

## THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA AND THE MOLDAVIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC IN THE MATRIX OF BREZHNEV'S SOCIALISM AND CEAUȘESCU'S NATIONAL COMMUNISM. THE HIGH-LEVEL VISITS (1976)

Olesea PALAMARJA 

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania  
e-mail: olesea\_palamarja@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *The Romanian-Moldovan rapports in the post-war era were rather a reflection of those between Bucharest and Moscow. Although there had been registered reciprocal activities among the organizations, which were functioning alongside the Council of Ministers or the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova, there were rare remarkable moments. Among these, one can mention the presence of a Romanian delegation led by Nicolae Ceaușescu in Chișinău on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1976. It was the first visit made by a Romanian head of state to the MSSR during the Communist regime, followed by both a visit of the General Secretary of the Soviet Union Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev in the same year in Bucharest and of a delegation led by Ivan Bodiul.*

*The Romanian delegation's visit coincided with the 36<sup>th</sup> formation anniversary of the Soviet Moldova. In the context of disagreements, which were affecting the relationships between Bucharest and Moscow, the visit in Chișinău wanted to be a chance to „freshen up” the connections of USSR with the Socialist Republic of Romania. The acceptance of invitation by the Romanian leader was interpreted as a gesture of renunciation at Bessarabia. At the end of their stay in the Soviet Moldova, the Romanian part launched an invitation to the hosts to come to Romania. The visit of the Moldovan delegation took place at the end of the same year, but it was preceded by the arrival of Leonid Brezhnev in Bucharest. At the same time, in 1976 there were discussed the Treaty regarding the Soviet-Romanian border status, the cooperation and assistance in borders issues.*

*The year 1976 marked a development of the Soviet/Moldovan-Romanian relations, in the context in which the Kremlin, seconded by the party leadership in Chișinău, consistently sought to limit as much as possible the contacts of the inhabitants from both sides of the Prut River.*

**Keywords:** *Romania, Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, communism, high-level visit, Ivan Bodiul, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Leonid Brezhnev.*

**Rezumat:** *Relațiile dintre Republica Socialistă România și Republica Sovietică Socialistă Moldovenească în matricea socialismului brejnevist și a comunismului*

**național ceaușist. Vizitele la nivel înalt (1976).** Raporturile româno-moldovenești din perioada postbelică au fost mai mult o reflexie a relațiilor dintre București și Moscova. În pofida derulării unor activități bilaterale pe linia organismelor care funcționau pe lângă Consiliul de Miniștri sau Comitetul Central al Partidului Comunist Moldovenesc, au fost puține momente marcante. În rândul evenimentelor importante se numără vizita la Chișinău în zilele de 2 și 3 august 1976, a unei delegații conduse de Nicolae Ceaușescu. A fost prima vizită efectuată de un șef de stat român în RSSM în perioada comunistă, urmată de deplasarea la București, în același an, a lui Leonid Brejnev, secretarul general al Partidului Comunist al Uniunii Sovietice, dar și a unei delegații conduse de Ivan Bodiul.

Vizita delegației române a coincis cu celebrarea celei de-a 36-a aniversări de la formarea Moldovei Sovietice. În contextul disensiunilor care afectau relațiile dintre București și Moscova, vizita la Chișinău se dorea a fi o șansă de „înviorare” a legăturilor dintre URSS cu RSR. Acceptarea invitației de către liderul român a fost interpretată ca un gest de renunțare la Basarabia. La finalul șederii în Moldova Sovietică, partea română a lansat invitația către gazde de a veni în România. Vizita delegației moldovene s-a produs la finele aceluiași an, fiind însă precedată de venirea lui Leonid Brejnev în București. Totodată, în anul 1976 s-a discutat pe marginea textului Tratatului privind regimul frontierei de stat sovieto-române, colaborarea și asistența mutuală în probleme de frontieră.

Anul 1976 a marcat o dezvoltare a relațiilor sovieto/moldo-române, în contextul în care Kremlinul, secondat de conducerea de partid de la Chișinău, a urmărit cu consecvență să limiteze cât mai mult contactele locuitorilor de pe ambele maluri ale râului Prut.

**Résumé: Les relations entre la République Socialiste de Roumanie et la République Socialiste Soviétique Moldave dans la matrice du socialisme de Brejnev et du communisme national de Ceaușescu. Les visites à haut niveau (1976).** Les rapports entre la Roumanie et la Moldavie dans l'après-guerre étaient plutôt un reflet des relations entre Bucarest et Moscou. Bien que des activités réciproques aient été enregistrées entre les organisations fonctionnant auprès du Conseil des ministres ou du Comité Central du Parti Communiste Moldave, il y a eu peu de moments importants. Parmi ceux-ci, on peut mentionner la présence d'une délégation roumaine conduite par Nicolae Ceaușescu à Chișinău le 2 et le 3 août 1976. Il s'agissait de la première visite effectuée par un président roumain dans la RSSM pendant la période communiste, suivie du déplacement à Bucarest du secrétaire général du Parti Communiste de l'Union Soviétique, Leonid Brejnev, mais aussi d'une délégation dirigée par Ivan Bodiul.

La visite de la délégation roumaine dans la capitale soviétique a coïncidé avec la célébration du 36-e anniversaire de la fondation de la Moldavie Soviétique. Dans le contexte des dissensions qui affectaient les relations entre Bucarest et Moscou, la visite à Chișinău voulut être une occasion de « rafraîchissement » des liens entre l'URSS et la RSR. On interpréta l'acceptation de l'invitation par le dirigeant roumain comme un geste de renoncement à la Bessarabie. À la fin du séjour en Moldavie soviétique, la partie roumaine invita les hôtes venir en Roumanie. La visite de la délégation moldave se produisit à la fin de la même année ;

*l'arrivée de Leonid Brejnev à Bucarest la précéda. D'ailleurs, en 1976, on discuta sur le texte du Traité concernant le statut de la frontière d'Etat soviéto-roumaine, la collaboration et l'assistance mutuelle dans les problèmes douaniers.*

*L'année 1976 marqua le développement des relations soviéto/moldo-roumaines, dans le contexte où le Kremlin, secondé par les dirigeants du parti de Chişinău, suivirent avec conséquence à limiter le plus les contacts des habitants des deux rives de la rivière Prout.*

## INTRODUCTION

The preparations and the proximity of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe which was to take place at Helsinki in 1975, represented at the beginning of the seventh decade of the XX<sup>th</sup> century a possibility and some hope as well to approach the topic of Bessarabia within this international forum. Among the Bessarabians who actively involved themselves and expressed their position and desire „for another state to raise this issue” at the European Conference was Pantelimon Halippa. Their greatest expectations were in Romania, which after its 1964 visit to The People's Republic of China (PRC) bothered Moscow, especially as in a bigger context, the issue of the Romanian territories occupied by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was tackled in China. Practically, this is the moment when Bessarabia “comes back” on the Romanian political agenda but without being an official reference point. There followed moments such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and also other situations in which the leader's opinion from Bucharest was different from the one in Moscow. In time the rapports among the former and the Romanian-Moldovan ones, respectively met periods in which the tensions were more or less fuelled by the mentioning of the aspects and problems that did not please the Soviet counterpart. However, the official delegation of Romania who took part in the Conference in Helsinki signed alongside other 34 participating countries-The Helsinki Final Act. Among other aspects, the document included the principle of “inviolability of a state's borders” which existed at the time, in other words, it was a “victory” of the USSR regarding the occupied foreign territories after the Second World War, which meant preserving the rights over Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, the Hertsa Region).

After three decades from the Second World War, meanwhile Bessarabia being part of the Soviet Union, there were still people however, who acted in any imaginable way to make themselves heard in Bucharest. From this viewpoint, one must mention the example of the same Pantelimon Halippa who in a petition to

Nicolae Ceaușescu in the autumn of 1975 was writing: "We neither have the right to resign, nor to be quiet when the blood of our brothers is at stake. We mustn't be quiet for the socialist harmony and brotherhood's sake either".<sup>1</sup>

Despite all insistence and persistence but especially by taking a high risk, the militants for the unification of Bessarabia and Romania did not have the support of Bucharest, which they may have wanted the most. However, the Romanians did not open this "old" topic of discussion with their Soviet partners on purpose, without totally denying its existence, though. As some historians write: "The Soviets were not pleased with the Romanian independent politics, but their constant, biggest concern was based on the leader's frequent trials to present publicly the historical truth about Bessarabia, fact which was totally in opposition with the USSR's interests, having as a main goal the claim over the former Romanian territories".<sup>2</sup>

Considering these disputes, on the right of the Prut the atmosphere was becoming extremely tense, and the local authorities in Chișinău intensified the anti-Romanian propaganda. The First Secretary of the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM), Ivan Bodiul was not secretive about the fact that the entire propaganda campaign was meant both against the political course of action from The Socialist Republic of Romania (SRR) and "the nationalism" from the MSSR and its main goal was to decrease the contact between the Romanians from both banks of the River Prut. This thing happened even if within The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova or alongside the Council of Ministers were functioning certain organizations, which theoretically dealt with the Romanian-Moldovan bilateral cooperation. Here one can mention: The Intelligence and International Relationships Department or the Friendship Society. Their activity, among other things indicates that in reality, Chișinău with Moscow's approval was "considerably limiting" the number of citizens from the SRR who were coming to the MSSR and the MSSR's citizens who were visiting the SRR by using the "private visas". Moreover, the institutions responsible for meeting the tourists from the SRR had to make sure that "the groups of Romanian tourists would be accompanied by the best trained and the most mature from a political point of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ion Constantin, *Problema Basarabiei în discuțiile româno-sovietice din timpul Războiului Rece 1945-1989* [The Problem of Bessarabia in the Romanian-Soviet Talks during the Cold War 1945-1989], București, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2015, p. 215

<sup>2</sup> Ioan Popa, Luiza Popa, *Românii, Basarabia și Transnistria* [Romanians, Bessarabia and Transdnistria], București, Fundația Europeană Titulescu, Centrul de Studii Strategice, 2009, p. 215.

view and the main employees from Inturist”.<sup>3</sup>

One must admit that the disputes between Bucharest and Moscow did not stop after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. The controversies on historical issues even escalated after signing this act. In addition, there was a common belief that the agreements reached within the Conference had to be considered as a basis of identifying “the solutions corresponding to all problems which existed in Europe”.

The animosities felt at the Kremlin towards Romania also increased due to the received support from China. Therefore, in 1976 there appeared in the magazine “Lishi Yanjiu” (“Historical Researches”), published in Beijing a long article with the title “The Aggressiveness and Expansion of the Tsarist Russia over Romania and the Bessarabian Issue”. These situations in which Romania obviously exceeded certain permission limits made Moscow interfere directly by involving in the “political ways”. Thereby, in the spring of the year 1976, Konstantin Katuşev, the Secretary of The Soviet Union Communist Party who was dealing with establishing the connection among the Communist Parties came to Bucharest for “friendly” talks together with General Alexei Epişev, the political deputy of the Soviet Army Commander. After lengthy discussions, they reached an agreement to use certain reciprocally accepted terms regarding 1812, 1918, 1940. The Romanian officials acknowledged the existence of the MSSR but they did not accept the idea that between the Dniester and the Prut there is a people different from the Romanian one - “a Moldovan people” or “a Moldovan nation”. In addition, Romania was about to declare that it did not have any territory issues with The Soviet Union and accept that it would not publish any allegations that would contradict these official statements.<sup>4</sup> Willing to be as convincing as possible in front of Katuşev, the Romanian leader read him a fragment from the speech draft, which he was to deliver at the Culture and Socialist Education Congress that had been programmed for June 1976, in which the latter claimed that Romania did not have any territorial issues with the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

As follows, on 2nd June 1976, in his speech within the Culture and Socialist Education Congress, the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party

---

<sup>3</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>4</sup> Gheorghe Cojocaru, *Confruntarea sovieto-română pe frontul ideologic din RSS Moldovenească (1968-1978)* [The Soviet-Romanian Confrontation on the Ideological Field in the MSSR], Iaşi, Tipo Moldova, 2011, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Ştefan Andrei, *Explicaţia unei declaraţii explozive a lui N. Ceauşescu la Congresul Educaţiei Politice şi al Educaţiei Socialiste (2-4 iunie 1976)* [The Explanation of a Fiery Declaration given by N. Ceauşescu at the Political and Socialist Education Congress (2-4 June 1976)], in „Flacăra lui Adrian Păunescu” [Adrian Păunescu's Flame], nr. 7, 13 octombrie 2018.

(RCP) declared that Romania considers as both “a national and international duty” to do its best so that “some inherited from the past issues, created by the oppressive classes’ policies should not overshadow the collaboration and the solidarity” between the parties and the peoples from both countries. In addition to this, N. Ceaușescu declared: *“Romania has no territorial or any other problems with the Soviet Union or the other neighbouring socialist countries. We want the borders between Romania and the other neighbouring states to be borders of friendships and collaboration to fight and work together for Socialism and Communism, for world peace and collaboration.”*<sup>6</sup>

On the one hand, in Moscow the interest was that of establishing a calm relationship with Bucharest, on the other hand, in 1976 there were debates in Chișinău on extra measures *to intensify the Romanian nationalist propaganda that was ruining the USSR’s interests.*<sup>7</sup>

#### **THE EVOLUTION OF THE RAPPORTS BETWEEN THE MSSR AND THE SRR DURING THE YEAR 1976**

During the year 1976 the Romanian Soviet relationships were in one way or another “calm”, at least this is what we infer from the Romanian leader’s softer attitude who publicly denied the existence of any territorial or any other type of requirement towards the USSR and any other socialist country. One must mention the fact that the situation remained tense in Chișinău, where the anti-Romanian policy remained constant. All the measures were taken with Moscow’s approval.

As a proof, one must mention that the year 1976 started with the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> January of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova presided by I. Bodiul. In that meeting there was discussed the decision of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union Communist Party *“regarding the supplementary measures in the ideological working field on the intensification of the Romanian nationalist propaganda which ruins the interests of the USSR”*.<sup>8</sup> More of the decision’s points were to become real in the MSSR too. Among the stipulated issues one could mention the fact that the State Committee of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Nicolae Ceaușescu, *România pe drumul construirii societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate* [Romania on its Way of Building the Multilateral Developed Socialist Society], vol. 13, București, Editura Politică, 1977, p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> Arhiva Organizațiilor Social-Politice din Republica Moldova [Archives of the Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova. Hereinafter – **AOSPRM**], f. 51, inv. 39, d. 16, f. 1-6.

<sup>8</sup> Gheorghe Cojocaru, *op. cit.*, p. 525.

Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova(CPR) in charge of radiobroadcasting, television and the republican newspapers editorial board had to transmit systematically on the radio and on TV and also publish in the press articles and materials which would uncover the attempts of the Occidental and Romanian intelligence organs to distort the past and the present of the Moldovan People.

The Sciences Academy of the MSSR, The History Institute of the CPM, the State Committee in charge of the publishing houses and polygraphies, and the Central Committee's book trade of CPM were to undertake and publish a series of monographs, exercise books, articles and documents on issues concerning the history of Moldova and Romania, the Soviet-Romanian relationships and the Moldovan-Romanian ones. The Ministry of Public Education of the MSSR had to ensure that the social sciences courses in the superior and average special environment education institutions would follow the rules of scientifically argued criticism, distortions, misrepresentations and modifications admitted by the political personalities and historians from the SRR concerning the Russian-Romanian relationships issues and the Soviet-Romanian ones.

The direction of the foreign tourism in the Central Committee of the CPM had to ensure an increase of the ideological level of the informing and propaganda activity among the foreign tourists, to take measures which would ensure the effective use of the tourist connections with the SRR in order to spread propaganda regarding the SUCP's policy and that of the Soviet Government, the USSR's and MSSR's achievements and would have as a final goal the neutralization of the Romanian part to use these connections with the Nationalist propaganda in mind.

The regional party committees, the Moldovan Friendship Society dealing with cultural bonds with the foreign countries had to increase the sending in the SRR, especially in neighbouring counties with which permanent friendship relationships had been established, informative materials, and photographic exhibitions about the history of Moldova, the Moldovan people's achievements in the economic and cultural evolution during the Soviet power years, scientific and awareness literature which was dealing with the Russian-Romanian and Soviet-Romanian issues from a Marxist-Leninist point of view.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the MSSR had to undergo regulation measures of the invitations for the Romanian citizens visiting Moldova as well as of the departures of the republic's citizens to the SRR and to introduce for the Romanian citizens on behalf of their reciprocity the same visiting and temporary stay rules on the territory of the Republic which had been established for the

Soviet citizens when visiting the SRR.<sup>9</sup>

The ideological working issues were debated in the XIV<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPM which took place from 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January 1976, where there was underlined that the duty of the scientists who activate in the social sciences field is that of “carrying out the propaganda in an argued and offensive manner, writing papers in which the key issues of our history and culture should be solved from correct standpoints”.<sup>10</sup>

In 1976 expired the validity of the Soviet-Romanian border status Treaty on collaboration and mutual assistance in the border issues signed in Bucharest on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1961, which took effect on 27<sup>th</sup> July the same year for a period of 10 years with the possibility of extending it for five years. Therefore, concerning this problem it was proposed to start the negotiations with the Soviet part in which either to prolong the existing Treaty or sign a new one.<sup>11</sup>

On 2 February 1976, the meeting of the Executive Political Committee of the CC of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) took place and one of the points on its agenda included the proposals on the validity of the Romanian-Soviet Border Treaty. All those who participated in the meeting opted for maintaining the current, at the time treaty if the Soviet part did not have anything against it. Also the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defence proposed to communicate in a diplomatic manner with the USSR in order to negotiate a new border treaty where the state frontier should be similar to the Peace Treaty regulations in 1947, with the principles of marking the frontier on the navigable water courses and the principles of marking the sea routes as well as the improvement of some regulations referring to the state border status.<sup>12</sup>

During this time, the leaders from Chişinău totally loyal to Moscow continued to send reports to the Kremlin in which they underlined the growth of “nationalist and anti-Sovietic” publications and radio shows from Romania and also “the biased” discussions of the Romanians visiting the MSSR. At the same time, they expressed their impressions that the “anti-Soviet tendency in the activity of historians, philosophers, party workers and those from the public institutions is manoeuvred from the Centre and it is promoted through wide means of influencing the masses, the worldwide public view in order to create a unique opinion on the unjust borders, on the so-called artificial split of the

---

<sup>9</sup> AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 39, d. 16, f. 1-6.

<sup>10</sup> Gheorghe Cojocaru, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Romanian people”.<sup>13</sup> Therefore towards 1976 under the guidance of the Central Committee of the CPM there were published more than 130 monographs, article collections, documents and other publications on the “issues of forming the Moldovan, bourgeois and socialist nation”, school textbooks were reprinted in which there were presented in a convincing way “the problems referring to the forming and the development of the Moldovan nation, its state formation, too.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite the effort made in order to strengthen the Romanian-Soviet rapports on the one hand, however “unofficially” there were maximum control measures imposed on the Romanian citizens. Thereby, in accordance with the guidelines given by the CC of the SUCP in order to increase the efficiency and quality of the informational-propaganda work among the Romanian tourists, in Chişinău there was organised a pan-Union seminar of the guides-interpreters of the Romanian language. Its main idea was to analyse the specific aspects of working with the Romanian tourists, more topics connected with the history of Moldova, the difference between the „Moldovan” and Romanian language, the economic perspectives of the MSSR, the participants received all the necessary guidelines regarding the interpretation of all these issues.

On the other side, in March 1976 in Bucharest took place the first mass show of “The Flame Literary Circle” called the “The Festival of Spring”, coordinated by the poet Adrian Păunescu and “some hints at joining Bessarabia to the USSR” reached some authorities' ears from Chişinău.<sup>15</sup> The shows of the literary circle became popular among the youth, especially students, even if they were watched secretly, mostly because this part of the public “was closely supervised” by the ideological and secret service authorities.<sup>16</sup> In this context on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1976, there was a meeting between N. Ceauşescu and C. F. Katuşev, the Secretary of the CC of the SUCP, in which the Romanian representative assured the latter that Romania has no territorial issues with the USSR, and the Romanian publications fully supported this statement.<sup>17</sup>

In Chişinău, the situation of the rapports with the SRR was analysed very harshly by I. Bodiul, who on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1976 transmitted an information note to the CC of the SUCP regarding the continuous misrepresentation acts of the Russian-

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Adam Burakovski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceauşescu. 1965-1989. Geniul Carpaţilor* [Nicolae Ceauşescu's Dictatorship 1965-1989. The Genius from the Carpathians], Bucureşti, Polirom, 2011, p. 204.

<sup>16</sup> Gheorghe Cojocaru, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Romanian and Soviet-Romanian rappers in the media from the SRR. Among other things, Bodiul claimed that: *“lately, the mass media, the scientific and propaganda institutions of the SRR have increased the number of publications that contain deliberate falsification. In publications, the participation of Romania in the First World War is totally justified. If beforehand the lies of forgers were only present in the scientists' works, now they can be found in the printed or uttered words of the party and state workers, leaders of the public organizations, culture and art representatives, published on the party, state, social-political page editions – in the Romanian magazines «Scînteia» (the Spark), «România liberă» (Free Romania), «Era socialistă» (The Socialist Era), «Analele de istorie» (The Annals of History). From this point of view, one can notice the active involvement of Popescu-Puțuri and Voicu, the deputy leaders of propaganda and agitation department of the CC of the RCP, and Pascu, the deputy member of the RCP. The number of publications with such a chauvinistic and nationalist character is growing, especially focusing on the preparation campaign to celebrate, in 1977, 100 years from proclaiming the independence of Romania. The Romanian citizens who visit Moldova as tourists openly bring forth topics such as the territorial problems and other issues”*.<sup>18</sup>

### **WAS N. CEAUȘESCU'S VISIT IN THE MSSR ANOTHER CONCESSION?**

Although the Romanian leader underlined in the Culture and Socialist Education Congress which took place in July 1976 that “Romania has no territorial or any other type of issues with the Soviet Union”, the Soviets were not totally satisfied. For further confirmation, they asked the Romanian leadership to take a one-day visit in Chișinău.<sup>19</sup> In this atmosphere, “due to the positive evolution of the bilateral official relationships”, at the invitation of the Soviet Leadership, a delegation of the SRR, led by N. Ceaușescu went in August 1976 on a visit in the MSSR, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. The General Secretary of the RCP was accompanied by Elena Ceaușescu, Ștefan Andrei, Nicu Ceaușescu, Constantin Mitea and Gheorghe Badrus.<sup>20</sup> Even if initially the Romanian leader was not eager to visit The Soviet Moldova, later he was convinced by Ștefan Andrei's arguments who considered it as an excellent opportunity to ease the tension between the Romanian-Soviet relationships.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 40, d. 24, p. 86-109.

<sup>19</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>21</sup> Vasile Buga, *Pe muchie de cuțit. Relațiile româno-sovietice, 1965-1989*, [On the edge.

Despite the Moldovan leadership's expressed dissatisfactions with the Romanian policy, on 2 August a historic moment took place in Chişinău. First, the delegation members were received at the CC of the CPM where N. Ceauşescu and the leaders of the Republic had an official talk. It was more a convenience talk and the discussed things would rather have had an informative character. For example, I. Bodiul presented the Moldovan people's achievements during Communism, emphasizing that the hosts paid a special attention to focusing and specializing on the agricultural production due to the cooperation among households and the agro-industrial integration. Nicolae Ceauşescu presented the successes of the SRR in the five-year plan, but also the prospects of developing his country in the next five years, expressing his belief in the continuous development of friendship and multilateral collaboration between the Soviet and Romanian peoples.

The programme for the Romanian guests also included a visit to the factory "Victoria" (Victory), the agro-industrial association "Moldvinprom" in Kotovsk (Hânţeşti), where N. N. Lukianov presented the principles of organising the agro-industrial institutions of planning and controlling the production. There was also organised the meeting with B. I. Glebov, the First-Secretary of the Regional Party Committee Kotovsk, who spoke about the attained success in developing the economy of the region.

The most interesting part of the visit was the moment in which the guests, accompanied by I. Bodiul, K. F. Iliăşenko, the President of the Supreme Soviet Presidium, and other leaders of the Republic visited the scientific association of production "Microprovod" in Chişinău. In one of the factory's departments took place a meeting with the workers, the engineers and the unit's technicians and I. Bodiul delivered a speech. The latter read a greeting card received from Leonid Ilici Brejnev, the General Secretary of the SUCP, on the occasion of celebrating the 36 years of the MSSR's existence since 2nd August 1940: "*Chişinău, to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova. I warmly congratulate the working people from the Republic on the occasion of the formation of the MSSR.*"<sup>22</sup> Then Bodiul addressing N. Ceauşescu, added: "*The Moldovan people gladly and with full satisfaction receives your visit in Moldova. We are deeply pleased that on the day of our 36th anniversary since the formation of the MSSR you have joined us. We consider it as a proof of the attention you pay to the MSSR, of the Romanian people's growing friendship with the Soviet one, of a bond which has become stronger due to*

---

Romanian-Soviet relations in 1965-1989], Bucureşti, Institutul Naţional pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2013, p. 180.

<sup>22</sup> "Moldova Sovietică" [The Soviet Moldova], 3 August 1976.

*the common principles, mainly Socialism."*

During the talks with the members of the Romanian delegation with I. Bodiul, K. Iliashenko, N. Merenişcev and other party and state leaders it was stressed out the important role that the reciprocal experience exchanges, the good neighbouring relationships the friendship among peoples. The Romanian-Soviet cooperation was positively appreciated, generating "great optimism, trust and bright prospects in life and work". The hosts made everyone sure that they had all the necessary conditions and possibilities for such friendship and solidarity, for mutual enrichment and successful development, socialist economic integration, development of the unity between the brotherly parties and peoples. To all these, the Romanian leader answered by saying that from the part of the Romanian leadership "there are no limits or reservations".<sup>23</sup> As the visit of the official group from the SRR had taken place before the 23rd of August, the hosts greeted their guests on the occasion of "celebrating Romania's national day."<sup>24</sup>

Referring to the evolution of the Romanian-Soviet relationships, N. Ceauşescu underlined that "for the time being" there was no problem between the two parties and countries to determine "a reason for friction or misunderstanding".<sup>25</sup> Also, there was mentioned the fact that a part of the counties from the SRR had rather close relationships with some from the MSSR. Among other things, N. Ceauşescu mentioned in his speech the conference of the Communist and Working Parties from Europe which took place in Berlin and which he characterized as being "of utmost historical importance in the relationships among the communist and working parties". The programme of the group also contained a visit to the Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy of the MSSR, where there could be seen the accomplishments of the republic in the years of the Soviet power.<sup>26</sup>

There were rumours which claimed that the time of the visit with the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the formation of the MSSR had been programmed by the Kremlin which used this date as the day when the MSSR was formed instead of 12th October (as they usually celebrated). From N. Ceauşescu's speech, one can deduce that the former tried to ignore the festive atmosphere given by the hosts. He did not address any "greeting" with the occasion of the "great anniversary", instead the Romanian leader only emphasized his agreement with Bodiul regarding the intensification of the contacts between Romania and

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

the MSSR “within the general connections which we have with the Soviet Union”.<sup>27</sup>

Another aspect about the Romanian leader's behaviour is that despite his knowing Russian rather well he only spoke Romanian with the hosts. The moment the Romanian interpreter wanted to translate in Russian the first sentence from Ceaușescu's speech, Bodiul stopped him, saying: “there is no need, they understand.” During the discussions, the Romanian delegation did not approach, on any account the issues, which would arouse suspicion in Moscow. The same thing was underlined in the informative note transmitted to the CC of the SUCP about N. Ceaușescu's visit in the MSSR and Ivan Bodiul was stressing out that the Romanian leader used the terms “the Moldovan SSR”, “the Soviet Moldova”, “the Moldovan people” and the former “corrected his translator many times as he had omitted these notions”. Bodiul was saying that the Romanian state leadership “actively supported” the increase of the relationship between Romania and the MSSR not only in the border sectors but also in other counties and towns, both socially and economically, as well as regarding the state and party bodies. The Moldovan leader admitted that the “despite the good relationships between the SRR and the USSR, the relationships between Romania and the MSSR had been rather tense”, emphasizing the idea that “the relationships between the SRR and Moldova depend to a great extent on the relationships between Romania and the USSR”.<sup>28</sup>

However, at the end of the visit in the MSSR, the arguments brought forward by Ștefan Andrei would have convinced N. Ceaușescu that as a result of the visit in the Soviet Moldova there should be made an invitation to Ivan Bodiul, the First-secretary of the CC of the CPM.

The visit made by the Romanian state leader in the Soviet Moldova was perceived differently and stirred up various reactions. Some claimed that it would have been better if the visit had been avoided as it was considered as a “substantial change of Romania's policy towards the USSR”.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, as an argument against the visit there was the idea that Ceaușescu should have avoided going to the MSSR “as a sign of not admitting the Soviet Union's right over this region”. In fact, by going to Chișinău, the Romanian leader did nothing but “confirm he had given up Bessarabia”. Others claimed that Ceaușescu “lost a great deal especially in front of Moldovans, because the position of the Romanian leadership towards Moscow had given them some hope to be reunited and this step actually turned him into the Soviets' subject. In one day only, the Romanian

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Vasile Buga, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

leader lost the sympathy feelings cherished by the Moldovan Romanians.”<sup>30</sup>

The Romanian delegation's next destination was Yalta, where a meeting took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1976 between N. Ceaușescu, the president of the SRR, and L. I. Brejnev, the General Secretary of the CC of the SUCP. They exchanged a few words on the visit in Moldova, as the details had already been known by the leader from the Kremlin.<sup>31</sup>

The visit on 1-2 August was the first and the only one made by a Romanian state leader during the Communist regime in the MSSR. Through his affirmative answer to visit the MSSR, no matter the implications, the leader of the RCP transmitted a political message to the Soviet leaders both from Chișinău and Moscow.

### **NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU'S PROPOSAL TO TEAR DOWN THE BARBED WIRE FENCE AT THE ROMANIAN -SOVIET BORDER**

After the visit in Chișinău, Nicolae Ceaușescu had a meeting with Leonid Brejnev on 3<sup>rd</sup> August in Yalta. Primarily, the Romanian leader emphasized from the start of his encounter that “at that time, between the two countries there were no problems which could raise any reason for friction or misunderstanding”. This tactic, which the General Secretary of the RCP approached, was considered opportune, as it did not amplify some misunderstandings that had already existed between the two countries and parties anyway.

Ceaușescu supported the idea to get rid of “the problems which caused conflicts in the past” and to consolidate “the brotherly rapports” between the RCP and the SUCP. In his turn, his Soviet counterpart shared the same declarations with the Romanian leader concerning “the absence of any territorial problems between the Soviet Union and Romania and the inviolability of the Soviet-Romanian borders.”<sup>32</sup>

The next meeting between Ceaușescu and Brejnev took place from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November 1976. That was the first official visit in Bucharest of the General Secretary of the SUCP (after 11 years from N. Ceaușescu's official visit in the USSR, in September 1965). The visit in Bucharest was an occasion in which to resume without deepening certain sensitive aspects of the rapports between the two states. The Soviet leader stressed out the agreement, which the two leaders of the parties reached that the border between the two countries was “a peace,

---

<sup>30</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>31</sup> Gheorghe Cojocaru, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

<sup>32</sup> AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 41, d. 5, f. 103-106.

friendship and brotherhood frontier.”<sup>33</sup>

In the same context, Brejnev emphasized the special significance of the declarations given by the Romanian leader at the Culture and Socialist Education Congress as well as those given during the visit in the MSSR. The Romanian leader took advantage of this moment to underline the responsibility that both parties had, to develop the friendship between them: “In this context one must understand the declarations that I have made at the Culture and Socialist Education Congress and in Moldova concerning the fact that the borders between Romania and the Soviet Union must become peace and active collaboration borders, that this is in fact the position of our party.”<sup>34</sup>

Through the way in which the problem was tackled, N. Ceaușescu considered opportune to emphasize the necessity of mutually adopting some measures of boosting the wider and free exchange among the citizens of the two countries and to draw up a daring proposal for those times – tearing down the barbed wire at the border between the two countries. “*And as we are among us I must say that it is hard to understand why we need to keep the barbed wire at our borders...I think that we should think about getting rid of some things which are truly abnormal between two Socialist and more than that friend countries and which have old collaboration traditions which we have to lift at a superior level.*”<sup>35</sup>

Despite the official Romanian assurance regarding the inexistence of the territorial problems with the Soviet Union, the Soviet part continued to show suspicions towards the SRR's opinions. Therefore, Ceaușescu's trial to approach the problem of tearing down the barbed wire at the Romanian-Soviet border was only a bravery act to which the Soviet part did not react in any way.

#### IVAN BODIUL'S “FRIENDSHIP VISIT” IN THE SRR

After the Romanian delegation's visit in Chișinău in August 1976, Ivan Bodiul highlighted the fact that the Romanian part “actively supported” the CPM's proposals aiming at “intensifying the contacts, the experience exchanges, as well as the expansion of the relationships between Romania and the MSSR not only in the border areas but also in counties and towns, socially and economically and within the party and state bodies.”<sup>36</sup> The local leaders from Chișinău admitted that “despite the good relationships that existed between the SRR and the USSR, the

---

<sup>33</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>34</sup> Vasile Buga, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Gheorghe Cojocaru, *op. cit.*, p. 608.

relationships between Romania and the MSSR were rather tense”<sup>37</sup> emphasizing the belief that “the relationships between the SRR and Moldova depend, greatly on the rapports between Romania and the USSR.”<sup>38</sup>

Accepting the invitation of N. Ceaușescu, the General Secretary of the RCP, I. I. Bodiul, the First Secretary of the CC of the MSSR, together with his wife Claudia Bodiul, paid a friendly visit in the SRR from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> December 1976, after the two highly ranked visits made by the leaders of the SRR and the USSR. The experience was the first of its kind in the history of Romanian-Moldovan post-war relationships. Ivan Bodiul spoke with Ilie Verdeț, Executive Political Committee member, and Constantin Dăscălescu, secretary of the CC of the RCP, and they visited a series of industrial and agricultural objectives from the capital and Prahova and Brașov counties. At a rally in Bucharest, the leader of the Communists from the Soviet Moldova said that the good relationships with Romania had been initiated by Ceaușescu's visit in the MSSR, which led to the “expansion of the contacts and the exchanges from all points of view.”<sup>39</sup> At the end of his visit, I. Bodiul was also received by N. Ceaușescu.<sup>40</sup>

One must mention the fact that despite the rejection of the Romanian political course, the General Secretary of the CPM after his visit in Romania expressed his deepest thanks for having been invited and “for being given the opportunity to get acquainted with the achievements obtained by the Romanian people in their endeavour to build a society with the aim of a continuous multilateral development of a close friendship between Romania and the USSR.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, I. Bodiul's visit stressed out the obvious Romanian desire to pay attention to his presence as well as to avoid on any account the discussion of some issues, which could make the guests suspicious. The former's informative note sent to Moscow pointed out the warm welcome and the special attention shown everywhere.<sup>42</sup>

Ceaușescu's visit in Chișinău, followed by Brejnev's and Bodiul's in Bucharest had some positive consequences, as the ambassador Ion Bistreanu commented: “from Moscow there was given «a green light» to the contacts with the Soviet Moldova, firstly from an economic point of view and then even to some sporadic contacts among the men of culture. However, they could not make possible the opening of a Romanian consulate in Chișinău, the Moldovans who needed the Romanian consular

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 609.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Vasile Buga, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>41</sup> “Scântea”, 4 decembrie 1976.

<sup>42</sup> Vasile Buga, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

services had to resort to Moscow's help taking into account the fact that there had been a General Romanian Consulate in Kiev since 1971. The Soviets stubbornly refused until 1989 to set the MSSR under the jurisdiction of the consulate from Kiev. Moscow was still suspicious so the Prut remained for the common people an impassable border".<sup>43</sup> During the entire Communist epoch, the leaders from Bucharest, each with a different intensity manifested an endemic fear and an out of the ordinary caution towards the Soviets and this attitude led to making mistakes for which no solutions could be found. From this perspective, one can mention Vlad Georgescu's statement who said about the leaders from Bucharest that "in order to please Moscow they would send the Soviets data on the activity of some nationalist Bessarabians who approached Ceaușescu with the hope of being helped and supported. As a result they spent many years in the camps from Siberia".<sup>44</sup> Another aspect, which can be reproached to the Romanian leadership, is that only in 1970's did they show any interest towards the lost territories in the Second World War. At the time within the Exterior Intelligence Department (also known as UM 0920) belonging to the State Security Directorate the operation "Crocus" ("Brândușa" in Romanian) was set up. Their main objective was to gather information by specific means in order to know and research the real aspects from the Romanian territories occupied by the Soviet Union after the Second World War. It was especially meant at knowing the way in which the authorities and historiography presented the history of the Romanian people but also the way in which this reality was shown in studies, papers and West mass media, here including the publications of the Romanian exile.<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The year 1976 represented through its magnitude and importance of its contacts a hope stage in the rapports between the MSSR and the SRR, and among the important moments one can mention the official visit in Romania, in November 1976 of the party and state delegation led by L. I. Brejnev, the General Secretary of the CC of the SUCP. The high-level Soviet-Romanian meetings were positively appreciated especially as they succeeded in "freshening up" on the one hand, the general atmosphere of the rapports between the two countries. The two parts were somehow forced to support the evolution of the bilateral relationships.<sup>46</sup> On the

---

<sup>43</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>44</sup> Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria Românilor* [The History of Romanians], A.R.A., Los Angeles, 1984, p. 339.

<sup>45</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>46</sup> AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 47, d. 3, f. 62-63.

other hand, the visit made by the Romanian delegation represented an opportune moment, which underlined the idea that between the two countries there were no issues that could bring “a reason for friction or misunderstanding”.<sup>47</sup>

Referring to the way in which the Romanian-Soviet rapports were shaping both the local leadership from Chişinău as well as the one in Bucharest showed their willingness to support “the intensification of the contacts and the necessity to expand the relationships of Romania with the MSSR, not only in the border areas, but also in other counties and towns”.<sup>48</sup> These promising statements were made with the acceptance of the Decision of the Central Committee Bureau of the CPM on 12th January 1976: “Regarding the extra measures in the ideological work issue regarding the intensification of the Romanian nationalist propaganda which damages the USSR's interests.” Thereby one can draw the conclusion that in spite of some actions and declarations which suggested a Romanian-Soviet closeness, in reality the two parts had reciprocal suspicions and did not trust each other on the basis of some old issues.

In Bucharest it was known very little about what was going on in Chişinău, even if there were reciprocal exchanges of delegations and tourist groups even since the beginning of the 1960's when the Exterior Tourism Department within the Ministers Council of the MSSR started its activity. This bilateral cooperation was often resented by the local authorities in the MSSR who were loyal to the Kremlin. The tourism was considered a risky possibility through which the population of the Soviet Moldova was “contaminated” with wrong ideas of the Romanian political course. That is why even if the expansion of the rapports between the MSSR and the SRR was officially supported, they also tried to reduce by all means the number of visits, especially the individual ones.

The challenge to the Romanian leadership to visit Chişinău represented a step that N. Ceauşescu did not refuse to take in order not to raise even higher suspicions from Moscow's part. In addition, the Romanian leader's trial to raise the problem of tearing down the barbed wire from the Romanian-Soviet border was a consequence of the “calmness” induced in the rapports between Bucharest and Moscow, but this topic was not put into practice, remaining just a “daring” idea. The discussions on the issues, which dissatisfied both parts, were resumed and the “distance” between Bucharest and Chişinău remained the same even if the local authorities expressed their need to enlarge the bilateral cooperation.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ion Constantin, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.