
Autonomy and Ideology:

Brezhnev, Ceaușescu and the

World Communist Movement

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Abstract

One of Leonid Brezhnev's primary goals when he acceded to party leadership in the Soviet Union was to restore Moscow's control over the world communist movement, severely undermined by the Sino-Soviet dispute. Nicolae Ceaușescu of Romania was determined to prevent this, in order to consolidate his country's autonomy in the Communist bloc. The Sino-Soviet dispute offered the political and ideological framework for autonomy, as the Romanian Communists claimed their neutrality in the dispute. This article describes Ceaușescu's efforts to sabotage Brezhnev's attempts to have China condemned by an international meeting of Communist parties between 1967 and 1969. His basic ideological argument was that unity of world communism should have a polycentric meaning.

When Leonid Brezhnev assumed the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in October 1964, following Nikita Khrushchev's ousting from power, he did not inherit a situation with a bright prospect from his predecessor, especially as far as Moscow's international position was concerned. The world communist movement was drifting away from Soviet control and Moscow saw itself increasingly isolated, as centrifugal forces grew stronger.¹ The most important of these forces was China: since the emergence of the Sino-Soviet dispute, Moscow was subjected to attacks and criticism which weakened its position among Communist parties of the world. The Albanians and the Romanians – although to different degrees – were good examples of this. But Western European Communist parties were also pursuing their independence from Moscow, trying to accommodate themselves to domestic politics.

What all these forces had in common – besides various differences dictated by differing political conditions – was the challenge they represented to Moscow's self-proclaimed leading position in world communism. As Maud Bracke has argued, the

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¹ Maud Bracke, *Which Socialism? Whose détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak Crisis, 1968* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 256–7.

1960s were a prelude to Eurocommunism.² The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was promoting a different view on world communism, one based on polycentrism rather than leadership from Moscow. The PCI also advocated close cooperation between communists and social democrats in order to strengthen the anti-imperialist front. Both approaches were designed to offer the PCI greater freedom of manoeuvre at home, so that it could find a respectable position in Italian politics and accede to government as part of a leftist coalition.³

For different reasons and with different instruments, the Chinese Communists also challenged Moscow's leadership. One of the core ideological arguments used by the Chinese against the Soviets was 'great power chauvinism', referring to the dominant position the CPSU had among other Communist parties. At the time Leonid Brezhnev took office, the Chinese were becoming a major problem in Moscow's relations with the United States as well. The escalation of the Vietnam War was inconvenient for the Soviets because it threatened their efforts to find a *modus vivendi* with the Americans, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁴ Soviet-American negotiations for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty were carried out against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and Moscow was interested in a peaceful settlement so that the war would not compromise the limited progress attained in its relations with the United States. However, active Chinese involvement in support of the North Vietnamese, as well as Chinese propaganda which accused the USSR of betraying the Vietnamese people's struggle for the sake of its agreement with the Americans, forced Moscow to increase its involvement in Vietnam.⁵ It was also a matter of prestige in world communism. In the context of the Sino-Soviet split, the Albanian Communists had taken the Chinese side while the Romanians proclaimed their neutrality, refusing to join Moscow and the other satellite states in anti-Chinese criticism.

One of Brezhnev's top priorities in foreign relations was to restore Moscow's prestige and influence among other Communist parties, in other words, Moscow's position as the leading centre of the world communist movement.⁶ He aimed to accomplish this by organising an international conference of worldwide Communist parties that would express support for the Soviets and therefore isolate China. His aim, though, came into direct conflict not only with the Chinese, but also with the Western European Communists who, although generally supportive of Moscow in the Sino-Soviet dispute, did not favour a return to the old practices of the Comintern but preferred to maintain their autonomy.

² Maud Bracke, *Proletarian Internationalism, Autonomy and Polycentrism*, EUI Working Paper (2002), 8.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ilya V. Gaiduk, 'Peacemaking or Troubleshooting? The Soviet Role in Peace Initiatives during the Vietnam War', in Lloyd C. Gardner, Ted Gittinger, eds, *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964–1968* (College Station, Tex.: TAMU Press, 2004), 261.

⁵ Fredrik Logevall, *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 74.

⁶ Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 17.

In this context, the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) emerged as a clear opponent of Brezhnev's plans. At that time, Romania's policy of autonomy in the Communist bloc, its challenge to Soviet control, were already well known abroad. An important manifestation of this policy was the PCR's neutrality in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Historiography has paid much attention to Romania's balancing between the USSR and China, as a form of autonomy in the Communist bloc. Dennis Deletant argued that Romania's policy of opposition to Moscow was strictly related to the Sino-Soviet dispute,⁷ and Vladimir Tismăneanu confirmed this point of view in his analysis of Romanian Communism.⁸ In a recent study, Mircea Munteanu also emphasised that Romania's support for China in the Sino-Soviet dispute was important in opening new doors in the West for the regime in Romania.⁹ Also, in his analysis of the Romanian-Chinese rapprochement, Liu Yong pointed out that there were numerous ideological differences between the two parties, but that it was Romanian opposition to Soviet hegemony that determined the Chinese leadership's favourable reaction to Romania's initiatives.¹⁰ Discussing the history and origins of the Sino-Soviet split, Sergey Radchenko also argued that Romania used the conflict in order to assert its independence vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.¹¹

This study describes the PCR's position in the world communist movement in the context of Moscow's efforts to restore its control as the leading centre in the late 1960s. It uses new evidence to illustrate the PCR's role in preventing the CPSU from isolating the Chinese and condemning their 'deviation' as Moscow sought to organise a conference of all Communist parties. The study contributes to the existing literature by discussing issues such as the PCR's participation in the debates concerning the reform of world communism on polycentric bases, its cooperation with Western European Communists and its balancing act between the Soviets and the Chinese. The period chosen for analysis is justified by the fact that the first meeting, dedicated solely to European security, took place in 1967 and, after another preparatory meeting in 1968, the final conference of world Communist parties convened in Moscow in 1969.

Karlovy Vary, 1967

An international conference of Communist parties, adopting a declaration condemning China and reaffirming support for Moscow, would have had an overwhelming political significance for the USSR. It would have made Moscow seem

⁷ Dennis Deletant, 'Taunting the Bear: Romania and the Warsaw Pact 1963–89', *Cold War History* 7, 4 (2007), 496.

⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003), 181.

⁹ Mircea Munteanu, 'Communication Breakdown? Romania and the Sino-American Rapprochement', *Diplomatic History* 33, 4 (2009), 615.

¹⁰ Liu Yong, *Sino-Romanian Relations 1950s–1960s* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studii Totalitarismului, 2006), 165–6.

¹¹ Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009), 84.

less isolated, the communist movement less centrifugal, and Nikita Khrushchev's mistakes could have been partially repaired. For Nicolae Ceaușescu, the secretary general of the PCR, maintaining the balance between China and the USSR was a proof of his party's autonomy and an implicit guarantee of polycentrism in world communism.

On the other hand, a joint denunciation of China was unacceptable to the PCR because it would have represented an abandonment of its autonomy. Also, should the condemnation happen anyway in the PCR's absence, it would have placed Ceaușescu and the PCR in a position of isolation similar to Albania. Romania was not willing to go as far as to assume all the economic and political risks involved in such an outcome. The only possible course of action for Ceaușescu was then to prevent the sort of joint denunciation of China that Brezhnev was looking for, but to do so within the safe limits of caution and ideological cover.

Moscow perceived the Romanians' balancing act as a risk, as declassified Soviet documents illustrate. Mark Kramer has emphasised the Soviet belief that China was trying to sow discord between the USSR and its satellites, as Mikhail Suslov stated during a CPSU Plenum in March 1965.¹² Suslov also pointed alarmingly to the alleged Chinese commitment to step up this sort of work. Romania had previously tried to mediate between Khrushchev and Mao in February 1964 and refused to participate in a Communist parties' meeting in March 1965, presumably because the Chinese were not participating.¹³ Such attitudes seemed to confirm Soviet suspicions that China was interfering in Eastern Europe. Chinese Ambassador Li Fenglin confirmed, during a conference in 2004, that China was indeed trying to manipulate differences between the Soviets and their Eastern European allies in order to isolate Moscow.¹⁴

Exploratory Soviet suggestions regarding the need for a preparatory meeting of the Communist parties had been issued since 1966, but the decisive signal appeared at the beginning of 1967. In unofficial discussions, the idea of such a meeting was constantly described as an immediate necessity, not only by the Soviets but also by other Eastern European officials. The signal was clearly understood by Ceaușescu, who was preparing for a visit to Moscow in March 1967.

Just a few weeks before Ceaușescu's arrival in Moscow, the PCR's official newspaper, *Scinteia*, published an editorial explaining the way the PCR envisaged the unity of the world communist movement. The argumentation remained purely theoretical, since no mention was made of any concrete proposal. The editorial affirmed that unity was indeed the most important goal of all communists worldwide, but unity, nevertheless, must be the result of a new type of relationship, as established by the Moscow Declarations of 1957 and 1960, respectively.¹⁵ Following Khrushchev's reformatory animus and Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, these declarations had

¹²Mark Kramer, 'Declassified materials from CPSU Central Committee Plenums', *Cahiers du monde russe* 1–2 (1999): 294–5.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Xiaoyuan Liu, Vojtech Mastny, eds, *China and Eastern Europe, 1960s–1980s* (Zurich: ETH Zurich, 2004), 33.

¹⁵*Scinteia*, 28 Feb, 1967.

specified that relations among Communist parties should be based on equality and non-interference in internal affairs.

Unity, the text continued in a clear signal to Moscow a question of principle, not of organisation. Further on, the article explicitly disputed the idea of a leading centre of world communism:

nowadays, leading the activity of Communist parties by or from an international centre would be a source of errors, and would produce – given the impossibility of knowing the diversity of situations and conditions in which parties are active – insufficiently substantiated solutions, thereby prejudicing the parties' activity and the cause of Socialism.¹⁶

This warning did not prevent the Soviets from raising the question of a Communist parties' conference. Between 18 and 19 March 1967 Nicolae Ceaușescu and premier Ion Gheoghe Maurer visited Moscow and met with Brezhnev, discussing mostly topics of bilateral relations. Among other things, Brezhnev brought up the conference, sounding out Ceaușescu about his intentions. Brezhnev had always maintained a cautious attitude towards the PCR, in line with Suslov's policy recommendations. At the March 1965 Plenum, Suslov had stressed that the Soviets had 'to move ahead patiently, without giving in to provocations'.¹⁷ Ceaușescu repeated the position previously published by *Scînteia*, stating that his party could only participate should the conference contribute to the restoration of Socialist unity, meaning Sino-Soviet reconciliation.

Upon his return, the PCR's secretary general summoned, as was usual, a plenum of the Central Committee (CC) to present the results of the visit. But the most important aim of the plenum was to obtain party consensus about a potential refusal to participate. It was customary, since Gheorghiu-Dej's years in power, for the party leader to ask approval from the Central Committee for any gesture of opposition to Moscow. This was not necessarily a proof of party democracy, but more as an insurance against possible disobedience. Rallying the entire party around the decision protected the leader and such plenums were also a good opportunity to explore attitudes among members of the leadership. Usually, the secretary general would present his point of view and then let other high-ranking members of the CC deliver speeches on the same theme.

Ceaușescu made it clear that, in his opinion, such a conference was detrimental to Romania's interests, mainly because of its aims. It was, in Ceaușescu's words, a conference with 'factious aims', trying to reunite the world communist movement around the CPSU in the dispute with China.¹⁸ It was not in the PCR's interests to take anybody's side, he pointed out, and it was against its principles to participate in public criticism addressed to another Communist party:

¹⁶ *Scînteia*, 28 Feb, 1967.

¹⁷ Kramer, 'Declassified materials', 295.

¹⁸ *Stenograma ședinței Plenare a CC al PCR din zilele de 27–8 martie 1967*, in ANIC [National Historical Archives of Romania], fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie [Section Chancellery], dossier no. 43/1967, 119.

we cannot participate in a conference where another Socialist country or another Communist party would be subject to discussions, no matter what that country or party may be. We participated in such a conference in 1948, about Yugoslavia, and we had enough of it, comrades.¹⁹

Part of the strategy of caution was to leave the door open for compromise at all times. So Ceaușescu also stated that Romania would participate in this potential conference, if no country or party were subjected to criticism and if no compulsory document were to be adopted by the participants.²⁰ With perfect unanimity, the plenum approved the proposals and Ceaușescu's point of view.

In the first days of April 1967, Moscow initiated new talks with the Romanians, using as an intermediary the Soviet ambassador in Bucharest, Alexander Vasilievich Basov. He met with Alexandru Drăghici, secretary of the CC, to inquire about the PCR's position concerning the conference, but Drăghici answered just as ambiguously as Ceaușescu: the PCR saw no use in this conference and would only participate should its conditions be respected.²¹ As Ceaușescu's decision to defy the Soviets by not participating was gaining momentum, so too were the political steps designed to thwart possible Soviet countermeasures.

Soon after Basov's visit to the CC, a large meeting was convened with the entire CC apparatus, for instructions concerning the party's position in the world communist movement. Paul Niculescu-Mizil, CC secretary responsible for ideology, chaired the meeting, explaining the party's position in the sense that any public condemnation of China by a Communist conclave would only lead to a further deterioration of relations in the movement. The PCR thus appeared the only mature and responsible party militating for real unity.²² Ceaușescu needed the entire party to see things this way.

The situation presented a double inconvenience for Moscow. The PCR's absence would have a negative impact on the credibility of the conference, since the PCR was not just any Communist party, but one within the direct Soviet sphere of influence. On the other hand, an obstructive PCR participation was also undesirable, since it had the potential to question Moscow's leadership of the movement. Giving up the plan to organise the conference would represent a pure defeat while the only acceptable solution was a cooperative participation by the Romanians that would save the conference and its aims.

Brezhnev's last attempt to convince Ceaușescu was through Yugoslav mediation. In mid April 1967, Tito, the president of Yugoslavia, conveyed a message to Ceaușescu advising him to participate in the conference, at least as an observer. But Ceaușescu's decision had already been made: he not only refused Tito's advice, but in turn suggested that Yugoslavia should not participate either.²³

¹⁹ *Stenograma ședinței Plenare a CC al PCR din zilele de 27–8 martie 1967*, in ANIC [National Historical Archives of Romania], fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie [Section Chancellery], dossier no. 43/1967, 122.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Notă de audiență*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 52/1967, 75.

²² *Stenograma ședinței de instructaj de la CC al PCR din ziua de 12 aprilie 1967*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 53/1967, 2–4.

²³ *Protocol nr. 23 al ședinței Prezidiului Permanent al CC al PCR din ziua de 14 aprilie 1967*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 54/1967, 2.

Faced with such pressures, Ceaușescu decided to make his position public, in order to avoid speculation and to pre-empt and counter the charge of 'deviation'. In making public statements, as Ceaușescu had learnt from his predecessor, it was important to take away the adversary's arguments by anticipating and combating them. In this case, the ideological component was vital, because only coherent ideological arguments could prevail against fatal accusations of deviation. Right before the conference, the PCR sent a letter to all Communist parties explaining its position and refusal to participate. The letter claimed that the conference had been organised without consulting the PCR – which was true – and that the Romanian conditions for participation, such as refraining from criticising other parties, had not been accepted. Also, in reference to any potential document that might emerge from the gathering, the letter stated: 'documents elaborated in conferences should record only those points of view that are common and only those conclusions upon which all parties participating have agreed'.²⁴ The letter was obviously not well received. A Polish party delegation that was returning from Bulgaria and was scheduled to stop in Bucharest for a few days cancelled its visit.²⁵

The conference eventually opened in the absence of the Romanian, Yugoslav and Albanian parties. Despite the virulence of Brezhnev's tone against China, there was no official document blaming the Chinese for anything. The conference only adopted a declaration calling for European states to work together for security and cooperation on the principles of peaceful coexistence.²⁶

As for China, discussions also took place behind closed doors. In particular, there was a proposal to address a letter to the Chinese inviting them to participate in a common plan to help Vietnam. Brezhnev thought that if Mao refused, it would have been very easy to use this against him²⁷. Brezhnev discussed the plan with Władysław Gomułka from Poland, Walter Ulbricht from East Germany and János Kádár from Hungary, trying to identify the best possible approach so as to persuade the Romanians to join in. This type of consultation behind Ceaușescu's back seem to anticipate the series of meeting and conferences which took place in the spring of 1968, on issues concerning the reforms in Czechoslovakia.

Declassified Soviet documents reveal that Moscow did perceive the Romanians as an obstacle and that they feared that their plans might be communicated to Beijing by the Romanians. In reference to the potential letter they were planning to address the Chinese, discussions took place as to whether or not the Romanians should be

²⁴ *Scrisoarea CC al PCR adresată partidelor comuniste și muncitorești*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cămarilor, dossier no. 55/1967, 10.

²⁵ *Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR din ziua de 17 aprilie 1967* in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cămarilor, dossier no. 55/1967, 4–5.

²⁶ Communist leaders of Eastern Europe had met in Bucharest in July 1966 where they called for a collective European system of security based on the same principle. One pretext the Soviets used in reference to the Karlovy Vary meeting was that its purpose was to evaluate the impact of the 1966 declaration. The Romanian answer was that, in such a case, the meeting should take place at governmental, not party level. For further details, see: Dennis Deletans, Mihail E. Ionescu, *Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1989: Selected Documents* (Bucharest: Politeia SNSPA, 2004).

²⁷ Vojtech Mastny, Malcolm Byrne, eds, *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact 1955–1991* (Budapest: Central University Press, 2005), 237–9.

invited as co-authors. On this particular issue, Brezhnev clearly stated: 'And now we have a situation in which Romania stands in our way. But if we send the letter earlier that means we would mess things up. They will notify the Chinese and, in general, they will be against [it], because it is not their initiative.'²⁸

Brezhnev's cautious attitude towards the Romanians was not only dictated by the need to avoid further public polemics, similar to those that Suslov had previously warned against, but also by the fact that the PCR's attitude was far from being isolated. Numerous Western European Communist parties opposed Moscow's plans to restore its control over the movement and Ceaușescu had developed close relations with most of them. In May 1967, soon after the Karlovy Vary conference had concluded, Ceaușescu was visited by Santiago Carillo, leader of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) who shared his views on world communism with his Romanian counterpart. Carillo, although generally favourable to the idea of an international conference, assured Ceaușescu that his party did not endorse the CPSU's endeavour to regain control over the world communist movement. Moreover, he expressed regret that parties like the Romanian or Yugoslav ones, who supported the reform of the movement, had been absent at the conference. Their presence, he implied, would have consolidated reformist views in world communism.²⁹

Similar discussions were also held, in August 1967, between Ceaușescu and the PCI leader, Luigi Longo. The Italians also advocated autonomy in the movement and Longo, who had participated in the Karlovy Vary meeting, defended his idea about close cooperation between communists and social-democrats.³⁰ During their meeting, Ceaușescu expressed similar views and told Longo that the PCR was in favour of such an enlargement of world communism. On China, Longo confessed to Ceaușescu his scepticism about possible Sino-Soviet reconciliation. They both agreed that a centre for world communism was not desirable for any party and promised each other to continue to fight for reform and party autonomy in the movement.³¹

Budapest, 1968

Successfully boycotting the Karlovy Vary meeting was only a battle in what soon appeared to be a long war for Ceaușescu. Brezhnev did not give up his idea and proposals resurfaced in the autumn of 1967, about a preparatory meeting for a general conference of the world communist movement. Already in November 1967, many official newspapers from the Communist bloc were publishing news about

²⁸ Mastny and Byrne, *A Cardboard Castle?*, 237–9, 248.

²⁹ *Stenograma convorbirilor dintre tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretar general al CC al PCR și tovarășul Santiago Carillo, secretar general al Partidului Comunist din Spania*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR, secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 38/1967, 53–5.

³⁰ Daryl Glasser, *Twentieth Century Marxism: A Global Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 85.

³¹ *Stenograma primirii de către tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretar general al CC al PCR, la Eforie Nord, a tovarășului Luigi Longo, secretar general al Partidului Comunist Italian*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR, secția Relații Externe, dossier no. 61/1967, 11–12.

a forthcoming meeting, explaining it as a result of consultations which had taken place in the previous months. There were also appeals in the press addressed to all Communist parties inviting them to take part in the future conference. Even *Pravda* published an editorial about the significance of such a conference, reassuring all those concerned that blaming other parties was not one of its aims.³² The Romanians were not specifically mentioned, but they understood the message, as would become clear over the following weeks.

In December 1967, Ceaușescu and Maurer visited Moscow again to discuss the evolution of Romanian–Soviet relations and ways to improve them. Ceaușescu was interested in evaluating Brezhnev's determination to go further with the conference project and he raised the problem himself, apparently among other issues of foreign affairs. Brezhnev appeared to be very determined to press ahead because, without much ado, he bluntly asked Ceaușescu if he would participate or not.³³ This was not a very comfortable moment for the Romanian leader and once again he eluded the answer, saying that he could not make decisions based on what he read in the newspapers, which was a reproach for not being consulted. After the differences regarding the Karlovy Vary meeting, it was getting more and more difficult for Ceaușescu to challenge Brezhnev on safe ground: not participating was no longer sufficient; instead he needed to block the plan completely. Should the conference go ahead without the PCR, Ceaușescu and Romania would find themselves in an isolated predicament reminiscent of that experienced by Tito during Stalin's era. In the end, Ceaușescu left Moscow in December 1967 without offering an answer.

In the New Year, Ceaușescu sent many delegations abroad in order to assess the spirit among other parties, including those in the West.³⁴ Since the loyalty of parties under direct Soviet control could hardly be questioned, Ceaușescu relied on Western European Communist parties to support his point of view. But once again, the conclusions of these fact-finding meetings inspired caution. Having refused to participate once, Ceaușescu felt that his only option was to attend this time, in order to avoid isolation, but also to publicise his point of view. A major decision such as this needed domestic backing so, as usual a plenum of the CC was convened to discuss Romanian participation.

At the plenum, Ceaușescu explained the entire history of the issue, as well as his opinion that such conferences could only deepen the split in the world communist movement and were therefore counterproductive. He also blamed the way the conference had been organised, without consulting all Communist parties, such as the PCR, and only confronting them with a *fait accompli*. This practice, Ceaușescu

³² *Notă cu privire la Consfătuirea internațională a partidelor comuniste și muncitorești*, in ANIC – fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 175/1967, 11–12.

³³ *Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR din ziua de 17 decembrie 1967*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR –secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 179/1967, 4.

³⁴ *Protocolul nr. 2 al ședinței Prezidiului Permanent al CC al PCR din ziua de 18 ianuarie 1968*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR –secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 6/1968, 2–3.

continued, contradicted the principle of equality among parties.³⁵ Another thing Ceaușescu objected to was the way Communist parties were selected and invited: only those parties who had attended the conferences which took place in 1957 and 1960 were invited this time around. In his view, this suggested the idea of continuity and, implicitly, of hierarchy in the world communist movement. In his words, all these aspects were:

repetitions of the idea of a leading centre, which, although rejected by life and definitely outrun by history, had not been abandoned in practice: they are always searching for new ways of penetration, new forms of institutionalisation. The erroneous character of using the above-mentioned criteria also results from the fact that its application only perpetuates the mistakes committed in 1960. As it is known, the Declaration adopted in 1960 included incriminations, un-just appreciations and insulting appellations addressed to the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and this was a source of prejudice towards the communist movement.³⁶

The plenum approved Ceaușescu's point of view unanimously. A decision was made to participate in the Budapest conference, since the Soviets had given assurances that there would be no criticism of other parties. A few days later, directives were elaborated by the Permanent Presidium of the party for a Romanian delegation to be led by the chief ideologist, Niculescu-Mizil. The delegation was instructed to advocate, organisationally, an enlargement of the number of participants including Yugoslavia and the national liberation movements from the Third World.³⁷

Enlargement had been a constant Romanian argument, not only with regards to the world communist movement, but also the Council of Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA) because logic said that the more countries outside direct Soviet influence that participated, the weaker Soviet influence would be. In this particular case, it is clear that the PCI's theory of *allargamento* (widening) and cooperation with non-communist forces was the source of inspiration.

Another point in the directives of the delegation was not to accept discussions on any topic other than the fight against imperialism, which had been officially declared as the aim of the conference. Should any participants (i.e. the Soviets) raise other issues for discussion, the Romanian delegation was to argue that it did not have a mandate to discuss anything else. Niculescu-Mizil was further instructed not to accept, at any cost, either criticism of other Communist parties (i.e. the Chinese one) or decisions or documents adopted by majority, but instead to insist that all decisions were taken unanimously.³⁸

Ceaușescu was clearly not willing to give up his position: choosing to participate was the only concession he was about to make. The directives were calculated in such a way as to avoid Romania being dragged into a condemnation of China but also to keep Niculescu-Mizil safe from pressure. The conference was opened

³⁵ *Stenograma ședinței Plenare a CC al PCR din ziua de 14 februarie 1968*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR –secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 21/1968, 21–3.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 24.

³⁷ *Protocolul nr. 9 al ședinței Prezidiului Permanent al CC al PCR din ziua de 20 februarie 1968* in ANIC, fund CC al PCR –secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 26/1968, 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 4–5.

on 26 February in Budapest.³⁹ Problems arose from the very beginning, regarding the character or purpose of the conference. Initially, it was supposed to have a consultative character, debating the future organisation of a worldwide conference of the communist movement, but the organisers called it a preliminary meeting to that conference, thereby suggesting that a decision to convene a conference had already been made. The nuance was immediately noticed by Niculescu-Mizil who objected.⁴⁰ But this skirmish was only a very timid beginning to the confrontations that followed.

The Romanians were soon to discover that assurances made by the Soviets were worth nothing. Mikhail Suslov, head of the Soviet delegation, kept quiet about China, but in turn encouraged others to raise the issue for him. The East German delegation opened its speech with a long and fierce attack against China. Niculescu-Mizil took the floor and protested, reminding everyone about the principles on which the meeting was based, but he was subjected to attack from all sides. Many of the delegates delivered speeches in which long-forgotten clichés of the Stalinist period were resurrected, like the one which associated the quality of a good Communist with love for the USSR. The decisive blow nevertheless was administered by a rather anonymous figure, Khaled Bagdash, leader of the Syrian Communist Party. In his speech, he accused the Romanians of ignoring the internationalist duties every party had and opposing nationalism to internationalism. Also because Romania had refused to break off diplomatic relations with Israel following the Six Day War in June 1967. Bagdash called for all Arabs to condemn the PCR and express solidarity with his position.⁴¹

The Romanian delegation reacted sharply to this, as they had been instructed. Niculescu-Mizil objected and threatened that if Bagdash would not withdraw his statement, the Romanians would leave the meeting. The Spanish party asked for a recess during which heated discussions took place. Many delegations asked Niculescu-Mizil not to leave the meeting and at the same time great pressures were exerted on the Syrian leader to amend his statement. When the meeting reconvened, Bagdash took the floor again and apologised, requesting that his statement be removed from the record of the meeting.⁴² This done, Niculescu-Mizil agreed to stay.

But things did not end there. In Bucharest, Ceaușescu was very angry when told about the incident. His reaction was much tougher and he criticised Niculescu-Mizil for his concession. Ceaușescu understood that this was a test of will from the Soviets and their future course of action would rely on his initial reaction. Right after midnight, he summoned the entire Permanent Presidium of the party for a meeting where he explained everything that had happened; a decision was made that the PCR would ask for a public statement from the entire conference condemning Bagdash. Soon afterwards, in the early hours of the morning, ambassadors of all the

³⁹ For the full text of documents adopted, see: *Materials of the Budapest Consultative Meeting of Representatives of Communist and Workers' Parties, February 26–March 5, 1968* (Novosti Press Agency, 1968).

⁴⁰ *Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR din ziua de 29 februarie 1968*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR –secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 30/1968, f. 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Socialist states in Bucharest were summoned as well, to be informed of this decision. In the morning, Niculescu-Mizil, having been informed about the decision made at home, demanded a public statement against Bagdash.⁴³ But the response was not as positive as it had been the day before.

Most of the delegates thought that Bagdash's withdrawal had been sufficient and were not willing to go as far as the PCR demanded. Not without a note of irony, some delegates remarked that, after all, it was the PCR that had laid so much emphasis on freedom of opinion and the Syrians had done nothing but express their opinions.⁴⁴ Confronted by this refusal, Niculescu-Mizil made the decision to leave the conference, as instructed by Ceaușescu.⁴⁵ This Romanian walk-out was another blow that Ceaușescu administered to Brezhnev's hopes of gathering the world communist movement around Moscow, after that of Karlovy Vary. It amplified Moscow's image of vulnerability and impotence in front of China. Just as had been the case for Stalin when it came to Tito, Brezhnev had no instrument at hand to force the Chinese into anything and their attacks were most destructive for Moscow's reputation. The experiences of Karlovy Vary and Budapest proved once again that Soviet influence was decreasing, including in its own sphere of influence.

After the Romanian delegation returned home, Ceaușescu convened a plenum of the CC on 1 March 1968 to discuss what had happened in Budapest. Niculescu-Mizil explained the sequence of events and his conviction that everything had been stage-managed by the Soviets. All of the speeches, Mizil asserted, were alike, all supporting the Soviet point of view and, of course, all delegates had voted the same way as the Soviets. It was in his opinion nothing more than a theatrical play staged in order to resurrect the idea of a leading centre of the communist movement. Another thing that he pointed out was that, on one hand, most delegates from the Third World were receiving generous subsidies from Moscow, and, on the other hand, there were a number of delegations who privately asked the Romanians not to leave because their objections were necessary:

almost all discussions, especially with those from the capitalist countries, were accompanied by abiding appeals not to leave, and in individual conversations many delegations have told us: don't go, don't leave us alone here, we cannot say what we think, to which we replied that of course, it's comfortable to have the Romanians say it, while the others stay silent or even speak exactly against the Romanians.⁴⁶

If this was indeed the attitude of most delegates, it would explain Brezhnev's hesitations in taking harder measures against the Romanians.

In front of the Plenum, Ceaușescu was much more blunt:

after all, [the meeting] was only a smoke screen, a delusion so that behind this conference a leading centre of the Communist and Workers' Movement could be imposed – the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This is the reality, comrades. And we have to look at it the

⁴³ *Stenograma ședinței plenare extraordinare a Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român, din ziua de 1 martie 1968*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR –secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 31/1968, f. 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 12–13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 25.

way it is. To accept this, would mean putting handcuffs on our hands, betraying the interests of the people, of the communist movement and I think our party cannot accept this . . . And if we have to talk about it, and we will have to talk about this problem of nationalism and internationalism at some point, I think that the classics of Marxism depict as a nationalist not the one who defends his independence, not the peoples who fight to shake off the yoke of domination, those are not nationalists. Nationalist-chauvinistic are those who oppress other peoples, who want others to kneel before them: this is the Marxist–Leninist conception of nationalism⁴⁷

The plenum of March 1968 approved, as always, the measures undertaken by the party leadership and published a communiqué explaining the reasons for which the PCR had left the conference. It was a victory at the level of principle for Ceaușescu, but the risks he was assuming were indeed high. Declassified Soviet documents, investigated by Kramer, reveal that Romanian opposition was a matter of great concern in Moscow. In April 1968, a CPSU Plenum discussed the party's international policy, among other things, and Romania was on several occasions brought up in negative terms. Politburo member Viktor Grishin, for example, referred to the party leadership's determination to 'help the Romanian . . . leaders return to correct positions'.⁴⁸

The PCR's special position on international issues raised much concern in Ukraine also, especially in the light of the reforms gaining momentum in Prague at the time. On 25 April 1968, the Ukrainian party leader Petro Shelest addressed his party's Central Committee and referred to Romania in the harshest words. According to documents quoted by Amir Weiner, Shelest accused Romania of betraying Socialist solidarity and propagating nationalist, irredentist ideas, mainly in reference to Bessarabia and North Bukovina, former Romanian provinces annexed by the USSR after the Second World War. Shelest also stated, on an aggressive note, that the USSR 'would not allow Romania to paralyse the Warsaw Pact'.⁴⁹

Moscow, 1969

During spring 1968, reforms in Prague were accelerating and Soviet leaders were becoming increasingly alarmed, as were Ulbricht, Gomulka and Kádár, the East German, Polish and Hungarian leaders. A series of meetings took place in the period between March and July 1968, at which Alexander Dubček, the Czechoslovak leader, was confronted with a common front represented by the five Communist parties which later took part in the military intervention. He was pressured to slow down the pace of reforms and to counter what the others perceived as anti-socialist forces in Czechoslovak society. Ceaușescu was not invited to participate in any of these meetings. Research in the Soviet and Warsaw Pact archives reveal that Romania was viewed in Moscow – and elsewhere – as a significant risk factor. Ceaușescu's opposition to Moscow seemed to gain new significance, in the context of the 'Prague Spring'.

⁴⁷ *Stenograma ședinței plenare extraordinare a Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român, din ziua de 1 martie 1968*, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR –secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 31/1968, 7–8.

⁴⁸ Mark Kramer, 'Ukraine and the Soviet–Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part II): New Evidence from the Ukrainian Archives', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 14–15 (2003–2004), 295, 348.

⁴⁹ Amir Weiner, 'Dejà Vu All Over Again: Prague Spring, Romanian Summer and Soviet Autumn on the Soviet Western Frontier', *Contemporary European History* 15, 2 (2006): 171.

Documents investigated by Kramer reveal that the Soviets were already considering, in March 1968, a possible Romanian withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.⁵⁰ Also, the five Communist parties appeared to be paying special attention to the relations between Ceaușescu and Dubček and there are sources mentioning that Ceaușescu had a special interest in approaching the latter. On 22 May 1968, for example, the Soviet Ambassador in Warsaw sent a telegram to Premier Alexei Kosygin referring to a discussion he had with Gomulka about Ceaușescu. According to the report, Gomulka claimed that Ceaușescu was very interested in inviting Dubček to Romania, and, confronted with a refusal, Ceaușescu had expressed his willingness to go to Prague himself. Gomulka also mentioned that Tito had manifested a similar interest.⁵¹

Such associations were hardly unique at the time. During another meeting of the five Communist parties held in Warsaw in mid July 1968, it was Ulbricht who made a similar statement, but much more alarmist in tone:

An idea has been floated to create a trilateral alliance among Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia . . . Today the concept is intended to separate socialist Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union and the whole commonwealth of socialist countries. Ceaușescu and Tito support it and have even given [the idea] their official backing.⁵²

The Soviet leadership was not immune to such influences, as far-fetched as such statements might have been. Romanian documents do not confirm these allegations, but the fact remains that, before and after the military intervention in Prague, Romania was subjected to a real ‘informational embargo’.⁵³ Romania had not been informed of the Soviet plans to intervene and, even more than that, Soviet authorities regarded Romania as a potential source of ideological contamination. The Romanians had expressed their support for the Czechoslovak reforms, in the name of party autonomy, and so did the Italians. Longo visited Dubček in May 1968 and expressed his party’s support for his efforts to reform socialism.⁵⁴ Ceaușescu, on the other hand, did not comment much on the content of the reforms but defended just as enthusiastically Prague’s right to pursue its own model of socialism, according to the country’s specificities.

During the intervention, Longo was in Moscow and protested against the military suppression of the reforms, as did the PCE, but Moscow ignored their objections. Suslov dismissed the Spanish Communists’ objections very harshly: ‘as a tiny party, you count for nothing’.⁵⁵ Soviet perceptions that the PCR was following an

⁵⁰Mark Kramer, ‘The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine’, in Vladimir Tismăneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 361–2.

⁵¹Jaromir Navratil, ed., *The ‘Prague Spring’ 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 147.

⁵²Vojtech Mastny, Malcolm Byrne, eds, *A Cardboard Castle?: An Inside History Of The Warsaw Pact, 1955–1991* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 298.

⁵³Vasile Paliu, ‘România și criza cehoslovacă: Mecanismele actului decizional din august 1968’, *Arhivele totalitarismului* 3–4 (2007): 123.

⁵⁴Navratil, *The ‘Prague Spring’ 1968*, 126.

⁵⁵Keith Middlemas, *Power and the Party: Changing Faces of Communism in Western Europe* (London: André Deutsch, 1980), 250. See also: Geof Elley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 564.

anti-Soviet course were amplified by Ceaușescu's noisy condemnation of the intervention, during his famous public speech on 21 August 1968.

Shortly after the intervention, a political incident occurred in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic when party organs noticed that the Soviet postal services in the republic failed to prevent the distribution of a large number of newspapers arriving from Romania.⁵⁶ Several reports signed by Yuri Andropov, chairman of the KGB, Vladimir Makashev, deputy secretary general of the Soviet foreign ministry and Basov, the Soviet ambassador in Romania, addressed to central party organs describe what the authors believed to be Romania's efforts to introduce anti-Soviet literature in the USSR.⁵⁷ Weiner also notes that, in the context of the Soviet-led intervention in Czechoslovakia, there was a clear anti-Romanian attitude developing in the USSR.⁵⁸

In the following months, Ceaușescu did his best to avoid an escalation of the conflict and to appease the Soviets, but this did not involve an abandonment of the PCR's fundamental position. This was to become evident in 1969, when the China issue resurfaced as the most important preoccupation of Moscow's policy towards world communism. In spite of the events in Czechoslovakia, the main reason for Brezhnev's determination to organise an international conference of Communist parties worldwide remained unchanged and so also did the PCR's determination to prevent a collective condemnation of the Chinese party.

In March 1969, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated even further with the occurrence of armed incidents at the border.⁵⁹ A few weeks later, Brezhnev tried to raise the issue during a Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) meeting but failed to obtain unity because Ceaușescu opposed any condemnation of China.⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that in the aftermath of the intervention in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet and Romanian discourse about the world communist movement did not change at all; the so-called 'Brezhnev doctrine' was in no way associated with world communism, but only with Central and Eastern Europe. The Soviets preferred not to bring it to discussion at the conference nor in its documents, and all participants did the same. So Romanian-Soviet debates concerning the unicentric or polycentric structure of the world communist movement were not mixed with the ideological justification Brezhnev used for his intervention in Prague.⁶¹

Initially, in Budapest, the conference was scheduled for November of that same year, but after the events in Czechoslovakia many Communist parties other than the PCR had asked for its postponement, especially parties from Western Europe. The PCI, for example, made its participation conditional on an assurance that no

⁵⁶ Mark Kramer, 'Moldova, Romania, and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 12–13 (2001): 329–30.

⁵⁷ Kramer, 'Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis', 349.

⁵⁸ Weiner, 'Déjà Vu All Over Again', 176.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Wishnick, *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China policy, from Brezhnev to Yeltsin* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2001), 32–5.

⁶⁰ L. Yong, *Sino-Romanian Relations*, 264.

⁶¹ The Brezhnev doctrine, according to Kramer, was merely a post-hoc justification of the intervention. See: Mark Kramer, 'Ideology and the Cold War', *Review of International Studies* 25, 4 (1999): 546.

Communist party would be subjected to criticism – echoing Ceaușescu's earlier stance.⁶² For Ceaușescu, the only option under the new circumstances was to participate and a decision was already made to that effect by September 1968.⁶³ Ceaușescu's freedom to manoeuvre was severely limited due to the events in Prague and it is reasonable to assume that his opposition to Soviet plans may have been milder. Once the conference was moved to the summer of the next year, most tensions were defused, however, and Ceaușescu was able to regain momentum in his opposition, especially because many parties had expressed sympathy for his position against the Prague intervention.⁶⁴

Both the PCR and the PCI maintained their opposition to the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, but chose not to bring the issue to discussion, each for its own reasons. As Bracke argues, each party chose to pursue its own agenda and not to form a common front, as a result of which the Czechoslovak intervention was not raised as a separate topic.⁶⁵ The Italian Communists' tactic was to promote reform in the world communist movement from the inside, rather than from outside.⁶⁶ The same can also be said about the PCR. The PCE also opposed a return to the previously monolithic conception of socialism and even turned out to be one of the most active critics of Moscow.⁶⁷

The Conference took place between 5–17 June 1969 in Moscow, the RCP being represented by a delegation led by Ceaușescu and Niculescu-Mizil. This time, Brezhnev was much more aggressive. From the first days, he made it clear that Moscow intended to raise the Chinese issue, in light of the armed incidents at the border. Ceaușescu replied that this was a violation of the conference's agenda and he was not mandated to discuss it. Were the organisers to proceed with their intentions, Ceaușescu said, he would have to return to Bucharest and ask for a mandate from the party's Central Committee on that matter.⁶⁸

Eventually, Brezhnev backed down. He had had a similar experience with the Romanians leaving the preparatory conference in Budapest and was not willing to go through that again. Ceaușescu's strategy was not to openly defend China, but to

⁶²Joan Barth Urban, *Moscow and the Italian Communist Party: From Togliatti to Berlinguer* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1986), 256.

⁶³Protocol nr. 51 al ședinței Prezidiului Permanent din ziua de 27 septembrie 1968, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 165/1969, 2.

⁶⁴In his memoirs, Niculescu-Mizil remembers the enthusiastic support for RCP policies that was received when he attended the PCE congress in February 1969. For details: Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *O istorie trăită: Memorii*, II: *București, Moscova, Praga, Bologna* (București: Editura Democrația, 2003), 236–44.

⁶⁵Bracke, 'Proletarian Internationalism', 32.

⁶⁶Valentine Lomellini, 'The Two Europes: Continuity and Breaks 1968 and 1981, Eastern Crisis, Italian Outcomes', in Michele Affinito, Guia Migani, Christian Wenkel, eds, *The Two Europes* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009), 61–2.

⁶⁷Michelangelo Di Giacomo, 'Prospettive eurocomuniste: M. Di Giacomo, Prospettive eurocomuniste: La strategia del Pci e i rapporti col Pce negli anni settanta', *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (2011): 175.

⁶⁸Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR din ziua de 18 iunie 1969 in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 91/1969, 2–3.

prevent debates and decisions about it making use of administrative and ideological arguments, which is why Brezhnev had such a hard time fighting Ceaușescu on this topic. Also, as Alfred D. Low points out, Brezhnev was aware of the fact that many other parties, especially the Western European ones, shared Ceaușescu's view, although most preferred to remain silent.⁶⁹

History thus repeated itself: Brezhnev did not resort to attacks against China, but had somebody else do it for him. When the delegate from the Communist Party of Paraguay harshly attacked China in his speech, Ceaușescu understood that it was just another test of will. He asked for the floor and demanded, in the name of unity, that all speakers refrain from criticising other parties, especially those who were not present.⁷⁰ But this time, there was no threat to leave: August 1968 had taught him to be cautious. Moreover, Ceaușescu sent a telegram to Bucharest to explain his position and the reasons behind it, asking for confirmation.⁷¹ The Permanent Presidium of the party immediately convened an extraordinary meeting and reaffirmed its full support for the secretary general. His speech was published in the press the next day and a telegram was sent to Moscow to reassure him that the party fully backed his stance.⁷² Ceaușescu was not leaving any gate open for Brezhnev.

In the following days, spirits calmed down. Ceaușescu did not leave the meeting and China was no longer mentioned in any speech. The conference adopted a declaration which was pretty much empty in its content: it reaffirmed the participants' commitment to fight against imperialism and attributed a similar task to movements of national liberation in the Third World. It called for unity against imperialist aggression and special paragraphs were dedicated to the war in Vietnam.⁷³ But there was no mention of China nor of the Brezhnev doctrine. As far as the Romanian-Soviet relations were concerned, it was a preservation of the status quo: Ceaușescu allowed Brezhnev to play his charade of unity and Brezhnev avoided bringing up issues that were likely to jeopardise the success of the conference.

Soon after the conference, Ceaușescu received probably the most important guest to have visited Bucharest until then: American President Richard Nixon. The United States was concerned about the escalation of the Vietnam War and was also looking for an intermediary in relations to China. Both issues were discussed during Nixon's visit and Ceaușescu agreed to help mediate between the Chinese and the Americans. This was recognition of the special position Ceaușescu had earned in world communism, especially due to Romania's stubborn refusal to condemn China.

⁶⁹ Alfred D. Low, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute: An Analysis of the Polemics* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), 297.

⁷⁰ *Declarația tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu în cadrul consfătuirii în ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 89/1969, 3–4.*

⁷¹ *Protocolnr. 24 al ședinței Prezidiului Permanent din ziua de 6 iunie 1969, in ANIC, fund CC al PCR – secția Cancelarie, dossier no. 89/1969, 2.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Documents adopted by the International Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties: Moscow, June 5–17, 1969* (Moscow: Novosti Press, 1969).

Conclusion

This was the last Soviet attempt to reunite the entire world communist movement under its political leadership. In the next decade, Sino-American rapprochement changed the rules of the game and Moscow gave up the ambition of being the centre of communism worldwide.⁷⁴ Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev failed to reach the same level of authority over world communism exercised by Stalin in the inter-war years and after.

In the years following the Moscow Conference of 1969, Moscow's claims to be recognised as the leading centre of world communism received another blow: the emergence of Eurocommunism.⁷⁵ In the aftermath of the Soviet-led intervention in Czechoslovakia, more and more Western Communist parties distanced themselves from Moscow's decision, repudiating the intervention. Numerous voices asserted that each Communist party had the right to decide on the methods and strategies of struggle that were appropriate to the domestic conditions in the respective country.⁷⁶ In time, such criticism evolved towards admitting some forms of pluralism and alliances with other social forces so as to encourage change by peaceful methods. Moscow found it increasingly difficult to fight against this trend which eventually contributed to sabotaging Soviet control over the world communist movement.

Another cause for Moscow's failure was Romania's opposition. The Communist elites in Romania sought to reduce Soviet domination and control of other Communist parties in order to assert their autonomy within the bloc. Their most important challenge was justifying this in such a way as to fight off Soviet threats. Gheorghiu-Dej chose to build an entire rhetoric around ideological arguments, as a mask and shield designed to avoid a situation similar to that of Yugoslavia and Albania, and to cast off accusations of deviation. His ideological construct claimed that all Communist parties were equal, that each had the right to choose its own path towards socialism and that, therefore, there could not be a leading centre of world communism.

For the period of reference (1967–9), Nicolae Ceaușescu employed the same type of argumentation as embodied in the RCP Declaration of 1964 to combat Moscow's attempts to restore its control over the world communist movement. His ultimate aim was to preserve and improve Romania's autonomy in the Communist bloc and for that he used ideology as a justification. The core of Ceaușescu's ideological battle against Brezhnev was the meaning of 'unity' in world communism. For Brezhnev, unity meant structure and hierarchy, a central point of command as there was during

⁷⁴ Robert G. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 71–3.

⁷⁵ Ivan T. Berend, *Europe Since 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 34–5. See also: Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), 543–5.

⁷⁶ Kramer, 'The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine', 363.

Stalin's time.⁷⁷ For Ceaușescu, unity meant polycentrism.⁷⁸ It was schism, he argued, like that between the USSR and Yugoslavia or between the USSR and China that prevented unity, because, he argued, unity could only be based on mutual respect and equality.

From Ceaușescu's point of view, condemnation of China involved the acceptance of one single centre in the world communism movement, namely Moscow. On the other hand, not condemning China meant that Moscow's control over other Communist parties would remain at a very low level, involving polycentrism. It was therefore one of his goals at the above-mentioned meetings to prevent a public condemnation of China by a Communist conclave.

His argumentation relied on the fact that Leninist norms in inter-party relations involved non-interference in domestic affairs and therefore, the acceptance of different courses and interpretations of Marxism–Leninism. There could not be a single course towards socialism, Ceaușescu claimed, as his predecessor had before him, but a multitude of courses that all had to be accepted as legitimate. It is apparent that the main source of ideological inspiration came from Titoism, in other words Yugoslavia's own road to socialism under Tito's leadership following the 1948 conflict with Moscow.

The clearest indicator of Ceaușescu's success in his endeavour was that China was never the subject of any direct condemnation by any Communist conclave during the period examined.⁷⁹ This is not to imply that Ceaușescu's resistance was the only or the most important factor. Ceaușescu defended China for realistic purposes: a world communist movement which included China in its ranks diminished Moscow's influence while a communist movement without China or one completely united against China significantly increased Moscow's influence. To conclude, it is apparent that Ceaușescu's approach sought to encourage Moscow's weaknesses in order to preserve Romania's autonomy; ideology was one of the most important instruments he used for this purpose.

Autonomie et idéologie : Brejnev, Ceaușescu et le mouvement communiste international

Un des principaux objectifs de Leonid Brejnev quand il a pris la direction du Parti en Union soviétique était de réinstaurer le contrôle de Moscou sur le mouvement communiste international, qui avait été sérieusement ébranlé par le conflit sino-soviétique. Le Roumain Nicolae Ceaușescu était déterminé à l'en empêcher pour

consolider l'autonomie de son pays au sein du bloc communiste. Le conflit sino-soviétique représentait un cadre politique et idéologique favorable à l'autonomie puisque les communistes roumains avaient revendiqué leur neutralité dans cette dispute. Cet article décrit les efforts de Nicolae Ceaușescu pour saboter les tentatives de Brejnev pour faire condamner la Chine à l'occasion d'une conférence internationale des partis communistes entre 1967 et 1969. Son argument idéologique de base était que l'unité

⁷⁷ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origin, Growth and Dissolution*, Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 109.

⁷⁸ J Martin Rochester, *Fundamental Principles of International Relations*, Vol. I (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2010), 113.

⁷⁹ L. Yong, *Sino-Romanian Relations*, 264.

du communisme international devait avoir une signification polycentrique.

**Autonomie und Ideologie:
Breschnew, Ceaușescu und die
kommunistische Weltbewegung**

Als Leonid Breschnew in der Sowjetunion die Parteiführung der KPdSU übernahm, bestand eines seiner Hauptziele darin, die Kontrolle Moskaus über die kommunistische Weltbewegung wiederherzustellen, die durch das chinesisch-sowjetische Zerwürfnis ernsthaft untergraben

worden war. Der rumänische Staatschef Nicolae Ceaușescu war entschlossen, dies zu verhindern, um die Autonomie seines Landes innerhalb des kommunistischen Blocks zu festigen. Das chinesisch-sowjetische Zerwürfnis bot den politischen und ideologischen Rahmen für diese Autonomie und ermöglichte es den rumänischen Kommunisten, die Neutralität ihres Landes zu erklären. Der Beitrag beschreibt Ceaușescus Bemühen, Breschnews Versuche zu sabotieren, China durch eine internationale Versammlung kommunistischer Parteien zwischen 1967 und 1969 verurteilen zu lassen. Sein ideologisches Hauptargument bestand darin, dass die Einheit des Weltkommunismus polyzentrisch verstanden werden sollte.