



ORIGINAL PAPER

The perception of the West upon the Romanian transition after the Romanian Revolution from December 1989. A historical perspective. The 1990's period

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes from a historical point of view the opinions of Western analysts and historians (but also Romanians - especially within foreign papers) the Romanian Revolution and the Transition period from 1989 till 2000. Firstly we have studied the authors opinions pointing in some cases our opinion as well. In this paper we have used the narrative (showing the opinions and indirectly the events) but also the analytical method. We consider that in 1989 we are dealing with a revolution and that from 1990 till 2000 the Iliescu and Constantinescu regimes have assured a transition towards democracy, but a transition characterized by many problems. At the same time we have analyzed some economic problems and the geopolitical situation of Romania in the twentieth century.

Keywords: *revolution; transition; political regimes.*

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The Iliescu regime

In this paper we have analyzed especially the opinions of Western journalists and historians but also of Romanian analysts whose writings were taken from foreign journals or books. In our opinion the events from 1989 constitute a revolution. The thousands, then the hundreds of thousands of people who got out in the street, confronted the regime and its order forces to overthrow the communist regime led by Nicolae Ceaușescu (Davies, 2006). No matter how leftist was the regime led by Ion Iliescu (Hlihor, 2014: 16)-in the period 1989-2000 we are dealing clearly with a transition from the communist dictatorship regime to a democratic, multi-party and free market regime.

The foreign authors did not hesitate to analyze both the events from 1989 and the transition period from the 1990's. In the French space, many times it was accredited the idea of a coup d'état in December 1989 and of the continuation of the communist regime with a powerful leftist one, till 1996 (Lucon, 2016). Some authors of the Anglo-Saxon space are more favorable to the idea of a revolution.

One example is Peter Siani Davies. He accurately describes the Romania Revolution from 1989-the events regarding the evacuation of the preacher Laszlo Tokes, the revolutionary movement in Timisoara, the revolution movement in Bucharest, the battle of the demonstrators with the order forces, Ceaușescu's speech on the 21st December, his escape and then trial, the aftermath fights but also the ascension of the National Salvation Front (Davies, 2006).

Another interesting factor is the fact that many cited authors in Davies book were dealing with the Romanian space from the 1980's. They accurately observed the decaying of the regime connected with the lack of energy, of food, of warm water, the dropping of investments in the educational and health systems (Jackson, 1989: 313; Sampson, 1984-1986: 42; Sampson, 1989: 221).

Historically speaking, the communist regime was collapsing and the opening policies followed by the United States and the Soviet Union (Shipler, 1987) probably orientated even more the collective Romanian mental towards rebellion.

The Anglo-Saxon historians were very familiar with the Romanian space and its problems.

Peter Siani Davies and Constantin Hlihor show us that, after 1989, many were towards a left conservatism, with a slow process of reform- and as a proof we had the National Salvation Front-The Democrat Social Party (FSN-PDSR) government from 1990 till 1996 (Hlihor, 2014:16, Davies, 2006: 345).

The author Tom Gallagher (Gallagher, 2001:390) considers that the first Iliescu regime was situated between a type of Western democracy and an autocratic one. Basically, according to the author, the Iliescu regime oscillated between searching better relations with the West and an autocracy (Gallagher, 2001:394). In fact, according to him, till 1992 the regime was not close to the West, giving as an example the fact that: the ambassadors were from the old guard (Gallagher, 2001: 391, 392); a treaty with the Soviet Union was signed (not ratified) (Gallagher, 2001: 392); the miners violence took place (Carter, 1991: 59, 60).

After that the regime got more close to the West (Romania became member of the European Council, a member of the Partnership for Peace, became a candidate for joining NATO). The author considers that the regime wanted Romania to enjoy first of all a good financial relation with the West without becoming a part of the West. But

Romania had to pass the NATO admission criteria- as a consequence it had to keep account of these criteria.

It is considered that a large part of the Iliescu mandates from the 90's were more connected rather as a façade with the European values. But Romania needed the financial and even political support of the West and that is why the Iliescu regime got closer to the West (Gallagher, 2001: 394, 395).

Marius Oprea considers that it was a reform but at the same time a continuation in the first two Iliescu regimes (Oprea, 2010) in the economy it was a huge part owned by the state, in the bureaucratic system we have a rotation of the personnel -many from the old communist regime (in my view it was very hard to change the personnel).

Marius Oprea also speaks about a coup d'état by bringing the miners (Oprea, 2010). It was not a coup d'état but it was an action which was turned against the human rights of the demonstrators from the University Square. From our point of view it could not have been a coup d'état because FSN was already in power, but its leaders probably feared that they could lose the power in front of the demonstrators and the Historical Parties. On the other hand the author is tough by accusing the communist inheritance from the transition period towards the ex-Securitate but also the denigration campaigns regarding the opposition (Oprea, 2010).

The multi-party system cannot be denied till a certain point. If we apply the realist theory within the internal relations in Romania, we can notice that there was a balance of power between-The Council of National Salvation Front (CFSN), The Historical Parties, The University Square demonstrators and then PDSR-The Democrat Party (PD), The National Peasant Christian and Democratic Party (PNȚCD), The National Liberal Party (PNL), The Hungarian Democratic Union from Romania (UDMR), The Great Romania Party (PRM).

An interesting fact is that the French Wikipedia refers to the miners violence action as being initiated by the ex-communist power (Wikipedia, 2017a).

In the Book Post Communism and the Media in Eastern Europe (edited by Patrick H. O'Neil, within the chapter written by Richard A. Hall) we are shown that in the first Iliescu mandates the declassification of the Securitate files was not promoted. Some other ex European communist countries were proceeding to the declassification of the files and their public control in order not to be used politically (Hall,1997:106) According to the author the Romanian Information Service SRI did not have all the communist files of the former Securitate (Hall,1997: 106).

Richard A. Hall considers that at the beginning of the 90's the political and civil institutions were weak and not all the members of the intelligence were on Iliescu's side (some had lost their position, their job or even their freedom) (Hall,1997:106).

In 1996 there were nine intelligence organizations and many from the ex Securitate were infiltrated in the Opposition, being against the regime and taking advantage of the precarious position, politically and economically of the Opposition, and of the past of some members of the Opposition (Hall,1997: 107).

According to Ron Tempest and David Lauter the great weakness of Iliescu (considered capable otherwise) was exactly the communist past (Tempest and Lauter, 1989). Ron Tempest and David Lauter had written this article on the 27th of December 1989. They considered that Iliescu and implicitly Romania could have become very close to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the authors showed that FSN was the only political force at that moment in Romania, but also that some demonstrators were against the communist past of some members of the National Salvation Front.

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Other authors are showing the big problems of the first Iliescu regimes-the communist past, the FSN decision to candidate as a political party, the orientation towards a slow reform regarding the free market (East and Thomas, 2010).

Alina Mungiu- Pippidi and Dragos Bogdan consider that in 1990 Romania had a very bad grade at the human rights chapter. But through the adoption of the Constitution in 1991, this has changed. Furthermore, in the Romanian Constitution, regarding the human rights the international law was more powerful than the internal law. Being accused with the failure to comply with the human rights, the Iliescu regime and its party made important steps including the adherence to the Council of Europe in 1993, the ratification of the European Convention of the Human Rights, the application for joining the European Union, in 1995 (Bogdan and Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013: 71, 72).

In the same book we have the Romanian population percentage who wanted to adhere to the European Union-80%. More than that, in the period of the 90's and the 2000's the leaders tried a powerful juridical reform (Bogdan and Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013: 72,73).

Clearly we are dealing with the idea that the old structures have taken a part of the power after 1989. Essentially in this sense was the fact that the 8th point of the Timișoara revolution was not taken into account (the 8th point stated that that no one from the ex-communist structure should be within the new leadership of Romania).

On the web site of Trial International it appears the accusation of crimes against humanity (Trial International, 2017), an accusation formulated against the ex-president Ion Iliescu. Along these accusations we think calling the miners was a grave mistake of the Iliescu regime, a mistake towards a part of the civilian population, which were demonstrating. A solution would have been negotiation, in the worst case using order forces, or calling new elections-but certainly not calling the miners, but probably, at that time, the Romanian state and its political regime were pretty weak. We consider that the gravest mistake of the Iliescu regime was connected with the calling of the miners.

On the other hand the political regimes in Romania, till 2007, were quite stable. This is due to the fact that the Romanian society was at that time quite optimistic and that the Romanian politicians were legitimating themselves through the vote of the citizens. Unfortunately, slowly, this legitimization began to disappear.

How can we explain the optimism of the 90's?

First of all, an important part of the population participated strongly and directly in overthrowing the communist dictatorship having, from historical point of view, a great belief in its own forces. Secondly, the intellectual class was quite strong and not so dominated by internal fights and, thirdly, the hope towards the West was great, the European Union not having its recent problems from now.

In 1996 we have a democratic transfer of power from the Democratic Socialist Romanian Party to the Democrat Convention (National Peasant Christian and Democrat Party, National Liberal Party, Social Democrat Party, Ecologic Romanian Party, the Civil Alliance Party, the Hungarian Democratic Union from Romania) a coalition which successfully proposed Emil Constantinescu as president, and was joined from the second presidential tour by the Democratic Party (Wikipedia, 2017b).

The Constantinescu regime

The Constantinescu regime led even more to the fortification of the Romanian option regarding Romania joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union (actions which were continued also on the Iliescu-Năstase mandate). At

the same time the regime was confronted with government instability and problems generated by the desire and the actions of its governments regarding privatization.

The privatizations were connected many times with controversies. At the same time we have the president's decision to back the NATO actions regarding Kosovo crises.

Lavinia Stan considers that the Constantinescu regime had great problems. First of all the ministry positions were given according to the results of the elections-many were keeping in mind the idea of political interest not that of reforms and many times the administrative actions on the long term were avoided. At the same time, it is shown, that the leaders of the coalition had a communication problem with the population, not succeeding in explaining their programs. Furthermore the coalition did not assume its own mistakes blaming the mistakes of the past of the Democrat Socialist Romanian Party (Stan: 2010).

The authorities tried sometimes to open the archives of Securitate (especially regarding those who had positions in the central or local administration) but without notable results (Stan: 2010).

The authors of the article *Shaping Change* consider that the regime led by Constantinescu did not succeed in imposing powerful changes in the management of the Romanian state (Shaping Change, 2018).

Tom Gallagher considers that the Romanian electoral option from 1996 was orientated to parties which were more credible to the West, with other words the Romanian Democratic Convention and the Democratic Party were more credible in the West (Gallagher, 2001: 391).

Dennis Deletant shows us that Constantinescu made powerful changes at the top of the intelligence agencies. (Deletant, 2004: 514, 515).

The problem of the connection with the former Securitate was very powerful in the 90's (Deletant, 2004: 515-516). We have a legitimate revolution which has overthrown the communist regime but at the same time we have powerful structure which could hardly have disappeared over night.

International Relations Regarding Romania in the 1990's

Starting with the 90's we are dealing with a transition and translation of power between East (the Soviet Union, the Central and Eastern Europe) and West (the United States but also Great Britain, France, the Federal Republic of Germany and then, Germany). Basically, we are dealing with a transfer of power from East to West, the West occupying or reoccupying a central place in the policies, economies and the societies from the Central and Eastern Europe. It is true that Romania signed a treaty with the Soviet Union, an un-ratified treaty. The Romanian leaders, both from power and opposition had a strong option for adherence to NATO and the European Union, for reintegration in the West. We have to mention that in the 90's there was an explosion of goods which came from the East but also from the West. It was an explosion of consuming goods-food, clothes, after so many shortages, and there was an import of Western culture (books, movies, music). We can state that the 90's were a starting point for the prosperity of the 2000's.

The Problem of Romanian Politics

Romania has passed in the last 100 of years through numerous changes in the political regimes. It started with a democracy, then Carol the Second's dictatorship, then

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the dictatorship of the Iron Guard and Ion Antonescu, the dictatorship of Antonescu, the communist dictatorship and after 1989, a democracy. I would argue that is very hard for the Romanian collective memory (even at a subconscious level) to deal with this type of troubled history. From 1918 we had 20 years of democracy, 51 years of dictatorship (both far right and far left) and then, 29 years of democracy (even if a troubled one). In the beginning I talked about the problems of the intellectual class. For a state a powerful intellectual class is very important (no matter if it is liked or disliked). A powerful intellectual group can at its turn give a meaning to the life of a state (through ideas, works), and even a purpose. We had many important intellectuals in the period after 1918 (Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Lucian Blaga, Marin Sorescu, Nichita Stănescu - and the list can continue). The problem of the Romanian society is that it suffered many changes - not only regarding the political regimes-but also regarding the social regimes. After 1989, the Romanian society is dealing with Globalization, the opportunity but sometimes the necessity of working abroad, and sometimes with the lack of jobs at home. After 1989, many industries were abandoned and that meant not only the loss of jobs but also the loss of social safe systems for those regions. Of course the new wave of globalization (financial globalization) acted in a powerful way –in the Romanian society many are working in the banking system, in multinational companies, in Information Technology. At the same time in January 2018, the unemployment rate was 4.6% (Mediafax, 1 martie 2018), compared with that of Germany of 3.55 (Trading Economic, Germany Unemployment Rate.30.05.2018), or with that of Great Britain of 4.3% (Trading Economics, 17.04.2018. Regarding the economic sectors from the Internal Brut Product with have the industry -23%, the commerce-20% from the Internal Brut Product, the information and communication -6% from the Internal Brut Product, agriculture-4.9% in 2007, and constructions-3.9% (Anghel, 2017).

The geopolitical situation of Romania was not simple being trapped in the Cold War. In fact, we have an interesting parallel, while Charles De Gaulle has played an independent card of France towards Washington, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, and at the beginning, Nicolae Ceausescu, played an independent card towards Moscow. We can say that the Romanian leaders found a middle way between Moscow and Washington cultivating good political relations with France, Great Britain, and Germany Federal Republic.

The middle way was very important for many geopolitical players: France from the 1960's till today (Gaddis, 2007: 138-141). Romania from 1960's till 1970's (Duțu, 2007: 173, 174, 175) when it adopted a new Stalinist middle way (Duțu, 2007: 183) Poland in the 1980's. Even the Soviet Union, during Gorbachev adopted a middle way towards its old hard line ideology (using new reformatory policies in economy but also in politics) (Duțu, 2007:183) Starting with the 60's there were some levels of the Cold War: direct confrontation or collaboration between Washington and Moscow; the relationships between and within the intermediate states: France, Great Britain, Germany Federal Republic, Germany Democratic Republic, Romania, Poland, Hungary etc.

Romania has played well its card of “independence” till the 1970's; it opposed the invasion of Czechoslovakia (Betea), it developed a strong economic collaboration with France especially, and it had a good standard of living compared with the 50's. But all that changed in the 80's when the leadership adopted a hard post Stalinist stance (Duțu, 2007: 208). Externally we have the relations between Romania and countries like: Iran, Iraq, but the most important relation, within the Cold War logic, and also within

the neo Stalinist line of the Romanian leaders, was that with the Soviet Union (Davies, 2006).

In the 1980's Romania lost the "American Most Favored Nation Clause" and from an European point of view its only backup was the relation with the Soviet Union and with the hard liners of the Warsaw Pact. In 1988, 1989 Ceausescu knew this but it was too late because a part of the Romanian population rebelled and the Soviet leadership renounced somehow to its Empire from Eastern Europe (the Warsaw Pact).

The rebellion of the Romanian people plus the new reality of the Cold War was fatal to the communist regime in Romania.

On the other hand in the 1990's we have a new geopolitical situation. The Warsaw Pact and also, later, the Soviet Union collapsed and part of the Central and Eastern Europe were becoming more and more close to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. It was a translation power process from East to West (accepted and promoted by the Western leaders, by Eastern and Central European leaders and reluctantly accepted by Russian leaders).

On the other hand we have the Yugoslav problem: the Declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia, the wars between them and Serbia, the wars in Bosnia and, later, the Kosovo war.

At the beginning of the 1990's Romania played well its card of neutrality tilting towards the West. With all its problems, externally Romania was a stability factor in Eastern Europe and in the Balkans. As stated before, the Iliescu regime and the Constantinescu regime, for better or for worse assured a transition from dictatorship to democracy, and from a Warsaw Pact member to a Western ally. During the Kosovo war, Romania had a neutral and at the same time an ally position towards the West, granting its air space to NATO aviation. It was a risky decision of the Constantinescu regime giving the fact that many Romanians opposed that decision.

From an interventional military point of view Romania adapted well to the new geopolitical situation (Hlihor: 4-8), participating at Western military operations (NATO, UN) in Bosnia-Hertehovina, Macedonia and later, Iraq and Afghanistan. The Romanian military proved to be a valuable player in these operations.

From our point of view improving political, economic, military but also cultural ties with the neighboring countries (like Poland and the Balkans) will be a step in Romanian foreign relations.

From an ideological point of view (but from the perspective of geopolitics or international relations) Ceausescu regime had more than one problem. Firstly, the conservatism of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher was gaining hearts and minds in the front of the communist ideology. Secondly, and more importantly, Gorbachev was changing Soviet communism by: retreating or giving liberty to the Warsaw Treaty countries; changing the economics in the Soviet Union; changing the politics in the Soviet Union (for the first time the government becomes more powerful than the Communist Party, and later other parties are accepted).

In the 80's, in Romania the president was more important than the party but in a neo-Stalinist sense and we can state that Romanian leaders did not adapt neither to the West, but neither to the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, at first glimpse, after 1989, as for all Central and East European Countries, the most favorable road in foreign relations was acceding in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

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For the Romanian collective mind the idea acceding the EU and NATO meant a continuation of the freedom process (started in 1989) with a lot of advantages at the security level, at the political level and at the welfare level. At the same time the geopolitics of the North Atlantic Treaty space plus the European Union Space and the European space in general was different in the 1990's compared with the years of the 2010 period. It is true there was the Yugoslav problem but in the years of 2010's there were the problems of Greece, of Syria and the migrants, of Ukraine and Russia, of Brexit and of the disunity of the European Union. If the European Union was regarded as an ally but at the same time a possible competitor of the United States in our days the European Union has many, many problems.

And for that, we consider that Romania has to have a good relation with the American superpower, with the big powers (Germany, Great Britain, France) but also with the Balkan space and with the Eastern European Countries (Poland, The Baltic States). It is true in its history Romania was many times caught in the great powers game, but many times in the Cold War and after the Cold War it managed to deal with this game, promoting its own interests (promoting its own interests is decisive for a state).

Conclusion

As a conclusion we can state that despite the violence from the beginning, and the ministerial changes from the late 90's, this period represents a powerful transition from the totalitarian regime to a democratic one. Both regimes - of Iliescu and Constantinescu, opted for the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and for Western values. We consider that the regimes led by Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu assured on the long term the transition towards democracy.

Furthermore Romania played and played well in the 1990's the stability card, a fact that led to Romania's integration in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This paper has showed that the foreign authors did not hesitate to analyze the Romanian political, social and economic space starting with the 1980's. We have as an example Peter Siani-Davies who analyses very well the Romanian Revolution but also the communist context from the 1980's. Tom Gallagher considers that the first Iliescu regime was situated between a Western type of democracy and an autocratic regime. We consider that this was generated also by the fact that Romania was under communist rule from 1947 to 1989 so, for 42 years (if we consider 1947 as the starting point of communist rule giving the fact that the Romanian Communist forces started to gain a lot of power since 1944). This is a very important fact because the power was concentrated at the top of the party, at the top of the state and of the security services. We have analyzed Marius Oprea's writings who deals also with the bringing the miners. We consider that it would be very interestingly to make a sociological and historical description and analysis for the Romanian collective mind in the 1990's giving some important facts: we had at least 42 years of communist rule, we had an important and somehow powerful intellectual class but also we had a powerful and numerous working class. We had the National Salvation Front and we had the historical parties, The National Peasant Christian and Democratic Party (PNȚCD), The National Liberal Party (PNL). There were also The Hungarian Democratic Union from Romania (UDMR) and The Great Romania Party (PRM). We consider that it would be very interestingly to analyze the Romanian perception and preferences about the Romanian political parties from the 1990's period till 2018. In this period there were numerous generations, many

political events (internally but also externally) and the media channels became more diverse and personalized. At the same time dealing with the past can be a problem as Lavinia Stan shows us the problem regarding the declassification of the Securitate files. At the same time we showed that the Romanian public was very inclined to the West (the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization). It would be very important to analyze what exactly meant and means the West to the Romanians starting with 1989 till 2018 because many things have changed also in the West. From a political and geopolitical point of view the West is very different now from what it was in the 1990's not to mention the 1950's or 1960's. As we stated the biggest problems in the 1990's for the European Union were the conflicts from ex-Yugoslavia and the further integration of new countries. In the years of 2010 the European Union dealt with the economic crisis of Greece, with Ukraine and Russia and with the Brexit (and there are even more problems than these). The European Union meant for the Romanians first of all opportunities for working places. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization meant security, collaboration and the reforming of the Army. All these things could not have been possible in the 1980's. In Europe, the end of Cold War was given by several important facts: Soviet Union was losing the Cold War and under Gorbachev rule was facing numerous reforms, the western ideologies were becoming attractive for the countries from Eastern and Central Europe and the populations from those countries rebelled against communism.

From this point of view the Iliescu and Constantinescu regimes were very important because they assured a transition between communism and democracy, between communism and capitalism.

Analyzing Western views but also Romanian view upon the transition but also upon the communist regime is very important because it helps us to understand better our own past. And we can state that it was a troubled past.

I would argue that the Romanian recent history is a clear case were the internal situation combined with the geopolitical situation defines the main events in politics but also affects the social and economic areas as we can notice clearly in the period of the 1990's.

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