

*The Restoration of Romanian-Belgian Economic Relations between 1957 and 1972. Information Collection*

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**Abstract:**

*The historiography of both Romania and Belgium has insufficiently examined the economic relations between the two countries during the post-war period. This article aims to provide an analysis of the efforts undertaken by Romania and Belgium to establish new economic treaties, despite facing significant political and social challenges. Official visits by ministers and various secondary political figures, including senators and mayors from both nations, played a crucial role in enhancing bilateral trade exchanges. The economic policies of the Benelux Union—comprising Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg—tended to favor a trade balance that was advantageous to Belgium, placing the Socialist Republic of Romania at a consistent disadvantage. Nonetheless, Romania's strategic and economic interests compelled it to maintain and pursue economic relations with the Kingdom of Belgium.*

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Between 1871 and 1880, Romania established a diplomatic mission in Brussels, which, on March 25, 1880, was upgraded to the status of a legation<sup>2</sup>. On September 1, 1940, Romania's Legation was downgraded to the rank of consulate under the leadership of diplomat Onișor Victor Marius<sup>3</sup>. From February 1941, the responsibilities of the Belgian embassy in Bucharest were temporarily assumed by the United States, with these duties being resumed by Belgium in August 1946. Diplomatic relations with the Netherlands were notably more restricted; Teodor Solacolu, the representative of the People's Republic of Romania in Brussels, was also tasked with overseeing Dutch interests. Beginning June 27, 1947, the Dutch government decided to delegate a significant portion of its functions to the Belgian legation in Bucharest, while the Dutch minister was accredited in Budapest<sup>4</sup>.

Following Romania's alignment with Moscow after 1945, there was a notable deterioration in relations with Western countries, both politically and economically. The implementation of Stalinist policies severely restricted foreign access to the Romanian market, compelling many investors to divest their holdings due to the nationalization of properties. The new proponents of Stalin's ideology adhered strictly to the emerging dictatorship, resulting in several significant developments: the expulsion of King Michael and the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic in December 1947; the establishment of the Romanian Workers' Party; the appointment of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej as General Secretary in February 1948; the signing of a cooperation agreement with

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<sup>2</sup> *Anuarul diplomatic*, Republica Populară Română, MAE, Direcția Protocol, 1960, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> MAE, *Documente privind stabilirea, ruperea și reluarea relațiilor diplomatice ale României 1859-1944*, Bucharest, 1973, p. 412.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 32.

the Soviet Union; among other consequential actions<sup>5</sup>. This optical illusion could not be maintained for many years, as the new communist republic needed to assert itself "on the international stage," especially after the creation of the Comecon, Stalin's death, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romanian territory. The affirmation of the Bucharest government and its exit from the Stalinist "bloc" depended on its domestic decisions as well as its openness to the Western world. The new "liberal" decisions made by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe Maurer, or Corneliu Mănescu after 1960 had to avoid tarnishing the image of the communist world or raising new suspicions of distancing from the Kremlin<sup>6</sup>.

The thawing of relations with the Western world was neither quick nor simple, as Romania had left several "wounds" between 1948 and 1955, such as the nationalization of properties, the closure of foreign consulates, and more. After Soviet leader Khrushchev's visit to Washington, the U.S. became of keen interest to the Romanian political class, with the renewal of relations being carried out gradually and with certain precautions<sup>7</sup>. All these efforts led to the signing of a "financial and ... cultural agreement" in 1960<sup>8</sup>. During this period (1954), the

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceușescu 1965-1989. Geniul Carpaților*, Bucharest, Polirom, 2011, pp. 59-63 (The Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) was established in 1949 as a counter-response to the Marshall Plan).

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Zvîncă, *Distanțarea României comuniste de Uniunea Sovietică înainte de declarația din aprilie 1964* in "Philohistoriss", year VI, no. 9, Kluasenboek, Cluj-Napoca, 2020 pp. 171-178 (Even though Khrushchev's policy towards the West was much more "peaceful" compared to his predecessor, he promoted the cooperation of all communist states within the Comecon, being dissatisfied with Romania's attitude in 1962).

<sup>7</sup> Paul Nistor, *Semnele „dezghețului”*. *Relațiile României comuniste cu Statele Unite ale Americii în 1954* in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A.D.Xenopol” din Iași", vol. 51, 2014, pp. 261-265.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, *Dincolo de Cortina de Fier: negocierile interguvernamentale româno-americane (mai-iunie 1964)* in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A.D.Xenopol” din Iași", vol. 57, 2020, p. 342.

Romanians also signed a new trade agreement with West Germany<sup>9</sup>. These actions were also noted in Belgian reports, which mentioned forthcoming agreements for grain exports with West Germans<sup>10</sup>.

At the Third Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej outlined the goal of developing and modernizing the nation's economy over the subsequent 10 to 15 years. This ambitious plan faced criticism from some member states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), which accused Romania of pursuing a policy of "autarky." During the fifth decade of the 20th century, Western nations had imposed trade restrictions on the Eastern bloc, including limitations on exports, imports, and external credits. The eventual relaxation of these restrictions allowed Romania to engage in trade with West Germany, Italy, England, Austria, France, and Finland. The primary objective was for Romania to export manufactured goods and import advanced technologies for industrial development.

This policy was maintained by Nicolae Ceaușescu, who succeeded Dej as the leader of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR). Ceaușescu emphasized mechanization and industrial autonomy, alongside efforts to "raise the standard

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<sup>9</sup> Mircea Dorel Suci, „Filierea franceză” și începuturile Agenției Comerciale ale Republicii Populare Române de la Frankfurt pe Main in „Arhivele Totalitarismului”, Bucharest, vol. 1-2, 2019, p. 222 (Let's not forget the visits of Malenkov and Khrushchev to London in 1956 for Soviet-American cooperation).

<sup>10</sup> Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels (hereafter referred to as AMFA Brussels), fund *Relations politique*, folder 6.792, file *Roumanie 1955 (Nationalisations)*, f. 1-5 (During this period, Belgium imposed an embargo on Belgian products, possibly to repair relations with England and France. Another issue was the excessive rise in the prices of Romanian cereals and oil to Antwerp. J.H. de Bruyn, the Belgian Minister of Internal Affairs, was well aware that Belgium was one of the countries exporting iron, chemical, and textile materials, which Romania needed to replace outdated factory equipment. Thus, it was proposed to lift the embargo, address the "nationalization" issue, and sign a commercial agreement for a period of 3 to 5 years. Concurrently, it was desired to continue negotiations in Brussels, not in Bucharest).

of living." Implementing these policies necessitated additional international visits by Romanian officials, the signing of new agreements, NATO arrangements for goods transit, and the establishment of new consulates. Consequently, between 1960 and 1967, imports constituted 90% of the economy, while exports increased to 67%, creating a challenging economic imbalance for the country<sup>11</sup>. Romania's exports to the Benelux countries included a diverse range of products such as cereals, vegetables, fruits, honey, tobacco, petroleum products, furniture, paper, and electrical machinery and appliances, among others, with a cumulative value of 272,500 Belgian francs. In contrast, imports from the Benelux countries comprised wool, textile materials, cocoa, chemical products, glass, and iron and steel products, among other items, totaling 631,500 Belgian francs. During this period, the Romanian state allocated 250,000 Belgian francs towards investments in equipment, facilities, machinery, electrical installations, scientific instruments, and various other items<sup>12</sup>.

Until the 1960s, Western Europe was "captured by the American utopian pragmatism," being compelled to establish new economic exchanges with the United States. At the same time, Americans were seen as "peacemakers and protectors" for non-Sovietized countries. Without being a "superpower" on the global stage, Western Europe managed to maintain its relationships with other countries without sliding abruptly into the Soviet-American power play. An example of this is the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which involved the signing of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community and the Euratom

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<sup>11</sup> Elena Dragormir, *Relațiile comerciale cu Occidentul în concepția economică a României postbelice. Argumente pentru o nouă perspectivă de studiu* în "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A.D.Xenopol” din Iași”, vol.67, 2021, p. 480-486.

<sup>12</sup> AMFA Brussels, fund *Relations politique*, folder 7057, file *Accord commercial signé à Bucarest le 30.09.1960*, f. 1-8.

Treaty<sup>13</sup>. In the early 1960s, maintaining economic relations with Western European countries was a strategic priority for the United States, which was engaged in competition with the Eastern bloc. President John F. Kennedy was compelled to lower tariff rates as part of a broader effort to integrate Atlantic Europe into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and to bolster the U.S. economy, albeit gradually. One proposed solution, discussed during the meeting between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States in Geneva from May 16 to 23, 1963, was the harmonization and reduction of industrial sector tariffs by 50%. However, this proposal failed to resolve the issue, as the six EEC member countries, particularly France, prioritized their own national interests.

In 1964, a cap was established on tariffs for several products imported into the EEC, which facilitated U.S. exports of one-third of its industrial products to Western Europe between 1968 and 1972. The most significant aspect of these agreements was the Europeans' willingness to negotiate with one of the world's most powerful nations, reflecting their diplomatic courage and commitment to reaching a compromise<sup>14</sup>.

Benelux was another European economic formation, consisting of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, established in September 1944. After World War II, Benelux, along with other European countries, was forced to accept

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<sup>13</sup> Uwe Nerlich, *Western Europe's relations with the United States in "Daedalus"*, Cambridge (US), The MIT Press, vol. 108, no. 1, 1979, pp. 87-91.

<sup>14</sup> Lucia Coppolaro, *US policy on European Integration during the GATT Kennedy Round negotiations (1963-67): the last Hurrah of America's Europeanist* in *"The International History Review"*, London, Taylor&Francis, vol. 33, no. 3, 2011, p. 409-425 (The EEC wanted to continue dominating the export of cereals, while Washington wanted Europeans to liberalize the industrial market (also known as the Kennedy Round). These factors made the agreements increasingly complicated. For France or West Germany, it was quite clear that the greatest gains could be achieved from industry, which led to blocking the GATT agreement).

General Marshall's economic aid plan. The integration of these three countries into the new liberal economic world was also reflected in their publications, promoting the exploitation of natural resources and the modernization of industry for a better quality of life. In other words, the new momentum of the three countries in the global race for economic recovery can be observed<sup>15</sup>. Their political and economic rise on the international stage starting in 1958 allowed them to sign 20 trade treaties, increasing the pressure on Great Britain to join the EEC, due to the close relations between the Dutch and the British<sup>16</sup>. It is no surprise that the three countries organized their first conferences in London. Benelux implemented its foreign policy after 1952, creating a diplomatic committee that addressed relations between East and West, as well as decisions from the Geneva meetings. Thus, the economies of the three countries were interdependent, and decisions had to be made jointly.

As mentioned in the title of the article, we will focus more on the case of Belgium. The Belgian economic system was "dominated" by small enterprises that were "sufficiently strong and durable" to agree on prices, investments, wages, and so on. Additionally, these groups had certain concepts, such as "the most powerful best organization is the most active and the most influential on the political level"<sup>17</sup>. In the 1950s, around 25 Belgian shareholders were involved in

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<sup>15</sup> *Echos BENELUX. Commercial review devoted to the Be-Ne-Lux Countries*, edition A, no. 27/A, juni 1948, pp. 7-11 (This magazine published in French General Marshall's speech, the response from French Foreign Minister Henri Bonnet, the USSR's opinion on the new American economic plan, as well as a speech by history professor Carl L. Becker from Cornell University regarding "The International Economic Order." During this period, the main driving force behind Benelux was held by the Netherlands).

<sup>16</sup> F. Gunther Eyck, *Benelux in the common market* in *Current History*, Oakland, vol. 47, no, 280, 1964, pp. 295-300.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon L. Weil, *The Benelux Nations. The politics of small-country democracies*, New-York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970, pp.121-122 (In the Netherlands, these groups have direct access to the

old Belgian companies such as Concordia, Astra Română, Société Roumano-Belge des Pétroles, Société Communales des Trams de Bucarest, and others<sup>18</sup>.

Over the decades, financial difficulties encountered by communist states compelled them to seek external credit from Western sources and underscored the necessity for the advancement of trade relations. For socialist economies, the primary objective was to establish pricing mechanisms conducive to the "rational conduct of business," in contrast to Western democratic economic models. Variable pricing within communist countries was determined in accordance with global market prices and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), an organization that Romania acceded to only in 1973. Frequently, Warsaw Pact nations would convert their currencies into rubles, in accordance with directives established by the International Bank for Economic Cooperation, which was headquartered in Moscow from 1964 onwards. On the international stage, each Soviet-aligned country utilized the ruble as a currency for payments, which was ultimately convertible into U.S. dollars. Pricing for both imports and exports was based on the ruble. Nevertheless, not all Eastern Bloc countries concurred with this arrangement, with some contending that the ruble did not always qualify as a "legitimate international currency."

In 1970, the International Investment Bank was established by all member states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) to facilitate ruble-denominated loans for new "investment projects." The sustainability of the

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Ministry of Economic Affairs. The difference from Belgian companies is that Dutch firms have much greater production capacity, such as Royal Dutch Shell, Philips, Unilever, etc).

<sup>18</sup> AMFA Brussels, fund *Relations politique*, folder 6792.7, file *Liste des participations belges a des societes privees en Roumanie*, Appendices to Report no. DJ-90.54.90-38 of September 8, 1958, f. 1-9.



bilateral agreements was compromised by financial difficulties, permitting each state to procure goods without the necessity of "balancing its trade with each individual country." The ruble, as an international currency, could be utilized within any CMEA member state. The remaining challenge was the conversion of the ruble into the capitalist economic system, a process that was experimentally initiated on January 1, 1973. It was imperative that the prices of Eastern products did not exceed prevailing market prices at the time of sale. Adjustments and decisions made by economists over the years were influenced by inflationary pressures and other economic variables, resulting in continuous fluctuations between the two economic blocs<sup>19</sup>.

Specialized literature mentions that, after Stalin's death, the country accepted the process of de-Stalinization but not the communist doctrine. In this regard, historian Mironov presents the language used by the press of the time against the "Common Market," with headlines and comments such as: "West German monopolies, the main beneficiaries" or "market interests also impact women's interests"<sup>20</sup>. It is not surprising that Benelux published in its official bulletin of 1963 its reservations about the ideological, economic, and social policies of communist countries, proposing to address issues that could lead to conflicts. The economic alliance, also influenced by the Cuban crisis and the German issue, proposed in 1963 to the governments of Eastern communist

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<sup>19</sup> Stanislaw Raczkowski, *La crise monétaire internationale et les pays socialistes* în volumul *La crise des paiements international et le développement du commerce es-ouest*, Brussels, Etablissements Emile Bruylant, 1976, pp. 92-112 (Among these nine countries, there was also a bilateral trade agreement that specified the quantitative quota or the value of reciprocal deliveries and the total export value, which had to match the imported value. This did not allow all countries the opportunity to purchase other products due to the bilateral trade agreement concerning the ruble).

<sup>20</sup> Alexandru Murad Mironov. *R.P.R. și construcția europeană, Semnarea Tratatului de la Roma, 1957* in "Arhivele Totalitarismului", Bucharest, vol. 1-2, 2013, pp. 114-116.

countries cooperation on its own terms. This also depended on the organization's decision, namely whether it wanted to cooperate or not<sup>21</sup>.

At the outset of the 1960s, there was a partial shift in outdated political ideologies spearheaded by Henry Spaak, who served as the Secretary General of NATO until early 1961. Spaak successfully introduced "new horizons" in NATO's policy towards the Soviet Union. Through a series of speeches delivered in Paris, London, and Moscow, Spaak was able to articulate to President John F. Kennedy that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) could only effectively address challenges posed by its adversary if its member states remained cohesive and adhered to shared principles. Spaak contended that the United States needed to relinquish its supremacist stance, as well as the divisions within the alliance that were characterized by factions advocating for "active policies" versus those awaiting a Soviet initiative.

Despite Kennedy's expression of gratitude in January 1963, Spaak observed that issues pertaining to Western European policy continued to be relegated to a secondary status in American foreign policy priorities. Spaak's persistent efforts on the European stage were aimed at extricating Belgium from diplomatic isolation, which had resulted from the Congo crisis. This endeavor included the establishment of new cultural agreements with Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and various other Central and Eastern European states<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> *Bulletin BENELUX*, Brussels, no. 6, 1963, pp. 36-37 (The meeting of the governments of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg at the Benelux Consultative Interparliamentary Council also relied on the support of other Western European states, noting that they "have sufficient assets and have nothing to lose from their dynamism").

<sup>22</sup> Michel Dumolin, *SPAAK*, Brussels, Racine, 1999, pp. 621-632 (Spaak was one of the Belgian socialist supporters, dealing with various "economic crises" related to the rise of the middle class in the 1950s-1960s).

The development and reinforcement of relations between Belgium and Romania were significantly influenced by Spaak's active engagement in ongoing dialogues, which were held either at his residence or at the residence of the Russian ambassador in Paris. Notably, Spaak continued these discussions with Vinogradov and, subsequently, with Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow on September 19, 1961. It is considered a commendable gesture on the part of the Soviet leader to extend an invitation for dialogue to a NATO representative, especially in the context of the incident involving an American U-2 aircraft that had breached Soviet airspace during the summer of 1961<sup>23</sup>.

According to the doctrine of the time, the prosperity of Romanian society depended on the development of the country's industry, with the aim of replicating the global model, especially in agriculture. The economic difficulties that Romania faced in the 1950s did not allow it to negotiate on equal terms with other Western states, and the still precarious trade was more advantageous to Western capitalists. The gradual growth of Romania's economy alongside other European states led political leaders to adopt a goal at the Third Congress of the PMR (Romanian Workers' Party) in June 1960 to double exports by 1965, with "65%-75% going to socialist countries, and the remainder to capitalist countries." The new goal of the new leader in Bucharest in 1965 was to balance export-import trade by 1970 through the modernization of heavy industry and distancing relations with Moscow. The progress of science in technology and

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<sup>23</sup> Paul-Henri Spaak, *Combats inachevés. De l'espoire aux déceptions*, vol. 2, Brussels, Fayard, 1969, pp.331-356 (Spaak's meetings with the Soviet ambassador between 1958-1960 sometimes took place at the residence of the Polish or Czechoslovak ambassador, or at the residence of NATO Council Dean Andre de Staercke, who was also of Belgian origin. In his memoirs, Spaak confesses that he always considered it dangerous to "find himself alone in the presence of four or five representatives from communist countries." Nevertheless, he had the courage to visit Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia).

economic thinking compelled the Bucharest government to abandon old ideologies in order to continue trade with the EEC<sup>24</sup>. The new economic ambitions of Gheorghiu-Dej and the future leader can be observed in relation to the Soviet Union, with Romania reaching a figure of 5.5 billion lei in 1964<sup>25</sup>.

### **The first steps**

In this study, we observe that both countries were seeking new trade partners with similar interests. The greatest advantage for the Romanians was that Belgium's Foreign Minister, Spaak, shared social-democratic ideologies, which facilitated communication with Maurer. However, the initial attempts by the Romanians to establish relations with the West were negotiated with France, followed by Great Britain and many other states. In 1959, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, a representative of the People's Republic of Romania at the CMEA and Vice President of the Council of Ministers, undertook an unofficial visit to Belgium to "resolve financial arrears"<sup>26</sup>. Gheorghe Gaston Marin, the man of national planning, made a point of visiting, among other places, the enterprises in Charleroi and Antwerp in 1959, followed by those in the Netherlands. He notes

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<sup>24</sup> Elena Dragomir, *Relațiile comerciale cu Occidentul în concepția economică a României postbelice. Argumente pentru o nouă perspectivă de studiu* in "Analele Științifice ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași”, vol. 67, 2021, pp.481-488 (Romania's good fortune was also due to the political shift in the USSR regarding satellite countries, coupled with the courage to oppose the supreme leader. Joining international organizations such as GATT improved the level of the economy).

<sup>25</sup> Constantin Moraru, *Politica externă a României 1958-1964*, Bucharest, Enciclopedica, 2008, p. 33 (Specialized literature shows that Russia did not want its satellite to deviate from its orbit, as exemplified by the Soviet leader's stubbornness in continuing nuclear armament in 1962. Romanians participated in disarmament talks in Brussels in 1961 alongside other countries. The economic growth "four times greater than in 1950" gave Dej more authority over the dictatorship in Moscow).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

that the Dutch "industrial circles" represented a much greater interest, leading to the conclusion of various contracts<sup>27</sup>.

The development and expansion of the communist politico-economic imagination were also mentioned in the foreign press, with Romania making "giant steps, unprecedented in its turbulent past, on the path of progress and prosperity"<sup>28</sup>. The skepticism of the Belgian business delegate in Bucharest, J. Leroy, is noted in the documents from 1958, which mention his distrust regarding the payment of Belgian indemnities following the discussions of 1957. The development of new trade relations between the two countries depended on the settlement of old debts<sup>29</sup>. At the time, the trade policy of Benelux did not align with Romania's, including payment methods<sup>30</sup>, due to ongoing disputes between the Netherlands and Romania in 1958. In this context, the Romanian Foreign Minister in Brussels had signed a trade agreement between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the Belgian-Luxembourg Economic Union (BLEU)<sup>31</sup>. New discussions took place between the Belgian plenipotentiary in Bucharest, R. H. de

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<sup>27</sup> Gheorghe Gaston Marin, *Consemnări*, Bucharest, Semne, 2003, pp. 249-250.

<sup>28</sup> Idem, *În serviciul României lui Gheorghiu-Dej. Însemnări din viață*, Bucharest, Evenimentul Românesc, 2000, pp.200-203.

<sup>29</sup> AMFA Brussels, fund *Relations politique*, folder 6792.7, file R. NAT. *Préparation Négociations BENELUX-ROUMANIE (La Haye)*, Report to Monsieur H. Fayat, Minister of Foreign Trade, dated January 27, 1958, f. 1-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, Report to Monsieur Leroy, Chargé d'Affaires de Belgique à Bucarest (no. B.1/144/008/22.534), f. 1-4 (On the same terms, the Netherlands also agreed to renegotiate with the Romanian government for future commercial dealings, delays that affected the agreements with Benelux).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, Note for Monsieur l'administrateur-directeur general, dated January 27, f. 1-5 (Note to the Foreign Trade Administration No. B.1/144/008/20.760. New discussions took place in Paris regarding the proposal for an air commercial agreement between Romania and the Netherlands, in the context of Belgium's desire to attract investments by settling commercial decisions and indemnities with the Netherlands. Romanian exports to the Belgian-Luxembourg Economic Union (U.E.B.L.) during 1955-1956 exceeded exports to France from 1952-1953, with Brussels showing interest in a much more advantageous trade for both parties. All this information can be found in Report no. 977/377 from July 9, 1957, f. 1-3).

Vleeschouwer, and the Romanian Minister of Oil and Chemicals, Mihail Florescu, regarding trade policy with Benelux. The Bucharest cabinet preferred signing a three-year agreement with the U.E.B.L. due to the financial benefits it would gain, as well as the payment of indemnities that would come into effect in the second year of the new treaty. This did not bother the Dutch, as the trade exchanges remained identical<sup>32</sup>.

In 1960, the issue of indemnity payments was discussed by some of the most important Belgian companies, including: Electrobél, Solvay et Cie, Oscar Lemoine (representing the Belgian company Foraj Lemoine), Société des Ciments de l'Europe Orientale, Compagnie Auxiliaire des Chemins de Fer, Banque de la Société Générale de Belgique (representing the shares of Usines Métallurgiques Lemaître in Bucharest), and Société Coopérative. However, Société des Sucreries de Roumanie did not participate in these negotiations due to a lack of documentation concerning indemnity payments to Belgium or Italy<sup>33</sup>.

Following the trade agreement signed on September 30, 1960, Belgium and Luxembourg managed to achieve a profit of 382.6 million Belgian francs (B.F.) that year, which was 7.7 times greater than the 49.4 million B.F. recorded in 1958. In contrast, Romania exported only 182.6 million B.F. to the Belgian-Luxembourg Economic Union (U.E.B.L.). One possible reason for this deficit could be the absence of Romanian commercial agents and diplomats in Belgium, with the Romanian Legation in Brussels having only "one employed secretary, M. Mocanu," to handle these matters<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, Note for l'administrateur-directeur general (Benelux-Roumanie), no. B2/Géo/N/144/008/26.861 dated June 2, 1958, f. 1-3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, Report to "Monsieur le Ministre" dated June 15, 1960, f. 1-2

<sup>34</sup> *Idem*, file Roumanie. Dossier négociation, „Note pour la direction generale de la politique" no. B/GEO/144/001, Julie 4, 1961, f. 1-3 (The figures obtained in 1960 prompted Belgian chemical traders

In the world of commerce, advertising played a crucial role. The sale or purchase of products depended on the image promoted by the press or other economic partners, whether for a short or long period. Until the early 1960s, Western Europe preferred to remain obscure regarding Romania, with very limited relations. In March 1961, the Belgian press, including "L'Echo de la Bourse" and "Agefi," published contracts between Romanians and Austrians for steel production and the promotion of the Galați steelworks, as well as collaborations with the English firm "Petrocarbon Developments." The adoption of the French Chausson model for "manufacturing truck bodies" sparked foreign interest in buying these products directly from the Romanians, potentially at a much more favorable price<sup>35</sup>. In 1962, Belgium was open to negotiating with Romania regarding the purchase of Romanian oil within the global quota of 340,000 tons allocated for Eastern European countries by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy. Concurrently, the Romanian government was expected to place orders worth 750 million Belgian francs in the upcoming period<sup>36</sup>. Let's not forget that the Romanian government had approved the reimbursement of Belgian investments declared in 1944, which were valued at 3 billion Belgian francs. In 1964, Romania agreed to pay the first installment of 55 million Belgian francs<sup>37</sup>.

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to visit Romania to "assess the existence of potentially interesting business opportunities" in this field. At the same time, Bucharest decided to send Lucian Florescu to Brussels as the third economic secretary).

<sup>35</sup> ANIC, Fund *CC al PCR-Secția Relații Externe*, file no. 26/1961, f. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Archives Generale du Royaume (The following will cite AGR), Fund *Comités Ministériels (CMCES)*, file no. 2016, f. 1-5 (Negotiations held in December 1962).

<sup>37</sup> AMFA Brussels, Fund *Relations politique*, folder 6792.7, file *Question Parlementaire. Roumanie*, f. 1-3 (Some of the indemnities were to be paid through the export of raw materials to Belgium. The funds were to be paid to Belgian and Luxembourg banks using Belgian francs).

It is important to note that the ideological concepts of Belgian socialists and Romanian socialists did not have the same meanings. Belgian socialists promoted the middle class by avoiding "dirigisme and nationalization," arguing that this was necessary to "prevent a Soviet-style dictatorial state." In contrast, the Social Christians avoided using the term "Soviet," substituting it with "Marxism," possibly to avoid a propagandistic interpretation<sup>38</sup>. Probably for this reason, Romanian-Belgian relations were limited until the late 1950s. The Belgian ambassador in Bucharest, Marcel de Vlieger, illustrated Brussels' ongoing ideological issues between the two countries in his diplomatic documents, noting Belgium's involvement in aiding Romanian Jews. In his reports, he often preferred to "let my thoughts mature." However, there were also moments when he did not shy away from criticizing the Communist Party's brutality: "The puppets [...] who govern this charming country, according to the instructions of their Moscow masters, have only one form of freedom: overstatement... It is both charming and depressing to live in Romania: this province of the Soviet Empire".

The improvement in economic relations in 1960 is readily apparent, with various Belgian businesspeople visiting Romania "five or six times." For example, the Belgian national airline Sabena agreed to cooperate with the Romanian national airline Tarom on the Brussels-Cologne-Budapest-Bucharest route. In the table below, we will present the visits of Belgian traders in 1960:

| The names of business people | The Belgian company                   |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Walter Gallez                | S.A. Ateliers Belges Reunis a Enghien |

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Timperman, *1945-1954:Le PSB s'ouvrea aux classes moyennes* in "Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine", Brussels, vol. 3-4, 1998, pp. 545-456.



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|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| R. Kervyn de Meerendre            | Société Belge de l'Azote et des Produits Chimique du marly |
| Melle R. Doupagne                 | Etablissements Germeau-Liege                               |
| R.Borneman                        | Sabena                                                     |
| Th. Snyers                        | S.A. la Metallurgie Liegeoise                              |
| Fr. Rupied                        | Compagnie de Wagons Lits                                   |
| A.Van Mol                         | Morissen-Anvers                                            |
| M. Dugard                         | P.J.Zurstrassen et Fils S.A.                               |
| E. Mertens                        | S.A. Copina-Bruxelles                                      |
| Lagrange                          | Soudometal                                                 |
| Ch. van der Vennet                | Ateliers J. Hanrez                                         |
| J. van Zandycke                   | Importator de încălțăminte                                 |
| L. Pourbaix                       | S.A.Interorient                                            |
| J.Marquet, G. Buysens, G. Debroux | L'Extraction Continue de Smet-Anvers                       |

Société Belge de l'Azote proposed building a propylene plant, with costs amounting to 400 million francs. S.A. Citrique Belge wanted to sign a contract with Romanian importers for the supply of 200 tons of citric acid. In addition to the Romanians requesting an increase in Romanian exports, they suggested that Belgium become a transit country for Romanian goods, like Germany and the Netherlands. Consequently, Bucharest needed a commercial office in the small kingdom for selling goods<sup>39</sup>, along with a new team—Florescu Lucian and Penn

<sup>39</sup> AMFA Brussels, Fund *Political Relations*, folder 13.798, file *Romania 1961*, Report no. 123 (File No. 641/407-no.376) dated June 3, 1961, f. 4 (Marcel de Vlieger, aged 50, was appointed to the post in Bucharest in January 1960 due to his experience as a diplomat in African countries as well as in Indonesia. The representative of Belgium was also responsible for managing the Dutch consulate,

Ion under the direction of M. Magheru. The negotiation conditions between G. Stuyck, the commercial attaché in Bucharest, and Mircea Petrescu, the director of foreign trade relations, were quite ambiguous, characterized by an imbalance between imports and exports. Some goods required a license to enter the Benelux area. The Belgian trading company Socomabel agreed that our country could import corn, petroleum products, chemicals, foodstuffs, and light industry goods worth 6–7 million dollars<sup>40</sup>.

Various visits were also made by C. Deleclos, a journalist for "Lloyd Anversois," J. Geal, president of the children's theater, deputies Guillaume and Wostyn, as well as senators Pairon, de Schepper, and Chot. However, the ambassador found it challenging to fulfill his duties due to a lack of qualified staff or employees for a short period, and due to a lack of contacts and freedom, which made the task "pénible et presque irréalisable l'exécution d'une tâche pourtant essentielle". Several Romanian secretaries worked at the embassy, including Mrs. Sofronescu, Chiapella, and Berlemont, who were appreciated for their work<sup>41</sup>. The lack of Romanian staff hindered the translation and understanding of the press or documents in Romanian<sup>42</sup>.

The efforts and intentions of the two countries appear to be bearing fruitful results, with the trade volume with Belgium reaching 150% in 1960. This percentage seems quite promising compared to the United Kingdom (68.3%), France (83.6%), West Germany (110.3%), Austria (118.5%), and Italy (129.4%).

Exports by year and country expressed in millions of lei:

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along with his advisor Jan Naaykens and commercial secretary Joseph Arnasteen. The Belgians managed the Dutch consulate for 12 years, from 1952 to 1964).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, Rapport no. 165 (Dos. no. B/64-No. 492), dated July 3, 1961, f. 1-4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, Rapport no. 46 (Dos.A/130-no.108), dated February 11, 1961, f. 1-6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, Rapport no. 50 (Dos. no. P/200-no.112), dated February 11, 1961, f. 1.

| Country        | 1958  | 1959  | 1960  |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Austria        | 35,7  | 39,5  | 94,3  |
| Belgium        | 7,1   | 5,2   | 12,8  |
| Danemark       | 2,7   | 0,9   | 1,8   |
| France         | 92,4  | 84,3  | 117,1 |
| United Kingdom | 39    | 52    | 89,5  |
| Greece         | 30,3  | 26    | 23,7  |
| Italy          | 66,5  | 56,3  | 153,8 |
| Netherlands    | 10,7  | 12,6  | 19,2  |
| West Germany   | 157,7 | 143,9 | 262,7 |
| Switzerland    | 37    | 24,9  | 66,8  |
| Sweden         | 2     | 4,1   | 14,3  |

Imports by year and country, expressed in millions of lei:

| Country        | 1958  | 1959  | 1960  |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Austria        | 34,2  | 30,7  | 59,1  |
| Belgium        | 7,5   | 5,9   | 15    |
| Danemark       | 4,4   | 1,8   | 3,8   |
| France         | 94,3  | 60,6  | 149   |
| United Kingdom | 44,6  | 64,5  | 106   |
| Greece         | 20,8  | 11,7  | 12,2  |
| Italy          | 48,7  | 53,5  | 98,1  |
| Netherlands    | 22,8  | 24,3  | 23,7  |
| West Germany   | 134,2 | 112,5 | 276,6 |

|             |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|
| Switzerland | 15,9 | 48,9 | 51,3 |
| Sweden      | 3,4  | 5    | 28,5 |

These are the figures declared by the Romanian service. We will observe that Western countries reported different amounts due to the currency exchange rate of 6 lei per dollar. In Belgian statistics, Romanian exports for 1960 are recorded at 182.8 million Belgian francs, while imports are recorded at 382.6 million Belgian francs. It is certain that the West could barely assess the discrepancy between statistics due to a lack of information regarding trade and monetary taxes<sup>43</sup>. The financial benefits for the year 1962 seem to be on the side of the Romanians, who exported goods to Belgium worth 72,830,000 Belgian francs. The major imbalance between exports and imports is not recommended by analysts, but the Walloons and Flemings managed to import goods worth 36,605,000 Belgian francs. The issue was resolved during 1963. Also in 1963, the Belgian Nitrogen Company succeeded in building a new factory in Craiova. Bilateral trade was facilitated by Romanian companies La Belgo-Roumaine and Devetra, which ensured exports to various regions of Belgium<sup>44</sup>. The presence of

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, Raport no. 276 (Dos. no. B/409/8-no.881), dated October 14, 1961, f. 1-7 (For the year 1961, it was expected that Romania would export goods worth 172.9 million francs to the European economic area, while Belgium would import goods worth 158.7 million francs into our country. Exports of goods to Belgium remained limited, which led to a meeting with Gaston Marin on October 30, 1961, explaining that various Belgian merchants were purchasing Romanian goods from Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. Without many details, Brussels refused to grant a visa to Ion Onicescu for "completing" the commercial service. In 1963, Oancea became Romania's ambassador to Brussels. On July 14, 1967, he was appointed Romania's ambassador to Bonn).

<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, Fund *Relations politique*, folder NA/14.374, Raport no. 86 (Dos. no. A/130-nr.251), dated February 28 1964, f. 9 (In this document, Romanian secretaries continued to be praised, given additional administrative duties within the chancery despite the reduced staff. Regarding the statistics for the year 1962, we observe differences between the figures officially declared by the two parties: U.E.B.L. reported a total value of imports and exports exceeding 574 million Belgian francs,

Romanian parliamentarians in Flanders and Wallonia in October 1963 contributed to the continuation of relations<sup>45</sup>.

New Belgian companies continued to operate in the Socialist Republic of Romania, such as Bell Telephone, which provided telephone and radio communication lines between Bucharest and Braşov and between Constanţa and Braşov<sup>46</sup>. Since the 19th century, the small industrial workshop had struggled to export its products worldwide. This "handicap" persisted into the 20th century, with V. Ionescu, Minister of Foreign Trade, lamenting the limited involvement of Belgians in promoting Romanian products. Nevertheless, A. Spinoy, Minister of Economic and Energy Affairs, agreed to visit the new Belgian factory L'Union Chimique Belge in June 1964, as well as the city of Braşov and the Brazi refinery<sup>47</sup>. Following the discussions, the Belgian cabinet agreed to appoint a new commercial agent in Brussels in addition to the nine diplomatic agents and six non-diplomatic commercial agents, accepting the policy of "prudent liberalism"<sup>48</sup>. The acceptance of communists near NATO headquarters was one of the reasons why Western Europeans were hesitant to grant visas. A clear example was Rodica Barba, who held the official position of First Secretary at the Legation in Brussels while also working as an SSI agent<sup>49</sup>.

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while the R.S.R. reported 750 million Belgian francs, equivalent to 90 million lei. The official exchange rate in 1963 was 1 leu = 8.33 francs).

<sup>45</sup> *Apărarea Patriei*, Bucharest, no. 254, October 29, 1963, p. 4 (Alongside the Minister of the R.P.R. in Brussels, Pavel Babuci).

<sup>46</sup> AMFA Brussels, Fund *Relations politique*, folder NA/14.14.374, file *Relations politique*, Raport no. 90 (Dos. no.B/520-no. 256), dated February 28, 1964, f. 8-9 (Much later, they also worked on the Sibiu-Braşov line).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, Raport no. 253 (Dos. no B/520-no.633), dated Juni 18, 1964, f. 1-5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, Note for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated July 16, 1964, f. 1-2

<sup>49</sup> Ciprian Niţulescu, *Între stema regală și stema roșie. Aspecte privind personalul diplomatic al României (1948-1952)* in "Analele Științifice ale Universității „Al. I. Cuza” din Iași", vol. 69, 2023, f. 284-285.

For the year 1964, statistics show an increase in Romanian exports to Belgium to a value of 50 million lei, while imports into Romania were valued at 56 million lei. The main goods purchased by the socialists were metallic products, followed by machinery and equipment, pharmaceutical products, and plant products, among others. Belgian consumers preferred Romanian plant and food products, as well as mineral products, which represented 80% of the imported goods. Bell Telephone Company continued to operate, installing Crossbar-Pentaconta type interurban telephone systems<sup>50</sup>. To gain a better understanding, it is necessary to mention Belgium's economic agreements with Eastern countries, such as Poland in 1965, Bulgaria in 1966, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1967. Despite the exchanges that took place between Benelux and the U.S.S.R. after 1945, Belgium decided to conclude a new trade agreement with the Soviets in 1969. However, our research will focus exclusively on analyzing the negotiations with Romania in 1968<sup>51</sup>.

In the press of the time, we will observe that Maurer, along with Cornel Mănescu, participated after 1960 in strengthening relations. We will focus on the visit to Romania by the President of the Belgian Senate, Paul Struye, in the autumn of 1967. Not intimidated by the idea of visiting the "communist camp" in Romania, Struye boldly approached the concept of European cooperation through the use of international institutions such as the UN. Journalist Florica

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<sup>50</sup> AMFA Brussels, Fund *Relations politique*, folder 14.653, file *Roumanie (janv.-decembrie)*, Activity Report for 1964 No. 138 (File No. A/130-no.294), dated March 10, 1965, f. 1-11 (In 1964, 703 visas were issued out of a total of 948 applications. The workload of the Belgian Embassy was reduced starting September 8, 1964, when the R.S.R. agreed to accept Haverkorn van Rijsewijk as the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Netherlands in Bucharest. M. Bursens had been serving as the chargé d'affaires for the Netherlands since mid-January of the same year).

<sup>51</sup> Idem, folder 18.890/40, file *Russie. Accord pour la coopération économique, industrielle et technique*, f. 1-3 (In the same folder, details about Harmel's visit to Moscow, one year after his visit to Romania in 1968, are also mentioned).

Şelmaru does not mention NATO in her article but directs the speech of the Belgian Senate president, using the period's language, towards Romania's cooperation with the two Western European economic engines, France and West Germany<sup>52</sup>. On the other hand, the Romanian representative at the UN, Mircea Maliţa, supported the idea of the independence of each country, provided that it did not militarily occupy another country. We believe that Maliţa was not only referring to situations in Asia or the Middle East but also to the struggle between NATO and the Moscow dictatorship. Thus, Romanian-Belgian cooperation could gain momentum as long as the two countries respected each other<sup>53</sup>. Between March 28 and 30, 1966, the mayors of Brussels (Lucien Cooremans), Antwerp (Lode Craeybeckx), Ghent (Emiel Claeys), and Liège (Maurice Destenay) were invited to visit the cities of Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Constanţa, and Iaşi, all as part of efforts for good political and economic collaboration. Concurrently, a Belgian delegation of agricultural experts visited Romanian lands<sup>54</sup>. It is certain that the R.S.R. managed to win the sympathy of foreigners through the large number of delegations that visited between January and November 1966, all with the same goal: to secure economic advantages with the East<sup>55</sup>.

The good intentions of the two countries are also supported by the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul Harmel, in an interview with the newspaper *Lumea* in 1967. Harmel invited Romania to create new "concrete" political and

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<sup>52</sup> *Lumea*, Bucharest, no. 39 (204), September 21, 1967, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> *Le Soir*, Brussels, no. 241, October 12, 1967, p. 3 (In July 1964, N. Ceauşescu had visited Belgium).

<sup>54</sup> AMFA Brussels, Fund *Relations politique*, folder 14.955, file *Roumanie 1966*, Annual Activity Report - 1966, f. 10 (In 1966, French-Romanian relations were placed under suspicion regarding France's military policy towards NATO and Romania's military policy towards the Warsaw Pact: "the positions of the respective countries are the same." Among the greatest concerns of Western states might have been the signing of the nuclear-atomic agreement between the two Latin countries).

<sup>55</sup> Mioara Anton, *Un proiect utopic, Societatea omului nou socialist. Începuturile* in "Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană", no. 1, Bucharest, 2018, p. 138.

economic agreements by respecting the decisions made by the UN in Geneva. The military situation represented one of the obstacles between the two "European" countries due to the ideologies they shared in 1967, with a desire to sign a non-nuclear proliferation treaty. The Warsaw Pact was not supported by the Belgian politician, who praised Romania for adapting to the new changes and moving away from the Soviet model, once again emphasizing the Europeans' desire. It is clear that Harmel was not afraid to speak frankly about the fear that communist countries still had of Moscow, depicted as a sick man with psychological trauma, referring to the presence of the Berlin Wall. It is evident that the new cooperation between Harmel and Mănescu in political, economic, and cultural matters with Romania aimed to provide an example to both camps that new changes could bring solutions to the old continent<sup>56</sup>. However, what about the statement by the communist leader Ceaușescu in his discussion with the Dutch Foreign Minister, Joseph Luns, on January 13, 1967, where he claimed that he was not enthusiastic about collaboration "either with the Common Market or with CMEA"? The word "independence" was not fully understood by the General Secretary of the Party, despite the Dutch minister's strong emphasis on economic market cooperation, possibly with the exception of France<sup>57</sup>. This is noted because the Netherlands was also part of Benelux, with political and economic decisions being made jointly with Belgium and Luxembourg.

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<sup>56</sup> AMFA Brussels, *Fund Relations politique*, folder 18.898(33), file *Bezoek Min. Mănescu 6-10/02/1967*, Interview sent by Harmel to the Belgian Ambassador in Bucharest, H. Cambier, on February 22, 1967, f. 1-6 (The Belgian's perspective is evident at the end of the discussions with the assertion that "Pour ma part j'ai l'impression de mieux connaître votre pays et votre politique depuis le passage de M. Mănescu" [For my part, I have the impression of better understanding your country and your politics since Mr. Mănescu's visit]. The publications *Lumea* and *Secolul XX* were quite enlightening, "expressing a closeness to Western culture," an idea supported by Corneliu Mănescu himself. See also *Convorbiri neterminate. Corneliu Mănescu în dialog cu Lavinia Betea*, Polirom, 2001, p.123).

<sup>57</sup> ANIC, *Fund C.C. al P.C.R. Secția Relații Externe*, file nr. 2/1967, f. 8-10.



The discussion between Harmel and Ceaușescu on September 16, 1968, led the two states to collaborate in the technical and scientific fields, despite the events in Prague that same year. Discussions about the thinking of the two blocs continued on the political front, with Harmel promising not to share what the communist leader wished to remain private. However, the Belgian Foreign Minister placed greater emphasis on Romania's adherence to Belgian political orientation and not limiting itself to "short-term interests," referring to the understanding of the idea of European construction<sup>58</sup>. The skepticism of Dutch Prime Minister Piet de Jong and Dutch Foreign Minister Joseph Luns on September 29, 1969, regarding Ceaușescu's and Maurer's plans led them to support new difficulties with the Common Market following political discussions<sup>59</sup>. In the autumn of the same year, Alexandru Drăghici and Manea Mănescu met in Bucharest with Marc Drumaux, a representative of the Belgian Communist Party, to discuss potential future cooperation. It is unclear how this meeting benefited the Belgian Communist Party, as the exchange of information was more advantageous for the Romanians. During this meeting, Drumaux merely complained about the weak influence of his own party in Belgian politics.

We wish to emphasize the revelations regarding Brussels' entanglement in the "American camp," specifically the installation of NATO military facilities and the involvement of the Washington cabinet in the Congo issue. The most concerning thing for the Belgian communist was the increasing "echo [...] of democratic organizations in our country." As previously mentioned, Romanian

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<sup>58</sup> Idem, *Fund C.C. al P.C.R. Secția Relații Externe*, file no. 75/1969 (The documents within the file are dated 1968, not 1969 as indicated by the file number).

<sup>59</sup> Idem, *Fond C.C. al P.C.R. Secția Relații Externe*, file no.95/1969, f. 1-7 (The lack of reflection and acceptance of Western European concepts by the party led the Dutch—possibly from the beginning—to conclude the discussion after 40 minutes on a rather stern note).

communists sought greater independence from the Kremlin by adopting political and economic relations with the West. Drăghici's interest is reflected in his questions: "You mentioned in your presentation that workers occupy certain factories and show interest in continuing their activities," and "... are there attempts by the bourgeoisie to address issues with foreign workers?" The response was that some solutions came from the state through support for credits aimed at modernizing the steel sector. Romanian leaders also emphasized this, arguing that, in addition to improving the lives of socialist people, the Romanian Communist Party had 1.7 million members, of which 70% were workers and peasants, and 25% intellectuals<sup>60</sup>. We can easily observe the transformation of the communist doctrine concerning the active class in the motherland. Also in this discussion, the Romanians expressed their positive stance towards the presence of Americans in Europe for maintaining balance and the independence of small nations, indirectly alluding to the policies of the USSR. To remain faithful to their own ideology, the two Romanians also asserted that "the central element of Romania's foreign policy is friendship and alliance with all socialist countries"<sup>61</sup>. The meeting between Drumaux and N. Ceaușescu on September 27, 1967, was focused more on foreign policy, such as the importance of recognizing the two Germanys, the Israeli crisis, and the Vietnamese crisis, among other topics<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Idem, Fund C.C. al P.C.R. *Secția Relații Externe*, file no. 78/1967, f. 3-22 (Drumaux's speech did not align with the intentions of the two Romanians, and the analysis presented left much to be desired. The rise of the Romanian communists to power was achieved with the help of the Soviet Union, while the involvement of Americans in domestic and foreign politics supported the bourgeois class of Belgian liberals and Christian-socialists. Manea and Drăghici, with more experience in practicing communist ideology, realized that the Belgian Communist Party's rise to power was merely "a dream." Not to mention the financial support for the bourgeois class from Western foreigners).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 25-26.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, Fund C.C. al P.C.R. *Secția Relații Externe*, file no. 81/1967, f. 45 (One of the most important ideas mentioned was that of the Belgian comrade Jean Terve, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, who attempted to revive the image of medieval Europe by arguing that the

On January 30, 1968, Paul Niculescu-Mizil presented Comrade Joseph Turf, the new Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belgium, with the new vision of Romanian communists regarding the international workers' movement's struggle against "imperialism," using Vietnamese communists as an example. In this context, the Romanian comrade referred to the lack of unity and equality among communists worldwide. It was clear that Romanians were breaking away from the old Soviet mold, adding: "... in the past, we did things this way because that's how it was done, but look, we've wised up, we've seen the damage this has done to the movement." It is evident that there was a desire for modernization by aligning with the new image of Romania within the confines of ideology<sup>63</sup>. Based on the exchange of information, Turf explained his party's desire for symbiosis with other parties, including socialist and Christian-democratic ones, in the political and economic sphere, "even if there will be no communists in the government." This reflects a pragmatic approach to integrating with a broader political spectrum while acknowledging the limitations of their own party's representation in the government<sup>64</sup>.

At the European level, the Catholic Church has managed to become involved, to some extent, in the decisions of the European Economic Community (EEC) by establishing new branches in Brussels and Luxembourg. Its concepts, represented by Belgian Catholics, in the European Parliament were similar to those of the socialists: fighting against unemployment, opposing factory closures,

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presence of Christians [Catholics] in the West supports the presence of NATO through the "moral-religious current" against the red pagans).

<sup>63</sup> Idem, *Fund C.C. al P.C.R. Secția Relații Externe*, file no. 17/1968, f. 9-23.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 67.

abolishing Sunday work, and so on, all since 1963. To achieve its goals, alongside other Christian denominations, the Church succeeded in introducing new representatives, such as Helmunt von Verschuer, as Director-General of Agriculture at the European Commission. Thus, the balance between socialists and Christian democrats [or social Christians] prevented Europeans from falling into a single ideology, with the existence of multi-party systems being indeed beneficial<sup>65</sup>.

Economic exchanges with the Benelux countries also depended on European security, which in this case was provided by NATO. This prevented the communist bloc from exchanging any types of goods, with its presence being controversial due to Ceaușescu, suggesting that Belgium should follow France's example of expelling the new command, an idea reinforced by Niculescu-Mizil who said, "and it would help us as well"<sup>66</sup>.

The Socialist Republic of Romania sought economic modernization not only through trade but also by applying new economic concepts. In 1969, Manea Mănescu was invited by the Dutch government to present new economic ideas alongside Nobel laureate Jan Tinbergen, such as "the practice of economic calculation used in the development and application of dynamic models in the analysis of socio-economic processes," specifically the elimination of outdated communist concepts. Similar meetings also took place in the USA, Austria, and many other countries<sup>67</sup>. The acceptance of new information in the field of science

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<sup>65</sup> Lucian N. Leuștean, *Roman Catholicism, diplomacy, and the European Community, 1958-1964* in "Journal of Cold War Studies", The MITT Press, vol. 15, no. 1, p.74.

<sup>66</sup> ANIC, Fund C.C. al P.C.R. *Secția Relații Externe*, file no. 18/1968, f. 3-5 (A desire which actually supported the "cessation of U.S. aggression" [Nixon] aimed at strengthening their "monopoly over the economy").

<sup>67</sup> Bujor Mănescu, Manea Mănescu, Ploiești, Mileniul III, 2020, pp.263-264.

and the modernization of factories allowed the Romanian communist leader to assert before the new Belgian communist leaders, Jean Blume and Albert de Coninck, that the economy of the Socialist Republic of Romania was now superior to that of Belgium, with capitalism not being the best solution. Concurrently, he claimed that the elimination of other "exploiting classes [parties]" had contributed to what the Romanian communists had achieved by 1969, providing, for the first time, the freedom for the people to participate in the "construction of socialism"<sup>68</sup>. In reality, the Ceaușist doctrinal regime managed to control almost all domains internally, so that the people were compelled to accept it as their leader. Even from an economic perspective, the lack of all necessary tools and knowledge impeded the progress of Romanian science and its adaptation to new international requirements.

The plans of the EEC and Romania were completely mismatched, being entirely opposed, with Belgium committing to the customs agreement of May 1, 1968<sup>69</sup>. The development of trade relations between the two countries also somewhat depended on the visit of Mănescu and Maurer in October 1969, with the main goal of extending the agreement between Benelux and Romania for a longer period. The reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels also note details less favorably viewed by the Belgian ambassador J. Adriaenssen, such as the accompaniment of spouses on this visit despite insistence, which was

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<sup>68</sup> Idem, Fund C.C. al P.C.R. *Secția Relații Externe*, file no. 5/1969, f. 4-7 (Ceaușescu stated during the discussion that France would follow this model of eliminating multi-partyism within the next 20 years. In reality, events turned out quite differently, with the French general being increasingly marginalized by students, the business environment, and the French political class. The French state began to distance itself from "independent policy," being open to collaborating with European countries, and de Gaulle resigned on April 28, 1969. It would be very interesting for future research to analyze whether there was any Romanian influence on French politics between 1969 and 1979).

<sup>69</sup> Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza, *Istoria secolului XX*, translation Marius Ioan, Bucharest, BIC All, 1998, pp.286-289.

considered "an old Romanian custom." The main theme was the visit to Belgian industrial branches, such as the Sybeta company and the primary production greenhouses "competent for Romanians"<sup>70</sup>. The language of communication was a barrier for the Belgians, who noted that the Romanian translators were not able to translate or understand French on political topics<sup>71</sup>. In fact, this extension was due to the agreement given by NATO also in 1969 for collaboration with communist countries. The visits served to measure the spread of Western doctrine and to establish "trust" through economic and cultural agreements, technology exchanges, and more. Analyzing the current document, we can argue that the Prague crisis shed more light on the Western doctrine of exploiting existing weaknesses in the Eastern bloc through the exchange of information "in a transitional phase". In reality, these economic agreements aimed to weaken the Soviet Union, with the North Atlantic Alliance agreeing to conclude various treaties<sup>72</sup> to "promote a situation that ensures the success of a few fundamental principles"<sup>73</sup>.

The visit of Minister H. Fayat, which took place between October 4-7, 1969, was marked by the publication of a new work titled "Roemenië" in Dutch,

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<sup>70</sup> AMFO Brussels, fund *Political Relations*, folder 18.920/36, file *Romania* (subfile *Visit from October 21-25, 1969*), f. 17-18 (During the delegation, including at dinners, Maurer was accompanied by his personal physician. His room had to be quite spacious to allow for daily medical exercises).

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, subfile *Journée de chasse*, pp. 5-7 (In file 18.898/40, we find the dossier of Harmel's visit to Moscow in 1969, which mentions the opinions of the Spanish newspaper "Informaciones" – Telegram No. 907 from May 28, 1969 – stating that visits by Eastern European communists, such as the Romanians, do nothing but exacerbate "psychologically" the ideologies of the two blocs. Thus, Harmel and Belgium are portrayed as NATO's puppets).

<sup>72</sup> *Idem*, folder 18.898/40, file *Voyage of Minister Harmel to Russia 1969*, Telegram No. 177 from April 30, 1969, f. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, Telegram No. 150 from April 21, 1969, f. 1 (This document clearly specifies Western intervention in aiding Czechoslovakia. Belgium was required to undertake this visit to maintain European "peace").

which largely describes the economic development of the Socialist Republic of Romania. The primary aim of this publication was to promote bilateral relations, using language that avoids communist interpretations. A notable aspect is Fayat's inclusion of various financial tables for the period 1965-1968, which raises some concerns due to discrepancies with Belgian diplomatic reports from Bucharest that highlighted Romanian and Belgian statistics, exchange rates, and bank transfers. Nonetheless, the main objective of the work was to demonstrate the increase in trade exchanges between the two nations<sup>74</sup>.

The desire and thirst for national economic development led the party to accept cooperation with GATT in 1971 and with the IMF and World Bank in 1972. To remove several obstacles, foreign policy also pushed for cooperation with the European Community. Economic control depended largely on the involvement of experienced specialists such as Maurer, who during this period was in a secondary role according to the party leader's directives. Ceaușescu was not specialized enough to recognize the rigidity of the economic market<sup>75</sup>, his desire being independence from other states<sup>76</sup>.

The spring of 1972 brought new changes to Belgian politics, with the signing of a consular convention with Romania for the first time, following the reestablishment of the Antwerp-Constanța trade route in July 1970. All these negotiations were made possible after the "amicable" discussion held in the second round, with the Belgians being confident of the Romanians' cooperation, who had "modified and supplemented" some articles of the treaty. However, it is

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<sup>74</sup> Idem, folder 15.721, file *Belgium-Romania 1966/70*, Algemene Directie der Buitelandse Economische Betrekkingen, Roemenië. Informatienata opgesteld naar aaleiding van het bezoek van De Heer Minister H. Fayat aan de Socialistische Republiek Roemenië (4-7 oktober 1969).

<sup>75</sup> Emil Răcilă, *Istoria economică a României*, Bucharest, Danlex Press, 2008, pp.234-235.

<sup>76</sup> Lucian Boia, *op.cit.*, pp. 144-145.

not known how the treaty ultimately turned out, as the discussions were quite heated<sup>77</sup>. Economic cooperation between Romania and Belgium, manifested through continuous trade exchanges and regular visits by experts from both countries, was a significant aspect of bilateral relations during the communist regime. Archived documents and the activity of the Danubiana company highlight that these connections were not only consistent but also crucial for the development of Romania's technical industry, even amidst the restrictions imposed by the political regime of the time.

This conclusion underscores the importance and continuity of economic cooperation, as well as its relevance to the Romanian industry<sup>78</sup>. The importance of this cooperation was also mentioned during the economic discussions with the Belgian Office of Foreign Trade delegation and the Belgo-Romanian Economic Committee on May 16, 1972<sup>79</sup>.

The political and economic relations between the two nations have evolved consistently over time. The visits of Belgian ministers between 1975 and 1976, as well as the visit of the Belgian royal family in 1976, were key moments that facilitated the strengthening and signing of new partnerships, despite the existence of tensions related to humanitarian issues. During this period, new cultural projects between the two countries were initiated and signed, focusing on partnerships between universities in areas such as medicine, technology, and

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<sup>77</sup> AGR, Fund *Ministerial Committees (CMCES)*, file no. 5297, Draft Law for the Approval of the Consular Convention between Belgium and the Socialist Republic of Romania from July 1972 and the Council of Ministers Reports from March 29 and April 14, 1972, f. 15-31.

<sup>78</sup> ANIC, Fund *Ministerul Comerțului Exterior. Direcția plan export*, file no. 19 (Activity Reports. Foreign Missions "DANIBIANA" 1972-1973), f. 86 (Dinu Vasile, the director of the Rubber Technical Workshop in Brașov, received the sum of 500 lei to negotiate these deals in Belgium for a period of seven days. He was also tasked with negotiating the same deals in the Netherlands).

<sup>79</sup> *Idem*, Fund XV. *ISISP. Personalități*, file no. 547 (Presentations, Speeches, Vol. II), f. 101-106.



broadcasting, among others. However, there is an exception in the last years of the 1980s, when relations began to deteriorate increasingly.

These achievements are largely due to the previous efforts of communist leaders in the 1960s, especially Ministers Maurer and Mănescu. It can be argued that these two ministers largely succeeded in achieving their main objectives of strengthening relations with the West; however, their actions were often limited by the vision of leader Ceaușescu. The desire for isolation from Moscow created certain disadvantages for Romania, which partly explains why the economic balance continuously tipped in favor of Belgium, a country that often acted within the Benelux group. It is considered that if Romania had managed to collaborate and form an economic union with another communist country, according to the Benelux model, the country's economic situation could have been significantly more favorable. This approach might have helped avoid or at least mitigate some major problems faced in the 1980s.

Source: *Cornel Mănescu's visit to Brussels welcomed by Pierre Harmel* in "România Liberă", 07 February 1967

