ROMANIA DURING CAUSESCU’S DICTATORSHIP:
FIRST PERIOD IN POWER (1965–1971)

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Abstract
The political regime of Nicolae Ceausescu had at least three distinct stages, each of these being characterized by important developments both in the internal political life and in Romania's foreign relations. The purpose of this study is to deepen the Ceausescu's first period in power (1965–1971), stage characterized, on the one hand, by a relative democratization of society and, on the other hand, the strengthening of his personal power through the assumption of important functions in the Party and State leadership along with the continuation of the political line of independence from Moscow. Thus, research is focused on works of the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party which gave "the historical start of the new times" and also is stressed the Ceausescu's public condemnation of the Warsaw Pact troops intervention in Czechoslovakia, a courageous act which gained him and our country worldwide respect. Also, it was analyzed the Constitution of Socialist Republic of Romania from 1965 (the document that formed the legal basis for the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu) and finally I focused on the end of the relative democratization period and the consolidation of Ceausescu’s personality cult.

Keywords: political regime of Nicolae Ceausescu, leadership of Romania, congresses of the Romanian Communist Party, cult of personality.

1. Introduction
After the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, in March 1965, Nicolae Ceausescu was elected the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), position from which he initiated some changes not only on the Party line but also on the State line. As first steps, the Party was renamed with its historical name - the Romanian Communist Party, and the official name of the country was changed from the Romanian People's Republic to the Socialist Republic of Romania. Thus, the year 1965 is a milestone for the beginning of a new era, the "Ceausescu Era" or how it was called - the "Golden Age".

Taking into account that the political regime of Nicolae Ceausescu had at least three distinct stages, each of them being characterized by particular evolutions, I considered that, in order to fully understand the developments that took place in Romania during the "Ceausescu Era", it is important to be deepened the Ceausescu's first period in power (1965–1971), stage characterized, on the one hand, by a relative democratization of society and, on the other hand, the strengthening of his personal power through the assumption of important functions in the Party and State leadership along with the continuation of the political line of independence from Moscow.

For this purpose, the objectives of this study are to clarify the way in which Ceausescu succeeded Gheorghiu-Dej and also how he managed to remove all potential rivals and, in a very short time, to concentrate all power in his hands. Not least, it is necessary to analyze also the events in Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968, events that gave

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Nicholas Ceausescu the opportunity to acquire a precious political capital, both internally and especially abroad, thus laying the foundations for a personal dictatorship.

Although the specialized literature comprises many studies on these topics, I am convinced that a new study on period under discussion will make it easier to understand how Ceausescu managed to promote a cult of personality that was unprecedented in Romanian history and, why not, even to be the foundation and underpin the new researches, thus contributing to the enrichment of historiography in the field of Romanian contemporary history.

2. The 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) - The beginning of a new era

Only a few days after the death of communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, following the plenary session of the Central Committee of Romanian Workers’ Party (RWP), Nicolae Ceausescu was elected Prime Secretary of RWP, Chivu Stoica as president of the State Council and Ion Gheorghe Maurer was reconfirmed as President of the Council of Ministers.¹

After his election as Prime Secretary of RWP, Nicolae Ceausescu’s immediate priority was the achievement of a large reorganization in the Party and the State, reform that would strengthen its own position and, at the same time, mark the beginning of a new era.

In this regard, during 19 to 24 July 1965, it was organized a Congress of RWP, occasion with which, at the proposal of Ceausescu, the name of the Party was changed in Romanian Communist Party (RCP) and also were renumbered the congresses of the Party, the 4th Congress of RWP was considered to be the 9th Congress of the RCP. As evidenced by Nicolae Ceausescu’s speech, changing the Party’s name and renumbering of congresses reflects "the continuity of the Party's activity throughout its history" and "corresponds best to the changes that took place in society, to the current state of development of the Party, to its ultimate goal - to build the communist society".²

In addition to changing the party’s name, at the 9th Congress of RCP a number of changes have been made to the organizational structure of the party. Thus, according to the RCP Statute, the Party’s supreme governing body was the Congress that met every four years, and in the interval between congresses, the entire party activity was led by the Central Committee. Among other powers, the Central Committee had the task of choosing the Executive Committee, Permanent Presidium, Secretary-General and the Secretariat. It should be underlined that in the new Statute of the RCP, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee was replaced by two new organs, namely: Executive Committee (the task of which was to lead the Party’s activity between plenary meetings, which took place at least once every four months); and Permanent Presidium (which did not have very clear attributions, in the Statute being established only that “solve the party's current political problems”).³ Also, it was created the position of General

¹ When the new leadership of RWP was elected, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej had not been buried, the Communist leaders still making the “first guard” at the head of the “first man of the country”. The funeral of Gheorghiu-Dej took place on 24 March 1965, with which occasion Nicolae Ceausescu gave a speech full of pathos in which he praised Gheorghiu-Dej, highlighting “work and struggle with all skill and inexhaustible energy” in serving with faith “the cause of the Party, the happiness of the people and the flourishing of the homeland” - Scânteia, no. 6569/25 March 1965.


Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, a function in which, as expected, was elected Nicolae Ceausescu. According to the Statute, the Secretariat of RCP was responsible for organizing and controlling the fulfilment of Party decisions and the selection of cadres. ⁴

Therewith, at the 9th Congress of RCP it was debated the draft of a new constitution, the participants unanimously agreed with the proposal that the country be named "Socialist Republic of Romania", as this name "fully corresponds to the stage of society's development", the basic principles of the new constitution reflect the "profound socio-economic transformations in the whole structure of society" and "consecrates the victories achieved in the building of the socialist society." ⁵

What should be noted is the fact that, in order to consolidate and secure his position as party leader, Ceausescu invited to the 9th Congress of RCP more delegations from communist states, among which: delegation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union led by Leonid Brejnev; delegation of the Chinese Communist Party led by Deng Xiaoping; delegation of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany led by Walter Ulbricht; delegation of the Bulgarian Communist Party led by Todor Zhivkov; League of Communists of Yugoslavia led by Edvard Kardelj; delegation of the Vietnamese Workers' Party led by Le Duc Tho; delegation of the Indonesian Communist Party led by Dipa Nusantara Aidit; delegation of the Party of Labour of Albania led by Ramiz Alia, and so on. As evidenced by Ceausescu's speech at the opening of the congress, the presence of these delegations was "a sign of deep friendship and appreciation" to the Romanian Communist Party and Romanian People, as well as "a manifestation of the solidarity of the Communists and Workers international movement." ⁶

3. Constitution of Socialist Republic of Romania - The document that formed the legal basis for the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu

The extensive reorganization envisaged by Nicolae Ceausescu materialized not only on the Party line but also on the State line. Thus, as shown above, at the 9th Congress of RCP it was debated the draft of a new constitution, a document which provided major reforms concerning the internal organization and policies of Romanian State.

The new Constitution of Romania was debated by the Grand National Assembly at its meeting on 21 August 1965, occasion with which Nicolae Ceausescu expressed his conviction that "the fundamental law of Socialist Romania embodies the realization of the most daring dreams for which the Romanian people fought and worked", at a time when the country has great prospects, and no generation has ever had the "happiness of being part of such grandiose social transformations." ⁷

As expected, the Constitution of Socialist Republic of Romania was adopted by Grand National Assembly with the unanimity of the 446 deputies present at the meeting, on the same day was promulgated under the signature of the President of the State Council, Chivu Stoica, and more than that, was published in the Official Gazette, which meant its immediate entry into force.

⁴ Ibid
⁶ Idem, 14.
With regard to the reforms introduced by the Constitution of 1965, first of all it should be mentioned that was changed the State's official name from the Romanian People's Republic to the Socialist Republic of Romania, thus being understood the completion of the construction of the socialist foundation in Romania. Also, the fundamental law placed an extremely high emphasis on the role of the Romanian Communist Party in almost all fields of activity, giving it the status of "leading political force of the whole society is the Romanian Communist Party".\(^9\)

The Great National Assembly remained the supreme body of the state power and sole legislative body of the Socialist Republic of Romania. The new Constitution maintained the State Council\(^10\) as a body of state power, subordinated to the Great National Assembly\(^11\). What should be noted is the fact that the State Council was formed of the President, three Vice-Presidents and fifteen members and carries its activity according to the principle of "collective leadership" in issuing decrees and adopting decisions.\(^12\)

According to the Constitution of 1965, the national economy was a socialist one based on socialist property on the means of production, which was either state property - on goods belonging to the whole people, or co-operative property - on the goods belonging to each cooperative organization.\(^13\)

In theory, the citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania enjoyed many rights, the Constitution consecrated and guaranteed equality of rights in all areas of economic, political, legal, social and cultural life.\(^14\) Thus, the Constitution provided the right to work, leisure, material insurance for old age, education, illness or incapacity to work, equal rights for women, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, inviolability of the person and domicile, secrecy of correspondence, right of petitions, personal property, inheritance, asylum, etc.\(^15\) At the same time, the Constitution imposed some obligations on citizens who were bound to defend socialist property and the development of the socialist system and also to defend their homeland.\(^16\)

With regard to the Foreign Relations of the Socialist Republic of Romania, the new Constitution states that are based on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and independence, equality of rights and mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs. On the basis of the principles enshrined in the Constitution, the Socialist Republic of Romania would "maintain and develop relations of friendship and cooperation with socialist countries in the spirit of socialist internationalism, promote relations of cooperation with countries having another order social and political system and activate in international organizations in order to ensure peace and understanding between peoples"\(^17\).

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\(^9\) Articles no. 1 and 3 of Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania (1965)
\(^10\) The State Council was established by Law no. 1/1961 for the modification of Chapter III, as well as Articles 43, 44 and 75 of the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic, published in the Official Bulletin no. 9 of 25 March 1961. From that moment, the State Council took over the duties belonging to the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, as it was established in previous constitutions.
\(^11\) Article no. 62 of Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania (1965)
\(^12\) Idem, Articles no. 66, 67 and 68
\(^13\) Idem, Articles no. 5 and 6
\(^14\) Idem, Article no. 17
\(^15\) Idem, Articles no. 18–38.
\(^16\) Idem, Articles no. 39–41.
\(^17\) Idem, Article no. 14
4. Demarches of Nicolae Ceausescu to strengthen his position by gaining the support of the Party's assets and population's appreciation

In the period following the 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceausescu continued to pursue the goal of strengthening personal power and, to that end, sought to achieve genuine popularity among Romanians. On this line, Ceausescu made numerous visits to all regions of the country, occasions with which he gave speeches and made certain gestures with an obvious patriotic signification, thus emphasizing the national teinte of communist ideology established from the time of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.

Thus, on 6 November 1965, at the meeting with the Party's assets of Cluj region, Nicolae Ceausescu pointed out that "enthusiastic and warm-hearted reception" that was made, constitutes "a manifestation of the unity of the whole people around the party, the indestructible ties of the Communist Party with all the working people, regardless of nationality, an expression of the deep attachment to party politics." 18 As can be seen, Ceausescu was careful to remember about the "cohabiting nationalities", especially since at that moment there was the Magyar Autonomous Region. Thereafter, the country's multinational character was largely ignored, and the problem of cohabiting nationalities officially was considered resolved.

Over the next few days, on 8 November 1965, at a meeting with the Party's assets of Maramureș region, Ceausescu underlined the "justness of the Communist Party policy" following which "working people, Romanian, Hungarian and other nationalities, who have lived in these lands for centuries, have worked twinned and have made a full contribution to the struggle of the whole people to conquer political power". 19

Ceausescu continued his journey through the country and the following period, he met with the Party's assets of several regions, such as: Crișana (19 February 1966), Banat (21 February 1966), Iași (21 May 1966), Suceava (23 May 1966), Argeș (12 June 1966), Galați (16 September 1966), Hunedoara (9 October 1966). Also, during this period he held speeches at other meetings, such as: National Conference of Workers in Construction (26 February 1966), Congress of Cooperatives of the Agricultural Production (7 March 1966), 8th Congress of the Communist Youth Union (23 March 1966), Congress of Unions in the Socialist Republic of Romania (16 May 1966), National Conference of Workers in the Machine Building Industry (1 June 1966), Meeting dedicated to the festive opening of the academic year 1966-1967 (3 October 1966), Conference to set up the National Board of the Pioneer Organization (11 November 1966), and many other occasions, both in the country and abroad. 20

5. December, 1967: Starting point of the Ceausescu's dictatorship

At the time of his election as Party leader, Nicolae Ceausescu has hinted that will follow the opening line started by his predecessor and that he was willing to accept a modernization and a democratization of the regime, fact reflected in the collective leadership established in 1965. Thus, at the 9th Congress of RCP was decided the separation of the functions in the Party from functions in state leadership, considering

19 Idem, 177.
20 All the speeches held by Ceausescu on these occasions can be found in volumes 1 and 2 of the book Romania pe drumul desăvârșirii construcției socialiste. Rapoarte, cuvântări, articole (București, Editura Politică, 1968).
that one person cannot deal effectively with both areas. As a result, between August 1965 and December 1967, the Party leadership was assured by a trio composed of Nicolae Ceausescu (as General Secretary), Chivu Stoica (as President of the State Council) and Ion Gheorghe Maurer (as Prime Minister). In fact, this collective leadership formula was just a compromise that allowed Ceausescu to have the time to plan the forthcoming removal of the old comrades and the concentration of power in his hands.

Despite these decisions, at the National Conference of the RCP (6-8 December 1967), it was concluded that the separation of functions has led to waste of resources and the creation of many parallelisms. In this regard, Chivu Stoica proposed that in the future the position of President of the State Council be occupied by General Secretary of RCP "in accordance with the Party's role of state political governing force". Of course, in the characteristic style of such meetings, the proposal was received with enthusiasm, "entire assistance showed their appreciation by standing and applauding for a long time".²¹

On the basis of this proposal, the National Conference empowered the Central Committee of the RCP "to take all measures to improve the Party and State apparatus". Consequently, on 8 December 1967, took place the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of RCP which adopted the appropriate decisions. The State Council also met at the same day and unanimously decided to resign, so that the party's decisions can be put into practice. The next day, during the session of Grand National Assembly, the first item on the order of the day was the election of the State Council. As it appears from newspapers of time, Chivu Stoica himself proposed that "Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu be elected as President of the State Council", what it has had happened with the unanimous vote of the Grand National Assembly.²²

Thus, since 9 December 1967, Nicolae Ceausescu became the head of the Romanian State, this moment representing the beginning of his personal dictatorship.

6. The end of the relative democratization period and the consolidation of Ceausescu's personality cult

The events in Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968 gave to Nicolae Ceausescu the opportunity to acquire a precious political capital, both internally and especially abroad.

Thus, the boldly condemnation of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia was the moment of glory of Nicolae Ceausescu. From the balcony of the Central Committee headquarters, the Romanian leader denounced the invasion and declared that it was a "grave error and constituted a serious danger to peace in Europe and for the prospects of world socialism." He also showed that "it is inconceivable in the present day world – when peoples rise to defend their national independence and for equal rights – that a socialist state, that socialist states to infringe on the liberty and independence of another state."²³

It should be noted that, in the strong hurrahs and applause from all participants, Ceausescu announced the decision to establish "patriotic armed guards made up of workers, peasants and intellectuals" which defends the homeland's independence, and also the message that "the entire Romanian people will not allow anyone to violate the homeland's territory". On behalf of the Party and State organs, Ceausescu made a promise that had enthused the crowd, saying: "Be sure comrades, be sure citizens of

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²¹ Drumul Socialismului, no. 4022/8 December 1967
²² Idem, no. 4024/10 December 1967
²³ Scânteia, no. 7802/22 August 1968
Romania that we will never betray our homeland, we will not betray the interests of our people." Taking this commitment, Ceausescu asked the Romanians to "show unity" and act "calmly and firmly", that all citizens be ready to "defend at any moment the socialist homeland, Romania."

The boldness with which Nicolae Ceausescu openly and categorically criticized the actions of the other socialist states made most Romanians believe in his politics and perceived him as a charismatic leader. Through his attitude Ceausescu gained not only the confidence of the Romanians, but also the sympathy of the Western countries and international prestige.

Under these circumstances, between 6 - 12 August 1969, took place the 10th Congress of RCP with the participation of 2000 delegates from Party’s county organizations, and also delegates representing 66 communist parties around the world. The main features of the Congress included: Ceausescu's unanimous reelection as General Secretary of the Party for a five-year term, the enlargement of the Central Committee from 121 to 165 members, and the approval of revisions of the Party Statute. Among other things, the statute revisions provided for the election of the Central Committee by secret ballot and transferred the responsibility for electing the general secretary from the Central Committee to the party congress. It was also decided that party congresses would be convened every five years rather than every four so that each congress could discuss and adopt a five-year economic plan for the country.

What should be mentioned is the fact that at the end of the 10th Congress, both those present in the Congress Hall as well as the thousands of people gathered in the Palace Square, shouted in unison "Ceausescu - RCP". More than that, during the Congress the Party's official newspaper Scânteia, titrate on the front page "When say Ceausescu, say the Party ".

It is noteworthy that only four years after the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Nicolae Ceausescu became the incontestable leader of both the Communist Party and the Romanian State.

Thus, the concentration of all power in his hands allowed Ceausescu to intensified authoritarian inclinations, especially after the 1971 visit to several Asian countries, such as China, North Korea, Vietnam and Mongolia. This is the moment when Nicolae Ceausescu, inspired by the cult of the personality of Mao Tse-tung and Kim Il-sung, decided that the system seen in China and North Korea must also be implemented in Romania.

In this regard, on 6 July 1971, Nicolae Ceausescu presented at the meeting of the Executive Committee of CC of RCP a material entitled "Proposals for measures to improve political-ideological activity, Marxist-Leninist education of party members and all working people", in which he showed that "despite the great successes achieved, in political-ideological and and cultural-educational work there still continue to persist a series of lacks, shortages and deficiencies, whose removal constitutes an imperative necessity of the advancement of our society". "Taking into account the requirements of the current stage of the socialist construction - further said Ceausescu - the great objectives that stand before the party and the people in forging the multilaterally-

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24 Ibid
26 Scânteia, no. 8148/6 August 1969
developed socialist society, it is necessary for measures to be taken to raise the level of revolutionary combativity and of the militant and partinic spirit of the entire activity political, ideological and of communist education of masses, operated by the party organs and organizations, by mass and collective organizations, by State organs, by propaganda, ideological and cultural-artistic institutions.”

According to the July Theses (as they are called Ceaușescu's proposals from 6 July 1971), the following measures were decisive in achieving the proposed objectives: continuous heightening of the party's directive role in all the fields of political-educational activity; intensifying propaganda activity and the activity of agitators; rise the role of party gatherings in debating the main life problems of working collectives; creation of a large mass current for the participation of all citizens and especially the young in actions of patriotic work; intensifying the activity of education and political preparation in schools and faculties; combating the manifestations of cosmopolitanism, different artistic fashions borrowed from the capitalist world; intensifying the atheist propaganda and education of the entire youth in the spirit of our materialist-dialectic philosophy; increasing the role of the press in the widespread propagation of the ideological positions of the party, of the ethical social cohabitation principles, in the firm fight against the influences of bourgeois ideology and of retrograde mentalities of any kind; increasing the educational role of all the radio and television shows, by stimulating the creation of revolutionary, patriotic and worker's songs; a better orientation of editorial activity, so that book production responds in greater measure to the requirements of communist education; development of Romanian creations of opera, operetta and ballet with themes springing from the battle of our people for socialism; limiting the projection of police and adventure movies, forbidding movies which cultivate violence and vulgarity, which propagate the bourgeois life style; in places of public alimentation will be broadcast especially the Romanian musical creation, making therewith a careful selection of foreign repertoire, in order to remove the music that expresses decadent currents.

What is noteworthy is that, at the end of the meeting of the Executive Committee of CC of RCP, Ceausescu, referring to the proposed measures, said: "I know that there will be people to say that this means Stalinism, a lack of humanism. Humanism means precisely the concern for the education of man, to not allow abuses, to care for what education we give, to not admit the bourgeois conception with our own means." There is no need to say that Ceausescu’s proposals have been unanimously approved by the Executive Committee of the CC of RCP.

Moreover, on 3 November 1971, in the plenary session of the Central Committee of the RCP, the ideological program of the party was adopted, based on the July Theses, thus putting an end to the brief post-1965 liberation period.

Thus, the adoption of the program for improving ideological activity was just the beginning of a vast program of action through which Nicolae Ceaușescu created an unprecedented cult of personality.

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27 Nicolae Ceaușescu, Propuneri de măsuri pentru împunătăţirea activităţii politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid, a tuturor oamenilor muncii (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1971), 7-8.
28 Idem, 8-16.
29 Central Historical National Archives (C.H.N.A.), Fund: Central Committee of Romanian Communist, Chancellery Section, File no. 76/1971, 61.
7. Conclusions

A few days after the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in March 1965, Nicolae Ceaucescu was elected General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) with the support of Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Emil Bodnaras and Chivu Stoica, the three believing that they would be able to control him. Even if Ceaucescu was not a genuine intellectual, he was endowed with native intelligence which allowed him to eliminate all potential opponents and, in a very short time, to concentrate all power in his hands.

Many books and studies have been written about the Ceaucescu era, or how it was called - the "Golden Age", but very few of them have managed to clarify certain confusing aspects and at the same time to restore the historical truth. In these circumstances, despite impressive historiographical offers, I consider that there is much to say about this so difficult and controversial period in Romanian history and believe that a new approach of the way in which Ceaucescu gave "the historical start of the new times" is constituted in an attempt both daring and useful.

Therefore, due to the need of understanding and correct perception of the contemporary national history and wishing to contribute to the outline of the real picture of the researched period, in this study were analyzed step by step the Ceaucescu's first period in power (1965–1971), stage characterized, on the one hand, by a relative democratization of society and, on the other hand, the strengthening of his personal power through the assumption of important functions in the Party and State leadership.

Taking into account the firsthand information used and the pertinent analysis of the events, I am of the opinion that this study can act as a useful reference point and basis for the further exploration of the topic in question and also an opportunity to develop new researches in the future.

Finally I express my conviction that a new study on period under discussion will make it easier to understand how Ceaucescu managed to promote a cult of personality that was unprecedented in Romanian history and at the same time will contribute to the enrichment of historiography in the field of Romanian contemporary history.

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