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The British-Romanian Relations during the Cold War

MIHAELA SITARIU

The Revolution of 1989 opened new prospects for bilateral British-Romanian relations in political, economic, and cultural fields. Elected in December 2004, the new Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, asserted his strong commitment towards Romania's strategic partnership with the United States and strong ties with Britain, saying that "the Washington-London-Bucharest axis will be a foreign priority for Romania". Does this statement represent the recognition of the most important actors that dominate the international setting nowadays or is it the continuation of the previously good relations with Britain and the United States of America?

This study analyses both the international setting and the domestic processes that took place in Britain and Romania during the Cold War. The emerging of new superpowers after the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union, led to the reconsideration of British foreign policy, in terms of power, influence, and diplomacy. Meanwhile, Romanian foreign policy was being reshaped according to the supremacy of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and the establishment of the Warsaw Treaty and COMECON. The recognition of the bipolar world within which British and Romanian national policies were pursued is fundamental for understanding the relations between them. But an analysis of the domestic processes in Britain and Romania also provides a better understanding of British and Romanian foreign policies. I base this approach on the assumption that foreign policy is ultimately the external output of the domestic policy-making process¹. Certainly, the imperatives of new internal and international demands faced by Britain and Romania after the Second World War influenced their relations.

At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union succeeded in consolidating its control over the Eastern European countries. By the time of Yalta it was clear that the position of the armies would determine the political influence in Europe². Having strengthened their military position in Eastern Europe, the Soviets bargained at Yalta Conference of 3-11 February 1945 from a position of strength³. But the pattern of influences in Europe had already been decided by Churchill and Stalin at Moscow in October 1944. The two mid-twentieth century leaders, behaving like "eighteenth century monarchs or nineteenth century empire builders" agreed on ninety per cent British influence in Greece in exchange for ninety per cent Soviet

¹ Michael SMITH, Steve SMITH, Brian WHITE, (eds.), *British Foreign Policy. Tradition, Change and Transformation*, Unwin Hyman, London and Boston, 1988, p. 9.

² T.E. VADNEY, *The World since 1945*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England; Markham, Ontario, 1987, pp. 36-37.

³ Western Allies made no effort to interfere when Soviet Union armies entered Romania. T.E. VADNEY, *The World ...cit.*, p. 40.

influence in Romania¹. One can argue that Britain continued its traditional policy of favouring a balance of power that led to the division of Europe into two spheres of influence². Consequently, neither the British nor the Americans had given any encouragement to the clandestine efforts of the Romanian politicians to negotiate a withdrawal from the war that would have guaranteed an equal participation of the three great powers in the democratisation of Romania³.

The Western powers did not even take into consideration the dramatic changing of side of Romania in August 1944 and the fact that Romanian armies had been fighting side by side with the Red Army for six months to clear the Germans from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Even though Romanian contribution to the defeating of Germans in Eastern Europe was substantial, Romania having the fourth largest army after the Russians, Americans, and British, the Western powers advised Romania to deal directly with the Soviet Union. Though, soon after Yalta, Western representatives began warning their governments that Soviet troops were directly assisting the communists. As in the other eastern and central European countries with the exception of Czechoslovakia, the Communists in Romania enjoyed a very scant popular support and without the support of the Soviet Union they could not have taken the power⁴. However, Britain and the United States showed no desire to make Romania a test case in East-West relations. The Soviet diplomats continued to reassure the British and Americans that the Soviet Union was acting in full accordance with the Yalta agreements.

British political representative in Bucharest, Le Rougetel, who was more pessimistic about the Soviet intentions in Romania than most British officials reported the increased Soviet interference in Romania's domestic affairs. But London warned him not to get involved and not to provide any advice or encouragement for the king and opposition leaders. The Soviet political presence in Romania was already massive. Besides the personnel of the government ministries, joint Soviet-Romanian companies and civilians attached to the Soviet army, there were large numbers of secret police who had been sent to "advise" the Romanian government and the Communist Party on political control and security issues⁵. Soviets agents were already engaged in a vast operation of stripping Romanian oil industry of machinery and equipment, confiscating as war booty fifty thousand tons of oil equipment (originally British and United States property) and a large amount of railway rolling stock⁶.

The enhanced position of the Soviet Union in Europe became the principal concern of British policymakers. The British ambassador in Moscow, Frank Roberts, was instructed to tell the Soviet leaders that the British "found themselves

¹ According to Sfikas, the mutual agreement between Churchill and Stalin reached in Moscow in October 1944 represents a "vulgar manifestation of great power politics typical of the manner in which European leaders had been addressing Balkan issues for centuries". Thanasis D. SFIKAS, "Toward a Regional Study of the Origins of the Cold War in Southeastern Europe: British and Soviet Policies in the Balkans, 1945-1949", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 17, 1999, p. 209.

² Albert RESIS, "The Churchill-Stalin Secret 'Percentages' Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944", *American Historical Review*, 83, (2), 1978, pp. 35-36.

³ A.J. RIEBER, "The Crack in the Plaster: Crisis in Romania and the Origins of the Cold War", *The Journal of Modern History*, 76, (1), 2004, p. 63.

⁴ Dennis DELETANT, *Teroarea comunistă în România*, Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 19.

⁵ Reuben H. MARKHAM, *Rumania under the Soviet Yoke*, Meador, Boston, 1949, p. 45.

⁶ A.J. RIEBER, "The Crack in the Plaster...cit.", p. 74.

unable to consider the governments [of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary] as representative or democratic within the meaning of the Potsdam decisions¹. Britain also complained that the Soviets were acting in the Allied Control Commissions of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary without consultation with the British and the United States' representatives². According to the Armistice terms, the Allied Control Commission was under the general direction of the Allied (Soviet) High Command, acting on behalf of the Allied Powers with a Russian executive staff³.

Britain was, also, concerned about the excessive Soviet demands on the Romanian economy. According to Sfikas, Britain's renewed interest in Romania had nothing to do with freedom and democracy, but with the economic and financial policies of the Petru Groza government, especially with the fixing of very low prices for petroleum products⁴. This represents also Rieber's point of view, who mentioned the attempt made by the British representative, Clark Kerr, to reduce the reparations figure demanded by Moscow from Romania. The attempt, however, was motivated by the worries that, ultimately, British oil interest in Romania would end up paying reparations to the Soviet Union⁵.

During 1946, the Labour Cabinet and the Foreign Office became convinced about Stalin's expansionist intentions in Eastern Europe. At Frank Roberts's suggestion a special "Russia Committee" was created in the Foreign Office, to review weekly Soviet conduct and its campaign of Marxist propaganda⁶. At that time, British leaders were aware that the West could not change the development in Eastern Europe⁷. The large Soviet military and political presence had already influenced the political shape of Europe.

Despite the fact that the Declaration of Liberated Territories was approved at Yalta by the "Big Three" guaranteeing free elections in Europe, no such elections were held in Romania. British protest on the falsification of the election did not meet any answer from the Romanian government⁸. The falsification of the results of the election was highlighted by Christopher Mayhew, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office⁹, who negatively reacted to a proposal

¹ Sfikas citing *Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO)*, series I, vol. VI, HMSO, London, 1991, no. 5, p. 19: Bevin to Clark Kerr, 20 August 1945. Thanasis D. SFIKAS, "Toward a Regional Study...cit.", p. 220.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Alexandre CRETZIANU, *The Lost Opportunity*, Cape, London, 1957, pp. 138-143.

⁴ Thanasis D. SFIKAS, "Toward a Regional Study...cit.", p. 220.

⁵ A.J. RIEBER, "The Crack in the Plaster...cit.", p. 63.

⁶ David REYNOLDS, *Britannia Overruled. British Policy and World Power in the 20th century*, 2nd ed., Longman, Harlow, Essex, U.K., 2000, p. 149.

⁷ G. WARNER, "From 'Ally' to Enemy: Britain's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1941-1948", in Francesca GORI, Silvio PONS (eds.), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1996, pp. 293-309.

⁸ On February 5, 1947, Professor Savory, a Conservative, the representative of the University of Belfast in the House of Commons, asked the Foreign Office if Romanian government responded to British protest regarding the election. He also pointed out that the opposition parties were let to obtain only 7 per cent of the total votes. Letter telegram, 5 February 1947, 12:30, Dossier "Anglia", vol. 10, the Archive of the Romanian Foreign Ministry.

⁹ Christopher Paget Mayhew, Baron Mayhew, a Labour Member of Parliament from 1945 to 1950 and from 1951 to 1974, when he left the Labour Party to become a Liberal. Mayhew was elected to Parliament from the constituency of Norfolk South in 1945. He became Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office where he served under Ernest Bevin. He proposed a covert "propaganda counter-offensive" against the Russians by means of a Foreign Office

made by John Mack MP of the Labour Party for congratulating Romanian government for its victory. Mathew asserted that Romanian elections had been not fair, nor free, they had not contributed to the British-Romanian friendship and, consequently, there was no need to congratulate the Romanian government¹.

The British-Romanian relations which were broken off during the Second World War were official reopened on April 1st, 1946, when new political representatives, Adrian Holman and Richard Franasovici were appointed at Bucharest and, respectively London. The only agreement that existed between Britain and Romania at that time was the Armistice convention². During the following year the Romanian government made some efforts to have good relations with Britain. A delegation composed of MPs and journalists "known for their political sympathies towards Romania and the Soviet Union" visited Romania in the summer of 1947 at the invitation of the Romanian Inter-Parliamentary Union³. Following his visit to Romania, L.J. Solley, MP, representative of the Labour Party, held a press conference "Romania from the inside", mentioning that he was received by King Michael and had interviews with Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Minister of Justice, Tudor Ionescu, Minister of Oil and Mines, Octav Livezeanu, Minister of Information and other political personalities. He also stated that "There is complete freedom of speech and action for all democrats in Romania. There is no freedom to carry on fascist propaganda or to indulge in anti-semitic activities"⁴.

The relations between Britain and Romania changed dramatically in 1948, after the Proclamation of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Following the demand made by the Romanian government in 1948 for the recall of two members of the British Legation, the British government withdrew its First Secretary and its Commercial Secretary in January 1949. Furthermore, the Foreign Office informed the Romanian government that the presence in the United Kingdom of two members of his mission was no longer desired⁵. Tense relations between the two countries even continued in 1949 when the secretary to the British Legation in Bucharest was accused of being acted against Romanian Laws. The Note delivered by the Romanian Communist government mentioned that the British representative was "found on July, 25th, together with the racketeers and smugglers" and accused of having deposited valuables belonging to Romanian citizens at the British Legacy with the aim of crossing them illegally to Britain⁶. Moreover, Romanian government protested against the so-called "arbitrary measure of reprisal" taken by the Foreign Office which stated

department to be formed specifically for that purpose. Lyn SMITH, "Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department, 1947-77", *Millenium. Journal of International Studies*, Spring 1980, vol. 9, no. 1 9.1, pp. 67-83.

¹ Letter telegram, 5 February 1947, 12:30, Dossier "Anglia", vol. 10, the Archive of the Romanian Foreign Ministry.

² "Referat, București, 29 iulie 1948", the archive of the Romanian Foreign Ministry.

³ Romanian Legation at London suggested that the invitation should include also MPs with other views, except for six MP with strong Romanian sympathies. "Propunere pentru vizita la București a unui grup de parlamentari englezi, 8 aprilie 1947", Serviciul Presei Londra, Dossier "Anglia", the Archive of the Romanian Foreign Ministry.

⁴ Serviciul Presei Londra, September-October 1947, Dossier "Anglia", Press, Sept-Dec., vol. 10, the Archive of the Romanian Foreign Ministry.

⁵ "British Request to Rumania. Recall of Two of Legation Staff", *The Times*, Wednesday, February 9, 1949, p. 8.

⁶ Note delivered to the Foreign Office, October 18th, 1949, Dossier "Anglia", vol. 10, the Archive of the Romanian Foreign Ministry.

that the presence of the Romanian Economic First-Counsellor of the Romanian Legation in Londra was no longer desired in Britain¹.

In October 1949, Mihail Macavei, the Romanian political representative at London protested to Foreign Office against the negative image of Ana Pauker, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, as appeared in an article published by *Sunday Express*. He was received by Bateman, the Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office who reminded Macavei that press was free in Britain. Bateman also pointed out that Britain's diplomatic relations with Romania were not among the best. In 1950s, Romania continued to develop a hostile foreign policy towards Britain. The Communist government accused the Third Secretary at the British Legation of spying and requested his leaving from Romania within 48 hours. The British Minister informed the Romanian government that, whilst the request will be complied with, the charges against the British representative would be repudiated. It was Ana Pauker, the Romanian Foreign Minister in the new Communist government, who protested against "the inadmissible activity of a member of the British Legation which constitutes a new hostile act against the Rumanian People's Republic". She claimed that "Bucharest militiamen watched two men exchanging envelopes containing secret information on Rumanian internal questions", one of them being British representative in Romania².

In the 1950s, Britain took a firm attitude regarding the Romanian infringement of human rights. British press informed the public opinion about the persecution that took place in Romania against the Church, the peasants, and the former officials. Newspapers also revealed Soviet economic exploitation through the joint Soviet-Romanian SOVRON companies which controlled in varying degrees the oil industry, transport, coal, tractor-building, shipping, metals, and some lesser industries. It had been mentioned that Romania also exported foodstuff to the Soviet Union at a lower price that it could have obtained on the world market³. Britain's representative in the Economic and Social Council to UNESCO criticized Romania for violating human rights as set out in a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations and even voted against Romanian's admission to UNESCO. Britain joined the United States, France, Turkey, China, Cuba, and Ecuador in opposing the resolution regarding Romania's admission to UNESCO. Tough, Romania was admitted to UNESCO as a result of the agreement of ten members of the council, Russia, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Norway, Argentina, Australia, Egypt, India, and Pakistan⁴.

Britain continued, however, to be interested in Romanian foreign policy. Tito's visit in Romania in 1956 echoed in British newspapers, being regarded as a symbol of a virtual Romanian independence within the Warsaw Pact. The British also seemed interested to see "whether Romanians – encouraged by this visit as the Yugoslav clearly wish them to be – will they seek to achieve an equal footing in their deals with the Russians"⁵. The British expectations regarding Romania were

¹ *Ibidem*.

² "Britain Ordered from Romania. Charge of Spying", *The Times*, Saturday, July 8, 1950, p. 8.

³ "Communism in Romania", *The Times*, Saturday, 29 August, 1953, p. 7 and "Persecution in Romania", *The Times*, Saturday, June 14, 1952, p. 7.

⁴ "Romania's Admission to UNESCO, Geneva July 12", *The Times*, Tuesday, July 13, 1954, p. 8.

⁵ *The Times* described the way Tito was received by the Romanians officials, the leader of the Romanian Workers Party, Dej, and the Prime Minister, Stoica asserting that "the manner of his receptions indicative of the extraordinary authority he now commands among the party leaders

accomplished during the 1960s and the 1970s, when Romanian leadership began to follow the same nationalist policy as Tito. Fearing losing economic autonomy as a result of the Soviet plans to integrate the economies of the COMECON states¹ in which Romania would have a subordinate role as a supplier of raw materials and agricultural products, Gheorghiu-Dej proceeded with his own plans for the country's industrial development².

The Consequences of Romania's Defiance within the Warsaw Pact

The conflict with the Soviet Union became acute in the mid-1960s, when the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party asserted the right of Romania to develop a national policy in the light of its own interests and domestic requirements³. Romanian-Soviet relations continued to deteriorate when Gheorghiu-Dej involved himself in the Sino-Soviet dispute, declaring his readiness to mediate the conflict and even supported the Chinese position on the equality of communist states. The stance adopted by Gheorghiu-Dej was continued by Ceaușescu who reiterated the independence of Romania and denied any other authority within the Communist block⁴. Tough Ceaușescu reaffirmed his party's resolve to preserve good relations with both Peking and Moscow, he distanced himself from Moscow to get closer to China⁵. He also tried to identify allies in the non-communist world, among them, Britain, in order to counterbalance the control of the Soviets.

The 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet-led forces was a turning point in Romanian relations within the Warsaw Pact, marking the culmination of the Romanian defiance of the Soviet Union⁶. Romania's non-involvement in the reprisals

of Eastern Europe". "Romania Welcomes Marshal Tito. Gestures of Renewed Friendship", *The Times*, June 25, 1956, p. 8.

¹ The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was an economic organization of the communist states of Eastern Europe between 1949 and 1991 in which national economies were subordinated to an overall planning body. The military counterpart to the COMECON was the Warsaw Pact. Signatories to the treaty – the USSR, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania – agreed to unify their forces under one command. Yugoslavia, the only European Communist state not included in the pact, was expelled in 1948 from Cominform, the Communist information agency for refusing to acknowledge Soviet supremacy.

² *The Times* noted that "Industrialization with priority for heavy industry remains the main target of the Communist regime", underling the "impressive" growth of over 10 per cent annually. "Romania Keeps Her Balance – Steady Progress in Industrialization", *The Times*, Friday, July 23, 1965, p. 10.

³ Daniel NELSON, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era*, Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, New York, 1988, p.180.

⁴ One of these occasions was the Congress of the Romanian Workers Party that opened on July 20th, 1965, with Ceaușescu's firm emphasis on Romania's national independence and the continuation of industrialisation. "Rumania Argues Case for Independence. Restoration of Traditional Ties with West Welcomed", *The Times*, Tuesday, July 20, 1965, p. 8.

⁵ In early 1972 Romanian General Ion Șerb was even arrested for giving the Soviet military attaché information about Chinese military arrangements with Romania. Daniel NELSON, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era*, cit., p. 183.

⁶ Dennis DELETANT, *Romania under Communist Rule*, Civic Academy Foundation, București, 1998, p. 89.

during the Prague Spring was perceived by the West as an act of political courage, which gave Ceaușescu considerable international prestige. Romanian defiance is perceived differently by various historians. According to Nelson, the stance adopted by Ceaușescu represented a threat to the cohesion of the Warsaw Pact. No matter whether or not Ceaușescu was an authentic or potentially disruptive element within the Communist block, the Soviet Union reacted by concentrating massive military forces on Romania's borders in 1968 in an evident demonstration of force. The threat determined Ceaușescu to urge Romanians to defend the country¹ and to meet Tito in order to plan a common defence against the Soviet Union. Both Tito and Ceaușescu reasserted the necessity of full autonomy and of non-interference of the Soviet Union in the internal affairs of Communist states².

As a result of its autonomous policy within the Warsaw Pact, Romania was considered to be a "thorn in the side of the Soviet Union"³. Two ministers at the British Foreign Office, Steward and Amery, respectively Labour and Conservative, praised Ceaușescu's stance. Steward visited Romania in 1968 and signed a Joint declaration. Julian Amery, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office in the early 1970s, stressed Ceaușescu's independence, his defiance of COMECON over industrialisation, the denunciation of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia and the absence of Soviet troops on Romanian territory⁴. Britain also established trade relations with Romania in order to encourage its independent foreign policy. Obviously, the more economic ties Ceaușescu had with the West, the stronger his political independence from the Soviet Union would become. The British attitude was later criticized by some historians who believe that Britain and other Western countries greatly over-estimated the degree of Ceaușescu's independence from Moscow since Romania never posed a serious problem to Moscow. There are also historians who believe that Moscow was prepared to tolerate Bucharest's limited deviation given the fact that communist party hegemony was not in danger⁵.

Obviously, Romania never attempted to leave the Warsaw Pact, as Hungary did in 1956, nor was Ceaușescu a reformer like Nagy in Hungary or Dubcek in Czechoslovakia, even though he posed as a Communist liberal leader⁶. Ceaușescu did, however, succeed in establishing relations with the West, being supported by the American Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald Ford. The later wanted to point out:

¹ There is a shorthand transcript of the meeting held by the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on August 21st 1968. The first to speak was Nicolae Ceaușescu. He began by saying that the meeting had been convened at 6.30 AM, following the latest news during the night news about the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Also, he announced that Patriotic Guards would be created as paramilitary units. These consisted of military trained of factory workers, peasants, students, and others. Daniel NELSON, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era*, cit., p. 184.

² According to Daniel Nelson, the military policies of the Ceaușescu regime turned towards a strategy of national defence modelled after Yugoslavia. *Ibidem*, p. 183.

³ *The Times*, 9 September, 1968, p. 7.

⁴ Mark PERCIVAL, "Britain's 'Political Romance' with Romania in the 1970s", *Contemporary European History*, 4, I (1994), p. 79.

⁵ T.E. VADNEY, *The World ...cit.*, p. 405.

⁶ Referring to the fact that Romania had never made any move to break out the Warsaw Pact, an American official asserted "Romania knows that there are limits beyond which it cannot go. The memory of Czechoslovakia in 1968 is still vivid". "Ford probes Brezhnev's Iron Curtain", *U.S. News & World Report*, 4 August, 1975.

"We are ready to keep moving toward better relations as fast as Romania thinks it is safe to go. Economic relations with the United States are expected to be strengthened in the next few months with the approval by Congress of most-favoured-nation treatment for Romanian exports".

Ford also stated that the United States had no intention of luring Romania, Poland or any other Eastern European country out of the Soviet block believing that any attempt of that sort would provoke a forceful reaction from the Soviet Union¹.

Nevertheless, Soviet efforts to intimidate Romania were omnipresent during the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, including manoeuvres near Romanian frontiers and economic pressures. Ceaușescu attempted to resist Soviet pressures by expanding economic, political, and cultural contacts with Western countries, among them, Britain. Consequently, Romania's ties with Western nations increased significantly during the 1970's². After joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Romania developed its trade with the non-communist world and initiated economic relations with the less-developed countries³. As a result of Western trade concessions and large foreign credits, Romania enjoyed a prosperous economy in comparison with the previous period. Popular acceptance of Ceaușescu's regime peaked also during his defiance of the Soviet Union because his military policy flavoured with Romanian nationalism appealed to anti-Russian feelings.

Britain's New Foreign Policy towards Romania in the 1970s

The Romanian policy of autonomy in foreign affairs was encouraged by Britain. The climate of opinion among politicians and journalists in Britain in the 1970s was conducive to closer relations with Ceaușescu's regime. Two Prime-Ministers, James Callaghan and Harold Wilson agreed that Ceaușescu achieved a well deserved reputation as a world statesman. At the time, British foreign policy towards Romania was considered to be both politically and economically beneficial. Politically, the support given to Romania would weaken Moscow's control over the Eastern block and economically it would benefit British economy⁴.

At that time, the trade balance was a constant cause of Britain's concerns. Following the oil crisis of 1973 Britain performed significantly worse than its major European countries. Increasing trade with Romania could therefore be seen as one of the motives for British-Romanian close relationship. Consequently, Harold

¹ Ford's intention in visiting four Eastern European capitals after signing the Helsinki Act was to "demonstrate that the United States is not writing off Eastern Europe as an exclusive preserve of the Soviet Union" as it was perceived in the aftermath of the Helsinki summit. "Ford Probes Brezhnev's Iron Curtain", *U.S. News & World Report*, August 4, 1975.

² *The Economist* reported that Romania was more independent of Soviet Union than the other Warsaw Pact countries, having the highest proportion of trade with the free world. *The Economist*, 14 September 1968.

³ In 1973 about 47.3 percent of Romanian foreign trade involved the capitalist developed nations leading to a large trade deficit that necessitated heavy borrowing from Western banks. During this period, major obligations to the IMF (US\$159.1 million) and the World Bank (US\$1,502.8 million) were incurred. *The International Monetary Fund Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook*.

⁴ Mark PERCIVAL, "Britain's 'Political Romance' ...cit.", p. 68.

Wilson signed a ten-year agreement on economic, industrial, and technical cooperation in 1975. The joint declaration reflected both countries' desire for increased co-operation. As a result of bilateral contacts, Britain was the fourth largest exporter to Romania behind the Soviet Union, West Germany and Italy¹.

If Britain was interested primarily in developing economic relations, Romania no less desired the same. At that time, it was keen to industrialise and needed suppliers outside the Communist block because of Moscow's reluctance to support industrialisation of Romania. As I already pointed out, in the 1970s, Romania attempted to oppose economic integration within the Soviet block by expanding its trade with the West. In November 1977 the Romanian Foreign Minister, George Macovescu, visited Britain. During his four-day visit, he met British Prime Minister James Callaghan, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs David Owen, and Secretary of State for Trade Edmund Dell. The two foreign ministers reaffirmed their determination to develop relations of friendship and cooperation between the two states in all fields, and also announced that Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena would pay a state visit to Britain the following year at the invitation of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Close British-Romanian relations reached their climax On June 13th, 1978, when Ceaușescu began his state visit in Britain. The Queen praised him for his independent foreign policy within the Communist block, stating "Today, we, in Britain, are impressed by the resolute stand you have taken to sustain the independence"². To emphasize the friendship between the two states, Queen Elisabeth II made Ceaușescu a Knight of the Order of the Bath. In return, Ceaușescu awarded Elisabeth II the high order of the Star of the Socialist Republic of Romania First Class. Ceaușescu reasserted Romania's desire for further collaboration with Britain, a belief reiterated by the executive political committee of the Romanian Communist Party. According to the Romanian committee, the visit proved the importance of exchanging views between the two countries in the area of international relations³.

The economic aspects of the visit consisted of a license to the Romanian government to manufacture 80 aircrafts and 225 Rolls-Royce engines⁴. Besides the co-operation in industry, other commercial agreements were approved. The British-Romanian statement reaffirmed both sides' determination to increase the annual volume of the trade by two and a half times the level of 1974⁵.

In the 1970s, Ceaușescu was considered as an anti-Soviet leader and his repressive domestic policies were mentioned and publicized far less than his nationalistic foreign policy. With a few exceptions, in the 1970s, British articles almost invariably concentrate on Ceaușescu's foreign policy without paying attention to his internal policies. Certain articles focused on Romania's internal situation, but only few of them described the living standards and the shortcomings of the regime.

¹ Mark PERCIVAL, "Britain's 'Political Romance' ...cit.", p. 70.

² David SPANIER, "Traditional Start for First State Visit by A Communist Leader", *The Times*, Wednesday, June 14, 1978, p. 7.

³ An excerpt from the "Communiqué of the Meeting of the Executive Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party" was inserted in the book *State visit of President Nicolae Ceaușescu to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, June 13-16, 1978*, Media Publishing House, 1979, p. 14-19.

⁴ Referring to the agreement, the Queen mentioned the "excellent cooperation" between Britain and Romania, particularly in the field of aviation. David SPANIER, "Traditional Start for First State Visit...cit."

⁵ "Britain and Romania Sign 200 m Pounds Plane Deal", *The Times*, June 16, 1978, p. 1.

The abuses of human rights that occurred in Romania were signalled to the British public opinion with the occasion of Ceaușescu's visit to Britain. While a large crowd gathered along the route around Parliament Square and Whitehall for a sight of the procession of Ceaușescu and the Queen in carriages, a group of protesters, members of the British-Romanian association, were carrying a placard reading "Human rights for Romanian Christians!"¹. Though the demonstration was authorized by the police, the protesters were completely obscured from Ceaușescu's view by a police bus parked right in front of them². The chairman of the British-Romanian association, Ion Rațiu, claimed that there was a deliberate action to block the demonstration³.

Referring to British foreign policy towards Romania, Rațiu stated that little practical purpose was served by arguing "whether or not Romania's foreign policy involved genuine defiance of the Soviet Union". According to Rațiu, Britain should be aware that even though Ceaușescu relied heavily on nationalistic appeal, and he professed a communist ideological purity which he constantly extolled to the party and country⁴.

Among the very few British officials concerned about human rights abuses in Romania was Lord Chelwood, member of the Conservative Party. After Ceaușescu's visit, he asked in the House of Lords,

"which promises in the field of human rights – according to the 1947 Peace Treaty and to the Helsinki Final Act signed by Romania – had President Ceaușescu undertaken to carry out in return for the large increases proposed in the provision of British technology; and whether they will give any assurance that the latter is consistent in every respect with our COCOM obligations"⁵.

In his answer, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Lord Goronwy-Roberts avoided being explicit regarding the issue of human rights. He merely stated that negotiations with Romania were based "on normal commercial considerations", expressing his belief that Britain and Romania "will, indeed, derive very considerable economic and, it may be, political advantage from the agreement that we have so far concluded". The political advantage drawn by Britain still remains an obscure. One can only suppose that Britain's presumed goal in establishing close relations with Romania was to restrict any further Soviet expansion and possibly make inroads into Moscow's sphere of influence. Lord Goronwy-Roberts pointed out only the economic advantages that Britain would derive, and the commercial benefits of the agreement, underlying that "the total value to the United Kingdom of the Aerospace deal is likely to exceed 300 millions in the next fifteen years"⁶.

It is hard, however, to believe that British officials were unaware of Ceaușescu's internal policy. Then why, apart from the economic advantages underlined by the

¹ David SPANIER, "Traditional Start for First State Visit...cit."

² *The Times*, June 16, 1978, p. 5.

³ *The Guardian* reported a similar incident on 13 June in which a London bus was driven in front of a group of Hungarian demonstrators. Mark PERCIVAL, "Britain's 'Political Romance'...cit.", p. 84.

⁴ *The Times*, June 22, 1978, p. 19.

⁵ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Fifth series, vol. CCCXCIV, Session 1977-1978, Wednesday, 28th June, 1978, British Technological Aid.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was Britain still interested in supporting a fiercely independent but rigid communist state? Following the revolution of December 1989, when former diplomats were questioned about Britain's close relations with Romania in the 1970s, they said they believed that Ceaușescu could be turned into the sort of moderate, friendly communist leader that Tito had become, independent of Moscow and open to the West¹.

Britain's New Attitude towards Romania in the 1980s

In the 1980s, Ceaușescu's infringement of human rights became notorious. He lost much of the credibility that he had previously gained through its defiance of Moscow. His efforts to silence all real or potential opposition within the country and the politically active exiles had a profound impact on the perception of the Romanian communist regime. Virgil Tănase, a dissident Romanian writer and, at that time, French citizen, accused the Romanian government of mounting a plot to assassinate him and another émigré, Paul Goma for campaigning for human rights in Romania². Shortly thereafter, President François Mitterand cancelled his visit to Romania planned for September 1982³. Romania reacted by expelling several French journalists. Furthermore, Romania's relations with the Western countries worsened rapidly.

As a result of "Tănase affair" and the stance adopted by Mitterand, representatives of fifteen member-countries of the "Club of Paris" agreed to recommend an "adjustment" in the timetable for repayment of Romanian foreign debt to the West⁴. Romania was declared factually insolvent by a German "think-tank" in 1982. The institute also mentioned that the US government rejected "possibly for political reasons" the Romanian request for a credit to finance a shipment of US corn and soya beans. Despite the readiness of the International Monetary Fund to make new loan to Romania, an action welcomed by the Western banks who expected a reschedule of Romanian debt⁵, Ceaușescu blamed the International Monetary Fund and the high rates of interest charged by the Western banks. He decided

¹ Amy HAMPARTUMIAN, "The relationship between Britain and Romania during the Rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu, 1966-1989", *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 3-4, 2003, p. 56 citing *The Independent*, 23 December and 27 December 1989 and *The Telegraph*, 24 December 1989.

² *The Times* published an article about the attempt to assassinate the two writers, asserting that "in Ceaușescu's orthodox Stalinist regime there is no room for criticism of his style of government". The author of the article, Gabriel Ronay, mentioned also the fate of leaders of the strike at the Jiu Valley, dispersed throughout the country after the strike. Two of miners' leaders died in separate and unexplained road accidents. Gabriel RONAY, "Silence is Golden in Romania", *The Times*, September 3, 1982, p. 5.

³ "Mitterand Cancels His Visit to Romania", *The Times*, Thursday, July 29, 1982, p. 5.

⁴ At the beginning of the 1980s, Romania was sliding into insolvency partly as a result of the Polish crisis that determined the international banks to cut the lending to Eastern Europe. *The Times* announced that "Romania's Foreign Debt Causes Concern", Monday, November 30, 1981, p. 15. The following year, *The Times* warned on the insolvency of Romania, "Report Puts Debt at \$10,000m. Romania Sliding into Insolvency", Monday, June 14, 1982, p. 13.

⁵ Poland and Hungary were also receiving fresh loans. "IMF Ready to Make New Romania Loan", *The Times*, June 23, 1982, p. 15.

to launch an austerity program in 1982 with the goal of paying off the foreign debt. Moreover, Romania announced that it will stop its principal loan payments due in 1983, turning the inevitability of rescheduling into "a useful piece of domestic propaganda"¹. In making that decision, Romania followed Brazil's "indecent" initiative in stopping payments without waiting for bankers to concur in refinancing the capital repayment. Even though these unilateral decisions were perceived as desperate measures they were a reminder of "how international banks are finding themselves increasingly caught in circumstances they no longer control"².

The difficulties faced by Romania were also the consequence of its foreign policy. Unlike other COMECON countries, Romania refused to import and depend on cheaper Soviet raw materials. For instance, while other COMECON states were importing Soviet oil 50 per cent below world prices, Romania was fully hit by the OPEC prices while also having to pay with hard Western currencies³. If the strategy of distancing Romania from the Soviet Union was not an authentic one, as some authors claim, why was Romania continuing to refuse to trade with the Soviet Union? Romania certainly resisted moves to integration in the Soviet block. However, it continued to face economic problems⁴ as trade relations with the Western countries declined. For instance, the value of Romanian imports from Britain declined from 261 million dollars to 89 million dollars between 1981 and 1989⁵.

In order to achieve the goal of paying off the foreign debt, the government cut imports and imposed restrictions on domestic electricity usage, set temperature restrictions for apartments, imposed a military discipline on workers in the energy field and even banned automobile traffic. Food shortages became usual as most foodstuffs were exported⁶. Romania's domestic crises multiplied each year, leading to even worse records in human rights and social welfare⁷. Despite the population's extreme privation and human rights abuses, at the Thirteenth Party Congress, the Romanian Communist Party leadership emphasized the need for discipline, political and cultural centralism.

The British media frequently highlighted the infringement of human rights in Romania and even drew a parallel between Ceaușescu's repressive system and Orwell's *1984*, but there was no sustained parliamentary campaign against Ceaușescu's abuses in human rights field⁸. According to *The Free Romanian*, the continuation of

¹ "Romania: Can't Pay, Won't Pay", *The Times*, Wednesday, January 5, 1983, p. 13.

² *Ibidem*.

³ The study of the German Institute for Economic Research. "Report Puts Debt at \$10,000m. Romania Sliding...cit."

⁴ "Winter in East Europe Romania. Grim Price of Ceaușescu's Failure", *The Times*, November 25, 1985, p. 7.

⁵ *The International Monetary Fund Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook, 1982-1989*, Washington, 1992, pp. 967-968.

⁶ Peter WILSON-SMITH, "Communism in Crisis Romania Follows Poland with Food Rationing", *The Times*, Monday, October 19, 1981, p. 7.

⁷ *The Times* published the letter of Horia GEORGESCU, "Human Rights in Romania", Thursday, April 9, 1981, p.15. In 1984, *The Times* published letters sent to the editor that revealed human rights abuses that took place in Romania. G.M. TAMAS, "Rights in Romania", Thursday, August 23, 1984, p. 13 and Roger BOYES, "Romania: Who Will Follow the 'conducator'?", Monday, November 19, 1984, p. 14.

⁸ In a case study about Chile, Paul Silk and Charles Carstairs asserted that there was no parliamentary campaign against dictators, such as Ceaușescu. Paul SILK, Charles CARSTAIRS, "Case Study: Chile", in Charles CARSTAIRS, Richard WARE (eds.), *Parliament and International Relations*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, Philadelphia, 1991, p. 138.

same policy towards Romania represented a monument to the West's failure to keep in touch with what was actually happening in Romania, being was irrespective of the fate of the Romanians¹.

None of the Ceaușescu's repressive measures led to so many Western reactions as the so-called "systematisation" program. Ceaușescu's intention was understood by the Western states to be a plan physically to demolish seven to eight thousand Romanian villages. Added to the demolition of churches in Bucharest and the disregard for Romanian architectural heritage, the systematisation plan led environmental groups in the Western Europe to co-ordinate an international protest. The most effective in terms of attracting media attention and in providing moral support to Romanian people was the so-called "Operation Villages Roumains" that recommended to Western European villages to "adopt" Romanian ones. Consequently, tens of thousands of letters sent from European communities to Romania and addressed to the mayors of Romanian villages proposed the "adoption"².

The British campaign against "systematisation" was supported by the Prince of Wales, who in an unprecedented political intervention condemned the program in a speech delivered on 27 April 1989. He highlighted that the purpose of systematisation was to create a new type of person, utterly subordinate to Ceaușescu's policy. The Prince declared that he could not remain silent when "the peasant traditions and ancient of a fellow European society are bulldozed to make way for a uniform and deathly mock-modernity":

"President Ceaușescu has embarked on the wholesale destruction of his country's cultural and human heritage. What happened here in the 1960s is not comparable with policy known as 'systematisation' which aims to transform Romania's cultural environment into over 500 urban collectives designated as 'agro-industrial complexes'. The object, which is very interesting, is to reshape the nation's identity, to create a new type of person, utterly subordinate to its dreams. To achieve this, President Ceaușescu has set about destroying the cities and villages of his country and replacing them with blocks of flats which are a repetition of a failed 1960s social engineering, mixed with the atmosphere of George Orwell's 1984. To achieve this plan, some 8,000 villages could be demolished, together with churches, ancestral graveyards and every connection with the rural people's past"³.

The 'Systematisation' plan eventually ceased only as a result of Romanian revolution of December 1989 that overthrew the Romanian Communist regime.

Exploring Britain-Romanian relations during the Cold War, I have pointed out the tense relations in the 1950s and the good relations in the 1970s when Britain encouraged Romania to pursue an independent national policy within the Soviet block. In the 1950s, the tense relations between Britain and Romania reached their

¹ "Why the West Should Look Ceaușescu Full in the Eye", *The Free Romanian. The Organ of the World Union of Free Romanians*, April 1987, vol. 3, no. 4, p. 1.

² Western newspapers underlined that systematisation plan would change the rural environment and would determine the losing of traditions. The 'adoption' of Romanian villages was broadcasted by the BBC and Radio Free Europe. By the beginning of May 1989, 231 communes in Belgium, 95 in France, and 42 in Switzerland had adopted Romanian villages. Dennis DELETANT, *Romania under Communist Rule*, cit., p. 242.

³ Prince Charles's speech was delivered at the opening of the Business Design Centre, at Islington, London in April 1989.

climax, with all the accusations of espionage directed against the British representatives in Romania. Britain also criticised Romania for violating human rights and even voted against its admission to UNESCO. In contrast to the 1950s, when the Romanian Communist regime was willing to obtain the Soviet support to consolidate its power, in the 1970s, the communist regime was interested in pursuing an autonomous politics. Therefore, it developed diplomatic and economic relations with the Western states. British foreign policy towards Romania also changed significantly at the beginning of the 1970s, as a result of Ceaușescu's international stance adopted during the Prague Spring. Apart from the Soviet leaders, Nicolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev in 1956, he was the first head of a communist country to visit Britain. His official visit to Britain not only opened new prospects for bilateral relations in political, economic, and cultural fields but also helped him to consolidate his regime.

British foreign relations toward Romania changed again in the 1980s. The severe austerity introduced by Ceaușescu to pay off the country's foreign debt, along with human rights abuses led to the isolation of Romania. In the late 1980s Britain adopted a more adversarial stance towards Romania, with even the Prince of Wales condemning Romanian domestic policy. Relations with Britain decreased as the situation of Romania worsened every day. The Revolution of 1989 brought a fundamental change in the relations between the two countries and opened new prospects for bilateral British-Romanian relations in political, economic, and cultural fields.