



ORIGINAL PAPER

The Ideological Identity of the Romanian Communist Party as Reflected in the Dialogues with the Left Belgian Political Formations

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Abstract

In the process of building socialism, like the other communist parties in Eastern Europe, PCR was based on a set of values and principles with origins in the Marxist-Leninist ideology. However, the dissident attitude of the Romanian communism towards Moscow in the sixties would imprint some peculiarities of a doctrinal identity.

In PCR's case, an expression of this identity has constantly manifested in the international relations engaged by the Romanian state, a domain in which Ceaușescu used to consider himself as a spokesman of the socialist doctrine. In its definition and argumentation, the concept of democracy was vital, both for the discourse of the socialist or communist parties in Western Europe and for that of the parties in the Eastern Block. But amid the historical demarcation between socialism and capitalism, the communist would use the concept of democracy in their own terms and acceptations, because, as compared to the political regimes with single party, the West-European communist/socialist parties had developed and functioned within multiparty democracies, sharing a different vision of the construction of socialism.

The goal of the present article is to analyse the ideological identity of the Romanian communism, having as documentary source the content of the dialogues between PCR and the Belgian Left parties. The research identifies Ceaușescu's vision on multiparty systems and regimes and on the ones with single party, as well as the concept of democracy in its particular acceptations.

Keywords: *ideological identity, multiparty, single party, PCR, socialism, democracy*

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Introduction

Either if we speak about Eastern or Western Europe, initially, communism was based on the same Marxist-Leninist principles in the process of building socialism. After World War II, the Western communist parties would embrace in some ideological aspects also principles of liberal democracy, while the parties in the Eastern Block would comply with the so-called popular democracy (socialist democracy). The Western communists' assent to the democratic political game in a multiparty environment as well as the assent to the idea that the communist ideology can be put into practice also through a peaceful transition to socialism have caused an ideological repositioning of those parties, repositioning called Euro-communism in the mid 70's. Certainly, these tendencies of the communist movement in Western Europe can be considered a sign of a distancing from Moscow. Similar dissident acts were also present in the case of the socialist states in the East. Thus, the Socialist Republic of Romania would fight for a weakening of the Soviet control through a rather nationalist policy, at the same time keeping the ideological model of popular democracy and the single party system.

PCR and popular democracy

As the thoroughly-conducted studies show us, for the communists, the concept of democracy was vital in order to argument and articulate the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Against the background of the historical divide between socialism and capitalism, the communists would use the concept of democracy in their own meanings, not just in order to justify the regime, but also to consolidate the effort to build socialism.

The deviation and reinterpreting of this concept from its classical meanings settled by the liberal ideology would lead to it being claimed from the perspective of the interpretations, the liberal one, that of political pluralism, typical for capitalist societies, with a democratic liberal regime, and the socialist one, specific for the so-called popular democracies.

Paradoxically, we find that the understanding of the democratic principles, and even of the democratic political regime, in general, is different even inside the communist world.

There were significant differences between the socialist states of Eastern Europe, as well as between those of the Soviet Union. The socialist societies in these states, although applying the same principles as in the socialist democracies, were different from one another through the intensity, extent and effectiveness of the centrally - operated control, as well as by the scale of popular support or opposition. Not least, such societies were differently characterized by their political reformative strength (Verdery, 1996: 38). Moreover, the Western European socialist - communist parties, at least from the perspective of the principles that were supposed to lay at the foundation of democracy, had a different view on the building of socialism. The talks within the meetings of the Romanian communist leaders with delegations of Belgian communists and socialists stand proof for that. Most records of those talks contain debates on topics regarding the way communism was applied, manifested in Western societies, the analysis of the democratic principles, the building of socialism in general.

The superiority of popular democratic and, of course, that of the political systems in which it manifested itself, was praised in many ways. In the communist doctrine it was believed that social achievements, even the historical events, were influenced by the form of popular democracy. For instance, in the communist theorists' minds, the victory over the Nazi

system in World War II was due to the superiority of social system in the Soviet Union, which applied a socialist democracy (Mitin, 1950: 5).

In the studies written by the classics of the Marxist - Leninist ideology, the main feature of the bourgeois democracy was that it was a democracy of the exploiting minority headed against the exploited majority. In other words, the bourgeois democracy was built upon the dominance of private property over the means of production, being accused of being formal, false and incomplete.

In the Romanian studies of the communist regime period, *the socialist way*-as the economic and political system of the socialist states was named, called on what the communists named *an authentic democracy*. The theorists of the system considered that such democracy manifested, by virtue of the legit character awarded by the masses, for the benefit of the working class and with the goal of a grand social achievement. From the point of view of a socialist country, like Romania, the general perception was that the communist parties in Western Europe were to be seen as the leaders of the fight for democracy in the sense that they were fighting for the unification of those political forces as democratic anti - monopole alliances led by the working class. Moreover, also in the name of democracy there had to take place national liberation revolutions or the new states were consolidating in the wake of the fall of imperialism (Lecuța, 1979: 35, 36).

While, with the Western communist parties a review of the concept of democracy was manifest, with the soviet - influenced communist parties, the authentic democratic principles were those of a socialist democracy. In his talks with the Western European communists on the topic of democracy, Ceausescu would stay loyal to the same principles as they were designed by the Marxist - Leninist ideology. Therefore, from the ideological point of view, Ceausescu would actually stay loyal to the soviet doctrine, but he would overlap upon those popular democratic principles, singularities of nationalist doctrine.

The Western communist parties also made use of the concept of socialist democracy, but with principles similar to the bourgeois democracy. For instance, in the Belgian communists perception, socialist democracy in the Eastern socialist states was difficult to apply exactly because of an authentic democratic culture was lacking. They claimed that the level of industrialization and the very low living standard in those countries, as well as the almost non-existing democratic tradition at the moment when the communists overtook the political power constituted obstacles in the formation and efficient functioning of the actually democratic institutions. The results achieved in the process of building socialism and of raising the living standard as an output of this process created larger material bases focusing on the very issue of socialist democracy. This meant that once a level was reached in the building of socialism, its further development created a change in the quality of the methods used, a more supple and less coercive and bureaucratic in the application of the democratic socialism principles. Thus, Belgian communists explained why such were even more necessary with Czechoslovakia, where the industrial development and the pre-socialist democratic traditions, unlike other states, were not subjected to the Stalinist patterns in the process of building socialism (Nudelhole, 1968: 11).

Frequently, N. Ceaușescu's dialogues with various members of communist and socialist parties in Western Europe have generated polemics on subjects as the building of socialism in a multiparty system or the interpretation of the democracy concept. For example, N. Ceaușescu had a different view in understanding the socialist democracy compared to the Western Left parties. In a conversation with the president of the Belgian delegation, Georges Dejardin, Ceaușescu expressed his opinion that the socialist and even the communist parties in the West were looking upon democracy only in its external form.

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It is highly possible that, by this phrase, the Romanian leader thought that the socialists in this area of Europe were limited to accepting the general principles of democracy and didn't share principles of democracy such as equality-an economic one, of course, in the Marxist sense. In the same conversation, the Romanian leader considered that in the West the communist had abandoned in their discourse the principle of the economic equality in its Marxist acception. For Ceausescu, the socialist democratic principles were "those principles by which the legal working conditions are provided and the national income is properly distributed, which insure the society's participation in the country's social-economical life" (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 76/1969: 17) and through which the economic equality could be achieved, because "socialist democracy stands, mainly for the elimination of economic equality" (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 76/1969: 17).

Thus, to Ceaușescu, economic inequality was incompatible to democracy. He considered that the socialist states had already solved one of the essential issues of democracy by putting into practice the equality towards the means of production, towards the social product and towards the national income (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 76/1969: 17).

The socialist states, since they had central control mechanisms, were perceived by the western political analysts as powerful states, applying an autocratic regime. Indeed, a society where power is set on a hierarchy from the centre down, manifests a political power and a population control, but, from the economic point of view, the socialist state was destined to bankruptcy in the long run. The frailty of socialism began with the very system of centralized planning, system that wasn't even planned, nor properly controlled by the centre (Verdery, 1996: 39). Actually, authors like Katherine Verdery did not see the communist states as being powerful, but rather weak. In fact, the leaders of socialism only in part and intermittently managed to gain a positive or supportive attitude among the population they represented, meaning by that-being perceived as legit. A feature of socialist societies in the post-war Europe was that the political regimes were constantly undermined by certain forms of internal resistance or sabotage. Unfortunately, resistance in Romania was too much intimidated by an aggressive oppressive regime on all society levels, the dissident movement playing a quite weak role inside, being more audible in the expat community.

It is interesting to see that N. Ceausescu accepted the reality according to which western workers had higher incomes and enjoyed more material benefits than those in the Eastern socialist states. However, replied Ceausescu to G. Dejardin, this welfare of the western states citizens was not the result of the economic superiority of the capitalist world, but rather the result of a long historical evolution during which such societies are the heirs of empires which applied a colonial exploitation policy upon other people. Therefore, morally speaking, the praises for exceeding its own condition, of setting up a new social system by their own efforts, belonged to Romania (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 76/1969: 18).

The multiparty system and the single party in the dialogues PCR-PSB

In the communist doctrine, the single party expressed best the interests of the Soviet Union people or those of the other socialist states. The argument in favor of the single party was the idea of unity. Quite often, in the soviet propaganda writings, the party was named "single and united party". The theory of communist doctrine believed that the Western bourgeois societies were divided into social classes with opposing goals, therefore, these societies were torn apart by the fight between these social groups (Mitin, 1950: 23). To be

more precise, it was believed that these groups with their own interests were represented by political parties. On the other hand, in a society freed of class differences, such as the one governed by popular democracy, there was no space for more than one party.

In Ceausescu's opinion, one of the goals of building socialism was to defend popular democracy. According to the communist doctrine, the single party had the responsibility to make sure that the socialist system would be safe from any attack. Thus, in the name of socialist democracy, Eastern totalitarian regimes could resort to the most diverse methods to suppress any type of opposition. Paradoxically, this way, in the name of democracy, the very breach of democratic principles regarding freedom (of expression, of the press, etc) was made legit. Such was the belief upon which the single party justified its reason to exist. On the other hand, in the liberal spirit, the Western states multiparty systems offered the opportunity for debate and dialogue to all opinion groups and trends, including those who did not share or practice liberal ideas, meaning communist parties and the supporters of the providential state.

With the Romanian Communist Party, it embodied the paradoxes specific to the single party, being the part standing for the whole, the political group which, as we well know, had almost eliminated the idea of civil society, in the name of popular interest. Like the other communist parties in Western Europe, who had signed the Warsaw Agreement, but in a more radical manner, R.C.P. suppressed, through state – run means and institutions, through oppression, censorship and propaganda, the natural rights and liberties in the name of civil rights and liberties. Obviously, the word “freedom“ was not taken out of the vocabulary of the communist propaganda, being, on the contrary, assigned a new meaning and used abusively to legitimize the imposed regime.

The socialist and communist parties in the West had a significantly different situation compared to the communist parties in the Eastern Block. First of all, the Western communist parties have arisen and functioned in multiparty regimes, as a mere actor of the political scene, most of the time as part of the opposition or sometimes part of the government in a system with a very powerful opposition. The democratic game in Western Europe was not just for show, but one based on rules, a game in which the respect for the rights and liberties of the people, the existence of political opposition or that of civil society were more than just bare words. The socialist or communist parties were able to practice equality-based and state-focused convictions, on which they could build political strategies to achieve the political power, exactly because of a functional democratic framework that allowed the plurality of views.

In the acception of the states with popular democracies, the party was a superior expression, an act of maturity of a democratic regime. An intriguing aspect in the dialogues between Ceausescu and the Belgian socialist delegation in 1969 is the Romanian leader's position towards the multiparty system as part of the process of building socialism. Ceausescu considered that it was possible only if all the parties had the same point of view on the matter (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 76/1969: 20). In these conditions, he stated, the political parties had no reason to exist. In other words, they could naturally be dissolved, without being necessary to be removed by the means of the traditional Marxist-Leninist revolution. In Ceausescu's opinion, the single party was a result of the composition of all the progressive political forces, of the working class' unity and eventually of the will of the entire people. Besides, Ceausescu's position in a dialogue with G. Dejardin is more than suggestive: "We are heading towards the development of the democracy, not towards the development of the parties; on the contrary, we're heading towards the abolishing of the parties because, as society evolves to unity the contradictions would disappear (...). Of course,

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this is not an urgent problem, but in the historical development this is the problem of the unity of the working class, having a single political party. The essential issue is that the working class can evolve to government class" (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 76/1969: 21).

Ceaușescu and the Eurocommunism thesis

The main topics related to the socialist doctrine on Ceaușescu's discussion agenda with the Western communists were old debate topics even between the European socialists and communists. In Western Europe the communist parties felt the need for a new view on the way to set in a socialist regime. During such ideological debates, the trends were new and with a reforming shade, promoting the possibility of peaceful ascent to power by obeying a pluralist political framework. At the same time, by obeying such pluralist and law-based framework specific to Western countries, it also meant that within the process of building socialism, the working class' dictatorship would not have been necessary anymore.

Although such ideological issues regarding the building of socialism manifested through talks between communists and socialists/social-democrats, as early as the 60's, they would be theorize as late as 1977 in the Spanish Communist Party president's study, Santiago Carrillo, called "Eurocommunism and state" .

The dynamics of the debates within the communist movement brought to the table of dialogue also the leaders of the communist parties in Spain and Romania. Like other contacts with the leaders of Western European Communist parties, the meeting with Carrillo was part of the foreign policy line that the Communist Party was following: establishing and consolidating new relations with Western Communism in order to create opposition to the strengthening of Soviet control in the communist movement. The dialogues between the two will be about the new concept that Carrillo himself had defined: Eurocommunism. Thus, the 1967 and 1968 meetings between the two would bring to the debate the idea of the single party and the Eurocommunist thesis (Stanciu, 2014c: 154).

Thus, the international communist movement was facing reforming ideas initiated by the main Western communist parties: The Italian Communist Party, the Spanish Communist Party or the French Communist Party. It is interesting to see that such reforming trends within the international communist movement and which would later on be integrated into the concept of Eurocommunism, became, as well, dialogue topics between RCP and the Belgian communists.

Until the emergence of Eurocommunism as a distinct trend, other attempts to fragment and progressively diminish Moscow's role had been manifested. By the meeting of communist parties in 1969, USSR tried, unsuccessfully, to reestablish control over the international communist movement. The soviets' failure to rally the communist parties to Moscow led to a decrease of the pressure for uniformity, especially on the Western - European communist parties. On that background, the Western communist parties tried to identify their own ways and methods to assert themselves (Stanciu, 2014b: 300). But what was, more precisely, this Eurocommunism trend? How did Ceaușescu relate to this new concept, specific to western communist parties, emerged at the middle of the 70's?

Eurocommunism represented a political trend (emerged, as we know, long before the emergence of the concept itself) which, actually, manifested within the same Marxist-Leninist ideological limitations, but which supported an adaptation of the communist ideological framework to the realities and requirements imposed by the singularity of the western states. As said before, one of the fundamental ideas of Eurocommunism was a peaceful transition to socialism through other means the insurrectional ones legitimized by

bolshevism (Stanciu, 2014b: 363). Another trait of Eurocommunism was to support the idea that socialism could be built within a political framework in the sense of Western democracy, meaning a pluralist, parliament-based framework, in which the rise to power was achieved by open elections. Also, complying with such pluralist and law-based framework specific to Western countries meant that in the building of socialism there would be no more need for the working class's dictatorship. In the equation of his political struggle to free himself from the soviet control, Ceausescu was open to any kind of dissidence to Moscow within the international communist movement. This is how one can explain the fact that, despite the Romanian leader's partial disagreement with these Eurocommunism ideas, he would support them to a certain extent. This is understandable, since the Eurocommunism thesis contained the idea of the communism's surviving together with the political multiparty system. However, in the process of building socialism, Eurocommunism also meant to reconsider the historical, cultural, national traits of each state, which Ceausescu tried to achieve in his relation to Moscow. In other words, Ceausescu would encourage the Eurocommunism discourse, as long as it contributed to a strengthening of the communist parties' autonomy and to the weakening of the soviet domination over international communism.

In his strategy to weaken Moscow's control, Ceausescu would make use of the position of the main western communist parties (FCP, ICP or SCP), in the international communist movement, aiming to strengthen his own party's position in relation to the USSR. At the RCP's National Conference in 1977, Ceausescu stated: "the notion of Eurocommunism reflects the legitimate right of each communist party to use strategies and concepts specific to their cultural and national area". "Of course, every party appreciates it in their own manner", Ceaușescu continued, "however, we see this as the parties' concern to find, in line with the new context in their area, the way to unify the social forces involved in the battle for democratizing the society, in order to create the conditions of a passage to a new social order" (Ceaușescu, 1977: 88).

In the conversations of N. Ceausescu with the members of the Belgian communist and socialist parties, the ideas of the Eurocommunism thesis were highly debated and Ceausescu's position was moderate. As well as in the discussions with the other Western communist parties, the Romanian leader would invariably reply that the political multiparty system is just an intermediary step in the process of the unification of the progressive parties having as the final goal the single party, in this respect a natural stage of building socialism. Ceausescu's assent with the Eurocommunism ideas also ensues from the conversations with the vice-president of the Belgian Communist Party, Jean Terfve, in 1977, when Ceausescu declared that the political activities must take place in accordance with the specific realities of each country.

Thus, the most significant discussions regarding the Eurocommunism ideas can be found in Ceausescu's talks to the BCP's vice-president, Jean Terfve, in 1977. The Romanian communist leader could not overlook certain ideas that were proposing a type of communism applied in accordance with the actual conditions in each country while the political actions had to be based on "respecting each party's right to act as they see suitable" (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 177/1977: 8). It is interesting to notice Ceausescu's position who states that, even though communism can be built in various forms in Western Europe, this is not necessarily bound to lead to arguments among the communist parties or among the socialist states, on the contrary, "we need to get to a cooperation, to solidarity". It was very clear that, for Ceausescu, the brotherly ties between socialist countries were of paramount importance, especially those between parties promoting a dissident policy towards the USSR.

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In his talks with Jean Terfve, Ceausescu claimed that the Eurocommunism action is not quite clear to him, but the recorded copy of this dialogue prove the opposite. The essence of the Eurocommunism thesis is grasped quite well by the communist leader, who declared that: "We for instance find difficulty in understanding some notions such as Eurocommunism. Nevertheless, we understand that the parties want to pinpoint that they will act in line with the concrete conditions in their country as well independently. If they accept this notion, we see nothing wrong with it, although, when we discussed with some of these comrades, we failed to see it clearly" (ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 177/1977: 9).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this metamorphosis of the Western communists' perception on the ways of building socialism meant actually a reformulation of the ideological identity. The adaptation of Western communism to the political and cultural realities of each country has naturally imposed a weakening of the Soviet control. In Eastern Europe, Romania was also fighting for independence from Moscow, in a nationalist perspective. Despite his lack of sympathy for these Eurocommunism ideas, Ceausescu supports them to a certain extent. Moreover, the Romanian communist leader encourages the Eurocommunism discourse as long as it would contribute to a strengthening of autonomy of the communist parties in their relationship with the Soviet Union.

These different views between communists belonging to the USSR area of influence and the Western ones, in doctrine-related issues, cannot be simply reduced to their strategies to distance themselves from Moscow. For sure, the communists' perception on democracy, for instance, was in accordance with the political system they belonged to. One can therefore talk about liberal societies, capitalist ones and those where Leninist-like regimes were functioning. The latter were characterized by what Kenneth Jowitt called *an insulation* to the societies they governed and by the attempt to imprint into the, at the same time, the revolutionary ideal inspiring them (Copilaș, 2011: 1). Therefore, with the Leninist regimes, the ideology and policy were fundamentally linked. In the context of political pluralism, the Western communist parties, not being subjected to a totalitarian regime, had the liberty to assimilate on the doctrinary level, certain ideas of the liberal-type democrats, being themselves part of the democratic game based on an alternation of political power.

On the national as well as on the international level, the doctrine of the socialist democracies used the term "bourgeois" as a pattern. Therefore, concepts like democracy, human rights, international democracy were reinterpreted getting their own semantic content. In these circumstances, the possibility of authentic communication between a regime with a popular democracy and a "bourgeois" one was very low. Basically, what Marxism - Leninism did was to recover expressions used by the liberal doctrine only to integrate them later into their own speech. Thus, the socialist doctrine developed a counter-speech in order to make the bourgeois way of thinking legit no more (Copilaș, 2011: 1). The western capitalist regimes were accused of miming democracy and that its principles were only used to favor the "dominant classes" versus the large working classes. Also, western democracy was accused of using false human rights which were in fact only ways to disguise the individual rights of those "exploiting" the masses. Actually, the communists' rhetoric, and we are referring to the ones in the socialist states, was built on accusations against the capitalist states. Ceausescu's dialogues with the Belgian communists and socialists stand proof for this. The attitude of the Romanian Communist Party secretary in ideological issues was relentless, and his reproach to the liberal regimes and to the principles on which they were based, was an

open one. But, as we already mentioned, the context of the 70's brings into the RCP's doctrinary speech certain shades. Ceausescu's dissident policy to USSR led to a nationalistic approach of communism and of the way it was applied in Romania. The Eurocommunism thesis contained ideas that overlapped those in Ceausescu's nationalist speech, like applying communism in traditional social-cultural conditions of society. In his talks with the Belgian communist delegates, the Romanian leader gets less radical when approaching the topic of the type of communism that was emerging as theory. On the other hand, Ceausescu was aware that a new face of communism in the west was leading to a weakening of the communist parties towards Moscow, which the RCP wanted.

The discussions between the Romanian and the Belgian communists, held mainly between 1966 and 1980, show also their perception on the communist doctrine. After World War II, during the romantic period of the western communists, they were much more connected, from the doctrinary point of view, to the Marxist-Leninist thesis. Coexisting in regimes with multiple parties, the western communist parties start developing "autonomous" trends of communist doctrine.

On the other hand, Ceausescu's meetings with Belgian communists show his relentless position related to the issue of democratic principles, to that of the idea of a single party and of the existence of more than one party, yet one can also discover a certain "tolerance" manifested by him in regard to the Eurocommunism thesis, as long as it meant a new method to weaken the soviet control over the international communist movement.

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