

# 1968 – Romania and the Czechoslovak Crisis. Political and Military Implications

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## 1. Romania's political and military relations within the Warsaw Pact during the period preceding the invasion

**D**ynamically pursuing its own political line, the regime of Bucharest found itself in the situation of being excluded from the debates and decisions adopted within the Warsaw Pact. An outstanding case was the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the troops of the Pact in August 1968, the Romanian "ally" having not been informed of this action.

During the gathering of the Consultative Political Committee of the Warsaw Pact, that took place in Sofia in March 1968, it was decided the establishment of the Statutes that were to enforce the reform of the alliance, already initiated since 1966. In May 1968, these documents arrived at Bucharest and were submitted to be analyzed by military experts. They remarked that only some of the Romanian proposals had been included<sup>1</sup>. Namely, there had been taken into account the aspects referring to the establishment of the Military Council, the appointment of the chief of the Unified Staff as well as of the deputies of the Supreme Commander for air defense and endowment, by the governments of the Treaty's participant states, from the armed forces belonging to the Treaty's any member state, the direct subordination to the ministries of defense of the troops due to be part of the Unified Armed Forces; the proportional representation of the Treaty's participant armies within the Unified Command etc<sup>2</sup>. Among the issues raised in the drafts of the Statutes which distinguished them from a certain point of view, repeatedly expressed by the Romanian delegations, there stood out the ones regarding the right of the Supreme Commander to command, control and order the troops composing the Unified Armed Forces.

The Romanian military experts assessed the provisions of the projects in relation with the stipulations of the alliance's founding Treaty and came to the conclusions that: there had been attributed extremely large prerogatives to the Consultative Political Committee which was in contradiction with its role of an consultative structure as settled in the Treaty; the draft of the Statute of the Unified Command of the Armed Forces comprised stipulations in contradiction with the principles of collaboration and mutual assistance on the basis of respecting the sovereignty and national independence, of the non-interference in the internal affairs, as settled in the Treaty and also affected the essential attributes of the member states' governments; the Statute of the Military Council of the Unified Armed Forces stipulated that its recommendations and proposals should be adopted by simple majority. It was assessed that this principle could not be applied to the relations between parties and states. It was not acceptable to have it applied to international relations; it was affirmed that the adoption of the Statute of an integrated air defense system "would actually lead to their subordination to the Commander of the air defense troops of the Warsaw Treaty's participant states"<sup>3</sup>.

The final part of the analysis made up by the Romanian experts highlighted "particularly the changes in the position of the Soviet side, namely by having included in the documents provisions that allowed the Supreme Commander, Staff, Commander of the air defense troops of the Warsaw Treaty's participant states to command and control the troops due to joint action"<sup>4</sup>.

The Romanian Ministry of Armed Forces requested within the framework of its mandate

the followings: to keep supporting its own point of view previously approved by the state's leaders in 1966; to agree to the draft of the Statute of the Military Council, specifying that the recommendations and proposals made by the Military Council should be adopted with unanimity; to support the elaboration of the draft of Statute regarding the establishment of an integrated air defense system in accordance with the same principles previously supported by the Romanian side.

Assessing in a realistic way this situation, minister Ion Ioniță's report stressed that it was likely that the point of view of the Ministry of the Armed Forces' delegation could not be agreed on. In this context, it was proposed that the Romanian delegation's position be consigned in a protocol "stating that Romania (...) would not work according to the provisions" of the adopted documents "since these ones were disrespectful of the principles of equality between the alliance's states, of independence and national sovereignty as well as of the non-interference in internal affairs and made up of the Consultative Political Committee and the Unified Command supranational bodies"<sup>5</sup>.

The report, using the same realistic arguments, came to a surprising political conclusion: "Following the adoption of this position, the Socialist Republic of Romania, without affirming the possibility to leave the Treaty of friendship, collaboration and mutual assistance, actually positioned itself, in which concerns the military issues, outside the joint military structures of the Warsaw Treaty"<sup>6</sup>.

One of the earlier principles affirmed within the framework of the Treaty that benefited of increased support after 1968, despite the Soviet pressures, referred to the exclusive subordination of the Romanian contingent participating at the Unified Armed Forces to the supreme national command<sup>7</sup>. Romania constantly opposed the actions of military integration, which could have affected state independence and sovereignty. It could also have subordinated the national armed forces to some foreign command. An effective instrument of the integration aiming to the training standardization of military and civil personnel and of the allied armies' troops was the annual Directive of the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces that the Romanian armed

forces, differently from the armies being part to the Treaty, did not apply. By putting in practice this document, the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces extended its authority, even partially, on the allied armies, while the military training of the armed forces could have faced quite an ambiguous situation: part of the armed forces were to be trained in accordance with the Directive of the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces, and the rest of the armed forces in accordance with the guidelines received from each national command. Consequently, the Romanian state steadily opposed the military integration and stressed on the principle of cooperation instead of subordination, position that was to become Romania's path of action within the Warsaw Pact.

There were less than three months until the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact's troops, in fact, Romania having been excluded from the decision regarding the invasion. The Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the other members of the Bucharest leadership were surprised that they were not consulted when it was made up the decision on the undertaking of a large scale action of the Pact<sup>8</sup>. Allegedly Ceaușescu was aware that he had pushed things too far and actually he found himself, on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1968, at a crossroad of his political strategy. He had thereby to make a choice: either to continue on the political path he was following at that moment, and to assume all its consequences, or to leave it earlier or later, aiming to a compromise as flexible as possible. The subsequent events would prove that he was hesitant in making an option and this situation gave way to a risky balance between the two alternatives, namely both pursuing an independent way of action, as well as, adopting a more flexible attitude by accepting to make some compromises<sup>9</sup>.

The Czechoslovak crisis, that took place all along 1968, generated substantial reconsidering of the political and military relations within the Eastern bloc. The failure in dealing with this crisis led to a predictable final that marked the first and, at the same time, the last military intervention under the aegis of the Warsaw Pact, except for Romania, precisely against a socialist state, Czechoslovakia, member of this alliance.

## 2. The attitude and measures adopted by Romania during the Czechoslovak crisis

Following the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, that took place between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1968, the hardliner Antonin Novotny was replaced by the reformer Alexander Dubcek. Dubcek was strongly motivated by the idea of building the “socialism with human face” in Czechoslovakia, being supported to a larger extent by students, intellectuals and other social categories of the country.

Despite the periodical and large consultations with the new Czechoslovak leadership, at Cerna nad Tisou, Bratislava, Dresden and Moscow, when it was firmly assured that Czechoslovakia would remain a communist state member of the Warsaw Pact whose only intention was to pursue its own path to building socialism, the Kremlin leaders decided the military intervention. Under the mask of serious concern for the faith of socialism in a “brotherly” country, Brezhnev, as an adept and initiator of the “limited sovereignty” doctrine<sup>10</sup>, alongside with the other leaders of the Warsaw Pact’s member states, eventually decided, at the secret meeting of Crimea, a large scale military invasion in Czechoslovakia, that was to be initiated fast and by surprise, to defend the “conquests of socialism” in this country<sup>11</sup>.

The military exercise “SUMAVA”, undertaken in Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact, between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1968, constituted an excellent occasion to prepare in detail the conditions and other features of the August intervention<sup>12</sup>. The other three military exercises undertaken by the Warsaw Pact aimed to the same objective. In July 1968, it took place the military exercise “NEMEN” at which participated units and large units of the armies of the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union. Between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of July, it took place in the Northern area of the Atlantic Ocean and in the Barents and Baltic Seas the naval military exercise “NORTH”, attended by the naval forces of the German Democratic Republic, Poland and the Soviet Union. The last military exercise preceding the invasion in Czechoslovakia took place on the territories of Eastern Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union, counting on the participation of ground and air forces of the three states. It contributed to the finalization of both operative and strategic disposition of the intervention<sup>13</sup>.

It is worth to highlight that all along 1968, there took place eight rounds of consultation during which the socialist states debated on the aspects referring to the situation in Czechoslovakia, not attended until the end or even at all by the Romanian representatives. The evolution of the events in Czechoslovakia was assessed with sympathy and understanding by the Bucharest regime, and similarly by the Yugoslav leader, Iosip Broz Tito. It is within this framework, that one can understand both Tito’s visit to Prague between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of August and Ceausescu’s one between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of August, as well as the signing of the Romanian – Czechoslovak Treaty, that were perceived by Moscow as an attempt to establish a socialist “Little Entente”<sup>14</sup>. Referring to the position adopted by the three states, Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev qualified it as some sort of “Danubian collusion”<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the entire series of political actions of 1968 undertaken through its official representatives highlighted that Romania had clearly individualized its position towards both the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

As it had been planned, on August 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>, 1968, at midnight, the Warsaw Pact’s forces, representing the Soviet Union (that provided the command and the majority of the invasion troops), the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, accounting for almost 600,000 troops, totalizing 29 divisions, supported by 7,500 tanks and more than 1,000 fighting and transportation aircrafts invaded Czechoslovakia within the framework of the operation “DANUBE”, following the itineraries identified by the reconnaissance units during the military exercise “SUMAVA” and undertaking air and ground operations, including airborne troops, they occupied or blocked the areas and strategic points also identified during the mentioned exercise: airports, airfields, Party and governmental institutions, barracks, hubs and centers of communication<sup>16</sup>. The Czechoslovak leaders were taken to Moscow to be “worked on”, and upon their return to the country, Alexander Dubcek and President Ludvig Svoboda addressed the nation, on August 27<sup>th</sup>, to make the people “understand” the situation. Subsequently, the Soviet Union’s and Czechoslovakia’s leaders have set up the legal bases for Soviet military presence regime in this country, the Soviet forces beginning the proceedings of the withdrawal only after 1989.

The events of Czechoslovakia obviously took by surprise the Bucharest leader that urgently summoned the Party's and State's decision-making structures to assess the situation and settle the necessary measures. At the same time, he addressed the Romanian nation, on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1968, strongly condemning the invasion and asking for the support of the population to his actions. Most probably it was the only moment when the Romanian nation willingly stood by its leader, during the entire period of the communist regime. At the same time, there were taken measures at military level to strengthen and enhance the armed forces combat capacity, given that at Romania's Eastern<sup>17</sup>, Western<sup>18</sup> and Southern<sup>19</sup> frontiers, the intelligence services warned on concentrations of troops having been assigned possible offensive missions directed against the Romanian territory.

The concentration of troops so closely to Romania's frontiers had been evaluated at around 10-12 large Soviet units, 4-5 large Bulgarian units and 2-3 large Hungarian units<sup>20</sup>. All these undoubtedly constituted an important political and military factor of pressure on the Romanian state, since it had the characteristics of a genuine force demonstration.

Taking into account the probability of military hostilities to be unleashed against Romania, Ceaușescu met Tito at Vrșeț, and asked him to allow the Romanian leader to transfer the government and the Romanian armed forces to Yugoslavia, in case of the national territory would have been occupied. Tito consented providing that the Romanian armed forces be disarmed and interned on Yugoslav territory. Facing this alternative and the obvious political isolation of the country, the Bucharest leader moderated his position and the following days he normalized his relations with the Soviets<sup>21</sup>.

Referring to the difference in military capabilities between a potential aggressor and Romania, General Earle Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States Armed Forces stressed that "19 Soviet divisions could be entered into Romania with a two to three days earlier notification. These forces could rapidly defeat any Romanian opposition"<sup>22</sup>.

The reaction of the West towards the events of August 1968 of Czechoslovakia was reserved which may be explained by the geopolitical and security configuration and settlements established in Europe after the end of the World War II<sup>23</sup>. In

accordance with the "Sonnenfeldt" doctrine<sup>24</sup>, the United States considered the Czechoslovak issue as a "family matter" of the socialist camp and Warsaw Pact, and "the Russians' invasion in Czechoslovakia should not be perceived as a tragedy since it only represents a flat tire on the road of cooperation between East and West"<sup>25</sup>.

The moment 1968 was deciding since it marked a turning point in Romania's military policy and for its relations within the Warsaw Pact. After 1968, Romania elaborated its own defense doctrine in accordance with its national interest and operated substantial changes in the structure, endowment and training of the national defense system. The establishment of the "patriotic guards" implied putting in practice, among many other things, the doctrinaire concept of the "entire people's war"<sup>26</sup>.

In this context, the Romanian communist authorities set up a specific military doctrine, unprecedented within the alliance and without counterpart one, and which colligated to the endorsed conduct in its foreign and military policy field (however, formally the Romanian state requested never the abandonment of the alliance), made without meaning Romania's *de facto* membership in the military structures of the Warsaw Pact.

The underlying principle of Romania's security strategy was the outright rejection of any foreign troops and joint exercises of the Warsaw Pact forces on its own national territory. The country's strategy aimed at relying on Western and Chinese support to successfully counter any pressures made by the Soviet Union. The careful assessment of the Czechoslovak crisis provided for the Romanian authorities the ideas and means of establishing and applying a military doctrine, particularly defined as a defensive one, focused on countering any military threat concerning "all azimuths" implied posed by the neighboring states and especially by the Soviets. A possible confrontation with an enemy of superior manpower and military technology led to the establishment of so-called "patriotic guards", irregular forces set up during the Czechoslovak crisis and that were to be employed alongside with the regular armed forces and paramilitary ones<sup>27</sup>.

The Romanian doctrine was underlying to its military tactics and strategy the concept of the "entire people's war". Defined as a main way to wage the war, with an especial stress to the allocation of all national resources in order to

repeal the aggression, this kind of military hostilities approach was likely to be an eloquent example of a total war or of a "people's war" and in the temporarily occupied territory the only option was to unleash the resistance or guerilla fighting actions<sup>28</sup>.

By adjusting to the definite Romania's realities, fundamental aspects of the Yugoslav military doctrine and also of the Chinese one in which regards waging the people's war, the Romanian military doctrine reflected the political and military options of the national-communist regime of Bucharest, the whole system tried to inculcate the Romanian people with nationalist and patriotic feelings<sup>29</sup>. Although it did not evolved into an official document codified according to the legal norms unanimously accepted, the Romanian military doctrine emerged from Law no. 14/1972 concerning the national defense of communist Romania, and its directives were to be found in the general and specific provisions of the military rules, instructions and regulations.

The very preamble of the Law on the Romanian national defense decried on the one hand imperialism as the promotion of an aggressive policy, hostile to socialism, progress and civilization, and on the other hand it stated the necessity to reject any aggression. This text made it more than obvious that, whereas its beginning was clearly an ideological one, re-asserting Romania's faithfulness towards the alliance to which it belonged as a full member, its ending pinpointed the country's determination to fight back any aggression, regardless of its origin.

The purpose and the nature of the war that Romania was supposed to wage could be exclusively defined as a defense anti-imperialistic war, and victory was possible only through engaging in the fight the whole people, the country's citizens being forced to participate at specific military training and fight for the defense of the country up to the extreme sacrifice.

The Law stipulated, among many other aspects, the interdiction to accept or recognize any action undertaken by a foreign state or any situation that could encourage it to occupy the national territory, or general surrender. By having included into the text of the law these provisions, Ceausescu intended to prevent any attempt, in time of peace or war, undertaken in order to remove him from power, irrespective of whether or not his decision would have had disastrous

consequences for the Romanian nation once it was engaged in a people's war<sup>30</sup>. According to this important normative act, the national defense distinguished itself from the Warsaw Pact and it was implicitly affirmed that Romania would not send troops outside its national frontiers.

However, Romania also understood that it was necessary to gradually moderate its intransigent position previously displayed and to adopt a compromise. In the new international context, this estimation proved to be realistic. The military thinkers of that period defined communist Romania's military doctrine as being the ensemble of thesis, ideas, and principles adopted by the Romanian state, of its options regarding the organizing, endowment, training and command of forces as well as the necessary means to ensure the military defense of the country's political system, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity against any possible aggression<sup>31</sup>.

The military strategists considered that the people's war fell entirely in line with the conjuncture of forces in which Romania could find itself in the event of aggression. This conjuncture of forces, analyzed in a realistic manner at regional level and taking into account the main operative directions, was clearly unfavorable for Romania in which regards the regular armed forces, both in terms of manpower, weaponry, and military technology, logistical support, as well as geostrategic disposition. Under such circumstances, the inferiority could be overcome only through extra forces that the people's war might supply, as well as through the effective implementation of specific ways and procedures of fight, including those referring to low intensity conflicts, all this aiming to avoid being taken by surprise by the aggressor. At the same time, it was argued that people's war strategy created favorable conditions for taking a superior advantage of the time factor, which could impede the aggressor to quickly attain the war objectives and force it to engage in a long confrontation that might trigger prolonged efforts, significant losses and massive costs. A prolonged war could set the premises for a change in the conjuncture of forces, as well as increased international support given to Romania. The preparation of the national defense system to wage a long people's war turned into an important deterrent factor of a possible aggression, the enemy facing high risks that were not worth to be assumed<sup>32</sup>.

At the same time, in April 1968, there were set up the basis of the national defense industry that was planned to ensure 70-80% of the necessary endowment of the Romanian armed forces while the rest was to be imported<sup>33</sup>.

It was made the decision that the Romanian armed forces should not participate any longer with troops in military exercises outside the national territory. It could only participate to command and staff military exercises, but without providing troops and it was underlined that during the exercises the adversary should not be nominated.

Similarly, Romania did not any longer accepted foreign troops on its territory or the over flight of foreign aircrafts transporting troops or

military equipment. It was suspended the practice of sending officers and Generals to study in the Soviet Union, and those having pursued studies in Moscow were appointed in functions of little importance, being gradually removed from the military institution, through a clever personnel policy<sup>34</sup>.

Meanwhile, it was stressed the development of the military relations also with other socialist states non members of the Warsaw Pact, with capitalist states members and non members of NATO, and with developing states<sup>35</sup>. The ensemble of measures adopted by the Bucharest leadership made up conspicuous the distinct position held by Romania within the Warsaw Pact.

### 3. The evolution of the political and military relations between Romania and the Warsaw Pact after the events of August 1968

The period that followed after the Czechoslovak crisis marked the beginning of the national military doctrine elaboration, with a specific content, in line with the then situation and with the political and military perspectives within the Pact. A relevant case in point directly referring to the event of 1968 is also the fact that Romania was neither asked to participate in the military intervention or informed about preparing it, the Soviet Union's leaders being pretty aware of the Romanian position within the Warsaw Pact.

One can assess that a possible intervention in Romania, immediately after the one in Czechoslovakia, would have generated significant international complications potentially increased by the protests of the world public opinion, which would have harmed the Soviet Union's interests and image in the field of international relations. In this context, one can also take into consideration the fact that the Romanian territory was bigger than Czechoslovakia's one. At the same time, since there were no Soviet troops stationing in Romania and military exercises with the Warsaw Pact's troops did not take place any longer on Romanian territory, an aggression by surprise was not possible<sup>36</sup>.

Similarly, the Soviet intelligence agencies acting in Romania had been uncovered ever since 1962, and their activities were largely observed and counteracted by the Romanian counter-intelligence structures<sup>37</sup>.

Given the current stage of the possibilities to have access to the information contained by the Moscow archives, it is extremely difficult, if not even impossible, to assess the intentions of the Kremlin leaders in which regards Romania all along the Czechoslovak crisis. One may conclude that these factors, acting together, as well as the decision made by Romania's political and military leadership to oppose military resistance in the event of aggression, finally entailed the withdrawal of the troops surrounding the country and the return to normality in this part of Europe.

The events of the 1968 summer guided Romania in defining directions for its future political and military position in its relations with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact as a whole. In accordance with these necessities, it came out the idea that the military doctrine could not and should not be anything else than a strictly defensive one, clearly different from the Soviet doctrine. Given the mentioned context, the national defense could be provided only through Romania's own forces. There is record of declarations of moral support for Romania. The President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson asked Leonid I. Brezhnev „not to let free the dogs of war” against Romania, and the Chinese Prime-Minister, Zhou Enlai stated that „an attack against Romania would be considered an attack against China”<sup>38</sup>.

It is also worth mentioning the episode of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1968, when the Soviet ambassador

to Washington, Anatoly F. Dobrynin, was warned during a meeting with the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, on the Soviet Union's possible aggressive intentions directed against Romania. Dobrynin denied the existence of any piece of information regarding the issue approached, adding that he personally did not believe that Moscow would act in this way in which concerned Romania<sup>39</sup>. The geographical distance and particularly the geopolitical and geostrategic conditions of that moment did not allow the United States or China to provide effective military support to Romania. However, these declarations demonstrated that the Romanian decision-makers had a correct perception of the geopolitical situation and consequently they were acting to ensure the national security.

Under such conditions, it gained momentum the option of following an inflexible policy and assumes up to the end the position that drew Moscow's annoyance and its decision of not informing the Bucharest authorities on the military action of Czechoslovakia. This attempt manifested through public protest against the invasion and the determination to resist using military means in case a similar action would have taken place against Romania too<sup>40</sup>.

It is difficult to assert that the Soviet Union and its satellites within the Warsaw Pact could afford to undertake two simultaneous operations, not only because of the international public opinion, but also for reasons of military capabilities. In Romania's case, it would have lacked the pretext of military maneuvers under the aegis of the Pact. At the same time, there was no indication of a scission at the level of the communist leadership. The lack of these conditions made that a possible intervention be associated to a typical aggression that could have been condemned by the United Nations Organization.

Ceaușescu reacted in a disproportionate way precisely in order to capitalize on the international support and, in perspective, to put the country at shelter in case of the Soviets' counter-reactions. At the same time, he used the compromise to prevent an irremediable rift with the Warsaw Pact<sup>41</sup>. During those moments, it stood out the need to consolidate the armed forces combat capacities and capabilities, given its role as a main component of Romania's national defense system.

It was within the framework of the political action dealing with consequence management of the Czechoslovak crisis, that the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces, the Soviet Marshal Ivan I. Yakubovski and the chief of Staff of the Unified Armed Forces, General S. M. Shtemenko visited Romania at the end of September 1968<sup>42</sup>. On this occasion, the Romanian leader pronounced himself in favor of the establishment within the Pact of the structures proposed in May 1968, but he raised two major objections. The first one referred to the need to reach consensus between the Pact's member states in the event of a decision to dispatch forces on other member states' territory. In this case, the invasion in Czechoslovakia was illegal. The second one referred to the fact that the recommendations and proposals of the Military Council should be made on the basis of unanimous agreement of the Warsaw Pact's members. It results that the Romanian side was deeply affected by the recent experience of Czechoslovakia and stressed on the need to reach unanimity in the military decision-making process. The exclusion syndrome had strongly affected Bucharest. The subsequent attitude of the Bucharest regime confirmed this hypothesis.

As a case in point, a "Note of Conversation", of February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1969, regarding the meeting between Nicolae Ceaușescu, accompanied by his subordinates Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Romanian Prim-Minister, Colonel-General Ion Ioniță, minister of the Armed Forces, Corneliu Mănescu, minister of Foreign Affairs, Lieutenant-General Vasile Ionel, deputy of the minister of the Armed Forces, and Marshal Ivan I. Yakubovski, Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces, V. Kuznetsov, prime-deputy of the Soviet Union's minister of Foreign Affairs provides several hints in this regards. The usefulness of the word "all" was at the core of the discussions. While the Romanian side requested that it should be included in article no. 12 of the Warsaw Pact's Rules of procedure, with reference to the rights of the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces, the Soviet side argued that this word could be left apart when editing the article that referred to the assessment of war danger as considered by Warsaw Pact's allies. The Romanian side underlined that it was imperious to have this word included in order to express the will of all of the Pact's members. In his memorandum, Maurer estimated that: "The

situation is clear: in the case of this problem that can unleash the military mechanism of the Warsaw Treaty, consensus cannot be reached. But you are right that the word "all" would signify kind of a "veto", and some countries, for example six out of seven, may ask: why shouldn't we, six countries, behave as we agreed, only because the seventh country refuses to share the same opinion as us? However, it does not mean that the seventh country has to accept the other six countries' decision"<sup>43</sup>.

It is obvious that the Romanian side requested that it should be compulsory to have the possible "dissidence" in the case of a conflict consigned in the Rules of procedure of the Warsaw Pact's mechanism and thereby legalized. The most surprising fact is the Soviet side's opposition to the Romanian request and the weak arguments supporting this opposition. The Romanian position was presented in the aftermath of the Warsaw Pact's invasion in Czechoslovakia. Ceaușescu even alluded to this event when he pointed out that: "And, I will speak frankly, openly and not diplomatically, vaguely: there were meetings that Romania was not summoned to attend and not even consulted about", because in Bucharest, the communist leadership was surprised by the invasion in Czechoslovakia of the Warsaw Pact's military forces. The Bucharest regime intended to impose on Moscow any pretext of legality regarding a possible military intervention.

The Bucharest leadership focus on the need to have the word "all" included in the document, in which regards the unanimous assessment of war danger and therefore of the decision to wage, it can be also perceived from another point of view. This issue could be defined as an attempt to give legal ground, agreed in advance, so that a nation to avoid being engaged in a war against the national will. Besides, Ceaușescu remarked at the end of the conversation that "it is difficult to assume that a Treaty's member country would not be in danger if another country is in danger. But it underlines even more the need to accept the member countries' obligation to act only after previous consultations and mutual agreement on the existence of the danger"<sup>44</sup>.

Subsequently, in order to ensure the practical coordination of the military problems, at the gathering of the Consultative Political Committee of the Warsaw Pact, that took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1968, at Budapest, it was decided the

establishment or the improvement of several bodies and structures belonging to the Pact: the Defense Ministers' Committee, the Command of the Unified Armed Forces, the Staff, the Military Council, and the Technical Committee. The Defense Ministers' Committee composed of the defense ministers of the Warsaw Pact's member states, the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces and the chief of the Staff of the Unified Command was assigned as main attributions the analyzing of the main problems regarding the organizational aspects, tactical, operative and strategic training, the operative and mobilization levels of the troops and headquarters previewed in the Treaty, infrastructure aspects, the European and international political and military situation, the development and improvement of the Unified Armed Forces, and not in the least, the debate, approval and executing procedures of the budget of the Unified Armed Forces' Command. In the communiqué issued at the end of the session, it was stated that "the states having participated at the gathering examined in detail and adopted by unanimity the Statute of the Defense Ministers' Committee of the Warsaw Treaty's participant states, the new Statute of the Unified Armed Forces and Unified Command, and other documents, aiming to the ongoing improvement of the leading structures and bodies belonging to the defensive organization of the Warsaw Treaty"<sup>45</sup>.

One of the Warsaw Pact's military decision-making structure was the Military Council of the Unified Armed Forces, set up at the session of the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1969, at Moscow, on the basis of a decision adopted by the Consultative Political Committee at Budapest, in March, the same year. The Military Council was composed of the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces, the chief of Staff of the Unified Armed Forces, the defense ministers' deputies (the chiefs of General Staffs) of the Treaty's participant states, the deputies of the Supreme Commander for air defense as well as of the air forces, navy, and the chief of the Technical Committee whose activity referring to the endowment with technique, equipment and armament of member states' armies was regulated in 1973 through a special convention. Among the attributions of the Military Council there were the evaluation of the issues concerning the combat capacity and the operative level of the Unified Armed Forces and



their endowment with armament and fight technique. The activity of this structure was consultative and it held semester reunions presided by the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces<sup>46</sup>.

Within the political climate characterizing the communist bloc, during the period post 1968, when the Bucharest regime became highly suspicious to Moscow's possible intentions to remove the leading team, Ceaușescu chose to adopt somehow a more inflexible policy line in the bilateral relations. Regarding the overall policy based on the binomial approach intransigency-compromise, the Bucharest appraised that an increased inflexible attitude would be more profitable both for the political survival of Romania's leading team, as well as, for preserving the freedom of action that Romania earned at international level. It was the period when Nicolae Ceaușescu played the role of intermediary between China and the United States and also put efforts to be accepted as a mediator in the case of the Vietnam War<sup>47</sup>.

It was in the context of this general trend of Romania's foreign policy, particularly after the Czechoslovak crisis, that it took place the United States President, Richard Nixon's visit to Bucharest, during the summer of 1969. The visit, a real triumph for the Bucharest regime, visibly irritated Moscow and was followed by other similar episodes meant to demonstrate to the Soviet Union, Romania's will to be considered as having the same rights as the other international actors.

After Romania was excluded from the only common action of the Warsaw Pact, namely the invasion in Czechoslovakia of 1968, the Bucharest communist leadership gave substance to its own political option, launched in April

1964. This was to become obvious in the military and security policy fields. After August 1968, to the temptation of sticking to the behavior line of April 1964, and in order to enhance and give ground to it, there were added Moscow's veiled menaces. This is the reason why the Bucharest regime's intransigency towards the Soviet hegemony was most evident in the military field. Romania's military link with the Warsaw Pact gradually receded. One can affirm with certitude that the political binomial action assumed by the Bucharest regime towards the Soviet Union and implicitly towards the Warsaw Pact, respectively intransigency-compromise, did not manage to diminish Kremlin's vigilance in which concerns Romania's possible desertion<sup>48</sup>.

Subsequently the 1968 events, it became clear that Romania adopted two positions towards the Warsaw Pact. The first position indicated the deepening of the Pact's political component and the diminishing of the military one that should be based, from Romania's perspective, on cooperation and not subordination. The second position referred to Romania's decision to accomplish the obligations assumed within the alliance, and at the same time it settled as a mandatory principle that the Romanian army would be totally subordinated only to the national military command, that it would not obey to orders received from abroad and would not take part to aggressive actions against other states.

This way, "accomplishing the obligations assumed" within the Pact remained a general perspective, and any concrete engagement was to be decided, depending on each situation, by the political and military leadership of the Romanian state.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Arhivele Militare Române – Romanian Military Archives (RMA), fund V2, vol. 3, file 12/35, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 56-57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 64.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>7</sup> Alexandru Duțu, *Prima aplicație românească la nivel de front independent și primele neînțelegeri româno-sovietice în cadrul Pactului de la Varșovia (mai 1965)*, in *Revista de Istorie Militară*, no. 5-6/2002, pp. 38-39.

<sup>8</sup> Ion Pătroiu (coord.), Alexandru Oșca, Vasile Popa, *Înghet în plină vară. Praga – august 1968*, Editura Paideia, 1998, pp. 23-25.

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- <sup>15</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1998, p. 507.
- <sup>16</sup> Mihai Retegan, *op.cit.*, pp. 203-204.
- <sup>17</sup> RMA, fund DSPA, microfilms, role 1466, c. 48-49.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, c. 44-45.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, c. 63.
- <sup>20</sup> Ion Gheorghe, Corneliu Soare, *Doctrina militară românească 1968-1989*, Editura Militară, București, 1999, p. 50.
- <sup>21</sup> Ion Pătroi (coord.), Alexandru Oșca, Vasile Popa, *op.cit.*, pp. 103-111.
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- <sup>23</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomația*, Editura All, București, 1998, p. 636.
- <sup>24</sup> Constantin Hlihor, *Istorie și geopolitică în Europa secolului XX. Considerații teoretice și metodologice*, Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, București, 1999, p. 78.
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- <sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 206-207.
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