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Introduction

The Romanian Workers' Party (RWP)—the product of the fusion of the Communist Party of Romania and the Romanian Social Democrat Party and renamed in 1965 the Romanian Communist Party (RCP)—was never an isolated unit within the world communist movement, and, at least after 1960, its leaders imagined themselves as main actors within the ongoing disputes between the leading Marxist-Leninist parties (the Soviet and the Chinese). This is a study¹ in the functioning of a political culture based on fear, suspicion, problematic legitimacy, spurious internationalism, populist manipulation of national symbols, unabashed personalization of power, and persecution mania. It is also a study about a group of people who came to power as exponents of a foreign power and succeeded in turning themselves into champions of autonomy from that imperial center. I focus not only on the relation of submission and subordination between Bucharest and Moscow, but also on the Romanian repudiation of the Kremlin's diktat in the 1960s and the strange dialectics of de-Sovietization and de-Stalinization.

There were major difficulties in completing this research. Sensitive archives in Romania are still hard to consult. Many of the present political actors have played important roles in the communist bureaucracy. I consider this topic to be extremely important not only for the understanding of the state socialist experiment in Romania and its heritage, but also for a better comprehension of the communist and post-communist phenomena in East-Central Europe.

The Search for Lost Archives

Unlike other East European countries, Romania has preserved, even after the collapse of communism, a very secretive attitude toward the archives of the former regime. I have experienced personally the difficulty and enormous obstacles created in order to discourage the researchers from trying to pierce the well-protected and often unknown storage areas where these archives are preserved. All possible arguments have

to other prominent personalities (Ana Pauker,³ Emil Bodn ra ,⁴ Lucre

"party files") of all the prominent party figures for the last forty-five years. I spent three weeks there and I succeeded in consulting, apparently for the first time by any Western or Romanian scholar, fundamental documents. I could thus consult thousands of Politburo and Secretariat meeting transcripts, the volumes linked to Ana Pauker's arrest (February-March 1953), her interrogations and further party investigations (with General Secretary Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's personal notes on the transcripts), the proceedings of the Politburo meetings during the crucial year 1956, and the transcripts of four key plenums: the May 1952 Plenum (the purge of the Ana Pauker–Vasile Luca⁷ group); the June 1958 (second wave of intra-party purges); the November-December 1961 (the pseudo-de-Stalinization Plenum, indeed a major settling of accounts and exercise in rewriting the

Dej and his group. Member of the CC after 1945, then member of the Politburo (1946-47), Minister of Justice, he was the most active communist official during the negotiations that led to the fall of Ion Antonescu's dictatorship. Arrested in 1948, interrogated by the Soviet agent and Securitate colonel Petre Gonciaruk, P tr ăcanu refused to cooperate with his inquisitors. He resisted interrogation until the end, but some of those he considered his friends did not. He was executed in April 1954, after a show trial and was rehabilitated politically in April 1968, as a part of Ceau ăscu's attempt to acquire legitimacy by restoring the "socialist legality" and demythologizing the figure of his predecessor.

⁶ Iosif Chi inievici. (1905-1963) the RCP's leading ideologue/propagandist during the period 1944-1957, one of the closest accomplices of Gheorghiu-Dej in the latter's tenebrous machinations that led to the fall of Ana Pauker, the assassination of P tr ăcanu and the trial against Vasile Luca. Born in Bessarabia, he studied in Russia at the famous Leninist School of the Comintern. He participated, in December 1931, to the 5th Congress of the RCP, which was held in Russia. In 1940 he was named member of the RCP's Secretariat. His destiny had been identified with the "homeland of socialism." Therefore, when the Russians changed the course in February 1956 at the 20th Congress, he started immediately to spread insidious allusions about Gheorghiu-Dej, hoping to thus cover his own past, full of crimes and abuses. After March 1956, in spite of his renewed declarations of faith to Gheorghiu-Dej, there was no chance for Chi inevschi's political survival. In June 1957 he was excluded from the Politburo, and in 1960 at the 3rd Congress of the RWP did not reelect him in the Central Committee.

⁷ Vasile Luka, (1898-1960) born Luka László, initially fought in the "Szekler detachment" against the Soviet Republic of Béla Kun. He entered the Communist movement immediately after 1919 and led the Bra ov party organization. After his arrest in 1952 he was accused of maintaining contacts with the interwar secret police, the *Siguran*

party history to suit Gheorghiu-Dej's own cult of personality) and the April 1964 Plenum (the watershed Romanian Workers' Party Declaration regarding the problems of world communist movement and the open challenge to Khrushchev's attempts to limit Romania's economic independence). These last two important events in the history of the Romanian communist movement are the subject of this working paper.

At this moment I can say that the archival materials confirm some of my previous hypotheses about the conspiratorial nature and the revolutionary militancy of the Stalinist elite in Romania; the struggle for power, the brutal and/or manipulative treatment of the intelligentsia, the distrust of any heretical or liberal strategy; and the use of nationalism as a

totalitarian social order. The competition for power between vying factions in the Kremlin resulted, among other things, in the expulsion and the physical annihilation of the former secret police chief, MGB Marshal Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria. Beria's role as a de-Stalinizer was of course one of the Kremlin's best-kept secrets. His public image, both in the USSR and abroad, was one of ruthlessness, sadism, and total contempt for anything smacking of democratic participation and civic rights. It was therefore with immense joy and high hopes that denizens of the Soviet bloc received the news about Beria's ouster, arrest, trial, and execution (June-December 1953).⁸

The wave of political rehabilitations after 1954, the reaffirmation, rather demagogical at the beginning, of the long-forgotten "Leninist norms of party life," allowed for the rise of certain expectations for change, not only in USSR, but also in the satellite countries. Beria and his collaborators were the perfect scapegoat used by the Malenkov-Khrushchev "collective leadership" to affirm their commitment to domestic political relaxation, better living standards for the Soviet people, and a new vision of intra-bloc relations. Beria's baleful influence on Stalin, especially during the tyrant's last years, was invoked as an explanation for the most egregious actions undertaken between 1948-53, including the split with Yugoslavia, the show trials in the people's democracies, and the vicious anti-Semitic campaigns. The once all-powerful Informative Bureau of Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform) began to wither away and its journal *For a Lasting Peace, For People's Democracy* entered a welcome and well-deserved oblivion.⁹ The post-1953 toning down and even disappearance of anti-Yugoslav rhetoric

⁸ In his memoir, *Beria, Mon pere: Au coeur du pouvoir stalinien* (Paris: Plon/Criterion, 1999), Beria's son, Sergo, questions the official story of a trial that would have taken place in December 1953. His thesis is that an MVD commando in his own private residence had liquidated Beria in a gangster-style operation, on June 26, 1953.

and, after 1954, the beginning of the Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement¹⁰ were signs that a new system of relationships was emerging both within the bloc as well as in the world communist movement. After all, the main cause of the Moscow-Belgrade dispute had been Tito's rejection of Stalin's claim to absolute control over the new Leninist regimes in East-Central Europe. The propaganda against Tito's Yugoslavia and revisionism, which were considered until 1953 the main enemies, the Trojan horse of imperialism sneaked into the very heart of the socialist system, was replaced by the themes of peaceful coexistence in international politics and of domestic democratization on the basis of collective leadership in the domestic politics of communist states.

The Berlin revolt in June 1953, caused by an increase in the norms of production in constructions, represented the first episode from a series of events that were to lead to the disintegration of the monolithic and homogenous image of the Soviet bloc. Drowned in blood by East German police supported by Soviet forces, the anti-totalitarian workers' movement in Berlin attracted the attention of the Western world upon the centrifugal phenomena in the communist world, contributed to the awakening of the liberal Western intelligentsia from its frivolous honeymoon with the Stalinist pseudo-humanism and the acknowledgement of the terrorist-repressive essence of this system. However, this did not mean the recognition that the Leninist systems were intrinsically corrupt and unable to radically reform themselves. Times were still propitious for a search for Marxist renewal and the rediscovery of the emancipatory dimension of socialism. Thus, the appointment of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister of Hungary in June 1953, his moderate political program, the curtailment of his predecessor Mátyás Rákosi's domination in the Hungarian leadership, the opening of the USSR to the West after 1955, and the beginning of the rehabilitation process of some of the most important communist victims of the Stalinist repression were without doubt phenomena meant to encourage the illusion that the system could be reformed from the top by suppressing the malignant tumors of Stalinism and by restoring of the humanist impetus of Marxist socialism.

The renunciation of the anti-Tito ideological slogans confused the zealots and encouraged the critical minds. If all the charges against the Yugoslavs turned out to have

¹⁰ See Svetozar Rajak, "The Tito-Khrushchev Correspondence, 1954," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin No. 12/13* (Fall/Winter 2001), pp. 315-324.

been trumped up, one did ask, then it was perhaps worthwhile to reconsider the very foundations of the Leninist regimes' institutional arrangements. Maybe, in spite of the officially-enshrined creed, the Party was not always right, and the leaders, the little local Stalins, may have erred as much as their protector in the Kremlin. In brief, the period between 1953-56 coincided with the dramatic dissolution of the Stalin myth and the beginning of a search for alternative socialist models. More powerfully in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, but also in Romania, the GDR and even in the USSR, the democratic socialist temptation affected significant strata of the intelligentsia. As authors like the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, the East German physicist Robert Havemann, or the Austrian communist thinker Ernst Fischer admitted, this break with the Stalinist faith amounted to an "awakening from the dogmatic sleep." The nuclei of intellectual opposition originated from the very same values on which the system was theoretically based, but which had been cynically mocked by the reality of political life. Revisionism was thus the vocal expression of the outrage experienced by many formerly regimented Marxist intellectuals regarding the gap between professed and practiced ideas. Moreover, the international environment was changing: the spirit of Geneva, named after the place of the Summit Conference of July 1955, meant a promise for peaceful cooperation between East and West, the neutrality of Austria and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland. But the cohesion of the system in the Kremlin was far from certain.

result of the political situation in the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, in a speech to the CPSU Presidium, in 1956, announced the end of the Stalinist era. This led to a re-evaluation of the role of the Party and the role of the individual. The revisionist movement, led by Khrushchev, Voroshilov, and others, sought to reform the system and to bring it closer to the principles of Leninism. This led to the formation of the Khrushchevite movement, which sought to reform the system and to bring it closer to the principles of Leninism. This led to the formation of the Khrushchevite movement, which sought to reform the system and to bring it closer to the principles of Leninism.

lived victory: the genie was already out of the bottle, Hungarian intellectuals and students

The Second RWP Congress was initially programmed for 1954, six years after the previous one, but had been postponed several times.¹³ In April 1954, following a simulacrum of trial, Gheorghiu-Dej obtained the execution of his political nemesis and would-be rival, Lucreiu P tr canu.¹⁴ In order to apparently emulate the changes in Moscow, at the Central Committee Plenum on 19 April 1954 a much-vaunted “collective leadership” was instituted. The position of Secretary General was replaced by a Secretariat of four members headed by a First Secretary. Gheorghiu-Dej, imitating Malenkov, became Prime Minister, position which he held until October 1955, when, realizing that the locus of power was still at the Central Committee Secretariat, took over the position of First Secretary, which was the title carried by Khrushchev. In fact, between April 1954 and October 1955, Gheorghiu-Dej’s alter ego, the loyalist Gheorghe Apostol, held the position of First Secretary.

It is significant that until that moment, Apostol’s main positions had been related to the trade unions and government assignments. He lacked therefore a power base within the party bureaucracy, and his main role was to ensure the appearance of a division of power at the RCP pinnacle. On the other hand, according to some of the former communist *apparatchiks*, Apostol had a critical role in reorienting party propaganda in a less dogmatic way.¹⁵ In fact, all information about Gheorghe Apostol suggests that he was his master’s voice and it is hard to believe that any significant initiative could have come from him without consultation with and approval from Gheorghiu-Dej. As mentioned, the 19 April 1954 Plenum took place two days after the

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propose any ideological innovation, several months later, after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, two of them, Chi inevschi and Constantinescu, turned against Gheorghiu-Dej. Actually, there is no exaggeration in saying that following the elimination of the “right-wing deviators” in 1952, Gheorghiu-Dej considered Chisinevschi his closest, most devoted collaborator. As an indication of this special relation, Chi inevschi’s position within the Secretariat included supervision of cadres and “special organs” (*Securitate*, justice, militia, prosecutors’ offices). It is likely that it was Chi inevschi who acted as Ceau escu’s main patron in the latter’s appointment as Secretary in charge of party organizations and apparatus.²¹ The new Politburo included not only all of the former members, Gheorghiu-Dej, Chivu Stoica, Iosif Chi inevschi, Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Moghioro , Emil Bodn ra , Miron Constantinescu, Constantin Pîrvulescu, but also three new ones, who will play significant roles in the following period, Petre Boril , Alexandru Dr ghici and Nicolae Ceau escu.²² As an expression of Ceau escu’s increasingly powerful status, he was entrusted with presenting the report concerning the party statutes, in which he emphasized, unsurprisingly, the traditional Leninist themes regarding “democratic centralism” and “socialist internationalism.” Dr ghici’s promotion was a clear indication that the Ministry of Internal Affairs, i.e., the Securitate

P tr canu, Valter Roman, Sorin Toma, Mircea B l nescu, and Tatiana Leapis (later Bulan, R utu’s first wife, whom she left for tefan Fori). Intelligent, witty, and well informed, he read extensively Russian literature, he was one of the few activists with a relative Marxist and even non-Marxist culture. Arrested and sentenced in the 1930s, he emigrated to the USSR after the annexation of Bessarabia in June 1940. He was the editor responsible for the Romanian program at Radio Moscow during the war, R utu was promoted Chi inevschi’s deputy at the top of RCP’s propaganda apparatus and the editorial board of *Scînteia* when Ana Pauker and the “Moscow Group” returned to Romania. Together with Silviu Brucan, tefan Voicu, Sorin Toma, Nestor Ignat, Nicolae Moraru, Miron Radu Paraschivescu, Traian elmaru he was among the most zealous critics of the pluralistic democracy and the multiparty system. From this group R utu recruited later on the nucleus of RWP’s ideological apparatus. Recognized officially as Chi inevschi’s right-hand assistant, member of the CC of RWP after 1948 and head of the section for propaganda and culture, R utu was in fact the dictator of the Romanian culture until the death of Gheorghiu-Dej. Beginning in 1956 he did not have practically any superior, except for the First-Secretary who was otherwise almost uninterested. At RWP’s 2nd Congress of December 1955 he became candidate member of the Politburo. After 1965 he became Secretary of the CC, member of the Executive Political Committee, vice-premier in charge with education and, between 1974 and 1981, rector of the Party University “ tefan Gheorghiu.” He was forced to resign from the RCP leadership and to retire after one of his daughter decided to emigrate with her husband in the United States.

²¹ On the occasion of Chi inevschi’s fiftieth birthday anniversary in 1956, Ceau escu was one of the very few top leaders invited to attend a special private reunion at the then number two’s residence. It is worth mentioning that the Chi inevschi and Ceau escu couples used to take long walks together in the Her str u (then “Stalin”) Park, in Bucharest’s most residential neighborhood. Needless to add, as in all Stalinist witch-hunts, after Chi inevschi’s ouster, it was Ceau escu who acted most aggressively in denouncing his former protector.

would continue to play an essential role as the regime's "sword and shield." As for Boril , he was a dyed-in-the-wool Stalinist, a former Spanish Civil War International Brigade commissar with excellent Moscow connections, especially needed in increasingly uncertain times that were to come.

Romanian Communists and the Twentieth CPSU Congress

The changes that had been taking place after Stalin's death were accelerated by the famous Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, when, on 25 February 1956, in front of a stupefied auditorium, Nikita Khrushchev exposed the monstrous Stalinist crimes, especially the persecution of party and government cadres, the destruction of the Red Army elite, the lack of preparation for Hitler's attack in June 1941, the lurid "Leningrad Affair," and many others. These facts had long before been decried by Trotsky and other anti-Stalinists, and were well known in the West. The major point, however, was that this indictment of Stalin's atrocities (in fact, only parts of them, since Khrushchev did not touch the horrors of collectivization, the judicial frame-up of the 1930s, including the three Moscow show trials, or the extermination of the former members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee) had never been admitted, let alone assumed from the official communist perspective. Unforgivable sins from the Leninist viewpoint were now denounced by world communism's most authorized voice: the First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. In his "Secret Speech," a document in fact composed by a commission headed by veteran party ideologue Piotr Pospelov, Khrushchev acknowledged the existence of the long-denied Lenin "Testament," in which the founder of Bolshevism had warned the party about Stalin's inordinate cruelty and potentially destructive behavior. What the Soviets limited themselves to defining as Stalin's "cult of personality" was, in fact, the tragic consequence, but nonetheless logical, of an inhumane system, based on despotic-authoritarian institutions, structurally hostile to the rules of traditional democracy, a social order for which ideological and police terror was the main means of political legitimation and economic, political, social, and cultural

²² Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 240-241.

reproduction.²³

Mao's China and Hoxha's Albania than with Gomulka's Poland. Yet, Gheorghiu-Dej also used his maneuvering skills to improve the relations of his country with Yugoslavia, whose leaders he had stigmatized at the November 1949 Cominform meeting "as a gang of assassins and spies." Based on later statements and extemporaneous confessions, especially on what was revealed during the November-December 1961 CC Plenum, the members of the Romanian delegation to the Twentieth Congress were spending their evenings playing dominos, trying to figure out what was going on at the top of the Soviet party.

In short, after the Twentieth CPSU Congress, the Romanian communist leaders were discombobulated, confused, traumatized and outraged; their entire world was falling apart once their former idol had been attacked as a criminal, a paranoid monster and a military non-entity. Whatever his sentiments toward Khrushchev before February 1956, it is obvious that from that moment on, Gheorghiu-Dej deeply distrusted the Soviet First Secretary. For him, as for Thorez, Novotny, or Ulbricht, the disbandment of Stalin's myth was a major strategic and ideological blunder, a godsend for the imperialist propaganda and a concession to Titoist "rotten revisionism." After having read the full text of Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the Romanian participants at the Twentieth Congress had to determine how to discuss these documents with the rest of the RWP's leadership. Since the new line adopted at Kremlin personally threatened him, Gheorghiu-Dej had to procrastinate the debates that threatened to develop in the party leadership.

line promoted by Khrushchev. They invoked the slogan of the Twentieth Congress about the “restoration of Leninist norms of internal party life” in order to weaken Gheorghiu-Dej’s position and restructure the party’s leadership. Also, Miron Constantinescu criticized the *Securitate*, including the fact that secret police operated within Ministries without consultations with top officials, even if those, as it was his case, served on the Politburo.

In Leninist parlance, this was an overall attack, and Gheorghiu-Dej did not miss the point. To Constantinescu’s and Chi inevschi’s criticism, Gheorghiu-Dej, who was able to combine a seductive personal affability with the icy requests of the Stalinist logic, opposed the theory that the personality cult had indeed existed within the RWP, with abominable and tragic consequences, but all this had come to an end with the elimination of the factionalist villains, the arch-opportunists Pauker, Luca, Teohari. After 1952, Gheorghiu-Dej and his supporters claimed, “collective leadership was re-installed.”²⁷ Later, at the Central Committee Plenum in November 1961, Gheorghiu-Dej maintained, seconded by a cohort of sycophants, that normal party life had started only after 1952, and this was due primarily to the great Leninist militant, Gheorghiu-Dej hininSm9(nse6bL)11.5(e)4snd this v

directly, saying that, although he acknowledged the merits of the First Secretary, he wanted to underline his defects, considering that the hitherto completely uncritical attitude towards Gheorghiu-Dej was a mistaken, non-Leninist position.²⁹ Constantinescu believed that he could also count on the support of intellectuals within the party, as well as among some major cultural figures that had been thrown to the periphery of social life after the communist takeover.

Gheorghiu-Dej's main confidants and supporters at that moment were Gheorghe Apostol, Emil Bodnăraș, Alexandru Moghioroș, and Petre Borilă. Actually, Miron Constantinescu's attempt to enroll Moghioroș on his side backfired: Moghioroș, who had earlier betrayed Vasile Luca and Ana Pauker, went immediately to Gheorghiu-Dej to inform him about the formation of an "anti-party platform." Iosif Chiinevschi went to the less astute Pîrvulescu, who, anyway, despised Gheorghiu-Dej, and tried to attract his assistance in this effort to blame the First Secretary for the abuses. Pîrvulescu either did not understand that Chiinevschi's suggested action amounted in fact to Gheorghiu-Dej's ouster, or pretended that he did not get the message clearly. His failure to inform on Chiinevschi's counterinvitation to "discuss the past in the light of the -10(ahflv(lested 9 Tw[r-p)-(thi

of the worst excesses, anyway, imposed by the much-vilified Muscovites Pauker-Luca-Georgescu. One can thus see the origins of national Stalinism in the reaction to the Twentieth CPSU Congress.

The Effects of the Hungarian Revolution

The wind of liberty of 1956, the Hungarian Revolution and struggle for liberalization in Poland exasperated Stalin's East European disciples, including Gheorghiu-Dej and his associates. In October 1956, sticking desperately to power, Gheorghiu-Dej tried to consolidate his prestige by normalizing and enhancing relations with the Titoist Yugoslavia. Just like the Hungarian Stalinist Ernő Gerő, the successor of Mátyás Rákosi, Gheorghiu-Dej thought that he could convince the Yugoslav leadership of his good intentions. The same man that, at the reunion of the Cominform in 1949, had delivered the infamous report entitled "The Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the Hands of Assassins and Spies," was not embarrassed to go to Canossa and ask the one he affronted with fervor for forgiveness.

Nicolae Ceaușescu, Minister of Internal Affairs Alexandru Drăghici, and Minister of Armed Forces Leontin Sălijan. The Commandment was entitled to take any measure, including the opening of fire in case of emergency.³² At the same time, the Soviet troops were amassed at the Romanian-Hungarian border, ready for a gigantic police-type action. The fear of the Romanian leadership was not potential territorial irredentism but the Marxist revisionism of the new Hungarian leadership.³³ The main danger for Gheorghiu-Dej was not a most unlikely Hungarian attempt to redraw the border with Romania by use of military force, but rather the contagious effect of the pluralistic experiment undertaken by the Budapest reformers. With a Balkan-type spirit of orientation, Gheorghiu-Dej initially established contacts with the legal government of Imre Nagy, and, then, when the Soviets organized the second intervention in Budapest in early

source of satisfaction; they were jubilating at the thought that their dogmatic theses were “confirmed” by the evolution in the neighboring country, that nobody could ask them to perform a humiliating self-critique. Experts in social and political diversions, the Romanian leaders used an embarrassing proletarian demagogy to suggest to the working class that the aim of democratization could not be but a slogan invented by the “class enemy” and the “imperialist intelligence services.” The Romanian Stalinists supported the Soviet and Hungarian security forces in exercising the post-revolution terror. On 21 November 1956, a delegation at the highest level, headed by Gheorghiu-Dej and Bodn ra , came to Budapest to discuss with Kádár the necessary measures for the complete annihilation of the revolutionary spirit that was still persisting in the neighboring country. Indeed, the propaganda apparatus went out of its way to portray the Hungarian uprising as a “bourgeois counter-revolution” meant to restore private property of industry, banks, and land. No word percolated in Romanian media regarding the existence of workers’ councils as the base of the revolutionary regime in the neighboring country as well as the recovery of Hungary’s national dignity through the proclamation of neutrality and the break with the Warsaw Pact.

After the Hungarian Revolution broke out, the most sensitive to its message, and the most excited by the advance of the anti-totalitarian forces in the communist bloc, were the students in the large university centers, primarily from Bucharest, Cluj and Timi oara. Among them, the most interested in the democratic evolutions were the Timi oara students in philosophy, history, language and literature. For a moment, the historical detour introduced by the communist revolution seemed reversed; the image of that “sober and more dignified cemetery” of which Nicolae Labi had spoken, outraging the ideological master Leonte R utu, seemed possible: the students dreamed of a de-Russified democratic and sovereign Romania, which for the communist leaders of the

revisionist tendencies in the fall of 1956 allowed Gheorghiu-Dej to consolidate his dwindling prestige within the Soviet bloc after the Twentieth Congress. After the crushing of the Hungarian revolution, Dej appeared to the most conservative among the Kremlin leaders as a trustworthy comrade.

A new wave of repression affected again the highest party ranks. As mentioned, Miron Constantinescu, the head of the State Planning Committee, was appointed Minister of Education on 18 November 1956, a decision that covered a degradation of his status. As will be further discussed, in June 1957, Constantinescu was accused of many sins of the Stalinist epoch and, through a typically Stalinist stroke, Gheorghiu-Dej associated him with one of the most compromised and hated Stalinist personalities, Iosif Chiinevschi, removing both from their posts. In 1958-59, thousands of party members experienced again the frightful moments of terror from Stalin's years. At Gheorghiu-Dej's order, the Party Control Committee headed by Dumitru Coliu-Ion Vin e (Vincze Janos), started a new wave of inquisitorial interrogations that encouraged denouncement and speculated the lowest instincts of upgrading. People who thought that Stalinism was dead in 1956 faced it once again in the years after the Hungarian Revolution.

At the same time, the Romanian communists collaborated intensely to the persecution of the Hungarian revolutionaries. After according political asylum to the Nagy government, the Politburo of Gheorghiu-Dej became accomplice with the assassins of the Hungarian revolutionary leaders by organizing their extradition to Budapest that was occupied by Soviet troops. While the Hungarian revolutionary leaders were in house arrest in Otopeni and Snagov in the residential outskirts of Bucharest, a number of Romanian party activists were directly involved in the squeezing of confessions from them (Nicolae Goldberger, Valter Roman, Iosif Ardeleanu). Initially, Boril and Bodn ra visited the members of the Nagy government held in Snagov. Later, because of his personal connections with Nagy (going back to their common Moscow émigré years), the Hungarian-speaking former head of the "Romania Liber ," the Comintern-sponsored broadcasting station, Valter Roman, became the permanent contact between the Romanians (and their Soviet patrons) and the former Hungarian premier.³⁶ In the

³⁶ For Valter Roman's role in the deportation of Nagy and his main collaborators in Romania, see Christian Duplan and Vincent Giret, *La vie en rouge. Les Pionniers. Varsovie, Prague, Budapest, Bucarest. 1944-*

meantime, pressures from the Kádár regime intensified to convince the Romanians that

developments in Romania. The Plenum of the CC of the RWP on 28-29 June and 1-3 July 1957 played a crucial role in the restructuring of RWP's Politburo and the expulsion of the so-called "factionalist group" Chi inevschi-Constantinescu. According to the official version of the events, it was the factionalists' intention to hamper the healthy course of events adopted by the party. In fact, as already stated, such a "group" did not exist in reality: it was only a propagandistic creation of Gheorghiu-Dej. The timeframe is the key to this episode, since in fact the purge was dealing with the immediate repercussions of the 20th CPSU Congress on the unity of the RWP ruling team. Simply put, the June 1957 Plenum was Dej's response to the minimal, but real attempts by two of his associates to engage in moderate de-Stalinization in the aftermath of Khrushchev's Secret Speech. The temporary and uneasy alliance between Chi inevschi and Constantinescu in the spring of 1956 had been dictated by pragmatic considerations. At that time, they believed that Gheorghiu-Dej was so compromised as a result of the revelations about Stalinist abuses, that he should be removed from power. In order to obtain a majority of votes within the Politburo, probably encouraged by Khrushchev, they tried to persuade other members of the Politburo to join in their efforts to topple Gheorghiu-Dej. Although they were successful in drawing Pîrvulescu, the president of the Party Control Commission, into the conspiracy, they did not manage to win over Alexandru Moghioro , who informed Gheorghiu-Dej about the plot. With regard to this episode, mention should be made of Gheorghiu-Dej's anti-intellectual sentiments, which may explain the particular bitterness and violence of the purge that followed the internal party debates in 1956. No doubt, Miron Constantinescu had been a committed Stalinist, but he internalized the lessons of the Twentieth CPSU Congress, and thought that Gheorghiu-Dej could be replaced by a collective leadership that would engage in a "regeneration of the socialist system in Romania." Gheorghiu-Dej used Constantinescu's uninspired alliance with Iosif Chi inevschi—by far the most detested party leader—as an argument against the "group." The two communist leaders were, actually, very different in intellectual background, in the way they understood the relationship with the policy promoted by Moscow, and in the significance they attributed to de-Stalinization.

Iosif Chi inevschi represented the pillar of the Soviet influence in the Romanian Communist Party. Born in 1905 in Bessarabia, Iosif Roitman, later on Chi inevschi after

party,” then only the director of the Printing Combinat “Casa Scînteii.”³⁷ When he died in 1963, not even the shortest obituary was published in the press that he suffocated for so long. In April 1968, Nicolae Ceaușescu took special pleasure in denouncing him once again as the co-author, together with Gheorghiu-Dej and Dr. Ghici, of Pătrășcanu’s judicial murder.

The other member of the Central Committee that confronted Gheorghiu-Dej was Miron Constantinescu, one of the very few authentic intellectuals accepted in the hegemonic group of Romanian communism. Partner rather than accomplice for Gheorghiu-Dej, he saw in the de-Stalinization process started by Khrushchev the chance

The Plenum in which Constantinescu and Chi inevschi were “unmasked” was held in two separate sessions, between 28-29 June and 1-3 July. At the same time, in Moscow, on 4 July, it was announced the purge of the “anti-party” group of Malenkov, Kaganovich, Molotov and Shepilov, who opposed Khrushchev’s policies. It is not clear yet if the purges within the RWP were linked to the purges within the CPSU, in this respect, Ghi Ionescu observed:

The Romanian purge, which could only have been linked with the Russian one if news of the Russian purge had leaked out before the *Pravda* announcement of July 4th, may well have represented an attempt to take more positive action on de-Stalinization, but there may also have been a special need to get rid of these two powerful figures, and in particular Miron Constantinescu.³⁹

As shown before, Gheorghiu-Dej, who was personally threatened by Khrushchev’s new line adopted at the Twentieth CPSU Congress, temporized skillfully the debates within the RWP, so that this Plenum took place after almost a year and five months from the Twentieth CPSU Congress, and a year and a half from the Second RWP Congress. In his intervention in front of the Plenum, Leonte R utu explained the delay by the necessity of avoiding “improvised judgements.” In fact, the delay proved to be crucial for Gheorghiu-Dej’s political survival. The Romanian communists, served wonderfully by the 1956 events in Poland and Hungary, paid lip service to the “practical teachings of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU,” displayed a hypocritical respect for the reformist course initiated by Khrushchev and, finally, retreated on conservative and dogmatic positions around their leader, Gheorghiu-Dej. One of the most interesting speeches delivered to the Plenum was that of Ceau escu, who proved to be not only a loyal disciple of Gheorghiu-Dej, but also an unabated Stalinist. Therefore, Ceau escu’s speech deserves a closer analysis since it provides the crucial elements for an in-depth understanding of his mindset in relation with Stalin and Stalinism. Although he admitted that there were some mistakes in Stalin’s activity, Ceau escu stated that one should be aware of Stalin’s major merits, and that his works were worth studying. Ceau escu further expressed admiration for Stalin when he bluntly declared: “Actually, we did not proceed like others,

³⁹ See Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 284-85.

who threw away from their homes Stalin's works."⁴⁰ This was a direct reference to Miron Constantinescu who had expressed doubts regarding many of Stalin's theses. However, Ceau escu was not alone in praising Stalin's legacy: in their speeches, both R utu and Moghioro referred to conversations they had with workers and, respectively, old-time members of the party who allegedly had asked them not to exaggerate Stalin's mistakes.⁴¹

With regards to the retaliation against Chi inevschi and Constantinescu, Ceau escu put it clearly: they constituted anti-party elements who exaggerated some shortcomings of the party's activity, misrepresented the activity of the party and its leadership, focused on facts isolated from their context and tried to link all these problems with Gheorghiu-Dej's figure, in order to make him the sole responsible person for the terror unleashed within the party and throughout the country during the entire period that followed the communist takeover.⁴²

The crucial elements of Ceau escu's vision of the party politics can be identified in his 1957 speech, and it is not exaggerated to say that these elements would remain constants of his political mindset until his final hours in power, in December 1989: preoccupation for the unity and leading role of the party, fear of factionalism, refusal of liberalization, fascination for Stalin, contempt for intellectuals, no mercy for the petty-bourgeois elements that tend to infiltrate the party and attack it from inside. In fact, the last theme epitomized Ceau escu's disgust for dialogue and free exchange of ideas:

We know comrades, what Stalin said on this problem, that all these small petty-bourgeois groups penetrate the party in a way or another, they introduce the sentiment of vacillation, the opportunism, the mistrust that leads to factionalism, the source of party's undermining.... Therefore, the struggle against these elements represents the condition that ensures the success of the struggle against imperialism.⁴³

Furthermore, in his analysis of the 1956 events in Hungary and their influence on Romania, Ceau escu pointed out that there were "negative manifestations" among

⁴⁰ See "Stenograma edin ei plenare a Comitetului Central al PMR din 28-29 iunie i 1-3 iulie 1957" (transcript of the CC Plenum on June 28-29 and July 1-3, 1957), R. 2/1.

⁴¹ For R utu's intervention see idem, R. 12/4. Moghioro ' spoke of a meeting he had in Baia Mare, where old-time members of the party told him that "Stalin was theirs, and would remain theirs." See idem, R. 26/5.

⁴² Idem, R. 2/2.

⁴³ Idem, R. 2/7.

students in Timi oara, Cluj, the Hungarian Autonomous Region and, on a smaller scale, in Bucharest, and stressed that there were serious shortcomings concerning the “patriotic education” of the young generation. More importantly, with regard to the influence of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution upon Romania, Ceau escu stated such an influence was felt in Transylvania, where, before 23 October 1956, “excursionists” came to convince Romanian students and intellectuals to follow the Hungarian path. Ceau

1955 in order to investigate the nature of the discussions that took place among some

in 1958-59, resulted in tens of thousands of expulsions from the party, and coincided with vicious anti-intellectual and anti-Semitic campaigns. Such a neo-Stalinist offensive was intended to ensure monolithic party control and to avoid a Hungarian-type crisis. Police actions were carried out against rebellious students in Timi oara, Cluj, Tîrgu-Mure , Bucharest and Ia i, and the most radical students were jailed after sham trials. As a CC secretary, Ceau escu was also responsible to direct youth organizations; in close cooperation with Alexandru Dr ghici, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ceau escu was successful in “restoring order” within universities. His closest associates in these operations were: Virgil Trofin, Ion Iliescu, tefan Andrei, Cornel Burtic , Cornel Pacoste,

the industrial base was expanding, and the collectivization campaigns were continuing. The main tasks were summed up in the strategic goal completing the building of the material and technical base of the socialist formation. Romania was entering the new decade as an apparently trustworthy Soviet ally, run by a cohesive oligarchy tightly united around a political leader for whom personal power prevailed over any moral principles. Once the Soviets would engage in a new anti-Stalin campaign in 1961, Gheorghiu-Dej felt his authority challenged, and surprised the Kremlin, his own party, and the West with the decision to engage in a bitter divorce from the once revered Moscow center. In less than five years, the once most loyal satellite became a maverick, even reluctant ally.

Opposing Khrushchevism: The Emergence of National Communism

Worried by Nikita Khrushchev's "second thaw," the Dejites were trying to resist de-Stalinization by devising a nationalist strategy meant to entice the intelligentsia and bridge the gap between the party elite and the population. In fact, the Romanian communist leadership proved to be extremely successful in constructing a platform for anti-de-Stalinization around the concepts of industrialization, autonomy, sovereignty, and national pride. The point for Gheorghiu-Dej was to maintain close relations with the

When, in the summer of 1958, under Chinese pressure, the Soviets criticized the Yugoslav Communist League's new program as "revisionist," the Romanians completely endorsed the Kremlin's stance. At least officially, the relations between the RWP and the CPSU top leaders had never been warmer. Based on documents from the RCP archives, it appears that this was far from being the complete truth: on various occasions, in private discussions, Gheorghiu-Dej insisted that his party had matured and that relations between socialist countries should be governed by the principles of complete equality and national independence. At the same time, as the conflict between Moscow and Albanian communists worsened, Dej lent his full support to Moscow. Implicitly, and he knew this very well, this meant that Bucharest was ready to back the Kremlin in the imminent clash with the Chinese communists, Albanian leader's Enver Hoxha's protectors. Moscow regarded the Romanian party as most loyal and decided to use a Bucharest-based event in June 1960 as a general rehearsal for the attack on Albania (and, obliquely on Mao's party) prepared for the world communist conference to be held in November.

Indeed, Soviet CC First Secretary and Chairman of USSR's Council of Ministers Nikita S. Khrushchev and numerous other main figures of world communism attended the Third RWP Congress. The congress proved that the RWP's leadership was united and Gheorghiu-Dej was in full control of the party; moreover the Congress did not bring major changes in RCP policies. Ghi Ionescu noticed this dullness of the speeches, as well as the absence of any examination of the dramatic events of previous years (the shockwaves of CPSU 20th Congress, the Hungarian Revolution, the major intra-party purges of 1957-58, the anti-student and anti-intellectual repressive campaigns and trials):

In the speeches at the Congress a broad series of successes were claimed on every front, but there were no references to any progress in de-Stalinization. Nor did the elections to the Central Committee and Politburo show any changes of personnel, which might herald any change in policy. The results seemed the same mixture as before, but rather more of it.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the effects of the failed attempt of Chi inevschi-Constantinescu faction to question Gheorghiu-Dej's responsibility for the Stalinist's period misdeeds were felt once again: Constantin Pîrvulescu, one of the party old-timers, lost his place in the Politburo

A most important event during the Congress was the unexpected attack launched by Khrushchev against the Albanian Workers' Party delegation headed by the Politburo member Hysni Kapo. As mentioned, the Romanian congress provided Khrushchev with the opportunity of a full-fledged onslaught on the Albanian Stalinist nostalgics and their Chinese protectors. During the Bucharest clash between Khrushchev and the Albanians, the Chinese delegate, Peng Chen, head of the Beijing party organization and member of the Standing Presidium of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo, expressed strong reservations regarding the Soviet attempt to excommunicate Albania under the charges of Stalinist dogmatism, suppression of intra-party democracy, and refusal to join the other Leninist parties in the historic reconciliation with Tito's Yugoslavia. Asked by Khrushchev to preside over a closed meeting of foreign delegations, Gheorghiu-Dej warmly supported the Soviet onslaught on the Albanians. Later, after the relations between Bucharest and Moscow went sour, during the preparations of the 1964 Declaration, Gheorghiu-Dej confessed to his associates that he had been practically compelled by Khrushchev to take this anti-Albanian (and implicitly anti-Chinese stand). This may have been more of a retroactive grudge rather than the genuine attitude of the Romanians in 1960.

As a matter of fact, at the Moscow N, Pen 1910n Wrldc Coferencde of 8o()JTJ0 -1.73 TD0.0014 Tc-0
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either “renegades” or “traitors.” Had it not been for the worsening of the personal

growing polemics between Moscow and the pro-Chinese Albanians. The Romanian leaders realized that the earth-shattering decisions made in Moscow, including the expulsion of Stalin's body from Lenin's Mausoleum, would have tremendous consequences for all the countries in the region. While perfunctorily applauding the CPSU Leninist course under Khrushchev, Gheorghiu-Dej cautiously prepared the intra-party debates on the lessons of the 22nd CPSU Congress. The last thing he needed was to

alien to Leninism, generated by this cult. Violation of the Leninist standards of Party life, of the principle of collective work in the leading bodies, defiance of the democratic rules of party and state construction, creation of an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion against valuable Party and state cadres, their intimidation and persecution, abuse of power and encroachment of people's legality characterized the activity of this factional, anti-Party group.⁵³

worth mentioning that at the same Politburo meeting, Gheorghiu-Dej praised some of his comrades for their speeches at the Plenum: Valter Roman, Gheorghe Vasilichi, Gheorghe Gaston Marin, Petre Boril and Nicolae Ceaușescu. Moreover, Gheorghiu-Dej stressed that he liked the way Ceaușescu spoke freely and said “very nice things.”⁵⁵ Therefore, it was not by chance that, at the Politburo meeting of 7 December 1961, Gheorghiu-Dej insisted for the publication of all the speeches prepared for the Plenum, and not only of those actually delivered during the Plenum. In his view, the newly concocted party hagiography (and of course, its counterpart, the revamped demonology) had to become “public good.” As Maurer and Valter Roman had emphasized, it was important for the whole party to know that it was first and foremost thanks to Gheorghiu-Dej that the healthy cadres had been protected from persecutions and there was no need to engage in any posthumous rehabilitations.

The party propaganda apparatus, led by Răutu, promptly made use of the theses developed by the 1961 CC Plenum and developed a new version of the RCP history, imbued by the myth of the “national roots” of the Dejites and their merits in exposing the vicious enemies of the Romanian working class. It is important to stress Răutu’s leading role in the creation of RWP’s mythology. The same Răutu who, together with Silviu Brucan, Ștefan Voicu, Sorin Toma, Nestor Ignat, Nicolae Moraru, Mihail Roller, and Traian Șelmaru had been among the most virulent critics of the pluralist democracy and the multiparty system, the ideological inquisitor who was in fact the dictator of the Romanian culture until the death of Gheorghiu-Dej, and who had led the unmasking of the “estheticizing” and “decadent-bourgeois” critics and poets, presided after 1961 “the reconsideration of the cultural heritage.” Under his supervision, the well-engineered maneuver to manipulate the RCP history and to invent the “national” strategy of the party proved to be successful.

Within this framework, Ceaușescu became one of the most ardent advocates of Romania’s burgeoning “independent line.” In his speech at the November-December 1961 Plenum, the address Gheorghiu-Dej enjoyed so much, Ceau

Luca, and Georgescu for “right-wing deviationism.” This speech helped Ceau escu to ingratiate himself even more with Gheorghiu-Dej. Ceau escu already had a following in the party through his involvement in the day-to-day running of the party apparatus, which grew accustomed to his style and habits. After 1961, Gheorghiu-Dej made Ceau escu the chief of the organizational directorate, which included the CC’s section for party organization and the section that supervised the “special organs,” that is, security, military, and justice. It is important to insist on Ceau escu’s direct association with Gheorghiu-Dej between 1956 and 1965, since otherwise his triumph over such powerful adversaries as Gheorghe Apostol and Alexandru Dr ghici would be simply incomprehensible. For Gheorghiu-Dej, Nicolae Ceau escu was the perfect embodiment of the Stalinist apparatchik. He appeared to Gheorghiu-Dej as a modest, dedicated, self-effacing, hard-working and profoundly loyal lieutenant. Having successfully dealt with some of the most cumbersome issues that had worried Gheorghiu-Dej over the years—including the forced collectivization of agriculture, the continuous purges and the harassment of critical intellectuals—the youngest Politburo member maintained a deferential attitude toward the General Secretary and other senior Politburo members (Emil Bodn ra and Ion Gheorghe Maurer). Certainly, Ceau escu had criticized Dr ghici for “indulgence in abuses” and “infringements on socialist legality,” but that had occurred during the hectic months that followed the 20th CPSU Congress. Dissent, disobedience, and critical thought had never been a temptation for him. On the contrary, his indictment of Miron Constantinescu at the CC Plenum in December 1961 played upon the party’s deeply entrenched anti-intellectual prejudices. A few years earlier, following the 1957 and 1958 CC Plenums, together with the former Comintern activist Dumitru Coliu (Dimitar Colev), the then Chairman of the Party Control Commission, Ceau escu carefully orchestrated the purges that, apart from the expulsion of thousands of important cadres from the party, had a particularly debilitating effect on the members of the RCP “Old Guard.” Unlike Miron Constantinescu, who in private conversation used to deplore Gheorghiu-Dej’s pivotal role in the “Byzantinization” of party life,⁵⁶ it seems that Ceau escu found special pleasure in complying with and cultivating Gheorghiu-Dej’s

PMR din ziua de 7 decembrie 1961” [Transcript of the CC of RWP’s Politburo meeting of 7 December 1961], pp. 6-7.

⁵⁶ Personal communication with the author, Cristina Luca-Boico, Leonte Tism neanu.

passion for secrecy and intrigue.⁵⁷ However, Ceau

leader).⁶¹ Furthermore, Gheorghiu-Dej voiced Romanian fears about a nuclear war as a result of the Cuban crisis during Khrushchev's next visit to Romania (3-7 October 1963):

“I have to tell you, Nikita Sergeyeovich, that I have never experienced after the [August 1944] liberation the sentiment I had during the period of crisis

spectacular efforts at mediation and by its defiance of Moscow it gained considerable admiration and respect.⁶³

The Romanian “deviation”—a self-styled version of national communism—resulted in a successful attempt by the ruling group to restructure the official ideology

profoundly resented the idea that Romania (perhaps in the company of Bulgaria) should remain a kind of agricultural hinterland of the integrated, Soviet-led economic system.

In June 1962, the COMECON adopted the document entitled "Principles for the International Division of Labor," in which was re-affirmed the idea of "socialist economic collaboration" in the sense of a division of labor within the socialist Bloc, between the industrialized North and the agrarian South.⁶⁵ The idea was strongly supported by Czechoslovakia and German Democratic Republic, the most industrialized "fraternal" countries.⁶⁶ But the Romanian communists did not share such a viewpoint. As Kenneth Jowitt perceptively remarked, "in 1962 Gheorghiu-Dej was placed in a state of intense dissonance with respect to his most cherished goal—industrialization. His was a very specific political-ideological vision in that the goal of industrialization seems to have been the concrete expression of his major aspirations: a powerful party and a socialist Romania."⁶⁷ Furthermore, regarding the commitment of the Gheorghiu-Dej regime to defend the country's industrialization program, Jowitt correctly observed:

The direct defense of the industrialization program was the setting for the ambitious policy of initiation, which the Romanian elite under Gheorghiu-Dej explicitly began in 1963 and which culminated in the Statement of April 1964. In this instance, the value placed on industrialization mediated a response of increasing opposition to the Soviet Union, and the initiation of a policy stressing the goals of Party and State sovereignty.⁶⁸

The Statement of April 1964, considered the "declaration of autonomy" of Romanian communists, indicates that the Romanian ruling elite believed that a comprehensive industrialization program could only be secured through party and state independence from Soviet Union.⁶⁹ It is, therefore, quite obvious why the Romanian

⁶⁵ Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians: A History*. (London: I. B. Tauris & Co, 1991), 245.

⁶⁶ See H. Gordon Skilling, *Communism National and International: Eastern Europe after Stalin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1964), p. 152.

⁶⁷ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 203.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p. 214.

⁶⁹ In April 1964 Soviet geographer E. B. Valev published an article concerning the creation of an "interstate economic complex" composed of parts of southern Soviet Union, south-east Romania and northern Bulgaria. Later referred to as the Valev Plan, this article gave rise to intense debates about the role of economic cooperation and economic specialization within the Communist bloc; see Georgescu, p. 245.

communists rejected steps towards further economic integration, such as the Valev Plan. As Shafir puts it, the Romanian ruling elite decided to "become not only the embodiment of industrial development, but also of national aspirations for independence."⁷⁰ We should hasten to add that this independence coincided with the de-Stalinization endeavors in most Soviet bloc countries: publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's story *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in the USSR, the Kafka symposium in Czechoslovakia, etc. In other words, it was not only a disassociation from Moscow's hegemonism that the Romanians were achieving with their autonomist line, but also a strategy of isolating their party (and country) from the contagious effects of the anti-Stalin campaigns pursued in other Leninist states in the aftermath of the 22nd Congress. Rejecting Khrushchevism as Stalinist imperialism was a way for Gheorghiu-Dej and his associates to oppose an opening of the political system. National unity around the party leadership headed by Gheorghiu-Dej was the ideological counterpart to the repudiation of Moscow's claim to a leading role within the bloc. In other words, breaking ranks internationally meant complete uniformity and unflinchingly closing the ranks domestically.

Romania's program of comprehensive industrialization was fiercely advocated by the Romanian delegation to the COMECON. A former political émigré in the USSR, Bessarabian-born and perfectly fluent in Russian, Alexandru Bîrl deanu was a well-trained economist who had served in the 1950s as Minister of Foreign Trade. After 1960, as deputy Prime Minister and Romania's permanent delegate to the COMECON, he had been involved in direct clashes with Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders. In his intervention in front of COMECON's Executive Committee, on 15 February 1963, Bîrl deanu challenged the Soviet tutelage, and defended the Romanian economic policy established by the 3rd RWP Congress of 1960.⁷¹ Incensed by Bîrl deanu's defense of Romanian economic interests, Khrushchev demanded his expulsion from the Romanian government. Instead, Gheorghiu-Dej promoted Bîrl deanu as a candidate Politburo member. The Plenum of the CC of RWP of 5-8 March 1963 approved Bîrl deanu's attitude at the COMECON session. There were also rumors that Gheorghiu-Dej had

⁷⁰ Shafir, p. 48.

⁷¹ See Bîrl deanu's own comments concerning his intervention in Lavinia Betea, *Alexandru Bîrl deanu despre Dej, Ceau escu i Iliescu* (Alexandru Bîrl deanu on Dej, Ceau escu and Iliescu) (Bucharest: Editura

written a letter to Khrushchev informing him that RCP would not modify its economic plans and that any pressure to do so would force Romania to leave COMECON.⁷²

Since a harsh polemic was developing, the Soviets decided to send an official delegation to Bucharest. On 24 May 1963, a Soviet delegation led by Nikolai Podgorny, member of the Presidium and Secretary of the CC of CPSU arrived to Bucharest, but an agreement could not be reached. Further developments in the Sino-Soviet conflict would serve Bucharest's independent line. Consequently, on 22 June 1963, the Romanian communists offered a new proof of independence from Moscow by publishing a summary of the letter sent by the Chinese Communist Party to the Soviet Central Committee on 14 June 1963, a letter that no other communist country of Eastern Europe dared to publish, except for Albania. Meanwhile, tensions with the Soviets intensified at the editorial board of the Prague-based *World Marxist Review*, to which Romanian leaders (Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Nicolae Ceau escu) contributed articles advocating their party's autonomist and "neutralist" course. On various occasions, the RWP representative, Barbu Zaharescu opposed efforts by pro-Moscow parties to transform the journal into an anti-Chinese tribune.

However, as H. Gordon Skilling correctly observed, for some time Romanian communists supported the Soviets in the major political and ideological issues involved in the Sino-Soviet dispute.⁷³ Their divergences with Moscow did not mean they endorsed the bellicose Maoist line in international affairs, but rather that they simply regarded Khrushchev's campaigns as efforts to restore the Soviet complete domination over the world communist movement.⁷⁴

Since they had felt they had come of age and could rely on a growing domestic political base for their economic and foreign policy initiatives, the Romanians staunchly

Evenimentul Românesc, 1997), pp. 150-51. Hereafter quoted as *Bîrl deanu despre Dej, Ceau escu i Iliescu*.

⁷² See Ionescu, p. 339.

⁷³ Skilling refers to the article published by the chairman of the Romanian Council of Ministers, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, in the November 1963 issue of the *Problemy mira i sotsializma* under the title "The

opposed the practice of stigmatizing other parties as “anti-Leninist,” “deviationist,” etc. During the fall of 1963, in closed party *aktiv* gatherings, RWP leaders informed the party members about the growing divergences between them and the Soviets. The tone of the discussions was reserved, but the meaning of the speeches was unambiguous: Gheorghiu-

terms, regardless the wishes of the neighboring Soviet Union and its East European allies.”⁷⁸

As a proof of communist Romania’s independent line, it is important to mention that at the 23 August 1964 celebrations the Soviet delegation, led by Anastas Mikoian, CPSU CC Presidium (Politburo) member and the President of the Supreme Soviet Presidium of USSR, was compelled to support the presence at the official tribune of the Chinese delegation headed by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai as well as that of Albanian governmental and party delegation, headed by the Vice-Premier Hysni Kapo, in a period when communist Albania had practically broken official relations with the USSR.⁷⁹ It should be added that Romania had resumed its relations with Albania more than one year before, in March 1963, by resending an ambassador to Tirana.

During the celebrations of 23 August 1964, the ubiquitous portraits of the nine Politburo oligarchs reminded the population that the power was still in the hands of those who had implemented the militaristic model of socialism and launched the repressive campaigns, of which the most recent was the forced collectivization of the agriculture. In 1964, Gheorghiu-Dej felt secure enough to show magnanimity towards political prisoners. As Chairman of the State Council he signed a series of decrees that released from jails and deportations sites thousands of political prisoners. Self-confident and increasingly convinced that his national contract with the Romanians made him popular, Gheorghiu-Dej could afford to relinquish some of the most outrageous repressive policies.

It is therefore important to insist on the ambivalence, the dual potential of the communist strategy during Gheorghiu-Dej’s last years. On the surface, Romania seemed interested in emulating Tito by engaging in a sweeping de-Sovietization that could have resulted in domestic liberalization. At the same time, it was difficult to overlook the fact that instead of loosening controls over society, the RWP leadership further tightened its grip and refused to allow even a minimal de-Stalinization. Hence, from its very inception,

⁷⁸ See David Binder, “Rumania Presses Pursuit of Independent Economy” in *The New York Times*, 6 July 1964, p.1.

⁷⁹ It was Gheorghiu-Dej’s proposal, approved by the Politburo, to invite delegations from all the “socialist” countries, including Yugoslavia and Cuba, to the 23 August celebrations. See “Stenograma edin ei Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R. din ziua de 4 august 1964” (Transcript of the CC of RWP’s Politburo meeting of August 4, 1964), Arhiva Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R., Nr. 1574/ 31.XII.1964, p.20.

Romanian domesticism contained an ambiguous potential: in accordance with the inclinations and interests of the leading team and the international circumstances, it could lead to either “Yugoslavization,” i.e., de-Sovietization coupled with de-Stalinization, or “Albanization,” i.e., de-Sovietization strengthened by radical domestic Stalinism. The dual nature of RWP’s divorce from the Kremlin stems from the contrast between its patriotic claims and the refusal to overhaul the Soviet-imposed, Leninist model of

phase). With that occasion, Ceau escu stated that a team of French physicians, brought especially to Bucharest to consult with Gheorghiu-Dej, made the diagnostic. Furthermore, Bîrl deanu insists that Ceau escu managed to restrict the other Politburo

biography and displayed modesty and obedience would be the perfect figure to be controlled and manipulated.⁸³

⁸³ For an insightful analysis of the remarkably brief transitional moment from Dej to Ceau escu, see Pavel Câmpeanu, “Însc unarea” (The Enthronement), *Revista 22* (Bucharest), August 14-20 (2001), pp. 15-16. Drawing from Politburo meeting transcripts, Câmpeanu demonstrates that there never was a serious Apostol alternative and that Ceau escu inherited Dej’s mantle as party leader without any significant opposition from any of his colleagues. As a matter of fact, the CC members invited to attend the first post-Dej plenum in March 1965 were presented with a fait accompli: Ceau escu was the new leader and there was no question about the extent of his authority. This was of course guaranteed not only by support from Dej’s “barons” (Maurer and Bodn ra), but even more important, by Ceau escu’s long-standing connections with the regional party leaders, many of whom he soon thereafter promoted to key central positions at the 9th RCP Congress in July 1965.

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