

# OLD FRIENDS, NEW TIMES. ROMANIA AND POLAND IN THE FIRST POSTWAR DECADE

CEZAR STANCIU

## Rejoining Each Other in the Same Political Sphere

The reestablishment of Romanian-Polish relations in the aftermath of World War Two encountered a serious obstacle in the fact that each country had joined different alliances during the war. The initiative for new diplomatic relations came from the Groza Government. On 20 August 1945, Romanian Foreign Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu wrote to Soviet General Susaikov, deputy chief of the Allied Control Commission, expressing his Government's desire to reestablish diplomatic relations with Poland, Yugoslavia and China. In this matter, Tătărescu requested mediation from the Soviet Union, since Romania had no contacts with these Governments.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Embassy in Bucharest responded on 8 September 1945, informing the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry of Poland's acceptance for reestablishing diplomatic relations with Romania.<sup>2</sup>

On 18 September 1945 the two countries agreed to open Legations in Warsaw and Bucharest, which later, on 11 November 1945, became Embassies.<sup>3</sup> During 1943-1945, Polish interests in Romania were represented by the Swiss Legation, through a Special Division, but this division had closed down in July 1945.<sup>4</sup> In February 1946, Ion Raiciu was appointed Romanian Ambassador in Warsaw.<sup>5</sup>

The bilateral relations evolved positively in the following years, under the influence of an obvious mutual regard, although embarrassing financial matters occasionally overshadowed this climate. As a member of the United Nations, Poland supported Romania at the Paris Peace Conference, according to its possibilities. In the summer of 1946, Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Raimovsky

---

<sup>1</sup> Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, București (hereafter: AMAE), box 220 Polonia 1 bis, file "Reluarea relațiilor diplomatice normale între România și Polonia 1945-1947," "Notă adresată gen. Susaikov no. 11565/20 August 1945."

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, "Nota Ambasadei URSS către MAS Direcția Protocolului," 8 September 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *Contribuții la istoria raporturilor româno-poloneze (1945-1947)*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie A.D. Xenopol," XIV, 1977, p. 417.

<sup>4</sup> AMAE, box 220 Polonia 1 bis, file "Reluarea relațiilor diplomatice normale între România și Polonia," "Notă Légation de Suisse – Division Spéciale către Gh. Tătărescu."

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, "Telegramă cifrată către Ambasada României la Moscova."

informed the Romanian Ambassador in Warsaw that his Government offered its full support to Romania, in the territorial issues which concerned Transylvania. In Raimovsky's opinion, Transylvania could only belong to Romania.<sup>6</sup> The President of the National Council of the Polish Republic, Bolesław Bierut, also affirmed in the course of the same year that between Romania and Poland there is no reason for separation, but plenty of reasons for approach.<sup>7</sup> In spite of such warm considerations, the financial issues were much more difficult to work out. Each party had several financial claims, mainly debts from before and during the war.

In the fall of 1946, at the Peace Conference in Paris, I. Christu and D.T. Sychowski, members of the Romanian and Polish delegations, exchanged letters in which both parties expressed their commitment to work out the differences by bilateral negotiations. A Polish delegation traveled to Bucharest for that purpose, in April 1947.<sup>8</sup> As regards the nature and origin of the debts, Romania claimed the reimbursement of its expenses caused by the Polish refugees in 1939. Other claims referred to the Polish currency accepted by the Romanian authorities from the Polish refugees at the beginning of the war. Romanian economists calculated more debts resulting from the transit of UNNRA commodities towards Poland. Altogether, the estimated debt was of more than 7 million USD.

The Polish Government requested the gold deposited in Romania after 1939, as well as the military goods brought in after 1939, by the fleeing Polish army.<sup>9</sup> On 10 October 1939 Polish authorities handed over to the Romanian Government, due to the Nazi occupation, no less than 51 sealed containers holding 2738.1 tones of gold, from the Treasury of the National Bank of Poland (Bank Polski). This bank later on took refuge in New York. On 20 April 1940, it communicated to the National Bank of Romania (BNR) its decision to transfer the gold to the American charitable organization Polish Food Commission, which was helping the Polish refugees. The Romanian Government decided to hold the gold as guarantee, but the Polish Food Commission sued Romania, managing to block some of the Romanian accounts in the United States. In 1946, BNR declared itself ready to return the gold to Bank Polski, upon a single condition: the Polish bank was to ensure BNR's access to its American accounts.<sup>10</sup>

The Polish claims were of more than 26 million USD, including some smaller debts dating from before the war. The April round of negotiations led to

---

<sup>6</sup> Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *România și organizarea postbelică a lumii (1945-1947)*, București, 1988, p. 165.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, *Contribuții*, p. 421.

<sup>8</sup> AMAE – Oficiul de Studii și Documentare: Ioan Suciu, *Relațiile româno-poloneze de la declanșarea celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial până la ultima întâlnire la nivel înalt dintre reprezentanții celor două țări*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *Contribuții*, p. 418.

no result, just as the second round in September. Although there was no general financial settlement, the gold issue was fixed separately: BNR decided to return the gold to Bank Polski and Bank Polski agreed to take care of the American lawsuit.<sup>11</sup> A Convention stipulating all these clauses was signed between the two parties in November 1947. The financial negotiations were resumed on 14 February 1948, leading to an agreement on the liquidation of all debts, signed on 10 September 1948. Romania agreed to pay a sum of 2 million USD, in ten years, starting from 1949.<sup>12</sup> Both parties found this agreement satisfying.

The commercial relations between the two countries also followed a favorable course. Poland was one of the very few countries with which Romania had signed trade agreements in the immediate aftermath of the war. The mutual trade in the first postwar years was limited and sporadic, dominated by the reconstruction needs of both countries, but also by the bad shape of the economy in Romania and Poland. The first Romanian-Polish Convention regarding trade was signed on 7 July 1945 in Moscow, by I.Gh. Maurer and Hilary Minc and was valid for one year. Romania imported coal and coke from Poland and exported oil. The amount of commercial exchanges stipulated in the Convention was too generous for the real economic possibilities of the two countries and was not reached in practice. Especially Romania had great economic obligations towards the USSR, resulting from the Armistice. At the end of 1946, the mutual sold was in Romania's advantage by almost one million dollars. Still, on 9 September 1947, Al. Bârlădeanu and Stefan Wenghierow were empowered by their Governments to sign a new Convention valid for one year for commercial exchanges equal in value.<sup>13</sup>

Polish historian Piotr Franaszek identified two stages in the evolution of Polish foreign trade, between 1944 and 1956. According to his studies, Poland was engaged in economic reconstruction until 1949, when the bases for the future Socialist economy were laid. In 1945, the Polish Central Office of Planning was established. Two years later it compiled the first three years reconstruction plan, the starting point of planned economy in Poland. The second stage started in 1949 and was dominated by the centrally planned economic model of Soviet inspiration. This is when the nationalization of the industry was carried out and the collectivization began.<sup>14</sup> The main commercial partner during this period was the USSR, which absorbed roughly 92% of Polish exports and contributed with almost

---

<sup>11</sup> AMAE – Oficiul de Studii și Documentare: Ioan Suci, *Relațiile româno-poloneze*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *Contribuții*, pp. 419-421.

<sup>14</sup> Piotr Franaszek, "Foreign Exchange of the People's Republic of Poland in the Years 1945-1980," paper presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Economic History, Helsinki, 2006, pp. 3-4.

90% to its imports. Poland's most important products for exportation were coal and ore for metallurgy.<sup>15</sup> The Romanian-Polish cooperation during these years would rely on the principle of complementary economies.

Political evolutions would play a role just as important in the Romanian-Polish rapprochement. While in leadership, Władysław Gomułka tried to guide Poland on a semi-independent, specific road to Socialism, somewhat similar to the Yugoslav model. Gomułka tried to resist the large privileges granted to the Informative Bureau of the Communist Parties and expressed opposition concerning Tito's expelling from the Bureau and the damnation of "Titoism." Apparently, during the Szklarska Poręba conference, Gomułka summoned an urgent meeting of the Politburo with the intention of resigning, as a protest against Stalin's abuses regarding the Cominform. His resistance did not stand much chance, since he was outnumbered by those loyal to Stalin in the Polish Politburo.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, his position did not pass unnoticed in Kremlin. The Foreign Policy Section of the Soviet Central Committee prepared a report in April 1948, regarding the so-called "anti-Marxist deviations" in the Polish Party. Gomułka was the main character, his position being examined in a very harsh tone.<sup>17</sup> In Stalinist political practices, the word "deviation" usually had fatal implications. Reaction in Warsaw occurred soon afterwards.

In September 1948 Gomułka was replaced from his position as Secretary General of the Party. A year later, his war-time rival Bolesław Bierut would raise the "Gomułka issue" in Moscow, in the context of the Rajk trial in Hungary. Bierut was planning a show-trial, the kind already organized in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, having Gomułka as principal target. Gomułka was arrested in September 1951, as preparations went on.<sup>18</sup> His dismissal changed the orientation of the Party, according to the Soviet requirements, within Stalin's political and ideological limits. Ideologically, these limits resulted from the acceptance of the Bolshevik model of Socialist construction as the unique model, as opposed to the idea of a specific and national road to Socialism, as upheld by Tito. In Romania, the idea of a national road to Socialism never occurred and the possibility of exploring such a course was removed along with Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu in 1948. Similar domestic evolutions naturally encouraged mutual cooperation.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>16</sup> Roman Wyborski, *Începutul Războiului Rece: Szklarska Poreba, 22-27 septembrie 1947*, in "Analele Sighet," vol. 5, 1997, p. 733.

<sup>17</sup> Leonid Ghibianski, *URSS și câteva aspecte ale formării blocului sovietic în Europa Orientală*, in vol. 6 martie 1945. *Începuturile comunizării României*, București, 1995, p. 260.

<sup>18</sup> Łukasz Kamiński, "Why did Gomułka Not Become a Polish Slansky?," paper presented at the International Conference "Political Trials of the '50s and the Slansky Case," Prague, April 2003, p. 2.

### Constructing Socialism Together

The international events of 1947-1948 favored the Romanian-Polish rapprochement. On 10 September 1948 Romania and Poland signed a Convention for Economic Cooperation, valid until 31 December 1953. The Convention also provided for the establishment of a permanent bilateral commission for cooperation. On the same occasion, a Trade and Payments Agreement was signed. Both sides assumed responsibility for putting together the lists of commodities for mutual exchange. The above-mentioned commission was called upon to supervise the commercial exchanges, so that the value of mutual deliveries would be approximately equal. The legal framework for the exchanges was to be provided by annual agreements, incorporating the lists of commodities.<sup>19</sup> The first annual agreement was signed on 16 December 1948, applicable starting with the following year. Until 1960, 12 such agreements had been signed.<sup>20</sup>

The relevance of these agreements derives from each side's efforts to overcome the absence of long-term reliable partners in the West. Western Europe had been a traditional source of industrial products and a market for Romanian products for decades. Poland also had strong interwar traditions in economical cooperation with the West. The needs of the industrialization process – underway in both countries and inspired by the Stalinist model – demanded strong supplies of raw materials and technological equipment which could not be procured from the West. At the same time, the Soviet Union could hardly satisfy these needs for all peoples' democracies.

As Franaszek explains, this situation encouraged a great strive directed towards economic autarchy, by developing those specific industrial branches that were not represented domestically.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the centrally planned model required exact calculations of production quantities which consequently demanded anticipated and reliable figures for all imports and exports. Generally, Romania – being underdeveloped – focused on developing strong economic relations especially with those peoples' democracies capable of providing industrial products as Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Polish regime, starting from 1950, applied a vast six-year plan aimed at an accelerated growth of industrial output, mainly in metallurgy, mining, heavy industry and armament.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the most important objective of the cooperation between Romania and

---

<sup>19</sup> AMAE – Oficiul de Studii și Documentare: Ioan Suciu, *Relațiile româno-poloneze*, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> Piotr Franaszek, *art. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

Poland was to identify industrial and raw materials resources, in a stable and reliable framework that would favor long-term economic planning.

This becomes obvious from the analysis of the merchandises exchanged by the two countries. In the first postwar years the most important exchanges consisted of raw materials necessary for production, such as oil, coal, cereals, timber. After 1949, certain modifications occurred on the commercial lists. The export lists of the following years included more and more industrial products, installations and machinery necessary for industrial constructions. Tools and machinery started to appear in the Polish export lists since 1950 and in the Romanian lists since 1951.<sup>23</sup> Although the percentage of such products was still low compared to the raw materials, the progress was visible. As more measures of planned economic development were being implemented, an increase in commercial exchanges became noticeable. In the Polish currency, the total volume of the Romanian-Polish trade during 1945-1947 was of only a few million, climbing to figures such as 45 million in 1948 and 100 million two years later. In the second half of the 1950s, this positive trend would continue.<sup>24</sup>

Economic cooperation during these years cannot be separated from political evolutions. After the Titoist split, in 1948-1949, the peoples' democracies had nearly severed their relations with the West and the Soviet control would increase dramatically. The international isolation of the peoples' democracies would generate a great need for closer cooperation within the "Socialist camp." Cooperation between the Soviet satellites served two main purposes: substituting former Western economic partners and creating the illusion of international legitimacy, at regional level.<sup>25</sup> Still, relations between Communist Parties remained at a very low level. The Stalinist political practices aimed at isolating the peoples' democracies among themselves to prevent an alliance against Moscow's interests. Instead, the Kremlin chose to mediate the relations between its satellites, in order to maintain a close watch on their political initiatives.<sup>26</sup>

This is why, politically, the only relevant episode in Romanian-Polish relations during Stalin's rule was the signing of a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. The ceremony took place in Bucharest, on 26 January 1949. The Polish delegation comprised only state officials, without high-level Party representation: Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, Foreign Affairs

---

<sup>23</sup> AMAE – Oficiul de Studii și Documentare: Ioan Suciu, *Relațiile româno-poloneze*, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Nistor, *Înfruntând Vestul. PCR, România lui Dej și politica americană de îngrădire a comunismului*, București, 2006, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> Leonid Ghibianski, *art. cit.*, pp. 254-255.

Minister Zigmunt Modzelewski. Signed by Groza and Cyrankiewicz, the treaty consisted of the same standard articles as all other similar treaties signed by the peoples' democracies. There were such stipulations as mutual help in case of a German aggression, consultations in matters of foreign policy, the commitment to encourage the development of cooperation in all fields.<sup>27</sup>

Political and economic relations were complementary. From the Soviet perspective, the development of intense, strong, relations between its satellites, economically and commercially speaking, served a higher purpose of foreign policy: to strengthen the "Socialist camp" in its fight against imperialism. Ideology explained that imperialism had taken advantage in time of the weakness of the Central and Eastern European nations, trying to perpetuate their underdevelopment. Such a policy was the Marshall plan, argued the Stalinist propaganda, which tried to prolong and consolidate Europe's submission to the United States, to the "monopolist interests of the war mongers." Failing to do so in Eastern Europe had determined Western imperialist Governments to isolate the peoples' democracies in order to cause them economic strains. This is how, ideologists explained, strengthening economic cooperation within serves the cause of peace and Socialism.<sup>28</sup> Precisely the same idea was expressed by Groza and Cyrankiewicz in their discourses brought about by the signing of the treaty. Both prime ministers emphasized the "anti-imperialist" character of the treaty and the need for common defense against the "war mongers."<sup>29</sup>

The industrialization raised another problem, that of expertise in industrial techniques. The problem was just as difficult as the issue of procuring resources and technology. This is why Moscow encouraged within CMEA the practice of exchange of expertise. In April 1951 in Warsaw, the Romanian-Polish Commission for Scientific Cooperation met for the first time. Its goal was to facilitate and organize the exchange of technical expertise between specialists from the two countries, but also to contribute to the implementation of common scientific projects in different technical domains.<sup>30</sup> To support this initiative, the two countries signed another agreement on 11 August 1953 which stipulated the cooperation in the field of inventions and technical innovations.<sup>31</sup>

Another important form of cooperation was common investment projects, aimed at developing certain branches of industry for mutual benefit. In 1954,

---

<sup>27</sup> "Scântea," 27 January 1949, no. 1335.

<sup>28</sup> V. Carra, *Rolul țărilor de democrație populară în economia Europei*, in "Probleme externe," June 1948, no. 2, pp. 41-43.

<sup>29</sup> "Scântea," 27 January 1949, no. 1335.

<sup>30</sup> AMAE – Oficiul de Studii și Documentare: Ioan Suciu, *Relațiile româno-poloneze*, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

Poland proposed to employ common efforts for identifying the most effective way of reed exploitation in the Danube Delta. The plan was to build industrial facilities for cellulose to serve both countries' necessities. The initial Polish proposal envisaged imports of reed from Romania, but Bucharest was not very fond of the idea.<sup>32</sup> The issue of reed exploitation was the object of another cooperation project with GDR. A Protocol had been signed in this sense in 1952. In exchange for half of the production, the German part assumed the responsibility of delivering the equipments and tools necessary for building the factory.<sup>33</sup> The project did not materialize, due to the changes in the investment policy caused by the "New Course" after Stalin's death. The riot in Berlin convinced the Soviet leadership to intervene in favor of a softer line in Eastern Germany, meaning especially significant improvements in the standard of living.<sup>34</sup> The new orientation led to the postponement of many industrial projects.

The cooperation for reed exploitation became a reality in the end, in a tripartite form by co-opting Poland and Czechoslovakia into the project. Romanian and Polish governmental delegations met on 2-18 July 1956 in Bucharest and signed a Convention for the construction of an industrial enterprise for cellulose. The factory was to be located somewhere near the Danube Delta and was going to use reed as primary raw material. Poland promised to contribute with technology and equipment in the amount of 10 million rubles. The Polish investment was going to be amortized in cellulose.<sup>35</sup>

As the Polish industrialization process was moving forward, Warsaw showed more and more interest in Romania as a source of raw materials. As advised by CMEA, the Polish Government initiated consultations about widening the cooperation in the field of chemistry. A bilateral commission was established and first met in April 1955. The Polish delegates expressed their Government's interest in building a gas pipe between Romania and Poland in order to import methane gas for a factory of chemical fertilizers. The Polish delegates also showed

---

<sup>32</sup> Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, București (hereafter: ANIC), fund CAER – Comisia Guvernamentală de Colaborare Economică și Tehnică, file "Colaborare economică RPR-RPP no. 1/1954," "Nota Comisiei de Colaborare Tehnico-Științifică de pe lângă Consiliul de Miniștri către Comisia Guvernamentală CAER no. 6189/22.10.1954," f. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, file "Colaborare economică RPR-RDG no. 2/1952," "Proiect de Convenție no. 2," f. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Kramer, *The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe. Internal and External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part I)*, in "Journal of Cold War Studies," vol. I, 1999, no. 1, pp. 10-14.

<sup>35</sup> AMAE – Oficiul de Studii și Documentare: Ioan Suci, *Relațiile româno-poloneze*, p. 36.



great interest in importing oil and oil derivatives from Romania for another chemical enterprise.<sup>36</sup> The Romanian part was very reserved. It emphasized the inconvenient of building a 700 kilometers long pipe. In exchange, the Romanians came up with a different proposal: using the oil and gas reserves for both countries' needs, but from the inside, by building enterprises in Romania, near the resources. Such enterprises should be built, the Romanians argued, with Polish contribution in technology and equipments, receiving in exchange the products Poland needed.<sup>37</sup>

Similar Romanian attitudes were also manifest in relation to Hungary. Budapest was even more interested than Poland in the methane gas deposits in Transylvania and demanded to import large quantities of this resource. Romania constantly rejected Hungarian import requests, offering in exchange a common industrial project in Romania. The Romanian Party leadership hoped to take advantage of these important resources in order to attract other parties in joint ventures. The advantages, as seen in Bucharest, were a fast industrial development, equipment and machinery, expertise, etc. for virtually no costs, stable long-term markets, etc. This is why Romania not only preferred, but also encouraged joint industrial projects, rather than exporting raw materials.

Beyond economic aspects, the Romanian-Polish rapprochement was visible in the cultural field, too. The East European Communist regimes employed a vast mutual propaganda to improve their neighbors' image, to point out their successes in the construction of Socialism and to create a sense of community (international Socialist community) in the public opinion. Creating a feeling of solidarity and common destiny, emphasizing the successes of the Socialist model in neighboring countries also contributed to the regime's legitimacy, to depicting an image of international recognition, as opposed to the real isolation in which peoples' democracies were placed. This was considered a factor of credibility for any Communist regime. Cultural relations played an important role in this sense.

In 1946 a Polish Institute was established in Bucharest with the purpose of improving the mutual knowledge of the two nations. The Romanian Government also established a Romanian-Polish Association of Friendship in Warsaw, a year later.<sup>38</sup> A Romanian-Polish Cultural Convention was signed on 27 February 1948, at governmental level. The Convention was aiming to popularize each nation's culture in the other country, by organizing cultural centers, departments of

---

<sup>36</sup> ANIC, fund CAER, file "Colaborare economică RPR-RPP no. 2/1955," "Notă informativă – secret no. 872/12.04.1955," ff. 4-5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, "Protocol privind prima sesiune referitor la schimbul de informații în domeniul industriei chimice," ff. 9-10.

<sup>38</sup> AMAE – Oficiul de Studii și Documentare: Ioan Suci, *Relațiile româno-poloneze*, p. 38.

Romanian language in Poland and of Polish language in Romania, exchanges of artists and scientists.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of its very intense character, the fact must be acknowledged that the Romanian-Polish cooperation was in great measure the result of the international evolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. The year 1956 was a turning point, separating the two countries in terms of both domestic evolutions and the relations with the Soviet Union. Romania stood away from the uproar in the fall of 1956 by severe preventive measures employed by a non-reformative Stalinist regime, afraid of liberalization. Romania fulfilled its duties as a faithful satellite, especially in what concerned Hungary. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej tried very hard to prevent the spread of any liberal current, inside the Party or within society. The “New Course” was loudly proclaimed at the Central Committee Plenary meeting in August 1953 but was not followed by any in-depth reforms.

The main reason for Gheorghiu-Dej’s success was the quasi-absence of any alternative to power.<sup>40</sup> From 1947 to 1953, his main opponents, either virtual or real, were Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and the Pauker group. Pătrășcanu was a different type of leader, not very pleasing to Moscow: intellectual, coming from a wealthy family of intellectuals, he had joined the Party for his sincere beliefs and supported as a lawyer the imprisoned Communist leaders in the 1930s. After the war he became minister of Justice and one of the most important Party leaders, the only one with popularity among bourgeois politicians. He was in favor of a more national approach to Communism, for which reason he was arrested and imprisoned in 1948, blamed for “nationalist deviation.” His trial stagnated until 1954, when he was rapidly convicted and executed. Gheorghiu-Dej was obviously trying to erase any trace of an alternative leadership.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, in 1952, the Ana Pauker group was purged in the context of Stalin’s anti-Semitic purges. An old Communist with long Comintern service, close to Molotov, Ana Pauker was the prime candidate to Party leadership after the war. Stalin chose Gheorghiu-Dej though, because of three main reasons: he was a worker, he was Romanian, and he was a man. As a woman and a Jew, Ana Pauker could only dream of exerting power behind closed doors, but Gheorghiu-Dej correctly understood the potential menace represented by her influence in the Party and took advantage of the anti-Semitic purges to get rid of her, as well.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>40</sup> Dennis Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist*, București, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Lavinia Betea, *Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Moartea unui lider comunist*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, București, 2006, p. 193.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Levy, *Gloria și decăderea Anei Pauker*, Iași, 2002.

So, at Stalin's death, there was no real alternative to his leadership. From this strong position, Gheorghiu-Dej tried to delay all reforms for as long as possible, cautiously waiting for a change in Moscow's line. He understood – as he always did when it came to threats – the danger represented by de-Stalinization. The events of 1956 confirmed his fears and he enthusiastically rushed to help Khrushchev crush the revolution in Hungary. Gheorghiu-Dej saw the uproar as a confirmation of his line against that of Khrushchev.

As for Poland, the situation was very different. The liberalization went far, both in the civil society and the high ranks of the Party. In December 1954, a Plenary meeting of the Polish Central Committee subjected the Politburo to harsh criticism for its methods.<sup>43</sup> The political police was also criticized for its abuses. During the same year, when Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was executed, Gomułka was released from prison. The “New Course” was not abandoned after Malenkov's dismissal, because even top Party leaders wished to slowly slide outside Moscow's control. The liberal current in society became stronger. In March 1956 Bolesław Bierut died and Edward Ochab, a moderate Stalinist, was appointed leader, in Khrushchev's presence.<sup>44</sup> Two factors contributed to avoiding a Hungarian-like turnout of events: Gomułka's moderate plan of reforms (not as radical as Nagy's) and Ochab's wisdom, when he decided to give up his position in Gomułka's favor.<sup>45</sup> A division inside the Party was avoided in this way. Gomułka continued with caution the liberalization and reforms, trying to maintain appearances and reach a compromise between social expectations and Moscow's apprehensions. Poland left behind the unconditional submission to Moscow which characterized the previous years, in favor of a distinctive voice in the “Socialist camp,” arguing its specificity and the need for various models of Socialist construction.

### **The Consequences of 1956 for Romanian-Polish Relations**

This approach was evident even from the most important post-1956 event of the Socialist world: the Moscow Conference of the Communist Parties in November 1957. The events in the fall of 1956, as well as the intense discussions regarding the uniqueness of the Bolshevik model of Socialist construction and Tito's opposition to the concept, determined Moscow to find a new slogan for its relations with the satellites: unity. The fight for unity and against deviation was the new motto of the international relations inside the “Socialist camp.” To affirm the

---

<sup>43</sup> Ion Constantin, *Polonia în secolul totalitarismelor*, București, 2007, p. 422.

<sup>44</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc. Unity and Conflict*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967, p. 241.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 242-245.

unity of Communist Parties and their determination to fight any deviation, a Conference was called by Khrushchev in November 1957. Most of the leaders present there, including Gheorghiu-Dej, obeyed Moscow's instruction and expressed their commitment to the unity of the working class movement.<sup>46</sup> Gomulka, nevertheless, had a very distinctive voice. Moscow did allow a larger freedom of action to its satellites, as compared to Stalin's years, and Gomulka was somehow testing that freedom and exploring its limits.

During the discussions about the text of the common declaration, Gomulka expressed his opposition to many ideas in the Soviet draft, including the formulation: Communist Parties "led by the USSR."<sup>47</sup> His observations were not taken into consideration by the other delegates, which determined Gomulka to reiterate his opinion in the plenary meeting, also protesting against such practices. His main argument was that no party should be forced to accept an idea to which it did not agree. He further explained that, although it was true that the USSR led the Communist movement, the Poles did not use the expression in their propaganda because the people might understand it the wrong way, as a Soviet interference in their domestic affairs.<sup>48</sup> Such attitude was breaking a taboo of the Stalinist era, when the motto was that patriotism was measured by the love for the Soviet Union.

The Polish Party would continue to pretend a certain degree of independence in the future, too. In March 1958, in Prague, another meeting of the Communist Parties was called to decide the establishment of another international Communist journal, after the Informative Bureau succumbed.<sup>49</sup> The Polish delegates were very noisy in demanding that the journal should refrain from criticizing other parties. They also required that every party should have the right to stop any article from being published, if the article was inconvenient.<sup>50</sup> The Romanian delegates did not express any separate opinion. They simply accepted the Soviet proposals without any observations.

Using this newly acquired relative freedom of speech, Poland did not miss any chance to express controversial points of view, in various issues like the CMEA cooperation. In April 1957, the Polish Government sent a letter to all CMEA Governments, complaining about the organizational malfunction of the Council. The letter contained a long list of discontents: the figures for mutual

---

<sup>46</sup> ANIC, fund CC al PCR – Secția Relații Externe, file no. 1/1957, "Consfătuirea reprezentanților partidelor comuniste și muncitorești din țările socialiste, Cuvântarea tovarășului Gomulka," ff. 54-57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Idem, fund CC al PCR – Secția Cancelarie, file no. 8/1958, "Informație despre întâlnirea de la Praga a unor partide comuniste și muncitorești," ff. 31-34.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

deliveries of goods were not realistic; the Council made plans as for one single country, not considering the specificity and needs of each taken separately; the need to export goods in the West for hard convertible currency was disregarded; recommendations to increase production were not accompanied by similar measures in investments, etc. The letter proposed the reduction of CMEA's international role of coordination.<sup>51</sup> The document was very unrelenting and Romania did not endorse it, although the problems were real and causing difficulties to all countries.

Romania's attitude vis-à-vis Moscow was well calculated by Gheorghiu-Dej. He kept a very low profile, simulating complete submission, in order to gain Khrushchev's trust. Gheorghiu-Dej was seeking for independence as well, but with different strategies. At that particular moment (1957-1958) his most important goal was to obtain the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania, which he actually achieved in 1958. For such a concession, he knew that he should appear in Moscow as the most loyal ally. Abroad, though, his image was different. The Poles noticed his position very clearly, without understanding its reasons. Romania's restrictive domestic policy did not leave much doubt or need for questions. Seen as one of Moscow's men, Gheorghiu-Dej could not make someone like Gomulka (or the Poles generally) feel drawn towards Romania.

Relations at Party level had not been too strong in the Stalinist years, as discussed above, but after 1956 the tone of these relations became really glacial. The same situation was visible at state level, as well. This change was noticed by two different reports, originating in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party (RWP). This situation will be further illustrated with concrete cases observed during 1957-1958.

From 21 November to 1 December 1957 a Romanian delegation representing the Grand National Assembly visited Poland, led by Constantin Pârvulescu. The delegation visited several industrial enterprises in Warsaw, Katowice, Cracow, and Poznań, and participated in a few meetings with various Polish officials. The report drawn up by the delegation stressed certain shortcomings of the Polish authorities, from political and organizational points of view. The greatest surprise was the lack of any meetings with workers or Party officials. The report mentioned: "it must be said that at mostly all factories visited, the Party secretary was not present and there was no mention of the Party."<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Idem, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, file no. 67/1957, "Notă privind problemele activității Consiliului de Ajutor Economic Reciproc precum și ale modificării necesare a metodelor și formelor de lucru ale acestuia," ff. 3-10.

<sup>52</sup> AMAE, fund 220, file "Polonia 8 – Secția RP Polonă, DR I dosar special," "Vizita delegației Marii Adunări Naționale a Republicii Populare Române în Republica Populară Polonă, confidențial – anexă la 3612/57," f. 2.

Moreover, no member of the Polish Politburo was present at the reception offered by the Seim and not even one member of the Central Committee.<sup>53</sup> Although, generally, the visit was appreciated positively, as regarded the mutual knowledge, the conclusion of the report was that "the leadership of the Polish United Workers Party did not pay proper attention to the visit of the Grand National Assembly."<sup>54</sup>

During 1958, while waiting for a Polish delegation to pay a return visit to Romania, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs compiled a consistent analysis of Romanian-Polish relations in the last years. It is edifying especially for its considerations regarding Poland's domestic situation in the context of the 1956 events and for the RWP's negative position vis-à-vis the Polish developments. The report emphasized the fact that the economic and cultural relations between the two countries had significantly increased in the last years, without reaching full potential, though. Also, it was mentioned that during this period there had been no important political initiative involving Romania and Poland. The events of 1956 were considered to be the most important obstacle for a future development of mutual relations. The report explained: "the events which occurred in Poland in the fall of 1956 led to a stagnation of Romania's relations with Poland because the Polish part expressed reservations about the popularization of our achievements in the construction of Socialism in Poland, reservations also manifested regarding all the countries from the Socialist camp."<sup>55</sup>

According to the above-mentioned analysis, in the field of cultural relations, Poland showed a terrible lack of interest regarding Romania's popularization and also an underestimation of Romania's cultural possibilities. This was why Polish authorities were reluctant to further develop cultural relations with Romania. The Romanian culture, it was noticed, was only mentioned in Poland if it obtained a success in the West. In addition to that the report pointed out that "often there is an undisguised opposition to popularize Romania among many Polish institutions."<sup>56</sup> An example was brought forward, regarding Polish author Janusz Meissner, who visited Romania in 1939 and described it in extremely negative colors: awful backwardness, illiterate population, etc. Polish authorities had decided to republish Meissner's book in 1957 and in spite of great efforts employed by Romania to prevent that, the decision was carried out anyway, totally disregarding Romania's plea.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, f. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, file "1958 Polonia 6," "Unele aspecte ale relațiilor româno-polone."

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, f. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, f. 9.

In what concerned Poland's foreign policy, the consequences of 1956 were used again to explain Warsaw's behavior. The document emphasized the fact that Poland "had reoriented its relations with each Socialist country according to that country's position regarding the October 1956 events. There was a weakening in the relations with the USSR, because the reaction had greatly intensified its activity aiming to sabotage the Polish-Soviet relations and to increase the anti-Soviet spirit."<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, the Romanian analysis made another interesting observation: during the events in Hungary in 1956, most of the Polish press had a hateful attitude towards the Soviet Union. Another interesting aspect, relevant considering future events, consisted in the careful attention paid by the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry to the Polish-Chinese relations. One particular opinion heard in Polish diplomatic circles was emphasized, that Poland should follow China's example, because this country always pursued its own particular road to Socialism: "Polish publicists have stressed repeatedly that the only country in the Socialist camp which understands and supports the evolutions in Poland was China; this way, there was a clear reactionary attempt to oppose China to the Soviet Union."<sup>59</sup>

Concerning Poland's relations with other peoples' democracies, the report pointed out the tension between Poland, on the one hand, and Czechoslovakia and GDR on the other hand, caused by the critical attitude expressed by those two countries about Poland, in the context on 1956. In reference to Hungary, the report stated, it was the Polish opinion still that the uproar in the fall of 1956 was a mass revolutionary movement.<sup>60</sup> During 1956-1957, the author of the document carefully noticed, the number of foreign (Western) tourists, business men and politicians who visited Poland had significantly increased.<sup>61</sup>

As this document illustrates, the Romanian diplomacy was still tributary to the Stalinist methods. Poland's image was distorted by the Stalinist interpretation to which it was subjected. At the same time, Romania's image in Poland was the creation of its visible political actions. As explained above, most of these actions were meant to soothe Soviet suspicions, as Gheorghiu-Dej followed a different path towards autonomy. From this incompatibility arose the appearance of a conflicting situation. Beyond these appearances, it was obvious that both before and after 1956, the Romanian-Polish relations were the product of the international circumstances. Factors outside their control acted in favor of an approach. The economic cooperation especially was mainly the product of international isolation,

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, "Despre politica externă a R.P. Polone," f. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, f. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, f. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, f. 4.

Soviet pressure and CMEA guidance. Constructive, long-term relations could not be built within this framework, because the premises were determined from the exterior. Once the two countries managed to shape a relative independence in their foreign policy – meaning that both the pressures and the taboos of the Stalinist era were overcome – they were able to develop constructive relations.