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**ROMANIAN ALTERNATIVE PATH TO SOCIALISM:
FROM INCEPTION TO CEAUȘESCU'S ASCENDANCY**

Abstract: The article examines the historical and political development of the Romanian Communist/Workers' Party, detailing its trajectory up to Nicolae Ceaușescu's rise to power in 1965. Even before the rise of Ceaușescu, Romanian communists had managed to develop their own unique socialist model. By the standards commonly accepted among the European Marxists at the time, this fact would be enough to count Romanian communists among the pioneers of the search for the so-called "third path" toward socialism. A notion that each communist or socialist party should develop its own ideology in accordance with the unique characteristics of its own social, economic and cultural circumstances became a cause for numerous splits on the European far left of the 1960s and 1970s. Development of the Yugoslav socialist model, Czechoslovakian reformism, Eurocommunism, and other alternative paths to socialism were all influenced by the idea of abandoning the practice of appropriating principles of the Bolshevik socialist model in the policy-making process. However, there are multiple factors that excluded the unique evolution of the new ideology created by the Romanian Communist Party from the substantial number of historical studies devoted to researching alternative paths to socialism. The aim of this paper is to contribute to further understanding of the historical circumstances that separated the development of the ideology created by the Romanian communists from both their Eastern and their Western counterparts.

Keywords: Romanian Communist/Workers' Party, Communist Party of Yugoslavia, membership, transformation, communism, ideological indoctrination, Soviet Union, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.

1. Communism in Romania before and during the Second World War - Bolshevization of the Romanian Communist Party

What stopped the Romanian communists from joining the international family of those parties that completely refused to define their policies in accordance with the dominant attitudes in the Soviet party remains one of the most commonly proposed debate subjects regarding the historical evolution of the Romanian socialist model. Certainly, Romanian governments had a clear interest in preserving at least tolerable relations with administrations of other Eastern Bloc countries, and were thus discouraged from pursuing expansion of their reformist agenda to the extent that the Czechoslovakian government did before the military intervention in 1968.¹ However, this prompts the question: To what extent was the reformist enthusiasm of the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s in the Romanian party even comparable with the one showcased by the Czechoslovakian reformists, and by their Yugoslav and later, Eurocommunist supporters? In order to at least partially answer this question, the development of the Romanian socialist model should be analyzed from the first formative years of the Romanian Communist Party, up to the time when the reformist fraction, then led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, took power within the party.²

Although there are many similarities in the emergence and early development of communism in Romania and its closest country that went through the period of socialist reformism, Yugoslavia, their trajectories did not follow a uniform pattern. Since its inception, the Communist Party of Romania has faced numerous unique challenges and crises. It is important to note that the ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Kautsky were present in Romania at the beginning of the 20th century. However, scholars estimate that the influence of the early Marxist ideas on the general population was minimal at that time. The public began to pay more attention when members of the Socialist Party leaned toward a more radical approach to defining political programs.³ The tendency toward appropriating ideas and principles of the Bolshevik socialist model gained traction after the success of the 1917 Russian Revolution, and became especially popular after the successful industrialization and introduction of new social policies in the Soviet Union during the 1920s.⁴

After the bombing of the Senate on December 8, 1920, the Romanian government started implementing harsh policies of surveillance and arrest against those who were suspected of being associated with communist or anarchist organizations.⁵ In turn, these policies influenced further radicalization of the Socialist Party, which suffered a major split on a Congress held in May of 1921.⁶ Majority of the gathered Romanian communists voted to rename the party into Romanian Communist Party (PCR), and to become a section of the Communist International. New party leadership, gathered around the newly elected General Secretary, Gheorghe Cristescu, was arrested in the immediate aftermath of the Congress,

¹ Chirot 1980: 363–381.

² Stanciu 2013: 1063–1085.

³ Foculescu 2006: 415–420, Balcescu 2020: 68–95

⁴ Ellman 2004: 841–847.

⁵ Adevărul 1922: 2, Tănase 2003: 5–8.

⁶ Constantiniu 1995: 229.

and subsequently, the party had to wait until the 1922 Congress of Ploiesti to define the new party ideology. This new ideology aimed to drastically sever ties with the more moderate, social-democratic ideas that were popular among the leftists of the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century. After the congress of Ploiesti, creating new party policies in a manner that would try to imitate the Soviet socialist model became an official doctrine of the Romanian Communist Party.⁷

Despite some similarities that can be noticed in the way the expansion of repressive policies against the far-left wing groups influenced further ideological radicalization of the same groups, there are still some crucial differences to be noted when comparing the interwar history of the Yugoslav and Romanian communist parties. Scholars are pointing out that “Bolshevization” of the Yugoslav Communist Party (CPY) was a gradual process that took place over nearly two decades. This process was certainly influenced by events such as the publishing of *Obznana (Proclamation)*, the governmental order that banned communists from institutionalized politics, or the series of arrests that followed the assassination of the interior minister, Milorad Drašković, in 1921. However, unique political, social and cultural circumstances of Yugoslavia allowed neither for such a determined reaction of the government, nor for such a swift bolshevization of the communist party, as was the case in Romania during the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ On the other hand, much clearer similarities can be established when comparing the Bolshevization of the early Romanian communists and their Mediterranean counterparts, who became ideologically radicalized in the historical period marked by the strong presence of the far-right wing movements on the political spectrum of their countries. However, unlike those who would create the first Eurocommunist ideologies some decades later, Romanian communists never seemed to develop the notion that the Soviet Union is too far away to aid them in the potentially violent fight against their far-right rivals.⁹

Numerous factors distinguished the Romanian interwar political crisis and subsequent development of the communist organizations from those in contemporary Yugoslavia or in the Western Europe. Some of those factors should be searched for in the still unresolved economic disparity between the urban and rural regions, as well as developed agricultural villages, which held manufacturing traditions from the Early Modern History, and those villages which still upheld a herding way of life. While inequality between Romanian social classes was remarkable even for the historical period, cultural and ethnic differences between different regions within the country were so deep that it inspired some contemporary authors to state that communist party leaders themselves often came from different worlds.¹⁰

Another potential factor is a rather extraordinary influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church over most groups that comprised the complex Romanian society at the time, as well as the political influence of the traditional aristocracy, which held a marginal importance in the political life of most Balkan countries.¹¹ Finally, Romanian interwar

⁷ Balcescu 2020: 68–95, Dologa 2011: 1–2.

⁸ Filipović 2023: 109–147.

⁹ King 1980, 37–38.

¹⁰ Chirot 1980: 363–381.

¹¹ Pečikan 2015: 517.

political debates were marked by constant disagreements over the question of achieving national goals, which themselves constantly remained somewhat vague, both due to the complexity of Romania's geopolitical position and the complexity of its still unfinished national ideology.¹² For example, it is interesting to note that after Gheorghe Cristescu, mostly foreigners or Romanian communists from ethnic minorities were elected as the general secretaries of PCR. Some scholars argue that the influence of far-right parties and ethnic tensions caused numerous foreigners and ethnic minorities to accept communist ideology from fear of and resentment toward those who discriminated against them within other political parties and movements.¹³

During the political turmoil of the early 1930s in Romania, the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, which served as a legitimate façade for the illegal communist party, achieved notable success in 1931, securing five parliamentary seats in alliance with the Social Democratic Party. However, the ruling party subsequently manipulated the election results to strip them of their seats. Following the railway workers' uprising in Grivița in 1933, the Bloc was banned. A newly founded Workers' League was short-lived, and from 1934 onward, all political activities by the communists ceased.¹⁴ Unlike in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Italy or France, where communist popularity grew exponentially during the times of economic depression and far-right insurgencies, Romanian communists started to lose much of their previously held public support after getting stranded among the numerous competitive parties on the growingly marginalized far-left. Massive arrests and persecution of the communists further disorganized the party and made its position even weaker, up to the point at which, out of approximately 5,000 members in the late 1920s, just months before the beginning of the Second World War, only around 300 remained active.¹⁵

Over the course of the Second World War, Romanian communists were not able to forge a massive communist resistance movement, as was the case with their Yugoslav, Italian or French counterparts. Forced to take a backseat while the country was going through major historical events that marked the wartime history of Romania, the communist party had to rely on compromises with both other leftist groups and with right-wing resistance organizations in order to survive in the complex network of political and military maneuvering.

Popularity of the communists did, however, achieve a new historical peak on the wave of widespread resistance against the far-right regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu. But when the turbulent climate of Romanian politics shifted yet again, and when the country switched sides in order to join the Allies, the brief capture of popular support was lost for the communists. Romanian communists now had to deal with the accusations that their resistance movement is only a satellite of the Red Army, whose ever-increasing presence in the country, as of 1944, sparked numerous animosities both toward the Soviet government and toward the Romanian Communist Party. And it was, to a certain degree, through financial and military aid provided by the Soviets that the Romanian communists were able to transform their resistance movement into a militarily significant force in the country, which

¹² Boia 2016, 13–17.

¹³ Cioroianu 2021:1-3.

¹⁴ King 1980, 19–20, Chiper 1998, 25–44.

¹⁵ Soica 2009: 321–322.

in turn provided the communist party with the much desired political leverage over the liberal and nationalist parties close to the royal court, which helped the king to overthrow the military junta of Antonescu.

Unlike the Yugoslav and Italian communists, their Romanian counterparts did not emerge from the chaos of the Second World War with an aura of liberators, further reinforced by the crucial military successes of the communist resistance. Some scholars believe that this fact deeply influenced the party's perception of itself, and thus further reinforced the already existing insecurities of PCR leadership about the strength of their position within the country they found themselves governing.¹⁶ This may have had a profound influence on the development of reformist ideas among the leading Romanian communists. When the notion about creating an alternative socialist model was formally recognized, many years after the war, Romanian communists were more inclined to emphasize those ideas that were assessed as having the potential to increase their popular support and legitimacy within the country, rather than those ideas that were used to define more abstract concepts like internal democratization or decentralization of the party institutions.¹⁷

2. Imperatives of Membership and Popular Support - The Dynamics of Numbers and the Crucial Role of Indoctrination

The Romanian party encountered significant challenges in the early years following the Second World War. Lacking a revolutionary tradition and having a small membership, it quickly transformed into a mass organization that was essentially under the control of the Kremlin.¹⁸ The Soviet Union pressured the PCR to quickly become the central political force in Romania, which resulted in a surge of uncontrolled membership. After the unification of the PCR with the Social Democratic Party in 1948 and the creation of the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP), the number of members increased to over one million and fifty thousand members. This dramatic rise in numbers within a few years implied that the entry criteria were very low, and most people joined for opportunistic reasons.¹⁹

At that moment, the party's foremost ambition was to draw in as many sympathizers as possible, aiming to broaden its influence and forge deeper connections with the people. In pursuit of this mass appeal, the PCR transitioned from a rigorous membership selection process—one that demanded members to demonstrate their unwavering commitment through actions and a thorough understanding of the ideology—to a more inviting system of filling out questionnaires. This shift transformed the previously exclusive membership, once reserved for the most dedicated and loyal communists during the interwar period, into an inclusive approach that became attractive to opportunists. However, this strategy also bore certain consequences.²⁰

¹⁶ Hodos 1987: 93–102, Chiper, Băncilă and Georgescu 2015: 21.

¹⁷ Tismăneanu 2005: 220–223.

¹⁸ Dobre 2004: 21–22.

¹⁹ Diplomatic Archive of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (DAMFARS), Political Archive of the Federal Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (PA), year 1960, Romania, in further text: DAMFARS, PA, 1960, Romania, f. 111, doc. 10, Report on the III Congress of the RWP, confidential document no. 418399, 17.

²⁰ Cioroianu 2021: 15–30.

A significant issue arose from the fact that only a small number of people understood the basic principles of Marxist ideology and were motivated to actively participate in party activities. Internal conflicts within the party during the 1950s raised questions about the criteria for membership and the rationale behind such a large number of passive members. The first mass purge of the party occurred between 1948 and 1949, resulting in the expulsion of around 200,000 members.²¹ Following this, the process of accepting new members became longer and more complex. Over the subsequent years, several more purges took place. By the time of the Second Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party in 1955, membership had been reduced by half to 538,815 people. New members were required to undergo a series of courses to be introduced to the party's ideology. Despite these measures, the quality of the remaining membership remained low. There was a persistent lack of knowledge about Marxism, along with a general apathy and disinterest in gaining a deeper understanding of the ideological and theoretical issues within the party. Moreover, many middle and lower-ranking members displayed a noticeable lack of initiative.²²

Since the events in Hungary in 1956, the RWP has focused heavily on the ideological and political education of its party members and workers. The party aimed to train as many individuals as possible for outreach and propaganda roles, ensuring that every enterprise and community had several trained individuals who had completed a party school, course, or seminar. The most significant educational institution for the party was High Party School "Ștefan Gheorghiu," established in 1945 as the Workers' University of the Romanian Communist Party. Initially, the education lasted six months, but this increased to three years in the 1960s. The school's purpose was to prepare cadres for the needs of the party's central organs, as well as for the press and publishing sectors. It also played a crucial role in indoctrinating lower-level members through various courses.²³ As Gheorghiu-Dej believed, "the purpose of party education is to instill a spirit of dedication to people's democracy and socialism, as well as a resolute opposition to warmongers and their tools, exploiters, and all those who aim to hinder the establishment of socialism in our country."²⁴ For the communist leadership, party schools served not only as specialized educational and political institutions but also as training grounds for the party's cadres and elite members. Additionally, they acted as tools for totalitarian control, political mobilization, the creation of a hierarchical system, and the reinforcement of discipline among party members. Their popularity among the public was largely due to the favorable employment opportunities available to graduates. Those who completed this education gained an advantage across various fields, as the state believed they would contribute more effectively to the construction of the socialist system than those who had acquired their education in other ways. Until the early 1960s, the primary reading material for party education consisted of translations of the classics of Marxism-Leninism (Marx,

²¹ Cioroianu 2018: 299–300.

²² AY, Federation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia, 117, f. 363, doc. 562, Workers' Party, formation and development, 32–34.

²³ AY, A CC LCY, IX, 107/I–36, Note from a conversation conducted by comrade Vlajko Begović, member of the CC LCY, with the leadership of "Ștefan Gheorghiu" High Party School in Bucharest, at the end of July 1964, 27 August 1964, 1–3.

²⁴ Ionescu-Gură 2005: 249.

Engels, Lenin, and Stalin). Afterward, the emphasis shifted toward “scientific socialism,” which includes works that interpret these foundational texts.²⁵

Party organizations required all members to attend some form of party school, seminar, or course, while the general population was also expected to undergo similar indoctrination. To accomplish this, groups of party activists were established to lead various forms of ideological and political education among the masses. Believing that courses and lectures are essential for enhancing the ideological understanding of party members, the party placed special emphasis on the selection and education of future lecturers. These individuals were chosen among party and state cadres who demonstrated a “high ideological and political level.”²⁶ Their training involved a comprehensive and diverse curriculum. For example, in 1959, the Regional Committee of the RWP in Bucharest trained 536 lecturers in various subjects, including an evening course for first and second-year students, a course on the history of the Romanian Workers' Party, as well as of the CPSU, political economy, the statutes of the RWP, the basics of Marxism-Leninism and the historical and dialectical materialism. The training program lasted about a month and included eleven joint lectures and several specialized sessions for each course. Additionally, all lecturers received training in public speaking, engaging with people, and leading discussions. The primary focus was on equipping lecturers to connect theoretical concepts with the practical construction of socialism in Romania. Accordingly, topics such as socialist industrialization—essential for developing the national economy and improving living standards—and the leading role of the RWP in socialist construction were prioritized. This approach indicates that the goal of these lectures was to strengthen the party’s influence across all areas of social activity and to motivate members for further industrialization and socialist transformation of the state. The seriousness of the party’s commitment to these courses is evident in the data showing that in the Pitesti region during 1958, approximately 95 percent of the party’s members and over 14,000 sympathizers attended the courses.²⁷

According to data from 1960, Romania had approximately 10,000 lecturers who taught about a million members through different courses and party schools. While attendance at lectures for the general population was not compulsory, there was an implied expectation that all would exhibit genuine interest. At the outset, the party showcased its commitment to engaging key segments of society that it deemed vital to its mission. The stratum of the population where this kind of indoctrination was most necessary were the intellectuals and students, because they showed the greatest tendencies toward liberalization, either from socialist or bourgeois-democratic positions.²⁸

It should be emphasized that the youth played a significant role in the party’s goals. The party aimed to rejuvenate its leadership by fostering a new generation of leaders with stronger ties to Romania rather than to the Soviet Union. As a result, the party paid special

²⁵ Abraham 2014: 9–28.

²⁶ DAMFARS, PA, 1957, Romania, f. 87, doc. 10, Practical activities of party organizations in the period June–October 1957, confidential no. 422653, 11–12.

²⁷ DAMFARS, PA, 1959, Romania, f. 105, doc. 10, Preparation of personnel for the new season of party courses, 12 September, 1959, confidential no. 424597, 1–3.

²⁸ Archive of *Borba* news agency, f. Europe, Romania 1947–1965, socio-political organizations, “Romanian press on party propaganda,” TANJUG, 13. 2. 1960, 17.

attention to organizing courses for members of the Romanian Youth Union (UTM) and youth in general. One of the major challenges in this area was engaging the youth and keeping their interest alive during the courses. In contrast to the courses offered to party members and sympathizers, the youth participated in much smaller numbers and were less actively involved in this type of activity.²⁹

However, the lectures organized by the party were the hardest for highly educated individuals, such as engineers and professors. They suffered great humiliation at these lectures, which was expressed, if not in other ways, by the very fact that they were forced to listen to semi-literate party apparatchiks, who only knew how to repeat learned phrases and dogmas. As the party had the fewest members from the intelligentsia and the social sciences sector, the idea arose to establish the Institute of Social Sciences. This institute aimed to foster a closer alignment between humanities scholars and Marxist ideology, as well as the Romanian Workers' Party, under the party's guidance and control.³⁰

In addition to ideological and political education measures, the party also applied other methods. These included restricting the admission of students from bourgeois backgrounds and prioritizing those from working-class and peasant families. This preference was further supported by a directive requiring each enterprise and people's council to allocate specific funds for scholarships for the children of workers. The only condition for receiving a scholarship was that the students would agree to work at the enterprise or institution that provided the scholarship upon graduation.³¹

In the second half of the 1950s, the party focused on changing its membership structure and strengthening local organizations. By 1957, the new membership of the RWP was predominantly composed of workers, who made up 80 to 90 percent of most regional and county committees. Engineers, technicians, and peasants from collectives were also represented, but workers exceeded 50 percent of the total membership. This met the requirement set by the Second Congress that over half of the membership should consist of workers. In 1955, workers accounted for 42.6 percent of the membership, and by 1960, this figure had risen to about 51 percent. The emphasis on this membership structure was driven not only by the ideological goals of the leadership but also by practical considerations, as the leadership enjoyed the most significant support from the working class.³²

In addition to the increase in membership, the end of the 1950s saw an increase in the number of basic party organizations. By establishing them in production units and institutions, their number increased by 5,600, so that in 1960 the party had over 35,000 basic party cells. This increase corresponded to the leadership's intention to better root the party among the people so that, with their support, it could begin a courageous defense of Romanian interests against Moscow. However, the quality of these basic party cells was found to be unsatisfactory. In his report to the Third Congress held in 1960, Gheorghiu-Dej

²⁹ DAMFARS, PA, 1959, Romania, f. 105, doc. 10, Preparation of personnel for the new season of party courses, 12 September, 1959, confidential no. 424597, 1–3.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 14–15.

³¹ DAMFARS, PA, 1957, Romania, f. 87, doc. 10, Practical activities of party organizations in the period June–October 1957, confidential no. 422653, 11–12.

³² Archive of the *Borba* news agency, f. Europe, Romania 1947–1965, socio-political organizations, “Romanian press on party propaganda,” TANJUG, 13. 2. 1960, 17.

outlined several shortcomings. He noted that the party bodies and organizations were unable to effectively analyze specific situations, and their methods and styles were noticeably outdated. Additionally, a bureaucratic attitude and the arbitrary exclusion of members from the party, rather than focusing on the ongoing education of candidates and members, were identified as significant problems. Despite these issues, it is important to acknowledge that the Romanian Workers' Party made considerable progress in the second half of the 1950s. The party strengthened and expanded its ranks through purges aimed at removing "opportunistic and petty-bourgeois elements", which ultimately reinforced unity at the highest levels. The RWP adopted an extreme emphasis on unity, primarily through the promotion of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's significance. This emphasis was particularly evident during the Third Congress and its associated activities. Throughout the city, decorations for the Congress prominently featured only Gheorghiu-Dej's portraits, while other Romanian leaders, as well as the leaders of other parties, were not highlighted. Gheorghiu-Dej's portraits were displayed alongside those of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. During this period, the emphasis on the party's leadership role in the state and its significant influence on key historical events, such as the August 23 uprising, was also evident.³³

The cautious and deliberate nature of Romanian leadership was particularly evident within the party sphere. The RWP was slow to embrace new positions, ideas, or attitudes. A clear example of this is its response to revisionism, the key pillar of the new anti-Yugoslav campaign that the Socialist camp launched after the Seventh Congress of the CPY in 1958. Romania's stance and participation in this campaign lagged behind that of other members of the bloc. Furthermore, the RWP engaged in the campaign only to the degree that Khrushchev required of them. The fight against Yugoslavia was not a priority for the RWP during this period. As Gheorghiu-Dej emphasized in his report presented at the Third Congress, one of the party's main objectives was to maintain a steady course in socialist construction and to counteract the influence of bourgeois culture on the people's consciousness.³⁴

Between 1955 and 1960, that is, during the period between two Romanian congresses, the ideological development of the RWP was noticeably lagging behind that of other parties in terms of theory. This was primarily because the RWP prioritized the development of the material foundation of socialism, resulting in a neglect of theoretical thought or relegating it to a subordinate role. During the new anti-Yugoslav campaign, high-ranking Romanian officials often avoided engaging in discussions about contemporary revisionism or any other theoretical issues. Additionally, theoretical journals such as *Luptă de clasă*, *Probleme economice*, *Cercetări filozofice*, and *Viața Românească* did not advance beyond the already established and repeatedly stated theses from other countries within the communist camp.³⁵

³³ DAMFARS, PA, 1960, Romania, f. 111, doc. 10, Report on the III Congress of the RWP, confidential no. 418399, 17.

³⁴ Gheorghiu-Dej 1960: 86–90.

³⁵ Some of the articles published in theoretical journals were: "Contemporary Revisionism—the Main Danger in the Workers' Movement," "On the Unity of the Working Class and Its Marxist-Leninist Party," and "Old and New Revisionism." The first article focuses on the necessity of class struggle in the transition from capitalism to socialism. The second emphasizes the leading role of the party, while the third highlights the unity of the

In the early 1960s, the Romanian Workers' Party experienced a significant increase in membership and quality. By 1962, the party had over 900,000 members and candidates, with 59 percent of them being under the age of forty and 25 percent between the ages of eighteen and thirty. This rejuvenation aimed to establish a new leadership that, unlike the old one, was not burdened with ideological and other ties to the Soviet Union. Thus, the rejuvenated membership was characterized by a stronger sense of national belonging. During the Ceaușescu era, a unified ideological trend known as national communism emerged. It is important to note that the significant growth in membership began after 1959; before that, the increase had been almost imperceptible. From 1955 to 1959, only about 5,000 new members were admitted.³⁶

To implement the new political line, it was essential to have a large and high-quality membership. In the early 1960s, intensive efforts were made to strengthen the party from within. Training and ideological indoctrination were significantly enhanced. According to data from 1964, the RWP had approximately 1,250,000 members, of which around 250,000 were candidates. These members were organized into 48,138 basic units. In terms of social composition, the membership mainly remains comprised of workers and peasants. A distinctive feature of the RWP was that it did not have a formal program; instead, it was guided by decisions made at congresses, plenums, and by the Secretariat and Politburo. The need for an independent path necessitated a strong party with clear rules and objectives. Consequently, the Statute was adopted at the Third Congress in June 1960 and was modified to some extent at the Central Committee Plenum in May 1962.³⁷

The statute prescribed the rights and obligations of members, among which the most prominent were: leadership at work, respect for the party and state discipline, keeping the party and state secrets, and propagating revolutionary principles. The Central Committee of the RWP also decided to improve and increase the system's flexibility for accepting new members into the party. Amendments to the statute from 1962 reduced the number of categories into which candidates and members were divided. To become a member, one needed to first be accepted as a candidate. The first category required a recommendation from two members with at least three years of service. This category included workers, collective farm peasants, engineers, technicians, scientists, and researchers from fields related to the economy. The candidate's service period for this group lasted one year, although it could be extended by one additional year or shortened by a maximum of six months. The second category consisted of associated peasants, who were part of smaller cooperative forms, along with individual peasants, intellectuals, civil servants, and members of craft production cooperatives. For candidates in this category, three recommendations from members with at least four years of membership were needed, and their candidate service lasted a year and a half. However, there were exceptions to these rules. The

camp and the Soviet Union's leading position within the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party (DAMFARS, PA, 1958, Romania, f. 105, doc. 29, Anti-Yugoslav campaign in the RPR and the state of bilateral relations, confidential no. 426086, 8).

³⁶ DAMFARS, PA, 1962, Romania, f. 116, doc. 7, Decision of the plenum of the Central Committee of the RWP regarding the admission of new members from the session of 23–25. April 1962, confidential no. 420670, 8.

³⁷ According to the statute, only Congress can make modifications, so the changes made at the May plenum were, in fact, a violation of the statute (*Statutul PMR* 1960: 21).

centralized party system required that the admission decision be confirmed by the regional committee, and in some cases, approval came from the Central Committee itself. This setup allowed higher authorities to exert significant influence over lower ones. Consequently, the leadership adopted a more flexible approach, particularly after the end of collectivization in 1962. During this time, prominent experts and peasants from collective farms, where there were no party members, were admitted directly to the party to help establish party cells. Special attention was given to enhancing the representation of minority groups. This measure aimed to strengthen the party's presence within minority communities. Additionally, it aimed to secure broad support, helping the party become more independent from Moscow. Preparations were also underway to transition the state from a people's republic to a socialist republic, aligned with these objectives.³⁸

Alongside their obligations for political and ideological work, a primary responsibility of party members was to address production tasks. This involvement meant that the party played a crucial role in the organizational and technological challenges faced in production. Such engagement established the party as a leading force in society. Members received support in this work from over 700,000 activists, as well as from numerous Union of Working Youth.³⁹

The 1950s were a critical period for the RWP in its "class struggle". During this time, the dictatorship of the proletariat was expected to gain full momentum, leading to the consolidation of a Soviet socio-economic model. This meant that it was essential to solidify the communist system within both the state and society. The goal was to ensure complete party control over all aspects of human activity and to transition to a planned economy and collectivized agriculture fully. However, this plan faced significant challenges due to a lack of popular support. Many Romanians, particularly peasants, strongly opposed the collectivization of agriculture. Accustomed to a traditional, individualistic lifestyle, they found it difficult to accept losing ownership of their land and joining cooperatives or participating in other forms of collective farming.⁴⁰ The guarantor of the measures aimed at the socialist transformation of Romanian society until 1958 was the advisory and military presence of the Soviet Union. This fact is crucial for understanding the total subordination of the Romanian leadership during the first fifteen years following the Second World War. Although the state and party leadership sought to distance themselves from Soviet influence, they were equally fearful that, without it, the party would lose control of the country. The initial joy that the people experienced after the withdrawal of Soviet troops was soon overshadowed by repression by the party. Believing that fear was the most effective way to ensure public obedience, Gheorghiu-Dej approved the immediate implementation of strict internal security measures.⁴¹ The party established a robust system for mass surveillance and control. With this repressive framework in place, the party could shift its focus to defining its ideology in contrast to that of the Soviet Union. This ideological distinction was

³⁸ DAMFARS, PA, 1962, Romania, f. 118, doc. 6, Memorandum of conversation between Luka Soldić, Counselor of the Embassy of the FPRY in Bucharest, and Tutu Georgescu, Scientific Secretary of the Institute for the History of the RPR, May 17, 1962, confidential no. 447170, 3–4.

³⁹ Gheorghiu-Dej 1960: 92.

⁴⁰ Micu 2010: 63–76.

⁴¹ Deletant and Ionescu, 2004: 218.

crucial for achieving the second goal of a totalitarian state: the development of a comprehensive ideology that dictates all aspects of human existence.⁴²

The use of repressive measures created a significant level of mistrust between the party and the people. To build a robust party that was deeply rooted in society, it was essential to continue efforts in ideological indoctrination. After 1960, up to 95 percent of party members participated in ideological and political training sessions and lectures. In those years, the propaganda and ideological efforts of the RWP mainly centered around strengthening the socialist patriotism of the people, followed by promoting the economic development of the country and the education of the workforce. These initiatives, which were initially supported by efforts to de-Stalinize and move toward the West, eventually led to the process of de-Sovietization. Symbolically, it was made official by restoring the traditional name of the state *România*, since the Russified version *Romînia* had been used until 1964.⁴³

3. Romania Forges Its Unique Path While Anchored in the Eastern Bloc's Borders

A few years after the Third Congress, patriotism was at a high level in Romania. When the country expressed its disagreement with Soviet plans within the framework of COMECON, the ruling party enjoyed strong public support. This was particularly evident after the adoption of the so-called Declaration of Independence in April 1964, in which the RWP outlined its key foreign policy principles. In the declaration, the Romanian leadership asserted that it would base its relations with other states on principles of equality, non-interference in internal affairs, respect for national interests, and full cooperation with all countries, regardless of their systems or ideologies. The document also conveyed Romania's stance on important international issues. Notably, it criticized the Soviet Union's ambition to coordinate the economic development of other socialist countries through COMECON. Moreover, it identified military blocs as the primary threat to world peace. The Romanian party advocated for a future policy that would see the simultaneous abolition of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. While the foreign policy framework emphasized peaceful coexistence and cooperation on equal terms, it did not suggest a departure from the socialist path. The continued struggle against imperialism and the expansion of the international communist movement remained a core imperative.⁴⁴

The publication of new foreign policy views marked the official announcement of the birth of national communism, which refers to the adaptation of Marxist-Leninist theory to Romanian interests and specific circumstances. It is important to note that the fusion of communist and nationalist ideology was not unique to Romania; Yugoslavia followed a similar path in 1948. Milovan Đilas devoted considerable attention to this concept in his writings. For instance, in his book *The New Class*, published in 1957, he argues that, fundamentally, there is no form of communism other than national communism. He maintained that communism could survive in a country only if it adapted and took on specific characteristics, thereby developing into a national form unique to each nation. Nevertheless,

⁴² Friedrich and Brzeziński, 1965: 88.

⁴³ DAMFARS, PA, 1964, Romania, f. 186, doc. 15, Some issues of the organization and functioning of the RWP, confidential no. 423461, 1–10.

⁴⁴ Oleteanu and Ciobanu 2001: 511–517.

the Romanian communists would elevate national communism to a new level, becoming the first to effectively merge various elements of national ideology with communism.⁴⁵

The publication of the April Declaration strengthened the bond between the people and the RWP. Ideological actions were quickly coordinated with this initiative. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej believed that special attention needed to be given to writers, artists, and youth. With the release of almost all political prisoners in the first half of 1964, the use of terror and coercion as methods was abandoned. The party's influence over artists and writers became more flexible. While artists were granted more freedom, they remained cautious of their influence, carefully avoiding any actions that might overstep the boundaries set by the party. Engaging with youth was also a priority, especially in the field of education. Party lecturers aimed to distance Romanian youth from the church. The RWP fought against religiosity by providing scientific explanations for various phenomena that were commonly perceived as having religious significance. The party managed its propaganda efforts through the Propaganda and Culture Directorate, which contained sections for propaganda and agitation, culture and art, education, and health. Additionally, the RWP had a Directorate for Organizational Affairs and an Economic Directorate.⁴⁶ During the early years of Ceaușescu's rule, a people-oriented policy was pursued, which led to a continuous increase in party membership. At the time of the Ninth Congress of the PCR, there were approximately 1,410,000 members, and by the end of 1969, this number exceeded two million. The promotion of nationalism and the desire to separate from Moscow provided the party with an opportunity to establish itself as a driving force across all spheres of society.⁴⁷

Walter Bacon argues that the strict centralism and comprehensive control of society by the party in Romania, which was unlike any other socialist state, is key to understanding why Moscow allowed Romania to de-align from the socialist camp. Although Romania's foreign policy was markedly different from that of the Soviet Union—especially in its relations with West Germany and Israel in 1967, along with its vocal opposition to the intervention in Czechoslovakia—Moscow chose not to take any drastic actions against it. According to Bacon, *Romania was, by all criteria, a true communist party-state*, and at no point did Moscow believe that the communist government was in jeopardy, as it was in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. As a result, there were no valid reasons for intervention because Nicolae Ceaușescu stayed within the limits that allowed for only verbal conflict and pressure from Moscow. In other words, Romania did not cross the “red line” set by the USSR, as it sought to leverage its potential, foster more developed relations with the West, and maintain its membership in COMECON and the Warsaw Pact without actually withdrawing from them. As long as other pressing issues, such as those involving Germany or China, were present, the Bucharest dissidence was perceived as a secondary concern.⁴⁸

Thus, on the domestic front, Romania developed strictly according to the Soviet model. However, in terms of foreign policy, it pursued some deviations from Soviet

⁴⁵ Djilas 1957; Tismăneanu 2005: 220.

⁴⁶ AY, A CC LCY, IX, 107/I-42, Note on the conversation between Arso Milatović, Ambassador of the SFRY to Romania, and Leonte Rautu, Director of the Directorate for Propaganda and Culture of the CC RWP, 11. 1964, 1-9.

⁴⁷ Dobre 2004: 25.

⁴⁸ Mitrović 2020: 129-146; Bacon 1984: 177-178.

interests. The basic principles guiding the Romanian Workers' Party in its foreign policy—namely, fostering friendships and alliances with other socialist countries—were well received by Moscow. Additionally, the Soviet Union had no objections to Romania's intentions to reduce Cold War tensions, advocate for the rights and interests of newly independent states, and build friendly relations based on respect for sovereignty, equality, and non-interference in internal affairs. Bucharest placed special emphasis on promoting inter-Balkan cooperation and establishing a nuclear-free zone in the Balkans, initiatives that also received support from Moscow. However, the Soviet leadership disapproved of Romania's efforts to expand trade relations with Western countries.⁴⁹ This orientation was driven by Romania's desire to effectively implement its six-year and fifteen-year development plans, which could not be achieved by depending solely on other socialist countries. Consequently, the USSR had to reluctantly accept Romania's pro-Western position. In summary, the main goals of the Romanian Communists included developing the party, improving living standards, enhancing education and culture, and ensuring that foreign policy was aligned with the national development of the economy.⁵⁰

The Romanian Party evolved from a minor group of like-minded political figures whose activities during the interwar period were largely illegal, into the dominant political organization in Romania after the Second World War. Throughout the late 1950s, reliance on the Soviet Union served as the primary guarantee of their power. As a result, the Romanian leadership willingly accepted and implemented all the demands imposed by Soviet leaders. To break away from this pattern, the Romanian Workers' Party emphasized the importance of national pride and focus on state interests. However, they needed to move past the recent history of their indifference to national sentiments and their total subordination to Moscow. The initial efforts to foster a broad nationalist campaign targeted the party's membership, as it was essential for spreading among the general population the new policy of distancing from Moscow and seeking economic integration with the West. By strategically strengthening its ranks, revitalizing its membership, continuously educating its members, and firmly emphasizing national goals, the party successfully garnered substantial popular support. This support was critical for advancing its policies abroad, which often contrasted sharply with those of the USSR.

4. Differences and Similarities between Romanian *Alternative Path* and other Reformist Movements among the European Marxists

Analyzed sources indicate that Romanian communists were firmly on a path toward creating a new party ideology before the rise of Nicolae Ceaușescu, under whose influence the party would formally enter into a reformist period during the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, scholars never considered the Romanian Communist Party an integral part of the reformist camp among European Marxist parties, unlike the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), the Czechoslovakian party in 1968, or Eurocommunist

⁴⁹ Mitrović 2020: 335–338.

⁵⁰ DAMFARS, PA, 1960, Romania, f. 111, doc. 10, Report on the III Congress of the RWP, confidential no. 418399, 24.

parties of Italy, France, Spain, or Greece.⁵¹ On one hand, the Romanian Communist Party needed to, at least to a certain degree, adapt its policies to the trends supported by the Soviet and other Eastern Bloc parties, even at those times when Romania was able to achieve the highest degree of independence in internal policy-making. On the other hand, Romanian socialist model still evolved in a way that was, in certain aspects, radically different from the one that was followed by other reformist parties and movements in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and on the Mediterranean.⁵²

Although Romanian communists did push for the internal democratization and decentralization of the party, as well as for liberalization of the market and freedom of the press in the sphere of state policies, that only happened to a certain extent and during brief periods. Leadership of the RCP was never nearly as committed to making the aforementioned factors a priority in defining their reformist policies as were Yugoslav communists between 1964 and 1974, Czechoslovakian reformists in 1968, or Eurocommunists from 1968 to the early 1980s. Additionally, putting a focus on integrating nationalist ideas into the new party ideology, and subsequently creating a unique, Romanian form of “national communism,” caused severe disagreements between Romanian reformists and most democratic socialists outside the Eastern Bloc. Documents of the LCY Department of International Relations testify that some of the leading Yugoslav and Italian, as well as Soviet communists, even went as far as to compare this tendency of Romanian communists with the early Maoist idea of „village socialism”, inclusive not just toward ethnocentric nationalism, but also toward traditional values and religiousness, which both democratic socialists and Bolsheviks considered an „ideological abomination”.⁵³ In the early 1970s, Eurocommunists adopted tolerant policies toward both the church and those parties that were considered conservative in terms of social values, though leftist in terms of economic policies. However, these policies never went to the extent that the Romanian party showcased a decade earlier, when it started its policies of indoctrinating and incorporating the opposition toward the regime, and they never included such a level of tolerance toward the idea of unfulfilled national goals.⁵⁴

Lastly, the Romanian Communist Party strived to indoctrinate and control rather than to appease and cooperate with the potential opposition. The amount of authoritarian ideas Romanian communists still held on to, even during the reforms of Gheorghiu-Dej and during the early rule of Ceaușescu, was bound to eventually find itself in the way of expanding cooperation with LCY and Eurocommunist parties. This is why the analysis presented here speaks in favor of the argument made by those scholars who chose not to include the Romanian alternative path among the major reformist ideologies of the period. In the words of Enrico Berlinguer, the famous PCI leader of the Eurocommunist era:

It is not enough for a communist party to simply renounce Bolshevism in order for its ideology to be defined as democratic socialism. Democratization must come from the internal structures of the party.⁵⁵

⁵¹ AY, SKJ, 507-IX, 48/I-549, Analysis of the conversations between Stane Dolanc and Enrico Berlinguer, 1972.

⁵² AY, SKJ, 507-IX, 48/I-543-555, Analysis of the correspondence between the institutions of LCY and PCI.

⁵³ Filipović 2023: 109–147.

⁵⁴ AY, SKJ, 507-IX, 122/I-110-162, SKJ, 507-IX, 33/I-779-825, Information on cooperation with PCE and KKE.

⁵⁵ Filipović 2023: 173–185.

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**РУМУНСКИ АЛТЕРНАТИВНИ ПУТ У СОЦИЈАЛИЗАМ
– ОД РАНИХ ПОЧЕТАКА ДО УСПОНА ЧАУШЕСКУА**

Резиме

Још пре доласка Николаја Чаушескуа на чело партије 1965. године, румунски комунисти годинама су покушавали да изграде онакав социјалистички модел какав би представљао извесну врсту алтернативе тенденцији усвајања политика и ставова Комунистичке партије Совјетског Савеза, која је била веома изражена међу готово свим марксистичким партијама и покретима у Европи током међуратног периода. Ипак, многи фактори допринели су да румунски „алтернативни пут“ у социјализам никада не добије ону пажњу европске и светске историографије која је била посвећена југословенском социјалистичком моделу или развоју партијских идеологија еврокомунистичких партија. Са једне стране, напоре румунске партије да напусти покушаје прилагођавања својих политика принципима бољшевичког социјалистичког модела ограничавали су императиви спољне политике румунских влада, које су покушавале да одрже посебан положај земље у оквирима Источног блока. Са друге стране, оне реформе које су биле успешно спровођене имале су за примарни циљ да омасове чланство у партији а партијску идеологију учине прихватљивом и популарном великом броју група које су чиниле веома сложени друштвени рељеф Румуније. На развој оваквих тенденција извесног утицаја могао је имати и стални страх румунских комуниста од губитка популарности у земљи у којој партизански покрет није имао ону улогу у рату коју су имали партизани у Југославији или Италији. Последишно, румунски комунисти су приликом дефинисања својих реформистичких програма давали приоритет борби за остварење националних циљева, толеранцији према цркви и културним политикама у односу на захтеве за већим степеном унутрашње демократизације и децентрализације саме партије, који су представљали приоритет за Савез комуниста Југославије, еврокомунистичке партије медитеранских земаља, и друге организације у тадашњој Европи које су своју идеологију дефинисале као припадницу породице идеологија демократског социјализма.

Кључне речи: Румунска комунистичка/радничка партија, Комунистичка партија Југославије, чланство, трансформација, комунизам, идеолошка индоктринација, Совјетски Савез, Георге Георгију-Деж.