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**Gheorghiu-Dej and the Romanian
Workers' Party: From De-Sovietization to
the Emergence of National Communism**

Vladimir Tismăneanu

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Introduction

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

There were major difficulties in completing this research. Sensitive archives in Romania are still hard to consult. Many of the present political actors have played important roles in the communist bureaucracy. I consider this topic to be extremely important not only for the understanding of the state socialist experiment in Romania and its heritage, but also for a better comprehension of the communist and post-communist phenomena in East-Central Europe. Although I have continuously and systematically researched this topic for the last twenty years, the new resources made available in post-communist Romania add tremendous new opportunities for my endeavor. Memoirs, documents, and interviews have come out in Romanian media that shed new light on the RCP history. We can now for the first time engage in a scholarly approach based on both open sources and archival materials.

¹ This study is part of a completed larger work, which will be published under the title *Stalinism for All Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism* (forthcoming from University of California Press, 2003)

The Search for Lost Archives

Unlike other East European countries, Romania has preserved, even after the collapse of communism, a very secretive attitude toward the archives of the former regime. I have experienced personally the difficulty and enormous obstacles created in order to discourage the researchers from trying to pierce the well-protected and often unknown storage areas where these archives are preserved. All possible arguments have been used: that the documents are still in the process of being sorted; that they are moved from the Army to the State archives; that nobody really knows what happened to certain sensitive documents from the archives of the Party Control Commission. In June 1994, when I was permitted to enter the Pitești branch of the Romanian State Archives, I came to the conclusion that the most important documents were still not available.

I took advantage of personal contacts, including a relationship with Virgil Măgureanu, head of the Romanian Service of Information (SRI) in order to receive access to important documents from the SRI archive (documents primarily linked to the [wartime communist leaders] Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Vasile Luca affair).

The most important archival resource, however, was still controlled by the army. This was the "operative archive:" before the revolution it was kept in sealed rooms in the building of the CC, and access was given only on the base of approvals signed by Nicolae Ceaușescu himself. Here one could find Romanian Workers' Party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's² personal notes, documents, letters, as well important documents related

² Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej: (1901-1965) First-Secretary of RWP and president of the State Council until his death, in March 1965. Railway worker, arrested after the 1933 strikes, sentenced at the Craiova trial. Leader of the "center of prisons," he escaped from the Tîrgu-Jiu concentration camp in August 1944, and retook the control over the party in collaboration with the Pauker-Luca group (which came back from the USSR in September 1944). Member of the RCP's CC since 1935. Elected secretary general at the National Conference of October 1945, he led the party in collaboration with Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca and Teohari Georgescu. Gheorghiu-Dej was the principal instigator and beneficiary of the assassination of Ștefan Foriș in 1946 and the arrest of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu in 1948. He maneuvered subtly during the power struggles within Stalin's entourage, supported the Malenkov group, and obtained the permission to eliminate Ana Pauker during the anti-Zionist campaign. In that period, Dej's principal ally was Iosif Chișinevschi. After 1954, he simulated a "new course" which was interrupted in 1956. Troubled by the disclosures of the 20th Congress and anguished by the contagious effects of the Hungarian Revolution, he stopped any intra-party reforms, and organized a new wave of exclusions, arrests, and persecutions. An unrepentant Stalinist, he had an unconditional admiration for grandiose constructions (like his disciple, Ceaușescu) and initiated the sinister channel, in reality a concentration camp. The main institution he based on in exercising his absolute power was the *Securitate*: headed, in the beginning, by the Soviets' men (Pintilie, Bucikov, Nikonov, Nikolski), and "ethnicized" later on, during the last period of Gheorghiu-Dej's life.

to other prominent personalities (Ana Pauker,³ Emil Bodnăraș,⁴ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu,⁵ Iosif Chișinevschi,⁶ etc.). Also part of this archive were the "personnel files" (or the

³ Ana Pauker, (1893-1960) was one of the most important figures of Romanian and European Stalinism. A schoolteacher by profession, she improved her education through direct implication in cultural circles from Romania and the West. She entered early the socialist movement and met Marcel Pauker, a descendant from an influential family of leftist journalists and lawyers. She was arrested in 1922, then released from prison with her husband, and left for Switzerland. Afterwards, she became active in the Balkan communist movement, but most importantly in France, where she was a Comintern instructor beside the Czech militant Eugen Fried. She returned to Romania where she was arrested on 14 July 1935, judged in a famous trial together with Alexandru Moghioroș, Alexandru Drăghici, etc., and sentenced to ten years in prison. She did not complete the term because in 1940 she was exchanged with a Romanian patriot detained by the Soviets after the occupation of Bessarabia. From the moment of her arrival in Moscow, she became the indisputable leader of the Romanian communist exile in USSR. Close to Dmitri Manuilski and Gheorgi Dimitrov, she has good relations with other communist leaders exiled to Moscow. She played an important role in the establishment of the "Tudor Vladimirescu" prisoners' division and led the "reeducation" activities (having close relations with Colonel, then General Dimitrie Cambrea). After the return to Romania, she was, for less than a year, the real leader of the RCP. She met Gheorghiu-Dej in 1940, when Gheorghiu-Dej was transported to Caransebeș, after the downfall of Doftana. Secretary of the Central Committee, Minister for the External Affairs after 1947, and subject of a hyperbolized personality cult, Ana Pauker was eliminated from the RCP leadership in 1952. She was arrested and interrogated between February and June 1952 by the *Securitate*. Under continuous surveillance, suspected of intending a political return during the period of relative de-Stalinization initiated by Nikita Khrushchev, she was invited in 1956 to have talks with Gheorghiu-Dej's emissaries: Apostol, Pârvulescu, Moghioroș, Borilă and Ion Vinze. She refused to acknowledge her guilt towards the RCP leader, declared herself innocent from the political point of view, and asked to be reinstated in her rights of party member. Defiant to her former colleagues and subordinates, she requested explanations regarding what happened to her in 1952-53, including the *Securitate* interrogations and the confiscation of family documents. She died of cancer in 1960.

⁴ Emil Bodnăraș, (1904-1976) was one of the most complex personalities of the Romanian communism. A career officer, he became a Soviet spy and defected to the USSR. He returned to Romania in the middle 1930s, and fulfilled different special missions for the Soviet military intelligence. Caught by chance, Bodnăraș was sentenced to ten years in prison. At Caransebeș and Tîrgu-Jiu he became a friend of Gheorghiu-Dej and a key-figure of the group from prisons. Released from prison in 1943, he was directly involved in the political elimination and physical sequestration of Ștefan Foriș, the RCP general secretary, on 4 April 1944. He led the party together with Constantin Pârvulescu and Iosif Rangheț until Gheorghiu-Dej's escape from prison and the formation of the party's new hegemonic nucleus. After 23 August 1944 he was the head of party's secret intelligence apparatus and, between 1945 and 1947, the head of the secret intelligence service affiliated to the Council of Ministries' Presidency. His enormous influence was due to a permanent and direct contact with the Soviet secret service—he was reporting on each of the RCP leaders, as revealed later in the case of Ana Pauker. Later on, he was named minister of armed forces, army general, vice-premier, and held other important positions until Gheorghiu-Dej's death. After 1965, he accepted a pact with Ceaușescu: in exchange for his total obedience, Ceaușescu offered him the honors of Vice-President of the State Council and member of the Permanent Presidium of the RCP. Like Apostol, Miron Constantinescu or Chivu Stoica, he took part, as a Politburo member, in the making of the decision to eliminate Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. Of a remarkable intelligence, an austere communist, it seems that he was sympathetic to the Maoist line during the conflict between Moscow and Beijing.

⁵ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, (1900-1954) militant communist, lawyer, sociologist and economist, Pătrășcanu was one of the most important personality of Romanian communism. Born in a distinguished family and having connections with the Romanian political class, he joined the socialist movement in his youth. Educated in Leipzig, he authored numerous works of social history and ideological critique and was RCP's representative to the Comintern during the period 1934-35. Those who were close to Pătrășcanu, including Lena Constante, testified that he developed his doubts regarding the Stalinist system in Moscow, in the 1930s. A convinced anti-fascist, he suspended his critical spirit and continued to be active within the RCP. During the war he was imprisoned for a period at Tîrgu-Jiu, where he came into contact with Gheorghiu-

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

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

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

⁷ Vasile Luca, (1898-1960) born Luka László, initially fought in the "Szekler detachment" against the Soviet Republic of Béla Kun. He entered the Communist movement immediately after 1919 and led the Brașov party organization. After his arrest in 1952 he was accused of maintaining contacts with the interwar secret police, the *Siguranță*, during his decade of illegal activity. Trade union leader and member of the RCP leadership, arrested and sentenced repeatedly, he was jailed in Cernăuți at the time of the Soviet ultimatum of June 1940. He remained in the USSR and became a deputy in the Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. During the wartime period, in Moscow, he was the closest collaborator of Ana Pauker. Luca returned to Romania together with Ana Pauker and became one of the members of the RCP dominant quartet. In January 1946, like Ana Pauker, was nearly expelled from Romania (Pauker to USSR, Luca to Hungary) as a part of Stalin's plan to "Romanize" the party. After 1947, he was Vice-Premier and Finance Minister. Accused of sabotaging the monetary reform of 1952, he was the first target in the attack orchestrated by the Dej-Chișinevici-Apostol-Borilă group against the group of the three "deviationists" Pauker-Luca-Teohari Georgescu. Arrested and interrogated ruthlessly, he gave up under torture and recognized the most aberrant accusations. He declared anything he was requested to by the interrogators against Ana Pauker. Psychologically and morally ruined, he sent numerous letters and memoirs to Gheorghiu-Dej from the Sighet prison, pledging unswerving faith and imploring his former friend's mercy. On the margin of one of these letters, preserved in his personal archive (to which this author had partial access) Gheorghiu-Dej noted: "The same old swine and unrepentant deceiver." Luca was rehabilitated posthumously in 1968.

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

At this moment I can say that the archival materials confirm some of my previous hypotheses about the conspiratorial nature and the revolutionary militantism of the Stalinist elite in Romania; the struggle for power, the brutal and/or manipulative treatment of the intelligentsia, the distrust of any heretical or liberal strategy; and the use of nationalism as a legitimizing ideology, especially after 1963. The continuity of the Stalinist methodology of intimidation, coercion, corruption, and regimentation during the first ten years of Dej's absolute rule (1948-58) appears glaringly clear from the archival materials. On the other hand, before entering the archives, most of my assessments (and I was not alone in this respect) were based on intuition, speculation, and reading between the lines of the party documents and the leaders' speeches. Now, the archives revealed the arcane and convoluted episodes in the struggle for power, the painstaking discussions among top leaders about political choices, and the origins of the Romanian-Soviet split. Based on the archival material I could revisit the most important chapters in the history of Romanian communism and frequently add colorful and informative details. I can also document the growing self-confidence of the party elite, especially after 1960.

The Aftershocks of the 20th CPSU Congress

The post-Stalin disarray among the top Soviet and East European ruling elites generated a series of political and social phenomena, which were defined by the concept of "New Course" and the literary metaphor of the "thaw." Between March and September 1953, Stalin's heirs engaged in sweeping efforts to limit the scope of mass terror, reassured the apparatus that no further purges were prepared, and significantly toned down the anti-Western and anti-Titoist rhetoric. The dominant Stalinist myths began to deteriorate, the mummified dogma of monolithic internationalism was gradually challenged by the pride of the subordinated nations, the demoralizing state and skepticism affected even members of the party apparatus, the institutional skeleton of

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

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

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

⁹ In 1957 an effort was made to resume an international insitutiion for inter-aprty consultations and theoretical collaboration. The monthly journal *Problems of Peace and Socialism* (also known as *World Marxist Review*) was established in Prague, and its first editor-in-chief was Soviet political ideologue and CPSCU CC member, Aleksei Rummyantsev. The French delegate was Jean Kanapa, a former Stalinist diehard doctrinaire, later one of the main voices of Euro-communism. The Romanian party's first delegate was my father, Leonte Tismăneanu, at that moment chair of the Scientific Socialism Department at the University of Bucharest and Deputy Director of the Political Publishing House (the director was Valter Roman). Intense discussions took place within the editorial board regarding the Yugoslav Communist League's new program (1958) and the emerging Sino-Soviet divergences. My father was recalled from Prague in September 1958, was charged with factionalist activity, and expelled from the party in 1960. Many of the Soviet staffers associated with the Prague-based journal became later members of Gorbachev's inner circle of party intellectuals (Anatoly Chernyav, Konstantin Zarodov, Fyodor Burlatsky, Georgi Shakhnazarov, Ivan Frolov). The journal ceased its publication in the late 1980s.

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

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

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

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

been trumped up, one did ask, then it was perhaps worthwhile to reconsider the very foundations of the Leninist regimes' institutional arrangements. Maybe, in spite of the officially-enshrined creed, the Party was not always right, and the leaders, the little local Stalins, may have erred as much as their protector in the Kremlin. In brief, the period between 1953-56 coincided with the dramatic dissolution of the Stalin myth and the beginning of a search for alternative socialist models. More powerfully in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, but also in Romania, the GDR and even in the USSR, the democratic socialist temptation affected significant strata of the intelligentsia. As authors like the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, the East German physicist Robert Havemann, or the Austrian communist thinker Ernst Fischer admitted, this break with the Stalinist faith amounted to an "awakening from the dogmatic sleep." The nuclei of intellectual opposition originated from the very same values on which the system was theoretically based, but which had been cynically mocked by the reality of political life. Revisionism was thus the vocal expression of the outrage experienced by many formerly regimented Marxist intellectuals regarding the gap between professed and practiced ideas. Moreover, the international environment was changing: the spirit of Geneva, named after the place of the Summit Conference of July 1955, meant a promise for peaceful cooperation between East and West, the neutrality of Austria and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from its zone of occupation in this country according to the peace treaty signed on 15 May 1955 raised expectations in countries like Hungary, Romania or Poland. But the outcome of the struggles for power in the Kremlin was far from certain: Stalinists and anti-Stalinists were fighting each other, and significant setbacks occurred as a result of this political and ideological imbroglio. Furthermore, in spite of his success in demoting Malenkov as Prime Minister in 1955, Nikita Khrushchev, who had become the champion of the anti-Stalinist forces within the CPSU Presidium, could not count on a majority among his colleagues. Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Voroshilov, and the other hard-liners were still controlling major party and government sectors, and they deeply resented efforts to expose Stalin's crimes.

In 1955, Imre Nagy was forced to resign as Prime Minister of Hungary and General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party Mátyás Rákosi and his diehard Stalinists seemed to make a political comeback. In reality, however, theirs was a short-

lived victory: the genie was already out of the bottle, Hungarian intellectuals and students had learned that the Soviets would not unconditionally back the dogmatic leaders, and the myth of the party infallibility had been irretrievably shattered. The struggle for the rehabilitation of László Rajk and other victims of Rákosism was in full swing, catalyzed by the warming up of the relations between the Soviet leaders and Tito. After all, Rajk had been executed in 1949 under the charge of being Tito's spy, and by implication, an agent for the imperialist West. Now, with Tito being celebrated as a fellow communist, there was no sense in maintaining the old anti-Rajk criminal charges. Panic, anguish, and insecurity were rampant among the high Stalinist echelons of East-Central European parties.

The Romanian communist leaders realized that times were changing and the old methods needed to be dramatically revised, so a kind of relaxation in domestic policy was introduced after 1953. One of the first measures taken was the decision to end the construction of the "Canal" between the Danube River and the Black Sea, a huge operation imposed by Stalin, but convenient for Gheorghiu-Dej's repressive policy.¹¹ During the Central Committee Plenum on 19-20 August 1953, under the influence of the New Course and the post-Stalin Soviet rhetoric, Gheorghiu-Dej criticized the attempts to promote the personality cult, his point being that the party should focus on the merit of the leadership as a collective body and not idealize one individual. Criticism was also voiced regarding excessive emphasis on heavy industry to the detriment of consumer goods and Gheorghiu-Dej insisted on the need to pay attention to the increase of the living standards of the population. More state budget funds should be distributed to the consumer good industries, Gheorghiu-Dej proclaimed, thereby echoing Malenkov's line in the USSR.¹²

¹¹ For the trial and executions staged at the Canal after the Stalinist model of 1929 Donbas sabotaging case, see Doina Jela, *Cazul Nichita Dumitru* [The case of Nichita Dumitru] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995). The working at the Canal was stopped on 18 July 1953. See "The Decision of the Council of Ministers and The Central Committee of the RWP" July 17, 1953. The photocopy of this document is in the possession of the author.

¹² See "Decizia Plenarei lărgite a CC al PMR din 19-29 august 1953" (Decision of the enlarged CC Plenum on August 19-20, 1953) in *Rezoluții și hotărâri ale Comitetului Central al PMR* (Resolutions and decisions of the CC of RWP) (Bucharest: ESPLP, 1952).

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

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

¹³ Actually, the decision to postpone the Second RWP Congress was made in mid-1954 during a confidential meeting at Gheorghiu-Dej’s place, attended by Gheorghe Apostol, Iosif Chisinevschi, and Mark Borisovich Mitin, CPSU CC member and editor-in-chief of the Cominform journal. It took several months until this decision was made public. In the meantime, preparations for the Congress continued as if it was to be held according to the initial announcement, in late 1954. I owe this information on the secret decision to postpone the Congress to my aunt, Dr. Nehama Tisminetsky, who got it from Mitin’s wife with whom she was on friendly terms.

¹⁴ Gheorghiu-Dej’s closest collaborators in masterminding the Pătrășcanu judicial murder were CC Secretary and Politburo member Iosif Chișinevschi and Politburo member, Minister of Internal Affairs, Alexandru Drăghici. It is very likely that the Beria execution, following a pseudo-trial behind the closed doors inspired and energized Gheorghiu-Dej in his effort to get rid of Pătrășcanu (this is at least the hypothesis put forward by Belu Zilber in his book, *Actor în procesul Pătrășcanu*, as already mentioned in the previous chapter).

¹⁵ See the argument of Pavel Țugui that the rehabilitation of the poet Tudor Arghezi was initiated by Apostol. Contrary to what Țugui argues in his book, *Istoria și limba română în vremea lui Gheorghiu-Dej. Memoriile unui fost șef de Secție a CC al PMR* (The Romanian history and language during Gheorghiu-

execution of Pătrășcanu, a fact that shows actually that Gheorghiu-Dej was careful to eliminate on time any possible adversary who would introduce genuine liberalization. At this Plenum among the newly appointed Central Committee secretaries were Nicolae Ceaușescu, who, in addition, became a candidate member of the otherwise unchanged Politburo, together with Alexandru Drăghici.¹⁶

The Second RWP Congress was eventually held on 23-28 December 1955. Actually the event followed shortly the admission of Romania at the United Nations on 14 December 1955, aside two other former allies of Germany from communist Eastern Europe, Bulgaria and Hungary. The Congress was attended by major world communist figures, such as Alexei Kirichenko, CPSU Presidium Member, First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party; Marshal Chu Teh, Deputy Premier of the Chinese People's Republic and Secretary of the Party's Central Committee; Dolores Ibarruri, Secretary General of the exiled Spanish Communist Party; Mátyás Rákosi, the First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party; and Todor Zhivkov, First Secretary of the Bulgarian Party.¹⁷ The Political Report of the Central Committee¹⁸ was prepared by a committee composed by Gheorghiu-Dej, Iosif Chișinevschi, Miron Constantinescu,¹⁹ and Leonte Răutu.²⁰ It is worth mentioning these names because, although the Congress did not

Dej's time. The memories of a former head of Section of the CC of RWP (Bucharest: Ion Cristoiu Publishing House, 1999), Apostol.

¹⁶ Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania*, pp. 231-233.

¹⁷ See *News From Behind the Iron Curtain*, January 1956, p. 8.

¹⁸ See "Cu privire la componența colectivelor ce se vor ocupa de pregătirea Congresului PMR" [Note regarding the committees that are going to prepare the RWP Congress], 15 October 1955. A copy of this document is in the possession of the author.

¹⁹ Miron Constantinescu, (1917-1974) a Marxist sociologist, one of the few intellectuals at the higher levels of the RCP (therefore detested by his less cultivated colleagues). Director of the party's newspaper, *Scînteia*, after 23 August 1944, member of the Politburo (1944-1957) head of the Planning Committee and for a short period Minister of Education, he criticized in 1956 the *Securitate* and Gheorghiu-Dej's leadership. Gheorghiu-Dej's revenge came in June 1957, when Constantinescu and Chișinevschi were excluded from the Politburo for their "attempt to orient the party towards the liberalist and revisionist anarchy." Afterwards, we worked at the Institute for Economic Research, the Academy History Institute and the Center for the Specialization of the Teaching Staff. He returned to the political life after the death of Gheorghiu-Dej: first as head of the Ministry of Education, then as Secretary of the Central Committee, candidate member of the Political Executive Committee and, towards the end of his life, President of the Great National Assembly. Power thirsty, solemn, haughty, and frequently abrasive, he had neither the intellectual depth of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, nor the ethical candor of Marxist philosopher Tudor Bugnariu. Nevertheless, he supported some young researchers who tried in the 1970s to rehabilitate the empirical social research and to eschew the imperatives of an increasingly virulent Stalinism.

²⁰ Leonte Răutu (1910-1993) chief ideologue of the RCP during the Dej era. The son of a pharmacist from Bălți, he joined the communist movement in his youth and was active in the propaganda apparatus. He was the editor of the clandestine party newspaper *Scînteia* and collaborated with Ștefan Foriș, Lucrețiu

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

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

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

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

Romanian Communists and the Twentieth CPSU Congress

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

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

reproduction.²³ Logically, the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU dramatically affected the relations of Moscow with its satellites. By attacking Stalin's leadership of the CPSU, Khrushchev implicitly brought into question Moscow's supremacy within the international movement. Indeed, many communist parties—the Chinese, French, Italian, Albanian, and Romanian—began to question Soviet policies. As a matter of fact, until the times of glasnost and perestroika, French communists preferred to question the authenticity of the “Secret Speech” and called it “le rapport attribue a Khrushchev” (the report attributed to Khrushchev).

The Romanian delegation at the Twentieth Congress was headed by Gheorghiu-Dej, and included, Politburo members Miron Constantinescu, Iosif Chișinevschi and Petre Borilă.²⁴ Obviously, the delegation had no idea that such a bombshell like Khrushchev's anti-Stalin attack had been prepared. It is not hard to imagine that Gheorghiu-Dej, undoubtedly a genuine Stalin worshipper, must have been less than enthusiastic about the severe criticism of the former Soviet leader. According to Miron Constantinescu, Gheorghiu-Dej was profoundly upset by the revelations in Khrushchev's Secret Speech. In Gheorghiu-Dej's view, by denouncing the idol of world communism, Khrushchev was committing a historical blunder. In this respect, the Romanian leader shared Mao Zedong's or Maurice Thorez's contempt for Khrushchev's “sensationalism.”²⁵ Actually this frustration with the Soviet leader's anti-Stalin initiative can be considered the first step in the development of the Romanian-Soviet dispute. Gheorghiu-Dej began to court the Chinese; indeed, after 1956, the Romanian communists had more in common in their treatment of the Stalin issue and de-Stalinization with

²³ See Vladimir Tismăneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: The Poverty of Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1988); Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*, vol. III, *The Breakdown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

²⁴ For further details regarding the discussions between the members of the RCP delegation see Paul Sfetcu, *13 ani în anticamera lui Dej* (13 years in Dej's antechamber) (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2000), pp. 273-74. It was during those turbulent times that Gheorghiu-Dej established a very close relationship with Petre Borilă, whom he included his inner circle in which the most secret issues were discussed and fateful decisions were made. On the relationship between Gheorghiu-Dej and Borilă, I owe significant information to Mircea Răceanu, who had grown up in the USSR together with Borilă's son, Iuri, and whose mother, Ileana, a CC member between 1955-58, was one of Borilă's wife, Ecaterina, close friends.

²⁵ One of the best analyses of the origins of the Romanian-Soviet dispute can be found in Georges Haupt, “La genèse du conflit soviéto-roumain” (The genesis of the Soviet-Romanian conflict) in *Revue française des sciences politiques* (Paris), Vol. XVIII, No. 4, August 1968. See also Branko Lazitch, *Le rapport Khrouchchev et son histoire* (The Khrushchev report and its history) (Paris: Seuil, 1976).

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

In short, after the Twentieth CPSU Congress, the Romanian communist leaders were discombobulated, confused, traumatized and outraged; their entire world was falling apart once their former idol had been attacked as a criminal, a paranoid monster and a military non-entity. Whatever his sentiments toward Khrushchev before February 1956, it is obvious that from that moment on, Gheorghiu-Dej deeply distrusted the Soviet First Secretary. For him, as for Thorez, Novotny, or Ulbricht, the disbandment of Stalin's myth was a major strategic and ideological blunder, a godsend for the imperialist propaganda and a concession to Titoist "rotten revisionism." After having read the full text of Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the Romanian participants at the Twentieth Congress had to determine how to discuss these documents with the rest of the RWP's leadership. Since the new line adopted at Kremlin personally threatened him, Gheorghiu-Dej had to procrastinate the debates that threatened to develop in the party leadership. Therefore, he invoked the crisis in the Greek Communist Party and his one-month involvement in that party's struggle, alleging that he had no way to direct the RWP's inner party discussions regarding the lessons of the Twentieth Congress. In fact, he was playing for time, cajoling different Politburo members, assessing their attitudes, and calculating the optimal strategy for the imminent discussions. In this, he counted primarily on support from Gheorghe Apostol, Chivu Stoica, Alexandru Moghioroș, Gheorghe Borilă, Emil Bodnăraș, Alexandru Drăghici, and, he had reasons to hope, Nicolae Ceaușescu. As for the ideological camouflage of the effort to pre-empt de-Stalinization, Gheorghiu-Dej was certain that he could rely on Leonte Răutu's dialectical sophistries.

Eventually, in March-April 1956, a series of CC meetings were summoned in order to inform the top apparatus on the Twentieth Congress. These well-orchestrated

sessions were meant to be a kind of purifying ritual in which every member of the communist supreme echelon was asked to engage in the notorious Leninist practice of criticism and self-criticism. At the March 23-25 Plenum, Gheorghiu-Dej presented a Politburo report (*Dare de Seamă*) in which he criticized Stalin and especially the practice of personality cult. However, the Secret Speech was not explicitly mentioned. As for the manifestations of Stalinism in his own party, Gheorghiu-Dej spoke about Romanian Stalinists without mentioning names, but insisted that the RWP had expelled them in 1952, and, therefore, implied that the only Stalinists in Romania had been the demoted Pauker, Luca and Georgescu and, he, Gheorghiu-Dej, deserved credit for having courageously started a de-Stalinization *avant la lettre*, long before the Twentieth Congress. Also, he emphasized that that the Second Congress of the RWP marked a new phase by the fact that collective leadership was established and democratic centralism was truly governing inner party life. Simply put, Gheorghiu-Dej's game was to invoke the struggle against the expelled Muscovite faction as an argument for his group's "presciently correct" political behavior. Compared to other East European parties, Gheorghiu-Dej maintained, the RWP leadership managed to avoid the worst excesses associated with Stalin's cult. Whatever needed to be rectified had basically been done as a result of the anti-Pauker purges. No word whatsoever was uttered regarding the fates of Foriș, Koffler, and Pătrășcanu (all liquidated on Gheorghiu-Dej's orders), or about the lawless treatment of Luca, Ana Pauker, Teohari Georgescu and so many other party militants.

At this Plenum, Iosif Chișinevschi and Miron Constantinescu, both members of the delegation to the Twentieth Congress, and each for very different reasons, challenged Gheorghiu-Dej's authority, so that the meeting was transformed in a real debate, as there was no other since the purge of the right-wing deviators.²⁶ This is the reason why from the documents of this Plenum only Gheorghiu-Dej's Report on the Twentieth Congress was published (and even that one in a sanitized version). Constantinescu, supported by Chișinevschi, argued for the "regeneration" of the party in the spirit of the anti-Stalinist

²⁶ See the opinion of Gheorghe Apostol, the most ardent supporter of Gheorghiu-Dej, at one of the following meetings of the Politburo in April. See "Ședința Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din 3, 4, 6, 12 aprilie 1956" [The Meeting of the CC Politburo on 3, 4, 6, 12 April 1956] in *Sfera Politicii* (Bucharest), No. 27, April 1995, p. 39.

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

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

It is worth emphasizing that the two main opponents of Gheorghiu-Dej attacked him for very different reasons. In the case of Chişinevschi, it was about his enduring opportunism, his unsurpassed chameleon-type of political conduct materialized in his will to associate himself with the group that was most probable to win the battle. A true follower of Moscow’s line, whatever its twist or turn, he grasped an opportunity to undermine Gheorghiu-Dej and re-compose for himself the image of a fighter for intra-party democracy. As Khrushchev seemed to run the show in Moscow, Chişinevschi thought, it was likely that a critical re-assessment of the Stalinist purges in Romania was inevitable.²⁸ Miron Constantinescu, at his turn, thought that he was the one destined to promote a new political course in Romania, and hoped that he could overthrow Gheorghiu-Dej. Actually, at the next Politburo meeting, he attacked Gheorghiu-Dej

²⁷ For the arguments used by Gheorghiu-Dej and his supports, on the one hand, and by the two main opponents, on the other hand, see “Stenograma şedinţei plenare a CC al PMR din 23-25 martie 1956” [Transcript of the CC Plenum on 23-25 March 1956]. A copy of this document is in my possession.

²⁸ Actually, my interpretation regarding Chişinevschi’s reasons to engage in an attack against Gheorghiu-Dej was confirmed by his son, Gheorghe Chişinevschi in his article “Iosif Chişinevschi şi PMR-ul în anii

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

Gheorghiu-Dej's main confidants and supporters at that moment were Gheorghe Apostol, Emil Bodnăraș, Alexandru Moghioroș, and Petre Borilă. Actually, Miron Constantinescu's attempt to enroll Moghioroș on his side backfired: Moghioroș, who had earlier betrayed Vasile Luca and Ana Pauker, went immediately to Gheorghiu-Dej to inform him about the formation of an "anti-party platform." Iosif Chișinevschi went to the less astute Pîrvulescu, who, anyway, despised Gheorghiu-Dej, and tried to attract his assistance in this effort to blame the First Secretary for the abuses. Pîrvulescu either did not understand that Chișinevschi's suggested action amounted in fact to Gheorghiu-Dej's ouster, or pretended that he did not get the message clearly. His failure to inform on Chișinevschi's courting and invitation to "discuss the past in the light of the Twentieth Congress Leninist course" greatly cost him. At the June 1957 Central Committee Plenum, Pîrvulescu was severely criticized, at the Third RWP Congress in 1960 he lost his Politburo seat, and at the November-December 1961 Plenum he was criticized for political myopia and opportunism.

The heated Politburo discussions of March-April of 1956 resulted in the decision to keep under strict control the mass party discussions on Khrushchev's de-Stalinization. Official explanations highlighted the righteousness of the party line and any attempt to question it resulted in immediate sanctions. All Politburo members were instructed to oppose revisionism and "liberal-anarchic" tendencies. Leonte Răutu was in charge with directing the propaganda efforts meant to conceal the genuine implications of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign. Calls for intra-party democratization were to be opposed staunchly and the emphasis was to be placed on the early Romanian abandoning

cincizeci" [Iosif Chișinevschi and the RWP in the 1950s], *Alergătorul de la Marathon*, No. 4 (1989), pp. 191-199.

²⁹ See "Ședința Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din 3, 4, 6, 12 aprilie 1956" [The Meeting of the CC Politburo on 3, 4, 6, 12 April 1956] in *Sfera Politicii* (Bucharest), No. 25, February 1995, p. 18.

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

The Effects of the Hungarian Revolution

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

The Hungarian Revolution started with the mass demonstration in Budapest, on 23 October 1956.³⁰ At that time, the Romanian party leadership, including Gheorghiu-Dej, was in Yugoslavia and would leave back for Bucharest on 28 October. Until their return, the Politburo meetings were presided by Gheorghe Apostol, and the only significant measures taken consisted of strengthening the borders with Hungary and sending some important leaders to Transylvania, in the counties that had a significant Hungarian minority, such as Cluj, where the delegate was Miron Constantinescu.³¹ Immediately after Gheorghiu-Dej's return from Yugoslavia, the Romanian communist leaders rapidly took measures to avoid any danger of contamination with the spirit of the Hungarian uprising, including the establishment of a General Commandment, under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister Emil Bodnăraș, which also comprised CC Secretary

³⁰ See Csaba Békés, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics*, CWIHP Working Paper No. 16, September 1996; see also Mark Kramer, "New Evidence on Soviet Decision Making in the 1956 Polish and Hungarian Crisis" in *CWIHP Bulletin No. 8/9*, pp. 358-385.

³¹ See "Sedința Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din 24 octombrie 1956" [The CC Politburo meeting on 24 October 1956] in Corneliu Mihai Lungu and Mihai Retegan, eds., *1956. Explozia. Percepții române, yugoslave și sovietice asupra evenimentelor din Polonia și Ungaria* [1956. The explosion. Romanian, Yugoslav and Soviet perceptions on the events in Poland and Hungary] (Bucharest: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1996), pp. 74-78. Hereafter cited as *1956. Explozia*.

Nicolae Ceaușescu, Minister of Internal Affairs Alexandru Drăghici, and Minister of Armed Forces Leontin Sălăjan. The Commandment was entitled to take any measure, including the opening of fire in case of emergency.³² At the same time, the Soviet troops were amassed at the Romanian-Hungarian border, ready for a gigantic police-type action. The fear of the Romanian leadership was not potential territorial irredentism but the Marxist revisionism of the new Hungarian leadership.³³ The main danger for Gheorghiu-Dej was not a most unlikely Hungarian attempt to redraw the border with Romania by use of military force, but rather the contagious effect of the pluralistic experiment undertaken by the Budapest reformers. With a Balkan-type spirit of orientation, Gheorghiu-Dej initially established contacts with the legal government of Imre Nagy, and, then, when the Soviets organized the second intervention in Budapest in early November, the hegemonic group in Bucharest declared its solidarity with the Soviet-created pseudo-government of János Kádár.³⁴

As he mentioned on various occasions, Gheorghiu-Dej secretly visited Budapest immediately after the second Soviet intervention, accompanied by Hungarian-language speaking poet Mihai Beniuc and Party Publishing House director, Comintern veteran Valter Roman. The latter, a kind of Hungarian-affairs RWP expert, had been sent to Budapest on 25 October and spent several days there in order to assess the course of events. His reports, in which lynchings by the revolutionaries of party apparatchiks and secret police officers were depicted in graphic details, convinced the Romanian Politburo that a similar mass uprising in Romania had to be prevented at any costs. For the Romanian Stalinists, the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution could not be but a mean

³² See “Ședința Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din 30 octombrie 1956” [The Meeting of the CC Politburo on 30 October 1956] in Lungu and Retegan, *1956. Explozia*, pp. 143-145.

³³ Actually, the requests of the revolutionary government in Budapest did not include any irredentism. See Paul E. Zinner, *National Communism and Popular Revolt: A Selection of Documents on Events in Poland and Hungary, February-November, 1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 398-484.

³⁴ The RWP’s delegation to Budapest in charge of evaluating the situation there, included Aurel Mălnășan and Valter Roman, the father of Petre Roman, the first post-communist Prime Minister in Romania. See “Stenograma ședinței din 2 noiembrie 1956 cu tov. Aurel Mălnășan și Valter Roman” [Transcript of the meeting on 2 November 1956] in Lungu and Retegan, *1956. Explozia*, pp. 166-180. For the message sent on 5 November 1956, to Kádár’s new government, see “Mesajul CC al PMR, al guvernului RPR și prezidiului MAN a RPR către Guvernul revoluționar muncitoresc-țăranesc al RPU, către clasa muncitoare ungară, către întreg poporul maghiar” [Message of CC of PWP, of RPR’s government and of the Prezidium of GNA of RPR to the workers’ and peasants’ revolutionary government of HPR, to the Hungarian working class, to the entire Hungarian people] in Lungu and Retegan, *1956. Explozia*, pp. 216-218.

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

After the Hungarian Revolution broke out, the most sensitive to its message, and the most excited by the advance of the anti-totalitarian forces in the communist bloc, were the students in the large university centers, primarily from Bucharest, Cluj and Timișoara. Among them, the most interested in the democratic evolutions were the students in philosophy, history, language and literature. For a moment, the historical detour introduced by the communist revolution seemed reversed; the image of that “sober and more dignified cemetery” of which Nicolae Labiș had spoken, outraging the ideological master Leonte Răutu, seemed possible: the students dreamed of a de-Russified democratic and sovereign Romania, which for the communist leaders of the time equated with a counter-revolutionary program. Significantly, Khrushchev himself recognized on 8 November 1956 that what he called “unhealthy states of spirit” manifested among the Romanian students. However, the Soviet leader praised the eagerness of the RWP leadership to eliminate any attempt to liberalization.³⁵ It is thus legitimate to assume that tactical perspicacity and tenacious opposition to the critical-

³⁵ See *Pravda*, 10 November 1956.

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

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

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

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

meantime, pressures from the Kádár regime intensified to convince the Romanians that the Nagy group was basically a bunch of traitors and should be treated accordingly. Kádár's emissary Gyula Kállay visited Bucharest in 1957 and even complained about the "royal treatment" Nagy and his friends were receiving from the Romanian comrades. This came to an end soon thereafter, when the Nagy group was transported back to Hungary and a pseudo-trial took place that led to the execution of the former Prime Minister and several of his associates in June 1958.

The military defeat of the Hungarian uprising and the collaboration with the Soviet secret police in the investigations that led to the pseudo-trial in 1958 are episodes that were ignored by the official history of the Romanian communism. However, the Romanian leaders benefited directly from the Hungarian tragedy, which they used as an argument for the tightening of totalitarian control in the country. For the Romanian Stalinist *nomenklatura*, the humanist-democratic ideas, the program of the pluralist government of Imre Nagy were equivalent with a real counter-revolutionary manifesto. The logic of bureaucratic survival functioned with terrifying efficiency in the years after the Hungarian Revolution, guaranteeing the continuity of Romanian communism under the guise of intrinsic hostility towards any democratic renewal of the old-fashioned Stalinist structures. There was a tremendous difference between the general reaction of revolt in Hungary in October-November 1956 and the meteoric protests in a ruthlessly Stalinized Romania. To put briefly, Hungarian revisionist Marxists had a "usable past," a pre-Stalinist and even anti-Stalinist impressive history that played a major role in Imre Nagy's efforts to transcend Stalinism and reconcile socialism and democracy. Much too little could be invoked in the same direction by the few would-be anti-totalitarian thinkers in Romania.

The June-July 1957 Plenum

The Hungarian uprising and the Polish crisis in the autumn of 1956 placed Gheorghiu-Dej in an advantageous position in his behind-the-scenes confrontation with the Khrushchev leadership. These events also reinforced his fear of "anarchic-liberal"

1968 (Life in red. The pioneers. Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest. 1944-1968), pp. 333-339 and 355-371.

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

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

his wife's name, played a fundamental role in the Bolshevization, respectively Stalinization, of the RCP in the underground years. Unlike Leonte Răutu, his main disciple after 23 August 1944, Chișinevschi was self-taught: born in a poor family, he entered in the communist movement since his early youth and did not finish high school. However, in his case, the cultural void was compensated by a terrible confidence in the educative virtues of the clandestine communist sect. Ignoring and detesting the real intellectual problems, unaware of the theoretical debates of the Marxist left, Chișinevschi venerated the Stalinist ideological surrogate. The book that influenced him most was *The Problems of Leninism* by Stalin, that embarrassing catechism meant to offer rapid, easy to understand solutions to some of the most difficult issues on the theory of revolution. Later on, after the publication of the *Short History of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party*, a masterpiece of the most outrageous falsification of the past, Chișinevschi did not need any other leading star in the field of Leninist doctrine. The history of the Romanian culture and the drama in the past of this country were not at all his concern.

For Chișinevschi, the attitude toward the USSR was the most important criterion of Leninist orthodoxy. Once the Soviet leaders decided to denounce Stalin, Chișinevschi followed the new line with the same zeal he had once applied Stalin's directives. His own role in the assassination of Pătrășcanu as well as his very close friendship with Dej did not matter any more: the Soviet Union had changed course, so did this old Comintern and Cominform hand. After the Twentieth Congress he started immediately to spread insidious critical allusions to Gheorghiu-Dej, hoping to cover his own past, full of crimes and abuses. After March 1956, in spite of his renewed declarations of faith to Gheorghiu-Dej, there was no chance for Chișinevschi's political survival; Gheorghiu-Dej surpassed him in ability and duplicity. In June 1957, he was excluded from the Politburo, and in 1960 the Third Congress of the RWP did not reelect him in the Central Committee. At the Plenum of November-December 1961, all his former comrades did not hesitate to humiliate him in a no less a cruel manner than he used to act once in the name of the same cause. Gheorghiu-Dej, Ceaușescu, Maurer, Răutu, Borilă, Moghioroș, Sencovici, Valter Roman, all accused the one whom they had once celebrated as the "brain of the

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

The other member of the Central Committee that confronted Gheorghiu-Dej was Miron Constantinescu, one of the very few authentic intellectuals accepted in the hegemonic group of Romanian communism. Partner rather than accomplice for Gheorghiu-Dej, he saw in the de-Stalinization process started by Khrushchev the chance of a lifetime. After 1954, Miron Constantinescu began to intensely cultivate his image as a fighter for liberalization in the party. He initiated a series of meetings with some of the outstanding intellectuals of the interwar period, especially after he was appointed Minister of Education and Culture on 18 November 1956.³⁸ No less significant was his meeting in February 1956 in Moscow with the leader of Italian communism, Palmiro Togliatti, whose heretical opinions would be disclosed in the following months. Associated with the tendencies for liberalization inside the party, caught in the traps of Gheorghiu-Dej and Răutu, Constantinescu was ousted from the Politburo at the June Plenum in 1957 together with Chișinevschi for their “attempt to orient the party towards the liberalist and revisionist anarchy.” In June 1958, his case was used as an argument for the last purge planned by Gheorghiu-Dej and his acolytes. It was only after 1965, in the context of the struggle against Gheorghiu-Dej’s phantom, that Ceaușescu made use of Constantinescu’s services. He was again on the list of the *nomenklatura*, first as Deputy Minister, then as Minister of Education, as Secretary of the Central Committee, candidate member of the Political Executive Committee and, towards the end of his life, president of the Grand National Assembly.

³⁷ See “Stenograma Ședinței Plenare a CC al PMR din 30 noiembrie-5 decembrie 1961” [Transcript of the CC Plenum on 30 November -5 December 1961], especially pp. 477-484. A copy of this document is in the possession of the author.

³⁸ He met in Cluj the philosopher Lucian Blaga and the historian Constantin Daicoviciu, in Bucharest the poet Tudor Arghezi and the historian Constantin C. Giurescu. For Miron Constantinescu’s involvement in Blaga’s rehabilitation, see Lucian Blaga, *Luntrea lui Caron* (Caron’s boat) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990). In this autobiographic novel, it is very easy to recognize Miron Constantinescu in the character Constant Mironescu.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴² Idem, R. 2/2.

⁴³ Idem, R. 2/7.

students in Timișoara, Cluj, the Hungarian Autonomous Region and, on a smaller scale, in Bucharest, and stressed that there were serious shortcomings concerning the “patriotic education” of the young generation. More importantly, with regard to the influence of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution upon Romania, Ceaușescu stated such an influence was felt in Transylvania, where, before 23 October 1956, “excursionists” came to convince Romanian students and intellectuals to follow the Hungarian path. Ceaușescu would have a similar reaction in December 1989, when the population of Timișoara would rise against his personal rule.

The June 1958 Plenum

The purge of the so-called Chișinevschi-Constantinescu “group” carried out by the 1957 Plenum of the RWP was followed in the summer of the next year, in June 1958, by the purge of a group of old-time party members. The Plenum of the CC of the RWP on 9-13 June 1958, similar to the 1957 Plenum, which invented the Chișinevschi-Constantinescu “group,” made use of a similar scenario to invent the so-called Doncea “group.” In his speech to the Plenum, Nicolae Ceaușescu “unmasked” the members of the “group:” Constantin Doncea, Grigore Răceanu, Ovidiu Șandru, Eugen Genad, Heinrich Genad, Ion Drancă, Constantin Moflic, Ștefan Pavel, Vasile Bîgu, Vasile Negoită, and Iacob Coțoveanu. However, in order to understand the tribulations of RWP history, it would be interesting to turn back to the interwar period and to remember the names of the most important party members who organized the 1933 strikes at the Grivița railway repair shops: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Dumitru Petrescu, Constantin Doncea, Gheorghe Vasilichi, Chivu Stoica, and Vasile Bîgu.

At the 1958 Plenum, Gheorghiu-Dej and Vasilichi (supported by Vasile Vîlcu, Simion Bughici, Mihai Burcă, Ștefan Voicu, Barbu Zaharescu, Ofelia Manole, and even Răceanu’s wife, Ileana Răceanu,⁴⁴ etc.) charged Constantin Doncea, and the others of anti-party activities and factionalism, revisionism and anarchical conceptions. At that time, Dumitru Petrescu, the other important organizer of the Grivița strikes aside Doncea, was already accused of anti-party attitude by a special commission appointed in June

⁴⁴ However, she criticized him only for character defects for which the party could not have punished him. Therefore, it is very likely that, once it was clear he is lost, they agreed together that she should try to save at least her skin.

1955 in order to investigate the nature of the discussions that took place among some party members outside the official meetings. The commission recommended Petrescu's dismissal from vice-premiership and from the Central Committee, as well as his punishment as a party member with the highest sanction before complete expulsion.⁴⁵

Again, like in the case of the 1957 Plenum, it was Ceaușescu who delivered the speech that contained the main accusations against Doncea and the other old-timers. In spite of Ceaușescu's efforts to convey the image of a well organized, anti-party and factionalist group, one could read between the lines that, in fact, the "group" of old-timers was guilty of criticizing RWP's leadership for abandoning the communist ideals of the clandestine movement, for its estrangement from the masses, and for the marginalization of the party members from the period of clandestinity. In his intervention, Răutu provided another main reason of the purge: Doncea, Răceanu and the other old-timers advocated a revisionist turn within the party and expressed their sympathy toward the Yugoslav type of communism.⁴⁶

The June 1958 Plenum permitted Gheorghiu-Dej and his comrades to achieve a full control of the party and showed that no real debates regarding the party line would be permitted. Adamantly opposed to economic reforms and ideological relaxation, the Dejites were haunted by the specter of a mass uprising like the Hungarian Revolution. Therefore, Gheorghiu-Dej extended his control by initiating a purge of the party as a whole. In these circumstances, Ceaușescu could once again demonstrate his loyalty and his determination to combat the "revisionist" deviators and troublemakers attempting to undermine party's unity. In his capacity of CC secretary responsible for cadre policy, he was the organizer of the purge of those party members who had voiced doubts about Gheorghiu-Dej's policies. A massive purge of the party and state apparatus was launched

⁴⁵ For the point of view of the investigation commission regarding the anti-party character of the discussion outside the official party meetings in which Petrescu engaged, see "Cu privire la activitatea antipartinică a unor membri de partid" (Regarding the anti-party activity of some party members), 13 July 1956. For the point of view of Petrescu, who tried to defend himself, arguing that he was treated less democratic than Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi, whose cases were long debated in the Politburo, although they were responsible for greater mistakes than his. See his memorandum "Către Biroul Politic al CC al PMR" (To the Politburo of CC of RWP), 3 October 1957. Copies of these documents from the Archives of the CC Politburo are in the possession of the author. Petrescu would be later rehabilitated by Ceaușescu, who included him in the Executive Committee at the Tenth Congress of the RCP in 1969, only one year before his death.

⁴⁶ "Stenograma ședinței plenare a CC al PMR din 9-13 iunie 1958" (Transcript of the CC Plenum on June 9-13, 1958). A copy of this document is in the possession of the author.

in 1958-59, resulted in tens of thousands of expulsions from the party, and coincided with vicious anti-intellectual and anti-Semitic campaigns. Such a neo-Stalinist offensive was intended to ensure monolithic party control and to avoid a Hungarian-type crisis. Police actions were carried out against rebellious students in Timișoara, Cluj, Tîrgu-Mureș, Bucharest and Iași, and the most radical students were jailed after sham trials. As a CC secretary, Ceaușescu was also responsible to direct youth organizations; in close cooperation with Alexandru Drăghici, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ceaușescu was successful in “restoring order” within universities. His closest associates in these operations were: Virgil Trofin, Ion Iliescu, Ștefan Andrei, Cornel Burtică, Cornel Pacoste, Ștefan Bârlea, and Mircea Angelescu, the leaders of the Communist Youth Union (UTC) and the Union of Romanian Students’ Associations (UASR).

After the Hungarian revolution, Gheorghiu-Dej’s leadership attempted to frighten the party and the population into believing that any challenge to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy or even advocacy of modestly liberal policies would bring about Soviet reprisals. Gheorghiu-Dej criticized the Hungarian Revolution, expressed his support for the Soviet military intervention, and displayed absolute loyalty toward Soviet Union. Consequently, in July 1958, Khrushchev made the unexpected decision to withdraw the Soviet troops that were stationed in Romania.⁴⁷ Gheorghiu-Dej and his supporters demonstrated remarkable acumen in outsmarting Khrushchev and simulating a unique form of de-Stalinization. Indeed, what they wanted was to play for time, to appear unwavering supporters of the Soviet leader’s initiatives in order to fortify their own control over the party and the country.

As Khrushchev was enjoying the highest moments of his international and domestic authority, with the sputnik launched in 1957 to the astonishment of the whole world, and a widely publicized trip to the US in 1959, the Romanian leaders were still obedient followers of the Soviet line within world communism. Domestically, the post-1958 repressions ensured Gheorghiu-Dej of the widespread conformity among the intelligentsia. There were indications of an increased living standard for the population,

⁴⁷ For details regarding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania, see Ioan Scurtu ed., *România. Retragerea trupelor sovietice - 1958* (Romania: The withdrawal of Soviet troops - 1958) (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1996). See also Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy: Soviet Troops in Romania, 1944-1958* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 1992).

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

Opposing Khrushchevism: The Emergence of National Communism

Worried by Nikita Khrushchev's "second thaw," the Dejites were trying to resist de-Stalinization by devising a nationalist strategy meant to entice the intelligentsia and bridge the gap between the party elite and the population. In fact, the Romanian communist leadership proved to be extremely successful in constructing a platform for anti-de-Stalinization around the concepts of industrialization, autonomy, sovereignty, and national pride. The point for Gheorghiu-Dej was to maintain close relations with the Soviet leaders without emulating their efforts to demolish Stalin's myth. The struggle against the "personality cult" amounted for the Romanians to emphasizing their impeccable internationalist credentials while fostering the image of the leading party nucleus as a stronghold of Leninist orthodoxy. The two main events that took place at the beginning of the 1960s, the Third Congress of the RWP (20-28 June 1960), and the Plenum of the Central Committee (30 November - 5 December 1961) emphasized the focus on rapid industrialization, which would create the basis of the mass support for party's policy and, respectively, strengthen the patriotic, "anti-hegemonic" claims of the Dej team. This emphasis on the leaders' commitment to national interests became a key element of party's strategy to woo both the intelligentsia and the masses.

Initially, Gheorghiu-Dej made sure that his emerging domesticism would not irritate the Kremlin. In major international communist conferences and symposia the Romanian delegates sounded more pro-Soviet than their Hungarian and Polish peers.

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

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

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

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

and the Central Committee, as well as his position as chairman of the Party Control Commission (he was replaced by the veteran hard-liner Cominternist, Dumitru Coliu). Clearly, Pîrvulescu's expulsion was related to his attitude toward the Chişinevschi-Constantinescu actions against Gheorghiu-Dej. The first secretary's close friend Ion Gheorghe Maurer, at the moment nominal chief of state, took his place in the Politburo. One year later, Maurer replaced the notoriously mediocre Chivu Stoica as chairman of the Council of Ministers, a position he held until his retirement in 1974.

The importance of the 3rd RWP Congress resides, however, in the launch of the long-term economic program (extending to the year 1965), which focused on the sweeping industrialization of the country, with a special emphasis on metallurgical and machine-building industries. The congress discussed the results of the previous Five-Year Plan and approved the draft of the new Six-Year Plan, and the key priority that stayed at its core: the project of the huge steel plant to be erected in Galaţi. With regard to the agriculture, Gheorghiu-Dej stated in his report to the congress that 680,000 peasant families, owning 1.8 million hectares, were not yet included into the socialist sector; however, the Romanian communist leader affirmed that the collectivization of Romanian agriculture would be completed in 1965. (Actually, the Romanian government announced the completion of the collectivization process in April 1962.) At the same time, the congress approved the strategy of an unprecedented mass-mobilization for the fulfillment of the economic objectives of the party.⁴⁹ In fact, communist Romania's economic policy constituted the starting point of the violent polemic between Bucharest and Moscow, which reached its climax in April 1964, with the Romanians publishing a bold "Declaration" regarding the crisis within world communism and proudly defying the Soviet claim to supremacy within the bloc. For the Romanians, developing their own industrial potential in addition to the agricultural sector was a matter of dignity. All these seeds of conflict were still ignored by both the delegates to the Third Congress and by foreign observers, convinced that the relations between Moscow and Bucharest were closer than ever.

⁴⁸ Ionescu, p. 316.

⁴⁹ For an in-depth analysis of RWP's Third Congress see Ionescu, pp. 316-25.

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

As a matter of fact, at the Moscow November 1960 World Conference of 81 Communist and Workers' Parties, the Romanian delegates were among the most enthusiastic in supporting the Soviets against the Albanians and the Chinese. For Gheorghiu-Dej, Hoxha's and Mao's attempt to break up the unity not only of world communism, but also of individual communist parties amounted to a most dangerous attack on the sacrosanct principles of socialist internationalism. While he was personally inclined to disapprove of Khrushchev's staunch criticism of Stalin, he was nevertheless favorable to the 20th CPSU Congress line regarding the vital need for peaceful coexistence between different social-political systems. No less important, Gheorghiu-Dej disliked the fierce Albanian-Chinese attacks against Tito's Yugoslavia. Having been Stalin's point man in the Cominform's anti-Tito campaigns of 1948-49, Gheorghiu-Dej did his utmost after 1956 to mend relations with the neighboring Yugoslavia. True, he disapproved of the Titoist rhetoric of self-management and other theoretical innovations in the field of building socialism, but this did not mean that he saw the Yugoslavs as

either “renegades” or “traitors.” Had it not been for the worsening of the personal relations between Gheorghiu-Dej and Khrushchev, directly linked to the post-1961 new de-Stalinization wave and the plans to transform the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) into a supranational organism, it was hard to believe that the Romanian attitude toward China or Albania would have significantly differed from other Soviet bloc countries.

By all means, until early 1962, and clearly during 1960-61, Gheorghiu-Dej continued to act as a most loyal supporter of Moscow’s hegemonic status within the bloc and the international communist movement. Romanian party apparatchiks continued to be sent to Moscow to attend courses within the CPSU party schools, Russian language remained compulsory in high schools and colleges, and ritualistic references to the Soviet Union’s decisive role in the country’s “liberation from the Fascist yoke” were made on every important occasion. In other words, the Third Congress symbolized the continuity with the traditional pro-Soviet position within world communism and consecrated the will of the RWP leaders to stick to their highly orthodox vision of socialist construction. The heretic propensities, especially those linked to the refusal to accept the Soviet plans for supra-national economic integration of Eastern Europe, were still carefully camouflaged under the rhetoric of bloc unity and proletarian internationalism.

In October 1961, world communism experienced a major event: the 22nd CPSU Congress, when Khrushchev engaged in a new anti-Stalin campaign and publicly attacked the Albanians for their allegedly schismatic, factionalist, seditious activities within the world communist movement. On that occasion, Zhou Enlai, head of the Chinese delegation spelled out discontent with the Soviet policies, including some of the theoretical points included in the CPSU new program. The hard-core Stalinists within world communism resented Khrushchev’s renunciation to the dogmas of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” and the announcement of the transformation of the CPSU into a “party of the whole people” and of the Soviet Union into a “state of the whole people.” World communism had entered a stage of intense convulsions, and the ultimate break between the two competing centers (Moscow and Beijing) appeared increasingly imminent. Communist parties throughout the whole world, and particularly in the “socialist camp” engaged in soul-searching analyses of their historical traditions and took sides on the

growing polemics between Moscow and the pro-Chinese Albanians. The Romanian leaders realized that the earth-shattering decisions made in Moscow, including the expulsion of Stalin's body from Lenin's Mausoleum, would have tremendous consequences for all the countries in the region. While perfunctorily applauding the CPSU Leninist course under Khrushchev, Gheorghiu-Dej cautiously prepared the intra-party debates on the lessons of the 22nd CPSU Congress. The last thing he needed was to allow these debates turn into attempts to revisit his role in the Stalinist purges. With acumen, patience, and cynicism, the Romanian leaders organized the struggle against the "consequences of the personality cult" in such a way that they would appear as genuine de-Stalinizers *avant la lettre*.

A crucial event was the Plenum of the Central Committee (30 November - 5 December 1961), when Gheorghiu-Dej displayed again his unconditional support for Khrushchev's international line, lambasting the Albanian deviation. Simply put, Gheorghiu-Dej was ready to endorse the Soviets in their conflict with Enver Hoxha, i.e., with Mao Zedong, as long as they did not push him into self-criticism regarding the Romanian Stalinist past. The CC Plenum was preceded by the Politburo meeting of 29 November 1961, a general rehearsal of the main themes to be addressed at the Plenum.⁵⁰ In his speech delivered to the Plenum, Gheorghiu-Dej adopted an unexpectedly harsh tone toward the Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha and his comrades:

The Central Committee informed the party in time of the anti-Leninist scissionist [schismatic] line adopted by the leaders of the Albanian Party of Labor headed by Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu, which was manifest in the stand taken by the representatives of the Albanian Party of Labor at the Bucharest Conference and then burst out with particular intensity at the 1960 meeting. The leaders of the Albanian Party of Labor fiercely attacked the line and the decisions of the 20th and 22nd Congresses of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, the open and resolute exposure of the cult of Stalin's person and of its nefarious consequences. Why do they rise so fiercely against the criticism of the personality cult, why do they defend the grave infringements perpetrated by Stalin in his activity? Because they themselves have set up and maintained in Albania for many

⁵⁰ The Politburo meeting was attended by Gheorghiu-Dej, Apostol, Bodnăraș, Borilă, Chivu Stoica, Ceaușescu, Drăghici, Maurer, Moghioroș, Coliu, Răutu, Sălăjan, Voitec and Dalea. See "Stenograma ședinței Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din ziua de 29 noiembrie 1961" [Transcript of the CC of RWP's Politburo meeting of 29 November 1961]. A copy of the document is in the possession of this author.

years situations identical with those against which the Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union have risen—practicing throughout the Party and state life methods peculiar to the personality cult, with its whole paraphernalia of abuses.⁵¹

The Plenum offered Gheorghiu-Dej a magnificent opportunity to engage in pseudo-liberalization. Whatever wrongly happened in party history, he claimed serenely, did happen either before he joined the top leadership or against his will. Pretending to be the true defender of Leninist principles of collective leadership and “healthy norms of party life,” Gheorghiu-Dej denounced the Pauker-Luca-Georgescu and Chişinevschi-Constantinescu factious groups as responsible for the Stalinist horrors in Romania. In the same vein, according to Dej, had it been not for him and his close associates, traitors like Ştefan Foriş and Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu could have destroyed the party in the 1940s. In Gheorghiu-Dej’s Orwellian scenario, the control over the past was essential as a method to control the present and the future. In this self-serving Manichean construct, the whole party history appeared as a continuous struggle between the healthy, patriotic, proletarian nucleus, headed by Gheorghiu-Dej, and successive gangs of factious villains. Celebrated as the providential savior of the party’s very existence, Gheorghiu-Dej incriminated the “right-wing deviators” Pauker, Luca and Georgescu of acting as “a separate group above and beyond the elected organs, ignoring the Central Committee and the Secretariat (which they dominated) and replacing the Politburo, which functioned almost as a committee.”⁵² In fact, in his speech, Gheorghiu-Dej codified the new official version of RWP’s history that stressed the abominable actions of the “factional anti-Party group,” and therefore exonerated the Dejites:

Returning to the country in September 1944 from the Soviet Union, where they had emigrated, the factional anti-party group Pauker-Luca, later joined by Teohari Georgescu, and actively assisted by Iosif Chişinevschi and Miron Constantinescu, promoted the cult of Stalin’s person with great intensity, and consistently tried—and unfortunately succeeded to a certain extent—to introduce into Party and state life the methods and practices,

⁵¹ See “Report of the delegation of the Rumanian Workers’ Party which attended the 22nd Congress of the C.P.S.U—Submitted to the Plenum of the C.C., R.W.P. held between November 30 and December 5, 1961,” in Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, *Articles and Speeches: June 1960-December 1962* (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1963), p. 291.

⁵² Quoted in King, p.92.

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

In his intervention at the same 1961 Plenum, Dej's Minister of Internal Affairs and head of the dreaded *Securitate*, General Alexandru Drăghici, stated that "the factionalist groups (Pauker, Luca, and others) turned the ministries they controlled into veritable fiefs, isolating them from the party and removing them from its control."⁵⁴ Furthermore, Ana Pauker (dead since 1960) and the other purged members of the leadership were accused of having used their powerful positions in 1944-48 to admit (and even invite) former Iron Guard members, as well as many opportunists and careerists into the party. Gheorghiu-Dej's speech, as well as the speeches delivered by other participants such as Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Leonte Răutu, Alexandru Drăghici, Emil Bodnăraș, Ana Toma, Valter Roman, Alexandru Sencovici, Alexandru Moghioroș, Petre Borilă *et. al.*, incriminated those "long time émigrés to USSR" and "alienated from the domestic realities" for adopting the criminal Stalinist methods and practices. Such accusations were meant to create the image that Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca and Teohari Georgescu were solely responsible for the terrorist, Stalinist policies, as opposed to the "national," "patriotic," and implicitly "anti-Stalinist" line epitomized by Gheorghiu-Dej and his close comrades.

The interpretation of the RCP history put a special emphasis on the struggle between the "domestic" Communists and the "dogmatic" Muscovites (Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca, Iosif Chișinevschi), with the latter faction accused of all the evils perpetrated during the Stalinist years. Skillfully put into practice, this myth would function extremely well as an ideological support for the new orientation in Bucharest's relations with Moscow. Therefore, there is no wonder why, at the Politburo meeting of 7 December 1961, Gheorghiu-Dej affirmed that the 1961 Plenum, which had just ended on 5 December was perhaps "the most beautiful (plenum) ever held." Furthermore, it is

⁵³ Dej, *Articles and Speeches: June 1960-December 1962*, pp. 278-79.

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

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

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

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ The meeting was attended by Dej, Apostol, Bodnăraș, Borilă, Chivu Stoica, Ceaușescu, Maurer, Drăghici, Moghioroș, Coliu, Răutu, Sălăjan and Voitec. See "Stenograma ședinței Biroului Politic al CC al

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

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

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

passion for secrecy and intrigue.⁵⁷ However, Ceaușescu avoided any deviation from what he perceived to be classic Leninist dogma.⁵⁸

Gheorghiu-Dej decided to celebrate the completion of the collectivization process by a special Plenum of the CC of RWP (23-25 April 1962), and a special session of the Grand National Assembly in Bucharest (27-30 April 1962), attended by 11,000 peasants.⁵⁹ For the ideological viewpoint, this event signified, Gheorghiu-Dej insisted, the completion of the construction of the material base of the new order and the transition to the fulfillment of socialist construction (“desăvârșirea construcției socialiste în România”).

The outbreak in 1962-63 of open hostile polemics between the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties,⁶⁰ and Khrushchev’s difficulties following the Cuban Missile Crisis, enabled the Romanian communists to escape Moscow’s domination. In Romanian Politburo meetings as well as in personal correspondence with the CPSU first secretary, Gheorghiu-Dej criticized the Soviet leadership for not informing the Romanian communists about his intention to install Soviet missiles in Cuba. During his official visit to Bucharest (24-25 June 1963), Khrushchev acknowledged the criticism as follows: “Comrade Dej, you have criticized me for taking missiles to Cuba and not telling you. It is true, we should have told you. I have explained to comrade Ceaușescu how it happened. Everybody knew about this except you.” (Ceaușescu had visited the Soviet Union before Khrushchev’s visit, in order to prepare the visit of the Soviet supreme

⁵⁷ There is agreement among RCP veteran members that Dej had increasingly become victim of a persecution mania, suspecting even his closest collaborators of fomenting plots to subvert his power.

⁵⁸ For instance, in a confidential lecture he delivered to students of the party academy in 1964, Ceaușescu emphasized the relevance of Stalinist ideology. His audience was apparently astonished to hear him praise Stalin’s theoretical legacy, particularly the work *The Problems of Leninism*. Ceaușescu referred to it as obligatory reading for anyone wanting to understand Marxism-Leninism. Private communication to author by persons present at that meeting.

⁵⁹ The number was a direct allusion to the victims of the 1907 anti-peasant repression organized by a bourgeois-landlord government under the Hohenzollern dynasty. See Gheorghe Buzatu and Mircea Chirițoiu, *Agresiunea comunismului în România: Documente din arhivele secrete: 1944-1989* (The communist aggression in Romania: Documents from the secret archives, 1944-1989), Vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 1998), p. 33.

⁶⁰ For a perceptive analysis of Khrushchev’s role in the Sino-Soviet split see Chapter 7, “Khrushchev and the Sino-Soviet Schism,” in Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 210-35.

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

“I have to tell you, Nikita Sergeevich, that I have never experienced after the [August 1944] liberation the sentiment I had during the period of crisis in the Caribbean Sea, when I felt that we were on the brink of the abyss and everything was hanging by a thread to plunge in a nuclear catastrophe. When I heard about the decision to withdraw the missiles from Cuba I was relieved. We have to do everything we can to preserve peace.”⁶²

As the Sino-Soviet schism was deepening, Gheorghiu-Dej cast himself into the role of mediator between the two competing communist centers. Rather than following Moscow's lead in relations with other communist parties and other states, Gheorghiu-Dej began to develop independent ties with them. Ceaușescu also became involved in Gheorghiu-Dej's world communist movement diplomacy. Together with Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer, he went to China, North Korea, and the Soviet Union in 1963 and 1964, for talks with Mao, Kim Il-sung, and Khrushchev. Simultaneously, the RCP endorsed Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti's polycentric, anti-hegemonic vision of world communism as formulated in the Italian communist leader's texts written shortly before his death in August 1964. With regard to the role played by Romanian communists during the fierce polemics between the Soviet and Chinese communist parties, J. F. Brown has perceptively argued that:

Mao and the whole Sino-Soviet dispute have provided a tremendous boost to the prestige and self-respect of the Rumanian Communist Party. Always considered one of the weakest in the bloc, it has now assumed an importance second only to that of the Soviet and Chinese parties. By its

⁶¹ See “Extras din stenograma convorbirilor care au avut loc la București între delegațiile CC al PMR și CC al PCUS în zilele de 24-25 iunie 1963” (Excerpt from the transcript of the discussions between the CC of RWP and CC of CPSU delegations held in Bucharest on June 24-25, 1963). Arhiva Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R., nr. 1702/1963, Protocol 2 (1645), 23-24.12.1963, cutia 26, p.1.

⁶² See “Extras din nota cu privire la discuțiile ce au avut loc cu prilejul vizitei în R.P.R. a tov. N. S. Hrușciiov în tren, mașină și cu alte ocazii în timpul deplasării la locurile de vânătoare între zilele de 3-7 octombrie 1963” (Excerpt from the transcript of the discussions held in train, car and other occasions during the visit of comrade N. S. Khrushchev to Romania on the way to hunting places between October 3-7, 1963), p.1.

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

The Romanian “deviation”—a self-styled version of national communism—resulted in a successful attempt by the ruling group to restructure the official ideology and assimilate populist and nationalist values. With regard to the origins of the Romanian-Soviet dispute, Joseph Rothschild aptly observed: “The background of the Soviet-Romanian tensions of the 1960s lies in the grievances and aspirations generated by expectations of change within a context of political backwardness.”⁶⁴

The dispute became overt in 1962-63 as a result of differences about long-term strategies for the economic integration of East European and Soviet economics, Khrushchev’s attempts to have transform Romania into the agricultural base for the industrially more developed COMECON countries, and the interpretation of such notions as “national sovereignty,” “economic independence,” “mutual assistance,” and “socialist internationalism.” Gheorghiu-Dej and his comrades mounted a successful propaganda campaign against the Soviet economic pressures on Romania, and consequently managed to generate a new image for the RCP, as a champion of Romanian national interests against Moscow’s plans to transform Romania into the agricultural hinterland of the Soviet bloc. The object of the dispute between Bucharest and Moscow was primarily economic and dealt with the “division and specialization of production within the socialist camp” and the calls for a supranational “planning council” advocated by Khrushchev, and strongly supported by Polish, East German and Czechoslovak leaders (Gomulka, Ulbricht, Novotny). All the long-amassed inferiority complexes of the Romanian leaders exploded in this confrontation: benefiting from Khrushchev’s weakened position within world communism and in his own party, Gheorghiu-Dej decided, for the first time in his political career, to openly confront the Soviet’s diktat. Not without reasons, the Romanian communists objected to the lack of support from the Soviet part in their efforts to speed up their country’s industrialization (by further developing chemical and electric energy industries). Gheorghiu-Dej and his team

⁶³ See J. F. Brown, “Eastern Europe,” in Leopold Labedz, ed., *International Communism after Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 79.

⁶⁴ See Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 162.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p. 214.

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

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

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

⁷⁰ Shafir, p. 48.

⁷¹ See Bîrlădeanu's own comments concerning his intervention in Lavinia Betea, *Alexandru Bîrlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu* (Alexandru Bîrlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu and Iliescu) (Bucharest: Editura

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

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

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

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

Evenimentul Românesc, 1997), pp. 150-51. Hereafter quoted as *Bîrlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu*.

⁷² See Ionescu, p. 339.

⁷³ Skilling refers to the article published by the chairman of the Romanian Council of Ministers, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, in the November 1963 issue of the *Problemy mira i sotsializma* under the title "The Firm Foundations of the Unity of the International Communist Movement." See Skilling, p. 153.

⁷⁴ See Gheorghiu-Dej's instructions to the RCP delegation to China in the spring of 1964. Gheorghiu-Dej wanted the RCP delegation to convince the Chinese communists to suspend the polemics with the Soviets for minimum 6 months or, better, for a year, and then to organize a world communist conference to discuss the controversial issues. See "Stenograma ședinței Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R. din ziua de 28 februarie 1964" (Transcript of the CC of RWP's Politburo meeting of February 28, 1964), Arhiva Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R., Nr. 207/28.III.1964, p. 4.

opposed the practice of stigmatizing other parties as “anti-Leninist,” “deviationist,” etc. During the fall of 1963, in closed party *aktiv* gatherings, RWP leaders informed the party members about the growing divergences between them and the Soviets. The tone of the discussions was reserved, but the meaning of the speeches was unambiguous: Gheorghiu-Dej was preparing the party for the hour of a direct clash with the Soviet attempt to impose complete alignment in the struggle against Beijing. Among the Politburo leaders who took the floor in these secretive meetings, the most outspoken in his criticism of Khrushchev was Prime Minister Maurer. Soviet agents immediately informed the Kremlin that the Romanian leaders were waging an anti-Moscow campaign. The topic of the agents’ network in Romania (*agentura*) was to be frequently mentioned in high-level discussions between the two parties in 1964, with the Romanians expressing indignation about Soviet distrust and the Soviets reproaching Gheorghiu-Dej and his comrades lack of communist internationalism.

The April 1964 RWP declaration on the main problems of world communist movement summed up the RWP’s new philosophy of intra-bloc, world communist, and international relations in general. In this fundamental document, Romanian communists broke with the Soviet concept of socialist internationalism and emphasized their commitment to the principles of national independence and sovereignty, full equality, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states and parties, and cooperation based on mutual advantage. Particularly influential in the conception of this trail-blazing document was vice-premier Alexandru Bîrlădeanu who, as Romania’s permanent delegate to the COMECON, had been directly involved in disputes with Soviet leaders. The Declaration squarely rejected Moscow’s privileged status within the world communist movement:

Bearing in mind the diversity of the conditions of socialist construction, there are not and there can be no unique patterns and recipes; no one can decide what is and what is not correct for other countries or parties. It is up to every Marxist-Leninist party; it is a sovereign right of each socialist state, to elaborate, choose, or change the forms and methods of socialist construction.... It is the exclusive right of each party independently to work out its political line, its concrete objectives, and the ways and means of attaining them, by creatively applying the general truths of Marxism-Leninism and the conclusions it arrives at from an attentive analysis of the

experience of the other Communist and workers' parties.... There is not and cannot be a "parent" party and a "son" party, parties that are "superior" and parties that are "subordinate"; rather there is the great family of Communist and workers' parties which have equal rights.... No party has or can have a privileged place, or can impose its line or opinions on other parties. Each party makes its own contribution to the development of the common treasure store of Marxist-Leninist teaching, to enriching the forms and practical methods of revolutionary struggle for winning power and building socialist society.⁷⁵

Simultaneously, Romania showed growing interest in improving relations with the West. One of Gheorghiu-Dej's confidants, Vice-premier and President of the State Planning Committee Gheorghe Gaston Marin visited the United States in 1963 and 1964,⁷⁶ and Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer, accompanied by Alexandru Bîrlădeanu, went to France in 1964.⁷⁷

In the summer of 1964 the RCP had gained both national and international recognition as the exponent of a domestic political platform opposed to Soviet interference and dedicated to fostering the country's political and economic autonomy. For instance, on 6 July 1964, in an article published by *The New York Times*, David Binder wrote: "The pursuit of independence and a national renaissance by the Communist leadership of Romania appears to be developing with the precision and confidence of a well-made symphony. The leitmotif remains the determination of the Government of President [sic] Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej to expand the country's economy on Romanian

⁷⁵ See *Declarație cu privire la poziția Partidului Muncitoresc Român în problemele mișcării comuniste și muncitorești internaționale, adoptată de Plenara lărgită a C.C. al P.M.R. din aprilie 1964* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1964). For the paragraphs quoted see Skilling, pp. 153-54. See also Bîrlădeanu's remarks on the importance of the April 1964 Declaration in Betea, *Bîrlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu*, pp. 152-58.

⁷⁶ Actually, Gaston Marin paid three official visits to the United States: in 1957, in November 1963, and May-June 1964. According to Gaston Marin's own account, his last official visit to the United States, in 1964, was the most important in terms of bilateral relations. See Gheorghe Gaston Marin, *În serviciul României lui Gheorghiu-Dej: Însemnări din viață* (Serving Gheorghiu-Dej's Romania: Notes from my life) (Bucharest: Editura Evenimentul Românesc, 2000), pp. 212-29.

⁷⁷ The results of the Romanian delegation's visit to France were discussed at the Politburo meeting of 4 August 1964. It is worth mentioning that the Romanian communist officials were extremely impressed by de Gaulle. See "Stenograma ședinței Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R. din ziua de 4 august 1964" (Transcript of the CC of RWP's Politburo meeting of 4 August 1964), Arhiva Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R., Nr. 1574/31.XII.1964, pp. 6-20.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Romanian domesticism contained an ambiguous potential: in accordance with the inclinations and interests of the leading team and the international circumstances, it could lead to either “Yugoslavization,” i.e., de-Sovietization coupled with de-Stalinization, or “Albanization,” i.e., de-Sovietization strengthened by radical domestic Stalinism. The dual nature of RWP’s divorce from the Kremlin stems from the contrast between its patriotic claims and the refusal to overhaul the Soviet-imposed, Leninist model of socialism. The ambivalence of RWP’s “independent line” was deeply rooted in the anxiety of the Romanian communist elite that reforms could unleash political unrest and jeopardize the party’s monopoly on power.

After attending the Warsaw Pact summit conference in Poland in February 1965, Gheorghiu-Dej was immobilized by lung cancer, and died on 19 March. A few days later, Ceaușescu became the RWP’s Secretary General, and Chivu Stoica, one of Gheorghiu-Dej’s closest collaborators since the war years, became Chairman of the Council of State. The unexpected coming to power of Ceaușescu deserves a closer look, since it was one of the most debated issues in Romania’s recent history. First of all, it is important to stress that Gheorghiu-Dej’s illness developed rapidly, and it seems that he did not think to designate the person who would take his place as RWP leader. Actually, in the fall of 1964, a thorough check-up did not reveal the disease that would kill him in March 1965.

Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Alexandru Bîrlădeanu have provided more detailed accounts concerning the succession struggle. According to Maurer, in the terminal phase of his illness, Gheorghiu-Dej asked him to be his successor and, faced with Maurer’s refusal, decided to support Apostol. However, Maurer continues, the proposal to name Apostol secretary of the CC, in order to become first secretary at the moment of Gheorghiu-Dej’s death, was met by a strong opposition from Drăghici and Ceaușescu and was not backed by the other members of the Politburo. Therefore, Maurer decided to support Ceaușescu, who had displayed a courageous attitude toward Khrushchev, taking into consideration that the other option was Drăghici, perceived as the “Soviets’ man.”⁸⁰ According to Bîrlădeanu, it was Ceaușescu who announced in a Politburo meeting in January-February 1965 that Gheorghiu-Dej was seriously ill (lung cancer in terminal

⁸⁰ See Maurer’s account in Lavinia Beta, *Maurer și lumea de ieri: Mărturii despre stalinizarea României* (Arad: Editura Iona Slavici, 1995), pp. 171-76.

phase). With that occasion, Ceaușescu stated that a team of French physicians, brought especially to Bucharest to consult with Gheorghiu-Dej, made the diagnostic. Furthermore, Bîrlădeanu insists that Ceaușescu managed to restrict the other Politburo members' access to Gheorghiu-Dej, and managed to create his own support group, composed of Drăghici and Chivu Stoica, while the other group within the Politburo was composed of Apostol, Bodnăraș, and Maurer.

According to Bîrlădeanu, Maurer's betrayal of Apostol was decisive in promoting Ceaușescu as RWP leader.⁸¹ However, Bîrlădeanu's version seems to be less plausible since it does not take into account the fierce rivalry between Drăghici and Ceaușescu. It is also worth mentioning that Sorin Toma, a former communist official (chief editor of the party newspaper *Scînteia* and CC member), in a personal communication to this author, stated that Drăghici had very little chances to become the RWP leader.⁸²

In conclusion, since Gheorghiu-Dej did not have the time to name his successor, the decision was made by the Politburo members, where the most influential were Maurer and Bodnăraș and, according to the information gathered until now, they decided to support Ceaușescu and not Drăghici, the brutal and merciless head of the *Securitate*, or Apostol, the mediocre and dogmatic Stalinist. They also convinced Chivu Stoica to support their proposal. It is no doubt that Maurer believed that Ceaușescu, the youngest member of the Politburo, who lacked any impressive credentials in his revolutionary

⁸¹ See Betea, *Bîrlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu*, pp. 180-84. One element to be kept in mind is the personal animosity between Bîrlădeanu and Maurer. On various occasions, in private conversations during the 1970s and 1980s with party old-timers, Bîrlădeanu described Maurer as a politically and morally corrupt individual. It was Bîrlădeanu who apparently opposed the idea of other "Letter of the 6" would-be signatories to approach Maurer and ask him to join them. As for the "procedural" elements of the post-Dej succession, this author could not find a single document in the RCP operational archive indicating any collective discussion on this decisive issue. Whatever debates may have taken place, they had been informal and, to use Dej's favorite charge against his enemies, "factionalist".

⁸² Sorin Toma joined the communist movement in his youth (he entered the RCP in 1932, when he was 18). In the 1930s he was married to Ana Grossman-Toma, a militant with an important role both Ana Pauker's and Gheorghiu-Dej's entourages. During WWII he fought with Soviet partisans and then regular army against the Nazis (1943-45). In 1946, he returned to Romania and was named deputy chief editor of the party newspaper *Scînteia*. From 1947 until 1960 he was the chief editor of *Scînteia*. Member of the CC of the RWP (1949-1960). His father, Alexandru Toma, a poet of meager talent but huge ambitions, was the official bard of the Stalinist epoch in Romania and author of the text for the first anthem of the Romanian People's republic. At the behest of the party leadership, in late 1940s, Sorin Toma wrote a vicious attack against one of Romania's most prominent poets, Tudor Arghezi. Victim of Dej's purges, Sorin Toma lost his position after 1960 and was excluded from the RWP in 1963. In 1988 he emigrated to Israel.

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

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

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In memory of my friends and mentors, Ghița Ionescu and Alvin Z. Rubinstein.