

Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Romania's relations with China. Archives and witnesses

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It is a fact that the historians beyond the communist perimeter wrote the best and the most profound analyses of the previous century, regarding the events and the phenomena of the communist world. Until the fall of the communist regimes, the people who lived under them were allowed neither to inform themselves nor to express their feelings about the realities of this excessively idealized society. Yet almost a decade and a half on from the 'annus mirabilis' of 1989, we think we are entitled to say that even the classic writings and analyses of the communist system and of communist history, written before the collapse of the system, will have to be seriously reconsidered, if not completely modified.

Allowing access to the archives, to the documents created by the centres of power and special services of the communist system, is probably the most spectacular event that has ever happened for those who are researching communist history of the last century. What were once considered to be decent historical or political analyses, now have their weaknesses revealed as they are confronted by information that comes from archival research on the main institutions of power, or from other areas that were generally not open to direct investigation.

Writing on the basis of very limited documentary sources, generally official published documents, historians of communism proved to be adept of logical analysis and created explanatory models using a wide variety of sources. But too often the scenarios and theories so produced did not correspond to the facts, and the motives of communist

leaders were often distorted, simply reflecting the thinking of the author. So now, faced with an avalanche of archival documents and statements from 'privileged witnesses' to the history of communism, historians from the free world turn out to be just as naive as those in the former communist countries.

Stalin's death (1953) was a shock to all the power centres of the communist world. There was no plan for the time when the leader in Kremlin would simply stop existing, his death revealing, as Furet put it, 'the paradox of a system, where everything depends in such a manner on one single person, ... [and]... when this person disappears, the system loses something essential'.¹ The absence of a succession procedure for the leadership was one of the characteristics of the regime. One of the Romanian members of the guard at Stalin's catafalque remembered a 'chaotic feeling' – because you didn't know what was coming next – a feeling that was common for all the participants at the burial ceremony.²

Without access to the contents of stenograms the deliberations of the key groups in the communist countries, it is hard to imagine the power relations and the difficulties they had in coping with the situation at that time, keeping a sense of normality and maintaining some sort of group stability, in the absence of that once dominant influence in the Kremlin.

Taking Stalin's death as the event which separates the history of the communist regimes into two parts, we will make some comments on the bitter dispute between Moscow and Beijing, and the way it was used for the

benefit of the communist nucleus in Bucharest, relying for our analysis both on archival

documents and the testimonies of direct participants.

Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej – ‘practical revolutionist’

The personality and life of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901-1965) remain of perennial interest to historians. Noted for his ‘agile diplomacy’, his ‘cruelty’, even his or ‘deceptiveness’, he was to become a very experienced player in the game of power. The discussion which follows, showing how he used the conflict between the Soviets and the Chinese to establish the independence of his party and country from the USSR in 1964, illustrates these qualities.

Often just mentioned as one of the leaders of the former Soviet Union’s satellite states, Gh. Dej’s political biography has distinct particularities. First of all, he was the only leader of a European country under Soviet influence who did not spend his early years, and did not receive his communist training in the U.S.S.R. Born in Moldova, into a poor family with a large number of children, Gh. Gheorghiu (once in power, he added ‘Dej’ to his name, a reminder of his outlaw years) was one of the few workers of interwar Romania who joined the communist party. At that time Romania didn’t have many workers and its communist party did not have more than 1000 members, at the end of the second world war being the smallest in Europe. He was arrested in 1933 as the leader of trade union strikes in the transportation sector, and then sentenced to twelve years of hard labour. In prison, alongside Jewish communist intellectuals, he acquired an impressive amount of cultural and ideological knowledge. He escaped from prison just a few days before Romania ceased the war against the Soviet Union.

Once the Soviets occupied the country, this former worker who had spent eleven years behind bars was to become, in the years between 1944 and 1947, head of the Department of Communication and Public Affairs, President of the National Economy Board, and finally Minister of Industry and Commerce. Between 1948-1952 he was First Vice-President of the Council of Ministers,

and in 1952-1955 he took the position of Prime Minister. From 1961 until his death he was President of the State Council. Simultaneously, from October 1945 until his last days, he was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party.

We could ask ‘what was it that determined Stalin to assign this former union leader to be the leader of the communists in Romania in 1945, instead of those well trained activists sent to Romania?’ Perhaps the experience of being a ‘practical revolutionist that Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej had, influenced Stalin, who had a similar background. Stalin once declared that as soon as the revolution is consolidated, the theoreticians leave the scene and are replaced by new leaders who combine pragmatism and the revolutionary spirit. It is only those who combine theory with a practical experience that prove to have the necessary leadership qualities.³

After 1956, with Khrushchev’s domestic and international strategy for maintaining the stability of the system, Dej’s native leadership capacity was highly valued. His strategies for power and influence gained coherence after 1961, with various stages and goals well laid out by their initiator. His more experienced collaborators would be handled in cold blood and with skill by this true master of politics who consolidated his power, before his death, by establishing a vast network of diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with the capitalist countries, and also by playing the game of balancing between the two great poles of the communist world, Moscow and Beijing.

The portraits of the two leaders of these poles, who would eventually find themselves locked in conflict, Mao and Khrushchev, are very interesting as regards the psychological aspect of power. This is how the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Corneliu Manescu, who knew them both personally, describes them:

'Problems started appearing after Stalin's death. They manifested themselves as problems in the ideological realm. The wider background might have been the differences between Mao and Khrushchev, namely personality differences. After the Second World War, Stalin looked victorious and also had legitimacy because of his participation in the organization of the Bolshevik revolution. Mao had similar qualifications - he was the founder of the Communist Chinese Party, organized 'The Long March', and also looked like a victorious leader in 1949. Stalin and Mao were relatively equal - but the fact that the Soviet Union was the first country where socialism was built, and Moscow was the capital of the strongest communist state, placed Stalin on a higher level. Khrushchev's ascension to power meant that there was a big change in what concerns who the CPSU was able to deal with ideological confrontations. Compared to Mao, Khrushchev was simply a party activist who had nothing to 'brag' about. His desire to have ascendancy over Mao seemed ridiculous.⁴

Moscow's man of hopes

It is important to understand that during the time following Stalin's death and, more importantly, during the period following the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (1956), the leaders in Bucharest acted as valuable allies of Khrushchev. A particularly strong proof is their involvement in the suppression of the Hungarian 'counter-revolution' of 1956. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania in 1958 might be considered the reward for this loyalty.

Preoccupied, during this time, with consolidating his power in the political circles and, domestically, with solving the economic problems of the country, Gheorghiu-Dej didn't seem to challenge either communist theory or the Kremlin line of policy.

But taking all this into consideration, the changes that he made in respect of diplomats and senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - with intellectuals being preferred for the key posts, even if they had an 'unhealthy social background's - suggest more plans than he had actually declared.

Particularly relevant on the nature of relations between Moscow and Bucharest are the encoded telegrams exchanged by officials in the Romanian embassy in Beijing and their superiors in Bucharest. On the 25th of May 1959 the recently appointed Romania's ambassador in China, Barbu Zaharescu (an intellectual from the inter-war period) reported to his minister Avram Bunaciu about the visit he had to meet with his Soviet counterpart, Pavel Yudin. Characterised as a protocol meeting, this took place in the private home of

the Soviet ambassador and was described as 'extremely cordial'. Yudin even offered not only his personal help, but also the facilities available in the Soviet embassy - for example, access to the Chinese press bulletin, and direct access to counsellors and specialists working in the embassy.

The conversation was over an hour long with - as we have noted - a very cordial tone, proving that the relationship was being established on a pattern that we can identify as it relates to the territories of 'occupied countries', with the Soviet specialists being the ones to set the rules by their suggestions and advice. The conversation, in fact, is a presentation by the Soviet ambassador regarding the way that Chinese realities should be interpreted. Its main theme was the 'people's commune'. Oddly, the Soviet ambassador was not too critical of the communes. He even characterized them as a 'necessity'. The former agricultural cooperatives were too small even though they had a large number of families. The people's communes, stretching over thousands of acres, permitted the practice of a socialist agriculture. Being specifically developed within the people's commune, industry gains a local character. There were - as Yudin put it - some 'exaggerations': giving up the principle of distribution according to work, and thus establishing a primitive form of egalitarian communism, the people ate 'according to their needs', and the administration of the commune merged with the state forms of leadership.

The Romanian ambassador gave an account of his meeting with Peng Dehuai, the Chinese Minister of Defence. He was astonished by some of the facts of Chinese military life (the officers being forced to live just like soldiers, and the soldiers being entitled to criticise their superiors). Yudin attributed this to the Chinese experience of partisan warfare. But they did not have experience of the 'real war'. The Soviets will help them, offering the most modern equipment to the Chinese army: fighter jets, ballistic missiles etc. and even helping them to produce this kind of equipment themselves. The Chinese army also lacks in training military leaders, and they will need help

because among them there still were generals in charge of aviation or tank divisions that did not know how to fly, or how to drive a tank.

It is important to note how Yudin's appreciation of the Chinese influenced the Romanian communist leaders – for Yudin the Chinese were very well regarded, and he had a great respect for their political attitude (he couldn't say the same about the Poles or the Czechs).⁶

All the actions and discussions that the Romanian diplomatic bloc would undertake in Beijing in the period 1957-61, would show the same spirit of 'consulting the Soviet comrades'.

Backstage of the Bucharest conference (June 1960)

Even the conference of June 1960 would be conducted in this same 'spirit of listening to the Soviet older brother'.

A previous conference held in Moscow in November 1957, with representatives of sixty-eight communist parties from all over the world, and where the two great parties openly differed regarding international relations, found the Romanian communists in some difficulty. The high-level Romanian delegation suffered an accident at the airport in Moscow, where the former Minister of Foreign Affairs (Grigore Preoteasa) lost his life.

Between the 20th and the 25th of June 1960, the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers Party took place in Bucharest, Romania's capital city, (the Communist Party took this name in 1948; Romanian initials : PMR). On the last day of the congress there was a meeting of the leaders of communist and labour parties of all the socialist countries. We know what happened there from a stenogram of the plenary session of the Central Committee of the PMR held a month later, in August 1960. Among the items discussed, there was a report about the Romanian contribution to the conference, and appended to this material there was the speech given by Gheorghiu-Dej. From this, we can see that the meeting had certain similarities with a meeting

of the Cominform held in Bucharest in June 1948, when the very same Dej – acting on Moscow's instructions – criticised Tito's policies. At the August meeting, Dej informed his audience that it had been his *intention* (or rather, Moscow's) to use the meeting of the Third Congress of the PMR to debate certain 'deviations' of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Chinese had suggested delaying the Bucharest meeting, motivating that it had to be more thoroughly prepared. On their way to Bucharest the Chinese delegation spent eight hours discussing matters in Moscow, but did not shift from their stated positions.

Dej's August speech shows us that the meeting that took place on the 24th of June, had two stages with different participants.⁷ First, there were the representatives of the communist parties of socialist countries, and then everybody else. Dej points out the 'combative spirit' of those discussions, as well as the fact that there was a certain unity - with the exception of Chinese. They would not sign the agreed document, claiming that they didn't have a mandate.⁸ Their final statement was that even though they didn't approve the document, for the sake of unity they would reluctantly sign it. All the other parties criticised their 'false position', and declared solidarity with the Moscow declaration and the

Peace Manifesto, whose importance was underlined by Dej. Only the Albanians gave their support to the Chinese.

Towards the end of his speech, Dej recalled that the Soviet delegation had drawn up a letter that was vouchsafed to the various parties, containing a 'profound' and 'convincing' analysis, but one to which the Chinese reacted violently.⁹

On the 26th of June, at the end of the meeting in Bucharest, the Chinese also distributed a written declaration to all the delegations.

In these events, we can see preparations for the declaration that would seek to renew the unity of the communist movement, to be held later in the same year, in Moscow. The way that things were set up indicates a desire to surprise the Chinese and force them into some sort of alignment within a united front.

Those are the essential backstage events of the Bucharest conference. Unlike Tito, who did not send any representatives in 1948, the Chinese did participate, albeit without sending their most important leaders.

Dej's speech (with advice from the Soviets, but possibly also on his own initiative) is regarded as a preliminary to the discussions about to take place. Dej makes the point that the exchanges of opinion they were called to undertake, are in fact a debate on the struggle for peace. He supported the Leninist principle of peaceful coexistence, and criticised the Chinese position regarding war, and also their unacceptable behaviour, while in Bucharest, in distributing the pamphlet 'Long Live Leninism' without asking for Romanian permission.¹⁰

These differences led to fragmentation in the communist bloc, in spite of the desire of so many to maintain a united front. A month after the event, Dej addressed his views in a letter to the Chinese, in answer to their letter distributed on 26th of June in Bucharest. Again, his position was very much for the

Soviets and against the Chinese. He said that he deeply regretted the devastating ideology of the Chinese, who were declaring that war was the only path which led to the victory of socialism. Their thesis was profoundly 'unjust and inhuman'.¹¹ In the course of the debate amongst members of the Romanian Politburo whilst drafting Dej's letter, they took up Mao's question: 'so what if 300 million people die, if we can have the whole world living in communism?'¹²

The Chinese were also criticised in this letter for the contradictions in their position. In Moscow, in 1957, when Khrushchev declared his party an equal member of the communist and socialist family, Mao stated that the international communist movement needed to have a head, and that its head could be no other than the Soviet communist party.¹³

Discussing the contents of the letter with other leaders, Dej remarked that it was a closed letter, in which they could not say everything, but they would say more 'when we see them in Moscow'.¹⁴

During the meeting of the Political Bureau held in October 1960, when discussions took place regarding the activity of the Romanian delegation that was to attend the Moscow meeting in December, the Romanians continued to play the role of supporters of the Soviets.

At the Moscow meeting almost 180-200 people participated, representing twenty-six parties. The Chinese delegation was led by Peng Zhen and the session was chaired – at the prompting of the Romanians – by Suslov. The positions were clearer this time. The criticisms put forward were that in Bucharest the Chinese felt that 'the debate was unjust', and that 'they were confronted by a fait accompli', and they were supported in this criticism by the Albanians.

But, as the ex-Cominternist, Petre Borila – a member of the Romanian delegation – put it, there were new matters to be considered in December, here in Moscow:

'The new thing is that the project document will analyse the new stage of the general crisis of capitalism, not in times of war, but in times of peace. You can see that world war can be avoided, and also local aggressive wars can be avoided. There are more and more possibilities to maintain peace and to convert countries from capitalism to socialism without using guns.'

Another question is the problem of the national democratic states. These are states, who have achieved their independence, but they are not socialist, and proletarian rule has not been established.

A further question in this document is the unity among socialist countries, those who excluded themselves from this unity ending up like the Yugoslavs. And, finally, there are no fractions or groups admitted in relations within socialist countries and the international labour movement.¹⁵

These positions were ignored by the Chinese and the Albanian representatives, supported by the Indonesians and the Japanese and, less so, by the Koreans and the Australians.¹⁶

On the 5th of December 1960 a meeting of the Romanian Politburo in Bucharest heard details of how the debates in Moscow, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, took place. The report, presented by Khrushchev, was not accepted by the Chinese, Albanian, Indonesian, Korean or Japanese delegations.¹⁷

It took about four hours to the Chinese to make their presentation. At one point, the Soviets sent a letter to the Chinese, which provoked their disapproval.¹⁸ They criticized its contents and the fact that there were efforts to separate Mao from the Central Committee of the Chinese communist party. They also condemned the meeting in Bucharest, saying that it had a bad impact on the communist movement, repeatedly charging that there had

been a 'surprise attack.' They also complained about the letter sent to them by the Central Committee of the PMR, on the 1st of Aug. 1960.¹⁹

Later in Dej's speech there were no statements against the Chinese position, but there were attacks against the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha. As a consequence, the Albanians left the room. There was a second speech from the Chinese, and a spontaneous reaction followed.

In editing the document, the Chinese were against using the word 'fractions', and the Romanians came up with a compromise formula, omitting the incriminating term.²⁰

So this is how the communist world movement divided. As for Romania, no other European satellite of USSR proved a better supporter of the Soviets. What would change Romania's position so dramatically in the future?

Strategies to consolidate power and influence

It seems that initially Dej's first concern was to consolidate his own power, a fact confirmed even by those close to him. In time, he would get rid of the ex-cominternists that came from Moscow after the Second World War, and of the Romanian 'ex-illegalists' that were giving signs of independence in reaction to the 'democratic centralism' of his rule.

March 21st, 1961 can be considered as the day on which the Romanian leader confirmed his ascendancy in Romania. On that day, in the 'the Grand Presidium of the National Assembly' – the institution that symbolised the state power – the new State Council was created, whose leader would be Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who from that time until his death in March 19th 1965, combined the two

supreme powers: that of party and state. On the same day, Ion Gheorghe Maurer became the prime minister of Romania. The new government, like the Political Bureau, was composed of people loyal to their leader.

The prime minister's personality is interesting. Maurer (1901-2001) was born into a family of teachers – his father was a German, his mother a French. Maurer himself was one of a group of left-leaning lawyers, who served in the trials of communists in the inter-war period. Being close to Dej, by virtue of the fact that he was the link man in organizing the escape of the future leader from prison in 1944, Maurer was, at the same time, one of the men watched by the organizers of the post-war Stalinist trials.

Other 'pieces' in the future politics of Bucharest were Alexandru Barladeanu (1911-1997), an economist, again from inter-war period, but a Soviet citizen during 1940-1946, who would represent Romania in Comecon (the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation). The Foreign Affairs Minister, Corneliu Manescu (1916-2000), is another intellectual who made a special impression as a diplomat, being elected in 1967 as the president of the Twenty-second session of the United Nations.

After promoting this loyal team, Dej distanced himself from the Stalinist past, through a strategy of manipulation. In the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the PMR, held at the end of November 1961, certain episodes in the history of the party were raised by the leader. All the abuses committed in the Stalinist period, including the personality cult, were blamed on the 'Cominternist' fractions in the leading unit of the communist party, fractions that disappeared in 1952.

Khrushchev and Mao had the same concerns as Dej, not only to extend their influence in and relationships with the outside world, but at the same time to feed their people. But Dej was looking for new resources by developing relations with the more advanced countries. His pragmatism led him not to wish to rely on importing products, but on extending the capacity of industrial production in Romania.

Dej did not aspire to 'socialist competition' with US or England, as Khrushchev and Mao did. More than that, in statements outside the propagandistic, he evidenced a fair understanding of the economic situation in Romania.

'We are on the verge of advancing from the stage of crafts' – that's how he characterised, in 1960, Romanian industry – and 'the path to follow is to buy machines from those countries which have modern equipment.'²¹

As his own representatives he would send educated men, former fighters in Spain, with powerful links to the leading figures of several communist parties in Europe. In 1962 and 1963 embassies were opened in Conakry, Havana, Damascus, Accra and Rabat. Diplomatic representations in Morocco, Algeria and Laos were elevated to the ambassadorial level and diplomatic representations were established in Finland, Austria, Great Britain, France, Belgium and Iceland. He put the basis of a trade centre in the Federal Republic of Germany and U Thant, the UN Secretary-General, visited the country in 1963. In 1962, a delegation led by Dej and Maurer, visited Indonesia, India and Burma.

In Romania itself the power station 'Electroputere Craiova' was built, and another power plant, 'Portile de fier', was constructed in cooperation with Yugoslavia.

Under the Chinese umbrella, far from Comecon constraints

When would the appearance of unity with the USSR finally crumble? On the 6th and 7th of June 1962, at a meeting of party representatives from Comecon member countries, during which there was adopted a statement of the fundamental principles of international division of labour, the Romanians stated their point of view regarding their independence. Shortly after that (18-25 of June) Khrushchev visited Romania, where he publicly criticized the policies of the Romanian leadership.

Dej believed that reactivating Comecon was Khrushchev's last try to subordinate, on

the economic level, all the communist countries. He was committed to impose on every country a degree of economic specialisation. Romania and Bulgaria would specialise in agriculture. The Soviet proposals were intended to advantage the countries involved.

'According to this division of labour, we were supposed to take care of growing corn and the Germans would raise their pigs with our corn. This is not a joke; it was actually a proposal from the German Democratic Republic' – remembers the former chief of the Romanian delegation, Barladeanu.²² Faced

with this problem, Dej resorted to a strategy which made use of methods from his revolutionary days. According to Barladeanu, in celebrating May Day 1962, he invited his close friends to a boat trip on the Danube. That is where he elaborated his future strategy to resist Comecon, laying the foundations for the document that would be known as the 'declaration of independence', published in April 1964.²³ Resisting Comecon and moving closer to states in Western Europe and to America would be a broad strategy further sustained by making use of the 'Chinese umbrella'.

One event involving Khrushchev and Dej had a particular impact on their relationship. Coming back from a trip to Asia in October 1962, on a Soviet plane, the pilot informed Dej that they had not received permission to enter Chinese airspace. Being over China at the time, Dej said that the plane should go back to Delhi. Meanwhile, the pilot informed them that the Tashkent airbase had reconsidered their decision, and they continued their flight over China. Landing in Tashkent, they found out that the flight had continued on orders *direct from the Kremlin*, without any kind of permission from the Chinese.

Arriving in Moscow, Dej found Khrushchev in the middle of the Cuban missile crisis – an event that contravened principles of peaceful-coexistence that he announced. Dej interpreted Khrushchev's order to continue the flight as a criminal order, saying to Khrushchev that he needed his dead body to show the world how criminal the Chinese leaders are.²⁴

How exactly a relationship with the Chinese leaders was established, and what precisely was the relationship between Mao and Dej, are questions which are very difficult to answer.

The first visit of a Romanian delegation to China was led by Prime Minister Maurer, and took place between March 2nd and 10th 1964. Maurer was sent to China with the task of mediating the Sino-Soviet conflict.²⁵ According to Manescu (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Dej was searching for a degree of support from the Chinese. Previously Dej had called Manescu to a meeting. Just like Stalin, most of his

difficult conversations took place in secret, with no written record being made. Usually, for these difficult missions only very loyal friends were sent to test the water. That instance where the mission was a failure was classified as personal initiatives that took place without Dej's consent. That's what happened with Manescu when he talked to the Chinese ambassador in Bucharest about Romania's position in Comecon. Manescu was supposed to communicate Romania's way of seeing relations with communist countries, and indicate that they wanted normal relations with China. Those were the instructions he got from Dej. If the meeting was successful, everybody would be satisfied, if not, Manescu was to be responsible.²⁶

Manescu was supposed to go and convince the Chinese that things had changed in Romania. After the Second World War, Romanians had to side with the Soviets and appear very unfriendly to the Chinese. That made things very difficult, and Romanian declarations could have appeared false if they would not have had their own trouble with the Soviets, regarding the international division of labour, and being forced to work in agriculture according to the 'Valev plan'. The result of this meeting was an invitation for Maurer to visit China.²⁷

But Maurer didn't go to China to mediate the conflict between the Soviets and the Chinese, he went there to make China understand the Romanian policy of breaking free of Soviet domination, and to win China's support. He had ten days of discussions with Zhou Enlai, the Prime Minister, where he explained Romanian policy towards the USSR, making clear the fact that they needed China's help to break free of Soviet domination.²⁸ As a consequence, on April 15th, 1964, the Romanian leadership promulgated the declaration regarding the PMR's position in the international communist movement. The declaration would underline the independence and equality of communist parties, and the sovereignty of socialist countries, marking officially the 'escape' of Romanian leaders from Moscow's domination.

Maurer undertook a second visit to China in the autumn of 1964, when the meeting extended to persons like Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping.

From documents held in the archives we can understand the complicated strategy that Dej was using in respect of the representatives of the two superpowers. So, on this visit, much alike on the previous one, the Romanian plane would stop in Moscow on its way to China. Because Khrushchev was on vacation, Maurer went straight to him.²⁹ This is how the meeting held on the 27th of Sept. took place: it was a very long lunch, between three in the afternoon and eight in the evening. Maurer had Emil Bodnaras and Paul Niculescu Mizil with him. The Soviets were represented by Khrushchev and Kosygin. At first Khrushchev spoke about production in agriculture for that autumn, and Maurer about the power plant, 'Portile de Fier'. Next came the interesting part – the Chinese position in certain international matters. Khrushchev discussed the problem of territorial disputes with China. Maurer continued, talking about the meeting he had with France's president at the beginning of August, where he debated the problem of peaceful coexistence. Khrushchev criticised the propaganda campaign that was accusing the Soviets of supporting the FRG against the GDR. The Romanians repeatedly asked for an end to the public polemics between the two big parties. Khrushchev brought the meeting to an end, saying that a new meeting was necessary in order to clarify the matters in discussion, starting with 1960.³⁰

The stenograms of the visit to China show that the issues debated with Khrushchev had already been related to Mao by members of the Romanian delegation.

The meeting with the Chinese on the 8th of October lasted almost two hours, and they cleared up many outstanding problems.³¹ They discussed the matters they had debated with Khrushchev. Maurer and Bodnaras presented

Khrushchev's opinions as they were recorded during their meeting in Moscow. From this point of view we might say that Romanians had a mediating role. Mao's opinion of Khrushchev's politics was that there were only two big countries that mattered – the United States and the Soviet Union. The leaders of the Soviet Union wanted to control the socialist countries. And they wanted to control Iran, Indonesia, and countries in Africa, like Algeria. But in the end they would not be able to control anybody. Khrushchev would pose as the father to his sons, but when the sons grow up, they won't want to listen to their father anymore. Even more, when it comes to countries and parties that don't want to be controlled.³² Maurer, Mao and other leaders responded one by one to the questions put by Khrushchev. As for the planned Moscow meeting of the representatives of the communist and labour parties, (it was planned for Dec. 15th of the same year), neither the Romanians nor the Chinese intended participating.

Not very well known to the Romanians was China's position regarding Comecon. Mao approved of Romania's position which declared itself 'against any kind of state formations that would allow control over the economy of the Comecon participating countries'. 'We don't need Comecon' – was Mao's opinion, – 'we need bilateral and multilateral discussions, and on this ground we can collaborate.' Mao wanted to 'open fire' over Comecon, soon, in a new letter. He also discussed the possibility of changing Comecon's statutes, and making it larger through the participation of communist countries from Asia, including China. The Romanian delegation was surprised by this – they didn't know that China wanted to participate, actually they had been told the contrary. The conversation ended with Mao's promise:

'In six months, or one year or more, we will start an offensive and we will vote for forming an economic assistance committee between the thirteen socialist countries, founded on a basis of equality. I think you will not be against it'.

The Romanians and the Chinese promised each other help 'down this road, and on this

position, no matter how hard it will be', as Bodnaras recounts it.³³

From these conversations we can get this opinion on Khrushchev made by Mao. 'If we are determined, and if we firmly resist him, he becomes an animal with a weak body.' Mao had underlined what he saw as the lack of character of the Soviet leader, proven by the fact that he doesn't live up to his word.³⁴

Mao offered a further, premonitory, judgment on the Soviet leader – that he is not

doing too well, and that he might 'hang himself'. Indeed, Khrushchev was shortly to be removed from the leading positions of the Soviet state and party. A few months later, in March 1965, Gheorghiu Dej also died, from cancer diagnosed less than two months before his death.

A Budapest Epilogue

I have long championed the 'recycling' of communist history with the help of archive documents, because they can tear down so many of the logical constructions and theories which have become 'petrified' in the conventional history and in public consciousness.

We end this summary tour of the problems between the Russian and the Chinese people,

as seen and recorded in Bucharest, with this story regarding the bloody course of the events in Hungary, in 1956. Among the examples that were to justify Mao's dismissal of Khrushchev's 'animal weak body', Mao recounted in October 1964, for the benefit of the Romanian delegation:

'When Imre Nagy's counter-revolution took place, Khrushchev didn't have things clear. The whole Political Bureau of the CPSU considered that Soviet troops should be withdrawn from Hungary. This was not our view, not the view of comrades Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping (who were present as Mao told this story) who were in Moscow to express China's position. Our view was that we should hold to our position and not give in to rebellion. The Soviets considered that the Soviet troops should be withdrawn from Hungary. In this situation, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping said that because they didn't have any more work to do they could leave the next day. The following day, all the members of the Political Bureau of the CPSU came to the airport and said that in fact they would not withdraw the troops from Hungary, but would send more. All this happened during a period of two days. On the first day they thought one thing, and on the second day, another thing.'³⁵

NOTES

¹ F. Furet, *Trecutul unei iluzii, Eseu despre ideea comunistă în secolul XX (1995)*, București, Humanitas, 1996, p. 503.

² L. Betea, "Alexandru Bărlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu", *Evenimentul Românesc*, București, 1997, p. 125.

³ *Apud* R. Pipes, *Scurtă istorie a revoluției ruse (1995)*, Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 126.

⁴ *Convorbiri neterminate. Corneliu Mănescu în dialog cu Lavinia Betea*, Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 70.

⁵ P. Sfetcu, *13 ani în anticamera lui Dej*, prefata, note și selecția textului L. Betea, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, București, 2000, pp. 205-208.

⁶ Arhivele MAE, Direcția VI, vol.220/1959, fond China 8, f.25-27.

⁷ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 36/1960, f.33.

⁸ *Idem*, f.34.

⁹ *Ibidem*, f.35.

¹⁰ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 36/1960, f. 59-61.

¹¹ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 36/1960, f.65-66.

¹² ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 36/1960, f.38.

¹³ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 36/1960, f. 63.

¹⁴ Darea de seamă, cit. f.38.

¹⁵ ANIC, fond Cancelaria CC al PMR, dosar 43/1960, f. 7.

¹⁶ *Idem*, f. 12.

¹⁷ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 47/1960, vol. I, f. 12.

¹⁸ Indeed, the fact is confirmed in the memoirs written by Mao's doctor, who was present when Hrushtchev met Mao, in 1958. See Dr. Li Zhui, *Viața particulară a președintelui Mao* (1994), vol. I. Elit, București, 1995, p. 322.

¹⁹ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 47/1960, vol. I, f. 16.

²⁰ *Idem*, f. 21-32.

²¹ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 17/1960, f. 2-5.

²² L. Betea, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²³ *Idem*, p. 147-148.

²⁴ P. Sfetcu, *op.cit.* pp. 303-304.

²⁵ C. Păiușan, N.D Ion, M. Retegan, *Regimul comunist din România, o cronologie politică (1945-1989)*, Tritonic, București, 2002, p. 120.

²⁶ *Convorbiri neterminate. Corneliu Mănescu în dialog cu Lavinia Betea*, Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 82.

²⁷ *Idem*, pp.85-86.

²⁸ L. Betea, *Maurer și lumea de ieri, mărturii despre stalinizarea României*, ed. II, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 176.

²⁹ *Idem*, p. 177.

³⁰ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 55/1964, vol. II, f.1-5.

³¹ ANIC, fond CC al PCR/ Cancelaria, dosar 55/1964, vol. II, f. 140.

³² *Idem*, f. 143.

³³ *Ibidem*, f.156.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 148.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 150.