from J.D Murray, British Legation, Bucharest to Foreign Office, Northern Department, 11 October, 1962, p 4. UKNA document FO 371 166 162.

<sup>423</sup> Annexes to the projection plan for developing the national economy until 1975. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 8/1960, p. 5 (marginalia).

clear vision for his country's future. Keen to add a veneer of legitimacy, Dej followed Moscow and Beijing's example, by adding an ideological dimension to his economic plans: the six-year plan was meant to ensure Romania's development of the techno-material base for socialism, while the fifteen-year plan sought to complete the construction of socialism and help the country transition to a truly Communist society.<sup>424</sup>

Neither scheme was modest. And both were meant to bring Romania as far as possible from its bleak and not-so-distant 'primitive' economic past. Echoing the ideological Soviet obsession with overcoming backwardness, Dej underlined how far the country had come. "Romania, as is known, was a backwards country, very backwards; a country with a high percentage of illiteracy, misery, hunger and shortages", he explained to a foreign visitor.<sup>425</sup> Now the country's economy was finally in the position to reach for the heights of Communist achievement.

This goal was to be pursued along the two main tracks espoused within the six-year plan.<sup>426</sup> The first was "to double the standard of living," as Dej explained to the Indian Ambassador shortly after its adoption.<sup>427</sup> The second was to place "the center of gravity for the development of the economy [on] heavy industry and the construction of machinery."<sup>428</sup> The two objectives were closely related. A strong emphasis on the development of heavy industry to fulfill the immodest goals set by the new economic plan required the support of a strong and supportive workforce. Dej was perhaps still keenly aware of the advice he had received from the Soviets in 1953 that a weak labor force could build precious little – much less Socialism – on an empty stomach. He had certainly heard the reports on the tired and demoralized Chinese workers toiling to achieve Mao's precarious Leap Forward. He therefore needed to coopt the Romanian population into supporting his economic plan in order to ensure its success and to thus achieve, by extension, a greater measure of

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<sup>424</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 209.

<sup>425</sup> Minutes of the meeting between Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej and David A. Morse, General Director of the International Workers' Bureau. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 21/1960, p 4.

<sup>426</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 14/1960.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*

legitimization for his regime. As Gheorghe Vasilichi, the President of the Consumer Cooperative, put it in his impassioned speech before the RWP's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress,

*We are building factories, power plants, metallurgical plants in Hunedoara [and] Resita and this is all very good for every person in the Republic. But all this does not represent the standard of living of the people. People want to live well, to have radios, televisions sets, coolers [refrigerators], bicycles. This matter of serving the population, of satisfying the demand of the working people, is sometimes considered only superficially. It's not enough [to have] only the factories in Hunedoara, Resita and 23 August; every year people increase their demands, they want better furniture, carpets, drapes, pens...*<sup>429</sup>

While Vasilichi's choice of examples might seem peculiar, his general idea was very much pertinent to the profile of Romanian consumerism at the time: people no longer wanted the only one, obligatory, cheaply-produced and widespread model of pen, which only 5-7 years prior would have been a godsend. They now wanted a choice of pens. In fact, according to historian Dan Catanus, Bucharest's motivation to make available a better quality and wider range of consumer goods at the turn of the decade ran deeper than implementing a simple appeasement tactic. The government was responding to "profound socio-economic mutations" within the country, as Romania was very much on the verge of becoming a consumer society.<sup>430</sup>

Although Gheorghiu-Dej was not yet confident enough to moderate his tactics of institutionalized oppression, which had intensified since the Soviet troops left Romania in mid-1958, he had to at least ensure a higher standard of living and to provide Romanians with a marginal sense of national dignity. As a result, the regime increased salaries and pensions across the board, and reduced taxes. The prices for basic consumer goods like food, clothing and shoes were slashed, along with some not-so-basic items like cognac, wine

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<sup>429</sup> Minutes from the enlarged plenary session of the CC of the RWP on 11-17 May, 1960, p. 44 in Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 210–11.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

and *tuica*, a particularly potent variety of Romanian schnapps. Keen to ensure that also women “will benefit the most” from these measures, items like fine stockings saw a 33% price cut.<sup>431</sup> Pens, unfortunately, remained at the same price.

Dej was indeed keen to accommodate the people and to try to bring them closer to the power structure. And another way to achieve this was to begin instilling a sense of national pride. With the Soviet troops out of the country, the moment was certainly ripe to give nationalism more impetus. At the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unification of the Romanian principalities in 1959, Dej’s widely disseminated speech hit all the trademark nationalistic notes, from the sycophantic praise of national heroes, real or imagined, to the identification and unforgiving condemnation of the enemies of the nation, also real or imagined (but mostly the “capitalist bourgeoisie”).<sup>432</sup> That same year, at the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Romania’s liberation, he gave a similarly rousing speech before the Grand National Assembly, intent again on creating deeper cohesion by appealing to the national sensibilities of an otherwise ethnically and religiously diverse population.<sup>433</sup> By summoning the forces of patriotism and by taking concrete measures to provide a higher standard of living, Gheorghiu-Dej thus sought to garner more support from the masses, while keeping dissent comfortably at bay.<sup>434</sup> As the British Minister in Bucharest reported to London,

*...the regime presumably calculates that, so long as there is no relaxation in its political methods, this offers the best hope of mitigating its unpopularity and of*

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<sup>431</sup> Minutes of the meeting with the accredited ambassadors from the fraternal countries in Bucharest, 25 July, 1959. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 32/1959.

<sup>432</sup> The presentation by Chivu Stoica at the Grand National Assembly on 24 January, 1959. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 51/1959.

<sup>433</sup> The speech of Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej at the Grand National Assembly on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Romania’s liberation. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 67/1959.

<sup>434</sup> In order to curb the use of the Hungarian language, the most telling example of Dej’s policy was the fusion of the Hungarian-language Bolyai University in Cluj, into the Romania-language Babes University from the same town. In Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist*, 145.

*persuading the workers to cooperate more energetically in its ambitious economic programme.*<sup>435</sup>

While populist measures for gaining support in implementing the economic plan were easy to adopt, creating the human, industrial and technological infrastructure for it, however, proved to be more complex. First, a detailed survey of the Romanian professional landscape, carried out in 1959, revealed a chronically under-skilled and poorly utilized workforce. An alarming 26.3% of the posts requiring engineering degrees were occupied by employees with medium or low-level education. Only 43% of the demand for economists was covered across all sectors of the economy.<sup>436</sup> It was therefore becoming uncomfortably clear that in the frenzied race for economic growth, the preparation of a matching and adequate professional workforce had been grossly overlooked. “This unacceptable state of affairs is damaging to the interest of the development and of perfecting of our production and has to be decisively eliminated” fumed Dej upon hearing the bleak details of the report.<sup>437</sup>

Second, Romania’s rapid and massive investment in large infrastructure projects put a considerable strain not only on its finances, but also on its under-skilled labor force. The decision to build a massive steelworks factory in the city of Galati, for example, implied the reconfiguration of the whole city through the integration of a complex infrastructure catering exclusively to the factory and its workers, including apartment building complexes, a hospital and a school. Similarly, the construction of the colossal Bicaz dam, in northern Romania, which required special-built facilities and difficult-terrain access roads, was deemed to be both “too expensive” and “inefficient” by foreign observers.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Roumania: Annual Review, Telegram No. 7 from R.D.J Scott Fox, British Legation, Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 5 January, 1960. UKNA document FO 371/151842.

<sup>436</sup> Decision nr. 1053 from 22 June, 1960 of the CC and the Council of Ministers of the RWP regarding the formation and promotion of technical, economic and scientific cadres, as well as the improvement of their pay. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 99/1960, p2-3.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>438</sup> Telegram from A.J. Wilton, British Legation, Bucharest, to J. Reeve, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 10 November, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143365.

The problematic link between the commitment to build such demanding infrastructure projects and the strain placed on Romania's already inadequate skilled labor force was eloquently explained by the British Minister to his colleagues in London,

*One of the problems the Roumanians (sic) will face ... as a result of the simultaneous 'maturing' of so much capital investment which in less difficult circumstances they might well have preferred to spread over a longer period, will be the demands that will be made on their skilled and semi-skilled labour force... One possible solution they are trying is the highest possible degree of automation. This, of course, brings its own problems and it remains to be seen whether they will find it easier to produce ten super-skilled technicians than a hundred skilled factory workers.*<sup>439</sup>

Indeed, the solution to automate large parts of the industry brought to the fore not only the issue of training high-skilled workers, but also the third – and perhaps most acute - problem facing Dej's new economic plan: the lack of high-quality technology. The plan's ambitious projections, which had been inspired by the Soviet near-obsession with technological and scientific progress as the driving engine for the successful achievement of socialism<sup>440</sup>, found little support in the existing Romanian reality. The available technology was scant, low-quality, and utterly incapable of generating the output required for robust growth.<sup>441</sup>

The only two possible solutions for obtaining the necessary technology within the Bloc – importing from the Soviet Union or through regional cooperation – soon proved to be less viable than hoped. First, despite the Kremlin's newfound confidence in its scientific and technological capabilities following its launch of the Sputnik, the fact remained that it still lacked the research and development infrastructure needed for scaling this high-tech but

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Sari Aution-Sarasmö, "Khrushchev and the Challenge of Technological Progress," 139.

<sup>441</sup> Romania's acute need for technological improvement was addressed through a governmental directive, adopted by the Council of Ministers, meant to promote technical scientific research, the assimilation of new technology, and to stimulate innovation. *Decision of the CC of the RCP and the Council of Ministers to increase the level of technical production, 2 July, 1960. ANIC, fond CC of the RCP, document 102/1960.*

very niche innovation to the wider spectrum of large-scale industrial production. Second, a brief stint with regional cooperation through COMECON, which had become the “vehicle” for scientific-technological cooperation within the Bloc following the launch of the Sputnik, revealed that technology was low-quality and insufficient throughout the camp.<sup>442</sup>

Moreover, for Romania, in particular, the option of sharing scientific innovation and know-how with its socialist brethren was becoming increasingly problematic as Bucharest’s position within COMECON was raising tensions – a topic that will be discussed in the next chapter. As the British Minister in Bucharest keenly observed in his annual report for 1959, a year during which Romania concluded a series of agreements with other members of the Bloc,

*...although there was of course no lack of the usual official demonstration of amity and solidarity, the impression remains that these were a little perfunctory and that there was probably no love lost between Roumania and her communist neighbours.*<sup>443</sup>

With Bloc economic cooperation tainted and the Kremlin’s inability to provide advanced industrial equipment or know-how, “at least temporarily”<sup>444</sup>, Romania had no other choice but to look elsewhere, and particularly to the neutral countries in the West.

### **Neutral as the New Black**

Bucharest’s decision to seek technological equipment and know-how from the neutral Scandinavian countries was not coincidental, but in fact driven by two strong currents. At the regional level, rapprochement with the neutral countries in Europe was easier and politically less demanding than with other countries in the West, especially the United Kingdom or the United States, whose relationship with the Socialist camp was more heavily

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<sup>442</sup> Sari Aution-Sarasmo, “Khrushchev and the Challenge of Technological Progress,” 139.

<sup>443</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1959), telegram from R.D.J. Scott Fox, British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, January 5, 1960, p3. UKNA document FO 371/151842.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

conditioned by political factors, such as ideology, human rights concerns, etc. In fact, the Kremlin's own technological and scientific deficiencies had pushed it towards Scandinavia in an effort to increase the Soviet Union's levels of infrastructural standards and know-how.<sup>445</sup> As a result, its technological and scientific cooperation with these countries, which had started in the mid-1950s, intensified by the early 1960s, with Finland becoming the Soviet Union's main provider of technology in Scandinavia with Sweden closely behind. The Soviet Union's drive to obtain scientific and technological know-how from Scandinavia was so intense, that by 1961 the main priority of the Soviet embassy in Stockholm was to broaden and improve relationships with Swedish companies and scientists.<sup>446</sup>

These elements in the regional climate allowed Romania to follow suit and 'piggyback' on the Kremlin's policy towards Scandinavia in order to obtain the same technological advantages. This, however, would not have been possible without a second, and more country-specific factor of influence: relatively less burdensome historical baggage. Romania's efforts to establish credible relationships with the Western countries as it reemerged onto the world stage heavily relied on Bucharest's willingness and ability to pay compensation for the nationalization of foreign-owned companies after World War II. Although such negotiations started with both neutral and non-neutral Western partners at roughly the same time, in the mid-1950s, it was relatively easier to come to an agreement with the neutrals. Not only were these governments to be compensated for far fewer confiscated assets, but the talks themselves were less fraught with ideological and political setbacks, such as Romania's involvement in crushing the Hungarian Revolution, for example.<sup>447</sup>

This relatively less burdensome process of rapprochement with the Western neutrals allowed Romania faster and more lucrative access to Western markets and technology. By 1959, and just a few months away from implementing its 6-year plan, Romania managed to

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<sup>445</sup> Sari Aution-Sarasmo, "Khrushchev and the Challenge of Technological Progress," 139–40.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>447</sup> After Romania's active involvement in suppressing the Hungarian Revolution by providing support to the Soviets in 1956, both the British and American ambassadors to Bucharest recommended to their governments a 'freezing' in the further development of the bilateral relations.



strike a trade agreement with Sweden, thus re-establishing trade relations on a government to government basis for the first time since the war.<sup>448</sup> In order to settle at least partially some of the outstanding compensation claims, the deal included an arrangement<sup>449</sup> whereby a certain percent of each year's exports from Romania to Sweden were used towards compensation payments. Although the deal had been reached "only after prolonged negotiations"<sup>450</sup>, its significance was considerable. It served not only as a model for a later and similar arrangement with Great Britain<sup>451</sup>, whose much larger compensation claims represented a major stumbling block in the warming of relations with Romania, but also as an impetus for the Swedish government to open its legation in Bucharest the following year.<sup>452</sup>

With the door now open to Scandinavia, and the road to technical-scientific exchange already paved by the Soviet Union, Romania's campaign to increase its technological and know-how capacity intensified.<sup>453</sup> Its main tactic was to use oil and oil products as the main currency of exchange, sold at slightly lower prices than the global market value in order to maintain an otherwise lacking competitive edge.<sup>454</sup> In exchange, Bucharest sought not only

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<sup>448</sup> Telegram from R.M.A Hawkey, British Embassy in Stockholm to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, 2 September, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143346.

<sup>449</sup> The scheme of payments towards compensation stipulated that 6% in the first year, 7% in the second year and 8% in subsequent years of the value of Romanian exports to Sweden were to be paid into a special Swedish fund, from which the Scandinavian government would later pay out disbursements to compensation 11 Swedish claimants, amounting to a total of 800 million Krona. Telegram from the British Legation in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, Northern Department, August 30, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143346.

<sup>450</sup> Telegram from R.M.A Hawkey, British Embassy in Stockholm to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, 2 September, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143346.

<sup>451</sup> Note from Treasury Chambers, Whitehall to Northern Department, Foreign Office, September 9, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143346.

<sup>452</sup> Telegram from the British Legation in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, August 30, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143346.

<sup>453</sup> At the end of 1960, a Romanian trade delegation headed by Mihail Florescu and Mircea Ocheana made a special visit to Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Their debriefing was made directly to Gheorghiu-Dej. Minutes of the meeting that took place in the office of comrade Gh Gheorghiu-Dej, in which the following participated: comrade Gh Gheorghiu-Dej, Chivu Stoic, P Borila, Mihail Florescu and Mircea Ocheana, 7 December 1960. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 48/1960.

<sup>454</sup> Telegram from the British Legation in Bucharest to the Foreign Office, August 30, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143346.

to expand the range of its technological infrastructure, but also to obtain the necessary – and sorely lacking - training for its workforce. From the Technical Academy in Stockholm, Romania obtained scientific and technological data on mineral extraction and chemical manufacturing – one of the main pillars of Romanian economy at the time. As the largest producer of wood fiber in the world, Sweden also trained Romanian engineers and specialists to work in specialized and fully automated factories.<sup>455</sup> These were later purchased by the Romanian government to cover the increasing need for wood floors in workers' apartment complexes it was building across the country, among other products.

The training of specialists and the transfer of know-how, in fact, remained one of Gheorghiu-Dej's top priorities when approaching the Scandinavians. By the end of 1959, he had already invested massive amounts of capital in automation; so much so, that it prompted the British minister to Bucharest to report to London on Romania's "extraordinarily large number of modern factories of all sorts (many of them provided with the most expensive and up-to-date machinery) which will be ready to come into action during the next four years."<sup>456</sup> Buying machinery was fast and easy. Training specialized workers to operate, maintain and repair this machinery, however, remained a critical challenge; and Dej had to find a solution by the time these factories became operational.

"With respect to the possibility of sending people for specialization in their factories, let's send engineers, good foremen to work there" demanded Dej upon the return of a special trade delegation he had sent to Helsinki in 1960.<sup>457</sup> Finland, who at the time was the fourth-largest producer of cellulose in the world, also excelled at paper manufacturing and wood processing. Romania not only purchased these products for import, but also bought entire

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<sup>455</sup> Minutes of the meeting that took place in the office of comrade Gh Gheorghiu-Dej between: comrade Gh Gheorghiu-Dej, Chivu Stoica, P Borila, Mihail Florescu and Mircea Ocheana, 7 december 1960. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 48/1960, p 17-24.

<sup>456</sup> Telegram from A.J. Wilton, British Legation, Bucharest, to J. Reeve, Foreign Office, Northern Department, 10 November, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143365.

<sup>457</sup> Minutes of the meeting that took place in the office of comrade Gh Gheorghiu-Dej between: comrade Gh Gheorghiu-Dej, Chivu Stoica, P Borila, Mihail Florescu and Mircea Ocheana, 7 December 1960. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 48/1960, p 10.

factories for its own national production, establishing a trainee internship scheme with two Finnish factories.<sup>458</sup> As a specialized ship manufacturer in Europe, Finland was also an attractive provider of technology and know-how for Romania's own expanding ship-building industry. "We can send our director general to the [Finnish] shipyards for 1-3 months; it is in our interest", recommended Dej.<sup>459</sup>

In exchange for its imports, Bucharest offered oil and chemical products. Despite some Conservatives' "concern" that the Romanian oil might be competing with the Soviets' on the Finnish market, the government in Helsinki asked not only for 200,000 tons of oil from the Romanians, but also for chemical products which they preferred to obtain from Romania instead of West Germany, its main chemical product provider at the time.<sup>460</sup> These negotiations were conducted by the Finnish Minister of Commerce, who according to the Romanians was "the right hand" of those who supported the development of relations with the Soviet Union within the Finnish government, much to the chagrin of the Conservatives.<sup>461</sup> "Everywhere we went to in Finland, we were welcomed with open arms," reported Mihail Florescu, one of the leaders of the delegation to Helsinki.<sup>462</sup>

Thanks in large part to the Scandinavian technology and know-how transfer, Romania was able to modernize and consolidate its production infrastructure in the late-1950s and early 1960s, paving the way to its economic independence only a few years later. Ironically, this feat would most likely not have been possible without Bucharest's strategy to closely emulate the Soviet Union, a policy which it would continue to apply in order to further its own interest until it became self-confident enough to defy the Kremlin only a short time later.

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., p 10-12.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., p 10.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid, p 10-12.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, p 10-11.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p 13.

## **Moscow, above all**

Romania's choice to remain closely aligned with the Kremlin until the early 1960s was not only the best, tried and tested, strategy to serve its own national interest by consolidating its economic backbone and international profile; it was also the result of the circumstances within the Socialist camp. In the context of an exacerbating schism between Moscow and Beijing, and a renewed ideological conflict between the Kremlin and Belgrade, Gheorghiu-Dej thought it wise to take a step back from his mediating attempts through triangular diplomacy, discussed in the last chapter.

He chose instead to remain loyally, but cautiously, at Moscow side, while still seeking to retain the relationships he had built with the Kremlin's two Camp rivals. This tactic allowed Dej to maintain cordial and still very much functional – even if cooled – relations with both China and Yugoslavia, a feat not successfully achieved by any other Bloc country at the time. Simultaneously, it also allowed Romania to focus its efforts beyond the Camp, and to intensify and consolidate its relations with the leading non-aligned countries, by adhering closely to the Soviet Union's campaign to win their allegiance – a policy that will be discussed later in this chapter.

By 1959 the souring dynamic between Moscow and Beijing was beginning to shed its bilateral and behind-the-scenes constraints, becoming instead increasingly public, litigious and uneasy for the rest of the Camp. The Kremlin's discontent with Mao's ideological radicalism, economic experiments and an increasingly belligerent foreign policy was being met by the Chinese leader's uncompromising position and defiant rhetoric. The countries within the Socialist camp thus saw themselves drawn into a progressively polarizing conflict, in which taking sides seemed unavoidable.

Romania was no exception. Yet, unlike most of the Soviet satellites which rallied unwaveringly behind the Kremlin, Bucharest did not want to damage the hard-earned position it had built with a country whose "giant potential"<sup>463</sup> was of strategic importance to its own political and economic future. And, unlike Albania, who openly defied Moscow and

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<sup>463</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 230.

eventually fully aligned itself with Beijing, Romania simply could not entertain such a bold and extremely dangerous move at a time when its own economic and political aspirations were very much linked to and still dependent on the Kremlin's own agenda.

For as long as it could, Bucharest therefore once again walked the tightrope – this time, between the two socialist giants. Gheorghiu-Dej was indeed very keen on preserving the special rapport he had managed to build with China. “The leaders of the Romanian Workers Party are very well seen by the Chinese comrades, who have great esteem for their political attitude”, Pavel Yudin, the Soviet ambassador to Beijing was assuring his newly-posted Romanian counterpart in May 1959.<sup>464</sup> Bucharest's privileged position at the time seemed incontrovertible. “In this context”, Yudin continued, “[the Chinese] have appreciated more the leadership of [the Romanian] Party than that of other fraternal parties, like the Czechs or the Poles.”<sup>465</sup> Gheorghiu-Dej was not only pleased to receive such news, but he was very careful to ensure the tide would not turn. This, however, was becoming increasingly difficult to achieve.<sup>466</sup>

In October 1959, only a few months after the meeting of the Soviet and Romanian ambassadors in Beijing, the city was to host the grand celebration of China's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a people's republic. The Romanians attended the festivities, to which all Socialist countries sent high-level delegations, with some apprehension. Led by Emil Bodnaras, one of Dej's most trusted allies, the Romanian delegation had already made the customary stop in Moscow on its way to the Chinese capital, in order to be briefed and to discuss the event ahead.

At the dinner hosted by Alexei Kosygin, who would soon become the First Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, the Romanians had been briefed on the most burning topic affecting Sino-Soviet relations at the time: the escalating border conflict between China and India. None too pleased about Beijing's recent military incursions, the hosts had

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<sup>464</sup> Minutes of the conversation between comrade B. Zaharescu with comrade Yudin, the USSR ambassador to Peking, June 6 1959. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 21/1959, p 4.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid*, marginalia.

made it clear to Bodnaras that “the Chinese did not proceed well in heightening the tensions with India because of a territory that has no historical significance, no matter to whom it belongs, and which has absolutely no value, even if the Indians keep it.”<sup>467</sup>

In a context in which the Kremlin was experiencing deteriorating relations with Beijing, while at the same time seeking to strengthen its link to New Delhi, the Soviets were taking the dispute very seriously. The night before heading out to Beijing together with other Communist Party delegations, Kosygin had made it clear that the Kremlin wanted “to avoid all provocations and tensions regarding border issues and territorial disputes, in order to avoid any elements that could constitute a problem for the cold war.”<sup>468</sup> With this warning, it had become obvious that the China’s forthcoming 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary festivities would likely be more of a delicate diplomatic balancing act than an occasion for real celebrations for all involved.

Bodnaras was therefore not likely looking forward to his sojourn in China. Not only was Khrushchev expected to approach Mao about the thorny issue of the border conflict during the visit – and possibly thus contributing to heightening tensions – but the Romanian dignitary had also arrived in Beijing with the task of reporting on the development Mao’s Great Leap Forward campaign. His unflattering observations on China’s economic experiment, highlighted in a previous section of this chapter, added an extra layer of complexity to his position. Keen to maintain the most neutral position possible by not stepping on any toes, the Romanian delegation therefore chose to approach its obligatory but delicate visit to China with a ‘hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil’ strategy,

*...from the beginning we discussed the way in which we wanted to come across, how to talk, to be disciplined, to always be together. Other delegations didn’t take these measures, which didn’t go unnoticed by the Chinese, the same way they noticed the way we presented ourselves. Nobody was ever missing from our delegation, nobody*

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<sup>467</sup> Minutes of the CC of the RWP Politburo meeting on 9 October, 1959. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 37/1959, p 2.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

*came late to a meeting and no one spoke their opinions freely... The Chinese comrades noticed that our delegation was completely disciplined.*<sup>469</sup>

This tactic of feigning polite neutrality seemed to have worked. And it is likely that Gheorghiu-Dej would have preferred to continue applying it, thus keeping himself at a safe distance from the worsening Sino-Soviet dispute. This, however, was not meant to be.

In the summer of 1960, Bucharest saw itself once more at the center of international attention. This time, however, such attention was neither invited nor most likely appreciated. If in 1956 and 1958 Dej had been keen to host the two most important meetings in the context of the Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, and thus raise Romania's profile as a benevolent mediator among socialist heavyweights, in 1960 he saw himself inadvertently hosting the most publicly unprecedented and acerbic feud between the Soviets and the Chinese up to that point.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Romanian Workers Party in June of that year was meant to be a rather smooth and relatively uneventful affair. Dej had planned to use it as a launching pad for his much-anticipated six-year plan, and the 'visionary' fifteen-year economic perspective scheme. As usual, both plans were to be adopted with much ceremony, pomp, and an exuberant show of optimism about the country's future.

It still remains unclear, however, why Dej's Soviet comrades proposed to use the RWP's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress as an opportunity to also organize an all-member communist party meeting in Bucharest. Khrushchev's invitation to the participants had been hurriedly launched in the immediate aftermath of the abortive Paris Summit, where he infamously confronted US President Dwight Eisenhower about the U2 spy plane downed over Soviet territory, demanding his public apology before storming out of the meeting. Khrushchev, it seemed, wanted to gather all communist parties in Bucharest to discuss the events in Paris and to release a common declaration.<sup>470</sup> When the Chinese refused to participate, the Soviets

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>470</sup> Mihai Croitor, *Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (1956-1971)*, Second Edition (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2014), 186.

launched instead another invitation, this time supposedly to a preparatory meeting ahead of the Moscow Summit in November of that year. Beijing reluctantly agreed to take part.<sup>471</sup>

Despite its willingness to participate in the Bucharest meeting, however, the Chinese delegation still remained unclear about what its real purpose was. Suspecting a potential attack in the context of heightened tensions, Peng Zhen (who at the time was First Secretary of the Beijing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party) pointedly asked Dej the night before the meeting if the Chinese had been invited “as participants, or as the accused?”<sup>472</sup> The Romanian leader assured him that, even if some differences of opinion were to arise, he was convinced that these could be resolved by carrying out “camaradely talks.”<sup>473</sup> “What could I have told [the Chinese]?” confessed Dej three years later to Giancarlo Pajetta, of the Italian Communist Party, “[I told them] what came to my head, what I sincerely believed.”<sup>474</sup>

Unbeknownst to Gheorghiu-Dej, however, Khrushchev was to launch an open attack on the Chinese delegation, accusing the Beijing government of “irrational” policies and of “willing to start a war” by seeking out its “purely nationalist” interest in its conflicts with India and Taiwan.<sup>475</sup> In his lengthy and incendiary intervention, he also accused Beijing of being “dogmatic”, “sectarian” and “worse than Yugoslavia.” Doubtlessly feeling ambushed, the Chinese in turn accused Khrushchev of possessing a “patriarchal, arbitrary and tyrannical” attitude.<sup>476</sup> With this, the Sino-Soviet conflict reached its point of no return.

Khrushchev, it seemed, had purposely called the meeting in Bucharest in order to orchestrate a broader, multilateral attack on Beijing, by rallying the support of the Bloc

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Minutes of the talks which took place on 19 July, 1963 between Giancarlo Pajetta, member of the Secretariat of the Italian Communist Party and comrade Gheorghiu-Dej, First Secretary of the of the CC of the RCP. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 40/1963, p 11 op. cit. in Mihai Croitor, *Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (1956-1971)*, 187.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>475</sup> The Origin and Development of the Differences between the Leadership of the CPSU and Ourselves, September 6, 1963 in Mihai Croitor, *Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (1956-1971)*, 189.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.



members. With the exception of Albania, all other socialist members had joined the Kremlin's line to varying degrees of intensity in their attack against China.<sup>477</sup> This did not go unnoticed by Western observers,

*[Khrushchev's] object appears to have been to isolate the Chinese publicly by invoking the explicit support of the European satellite leaders for his views and thus to reassert Soviet leadership of the Bloc which must have seemed to him to be threatened by Chinese persistence in error.*<sup>478</sup>

By choosing to organize such a public and concerted attack in Bucharest, Khrushchev left Dej with no other option but to take sides, thus forcing the Romanian leader out of his apparently equidistant policy towards both Moscow and Beijing. Still reluctant to launch an all-out attack against Mao, Dej initially chose to pursue only a rather "lukewarm"<sup>479</sup> position against China by complaining that Beijing's decision to translate and distribute throughout Romania 4,500 copies of its latest ideological manifesto, *Long Live Leninism!*, had constituted a "breach of the RWP's internal affairs."<sup>480</sup>

Although it would later use stronger words to express its lack of appreciation towards Chinese policies, Bucharest still maintained a relatively docile position against Beijing over the next couple of years, comparative to its Socialist brethren. While it did not refrain from some token shows of 'disapproval', Bucharest still supported China's bid for UN membership by actively campaigning with Security Council members, such as Great

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<sup>477</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 236.

<sup>478</sup> Telegram, Foreign Office to British NATO representation, June 27, 1960. UKNA document FO 371/151924.

<sup>479</sup> Working Summary of the Chinese Embassy in Romania in 1960 and Working Plan in 1961 (1.4, 1961), p. 17. Archives of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Document 109-00963-02 in Yong Liu, "Romania and Sino-Soviet Relations Moving Towards Split, 1960-1965," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 1–2 (2014): 65–80.

<sup>480</sup> Speech of Comrade Gheorghiu-Dej at the meeting of the representatives of the communist and working parties in the socialist countries, which took place in Bucharest on 24 June, 1960. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 36/1960 in Dan Catanus, *Intre Beijing Si Moscova: Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (Between Beijing and Moscow: Romania and the Sino-Soviet Conflict)*, vol. I (Bucharest: National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, n.d.), 67.

Britain.<sup>481</sup> The temporary waning of Sino-Romanian relations in the early 1960s was nevertheless reflected in the volume of trade between the two countries – if in 1960 the value of trade reached \$595,200,000, by 1962 it had fallen by nearly two thirds, to \$129,000,000.<sup>482</sup>

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A similar – though far less dramatic – cooling-off between Romania and Yugoslavia followed the renewed ideological rift between Moscow and Belgrade after the Yugoslav Party Congress in 1958. While the relationship between Tito and Khrushchev returned to antagonism following their 3-year stint of cordiality, however, Gheorghiu-Dej tried (and, for the most part succeeded) to maintain the special relationship he had built with Tito while trying to mediate the previous dispute. He achieved this by engineering an admirably original method of shunning Belgrade’s ideological nonconformities, while at the same time maintaining good neighborly relations with his counterparts across the Danube: he separated Church and State; or rather, for Communist purposes, Party and State.

This strategy allowed him to stay close both to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. By isolating the dispute to the Party level, Dej could show ideological allegiance to Moscow (and by extension, to the rest of the Camp); and by maintaining state-level relations, he could continue economic, political and cultural cooperation with Belgrade. The circuitous reasoning behind such an acrobatic foreign policy is revealed by an internal memo of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, outlining Romania’s position.

While it confirmed that “in reality [the RWP’s] position in the matter of the Yugoslav revisionism does not differ ideologically from the rest of the Camp”, it also acknowledged the existence “of a certain nuance in the Yugoslav policies towards Romania.”<sup>483</sup> At a time

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<sup>481</sup> Minutes of the conversation with C. Barker, Minister Counsellor of the British embassy in Moscow, 20 March, 1961. AMAE, USSR/220/1961, p 62.

<sup>482</sup> Liu Yong, *Sino-Romanian Relations, 1950s-1960s* (Bucharest: National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2006), 133.

<sup>483</sup> Tito’s Trip to some Countries in Asia and Africa, p 163. AMAE, Special Dossiers, Jugoslavia 220-4.

when Belgrade's relations with the rest of the Camp were worsening, Romania was less attacked in the Yugoslav press than the rest of the Bloc members, and the Yugoslav diplomats in Bucharest continued to work in earnest towards maintaining and further developing the bilateral relations between the two countries.<sup>484</sup>

The preferential treatment that Romania was enjoying relative to the rest of the Camp was due, according to the memo, to Bucharest's own "principled, intransigent, but at the same time temperate and elastic policy" towards Yugoslavia.<sup>485</sup> This self-contradictory explanation betrays the very duplicitous nature of Dej's own intentions – that of wanting to appear ideologically 'principled and intransigent' in order to appease the Kremlin, while at the same time maintaining a conveniently 'temperate and elastic' policy towards Belgrade for Romania's own national interest.

Such blatant intentions were, of course, more tactfully clothed in the bureaucratic language of Romania's top diplomats, who outlined the country's policy towards its neighbor in a more elegant manner,

*...without straying from the Leninist principles of our foreign policy, and maintaining in the future the same firm and principled attitude towards the opportunistic foreign policy of the Yugoslav leaders, we consider at the same time necessary and useful to utilize the favorable situation in which Romania finds itself comparative to other socialist countries with regard to the existence of some objective possibilities to develop relations with Yugoslavia along state lines.*<sup>486</sup>

By maintaining the relationship with Belgrade 'along State lines', Romania could opportunistically continue to cultivate relations with a country that was strongly – and very conveniently – also linked to the West. This allowed Dej, therefore, to obtain from

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid, p 162.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

Yugoslavia much-needed Western licenses for certain industrial products in exchange for what had by now already become Romania's usual currency: oil products and know-how.<sup>487</sup>

By the early 1960s, Bucharest's relationship with Belgrade had therefore remained cordial, despite a significant decline in the ideological dimension of the bilateral relationship. At the end of his tenure in Belgrade, the Romanian ambassador to Yugoslavia reported that there was still a warm and amiable attitude towards Romania among the Yugoslav political elites, which he had met as part of his farewell protocol.<sup>488</sup> The same was noted among the Yugoslav population, which still generally showed "good sentiments towards the Romanian people."<sup>489</sup>

In the context of heightened tensions between Yugoslavia and the rest of the Camp, Bucharest had thus managed to maintain a quietly constructive relationship with its neighbor. Collaboration on the jointly run hydro-electric plant at the Iron Gates, on the Danube, carried on without disruption. Cultural exchanges between women's, youth and artists' groups continued. And several agreements on border collaboration, logistics and extradition were signed between the two governments.<sup>490</sup>

If cooperation along state lines allowed the two neighbors to maintain their regional cooperation largely undisturbed, however, their ideological differences became more visible in their respective approach to the Third World. In this context, the renewed ideological rift between Moscow and Belgrade, provided Gheorghiu-Dej not only with a unique opportunity to consolidate Romania's relationship with the non-aligned countries, but indeed to eventually gain a strategic presence. By aligning himself with Moscow's policies, yet again, the Romanian leader was thus able to develop a foreign policy strategy that eventually provided his country with a strategic advantage among the Eastern Bloc in the Third World space.

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> The issue of frontiers between the socialist countries (excerpts and speeches), 7 March, 1959. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 49/1959, pp 1-3.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>490</sup> Decrees of the CC of the RWP. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 71/1960.

## Romania and the Third World

Due to their divergences, by 1958 the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia began competing for influence in the Third World. A lengthy trip undertaken by Tito throughout Asia and Africa at the end of that year had convinced the Soviets that the Yugoslav leader was leading a campaign against their interests in this region. Veljko Micunovic, who had been the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow until just a few weeks prior, had accompanied Tito on his extensive Afro-Asian tour. As a result, the Kremlin decisively concluded that one of the main objectives of the trip had been “to combat the increasing influence of the USSR and China, and to therefore undermine the internal communist movement in these countries [that Tito is visiting].”<sup>491</sup>

This belief was further consolidated by the fact that, during his stay in Egypt, Tito had reportedly asked Gamal Abdel Nasser to act as an intermediary in Yugoslavia’s dispute with China. Although Nasser had chosen to distance himself from this issue by arguing that he did not consider himself “competent” in the matter, the Soviets expected Tito to approach both Jawaharlal Nehru and Sukarno with similar requests during his later stays in India and Indonesia.<sup>492</sup>

The Soviet Union and China certainly had their differences at the time, but they also had a common enemy within the Camp: Yugoslavia. Tito’s appeals to these nonaligned leaders to mediate his conflict with Mao was unpalatable to the Soviets, who became convinced that “Tito uses every opportunity to deceive the leaders of [the NAM] about the real situation between Yugoslavia and the socialist countries and in the end, the real objective of his trip is to denigrate the socialist camp.”<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup>Tito’s Trip to some Countries in Asia and Africa, p 163. AMAE, Special Dossiers, Jugoslavia 220-4., p. 185-6.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

Such a campaign struck at the very core of Soviet ideology, which, according to Odd Arne Westad, had already “reached a stage where the competition for influence in the Third World was an essential part of the existence of socialism.”<sup>494</sup> While Westad specifically refers to the Soviets’ ideological competition with the West in the Third World, the added conflict of interest with another fellow socialist camp member no doubt complicated the Kremlin’s position, leading to intensified efforts for influence. According to a key Moscow aide, ever since 1956, when Tito had met with Nehru and Nasser in Brioni, “the idea of having a whole set of Titos running the Third World [had not been] very palatable from the Kremlin’s perspective”.<sup>495</sup> In the context of exacerbating tensions between Moscow and Belgrade, by 1960 Khrushchev’s campaign in the Third World was therefore meant not only to combat capitalism, but to also assert the Soviet Union’s indisputable leadership position within the socialist camp – a position that both Tito and Mao by now very much disputed.

True to form, Romania followed suit. After Tito’s ‘defamatory’ campaign in Africa and Asia, Bucharest immediately launched a diplomatic counter-offensive in order to support the Kremlin’s bid for influence in the Third World,

*...taking into consideration the policy to undermine the relations between Afro-Asian and socialist countries carried out by the Yugoslav[s], it will be necessary that our diplomats carry out an intense effort to get closer to the Afro-Asian diplomats in order to counter Yugoslav actions. In this way our diplomats will not only unmask the slanders of the Yugoslavs against the socialist countries, but they will also unmask the pro-imperialist positions of the Yugoslav policies.*<sup>496</sup>

Moscow’s intensifying disputes with Belgrade and Beijing had therefore not only pushed Gheorghiu-Dej to take some cautionary steps back from both Yugoslavia and China – as

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<sup>494</sup> Op. cit. in Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>496</sup> Tito’s Trip to some Countries in Asia and Africa, p 158. AMAE, Special Dossiers, Jugoslavia 220-4.

discussed in the last section - but indeed also inspired him to align his efforts with the Kremlin's against them in the Third World.<sup>497</sup>

This policy was very well rewarded: by the beginning of the 1960s, Romania had become the only Bloc country outside the Soviet Union to establish strong links with nonaligned countries, and especially India and Indonesia. By using its expertise in oil extraction and processing as the main tool of diplomacy<sup>498</sup>, Bucharest positioned itself strategically within the economies of these newly decolonized countries, both of which were making efforts to develop their own national oil industries at the time.

Romania's privileged access in this process had not been coincidental. While both nonaligned countries wanted to fashion this key industry on the Soviet model, neither wanted to rely (or be seen to rely) too heavily on Moscow's help. Bucharest was therefore considered less threatening – it could provide expertise, technology and products without imposing ideological influence.

By piggybacking on Moscow's efforts to win over the non-aligned, Romania not only gained a competitive advantage in Asia, but also more notoriety in the West. In fact, by 1960 the Dej regime had also become the poster child for Khrushchev's peace offensive. The campaign, which the West viewed at the time as "détente, with a steady promotion of the world-wide progress of Soviet power and influence"<sup>499</sup>, had become the backbone of Khrushchev's approach to the rest of the world – both within the socialist camp, but especially beyond it.

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<sup>497</sup> At the time, Moscow was renewing its efforts to consolidate the relationship with New Delhi in the context of the Sino-Indian border conflict and were, in fact, providing military 'aid' towards this effort.

<sup>498</sup> Romania's strategy to leverage its oil expertise and technology to develop relations with the 'capitalist' countries in the Third World (the first and prioritised group of which being comprised of India, Burma, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Indonesia) were outlined in an undated internal memo of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Proposals for the development technological-scientific collaboration, undated. AMAE, Problem 212, India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of oil rigs in India, pp 187-188.

<sup>499</sup> Telegram from the British embassy in Paris to the Foreign Office, 8 June 1960. FO 371/151924.

By 1960 Gheorghiu-Dej was ready to assume a leading role in championing this policy. Politically, he was now both more self-confident and relatively more independent after having consolidated his regime and negotiated the Soviet troop withdrawal. Economically, Romania's national profile had already pivoted from an aid-receiving to an increasingly well off country, now able to provide help to needier countries in the Third World. And culturally, Romania was once again ready to re-assert its historic links to the West by emphasizing its unique Latin roots among the Bloc countries.

"Roumania's support for Khrushchev's version of peaceful co-existence is probably quite sincere" observed the British minister to Bucharest.<sup>500</sup> And, indeed, it seemed that this sincerity was ready to be expressed within a broader, more global context,

*... a limited relaxation of international tension suits [Bucharest]'s book very well. Not only does it enable Roumania to proceed undisturbed with her economic development plans, which are now increasingly dependent on trade with the West; it may also give her an opportunity to cut rather more of a figure in world affairs. Hitherto, her economic and political weakness had set her narrow limits to her international pretensions: now, however, she has gone some way to solve her economic difficulties, and her internal political problems are at any rate quiescent. This year, there were increasing indications, of which we are likely to see more in the future, that Roumania believes that her position as the only member of the Bloc with Latin origins and traditions qualifies her to play a special role in the communist "peace offensive."*<sup>501</sup>

Romania made its world debut as a more assertive player on the international stage at the UN General Assembly in the fall of 1960. The moment had been carefully chosen – the organization's fifteenth anniversary that year was also expected to become a platform for

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<sup>500</sup> Roumania: Annual Review (1960). Despatch no 139 S from David Swalton, British Legation, Bucharest, to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 29 December 1960, p. 4. UKNA document FO 371/159501.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.



Third World affirmation. Not only were the calls for decolonization becoming increasingly vociferous, but the leaders of the non-aligned countries were also expected to push their agenda for cooperation and development outside the bipolar dynamic more boldly. For Khrushchev, this was the perfect opportunity to deploy a renewed and much stronger peace offensive in order to expand Soviet leadership and global influence. And for Gheorghiu-Dej, it was the right moment to shine in the international spotlight by playing a key supporting role in this endeavor.

The two leaders' actions had been most likely concerted and planned long before arriving in New York. Dej, who now seemed to be particularly well in favor with Khrushchev, had been invited by the Soviet leader to travel with him across the Atlantic on his ship, the *Baltika* – an honor not bestowed onto many. The Romanian dictator had also been Khrushchev's special guest at his Glen Cove mansion throughout the course of his stay in New York.<sup>502</sup> These symbolic, yet telling signs of preferential treatment had probably less to do with a genuine friendship between the two, and more with the fact that Dej had by now become the most strategically placed Bloc leader to champion the Kremlin's peace offensive campaign. He was therefore now a leader that increasingly needed to be courted, not strong-armed by the Kremlin.

Dej did not disappoint in his "important mission in the Soviet peace campaign."<sup>503</sup> Throughout the two-week long session, Romania reached out to the sensibilities of the neutral and the non-aligned members of the UN by sponsoring two initiatives within the General Assembly. While neither was expected to be successful, they were both meant to shame their capitalist opponents by exposing their hypocrisy and therefore prove the merits of socialist benevolence.

The first resolution sponsored by Romania was a rehash of Stoica's 1957 plan for the Balkan Pact, which had by now become nearly defunct. Its new and improved version, however, went far beyond the idea of a neutral zone of cooperation between socialist and capitalist

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<sup>502</sup> "Anti-War Theme Supported: Satellites Buck Peking View", *Christian Science Monitor*, September 18, 1960.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*

countries in Southeastern Europe: it also stressed the need for the region to become a denuclearized zone.

Gheorghiu-Dej made significant efforts to promote his proposal for the “Balkan zone of peace” to the global audience.<sup>504</sup> The plan, however, was more of a public relations maneuver than a genuine scheme for regional cooperation. As a fellow socialist country under the patronage of the Kremlin Bulgaria was, naturally, on board with such an idea. It was unlikely, however, that the rest of the countries in the Balkan region would have met it with enthusiasm. While Yugoslavia had approved and championed the plan’s earlier incarnation a few years prior, this time it had only responded with a polite acknowledgement. Greece and Turkey, with whom relations were already strained, if not antagonistic, were likely not even considering its viability.<sup>505</sup>

“[T]he communist plans for peace, even when they are limited to a certain region, only serve the Soviet expansionist interest” wrote the Greek conservative newspaper *Kathimerini*.<sup>506</sup> In a country where the Communist Party was still illegal, Dej’s proposal was as good as dead. It was precisely this unwillingness to participate, however, that Khrushchev – via Dej – had wanted to exploit. By exposing the ‘unpeaceful’ nature of the capitalist countries to a global population that had become highly sensitive and nervous about the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, the two leaders were seeking to gain public support at the cost of political achievement. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Dej had made the gambit clear: Khrushchev had already graciously given his approval for the Warsaw Pact countries in the region – Romania and Bulgaria – to join the Pact; he now expected NATO to do the same for Greece and Turkey.<sup>507</sup>

Romania’s recent improvement of relations with the West, which will be discussed in the next chapter, was an advantage that both Bucharest and Moscow were perhaps counting on for the promotion of this initiative. “The Soviets probably assume that Romania, because of

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<sup>504</sup> “Rumanian Renews His Bid for a Balkan Entente” in the *New York Times*, 1 October 1960.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> “Greece and UN” in *Kathimerini*, 28 September, 1960. Romanian-language synopsis of article in ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 49/1960.

<sup>507</sup> “Rumanian Renews His Bid for a Balkan Entente” in the *New York Times*, 1 October 1960.

its recent financial settlement with the United States, will meet in this country with a certain amount of consideration,” commented the Western media.<sup>508</sup> “The Soviets are also known to bank on Romania’s long and intimate cultural ties with France and Italy and its trade relations with West Germany.”<sup>509</sup> While Bucharest may have been very well placed to promote the merits of this initiative to the West, it was highly unlikely they would have been successful. Instead, it was the neutral countries in Europe and the non-aligned states in Asia and Africa that Romania wanted most likely to attract by proposing this resolution.

“The idea apparently is to give a new boost to the coexistence slogan, by proposing that it should be tried out in Europe where capitalist and socialist states are compelled by geography to maintain neighborly relations,” proposed one American newspaper.<sup>510</sup> Indeed, such an idea would have garnered more support not only among the neutral countries in Europe, on which Romania was counting for techno-scientific support, but also among the non-aligned, who had been the original proponents of peaceful co-existence.

The bid to win the hearts and minds of this group as a conjoined entity was not coincidental. The tsunami of decolonization rising at the turn of the decade, which engendered a robust inclination towards non-alignment for the newly-independent states, brought along with it a sudden and perhaps strange sense of kinship between the neutral countries of Western Europe and the non-aligned states of Asia and Africa.<sup>511</sup> Their shared position, based on the principle of political detachment from the bipolar conflict, converted them into natural allies.

This bond was not only tacit or symbolic; but, indeed, would see its loudest expression in Nehru’s proposal to invite the European neutrals to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at its founding conference in Belgrade in 1961.<sup>512</sup> This political link created a natural bridge

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<sup>508</sup> “Anti-War Theme Supported: Satellites Buck Peking View”, *Christian Science Monitor*, September 18, 1960.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>511</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

<sup>512</sup> Nehru’s proposal, made at the preparatory meeting in Cairo in the summer of 1961 between the NAM’s leaders, was rejected on unclear grounds. The invitation of the neutral

for the Soviet Union's foreign policy at the time, which sought on the one hand to intensify its campaign of attracting non-aligned countries into its sphere of influence, while on the other hand to embolden its efforts for cooperation with the Scandinavian neutrals (discussed earlier in this chapter). Romania's UN bid for a European coexistence plan, no matter how unfeasible given the political realities at the time, was therefore meant more as a seduction tactic for socialist influence.

The second resolution proposed by Romania at the 1960 UN General Assembly session called for international cooperation in developing the oil industries of underdeveloped countries. This very calculated initiative was launched with two clear objectives. The first was to double as a public relations tactic for promoting Romania's profile as an oil producing country (and therefore clearly in the position to sponsor such a proposal). During his stay in New York, Gheorghiu-Dej was in fact very keen on championing his country's brand as an independent oil producer and expert. In an interview conducted by the New York Times, the Romanian leader was keen to highlight this to the newspaper's global audience,

*Romania has a lot of resources and it produces independently its own machinery and equipment for the oil industry. What is interesting and very important for the development of the country's economy? That we don't depend on imports in this respective, we don't depend on the market... We [have the capacity] to completely cover the [need] of the extractive industry... as well as the equipment necessary for oil processing.*<sup>513</sup>

Apart from being a thinly-veiled promotional stratagem, however, Romania's resolution calling for international help in developing the oil sectors of the underdeveloped countries

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European countries to join the NAM at its foundation in Belgrade that year therefore was never officially extended. Report from Romanian embassy staff member Gheorghe Stoian in Moscow after his meeting with Firiubin, an adjunct of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, regarding the visit of C Popovich in the USSR, on 14 august, 1961 in AMAE/URSS/220/1961, pages unnumbered.

<sup>513</sup> "Rumanian Renews His Bid for a Balkan Entente" in the *New York Times*, 1 October 1960.

had a far darker objective: to expose and embarrass the Western colonial powers.<sup>514</sup> Indeed, the resolution was blocked by fierce interventions from the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands<sup>515</sup> – all of three of which still had interests strongly tied to oil monopolies across the Third World.

While Romania's initiative failed institutionally, it succeeded politically. At the same time that the resolution was being debated within the General Assembly in New York, Romania was conveniently signing an agreement for technical collaboration with Indonesia, intended to provide the southeast Asian country with oil extraction expertise and equipment.<sup>516</sup> Chairul Saleh, the Indonesian Minister of Industry, was the first to applaud and support Bucharest's initiative at the UN.<sup>517</sup>

With this strategic move, Romania earned a key role in the development of Indonesia's incipient national oil industry. While it was extremely rich in resources, the country was in dire need of reviving its extraction capacity after years of colonial exploitation and war devastation had left it, quite literally, in ruins.<sup>518</sup>

Jakarta's request for expertise from Bucharest was motivated by three factors. First, Indonesia wanted to avoid getting any of the big powers involved, and especially the capitalist countries after having nationalized all oil properties from Dutch BPM.<sup>519</sup> Also, asking the USSR "would have led to tensions with the UK and the US."<sup>520</sup> Second, Romania

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<sup>514</sup> A. Glenn Mower, "The Sponsorship of Proposals in the United Nations General Assembly," *The Western Political Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1962): 664, doi:10.2307/445544.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 665.

<sup>516</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 49/1960.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>518</sup> Report regarding the experts requested by the Indonesian Government from the RPR, 8 August, 1960. AMAE, Special Dossiers, Indonezia 212/1959, Regarding the techno-scientific collaboration between Romania and Indonesia (sending Romanian oil experts to Indonesia and the Romanian-Indonesian agreement for technical assistance).

<sup>519</sup> Report concerning the issue of technical assistance in the oil sector, requested by the Indonesian government (internal, undated). AMAE, Special Dossiers, Indonezia 212/1959, Regarding the techno-scientific collaboration between Romania and Indonesia (sending Romanian oil experts to Indonesia and the Romanian-Indonesian agreement for technical assistance).

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*

had already built in the Third World a trusted brand in the field of oil expertise.<sup>521</sup> Romania's contribution to the development of India's oil sector – which will be detailed in the following section – was considered a successful pilot program in that regard. Last, but not least, based on this very experience of the Indian government, the Indonesians upheld “the conviction that the Romanian experts will truly work in the national interest of Indonesia.”<sup>522</sup> For work in such a strategic industry, this vote of confidence was vital. “The fact that the Indonesian government has asked Romania for experts means that our oil technique enjoys a good appreciation in the world,” stated an internal policy paper of the Romanian government.<sup>523</sup> “[It] should make us proud to help the Indonesians.”<sup>524</sup>

By the end of 1960, Romania had therefore made its first mark on international politics. Both initiatives that it had launched at the UN had been politically successful: they not only raised Romania's international profile, but they also contributed to making the Kremlin's peace offensive more appealing to the Third World. In so doing, Romania was therefore able to forge stronger but nonetheless significant partnerships with neutral and nonaligned countries. In a global political context dominated by the big power dynamic, Bucharest was clearly discovering the potential of junior partnerships and the leverage power that ‘peripheral’ politics could carry. As the case study on India, below, clearly illustrates, it was in the Third World that a small but politically adept country like Romania could most efficiently impact the larger bipolar dynamic.

### **India: a case study**

If Romania's presence in India started off somewhat haphazardly in the early 1950s, by the end of the decade Bucharest had already earned itself a strategic, though somewhat controversial, position as a key ally in Delhi's efforts to develop its incipient, state-owned oil

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Report regarding the experts requested by the Indonesian Government from the RPR, 8 August, 1960. AMAE, Special Dossiers, Indonezia 212/1959, Regarding the techno-scientific collaboration between Romania and Indonesia (sending Romanian oil experts to Indonesia and the Romanian-Indonesian agreement for technical assistance).

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

industry. The process, fraught with logistical complications, political interference and foreign obstruction, had not been easy; but it had been mitigated in part by the Romanians' sincere belief that they were championing the cause of socialism in the Third World, and in part by the drive to expand the markets for Romania's oil products. Where the Indians would encounter internal difficulties, the Romanians would meet them with (perhaps an almost naïve) determination to provide more and perform better. This often difficult, yet overall mutually beneficial partnership helped build the foundations for one of India's most successful state-owned ventures. In 1955 the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) had had a modest birth as a fledgling directorate within India's Ministry of Natural Resources and Scientific Research; however, by 2007 it had become the country's biggest oil and gas company, ranking among Forbes' top 300 Global 2000 list.<sup>525</sup>

Despite this eventual success, however, the relationship between India and Romania had not had a very promising beginning. Attempting to establish a diplomatic mission in New Delhi in 1951, the Romanians had been promptly turned down by the Indian government.<sup>526</sup> The urban infrastructure of the capital was still so underdeveloped, that the Indian authorities simply could not provide adequate living facilities for the foreign diplomatic staff.<sup>527</sup>

It was precisely India's dire economic situation, however, that soon brought the two countries together. Only a year later, the Romanian missions in both Teheran and Rome were approached by Indian diplomats requesting wheat and other foodstuffs to help alleviate a national food shortage.<sup>528</sup> This demand provided Bucharest with a perfect opportunity to relaunch its request to open a legation in Delhi, and to therefore finally establish Romanian a presence in southern Asia.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Tanvi Madan, "India's ONGC: Balancing Different Roles, Different Goals" (The Changing Role of National Oil Companies in International Oil Markets, Japan Petroleum Center, Rice University: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, 2007), 1.

<sup>526</sup> Note (internal), 17 October, 1952. AMAE, Special Dossiers, India, 2/212 (Authorization by the Indian government for Indian firms to restart commercial relations with Romania).

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

By 1952, Bucharest was already aware of the “difficult challenges” that Nehru’s government had had to face since his country’s independence in 1947.<sup>530</sup> The “popular masses” had initially hoped that he would lead “a real policy of liberation from under the English colonial yoke”, according to the Romanians, and had looked “with sympathy at the path led by the Chinese government.”<sup>531</sup> Much to their disappointment, however, Nehru ultimately turned out to represent “the elites” and “the interests of the English and American imperialists.”<sup>532</sup> It was therefore little wonder for Bucharest that five years after independence, Nehru’s government could not meet the needs of the population. The economy was still very much “at the hands of foreign monopolies, and especially the British, which [have] arrested the development of the Indian industry and agriculture.”<sup>533</sup>

As a result, the outlook for India’s future was rather bleak from the Romanian perspective,

*...alongside an acute class struggle, the Nehru government has to cope with a bad economic situation, which has been officially recognized. The alimentary issue has yet to receive a practical solution from the Nehru government.*<sup>534</sup>

Luckily for New Delhi, Romania considered itself ready, able and willing to help alleviate India’s ‘alimentary issue’ by providing 10,000 tons of the requested wheat, alongside other cereals.<sup>535</sup> Although the Indian government considered such amount to be rather “small for the needs of India”, it did not refuse it, providing Romania with cotton, leather and condiments in return.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Note, undated (internal). AMAE, Special Dossiers, India, 2/212 (Authorization by the Indian government for Indian firms to restart commercial relations with Romania).

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> Note on the economic relations between the RPR and India (Internal), 29 November, 1952, p1. AMAE, Special Dossiers, India, 2/212 (Authorization by the Indian government for Indian firms to restart commercial relations with Romania).

<sup>536</sup> Ibid, p2.



On this modest exchange,<sup>537</sup> Bucharest saw itself building enough political capital to gain a strategic foothold on the subcontinent,

*The presence of a diplomatic mission in Delhi... would constitute support for the Indian democratic forces by popularizing our regime, and could lead to more advantageous economic ties for the RPR. At the same time, the presence of our diplomats [in India], would represent a real and precise source of information about the events across the Southeast Asian space.*<sup>538</sup>

Although the Romanian legation in New Delhi was opened shortly thereafter, Bucharest's relationship with the Indian government remained relatively feeble until the mid-1950s. This was due, on the one hand, to Romania's own limited scope of operation before Stalin's death in 1953; and on the other hand to India's foreign policy priorities, the top list of which did not really include the strengthening of ties with the socialist countries of Eastern Europe at the time.<sup>539</sup> Exchanges between Bucharest and New Delhi were thus modestly constrained to negligible amounts of trade on both sides, as the Romanian government's only avenue to exert some influence in India was through ties with the United Left Front, the Communist party which at the time boasted 27 deputies in the Indian parliament.<sup>540</sup>

This state of affairs dramatically changed in 1955, however, when India's budding ambitions to establish a state-owned oil industry started to gain impetus. Steering this difficult and controversial process was K.D. Malaviya, the country's Natural Resources Minister. Having

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<sup>537</sup> As soon as the Indian diplomats approached the Romanian Mission to Teheran, an internal note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed to answer positively to any commercial request made by the Indian government, even if it will not be necessarily finalized, in order to use the opportunity to send a group of commercial agents to India and "to approach the topic, with all necessary prudence, of opening a diplomatic mission" in India. Note (internal), undated. AMAE, Special Dossiers, India, 2/212 (Authorization by the Indian government for Indian firms to restart commercial relations with Romania).

<sup>538</sup> Note (internal), 17 October, 1952. AMAE, Special Dossiers, India, 2/212 (Authorization by the Indian government for Indian firms to restart commercial relations with Romania).

<sup>539</sup> These exchanges started predominantly on the basis of trade after the Moscow Economic conference. In *Ibid.*

<sup>540</sup> Note, undated (internal). AMAE, Special Dossiers, India, 2/212 (Authorization by the Indian government for Indian firms to restart commercial relations with Romania).

been recruited into politics by Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's father, at a very young age, Malaviya's history with the Prime Minister ran deep, and their relationship was close.<sup>541</sup> At the time of his death in 1981, Malaviya was still considered "one of the most controversial figures" of the post-independence period for his role in laying the foundations of India's industrialization.<sup>542</sup>

His formal education in chemical engineering had inspired in Malaviya "the commitment to India's scientific and technological progress"<sup>543</sup>; and his background in nationalist and left-leaning politics had inspired his drive to develop the country's state-owned oil industry as a means to foster India's self-sufficiency from foreign monopolies.<sup>544</sup> Dubbed by some as a 'Bolshevik' for his initiative, he had created the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation as a small directorate within his Ministry after facing a fierce opposition from other members of the government.<sup>545</sup> In a country where the political elites still had interests closely tied to the colonial-era monopolies, such feat had been achieved with great difficulty.

It was only after India's neighbor and rival, Pakistan, joined SEATO in 1954 - therefore acquiring additional strength and legitimacy within the framework of this military alliance - that Malaviya was finally able to win over the defense committee within India's government.<sup>546</sup> His argument that a nationally-owned oil supply was critical to India's military in case of an attack not only won him enough support and funding to set up the ONGC,<sup>547</sup> but in fact transformed its mission to develop India's state-owned oil industry into a national defense priority, despite continued internal opposition and foreign pressure.

As soon as the ONGC was established in 1955, Malaviya set out to develop the modest directorate under his authority at an almost frantic pace. Paradoxically, however, his driving

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<sup>541</sup> Ganesh Shukla, "K.D. Malaviya: An Indian National-Builder," *Executive Intelligence Review*, July 7, 1981.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>544</sup> Tanvi Madan, "India's ONGC: Balancing Different Roles, Different Goals," 13.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*

quest for India's self-sufficiency soon impelled him to seek help from abroad.<sup>548</sup> For all its honorable ambitions, the fact remained that the ONGC still sorely lacked both the know-how and technology needed for such an ambitious project. In order to develop a national oil industry from the ground up (quite literally), Malaviya needed expert geologists and engineers for prospecting the right areas in order to find oil; he needed specialized drills suited to these regions' highly difficult terrain in order to extract it; and he needed a whole range of technical equipment and machinery in order to refine it. Although such know-how and technology was already well set up in India, it belonged exclusively to the Dutch-British and American monopolies already operating there - and they were naturally reluctant to share their piece of a very profitable pie with the Indian government.<sup>549</sup>

Within a few short months of setting up the ONGC, Malaviya unofficially reached out to Bucharest, explaining that he intended to nationalize oil extraction and, as a result, he could not count on the capitalist countries for help. He therefore asked the Romanians, quite bluntly - even if informally - what kind of support they could provide.<sup>550</sup>

The Romanian government immediately recognized the opportunity to fend off capitalism in India despite the country's weakness as a commercial partner. At the time, New Delhi's deficit of several billion rupees meant that Malaviya could only buy oil products from Romania against very long-term loans, of up to ten years.<sup>551</sup> In addition, India's market was so weak, that it could not even offer finished products in exchange. And although Romania was willing to accept the only goods available – raw materials, such as cotton and textiles –

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<sup>548</sup> Canada, France, Italy and West Germany also participated in Indian oil sector projects. Romania was the only socialist country, aside from the Soviet Union, to contribute. *Ibid*, p 14.

<sup>549</sup> Telegram from the Romanian Legation in New Delhi to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 June 1955. AMAE, Problem 212, Dossier India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of some oil refineries in India – sending specialists for drilling (1955-1960), pp 99-100.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>551</sup> Note verbale, non-dated (internal), regarding India's political and economic situation, Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. AMAE, Problem 212, Dossier India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of some oil refineries in India – sending specialists for drilling (1955-1960)

their export was in itself problematic, as the foreign oil and other monopolies in India controlled the country's ports.<sup>552</sup>

For Bucharest, however, the issue of contributing to the development of India's national oil industry was less about a profitable business, and more about the opportunity to promote socialism in the post-colonial space. The matter was also not only strategic, but very urgent. The entire oil industry in India was under the control of only three companies - two Anglo-American (Caltex and Standard Vacuum) and one Anglo-Dutch (Burmah Shell). In the case of an attack from Pakistan – a defense concern that was very much on the minds of India's ruling elites at the time, regardless of political orientation – the country's army would have been placed in the uncomfortable and quite vulnerable position of asking the president of Burmah Shell to provide fuel for a national defense emergency.<sup>553</sup> Keen to avoid such an undesirable situation, the right of center government members had already reached out to the UK, US and West Germany for credits to develop a national oil industry. Luckily for the Romanians, these negotiations were still stalling due to payment and other conditions that the Indian government could not fulfill.<sup>554</sup>

This context provided Bucharest with a perfect opportunity to gain a strategic advantage on the Indian oil market, though it had to do it fast and it had to do it well. For the Romanian government, the stakes went far beyond establishing economic ties with New Delhi. Indeed, in a highly secret telegram sent by the Romanian legation in New Delhi to Bucharest, Malaviya's request was considered within the broader context of the Cold War dynamic,

*examining [this request] we have to consider the fact that, by providing India with help in developing its own oil industry, we would contribute to the weakening of the economic influence of the imperialists on India, to reducing the means of imperialist pressure on India, and to the creation of an increasingly large basis for an*

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<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

*independent Indian policy; a policy that can be more compatible with the defense of peace and of international security.*<sup>555</sup>

Capitalizing on their already established expertise in the oil industry, the Romanians rose to the occasion. Within two months of Malaviya's initiative, the first group of Indian oil experts were sent to Bucharest at his special special request.<sup>556</sup> A year later, in the summer of 1956, a parliamentary delegation headed by Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Lower House), arrived in Bucharest to officially discuss cooperation on oil extraction. Although the visit was partially overshadowed by Tito's simultaneous trip to the Romanian capital<sup>557</sup>, it was nevertheless extremely significant for Indo-Romanian relations, as it sealed the deal for the first Romanian oil project in India.

In his farewell speech before returning to the subcontinent, Ayyangar emphasized the importance of small-country cooperation,

*Romania recovered fast after the war, having become an advanced country with regards to industry, especially the oil sector. Romania is helping us develop our oil industry. India can count on the help given by a small country like Romania, in contrast with the bigger countries, which are arrogant with respect to providing aid. It is truly remarkable to see how a drill can be raised in just a few moments.*<sup>558</sup>

The drill to which Ayyangar was referring was a showroom replica of the one that would be brought only a few months later by a team of Romanian experts to Jawalamukhi (in current day Himchal Pradesh, northern India).

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<sup>555</sup> Telegram from the Romanian Legation in New Delhi to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 June 1955. AMAE, Problem 212, Dossier India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of some oil refineries in India – sending specialists for drilling (1955-1960), pp 99-100.

<sup>556</sup> Telegram from the Romanian Legation in New Delhi to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 August 1955. Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Telegram from the British Legation in Bucharest to S. Lloyd, Foreign Office, 2 July, 1956. UKNA document FO 371/122741.

<sup>558</sup> Speech of Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, President of the the Lok Sabha at the farewell dinner offered in his honor. AMAE, Problem 220, India 4 (1957-1959) Concerning the visit of the Indian parliamentary delegation to the RPR, 1957-1960, p 58.

A not insignificant amount of pressure rested on the shoulders of the small team of specialists, none of whom had likely ever set foot outside Romania. Their task to install and operate the first Romanian oil drill in India was seen by their government as nothing less than a matter of national prestige; by the Soviets as a contribution to the socialist cause against capitalist influence in the Third World; and by K. D. Malaviya as a potentially precarious investment in a vital national project that was already being met with substantial internal opposition.

The drill's inauguration on 19 April, 1957 was a veritable reflection of the project's meaning to all involved. Presiding over the event was none other than Malaviya himself, who had travelled the difficult 500 km journey from the capital in order to celebrate this small success for India's national economy. "The character of the ceremony was that of a great victory for internal policy" reported to Bucharest the Romanian minister in India.<sup>559</sup> Still very much keen on promoting his project's cause for self-sufficiency, Malaviya had "avoided giving [the event] the character of an Indo-Romanian or Indo-Soviet celebration."<sup>560</sup> Although he was reluctant to publicly "insist on [the Romanians'] presence", the Indian Minister had "wanted at the same time to show gratefulness."<sup>561</sup> Malaviya, who had been "happy and emotional" throughout the festivities, gave the Romanian minister "a very emotional show of sympathy" once the drill engine was started.<sup>562</sup> The political significance of this first Romanian oil drill in India was undoubtedly considerable; it therefore had to succeed, and fast.

Unforeseen logistical difficulties, however, brought the project dangerously close to failure – and, by extension, to a potentially disastrous political situation. The drill that the Romanians had brought and installed in Jawalamukhi was a standard-issue piece of

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<sup>559</sup> Telegram from the Romanian Legation in New Delhi to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 April 1957. AMAE, Problem 212, Dossier India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of some oil refineries in India – sending specialists for drilling (1955-1960), pages unnumbered.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*

equipment meant for 'normal' soil, and therefore ill-suited to the exceptionally hard and rocky layers of the western Himalayas. Although the drill was performing well under "extremely difficult" conditions thanks to the maintenance and expertise of the Romanian team, it was advancing very slowly.<sup>563</sup> After nearly three months, the team had only managed to drill 638 meters<sup>564</sup> of the 3,500 needed, when under 'normal' circumstances it would have drilled at a rate of 100 meters per day. At such a slow pace, the Romanians, led by one Ion Petcu, could now only expect to complete the drilling in a staggering 14-16 month timeframe.<sup>565</sup>

This state of affairs was alarming not only to the ONGC, whose political survival depended in part on this project, but also to the Soviets, who at the time were carrying out similar extraction campaigns for the greater cause of Indian economic independence. The problem of a slow drill, no matter how understandable it might have been to the field experts, was in fact unacceptable to the politicians. The right of center-leaning members of parliament, who were still conducting negotiations with the UK, US and West Germany, were now beginning to use the slow pace of the Romanian-led project as an argument in their favor. The Soviets intervened, prompted perhaps by Malaviya himself, in order to ensure that the Romanians understood the gravity of the problem.

"It is necessary for something to be done because there have already been some comments made in the [Indian] parliament regarding the rhythm of the drilling in Jawalamukhi" intimated the Soviet Economic Counsellor to his Romanian counterpart in New Delhi.<sup>566</sup> "Those who are commenting are not experts in the matter, but this problem being raised will only fuel the argument of our enemies, even if we are not responsible for the slow

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<sup>563</sup> Telegram from the Romanian Legation in New Delhi to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 July 1957. Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid

<sup>565</sup> Minutes of the conversation between A. Bezarian, of the Romanian Legation in New Delhi with Comrade Sergheev, Economic Counsellor at the USSR Embassy in New Delhi, 20 June 1957. Ibid

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

drilling” the Soviet diplomat explained.<sup>567</sup> The political stakes of the project were extremely high, he continued,

*Minister Malaviya, whom I saw recently, has expressed his concern in this matter. Malaviya is a patriot, but he is surrounded by others who can hardly wait for reasons to obstruct us<sup>568</sup> in order to begin working with the British, the Americans or the West Germans. [They] can offer oil equipment at very advantageous prices in order to penetrate the market.<sup>569</sup>*

Indeed, for those few months in 1957, it seemed like the elusive the forces of socialism and capitalism had chosen Jawalamukhi, an otherwise sleepy community of at the foothills of the Himalayas, to engage in mortal combat. The Romanians understood the risk, corrected the situation best they could, and delivered results sooner than anticipated.<sup>570</sup> Their performance had ultimately been so impressive, that Nehru himself made it a point to praise the team of experts. “My colleague Malavyia informed me about the Romanian technicians, who are working [in Jawalamukhi] and who are very enthusiastic and hardworking”, commented the Prime Minister to the Romanian authorities.<sup>571</sup>

Malaviya had in fact been so impressed by the Romanian team, that he decided to shift the center of gravity with respect to the expertise and technology received by the ONGC from the Soviets, to the Romanians. This “special interest” to develop stronger ties with Romania was certainly based on the experience with the Jawalamukhi drill; but only partially.<sup>572</sup> The tactic of shifting emphasis from Moscow to Bucharest also played into a far broader and more complex political balancing act, much to the Romanians’ advantage. While “certain

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Author’s note on translation: the Romanian idiom used in the report, “*sa ne puie bete in roate*”, would literally translate to “putting sticks in our tires”. It was translated instead as “to obstruct”, which is perhaps the nearest English equivalent, for the sake of fluency.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> Although the records of this process are missing from the available documents, it is assumed that somehow the situation was corrected and on time, prompting Nehru to congratulate the efforts.

<sup>571</sup> Letter from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry for the Oil and Chemical Industries, Bucharest, 21 May, 1958. Ibid, p.125.

<sup>572</sup> Report on the visit of Titus Cristureanu to India, 15 May, 1958. Ibid, p.150-161.



leaders” in New Delhi at the time wanted to develop the Indian economy without British or American capital, other “reactionary Indian circles” were “making a big deal” about the intensity of the commercial exchanges between India and the USSR, which had reportedly risen by 8% in 1957.<sup>573</sup>

Once again, Romania was conveniently able to position itself as a non-threatening middle ground and reliable intermediary. The country’s small size, socialist profile and emergent independent foreign policy (reflected by an incipient, yet promising relationship with the neutrals and the West) was enough to appease both spectrums of the Indian political scene. Not wanting to be seen leaning “too much towards the USSR”<sup>574</sup>, yet insisting on developing a Soviet-model oil industry, Malaviya chose Romania as India’s main partner within the eastern European Bloc at the expense of a lowered exchange with Moscow.<sup>575</sup>

His decision was translated into policy almost overnight. By January 1958, Malaviya presented Bucharest with a staggering list of things he urgently needed to further develop his country’s national oil infrastructure: two refineries (one with a 750,000-ton capacity for Assam, and another of 2 million-ton capacity for Bihar); oil tanks for fluvial transport; specialized pipes for the construction of a national pipeline; and 2-3 additional drilling facilities. To this ambitious demand, he also added an assorted list of oil products, ranging from diesel fuel (300,000 tons/year) to kerosene (1million tons/year).<sup>576</sup>

New Delhi’s policy to designate Romania as its main provider of oil products, technology and know-how in Eastern Europe had not been intended to slight the Kremlin; in fact, the arrangement had been designed with the knowledge and complicity of Moscow. Fully aware that Romania’s production capacity could not possibly fulfill India’s disproportionate demands, Malaviya had in fact made it perfectly clear to Bucharest he did

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<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Tanvi Madan, “India’s ONGC: Balancing Different Roles, Different Goals,” 22.

<sup>576</sup> Telegram from Romanian legation in New Delhi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, January 15, 1958. AMAE, Problem 212, Dossier India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of some oil refineries in India – sending specialists for drilling (1955-1960).

“not really care if you buy from the Soviets the products that you will provide [India] with”.<sup>577</sup> Well versed in the role of intermediary, and eager to provide India with “this important economic help,” the Romanian government therefore considered making these arrangements as a matter of “urgent importance.”<sup>578</sup>

Bucharest’s contribution to the development of India’s oil national industry therefore evolved on two separate - but equally important - dimensions. First, Romania became India’s main channel for technology and equipment in the Eastern Bloc. Either directly or as a third party, it thus provided India with a critical mass in laying the foundations for its state-owned oil production. Second, it facilitated a substantial amount of know-how transfer. With every oil extracting or refining facility that Romania installed in India, a small army of experts would be deployed not only to manage its set-up, but also to train local staff on operations and maintenance. Over the next few years, a visiting traineeship program was also set up in Romania for the growing number of Indian experts who now needed to receive further qualifications and higher specialization.

By 1959, on the eve of the mass decolonization process in Africa, the stakes for ideological influence and market penetration had become so high, that Bucharest viewed its relationship with Delhi not only as a campaign against capitalism on the subcontinent, but indeed as a sort of ‘pilot program’ for the entire Third World,

*Maintaining our prestige in the field of oil-extraction machinery, and of the high qualifications of Romanian experts, not only for the future development of our relations with India, but also with the other countries of Asia and Africa, in the current political climate, is of very high importance.*<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Report on the visit of Titus Cristureanu to India, 15 May, 1958. Ibid, p.150-161.

<sup>578</sup> Telegram from Romanian legation in New Delhi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, January 15, 1958. Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Telegram from Ambassador N. Cioroiu (New Delhi) to Foreign Minister Avram Bunaciu, 26 January 1959, Strictly Confidential. Ibid.

As one of the leaders of the nonaligned and of an imminently enlarged Third World, India was a therefore a critical partner and an inextricable link to Romania's policy in Asia and Africa. Getting things right with Nehru's government was vital.

The Romanian government was keenly aware of the privileged position it had earned on the subcontinent - thanks in part to its own efforts, and in part to circumstances – and it was obdurately set on maintaining it. And while it could not control the factors of decision within the upper echelons of the Indian government, Bucharest was resolute on delivering the best services, both in terms of technical quality, as well as in human performance, in order to consolidate and preserve this position. This, of course, also implied learning well and fast from past mistakes,

*The quality of the machinery and the level of expertise of the people who will be sent along with this machinery will have an important role in the fight against the influence of foreign American-English companies in India's economy and especially in the state oil sector. It is absolutely necessary – in our opinion – that the machines be of the most irreproachable quality and well-suited to India's climate. We say this because in Jawalamukhi, if it had not been for our experts, the machinery would not have lasted long. We therefore recommend that the oil experts chosen to be sent here should be among the best.<sup>580</sup>*

The close encounter with failure in Jawalamukhi two years prior had nearly cost Bucharest its chance to prove itself in India and Malaviya the internal struggle to develop India's state oil sector. Since then, the stakes had only increased.

Romania's fight to maintain its strategic position in India was not waged against imaginary adversaries. Indeed, Bucharest faced very real opponents, both within the national political structure as well as from foreign monopolies and governments. "An unmasked resistance can sometimes be noticed on the part of some people with respect to [India's] exchanges

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<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

with our country” reported a Romanian official after a visit to New Delhi May 1958.<sup>581</sup> “In most cases, these are people whose interests are tied to the American trusts.”<sup>582</sup>

Malaviya’s vote of confidence in the Romanian expertise and technology was therefore a precarious affair - the more Bucharest became involved in India’s state-owned oil sector, the more opposition it faced. At the drilling facility in Jawalamukhi, which the Romanians continued to manage, the staff had reported strong signs of sabotage – a fire close to the facility had allegedly started in four different areas simultaneously; and bribes had been offered to Indian employees reportedly to undermine the Romanian experts.<sup>583</sup>

In Assam, where the ONGC expected to contract the installation of a Romanian refinery, the British and American monopolies were lobbying against it by trying to convince the local government that a higher-capacity facility was needed than the one offered by Bucharest (and which they could ostensibly offer).<sup>584</sup> So delicate had the political situation become, that when Malaviya cancelled his trip to Romania in July 1958 to negotiate the last details for the refinery, Bucharest suspected it was because he had caved in under the pressures of the “reactionary forces in India, who [were] looking to block the political dimensions of the transaction.”<sup>585</sup> It would be more realistic to assume, however, that the reason he invoked to delay the trip – relating to other pressing internal matters – was likely more realistic.<sup>586</sup>

Bucharest’s conflict with the British oil monopolies in India was further exacerbated by the historical dimension of British-Romanian relations: some of the oil products that the Romanian state was to provide India with, would have come from refineries it had previously confiscated from British companies after the War. Shell was one such company.

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<sup>581</sup> Report on the visit of Titus Cristureanu to India, 15 May, 1958. Ibid, p.150-161. Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Report from Romanian Embassy, New Delhi, to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, 7 March, 1959. Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office to Foreign Office, 1 December, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143365.

<sup>585</sup> Informative note from the Romanian legation in New Delhi to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, 18 July 1958. Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

It therefore began lobbying with the British government, trying to block the sale of Romanian oil products to India through diplomatic channels.<sup>587</sup>

The argument made by Shell was that, should India receive Romanian oil products, it would be placed in a position where one of its affiliates would be handling and marketing products “derived from their properties in Roumania (sic) which have been confiscated without compensation.”<sup>588</sup> Unable to block Romania’s transfer of oil machinery, technology or know-how to India, the foreign oil monopolies were now campaigning to block its exports of oil products (i.e. diesel fuel, kerosene, etc.), and to therefore maintain at least that share of the market exclusively to themselves.

The British government not only considered Shell’s request, but contemplated scaling it up. “Since Shell was not the only UK interest affected by Roumanian nationalisation decrees,” the Commonwealth Relations Office proposed, “it would be possible to speak to the Indians on behalf of UK interests as a whole and not just Shell as a group of companies alone.”<sup>589</sup> The position of the British government was therefore to be made clear to the Indian government, though in a measured and non-confrontational way,

*Our main interest is that the Indians should know [our] position before they buy the oil in the hope that they will think twice before buying goods stolen from another Commonwealth country. We envisage that any such approach would be one of imparting information rather than making any representations or conveying any formal warning...*<sup>590</sup>

At London’s behest, therefore, R.R.D. McIntosh, the UK Trade Commissioner to India, approached those members of the Indian government that would have been most sympathetic to the British position. The results, however, were disappointing

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<sup>587</sup> Telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office to Foreign Office, 1 December, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143365.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

*...for India to break off negotiations with Roumania (sic) would do our interests more harm than good. It would be represented by our critics that we are trying to involve the government of India in a dispute with Roumania which is no concern of theirs... It [would be] very hard to justify... a decision to introduce what would amount to a boycott of Roumanian oil products.<sup>591</sup>*

Shell's attempt to block Romanian oil products to India through political channels had failed. After only three months, London concluded that there was no point in pursuing the issue further with New Delhi,

*Unless we can show that there lies some advantage in following our suggestions, or at least argue convincingly that there is no disadvantage to India in doing so, any moderates within the Indian Ministerial and official circles will be unable to support us, even when they are in sympathy with our views.... Having made our protest, I think we should now allow the matter quietly to drop...<sup>592</sup>*

And drop it they did. In the post-independence era, it seemed that colonial monopolies would have to make peace with a loss of privilege and with an increased level of competition from state-owned enterprises.

Aside from the drill in Jawalamukhi and the refinery in Assam, by 1960 the Romanians were carrying out negotiations for the sale of another eight oil rigs.<sup>593</sup> Most importantly, the sale of two others had already been finalized for Cambay, in western India<sup>594</sup>, where after intensive prospecting the ONGC had finally discovered oil in 1958, thus vindicating the Commission's ardent political struggle. "Cambay is ours. No foreigner can lay claim to this precious treasure; it belongs to nobody else" victoriously claimed at the time A.N. Ghosh, a

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<sup>591</sup> Letter from Mr R.R.D. McIntosh, United Kingdom Trade Commissioner, New Delhi to Mr. J.J.B. Hunt, Commonwealth Relations Office, 17 March, 1960. UKNA document DO 35/8521.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> Telegram from Ambassador N. Cioroiu (New Delhi) to Foreign Minister Avram Bunaciu, 26 January 1959, Strictly Confidential. AMAE, Problem 212, Dossier India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of some oil refineries in India – sending specialists for drilling (1955-1960), pp 44-46.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

member of its technical team.<sup>595</sup> The fact that the Romanian government was brought in to drill the oil from this source was testament to the trust that New Delhi placed in its relationship with Bucharest.

So close had this relationship become, in fact, that in 1959 Malaviya formally requested that Ion Petcu, the leader of the Romanian team of experts in Jawalamukhi, become his advisor within the ONGC. After having successfully overcome the drilling challenges in the Himalayas, Petcu had made a lasting impression on the Indian Minister, who now considered him “trustworthy” and “a good specialist – very knowledgeable about the oil issue in India.”<sup>596</sup>

Humbled by Malaviya’s request, yet concerned about American reactions, the Romanian government was initially conflicted about deploying a Romanian national within the Indian government structure. Romania’s position as a political middle ground between Moscow and Washington in India, however, helped with the decision. Noting that India was trying to counter-balance Soviet help with others so that it wouldn’t be considered “reactionary” and therefore risk losing Western aid, the Romanians concluded that such “business with a small, un-communist country would not be reproachable – the Americans would not object.”<sup>597</sup> Interestingly enough, Bucharest speculated that, if they wanted to, “the Indians could ask for American help via Yugoslavia” eventually anyway.<sup>598</sup> Under these circumstances, Romanian national interest and prestige eventually won out. Ion Petcu was assigned to the “very important” role of advisor within Malaviya’s Commission, where he contributed his expertise to the development of India’s state oil sector over the next several years.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>595</sup> Tanvi Madan, “India’s ONGC: Balancing Different Roles, Different Goals,” 14.

<sup>596</sup> Telegram from Ambassador N. Cioroiu (New Delhi) to Foreign Minister Avram Bunaciu, 26 January 1959, Strictly Confidential. AMAE, Problem 212, Dossier India 3, Regarding the construction by Romania of some oil refineries in India – sending specialists for drilling (1955-1960), pp 44-46.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

By 1960, Indo-Romanian relations had come an exceptionally – and perhaps very surprisingly – long way from their humble beginnings. The Romanian legation in India, which had been initially rejected in 1951 on account of unavailable facilities, was raised to embassy status by 1959. And in the meantime, the relationship between Bucharest and New Delhi blossomed ever so steadily and very strongly, on the basis of a shared interest in ‘the third way’ – for India to pursue it by balancing its conflicting allegiances between socialism and capitalism; and for Romania to support it in this endeavor, and to thus prove its diplomatic skills a small but uniquely qualified and positioned country.

## **Conclusion**

Within only seven years of Stalin’s death, Gheorghiu-Dej managed a truly remarkable feat: he transformed his country from an anemic and subservient Kremlin satellite into an international political actor with a thriving economy and stable global partnerships. This he achieved by transforming weakness into strength: he leveraged Romania’s junior and vulnerable profile in order piggyback on Moscow’s foreign policy to gain economic and political advantage abroad, while at the same time forging alliances with key nonaligned countries when the Soviet Union was seen as too strong or politically threatening an influence.

At the core of this foreign policy strategy stood the objective of national rehabilitation through economic development. Keenly aware that his internal legitimacy depended heavily on the government’s ability to improve the standard of life of the impoverished Romanian people, Dej set out to build the infrastructure for a healthier and more productive economy through robust industrialization. Unable to obtain technological licenses, equipment or know-how from its fellow underdeveloped satellites nor from the advanced, but politically restrictive West, Bucharest reached out to the Scandinavian neutrals. By leveraging Romania’s only economic asset, oil, Dej was thus able to build Romania’s industrial backbone – a tactic he will later also use to open the door for trade with the West.

In the meantime, however, the Romanian leader also used his country’s oil expertise to establish and develop relationships with the leading members of the NAM. As the case



study on India details, Bucharest was a key actor in developing the country's national oil sector, in an adverse political climate where former colonial elements – both political and economic – were still adamantly looking to maintain influence. As a small and perceptively non-threatening member of the Socialist camp (in contrast with the USSR, for example), Romania thus contributed to developing the national economies of India (and Indonesia) by championing Moscow's campaign of peaceful co-existence, while at the same time gaining significant political capital and international recognition in exchange.

This is not to say that Dej's strategy might have been a carefully drawn-out and staged scheme for Romania's development. He sought the opportunity to fill out the country's ambitious economic plan wherever it availed itself in the otherwise tense and volatile international climate. While Bucharest's relationship with the West was slowly thawing at the time, it was not yet warm enough to provide the economic aid so sorely needed, and which the Scandinavian neutrals were willing to provide thanks to the Soviet rapprochement with those countries. Likewise, the chance to increase Romania's visibility in the Third World was not exclusively the result of Dej's initiative; it was rather Bucharest's response to an opportunity created by the ebbs and flows of the international climate in which recently decolonized countries were growing in number and influence. Dej's initiatives within the framework of the UN are perhaps the best examples of his tactic to instrumentalize international currents for his country's own benefit. This was perhaps one of Dej's best yet overlooked abilities: to identify the prospects for political/economic advantage in the changing international climate and quickly pivot, by adapting his policy in order to negotiate a better outcome for Romania. As will be shown in the next chapter, this aptitude would only become more obvious over the next couple of years, as his policies will be carried out more boldly and more publicly in a clear effort to bring Romania out of the Kremlin's orbit.

## Chapter 5: Breaking Ranks (1962-1963)

### **Introduction**

By 1963, Romania's growing self-assertion on the global stage came to a peak. That year, just as Bucharest was reaching the halfway point of its ambitious six-year economic plan – with even better results than anticipated – the Soviet Union began pushing for economic specialization within the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). This scheme, which would have relegated Romania to the role of cereal and raw material provider within the Eastern Bloc, would have jeopardized not only the country's project for rapid industrialization and development, but also the intention to gain more independence from Moscow, which very much rested on these projects. Although throughout 1962 Bucharest was able to block the plans for specialization at various levels of the organization (and away from Western eyes), by early 1963 the Romanian leadership was forced to publicly defend its position in the face of mounting pressures from Moscow. By openly invoking the principles of sovereign national interest and equality among states (both of which were espoused in the Moscow Declaration of 1960), the Romanians were thus able to thwart the COMECON specialization project and defend their economic independence.

Such policy, however, was as beneficial as it was dangerous. On the one hand, it protected Romania's national economy – and, by extension its plans for detachment from Moscow by minimizing economic dependence. Dej's strategic move to oppose the Kremlin within COMECON publicly also managed to draw the attention of the West, and especially of the United States, which became increasingly more interested in developing political and economic ties with Bucharest. On the other hand, however, Romania's open and unprecedented defiance of Moscow exposed the country to potential retaliation from the Kremlin.

In order to manage this strategic pivot away from the Soviet Union without incurring substantial cost, Dej took advantage of both the Sino-Soviet dispute as well as the international climate of détente in order to garner political protection. As a result, he sought a rapprochement with both China and the United States in order to counter Soviet

power and thus keep the USSR safely at bay. In this sense, as historian Dennis Deletant explains, Romania's strategy of detachment from the Soviet Union was both 'active' and 'reactive'<sup>600</sup>: while the initiative to defend national interest by defying Soviet initiatives belonged to the Romanian leadership, Bucharest would certainly not have been able to safely navigate such a policy without reacting to and taking advantage of the larger political currents in the global dynamic.

### **'The Daring Rumanian Gypsy'<sup>601</sup> Defies Moscow**

No other episode in Gheorghiu-Dej's tenure – or in Romania's history since the end of the war, for that matter – better exemplified the leader's aptitude for strategic diplomacy than the way in which he successfully navigated the country's peaceful, yet firm dissidence within COMECON. If until 1960 Bucharest was a willing, though unenthusiastic participant in the organization's lethargic economic cooperation efforts, by 1963 it dared to boldly challenge its plans for specialization, despite the Kremlin's best efforts to convince it to conform. This very public gesture of open defiance signaled both to Moscow as well as to the West Romania's need to assert its sovereignty in pursuit of its national interest, thereby marking a pivotal moment in its post-War history.

It is somewhat ironic, if not coincidental, that Bucharest's defiance of Moscow's hard power found its expression within the soft power framework of the COMECON. Until the late 1950s, the organization was not only one of the Kremlin's main tools of control over its satellites, but indeed also one the Bloc's most potent symbols of reactive policy against the West. Set up in 1949 in response to the Marshall Plan, COMECON's first success was Czechoslovakia's abandonment of its plans to accept the American scheme for European reconstruction. For the remainder of Stalin's rule, the economic consortium remained little

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<sup>600</sup> Dennis Deletant, "'Taunting the Bear': Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1963-89," *Cold War History* 7, no. 4 (November 2007): 496; Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, "Romania and the Warsaw Pact: 1955-1989," Cold War International History Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2004), 16.

<sup>601</sup> Expression used by the British minister to Bucharest to explain the bold new foreign policy to defy Moscow within the framework of COMECON in 1963, in Roumania: Annual Review (1963), telegram from J.D Murray, British Legation in Bucharest to R.A. Butler, Foreign Office, 13 January, 1964. UKNA document FO 371/177614.

more than the Kremlin's extended arm into the uniform economies of the Bloc's 'social democracies', though growing less active in the last years of the dictator's life. It was Khrushchev who, needing to replace his predecessor's hard methods of control, decided to resuscitate it and restructure it by adding new bodies to the institution and new rules for membership.<sup>602</sup> Thus, by the mid-1950s, COMECON had re-emerged as Moscow's sharp new tool for "economic subordination and political coordination", albeit in the disguise of a more 'democratic' institution.<sup>603</sup>

The formation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 prompted a wave of faint, but increasingly growing calls for similar economic integration behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>604</sup> Cloaked under the principle of an 'international division of labor', the socialist version of integration implied that the production of the COMECON member states needed to be coordinated and specialized for the greater good of an aggregate Bloc economy. While Romania was able fend off such proposals, in part because they were disparate, and in part because they lacked critical mass, by 1960 it became clear that Bucharest needed to draw a robust and long-term strategy for opposing what was clearly becoming an increasingly popular idea within the Bloc.

It was at the Agricultural Conference held in Moscow in February 1960 that Romania saw itself forced to voice – as Dej later put it – its "first 'open riposte' and 'categorical' opposition" to specialization.<sup>605</sup> Although Bucharest had consistently opposed specialization over the previous two years, it had done so at the lower levels of working and expert groups; this high-level meeting was an altogether different ball game.

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<sup>602</sup> Dan Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965* (Bucharest: The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2011), 267.

<sup>603</sup> Mioara Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007), 121.

<sup>604</sup> Initial proposals were made by the GDR and Czechoslovakia, who were among the most economically developed of the satellites at the time.

<sup>605</sup> Elena Dragomir, "Romania's Participation in the Agricultural Conference in Moscow, 2–3 February 1960," *Cold War History* 13, no. 3 (2013): 336, doi:10.1080/14682745.2013.768068.

The Romanians had not come to Moscow prepared to stand against their peers; but as the conference unfolded, it seemed more than a coincidence that the proposals made by the other delegations were well coordinated.<sup>606</sup> Indeed, it seemed to Dej that “they [had come] to an understanding beforehand in this matter”, to pressure Romania in accepting agricultural specialization.<sup>607</sup> Championed by Czechoslovakia and the GDR - the most industrially advanced members of COMECON and its most ardent supporters of specialization – the main proposal would have assigned to Romania the production of cereal and fodder for the rest of the Bloc. For Dej, this represented nothing less than the “abject” interest of the industrialized members of the Bloc in keeping Romania agricultural<sup>608</sup> at the cost of its own industrial development.

The Romanian delegation opposed specialization with a measured, but firm response. First, they presented at length Romania’s six-year economic plan (1960-1965), which had already been drawn up, thus implying that any structural change to Romania’s economy would be unlikely. However, to avoid antagonizing their peers, and especially the Soviet Union, they also conceded that they were willing to take into consideration the specialization of agriculture, pending further studies on the topic – a thinly veiled delaying tactic. “Everyone’s jaw dropped when we told them we did not agree with the specialization plans” Dej proudly gushed to his Politburo colleagues upon returning from Moscow.<sup>609</sup>

Behind his rather unexpected gesture and closeted bravado, however, the Romanian leader was beginning to plant the seeds of a long-term strategy meant to keep his country safely at bay from economic subservience to Bloc interests, for he remained convinced that the specialization ‘offensive’ was only just beginning. For the time being, part of his approach rested on Khrushchev’s sensitivity to socialist camp feuds, in the context of growing disputes with China and Yugoslavia, in order to negotiate his approval of the Romanian position. The other part was the use of good old fashioned rhetoric, meant to appeal to Khrushchev’s

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>607</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the CC of the RWP on 8 February, 1960. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 9/1960, p. 10.

<sup>608</sup> Dragomir, “Romania’s Participation in the Agricultural Conference in Moscow, 2–3 February 1960,” 341.

<sup>609</sup> *Op cit.* in Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 124.

reasoning and his need to appear as the benevolent leader of the Camp, with his subjects' best interests at heart. Underlying these tactics, however, was Dej's conviction that the idea of an international division of labor was "an unjust thesis" that his country "cannot compromise with".<sup>610</sup> This opinion, of course, he could not so bluntly present to Khrushchev. Instead, Dej used the opportunity of a private meeting with the Soviet leader during the summit in Moscow to explain more diplomatically the Romanian position on agricultural specialization:

*In our opinion, the fundamental objective in agriculture is its development to the fullest and most multilateral extent possible - on the basis of the natural and economic conditions for each country – through a rational combination of economic branches; it is the utilization of all reserves available in each country, in order to raise production in the first place, and to reduce cost. This is how we understand specialization.*<sup>611</sup>

Keen to underline that there was a clear contradiction between the principle of an international division of labor and national interest, Dej went further

*...If, on the hand, specialization is supposed to mean that a country constrains or doesn't develop a branch of its agriculture – even if it has the necessary conditions to do so and it is advantageous to maintain and to develop it – we are against this kind of "specialization", because it leads to constraining production resources and not using existing resources, in the name of a principle that can only be an advantage for some, and not for others."*<sup>612</sup>

For the time being, Khrushchev – who did not seem too committed himself to the idea of specialization – accepted the Romanian position. For the next couple of years, in fact, he

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<sup>610</sup> *Op cit.* in Dragomir, "Romania's Participation in the Agricultural Conference in Moscow, 2–3 February 1960," 341–42.

<sup>611</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 9/1960, p. 28.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

remained relatively ambivalent on this issue, as the Czechs and the East Germans continued their efforts to push for this policy only to be met by Romania's obdurate resistance.

By 1962, however, Khrushchev became convinced that the only way forward for the Eastern Bloc was economic integration through the division of labor. There are three main reasons why the Soviet leader's position shifted from ambivalence towards hardline support of specialization within COMECON. First, at the international level it was becoming increasingly more obvious that the project for a European common market was not only gaining speed, but it was also expanding after the first wave of enlargement in 1961.<sup>613</sup> Khrushchev's obsessive need to prove the superiority of socialism through peaceful means inspired his conviction that a similar, but improved and more efficient integration project had to be developed in Eastern Europe.<sup>614</sup> Second, the growing internal strife within the socialist camp, which also in 1961 had caused Albania to break relations with the Soviet Union in favor of China, highlighted the necessity for more political and economic cohesion. And last, but certainly not least, at the national level the Soviet Union was beginning to experience hardship, as Khrushchev's plans for economic restructuring were beginning to fail. As a result, Moscow was no longer in the position to provide economic aid and raw materials to its satellites; they now had to collaborate more closely to help each other.<sup>615</sup>

The June 1962 COMECON Conference therefore became the launch pad for Khrushchev's specialization offensive. At the gathering of the communist heads of state in Moscow, the Soviet leader sought the unanimous vote needed to adopt the measure by professing the urgent need "to ensure our superiority in the race against capitalism."<sup>616</sup> This could only be done, according to the Soviet leader, by countering the economic reorganization within the West with "[giving] a new dimension to economic collaboration" within the Bloc, and to

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<sup>613</sup> In 1961, The United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway and Denmark applied for accession.

<sup>614</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 276.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, 275–76. Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 126.

<sup>616</sup> Speech by N.S. Khrushchev at the COMECON plenum on 6-7 June, 1962. ANIC, fond CC of the RCP, Chancellery, document 29/1962, p. 56-8. Op cit in Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 276.

thus “highlight the superiority of socialism as a global system.”<sup>617</sup> Khrushchev’s belief in proving this superiority through a “peaceful economic race against the capitalist system” was also his way of emphasizing disapproval of the Chinese Communist orthodoxy, which he believed promoted an aggressive and destructive alternative “of spilling blood.”<sup>618</sup>

During the conference, the Soviet leader did not hide that fact his proposals to create ‘a single economic unit’, a single production plan for all COMECON member states, and a coordinated investment plan, among other such integrative measures, had been inspired by the European project for economic integration,

*If even the capitalists obtain certain results from the coordination of their economic activity, [then] we, the communists, and leaders of states with planned economies which are united through common goals, have a mandate from God, as they say, to demonstrate a model for economic integration.*<sup>619</sup>

So adamant had Khrushchev become about the need for specialized economies among COMECON member states, that he even went so far as to promote the idea of sacrificing sovereignty for the greater good of the Bloc,

*And we shouldn’t hesitate to sacrifice, in some cases, our particular interest to the general interest. If even the capitalist countries accept the limitation of their sovereignty in the interest of their common effort to fight communism, then we, the socialist states, led by the international communists, should strive even more towards our common and glorious cause.*<sup>620</sup>

To the Romanians, Khrushchev’s initiative meant nothing less than a threat to their national interest; this, especially since the Soviet leader’s proposal was likely to be supported by the

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.



vast majority of the COMECON members. Dej, however, had come to Moscow fully prepared to stymie the unanimous vote that the Kremlin was seeking.

Khrushchev's change of mind over the issue of specialization had not been entirely unexpected by the Romanian leadership. Since 1961, the Soviets had been voicing criticism about Romania's ambitious industrialization plans and had been applying pressure on the country to increase the production of oil and natural gas geared towards COMECON member states.<sup>621</sup> Throughout the course of that year, the Kremlin had switched from praising Romania's "rapidly growing industry"<sup>622</sup> to echoing rumors that the country was creating "an autarkical economy on the one hand, while on the other hand sitting on its natural resources same as a hen sits on its own eggs."<sup>623</sup>

From a Romanian perspective, neither the country's rapid industrialization plans nor its oil production and distribution were up for negotiation. In fact, by 1962 both had come to represent the main pillars on which Bucharest was planning to build its economic detachment from Moscow, while at the same time using them to develop closer and stronger ties to the West. Their subordination to COMECON quotas would have inadvertently cost Dej his plans for Romania's independence.

The need for industrialization had been a lesson hard learned for the Romanian leadership, who in the winter of 1956 had nearly faced the contagion of revolt from Hungary, due in large part to the widespread penury caused by a poor harvest (discussed in Chapter 3). The dire situation at the time had revealed the country's biggest vulnerabilities for failing to industrialize since the war, and for developing instead a predominantly agricultural economy. The first was that "a bad harvest can play havoc with [Romania's] foreign exchange position and the supply of basic foodstuffs to the population," as Chivu Stoica

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<sup>621</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 272–73.

<sup>622</sup> ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 31/1961.

<sup>623</sup> Minutes of the meeting on 7 June 1960, between G. Gheorghiu-Dej, Emil Bodnaras, Chivu Stoica, Al. Barladeanu and G. Gaston Marin. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 25/1961, p2.

openly admitted at the time.<sup>624</sup> In turn, this weak position caused - and was further exacerbated by - a heavy reliance on the Soviet Union for economic aid as well as for political support, without which the Romanian leadership was unlikely to have maintained power at the time. As discussed at length in Chapter 4, the drive for rapid and robust industrialization had been Dej's insurance against dependence on Moscow, as well as his main tactic towards gaining internal popular support and legitimacy.

These ambitions, embodied in the six-year plan adopted by Romania in 1960, were now well on the way to materializing. By 1962, as Khrushchev began pushing towards the kind of specialization that would have relegated Romania to the role of cereal producer and raw materials provider within COMECON, the country was already making astonishing progress towards industrialization. That year it had already reached the halfway point of its economic plan, and Dej was keen to boast about the results. Over the last three years, the country had registered an average annual rise in industrial production of 15.7%, compared to the 13% originally projected. Chemical industry production had reportedly increased by 80%, the iron, steel and engineering industries by 70% and electrical generation by 60%.<sup>625</sup>

Even allowing for the inflationary reporting customary of the Bloc regimes, Romania's progress was still impressive and very much visible to the naked eye of foreign observers. As the new British Minister to Bucharest, J.D. Murray reported at the end of 1962,

*...It is undeniable that there is more intense economic activity in this country than ever before, and the creation of a sound industrial base, though it has required many sacrifices, is likely to be reflected in the respect of ordinary people for the system which has laid the foundation for future prosperity.*<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> Telegram from A. Dudley, British legation, Bucharest to T. Brimelow, Northern Department, Foreign Office, 13 December 1956. UKNA document FO 371/122703.

<sup>625</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1962). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British legation, Bucharest to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 1 January, 1963, p. 4. UKNA document FO 371/171881.

<sup>626</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1961). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British Legation, Bucharest, to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, January 4, 1962. UKNA document FO 371/166161.

It is no small wonder then, that the more the Kremlin now sought to push Romania back towards a predominantly agricultural role within COMECON, the more industry-driven Bucharest was willing to resist.

The Romanian leadership was also likely to display a similarly protective attitude towards its oil industry. Severely bombed by the Allied powers in 1944 and partially seized by the Soviets as a form of reparation until 1956, Romania's oil-rich fields had been more of a curse than a blessing for the first decade after the war. As shown in Chapter 1, the Soviet scheme of incorporating them into Soviet-Romanian joint ventures (SOVROMs) as a thinly veiled way of controlling the country's extractive industry had left a deep scar on Romania's collective memory since its 'liberation' by the Red Army, becoming thus a potent symbol of Moscow's oppression. SOVROMPETROL's dissolution in 1956 therefore represented a turning point in Romania's economic history, as the country regained full control over its natural resources. Since then, Gheorghiu-Dej had been making substantial efforts to leverage Romania's oil – its only competitive advantage among Bloc members – to strengthen and open the country's economy. The leader's strategy, discussed in the last chapter, hinged on exchanging oil for technology and know-how from the Scandinavian neutral countries in order to rapidly grow Romania's industry, on the one hand; and on using the country's expertise and oil technology as a diplomatic tool for promoting Romania's profile in the Third World, on the other hand.

By 1962, as the Kremlin was trying to pull Romania ever closer into the Bloc by pressuring it to channel more of its oil towards COMECON, Bucharest was actively making efforts to take its oil diplomacy in the opposite direction and to the next level – as a bridge-builder with the West. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, for the previous few years this process had been hindered by Western embargos placed on Romanian oil due to the government's seizure of foreign assets after the war. Romania's penetration of Western markets - and especially those of the US and UK – was therefore heavily reliant on negotiations for compensation payments, and further complicated by political and ideological considerations (as compared to the European neutrals, for example).

However, since the turn of the decade Romania was not only making progress in its negotiations with the West, which will be discussed later in this chapter, but also becoming creative at finding ways to bypass the embargos. By using third party channels – usually through France or West Germany – Romania had been managing to sell small quantities of oil in the US and UK. It was thus not only undermining those governments’ restrictions, but indeed making them rethink their castigating policies,

*...since increasing quantities of Roumanian (sic) oil now seem to be finding their way to western markets we wonder how much of a deterrent this now is, and how far our own denial of the UK market to Roumanian oil continues to exert any effective pressure on the Roumanian government.*<sup>627</sup>

Indeed, the more pressure Moscow was exerting on Bucharest’s oil production, the more emboldened the Romanians were becoming in approaching the West. In April 1962, and only two months prior to the COMECON Conference in Moscow, Alexandru Lazareanu, the Romanian Minister to London approached the British government on the issue of oil exports. F.C. Mason, who met with Lazareanu on behalf of the Foreign Office, later reported on the unprecedentedly frank discussion he had held with the Romanian diplomat,

*Mr. Lazareanu then got on to the inevitable subject of oil imports from Roumania, emphasising that the Roumanians really had no need to export to us since their production was well taken up by supplying the home market and the East. Nevertheless, he said it was most important to Roumania, and to him personally as Minister in London, to get oil imports to us moving again, not for themselves, but in order to make room for wider expansion of our capital goods exports to Roumania which they so fervently desired. **In fact, oil was the key to opening the door for expansion.***<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> Telegram from British legation, Bucharest, to Northern Department, Foreign Office, 27 February, 1959. UKNA document FO 371/143365.

<sup>628</sup> Minutes of conversation between F.C Mason, Foreign office, with Romanian Minister. D. Lazareanu in London on Trade on April 5, 1962. UKNA document FO 371/166195. Bold italics added by author to emphasize the bottom line message conveyed by the Romanian government that oil was “the key” to a developing bilateral relationship.

Given this close interconnection between Romania's oil, its increasingly Western-oriented foreign policy and its ambitious industrialization plans, it is therefore unsurprising that Gheorghiu-Dej chose to show up in Moscow in June 1962 fully prepared to block Khrushchev's COMECON specialization initiative. Counting perhaps on the Soviet leader's infamously temperamental approach to issues he deemed important, Dej's prepared his speech well in advance and very meticulously. During the conference, he was therefore able to meet Khrushchev's impassioned rallying calls for national self-sacrifice and the creation of a collective economy to prove its superiority against the West with calm, rational and compelling arguments against specialization.

Dej's intervention was as tactful as it was efficient. First, he was careful not to openly contradict or criticize the Kremlin leader's plans for economic integration; instead, he spoke against the merits of the EEC, portraying the Western project as an inevitable failure and therefore not worthy of matching efforts within the Socialist camp. As Dan Catanus points out, Dej chose this line of reasoning not necessarily out of dogmatic conviction – since he was, in fact, very keen at the time on striking bilateral deals with the very Western monopolies he was criticizing in his speech – but more out of need to boost rhetorical impact.<sup>629</sup> Second, he argued that, since the members of COMECON boasted different levels of development, a scheme to specialize their economies would only increase the discrepancies among socialist states, and also work against the interest of the less advanced countries by preventing them from developing their potential – a principle very much at odds with the Soviet declaration of 1956, which professed equality and respect for sovereignty among Socialist states.<sup>630</sup> And, finally, Dej used Romania – one of the most underdeveloped socialist countries at the time – as an elaborate case in point. Dej took his time outlining the country's six-year plan, highlighting the objectives for industrialization and the progress made to that point in transforming Romania's backwards, agricultural economy into a more prosperous, industrialized one. Using a plethora of facts, figures and

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<sup>629</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 278–79.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*; Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 125–27.

statistics, Dej then explained how a potential specialization of the country's economy would severely handicap Romania's development, which was in full swing at the time.<sup>631</sup>

Dej's intervention at the COMECON Conference in Moscow in June 1962 was a complete political success. While the proposal for specializing Bloc economies had many supporters ahead of the meeting, leading the Soviets to believe they could successfully push for the unanimous vote needed to adopt the measure, after Dej's intervention the prospects looked quite differently: the Poles abandoned their position and aligned themselves with the Romanians against specialization, while the Hungarians and the East Germans shifted towards a more neutral position.<sup>632</sup> In order to avoid embarrassment, Khrushchev was forced to postpone the vote.

"The success of the Romanian delegation in this initial confrontation was full", declared Dej triumphantly upon his return to Bucharest. Astonished perhaps at his own success against Soviets - on their home turf, no less - the Romanian leader rather awkwardly underlined what he thought to be the merits of his approach, "everybody appreciated our intervention because it was principled; we had a principled position and that is why it turns out that no one can stand against a fair principle".<sup>633</sup>

What Dej might have lacked in eloquence, however, he certainly made up for in tactical expediency. Not the kind of despot to sit on his laurels, and fully aware that his strategy might have won him the battle in this 'initial confrontation', but would perhaps not be enough to win him the COMECON war, he immediately set out to expand the breadth and depth of his stratagem. Within days of returning to Bucharest, the Romanian leader ordered the inception of a special task force to monitor the organization's agenda and report on its proceedings.<sup>634</sup> Most importantly, this elite group of experts, carefully selected

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<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 281.

<sup>633</sup> Op. cit. in Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 128.

<sup>634</sup> Minutes of the meeting that took place on 11 June 1962 between Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, Chivu Stoica, I. Gh. Maurer, Al. I. Barladeanu, Gaston Marin and Gogu Radulescu. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, Document 27/1963 in Dan Catanus, *Intre Beijing Si Moscova: Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (Between Beijing and Moscow: Romania and the Sino-*

among the most qualified and loyal of party cadres, were to actively champion Romania's interests within this organization, while serving as a bridge to government and policy-makers,

*We have to consolidate [the COMECON team] there with competent, combative and well trained people, who will be under our control, who will not fall under the influence of the various elements they will come into contact with; who will know to keep their mouth shut, their brain open and to investigate everything that interests our country, so that we can draw maximum advantages.*<sup>635</sup>

Charged with the selection and coordination of this task force was none other than Alexandru Barladeanu, the architect of Romania's six-year economic plan and Dej's right hand and main representative in the COMECON offensive. "We have to be present, to take initiative, and to [be able] to present issues in a legitimate way," Barladeanu enunciated in a terse, yet resolute way Bucharest's strategy for upcoming battles within the organization.<sup>636</sup>

The Romanians had good reason to prepare for increasing tensions with the Kremlin. Within just two short weeks of the COMECON conference where his specialization initiative was stymied, Khrushchev descended upon Bucharest for a one-week visit, leaving foreign observers baffled about its purpose.<sup>637</sup> Since the proceedings of the high-level meeting in Moscow had been kept away from the public eye, the West was not privy to Dej's audacious stand against Bloc policies and was therefore still unaware of the growing rift between Romania and the Soviet Union.

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*Soviet Conflict*), vol. I (Bucharest: National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, n.d.), 177–75. pp 171-75.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> According to diplomatic reports from embassies in the West, the press in several western countries were speculating on the visit as part of Khrushchev's strategy to make conciliatory gestures towards Yugoslavia – using Romania's traditional role as intermediary – in the context of worsening Yugoslav-Soviet relations. In Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 145–47.

In fact, the leading foreign press, including *Le Monde* and *Radio London*, speculated that Khrushchev's unannounced visit to Bucharest was meant as an initiative to iron out an increasingly delicate situation in the Balkans.<sup>638</sup> With Albania having broken with the Kremlin just a year earlier, at roughly the same time that Yugoslavia became one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement at its founding conference in Belgrade, it was considered that the Soviet leader was now taking conciliatory steps towards the problematic Balkan countries. And Romania, having served as a bridge between Moscow and Belgrade over the last decade, was now seen as a natural starting point in the Kremlin's renewed efforts to bring Tito and, possibly even by extension Enver Hoxha, back into its sphere of influence.<sup>639</sup>

As far as the West was concerned, therefore, Romania was still at that point seen as Moscow's most subservient of allies. And according to the account of Paul Niculescu-Mizil, one of Dej's closer associates and a member of the Politburo at the time, the Romanian leader was extremely keen on making sure that this image was upheld.<sup>640</sup> Ahead of Khrushchev's arrival, Dej gave special orders that he should be received with much pomp and ceremony, wanting not only to hide divergences from the public eye, but also to create a calm and relaxed atmosphere, in which to be able to carry out a more constructive conversation with his Soviet counterpart.<sup>641</sup> Dej was still hopeful that, by discussing at length and showing Khrushchev Romania's rapidly growing industrial infrastructure, he could calmly persuade Khrushchev against specialization.

Khrushchev, however, was in no mood for such pleasantries. The Sino-Soviet dispute was growing increasingly more acerbic; as a result, in 1961 Albania had severed its relationship with Moscow in favor of closer ties with Beijing; that same year, Tito had proudly become the founding leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, which denied allegiance to either superpower in the bipolar dynamic; at the same time, tensions between a divided Germany

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<sup>638</sup> Foreign coverage of the visit in RPR of the party and governmental delegation of the USSR (Agerpres). AMAE, Problem 220. 1962 (annex to document 220. USSR-3. Vol. 4) in *Ibid.*, 146–47.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–47.

<sup>640</sup> Niculescu-Mizil, Paul, *O Istorie Traita* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 1997), 166–67.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*



heightened, as the Berlin Wall was erected; and finally, by the summer of 1962, and the Cuban Missile crisis was already brewing. Providing concessions to an increasingly defiant Romania would therefore have only have added to the image of a Soviet empire in crisis.

Within hours of landing in Bucharest, Khrushchev's infamously tempestuous character took the better of him. Keen perhaps to not seem too heavy-handed by directly attacking Romania's lack of compliance within COMECON, he chose instead to criticize certain aspects of the country's economic policies. During his very first meeting with Dej (among many that week), he stubbornly and vociferously chastised the Romanian government for slaughtering underweight pigs.<sup>642</sup> This led to a rather awkward and comical, yet nonetheless and heated and drawn-out debate between the two heads of state on the weight at which pigs were being killed in Romania.<sup>643</sup> Khrushchev's odd choice of critique and the intensity with which it was carried out had taken Dej by surprise. It was only two years later, within just a few days after Khrushchev's removal from power in mid-October 1964, that he openly discussed the memorable episode with I.K Jegalin, the Kremlin's new ambassador to Bucharest, and dared to confess how insulted he had felt at the time,

*... [Khrushchev] had a plan. He had other issues, but he started with this one in order to humiliate us and to prove to us that we were bad managers in our own country.*<sup>644</sup>

Indeed, the Soviet leader had been adamant to voice other 'issues' throughout the course of his visit in Romania. Keen to show the Soviet leader how advanced the country's economy had become thanks to its six-year plan, Dej took Khrushchev on a national tour of Romania's most impressive industrial sites and research centers. The Soviet leader, however, remained unimpressed, despite his hosts' best efforts to please him. During a visit to

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<sup>642</sup> Conversation between G. Gheorghiu-Dej and comrade I.K. Jegalin, USSR ambassador to Bucharest on 16 October, 1964. ANIC, fond CC of the RCP, Chancellery, document 64/1964, p 1-24 in Dan Catanus, *Intre Beijing Si Moscova: Romania Si Conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (Between Beijing and Moscow: Romania and the Sino-Soviet Conflict)*, 1:413–23.

<sup>643</sup> According to documents and eyewitness accounts, Khrushchev began attacking Dej by saying that in Romania pigs were being slaughtered at 25 kg. Dej consistently upheld that it was at 110-130kgs. The next day, the debate reignited, with Khrushchev conceding that it could be as high as 50-60kg, which was still under optimal weight. *Ibid.*, 1:419.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*

Romania's most prominent agricultural research institute, he harshly criticized the country's method of planting corn, which emulated the American, not Soviet model.<sup>645</sup> At the site of leading industrial plant, he allegedly turned to Dej and scoffed, "why do you need industry? Do you want to be independent?"<sup>646</sup>

Far from becoming the diplomatic success that Dej had hoped for, Khrushchev's visit had instead failed to win over the Soviet leader on all counts, becoming instead a political fiasco. To foreign observers, however, the deteriorating relations between Bucharest and Moscow remained invisible. To the contrary, they seemed to remain as strong as ever, with Khrushchev's visit being reported by J.D Murray, the British Minister to Bucharest, as a token of ultimate camaraderie,

*Mr. Khrushchev[']s 'Visit of Friendship' in June was rather like a Commander in Chief's inspection. [It] made it quite clear that Mr. Gheorghiu-Dej and his henchmen had done well; they enjoyed his full support and their policies his blessing.*<sup>647</sup>

Behind the scenes, however, the visit symbolized the awkward beginning of souring relations between the two countries, as it set the tone for further conflict over economic issues. Indeed, over the next months, tensions within COMECON rose quickly. An article published by Khrushchev in September 1962, arguing that by perfecting the system of economic collaboration, socialist countries could strive towards equality and to a strengthening of national sovereignty<sup>648</sup> was immediately dismissed by Barladeanu as "full of fallacies and of nuances that are contradictory."<sup>649</sup>

As Romania's chief economist and Dej's trusted ally, Barladeanu had been informally championing the country's interests within the COMECON framework. At the RWP plenary in November 1962, however, this role was formalized and showcased, as Barladeanu was

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<sup>645</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 283.

<sup>646</sup> Niculescu-Mizil, Paul, *O Istorie Traita*, 174.

<sup>647</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1962). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British legation, Bucharest to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 1 January, 1963, p. 4. UKNA document FO 371/171881.

<sup>648</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 284.

<sup>649</sup> Minutes of the CC of the RWP plenary on 5-8 March, 1963, p29-30. *Op. cit.* in *Ibid.*, 286.

also named member of the Politburo. This promotion automatically increased Romania's level of representation at COMECON - a clear signal to Moscow that Bucharest was taking its role within the organization very seriously. Barladeanu's first order of business as a newly minted Politburo member was to provide the entire RWP Central Committee with a thorough briefing on the issues and developments within COMECON, as well as Romania's position. In so doing, the polemic no longer remained confined to top-level officials or a handful of economic experts; it was now officially broadcast throughout the Party structure. This gesture, made also within the context of the developments surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis – which the Romanians were none too pleased with, and which will be discussed further in this chapter – therefore represented the formal admission, even if strictly internal for the time being, that the Romanian government was in ever greater disagreement with Moscow.

Though efforts still were made to keep such sensitive information away from foreign observers, subtle signals were beginning to be picked up by the Western diplomatic community in Bucharest that Romania's national interest was indeed a potential cause for dispute with Moscow. At the end of 1962, JD Murray was reporting to London with a surprisingly insightful and almost uncannily predictive analysis on Romania's position,

*The important question, as the year ends, is whether Roumania's (sic) leaders will be content to dance in strict tempo to the new tunes piped by the economic planner in Moscow. The main theme of Mr Khrushchev's speeches when he was here was Socialist Division of Labour and many people thought his choice of this country for these pronouncements was intended to put comparatively prosperous and somewhat economically independent-minded Roumania, with her large resources and her high rate of economic growth, on notice that future economic development must be directed to the best interest of the [COMECON] countries as a whole, even at the cost of some sacrifice to the more immediate interests of individual members. The Council and the executive Committee met here in December, with rumours flying that Roumania was under pressure to reduce her considerable reliance on Western countries for plant and equipment for her industrialization programme. To echo Soviet pronouncements on all points of foreign policy has cost Roumania nothing. It*

*remains to be seen whether, if projects she regards as essential for her national economic interests are threatened, she will be contrary enough to stand up for the cockleshells and silver bells she would like to see in her communist garden...*

*...Potential grounds for dissension and strain in Roumania's relations to the Soviet Union and the other members of the Bloc can thus be discerned; and while she would no doubt seek to compromise if any serious conflict of view should arise, it would not be altogether surprising if the nationalist urge, which Mr Gheorghiu-Dej has promoted, coupled with Roumania's traditional dislike of Russians, Poles, Hungarians and Bulgars, should give her courage to continue to edge her way towards greater independence within the Bloc.<sup>650</sup>*

Indeed, the first half of 1963 witnessed unprecedented and dangerously heightened tensions between Bucharest and Moscow. During the COMECON Executive Committee meeting in February those tensions peaked when Khrushchev formally proposed economic integration and Romania remained the only Bloc country to obdurately reject the measure, leading to an open confrontation between the Soviet leader and Barladeanu. While Khrushchev accused the Romanian government of autarky and of following its narrow interests,<sup>651</sup> Barladeanu calmly explained that Romania “does not have any antagonistic interests” to those of the Bloc, but since it had a different level of development, it also to adopt a different approach to integration.<sup>652</sup> Once again, Khrushchev was forced into a humiliating retreat. “We can't make any kind of concession,” declared Dej at the end of the meeting. “If we would accept such proposals, they would lead to the weakening of our sovereignty.”<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1962). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British legation, Bucharest to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 1 January, 1963, p. 9-10. UKNA document FO 371/171881.

<sup>651</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 289.

<sup>652</sup> Minutes of the Politburo meeting on 26-27 February, 1963. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 4/1963. Op. cit. in *Ibid.*, 289–90.

<sup>653</sup> Op. cit. in *Ibid.*, 290.

Spurred by a series of provocations from the Kremlin over the next few weeks, at the end of March the Romanians made a gesture that would have been all but unthinkable just a few years prior: they placed the divergence with Moscow on the agenda of the 1963 RWP Plenary. This represented nothing less than an open declaration that Romania was officially engaged in a dispute with Moscow, and potentially on the brink of dissidence. With this opening gambit, Dej began playing a dangerous, albeit well calculated and tactful game. And the Kremlin was starting to lose patience. Leaving all diplomatic subtleties aside, the Soviets warned Dej point-blank that “it is not in your interest to break off relations with us.”<sup>654</sup>

A large part of the Romanian leader’s strategy hinged on taking advantage of the Sino-Soviet schism, as he once again began walking the tightrope between the two communist giants – a strategy that will be detailed further later in this chapter. In this way, he could ensure safety from heavy-handed repercussions while inching away from the Kremlin. Playing on Moscow’s heightened sensitivities to further dissent within the Bloc, while at the same time sending an indirect, yet not-too-subtle message to Beijing, Dej sent the Romanian ambassador back to Tirana in the beginning of 1963. At the same time, however, he was very keen on explaining to Moscow that while Romania was the only Bloc country to have re-established diplomatic relations with Albania, Bucharest was not “sliding” towards Beijing; it would have therefore be “wrong to say”, he reassured the Kremlin, “that the Romanians are starting to speak Chinese.”<sup>655</sup> Of course, it was in the best interest of his strategy to leave the door ever so slightly ajar for such possibility; just enough to keep Khrushchev on his toes, and away from making any rash moves against Bucharest.<sup>656</sup>

The top officials within the Romanian government were not only aware of how dangerous this strategy was, but were indeed gearing up for the potential break with the Kremlin that

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<sup>654</sup> Minutes of the Politburo meeting of 26 June, 1963. Op. cit. in Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 297.

<sup>655</sup> Conclusions after the last visit to Bucharest of N.S. Khrushchev, 1963, VI, p. 182. Op. cit. in *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>656</sup> According to Dennis Deletant and Mihail Ionescu, “the rift was indispensable to Dej’s challenge to Khrushchev” even if the Romanian leader was careful to preserve neutrality in the dispute. Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, “Romania and the Warsaw Pact: 1955-1989,” 17.

the Soviets themselves had warned against. “In the eventuality of heightened tensions in these relations, we have to be able to successfully navigate a pivot; we can’t rely on one [economic] source only,”<sup>657</sup> advised Barladeanu. Of course, such policy had implicitly underlined Bucharest’s economic ambitions over the last years; now, however, under the extremely strained relations with Moscow, such need to anchor Romania’s economy further away from the Soviet Union was also starting to become blatantly obvious even to the West.

Since the RWP plenary in March, when Dej had dared to display his differences of opinion on the meeting’s public agenda, the Americans had paid very close attention to the developments in Soviet-Romanian relations. Immediately after the plenary, William C. Crawford, the US minister to Bucharest, had written to Washington, explicitly asking the State Department to adopt policies to help Romania detach itself from the Kremlin.<sup>658</sup> By mid-July the CIA released its internal report, concluding that the country’s increasingly Western-oriented economy (a third of its trade, and growing) would, in fact, be able to withstand an orientation towards the West in case of a Soviet embargo.<sup>659</sup> Within just a few days, the State Department decided to adopt ‘restricted actions’ to support Romania in its bid to forge its own path away from Moscow.

Suspecting that the West would take advantage of its potential schism with Bucharest, the Kremlin began adopting dangerously provocative measures. By the summer of 1963, as the Americans were deciding to step up their efforts to help Bucharest become more independent, the USSR had already activated its espionage system against all Romanian diplomats and government envoys active within the Bloc, who began complaining of being

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<sup>657</sup> Op. cit., p. 184 in Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 298.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>659</sup> *Rumanian Susceptibility to Soviet Bloc Pressures*, Special Report, Office of Current Intelligence, 19 July, 1963. General CIA Records, CREST (FOIA) document CIA-RDP79-00927A004100060002-1. (<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79-00927a004100060002-1>)

followed, bugged and monitored.<sup>660</sup> For the first time since the end of the War, Romania was openly challenging the Soviet bear, potentially at its own peril.

### **The Cuban Missile Crisis and Its Warsaw Pact complications**

If in the summer of 1963 tensions between Bucharest and Moscow had peaked at an all-time high since the end of the War, they certainly would not have reached this apogee had it not been for the Cuban Missile Crisis six months prior. Indeed, while the Romanian government was growing increasingly defiant over economic issues at the time, the sudden and unexpected crisis in the Caribbean - which nearly implicated Bucharest unknowingly and by default in an open confrontation with the United States – certainly drove Dej to accelerate Romania’s efforts towards independence.

From Dej’s perspective, Khrushchev’s recklessness in provoking the crisis by sending missiles to Cuba had only been matched by his irresponsibility in keeping the decision secret from all Warsaw Pact (WP) member states until after 22 October, when John F. Kennedy publicly gave the Kremlin his ultimatum.<sup>661</sup> As a WP member, Romania had thus almost inadvertently been bought to war with the United States. And even as tensions waned following the Soviet Union’s retreat from Cuba, the fact remained that the crisis could have severely jeopardized Romania’s relations with both the West and the Third World – relationships which it had been so earnestly trying to cultivate over the last years. In a testament to Dej’s political tact, however, the shock, fear and embarrassment he surely felt upon finding himself in such a delicate situation were only translated into a policy of caution, restraint, and only measured alignment to Soviet rhetoric throughout the crisis - thus salvaging Romania’s links to both geopolitical spaces, which remained intact in the long run.

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<sup>660</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 299.

<sup>661</sup> After a tense summer regarding Soviet presence in Cuba, on 16 October 1962 American planes found proof of the existence of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Confronted within the UN on 18 October, the Soviets denied their existence, prompting President John F. Kennedy to publicly report on the situation, as well as on his initiative to set up a blockade off the Cuban shores on 22 October. The Soviets withdrew on 28 October.

In a somewhat ironic twist of history, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis Gheorghiu-Dej was conducting his first ever tour of Southeast Asia, where, blissfully ignorant of the impending nuclear holocaust standoff, he was portentously promoting the socialist principles of peaceful coexistence and non-proliferation. Accompanied by Prime Minister Gheorghe Maurer and Foreign Minister Mircea Malita, Dej's high-level, three-week tour of the Asian non-aligned countries was meant to reap the benefits of his intensive and inexhaustible campaign to woo this part of the Third World – discussed at length in the last chapter – and to thus raise Romania's profile as the socialist champion of the recently decolonized, underdeveloped countries.

Dej's first stop had been to Indonesia, where he remained for an extended and much-anticipated visit on 1-12 October. After having received Sukarno twice in Romania with much pomp and circumstance (in 1960 and 1961), hoping thus to impress the most capricious and politically volatile co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), his hospitality was finally reciprocated. The Indonesian leader not only received Dej with his signature, over the top pageantry, but indeed validated all his efforts to help develop the country's oil industry by bestowing on him with the Republic of Indonesia Star, First Class. The decoration, offered for "his services in the struggle to defend freedom, social justice, and everlasting peace between mankind,"<sup>662</sup> together with the inking of a generous three-year trade agreement<sup>663</sup>, automatically raised Dej's credentials as friend of the oppressed Third World to new heights.

From Jakarta, Dej had flown on to New Delhi, where he reached with Nehru an unprecedentedly long-term trade and payments agreement (for 1963-7), thus significantly increasing the level of trade between Romania and India.<sup>664</sup> In exchange for oil products and more oil drilling rigs, India committed to provide Romania with iron ore, which

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<sup>662</sup> Telegram from the British embassy in Jakarta to Foreign Office, 16 October, 1962, p. 2. UKNA document 371/166170.

<sup>663</sup> Through the trade agreement concluded for 1963-65, Romania offered Indonesia a credit for \$15 million and provided for the construction of a refinery of 1.5 million ton/year capacity in Java, alongside the exploration, rehabilitation and exploitation of other oilfields in the same region, in *Ibid.*

<sup>664</sup> Telegram from C.W. Squire, the British Legation in Bucharest to Miss M.I. Rothwell, Northern Department, Foreign Office, 13 December, 1962. UKNA document FO 371/166191.



accounted for an astonishing 60% of Indian-Romanian trade.<sup>665</sup> In a context in which the Soviet Union was not only becoming increasingly unable to provide this raw material for Romania<sup>666</sup>, but was indeed twisting Bucharest's arm to provide more raw materials to COMECON members, Gheorghiu-Dej was clearly looking for alternative sources for this precious resource outside the Socialist Bloc.

With this economic achievement firmly reached, the Romanian leader had finally headed for Burma - a small, yet prestigious and well-respected member of the NAM. Rangoon not only enjoyed a special history and relationship with Belgrade within the NAM framework<sup>667</sup>; but it was also the home of U Thant - the United Nations' first non-white, non-Western Secretary General – who had been promoted to his post following an intensive campaign by the newly decolonized African and Asian members of the organization.<sup>668</sup> Dej's visit to Burma, which concluded his tour of the Asian NAM members, was thus intended as a strategic move of public diplomacy.

In a somewhat embarrassingly turn of events, however, it proved to be quite a diplomatic shot in the foot. Just as Kennedy was publicly confronting the Kremlin about the existence of Soviet missiles in Cuba, the Romanian leader was using his platform in Burma to urge the world to “consider a total nuclear test ban, which [should be] binding on all nations possessing nuclear capability,” and a “necessary first step towards disarmament.”<sup>669</sup> No other statement could perhaps have been more out of place at the time than for a Warsaw Pact member whose ‘big brother’ had just brought the world on the brink of nuclear war.

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 284–85.

<sup>667</sup> Jovan Cavoski, “Arming Nonalignment: Yugoslavia's Relations with Burma and the Cold War in Asia (1950-1955),” *Wilson Center*, April 2010, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/arming-nonalignment-yugoslavia-relations-burma-and-the-cold-war-asia-1950-1955>.

<sup>668</sup> According to Mircea Malita, one of Romania's top representatives to the UN at the time, U Thant enjoyed a wide popularity among the representatives of the non-aligned countries, who had worked with him while he had been Burma's ambassador to the UN, and who had actively supported his ascension to the Secretary General post. In Mircea Malita, *Tablouri Din Razboiul Rece: Memorii Ale Unui Diplomat roman. (Sketches from the Cold War: Memoirs of a Romanian Diplomat)* (Bucharest: C. H. Beck, 2007), 10.

<sup>669</sup> Telegram from S.H. Hebblethwaite, British embassy in Rangoon, to The Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 25 October, 1962, p. 2. UKNA document 371/166171.

Despite this mishap, however, it was perhaps his national audience that Dej was more keen to impress in his quest for legitimacy. And, as in any self-respecting autocracy, the information received by Romanian population could be carefully selected anyways, in order to turn a potential diplomatic failure into a beaming success. As the British embassy in Rangoon reported at the time,

*...the visit can doubtless be counted as a prestige success for the Roumanian (sic) visitors and will presumably supply the Romanian propaganda machine with material for illustrating the good work for peace and friendship put in by the Roumanian leaders.*<sup>670</sup>

International crises and diplomatic hiccups aside, however, on the whole Gheorghiu-Dej's extended tour of the Asian non-aligned states was considered a success. After years of providing aid, technology and know-how to India and Indonesia's developing oil sectors, the Romanian leader had finally been invited for a highly publicized visit to each country. His sojourns in both Jakarta and New Delhi had been crowned by substantial and unprecedentedly long-term economic agreements, which not only firmly established Romania's presence in those countries, but indeed secured the country with much-needed supplies of raw materials at a time when its cooperation with other potential providers within COMECON was precariously hanging by a thread. This achievement proved of noteworthy importance to J.D Murray, the British minister in Bucharest, who reported to London in his annual review for the year,

*During 1962 Roumania (sic) has intensified her cultivation of the uncommitted countries, which she apparently sees as trading partners of growing importance for her expanding economy.*<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>671</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1962). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British Embassy in Bucharest to Northern Department, Foreign Office, 1 January, 1963, p. 8. UKNA document FO 371/171881.

On his way back from Asia, Dej would make his customary stopover in Moscow – this time, to receive a sobering briefing on the nuclear crisis he had thus far been blissfully unaware of. Upon arrival to the Soviet capital on 23 October – the day after Kennedy’s ultimatum to the Kremlin and his announcement of the blockade in the Caribbean – Dej was received at the airport by Khrushchev and, together with the entire Soviet Politburo, taken to the Bolshoy Theater for a special production of *Boris Godunov*.<sup>672673</sup> In his memoirs, Khrushchev explains his decision to show up at the opera at the height of the crisis as a measure to assure the Russian people as well as the international community that the situation was not really as tense as, in reality, it really was.<sup>674</sup> And to Dej it was, in fact, non-existent - until intermission. During the break, Khrushchev approached the Romanian leader and, after briefing him on the American blockade of Soviet ships in the Caribbean, he launched into a vitriolic diatribe on the ‘intransigent’ nature of Kennedy’s decision.<sup>675</sup>

The Romanian delegation was astonished. After Khrushchev retreated at the end of intermission, Prime Minister Maurer reportedly exclaimed to Dej, in utter disbelief, “you’ve seen and heard them; these guys have lost their minds; one of these days you will find out from the newspapers that you’re at war with America!”<sup>676</sup>

The state of shock that Dej, Maurer and Foreign Minister Manescu probably felt in Moscow had been matched only by a frenzy of utter confusion within the Romanian diplomatic corps over the previous 24-hours. With the upper echelons of Romanian power away and uninformed, the Romanian envoys abroad – and particularly those at the UN New York and in the Romanian embassy in Washington, DC – had been receiving only vague and confusing instructions from Bucharest at a time when their response was most critical. Mircea Malita,

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<sup>672</sup> Modest Mussorgosky’s only completed opera, based on the play with the same title by Alexander Pushkin, which first premiered at the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg in January, 1874.

<sup>673</sup> Mircea Malita, *Tablouri Din Razboiul Rece: Memorii Ale Unui Diplomat roman. (Sketches from the Cold War: Memoirs of a Romanian Diplomat)*, 24.

<sup>674</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume III: Statesman (1953-1964)*, vol. 3, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 337.

<sup>675</sup> Mircea Malita, *Tablouri Din Razboiul Rece: Memorii Ale Unui Diplomat roman. (Sketches from the Cold War: Memoirs of a Romanian Diplomat)*, 23.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

who represented Romania at the General Assembly, recounts being faced with an enormous dilemma.<sup>677</sup> While Bucharest was instructing him, for lack of better advice, “to ask our ‘friends’, what is their position?” and “to follow our ‘friends’ position” (referring to the Soviets, of course), the Russian ambassador to the UN, Valerian Zorin, was adamantly denying the existence of the missiles and urging all socialist camp representatives to do the same.<sup>678</sup> Romania’s envoys chose to err on the side of caution by adopting a more neutral stance and, instead of confirming or denying the existence of the missiles, chose instead only to comment on the American decision to orchestrate the blockade.<sup>679</sup>

Internally, however, the Romanian diplomatic corps in the US was struggling with a situation that oscillated between searing panic and utter confusion, in a climate in which a hysterical media was only contributing to the heightened tensions of those days in October.

Immediately following the announcement of the American blockade, Mihai Haseganu, the Romanian Ambassador to the UN, met with Petre Balacescu, the ambassador to Washington to coordinate on the next steps in case of a potential war. Balacescu said he received instructions to burn the embassy’s archive in case of an extreme situation, and was already prepared to follow through.<sup>680</sup> When later Haseganu asked Bucharest for permission to do the same, he was accused of “losing his head”, and was told that he had “fallen under the influence of the bellicose hysteria of the American press.”<sup>681</sup>

Indeed, what is likely to have happened between the two diplomats’ contact with Bucharest was that Dej had returned to Romania in the meantime and was ready to take control of the frenzied situation. In fact, immediately upon his arrival back in the country, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent telegrams to all Romanian missions abroad, urging them “to be firm, but calm, controlled, and to carefully avoid any verbal violence towards American representatives or any of their allies.”<sup>682</sup> Most importantly and of later consequence with respect to Romania’s future with the Warsaw Pact, Leontin Salajan, the Minister of the

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<sup>677</sup> Ibid., p. 8-9.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

<sup>680</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 319.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid, p. 320.

Armed forces , “did not hurry” to follow the Pact’s directive of placing troops on high alert<sup>683</sup>, thereby avoiding the visibility of heightened tensions both to the Romanian public as well as international observers.

Gheorghiu-Dej’s measured response and only lukewarm support of the Kremlin throughout the rest of the crisis was immediately noted by the Western diplomats, who had already been working on establishing closer ties between their countries and Romania. In his dispatch to London at the end of 1962, JD Murray underlined Bucharest’s implied position of distance from the Soviet actions and consistently positive attitude towards the West,

*It has ... been possible to detect a certain lack of zeal over questions which would embroil Roumania in international disputes... the first few days of the crisis over Cuba found the Roumanians aghast at the possible consequences of the Soviet venture in the Caribbean; the Roumanian reaction throughout, both public and private, was studiously moderate... There was a general wave of pleasure and relief at the outcome – and a good deal of unofficial ‘schaden-freude’ over the Russian climb-down. Certainly there was no withdrawal of cordiality towards Britain or the West over the Cuban affair; to the contrary.*

*... although the Romanians paid lip service to the chorus of the socialist countries, less public indications of Roumania’s attitude all serve to confirm my belief that the over-riding desire of the Roumanian leaders is to be left in peace and quiet to cultivate their own particular communist garden.*<sup>684</sup>

Once again, Dej was able to successfully navigate the delicate balance between alignment with the Kremlin and cordiality towards the West. In public, at least. In private, he would later make much stronger statements to both sides, showing his categorical disagreement with Khrushchev’s crisis policies in no uncertain, even if very different, terms. Indeed, the

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<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

<sup>684</sup> Rumania: Annual Report (1962). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British Embassy in Bucharest to Northern Department, Foreign Office, 1 January, 1963, p. 8-9. UKNA document FO 371/171881.

crisis would leave an indelible mark on Dej's strategy for detachment – not only did it reinforce his conviction that Romania's national interest was placed in increasing jeopardy by Khrushchev's policies, especially since it took place at a phase of tensions between Moscow and Bucharest over COMECON issues; but it also most likely accelerated his plans for de-satellization. In fact, the Cuban Missile Crisis provided Dej with yet another avenue for challenging the Kremlin's authority: the framework of the Warsaw Pact.

Despite his apparent equanimity during crisis, the Romanian leader remained profoundly shaken by the episode. In a moment of truth, he would later confess to Khrushchev,

*I have to tell you, Nikita Sergeevich, that never since liberation have I had the feeling I did during the Crisis in the Caribbean, when I felt we were on the edge of the precipice and that everything is hanging by a thread before facing a nuclear catastrophe. When I found out about the decision to withdraw the missiles from Cuba, I breathed with relief.*<sup>685</sup>

Keen to maintain a certain level of amiability with the tempestuous Soviet leader, Dej had managed to voice his concerns while at the same time implicitly crediting Khrushchev for ending the crisis through withdrawal of the missiles. However, it hadn't been just the prospect of a nuclear holocaust that had disturbed the Romanian leader. Long after the crisis was over, Dej remained "profoundly unhappy" about the way in which the Soviets had conducted themselves throughout the crisis, having obdurately denied the missiles' existence in Cuba to the rest of the Warsaw Pact members.<sup>686</sup> Khrushchev's failure to inform, much less consult Dej on the issue was not only a personal affront; it had also constituted a threat to Romanian national security, as he would later confess to the Romanian Politburo,

*We didn't find out until after [the missiles] were sent. And those who sent them to Cuba later withdrew them. The question is, why wasn't such a thing predictable? We*

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<sup>685</sup> Op. cit. in Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 320.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

*have said all those things to the Soviet comrades, that one cannot proceed this way. We are all signatories of the Warsaw Pact. We are interested in all actions, because any measure undertaken by one or another is pertinent to all of us.*<sup>687</sup>

The Romanian leader, however, was not happy to let his preoccupation with the perilous pitfalls of collective security be confined to the confidentiality of the Romanian Politburo. In a bold - and perhaps first such initiative – Bucharest openly criticized the Kremlin before the entire membership of the Warsaw Pact. During the Pact’s first consultative political committee meeting after the crisis, the Romanian delegation formally went on record voicing disapproval of the Kremlin’s policies in the Caribbean. In what had by now become a signature method of shrewdly combining compliments with criticism, the Romanians left no ambiguity about their discontent with Moscow,

*Our country appreciates the wisdom of the Soviet government in resolving the acute crisis through which mankind was going through at the time, and publicly showed, therefore its full support in this sense. **But we do have to say that for us it has remained incomprehensible how a measure of such importance and with such implications for world peace ... could have been adopted without prior discussion with the socialist countries members of the Warsaw Pact, which are tied to each other through mutual defense obligations.***<sup>688</sup>

Bucharest’s problem with the Soviet policies during the crisis, however, seem to have run even deeper than the potential involuntary implication in a collective action against Washington. During the days of the crisis - between the announcement of the American blockade and the Soviet retreat a few days later - the Kremlin had ordered all Warsaw Pact armies to stand on high alert. The directive had been released to each national army without prior consultation with the respective WP governments. As mentioned above, Romania’s army commander-in-chief had not been “in a hurry” to follow the Kremlin’s

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<sup>687</sup> Op. cit. in Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej*, 153.

<sup>688</sup> Minutes of the plenary meeting of the CC of the RWP, 15-22 April, 1964. Op. cit. in Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 323. Bold letters added by author to emphasize the strength of the Romanian criticism, otherwise diplomatically cloaked in compliment, of the Soviet actions.

orders at the time, pointing to a certain discomfort in Bucharest over Moscow's direct commandeering of WP national defense structures.

By the beginning of 1963, the issue of sovereignty was therefore becoming of highest concern for the Romanian leadership. Not only was the pressure mounting within COMECON for the specialization of national economies, as discussed previously in this chapter, but the Soviet adventurism in the Caribbean had also seriously breached collective defense protocols within the framework of the Warsaw Pact<sup>689</sup>, thereby further jeopardizing Romanian national interest.

### **'The flirtation with China'<sup>690</sup>**

The deepening Sino-Soviet rift in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile crisis provided Gheorghiu-Dej with a unique opportunity to address these concerns both politically and theoretically/ideologically. Over the last years, the Romanian leader had already been paying close attention to Beijing's arguments against Moscow's dominant position within the socialist camp. The Chinese had been consistently invoking the principles outlined in the Moscow Declaration - of respect for sovereignty and equality among the socialist states – in order to challenge the Kremlin's assertions to leadership. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising, as Laurien Crump points out, that Bucharest was becoming increasingly interested in and receptive to the Chinese line of reasoning exactly at the same time that its own interests within the Camp were being threatened.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>689</sup> The Soviet action in the Caribbean had violated Article 3 of the Warsaw Pact, which stated that all Pact members "shall immediately consult with one another whenever, in the opinion of any one of them, a threat of armed attack on one or more of the Parties to the Treaty has arisen, in order to ensure joint defense and the maintenance of peace and security".

<sup>690</sup> Phrase used by J.D. Murray, the British Minister to Bucharest, to describe Romania's strategy of making public conciliatory gestures towards China throughout 1963, thereby increasing its leverage against the Soviet Union and at the same time claiming a "self-appointed position as conciliator between Moscow and Peking" in Roumania, Annual Review for 1963, telegram from J.D Murray, British Legation in Bucharest to R.A. Butler, Foreign Office, 13 January, 1964. UKNA document FO 371/177614.

<sup>691</sup> Laurien Crump, "The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: Inquiries into the Evolution of an Underestimated Alliance, 1960-1969" (Utrecht University, 2014), 88–91.



Finding perhaps some ideological inspiration in Beijing, Dej had already been basing his arguments against economic specialization within COMECON on the principle of sovereign equality, as explained earlier in this chapter. And the bolder his assertions needed to be in the face of an increasingly intimidating Kremlin, the more perhaps he felt impelled to ground his arguments in a solid ideological framework. In an effort to obtain such rhetorical strength, in early 1963 Dej commissioned a study of the Marxist-Leninist documents on 'sovereignty and national independence' which stood at the basis of the Moscow Declaration.<sup>692</sup> The ideological fortitude that Dej seemed to be seeking did not appear from this academic study, however, but – once again – from the Chinese themselves.

On 14 June, 1963 Beijing published an exhaustive article on the twenty-five points of contention between the CPSU and the CPC. Among those, the Chinese also included the topic of economic collaboration among socialist states, which could only be based, according to Beijing, on the principles of full equality, and of mutual help and advantage.<sup>693</sup> In a clear allusion to Moscow's coercive COMECON policies, the article went on to launch a full-scale attack on the Kremlin,

*It would be large-scale chauvinism to deny these principles in the name of an international division of labor or of specialization, to impose onto others ones' own will, to weaken the independence and the sovereignty of other brotherly countries or to hurt the interest of their peoples.*<sup>694</sup>

Whether or not Beijing intended to win over Bucharest with the publication of such bold statement, it certainly got the Romanian leadership's attention. Within only a few days of the article's appearance, the Romanians started discussing with the Chinese at length, though in private, the merits of the Moscow Declaration, and especially its clause regarding the idea that "every party is independent concerning its internal problems."<sup>695</sup> Behind the

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<sup>692</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>693</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 308–9.

<sup>694</sup> *Scanteia*, 18 July, 1963, op. cit. in Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>695</sup> Conversation between the Chinese ambassador to Bucharest and Leonte Rautu (RWP), 19 June, 1963. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 1/1963, p. 64 op. cit.

closed doors of the Politburo, the Romanian elites were also growing increasingly emboldened. During a particularly heated discussion on 26 June, the Politburo members voiced “the righteousness of [the Romanian] position”, while condemning the “great discrepancy” between the Kremlin’s theoretical declarations on sovereignty and its actual practice with respect to the satellites.<sup>696</sup> This growing ideological consensus between Bucharest and Beijing on the issue of sovereignty soon found its public expression. On 18 July, the Romanians decided to publish the Chinese article – which had been obdurately ignored by all other Eastern Bloc countries - in the RWP’s mouthpiece, *Scanteia*, much to the searing irritation of the Kremlin (and the surprise of Western observers).

The singularity of Bucharest’s manifestation of ideological solidarity with Beijing<sup>697</sup>, as well as its timing were clearly part of a bigger political strategy. It seems at the very least interesting that Dej chose to publish the Chinese article a full month after its original issue, and just at the same time that Khrushchev had convened a meeting of the Warsaw Pact to discuss Mongolia’s accession into the alliance. During this meeting, the Romanian delegation openly – and, again, singularly - opposed the Kremlin’s initiative, forcing the Soviet leader to withdraw his proposal. In so doing, as Laurien Crump points out, Bucharest not only gained an upper hand in its relationship with the Kremlin, but indeed signaled “a reorientation in Romanian foreign policy.”<sup>698</sup>

Bucharest’s move had been well-calculated: by thwarting the membership of another Asian member in the WP, it thus prevented the alliance from turning anti-Chinese. In a context of escalating tensions between Moscow and Beijing, this tactical gesture would later allow the Romanians to claim that they had single-handedly prevented a further escalation of the

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in Laurien Crump, “The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: Inquiries into the Evolution of an Underestimated Alliance, 1960-1969,” 90–91.

<sup>696</sup> Minutes of the CC Politburo meeting of the RWP, 26 June, 1963. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 34/1963, p 2-32 op. cit. in Ibid., 91.

<sup>697</sup> While it was important to find common ground on the issue of economic autonomy, Bucharest and Beijing certainly did not agree on all matters. Some foreign policy issues especially, such as Nuclear Test Ban treaty, remained a major point of contention between the two. In Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*.

<sup>698</sup> Laurien Crump, “The Balkan Challenge to the Warsaw Pact, 1960–64,” in *The Balkans in the Cold War* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 133.

Sino-Soviet dispute.<sup>699</sup> Indeed, even Western observers at the time – who were keeping a closer eye as ever on Romania – were quick to notice that “Rumania preaches conciliation and sets herself up as a would-be conciliator between Moscow and Peking.”<sup>700</sup>

Regardless of Bucharest’s long-term plans to become a potential mediator between the two Communist giants, however, its unprecedented gesture of solidarity with China within the WP had immediate advantages. At a time when its own frictions with the Kremlin had reached a peak over COMECON issues, Romania was clearly signaling to Moscow that it was seeking a rapprochement with China – a move guaranteed to secure more leverage. As J.D Murray astutely observed,

*I think it is safe to assume that the flirtation with China was a tactical move to strengthen Rumania’s hand in the dispute with [COMECON] and that her continued tenderness towards China is likewise designed to give her some room to manoeuvre in the future.*<sup>701</sup>

Indeed, Bucharest’s ‘continued tenderness’ towards Beijing was also likely meant to hint to Moscow, not so gently, the vague possibility of dissidence – a strategy to keep the Kremlin’s potential retaliation safely at bay. The signing of trade agreements with both Beijing and Tirana – the Bloc’s fiercely unapologetic dissidents – in the first half of 1963 was perhaps the strongest such message.

While Bucharest was keen on forcing the Kremlin’s hand with such policies, however, it was also equally careful not to let the West misinterpret its newfound rapprochement with China and Albania. Indeed, it would have been strategically unwise for the Romanian leadership to let the West believe that it was sliding towards the more hardline spectrum of the Socialist camp, and thus risk losing the relationships it had so earnestly tried to consolidate over the last years. In what seems to have been an intentional gesture, the

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<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

<sup>700</sup> Rumania: Annual Review (1963). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British embassy, Bucharest, to R.A. Butler, Foreign Office, 13 January, 1963, p. 3. UKNA document FO 371/177614.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

Romanian government was therefore leaking details of its strategy to Washington. A report compiled by the CIA in 1963 very clearly shows both this transparency on the part of the Romanians, as well as their intended strategy,

*By and large, the Rumanian regime, as one Rumanian diplomat said, has been “playing games” with Communist China and Albania to strengthen its bargaining power vis-à-vis the [COMECON] members.<sup>702</sup>*

By the summer of 1963, Dej had therefore engaged Romania in a very tactical and potentially extremely dangerous game: staunchly defying the Soviets within both COMECON and the WP, while at the same time seeking both rapprochement with China and Albania and an increasingly solid relationship with the West. The audacity of the Romanian government and its now obvious strategy to gain more independence was very aptly described by Britain’s top representative to Bucharest,

*Most remarkable in the field of foreign relations is the flirtation which Rumania conducted with China. This reached its height prior to the July meeting, when it looked as if the Russian Bear might swipe out angrily to discourage further baiting by the daring Rumanian Gypsy. As early as March the Rumanians had sent back their ambassador to Tirana and signed a commercial agreement with Albania and, in April, with China, allowing for modest increase of trade with both countries. These moves might have passed without comment but for the highly individualistic manner in which the Rumanian Government chose to treat the Sino-Soviet dispute, as compared to other Eastern European Communist Governments.<sup>703</sup>*

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<sup>702</sup> *Rumanian Susceptibility to Soviet Bloc Pressures*, Special Report, Office of Current Intelligence, 19 July, 1963. General CIA Records, CREST (FOIA) document CIA-RDP79-00927A004100060002-1. (<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79-00927a004100060002-1>)

<sup>703</sup> Rumania: Annual Review (1963). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British embassy, Bucharest, to R.A. Butler, Foreign Office, 13 January, 1963, p. 2. UKNA document FO 371/177614.

Indeed, Gheorghiu-Dej's increasingly independent and defiant policy was now not only becoming a subject of intense scrutiny, especially from the West, but also potentially a target for retaliation from the Kremlin.

### **Western promises**

So heightened had tensions become by the summer of 1963, in fact, that the American government commissioned a special report on the Kremlin's potential responses to Bucharest's insubordination. Noting that Romania's relationship with Moscow and the rest of the Bloc was facing an "uncertain future", Washington was already considering that "the USSR might eventually feel it necessary to bring pressures... to bear, even at the risk of failure or of damage to its relations with other European satellites."

It had therefore become obvious to all observers, and especially those in the West, that the game that Gheorghiu-Dej was playing was exceptionally high-risk. And there were good reasons to believe that the Kremlin might choose to retaliate, one way or another. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Soviet Union had already activated its surveillance network, which targeted all Romanian diplomats and officials operating abroad. The Americans, whose surveillance network seems to have been equally active at the time, were already considering the possibility that the Kremlin might use psychological pressures, economic sanctions or clandestine operations to 'convince' Bucharest to fall back in line with its policies. A military intervention, however, was quickly ruled out by the American government,

*It is unlikely that military forces would be used and none of the remaining forms of pressure, either singly or in combination, would be certain to bring about what the USSR would regard as a salutary change in the Rumanian attitude. Moreover, their use could provoke unfavorable reactions in Eastern Europe, provide further reason for the*

*Chinese Communists to attack and weaken the receptiveness of the underdeveloped countries to Russian overtures.*<sup>704</sup>

The American assessment was accurate: Gheorghiu-Dej's strategy over the last half decade was now bearing fruit and acting as a strong insurance cover against Soviet wrath. First, by acting as the Kremlin's most faithful of allies during the Hungarian revolution, Dej had been able to gradually obtain from the Soviets important concessions – such as the troop withdrawal and the green light to Romania's rapid industrialization process – which had been essential elements to his slow and sometimes awkward but nonetheless consistent strategy of detachment. Thanks to a climate of intra-camp factionism, Dej could choose to pursue a bolder course for independence knowing that the Soviets would not risk losing more political capital by applying coercive measures. Second, his relationship with Beijing – which he had intensely cultivated over the last decade and which, even at the height of the Sino-Soviet tensions had not become as cold and detached as had the rest of the satellites' ties with Beijing – was now proving to be a strong bulwark against any potential Soviet action. Indeed, this relationship was key to Dej's plans for earning Romania more independence from the Kremlin. As the Americans rightly predicted,

*Bucharest will continue to exploit Moscow's need for support in the Sino-Soviet dispute as it tries to gain acceptance for its position in [COMECON] and to retain the right of independent national planning.*<sup>705</sup>

And finally, Bucharest's campaign to build strong relationships in the non-aligned Third World over the last years was now also providing the country with an additional measure of political cover in its bid for detachment. These efforts, which had culminated in Dej's extensive tour of the Asian non-aligned countries in October 1962, were further reinforced by U Thant's official visit to Romania in May 1963. The presence in Bucharest of the UN Secretary General, who not only enjoyed wide popularity among the non-aligned states

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<sup>704</sup> *Rumanian Susceptibility to Soviet Bloc Pressures*, Special Report, Office of Current Intelligence, 19 July, 1963. General CIA Records, CREST (FOIA) document CIA-RDP79-00927A004100060002-1. (<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79-00927a004100060002-1>)

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

within the international organization, but had in fact been elected to his post thanks to their intense campaigning, “stressed Romania’s increasing respectability”<sup>706</sup> on the global stage, and especially within the NAM. Within this context, as the CIA had rightly pointed out, it was therefore highly unlikely that the Soviets would have risked losing political capital in a sphere they themselves had been arduously trying to impress, by retaliating against Bucharest – now a strong ally of the Third World.

Despite the potential precariousness of his high-risk game, Dej was therefore in a strong position to play it. And the West had good reason to keep its eyes on Romania. In fact, the more Bucharest’s relations with Moscow deteriorated, the more its dealings with the West – and especially those with the United States - improved.<sup>707</sup>

Indeed, thanks to an international climate of détente, the relationship between Bucharest and Washington has been gradually, albeit very slowly improving over the previous years. At the core of this cautious rapprochement had been the pivot in the US foreign policy towards the Eastern European satellites. The Hungarian Revolution in 1956 had tested Washington’s policy of potential liberation of the Soviet satellites through armed intervention. At the height of the crisis, Washington had decided not to intervene, thus not only reconfirming the geopolitical status quo, but also underscoring the need to recalibrate the policy towards the Eastern Bloc. In 1958, Washington thus acknowledged the need for more “flexible US courses of action” towards the satellites, which were intended take advantage of these countries’ differences in order to “appropriately exploit their individual historical and cultural characteristics” as a way of driving a wedge between them and the Soviet Union.<sup>708</sup>

Through this shift in foreign policy, the prospect of hard power applied through intervention thus gave way to a more flexible and differentiated approach to the Eastern Bloc countries.

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<sup>706</sup> Rumania: Annual Review (1963). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British embassy, Bucharest, to R.A. Butler, Foreign Office, 13 January, 1963, p. 3. UKNA document FO 371/177614.

<sup>707</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 298.

<sup>708</sup> National Security Council Report (NSC 5811/1): Statement of the US Policy toward the Soviet-Dominated Nations in Eastern Europe, 24 May, 1958. FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume X, Part 1, Eastern Europe Region, Soviet Union, Cyprus, document 6.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d6>

At the core of this strategy was leveraging soft power tactics – such as “cultural, technical and educational exchanges – in order to ‘lure’ the satellites away from the Kremlin. Noting that Bucharest was “exceptionally receptive to increased contacts with the West”<sup>709</sup>, Washington developed a detailed strategy of intensifying its contacts with Romania through a wide range of cultural avenues, including a university exchange program, the establishment of a US information library in Bucharest, and the dissemination of technical and popular US publications.<sup>710</sup>

By 1960, the Washington was reporting “substantial progress” in the US-Romanian relations, after an agreement was reached on March 30 on the American financial claims against the Romanian government for having nationalized US assets after the War.<sup>711</sup> The agreement not only encouraged Washington to continue its ongoing cultural and technical exchange programs with Bucharest, but also invigorated its efforts to explore the “modest opportunities for advancing [US] policy objectives with respect to Rumania (sic).”<sup>712</sup>

Reaching an agreement on confiscated property claims was an important milestone in Romania’s relationship with the West, and especially with the US and UK. As mentioned in Chapter 4, while similar agreements had been reached with the neutral Scandinavian countries a couple of years earlier, the negotiations with Washington and London lagged behind mainly because of the ideologically-oriented foreign policy of these two governments. In fact, the Anglo-American approach to the Eastern European satellites was so strikingly similar at the time, that they seemed to influence each other substantially, even though they were not altogether coordinated. A testament to this ‘mirror’ approach is the fact that Bucharest’s signature of the claims agreement with Washington in March 1960 was very shortly followed by a similar agreement with London in November. In both cases, negotiations had been languishing for nearly half a decade; and, in both cases, once the

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<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Operations Coordinating Board Report: Operations Plan for the Soviet Dominated Nations of Eastern Europe, 2 July, 1959. Ibid., document 18.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d19>

<sup>711</sup> Operations Coordinating Report: Report on Soviet-Dominated Nations in Eastern Europe (NSC 5811/1), 27 July 1960. Ibid., document 30.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d30>

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.



agreements were reached, similar consequences then followed, as explained by David Scott Fox, then-British minister to Romania,

*The progress thus achieved in disposing of some of our principal long-standing differences with the Roumanian Government should open the way for the modest expansion of Anglo-Roumanian trade and may have repercussions in other fields as well. **When the United States reached a financial settlement with Roumania in the Spring of 1960, it was promptly followed by successful negotiations on cultural relations. Similarly, within a few weeks of the signature of the Anglo-Roumanian trade and financial agreements we received some quite promising Roumanian proposals for increasing our cultural exchanges.***<sup>713</sup>

After reaching the claims' agreements in 1960, the level of cultural and economic exchange between Romania and the UK and US therefore continued to grow modestly over the next two years, signaling positive, if only modest improvements in those relationships.

In 1963, however, Bucharest's relationship with the West – and especially with Washington – witnessed an unprecedented improvement, both in intensity as well as quality. Although Romania had been pursuing detachment from Moscow for some time, it was not until Bucharest's very public and controversial defiance of Moscow over COMECON issues in the spring of that year that Washington began to show stronger signals of rapprochement with the Eastern Bloc country. Indeed, as soon as the COMECON controversy came to light R. Thayer, the American minister to Bucharest immediately recommended to the State Department that a more open and inclusive policy towards Romania should be adopted. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Washington had been cautious, expecting other signals of independence from Bucharest before embarking on a more sustained campaign to improve the relationship.

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<sup>713</sup> Roumania: Annual Report (1960). Telegram from David Scott Fox, British Legation, Bucharest, to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, December 29, 1960, p. 6-7. UKNA document FO 371/159501. Italics added by author to emphasize the striking similarity between the US and UK approaches, and also how one automatically represented a frame of reference for the other.

By the summer of 1963, it had become obvious that Dej was keen to pull Romania out of the Kremlin's orbit, and at great risk. Bucharest's friendly gestures towards China and Albania had been rightly interpreted by the CIA as tactics to increase bargaining power, rather than hints that Romania was sliding towards ideological orthodoxies. Washington was thus well-aware of the dangerously heightened tensions between Moscow and Bucharest at the time. And precisely because of these tensions, perhaps, the State Department decided to make its first grand and open gesture of friendship towards Romania, therefore adding another measure of protective insurance from a potential Soviet retaliation.

At the beginning of August Orville Freeman, the US Secretary of Agriculture, paid an official, three-day visit to Romania, together with his wife and an assorted group of agricultural specialists. The event marked a turning point in the country's Cold War history: Freeman was the first US official to visit Bucharest since the end of World War II<sup>714</sup>, thereby sending a strong signal that Washington was shifting its policy towards the Eastern Bloc country.

Apart from its symbolic significance, the visit was crucial to Romania's foreign policy for two main reasons. First, it was absolutely necessary for Dej – who viewed Freeman as John F. Kennedy's personal envoy<sup>715</sup> - to ensure that his guest would obtain a better informed and therefore more nuanced perspective on Romania. "It is hoped", an internal report regarding the visit underlined, "that throughout his visit, the American guest was able to notice that there is no 'Iron Curtain', which is so often mentioned in the United States, and that we are not satellites, as some people in the United States claim."<sup>716</sup> Indeed, underscoring Romania's independence vis-à-vis Moscow was vital for the Romanian leadership, especially in light of the situation at the time. And the mission of dispelling some of the Iron Curtain myth seemed to have been achieved. According to the same report, Freeman had confirmed that, "after his visit, he was now convinced that such

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<sup>714</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 303.

<sup>715</sup> Ibid.

<sup>716</sup> Note regarding the visit to Romania of the American Secretary for Agriculture, Orville Freeman, together with his wife, 3-5 August, 1963. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Foreign Relations, document 12/1963 in Nicolae Escobescu, Constantin Moraru, Nicolae Rapotean, *Trei Decenii de Relatii Romano-Americane, 1955-1985: Documente I, 1955-1972 (Three Decades of Romanian-American Relations, 1955-1985: Documents I (1955-1972))*, vol. 5 (Bucharest: Fundatia Europeana Titulescu, 2015), 150–57.

characterizations did not correspond with reality.”<sup>717</sup> Indeed, the American official assured Dej that he was happy to have had the opportunity to have gained a more nuanced understanding of Romania’s position on the international stage, and assured Dej that he would personally relay to JFK these impressions.<sup>718</sup>

The US perception of Romanian foreign policy was not just a matter of national prestige; it was also of strategic importance in securing Romania’s industrialization plans, and thus in securing the country’s economic independence. Dej was keenly aware that the American government would not provide Romania with industrial licenses and equipment if it were not convinced of the country’s willingness to pursue a more independent course. Such belief was strongly exhibited throughout Freeman’s visit, as the Romanian leader often tied his arguments in support of his country’s independence to requests for industrial equipment.<sup>719</sup>

The close interrelation between those two topics would indeed become a predominant theme of Romanian-American relations over the short term. Keen to strike the iron while it was still hot, the Romanian leadership made sure that the message of Romania’s independence and need for industrial equipment would be echoed within all relevant channels of the American government. Within only two days of Freeman’s visit to Bucharest, Romanian Deputy Mircea Malita met in Washington with his American counterpart, Averell Harriman, Under Secretary for Political Affairs. During this meeting, Malita underlined that “Rumania (sic) clearly intends to pursue its established course of building up its industry” despite clashes of interest within COMECON, where “nothing can be done... contrary to the desires and interests of any individual member.”

The Americans were quick to note the perhaps no-so-subtle hint that Romania’s independence was in part reliant on American industrial equipment. Their response was not only reassuring, but indeed must have come as great relief,

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid., p. 155-7.

*Governor Harriman referred to newspaper reports here over recent months of evidence of a more independent Rumanian position and spirit vis-à-vis Moscow both with regard to [COMECON] and to Sino-Soviet differences, and noted that the Rumanians had returned their Ambassador to Albania, contrary to the action of other Bloc countries. **He said that these signs of an independent spirit met with an approving reaction on the part of the American people and that in this atmosphere it might be possible to be more receptive to Rumanian requests for more trade and to Rumanian needs for industrial installations to which Mr. Gheorghiu-Dej had referred in his recent talk with Agriculture Secretary Freeman.***<sup>720</sup>

Malita's mission to the United States had been successful – in light of Romania's recent policies, the Americans were clearly open to considering Dej's request for equipment. Upon his return to Bucharest, the Romanian diplomat sat down with Dej for a briefing on his conversations with the Americans. They had signaled their willingness "to enter a new phase" of the Romanian-American relationship, but only once "reciprocal interests are perfectly identified," Malita recounted. Washington was interested, above all, to know if Romania's dissent within COMECON had been a one-off act of rebellion against her 'big brother', or if it was part of a bigger and consistent strategy to gain independence.<sup>721</sup>

The American insistence on clarifying Romania's position vis-à-vis the Kremlin irritated the Romanian leader, who launched into a tirade about Washington's black-and-white approach,

*They wanted something else. They wanted open gestures against the Soviet Union, similar to those of Yugoslavia, let's say. Because they're afraid of China's current*

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<sup>720</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 8 August, 1963, 1pm. FRUS, 1961-1963, Volume XVI, Part 1, Eastern Europe; Cyprus; Greece; Turkey. Document 20:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v16/d20> .

<sup>721</sup> Minutes of the verbal report presented by Mircea Malita, Deputy Foreign Minister, to Gheorghiu-Dej regarding his talks in Washington, Bucharest, 18 August, 1963. ANIC, fond CC of the RWP, Chancellery, document 42/1963, pp. 2-26. In Nicolae Escobescu, Constantin Moraru, Nicolae Rapotean, *Trei Decenii de Relatii Romano-Americane, 1955-1985: Documente I, 1955-1972 (Three Decades of Romanian-American Relations, 1955-1985: Documents I (1955-1972))*, 5:159–74.

*gestures [against the SU]... This is their mentality. Even if we had said that the Soviet Union does not lead our internal policy, they wouldn't have believed us... We have the same flag: Marxism-Leninism. But [its] practical application in one place or another depends on internal factors. They don't understand all these issues.*<sup>722</sup>

Clearly, the Americans had misjudged Romania's position, which was neither yet as solid nor as independent as Yugoslavia's, and could therefore not afford too many signs of defiance against the Kremlin. In fact, Dej's whole strategy of detachment had been based on a conciliatory approach towards Moscow to the largest extent possible in order to slowly carve out higher degrees of autonomy, over time and without conflict. Unlike Albania, the only other 'rebellious' satellite who had chosen to vociferously cut ties with the Kremlin and its allies in a bid for independence (and at great cost), Bucharest was choosing instead to 'play well' with the Russian bear in order to gain a gradual, but potentially more stable and prosperous independent path for Romania. Even Bucharest's gestures of resistance against the Kremlin had been meticulously well-calibrated: they had been ideologically principled, politically moderate, even if firm; and they had been carried out systematically, within the boundaries and guidelines of institutional frameworks, such as COMECON and the WP.

The Americans were pushing too much, too soon, in wanting assurances of an open and long-term rebellion.

Dej's annoyance with the American lack of nuance was brief, however. After his short diatribe on Washington's unrealistic expectations, he chose to refocus on the merits of Romania's current position, and the benefits it could reap from the American rapprochement. And in order to do so, Romania had to play its usual, diplomatically appeasing part – as it had been for the last two decades. After hearing Malita's briefing on his visit to Washington, the Romanian leader began instructing his top diplomat on the narrative he should adopt in all his interactions with the American interlocutors from there onwards,

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

*Whenever we have the opportunity, we have to refer to concrete things; like I said, we have to present things from a principled point of view: we have always had independence and sovereignty and we continue to have them. Maybe they are more obvious now or maybe they stand out more because of certain controversies, the same way there can be controversies between any institutions, even from within the same country. I won't even talk about different countries. Although we are socialist countries, controversies can arise; different interests, which can also determine different positions. The relations between us are [based] on equality and... the principle of reciprocal advantage. They are not relations [which allow] some to impose their point of view onto others...<sup>723</sup>*

With such diplomatic explanation of Romania's COMECON dissent, Gheorghiu-Dej was thus trying to attract the Americans, while at the same time keeping the Kremlin's (and, to an extent, Beijing's) irritations safely at bay.

Gheorghiu-Dej's preference for subtlety, nuance and back-door diplomacy could best perhaps be exemplified by an episode in Romanian-American relations that to this day has remained somewhat of a historical enigma. During a meeting between Foreign Minister Corneliu Manescu and Secretary of State Dean Rusk on 4 October, 1963, the Romanian diplomat allegedly professed to his counterpart Bucharest's position of neutrality in the event of another episode similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>724</sup> According to Raymond Garthoff, Rusk's colleague and confidant at the time, the Romanian diplomat had approached the Secretary of State in secrecy with this declaration,

*Manescu told Rusk that Romania had not been consulted over the Soviet decision to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, and was not therefore party to the dispute. The Romanian government wanted the United States to understand that Romania would remain neutral in any conflict generated by such actions as the Soviet deployment of missiles in Cuba, and sought assurances that in the event of hostilities arising from*

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<sup>723</sup> Ibid., p. 166-7.

<sup>724</sup> Raymond Garthoff, "When and Why Romania Distanced Itself from the Warsaw Pact," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* Spring 1995, no. 5 (1995): 111.

*such situation, the United States would not strike Romania on the mistaken assumption that it would be allied with the Soviet Union in such a war.*<sup>725</sup>

If true, such astounding declaration of detachment from Moscow's policies – made at the highest diplomatic level, no less – would indeed be of significant importance to Romania's Cold War history. Although no paper trail pertaining to this conversation exists (perhaps understandably so), documents from the Romanian archives do confirm the fact that a meeting between the two men did take place on that day.<sup>726</sup>

In either case, Romania's relationship with the West was on an upwards trend throughout 1963. By the end of the year, both the British and American legations in Bucharest were raised to embassy rank – a strong signal of the West's commitment to improving ties with the Eastern European country. Within just a few short months after that, and due to increasing pressures from the Kremlin, in April 1964 Romania would publish its 'Declaration of Independence' – its public, unequivocal and unapologetic affirmation of sovereignty. With this gesture – by far the most daring in Romania's two decades of post-War history – Gheorghiu-Dej thus firmly and formally placed the country on its path towards detachment. Somewhat ironically, it would not be until four years later, when Nicolae Ceausescu condemned the Soviet intervention to crush the Prague Spring in 1968, that the West would dub him as 'the maverick' of the Eastern Bloc for his audacity. Little did the West know then, and still scarcely recognizes today, that Ceausescu's impudently rebellious tendencies were only a continuation of his predecessor's more subtle policies to gain Romania's detachment.

## **Conclusion**

1963 was a pivotal year for Romanian foreign policy. Throughout its tense and eventful course, Gheorghiu-Dej was able to successfully navigate his country's new path: away from Soviet influence and towards a more active and independent role on the global stage. Within just a decade since Romania began its awkward process of de-Stalinization in 1953, the country had evolved from Moscow's most subservient, but poorest of allies, into a rapidly developing and confident challenger against the Kremlin. At the core of this

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<sup>725</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>726</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 303–5.

transformation stood a robust plan for economic development which, had the Soviets not challenged with their initiative for specialization, might have just turned Romania into their strongest ally. Instead, it emboldened Bucharest's efforts for detachment. As J.D Murray aptly described the year's events and the Soviet's uninspiring policies,

*At the end of 1962 observers were beginning to wonder whether Roumania would dance to the tunes of Moscow. Before 1963 was very old it became obvious that Roumania, so long one of the best-drilled of Moscow Eastern European troupe of Tiller Girls, was out of step; and 1963 is likely to go down as the year in which Roumania found a will of her own, defied the Soviet Union and other members of [COMECON] and forced, by her intransigence, a drastic reassessment of Mr. Khrushchev's scheme to use [COMECON] to speed integration of the economies of its member States. Roumania's assertion of greater independence had, of course, been gathering strength over the last two or three years.... [T]he effect of pressure to amend their plans for economic development was to kindle a blaze of nationalist feeling stronger, perhaps, than the Roumanian leaders may have at first realised was latent to inspire them.<sup>727</sup>*

Of course, Bucharest's 'intransigence' in pursuing its national interest would not have easily been tolerated by Moscow had not a few significant other factors been present within the global political atmosphere. First, Romania took advantage of the widening Sino-Soviet rift in order to play on Moscow's sensitivities to growing dissent within the Socialist camp. By making conciliatory gestures towards Beijing and hinting towards a potential rapprochement with Moscow's socialist rival, Bucharest was thus able to obtain a measure of security against the Soviet bear. At the same time, Romania's efforts of cultivating its relationship with the NAM leaders over the last years paid off many times over in 1962-63, as Bucharest was able to raise its international profile and legitimacy as supporter of the Third World, thus gaining an added measure of protection against any Soviet hostilities. Finally – and most importantly – because of its open dissent within COMECON, and thanks

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<sup>727</sup> Rumania: Annual Review (1963). Telegram from J.D. Murray, British embassy, Bucharest, to R.A. Butler, Foreign Office, 13 January, 1963, p. 1. UKNA document FO 371/177614.



to an international climate of détente, Romania was able to firmly establish and build stronger bridges to the West, and especially the United States.

In such an international climate, Gheorghiu-Dej therefore had to play with forces beyond his control in order to obtain competitive advantages for his initiative to firmly place Romania on a course towards independence. And in this process his political acumen and strong inclination towards tactful strategy came strongly into play. Indeed, as Dan Catanus aptly puts it, Dej was only able to get away with his intransigent policies “by convincing the Soviets he was not pro-Chinese; the Chinese that he was not pro-Soviet; and the West that he was pursuing an independent course.”<sup>728</sup> Such tactical skill becomes only more outstanding when considering not only his humble and precarious beginnings as Romania’s leader, but also the country’s deplorable economic situation and obscure international profile only a decade earlier.

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<sup>728</sup> Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965*, 311.

## Conclusions

This thesis has shown the evolution of Romania's journey from "the most abject of the satellites" at the time of Stalin's death in 1953 to the "daring gypsy" that defied Moscow ten years later. Steered by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the country's first Communist dictator, this decade-long process was oftentimes awkward and syncopated, yet nonetheless consistently focused on seeking more independence from the Soviet Union. This does not imply, of course, that Dej possessed a blueprint for reaching this aim. But he did, clearly, seem to identify this objective as early as 1955, when he initially and very awkwardly requested Soviet troop withdrawal. And he pursued it according to the opportunities conferred to him by the ebbs and flows of the global Cold War dynamic throughout this ten-year period.

The result was not a modest one: Gheorghiu-Dej was able to carry out the first peaceful and successful process of de-satellization of an Eastern European country within the constraining framework of the Warsaw Pact. By 1963 Romania was not only able to challenge Moscow's plans for economic integration within the COMECON framework, thereby asserting its sovereign right to pursue its own national economic interest; but it was able to do so without incurring any retaliatory punishment from the Kremlin. This is even more remarkable considering that Romania's journey towards autonomy from 1953 to 1963 was temporally flanked by the Soviet military interventions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). If Budapest and Prague paid the price for their intransigent demands for freedom with the oppressive weight of thousands of Soviet tanks, Bucharest managed to gain its autonomy without a single Kalashnikov bullet fired in its direction.

Herein lies one of Gheorghiu-Dej's key ingredients to his success, however – he was not a reformer. In matters of internal policy, he was indisputably one of the most iron-fisted leaders within the bloc. Unlike the revolutionary leaders in Hungary and Czechoslovakia then, Dej was not seeking a higher degree of self-determination for his people, but only a stronger hold on power for himself. And this, he managed to achieve quite masterfully. In

fact, by 1963 Gheorghiu-Dej was the only “little Stalin” left standing in Eastern Europe after the sweeping changes following the Soviet dictator’s death a decade prior.<sup>729</sup>

His political longevity was owed in no small part to his clear-cut differentiation between Romania’s internal affairs, over which he maintained the most stringent of controls, and its foreign policy, which he actively sought to detach from Moscow’s overbearing influence. This dichotomy he was keen on maintaining with fierce tenacity; although, paradoxically, the two elements were also complementary and mutually reinforcing – without an open and healthy economy, Dej could not rule by force only. Throughout the country’s decade-long journey towards de-satellization, Dej ensured that any step away from the Soviet Union would not be interpreted by the local population as an opportunity for political liberalization. As a result, every important concession he extracted from Moscow was immediately followed by a wave of internal terror and oppression – an extremely effective method of keeping in check any potential opposition or initiative for reform.

The inextricable and often problematic link between these two spheres – the internal and the external - was the economy. As the Romanian leader was shocked to learn immediately after Stalin’s death, ruling over a starving and destitute population was a precarious affair. If he hoped to maintain power – the Kremlin had warned him at the time – he had to endear himself to the people by increasing their deplorable standard of living. This Soviet-inspired principle was later internalized by Dej and applied consistently throughout the rest of his career, by turning Romania from one of the poorest, most agricultural and underdeveloped countries in the Eastern Bloc into a thriving and rapidly industrializing regional power with a growing presence on the world stage. This is yet perhaps another secret to Dej’s success: his uncanny ability of turning failure into success with patience, tact and an enviable sensitivity to the larger currents in global politics. It was therefore this way that he not only politically survived the wave of de-Stalinization that displaced his counterparts within the bloc, but

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<sup>729</sup>Following the 1953 uprisings in Berlin, Walter Ulbricht eventually lost both power and influence within the government. In Hungary, hardliner Matias Rakosi was replaced by a more moderate and reform-oriented Imre Nagy; similarly, Vulko Chernekov was replaced by a more moderate Todor Zhivkov in Bulgaria, while in Czechoslovakia Antonin Novotny took over after Klement Gottwald died in office earlier that year.

also how he cemented his position of leadership over the next ten years – through economic reform, if not political.

It was therefore Dej's quest for internal legitimacy that steered his efforts towards a more autonomous foreign policy. The low living conditions of the Romanian population and the country's dependence on Soviet aid represented the most significant liabilities for his leadership position in the early and mid-1950s. By adopting a plan for robust economic development through rapid industrialization at the end of that decade, Dej hoped to address both these issues: a healthier economy could provide the consumer goods necessary for a content population; while a decreased reliance on the Kremlin's help would not only further pacify the otherwise anti-Soviet Romanians, but would also allow him a freer hand at steering his country's foreign policy. It was thus that Romania's 'alternative' path to the construction of socialism was born, out of need for a stronger economy through an increasingly more open foreign policy. Thus, it can be said that while internally Dej applied Stalinist policies throughout his tenure, externally he came to pursue a Titoist foreign policy by the mid-1960s.

If Dej was not a reformist, however, then neither was he an ideologue. Despite his fondness for Stalin's methods of heavy-handed internal oppression, he only seemed to pay lip service to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism enough to appease and earn the trust of the Soviets. Instead, he appealed to the nationalist sentiment of the Romanian population in order to create more cohesion within the most ethnically diverse country in the Eastern bloc; and, in so doing, thus gain an extra veneer of legitimacy for his position of leadership. It was therefore perhaps opportunism rather than national communism – or very well a mixture of both – that influenced the Romanian leader's decision-making, especially in terms of foreign policy. Instead of aligning himself with the ideological orthodoxies championed by China – a viable alternative to him by the beginning of the 1960s - he chose instead to pursue tactics that could confer on Romania the most advantageous economic and political benefits. By mimicking the Soviet proclamations and policies with respect to the neutrals, the Third World and the West, Dej was able to expand Romania's economy and establish its relationships with the world beyond the socialist camp in a way that later allowed him to irreversibly detach Bucharest from Moscow.

It is this relentless pragmatism that is perhaps most instructive when looking at Romania's evolving role as a junior actor within the Cold War dynamic. From a pericentric perspective<sup>730</sup>, Dej's ability to skillfully steer Romania out of the Kremlin's orbit offers valuable insight into the level of agency that the Soviet satellites possessed in charting their own courses within the Soviet sphere. Indeed, this thesis has detailed the country's transformation over a ten-year period from what Tony Smith has referred to as a "manipulated object" of the hegemon into an "effective subject" on the global stage.<sup>731</sup> And, in so doing, it has illustrated not only the varying degrees of flexibility that the Kremlin showed vis-à-vis its satellites throughout this period; but also, conversely, the extent to which this flexibility could be tested and manipulated by the satellites in order to gain more autonomy by employing Cold War exigencies.

By detailing Romania's process of de-satellization within the five, chronologically-ordered preceding chapters, this thesis integrated topics within the historiography that have, until now, mostly been discussed individually (i.e. the impact of de-Stalinization or the Hungarian Revolution, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, or Romania's bilateral relations with Yugoslavia, etc.). Through this comprehensive approach, it has therefore been able to highlight three key findings. First, the thesis identifies and discusses in detail the intimate relationship between Romania's national economy and its increasingly autonomous foreign policy – a topic that not only has remained largely uncharted by English-language historiography<sup>732</sup>, but that also offers valuable insight into the broader dynamic between

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<sup>730</sup> Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000).

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>732</sup> See, among others, Elena Dragomir, "Romania's Participation in the Agricultural Conference in Moscow, 2–3 February 1960," *Cold War History* 13, no. 3 (2013): 331–351, doi:10.1080/14682745.2013.768068; Stephen Fischer-Galati, *Eastern Europe and the Cold War: Perceptions and Perspectives* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1994); Gridan Irina, "La Roumanie de Gheorghiu-Dej, satellite récalcitrant de l'URSS," *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, no. 1 (2014): 147; Joseph F. Harrington and Bruce J. Courtney, *Tweaking the Nose of the Russians: Fifty Years of American-Romanian Relations, 1940-1990*, East European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). By far the most comprehensive texts on the link between Romania's economy and its foreign policy to date, however, are in Romanian, Mioara Anton, *Iesirea Din Cerc. Politica Externa a Regimului*

junior partners and international politics in the global Cold War. Second, this methodology has also allowed the investigation to trace the beginnings of Romania's bid for autonomy further back than previously acknowledged. In this sense, it posits that while Dennis Deletant's description of Bucharest's "active" and "reactive"<sup>733</sup> strategy to obtain autonomy is accurate, it was employed long before the early 1960s. And third, by detailing Romania's course towards autonomy over its ten-year period, this investigation sheds light onto previously overlooked tactics that Gheorghiu-Dej employed towards this end.

A key finding in this sense was Bucharest's use of oil – Romania's only competitive advantage among the satellites – as a currency for obtaining industrial equipment and technological know-how from the neutral countries of Scandinavia, at a time when the 'ideological' Western states were still very much opposed to trading with the East.<sup>734</sup> The willingness of the Scandinavian countries to provide such sorely needed assets was critical to Romania's incipient path towards economic autonomy. By discussing Romania's commercial relationship with Finland and Sweden in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this thesis has therefore contributed to a small but growing body of literature – mainly by Scandinavian authors – on the economically significant ties between the advanced European neutrals and the Eastern European bloc.<sup>735</sup>

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*Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007); Dan Catanus, *Tot Mai Departe de Moscova... Politica Externa a Romaniei 1956-1965* (Bucharest: The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, 2011); Liviu Taranu, *Romania in Consiliul de Ajutor Economic Reciproc, 1949-1965 (Romania in the Council of Help and Mutual Assistance)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2007).

<sup>733</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Romania Sub Regimul Comunist* (Bucharest: Fundatia Academia Civica, 2010); Dennis Deletant, Mihail Ionescu, "Romania and the Warsaw Pact: 1955-1989," Cold War International History Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2004).

<sup>734</sup> The reaction of the British and American governments to Romania's involvement in crushing the Hungarian Revolution was discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

<sup>735</sup> Sandra Bott et al., eds., *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War: Between or Within the Blocs?* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2015); Gertrude Enderle-Burcel et al., eds., *Gaps in the Iron Curtain: Economic Relation between Neutral and Socialist Countries in Cold War Europe* (Jagiellonian University Press, 2014); Sari Aution-Sarasmo, "Khrushchev and the Challenge of Technological Progress," in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1960* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Romania's oil products and extractive know-how were also employed by Dej as a political tool for establishing and developing Romania's relationship with the leading members of the Third World. This previously unexplored aspect of Romania's policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s – detailed at length in Chapter 4, using India as a case study – represents a key contribution to the current historiography on Romania's process of de-satellization. Bucharest's relentless efforts to woo the leaders of the NAM bore a not insignificant amount of importance to its overall objective. By helping NAM heavyweights such as India and Indonesia to develop their national oil sectors, Romania was not only actively – and very faithfully - championing Moscow's *cause célèbre* of peaceful co-existence, but it was also gaining international recognition in the process. Romania was therefore using oil diplomacy to gain much-needed political capital in the Third World precisely at the time when the wave of decolonization and calls for non-alignment were gaining critical mass – a tactic that later provided Bucharest with an added layer of protection against Moscow's potential retaliation. This dissertation's exploration of Romania's oil diplomacy with the key members of the NAM in Asia provides an original complement to current historiography on Moscow's prolonged campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Third World.<sup>736</sup>

Oil therefore provided Romania not only with a solid currency for industrialization, but also with a master key opening the political doors to Scandinavia, the Third World and, later the West. By turning this key, Bucharest was thus able to further its economic ambitions while at the same time maximizing its political capital – both elements that contributed significantly to its efforts towards autonomy. To the extent that natural resources can be used by junior actors to engage with and affect to a certain extent the international political climate, Romania's use of oil to assert itself onto the global stage transcends in many senses, the constraints of the Cold War framework. It therefore opens the door to another,

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<sup>736</sup> See, for example, Mark T. Berger, "Decolonisation, Modernisation and Nation-Building: Political Development Theory and the Appeal of Communism in Southeast Asia, 1945-1975," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2003): 421–48; Christopher Andrews, Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Alessandro Iandolo, "Beyond the Shoe: Rethinking Khrushchev at the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 128–54, doi:10.1093/dh/dhw010; Jeremy Scott Friedman, *Shadow Cold War : The Sino-Soviet Split and the Third World* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2015).

potentially instructive – and certainly topical - discussion on the importance of natural resources in global politics.<sup>737</sup>

Another important aspect of Dej's strategy that this investigation has detailed was his tactic to create for Romania a role as conflict mediator for intra-camp disputes long before this was visible to the Western eye. This allowed him to increase Bucharest's political relevance and profile behind the scenes, by making himself indispensable to the Kremlin's efforts to assert its leadership within the Socialist camp. By building bridges between Moscow and its camp adversaries, Bucharest was therefore using the same bargaining 'Balkan tactics' in the 1950s that the West would only perceive much later.<sup>738</sup>

Playing an increasingly active regional role was another, and essential, first step in Romania's journey towards autonomy. Before Romania could emerge onto the global stage and forge alliances with the West, and especially with the US, Dej first cultivated his relationship with Josip Broz Tito – a not insignificant feat, considering that until 1953 Bucharest and Belgrade were mortal enemies following Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Camp in 1948.<sup>739</sup> Bucharest's special relationship with Belgrade allowed the Romanian leader not only to fashion himself into the role of intermediary when Yugoslavia's relationship with Moscow soured, but also to increase his regional profile by launching the Balkan Pact initiative, which proposed a de-militarized and, later, a nuclear-free zone in the

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<sup>737</sup> Michel A. Amsalem, "Bauxite, Copper and Oil: Bargaining Power and the Economics of Natural Resources," *Columbia Journal of World Business* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 19; David S. Painter, "Oil and World Power\*" 17, no. 1 (1993): 159–70, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.1993.tb00167.x; David S. Painter, "Oil, Resources, and the Cold War, 1945–1962," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 486–507; Oystein Noreng, *Crude Power: Politics and the Oil Market*, Library of International Relations ; Vol. 21 (London: IBTauris, 2002); Percyslage Chigora, "Beyond the Curse: Policies to Harness the Power of Natural Resources," *African Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2015): 104–106.

<sup>738</sup> Mircea Munteanu, "When the Levee Breaks: The Impact of the Sino-Soviet Split and the Invasion of Czechoslovakia on Romanian-Soviet Relations, 1967–1970," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 1 (June 9, 2010): 43–61; Robert R. King, "Rumania and the Sino-Soviet Conflict," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 373–93; Cezar Stanciu, "Fragile Equilibrium: Romania and the Vietnam War in the Context of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 13, 2016): 161–87.

<sup>739</sup> Detailed in Chapter 1 and 2.



Balkans.<sup>740</sup> Although this project never materialized (as NATO members Greece and Turkey ultimately refused to join) it did nonetheless have the intended effect: to draw international attention to Romania's mediating capabilities as a small and relatively non-threatening member of the Socialist camp. This role later evolved to include efforts beyond the bloc, as the Romanian leader also began championing triangular diplomacy within the camp, as dispute mediator between Moscow, Belgrade and Beijing in the context of the Sino-Soviet schism. As shown in Chapter 5, Gheorghiu-Dej's tactical positioning of Romania as a potential arbitrator between Moscow and Beijing in 1963 provided him with an indispensable level of political insurance against the Kremlin's potential retaliation once he openly defied Moscow.

Indeed, in April 1964, Dej published the ideological tenets of Romania's political and economic autonomy, which espoused the country's sovereign right to pursue its own, self-created path on the Socialist road,

*Bearing in mind the diversity of the conditions of socialist construction, there are not and there can be no unique patterns and recipes; no one can decide what is and what is not correct for other countries or parties. It is up to every Marxist-Leninist party, it is a sovereign right of each socialist state, to elaborate, choose or change the forms and methods of socialist construction.*<sup>741</sup>

The April declaration thus represented not only the unequivocal statement of Romania's independence, but was indeed the culmination of Dej's efforts over the last decade. And its impact was as immediate as it was paradigm-shifting, leading Washington to conclude that Gheorghiu-Dej had at that time more in common with Tito than he did with Khrushchev.<sup>742</sup> Given the geopolitical context of the time, the implications of this new Western perception

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<sup>740</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>741</sup> *Another Tito in the Balkans*. Staff Memorandum No. 28-64, 27 May, 1964. General CIA Records, CREST (FOIA), document CIA-RDP85T00875R002000210014-8:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00875r002000210014-8>

<sup>742</sup> *Another Tito in the Balkans*. Staff Memorandum No. 28-64, 27 May, 1964. General CIA Records, CREST (FOIA), document CIA-RDP85T00875R002000210014-8:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00875r002000210014-8>.

of Romania as Yugoslavia's political and ideological sibling cannot be overstated. Bucharest's rise to notoriety as an independently oriented – soon-to-be former? – satellite had an instantaneous and direct impact on Washington's perception of the Soviet Union's declining power within its sphere of influence.<sup>743</sup> This perception, which also led the Americans to speculate that the Romanian case could very well trigger a domino effect within the Eastern bloc, likely influenced American policy for some time.<sup>744</sup>

The West had been anticipating Bucharest's dissidence for nearly a year. For the Romanian leader, however, this process had been as long, awkward and uncertain as it had been perilous - according to (unconfirmed) British intelligence reports, the Kremlin had already made three attempts on his life to that point. The last one, which happened within just a few weeks after the publication of the April declaration, was carried out by a family acquaintance – a Soviet actress who befriended Dej's daughter. Invited to lunch with the Romanian leader, the woman (whose name remains a mystery) attempted to mortally wound him with a poison dart she had concealed in her hair. Although she was caught and disabled, she was later pardoned by Dej "in order not to worsen relations with Russia."<sup>745</sup>

Gheorghiu-Dej would die within a year of this incident, on 9 March 1965, quite suddenly and from causes that are still subject of controversy. His successor, Nicolae Ceausescu, had been an unlikely candidate to Dej's throne. Over the course of the previous few years, he had been described by Western diplomats surveying the Romanian political scene as a "not very intelligent"<sup>746</sup> man with "black crinkly hair and unpleasant fleshy features... [who] is pushing, ruthless and ambitious, and is reported to be thoroughly disliked by everybody, including his fellow Communists."<sup>747</sup> Yet despite his unappealing characteristics or his young age (in his mid-forties at the time) he not only ascended to power; but he managed to quickly earn himself the title of Eastern Europe's 'maverick' leader by openly opposing the Soviet

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<sup>743</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid.

<sup>745</sup> Letter from P.J. Walker, Whitehall, to B.L. Crowe, Esq., Northern Department, Foreign Office, 22 September, 1965. UKNA document FO 371/182729, p2.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>747</sup> Personalities report. Dispatch no. 77 from J.D. Murray, British Legation, Bucharest, to the Earl of Home, Foreign Office, 11 October, 1962. UKNA document 371/166162, p. 6.

intervention to crush the Prague Spring in 1968. Over the course of the next three decades, he would wear this label as a badge of honor only by continuing aspects of foreign policy that Dej had initiated – though he was careful to erase, as would any self-respecting dictator, any trace of his predecessor’s legacy in an effort to aggrandize himself. Dej’s dismissal from history books for the better part of Romania’s Communist history may account, in part, for the reason behind a generally low social interest or knowledge about his tenure. Despite this relegation to obscurity, however, the fact remains that Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’s contribution to Romania’s history in the broader framework of the Cold War was as politically remarkable as it was geographically elegant.

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