

DOI: 10.24193/OJMNE.2023.42.03

THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR AS A FACTOR IN REVIVING JOINT PROJECTS BETWEEN THE STATES OF THE INTERMARIUM REGION

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Abstract: *Various studies have revealed a revival of the cooperation projects of Central and Eastern European countries. This reality has been materialised by the emergence of projects such as the Three Seas Initiative or the Bucharest Format. The thesis of the present research is that the main cohesive factor of the "inter-seas" states is the Russian aggression in Ukraine together with the aggressive policy undertaken by the Russian state. The investigative approach of the research followed the missions, goals, or media reports of the mentioned programs. The objective of the investigation is to capture the link between Russian aggression in Ukraine and the stimulation of regional cooperation. As will be revealed throughout the paper, the subject is gaining an increasing attention. In this aspect the significance of the research grows. Various hypotheses have appeared regarding the emergence and purposes of TSI or B9. The present research attempts to clarify the main reason for the collaboration of the mentioned states. It captures an important dimension of the projects by confirming a major general reason for their existence. The results of the present investigation reveal that Russian aggression in Ukraine and the aggressive nature of the Russian Federation's foreign policy have been a real leitmotiv in the formation and development of joint projects in the Intermarium area. Both TSI and B9 emerged from the desire of the Balto-Pontic Isthmus states to ensure the security and resilience of the Eastern flank of the Western World.*

Keywords: The Intermarium Region, Bucharest Nine, Three Seas, Russo-Ukrainian War

Introduction

In his inaugural speech, Polish President Andrzej Duda (2015) said that stronger guarantees from NATO are vital not only for Poland but also for the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. The reason given was that the political situation is challenging. From the vision he expressed, it follows that there is a need for dialogue of the states in the territory between the Baltic Sea and the Adriatic Sea. In the same year the Polish President along with the President of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, launched the political platform "The Three Seas

Initiative" (Popławski & Jakóbowski, 2020, p. 7). The efforts did not stop there and at the initiative of the Polish President and the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, the Bucharest 9 format was launched in the autumn of 2015 (Gerasymchuk, 2019, p. 5). Most states in the Intermarium area are in NATO and the EU. Therefore, the research raises the following question: Is the Russian aggression in Ukraine the main external factor that stimulated the emergence of the current projects in the Intermarium region?

The thesis of this paper is that the Russian-Ukrainian war is the main external factor that led to the materialization of projects aimed at regional cooperation between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Sea states. Our research addresses the Russian-Ukrainian war and focuses chronologically on the period from 2014 to the present, not just the full-scale invasion. The approach distances itself from the analysis of the plan for a confederal Central and South-Eastern Europe and it does not deal with the plans of a particular federal political unit. The proposed investigative method is a qualitative one, namely discourse analysis. The first objective of the approach was to identify organisations that are based on the concept of cooperation of the "between seas" states. The second objective aimed to capture the link between Russian aggression in Ukraine and fostering regional cooperation. After reviewing the relevant literature, the methodological approach targeted to identify the sources recorded adjacent to the topic. To this end, the information concerned was analysed and extracted from the speeches of the organisations' officials, the missions and goals presented in the projects related to the "Between Seas" region and press reports. The information on the external cohesive factor component was investigated, reviewed, and presented in relation to the research question to answer it.

The subject is enjoying growing attention. As Laruelle & Rivera (2019, p. 4) found, the concept is among those that have experienced a "renaissance" in the contemporary period. In addition to popularization, the concept of Intermarium has become important in academic research and, as Ištók et al. (2018) noted, the most significant for Polish debates on local geopolitics. The present research is a contribution to the academic debate on an important topic. Its significance increases given the importance of the ongoing war in Eastern Europe and the complex response generated by regional states.

The first part of the paper discusses the conceptual history of Intermarium, followed by recent literature on the current understanding of the concept and concludes with perspectives on Ukraine as related to it. The second part investigates the reinvigoration of the Intermarium idea through the regional projects Three Seas Initiative and The Bucharest Nine Format. The third section of the research is the most significant. It captures and presents the link between regional cooperation projects "between the seas" and the Russo-Ukrainian war. The end is represented by the conclusions of the research and its perspective on the topic.

1. Intermarium: history and literature

From a historical perspective, the concept of Intermarium has its origins in the 19th century. It was designed by Polish thinkers following the failure of the November Uprising. They targeted nationalist aspirations to resist the powers that divided their territories. The concept was further developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It gained popularity in the interwar period thanks to Józef Piłsudski. The politician proposed the creation of a bloc of confederal states to counter both Eastern and Western expansionist tendencies. The central idea of Intermarium was to form a military alliance, the other links being considered of secondary importance. States would remain sovereign. Originally, the project was intended for Slavic states such as the Baltic States and Ukraine. For strategic reasons, the project was later extended to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia. After Piłsudski's death, the failed project was adapted by Józef Beck but again remained unsuccessful (Nałęcz, 2019, pp. 2-4). The project was also conceived in the post-war period by thinkers in exile. The idea was revived after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Ištók et al., 2018). As can be seen in works such as that of Crețu & Ardeleanu (2018), a revival of projects adjacent to the Intermarium space is taking place through newly established organizations such as the Three Seas Initiative or Bucharest Nine.

Numerous sources are investigating the present concept of "Intermarium". Early on, Troebst (2003) presented the "Intermarium" concept in the context of the mental mapping of Central Europe. There is historical research such as Chodakiewicz's (2012) which analyses the space between the Baltic and the Black Sea as a particular whole. Smyrgała (2014, p. 36)

concludes that the Intermarium states constitute a definite geopolitical entity based on common history and culture. We also find that although they have a strong sense of European identity, they have had to fight constantly to the south and east and remain a main eastern "bulwark" for the West. Authors such as Crețu & Ardeleanu (2018) have tried to indicate the revival of the Intermarium projects from a Romanian perspective and attempted to capture the implications for Romania. Laruelle & Rivera (2019) addressed the different points of mental design. In this respect, the project has also been investigated from the perspective of a "New Europe" with trans-Atlantic sympathies or as a dream of the Ukrainian radical right. There are favourable prospects for ideas like Tycner's (2020). It confirmed the popularisation of the concept, its strategic importance in the context of post-2014 events and made recommendations on adapting the idea to the current situation.

Ukraine has particularly benefited from the attention of Intermarium-related projects over the years (Kushnir, 2019). From this point of view, it is relevant to grasp the connection between the conflict opened by the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian territory. According to some views (Smyrgała, 2014, p. 36), Ukraine follows specific Intermarium policies and fights for the defence of Europe. On the Ukrainian side, there is research that has geo-strategically indicated the need to revive such projects in a modern manner (Todorov, 2016). He indeed emphasized the traditionalist, Christian and nationally centered component of the Intermarium states. For him, the project would revitalise traditional Europe and constitute an informal anti-Russian union. Boichenko (2020, p. 9) criticized the perspective of authors such as Laruelle & Rivera (2019) who attribute the Intermarium revival to the Ukrainian far right. According to the author, the Intermarium option is the wish of most Ukrainian citizens and various citizens of Central and Eastern Europe due to close historical political, economic, and religious experience. He also said that relations between the EU and other forms of European integration should not be based on destructive competition or mutual hostility. According to Boichenko (2020, pp. 9-11), they should be complementary.

General examples and those of Ukrainian literature confirm that the concept of "Intermarium" has been explored by numerous sources that contribute to the understanding and mental mapping of its revival. Debates and opinions on the identity and implications of the

projects are varied. Therefore, elucidating the main external factor generating the current cohesion of this part of Europe is a part of ongoing thematic research.

2. The Three Seas Initiative and Bucharest Format: A revival of Intermarium projects

It was not until 2014 that the concept returned to the mainstream (Tycner, 2020). It seems that in this tense context related to the war in the region, new projects are emerging to promote cooperation between "Intermarium" states. Researchers such as that of Crețu & Ardeleanu (2018) concludes that there has subsequently been a revival of ideas related to the project. This revival has been attributed to various issues. Wishart (2018), for example, considered that the project is predominantly supported by the Ukrainian far right. Laruelle & Rivera (2019, p. 3, 27) also supported the same idea but completed the conceptual dimension by adding two elements. The first is the American encouragement of a Central and Eastern Europe seen to be more Atlanticist than Western. The second is the deepening socio-political differences between Western Europe and the predominantly conservative Eastern Europe, which claims to be the protector of true European values. A similar view was taken by Umland who, together with Fedorenko (2017), concluded that the Intermarium revival among some EU states is due to the conservative views of some Eastern European politicians.

Even if economic and political projects such as Via Carpatia, Three Seas Initiative (TSI) or Bucharest 9 (B-9) are of marginal relevance, they evoke the interwar idea of Intermarium (Fedorenko & Umland, 2017). Since their creation, the presidents of the TSI or B9 states have made it clear that they are only seeking regional cooperation and cohesion. Presidents such as Klaus Iohannis (Romania) and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović (Croatia) stressed that while they are pursuing the transatlantic relationship, the initiatives are pro-European. It was also stated that among the main goals pursued was the development of their states as they did not enjoy the historical privileges of those in the West (Ene, 2017, pp. 115-116). It has been noted that the Three Seas Initiative and the Bucharest 9 format evoke the interwar idea of Intermarium, but what are TSI and B9?

The Three Seas Initiative was launched in August 2015. Subsequently, various annual summits were held in the capitals of the member states. The member states of the Initiative belong to the EU and, except for Austria, to NATO. In addition to Austria, TSI members are the three Baltic States, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria. The geopolitical potential of the organization has been confirmed by the attendance at TSI meetings of many important leaders from the United States, the European Union and even the People's Republic of China. The Three Seas Initiative openly set out to strengthen transatlantic ties. Furthermore, its stated aims were to strengthen the integrated economy and build an infrastructure network linking the region from north to south. Mentions of the desire for cooperation within the EU were clear. However, in this respect, various fears have arisen that the member states of the Initiative could be more strongly influenced by Washington or even Beijing. As the TSI did not directly address the security issue, there was pressure from Romanian and Polish officials to set up a sub-group to include this component. It was in this context that the Bucharest 9 format emerged following a small summit of NATO's Eastern European states. It was held in Bucharest in November 2015 (Soroka & Stępniewski, 2019, pp. 14-23).

Nine of the member states of the Three Seas Initiative signed a joint declaration at the Bucharest Summit. The initiative is attributed to Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and Polish President Andrzej Duda. States that have targeted special regional cooperation within NATO are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. They aimed to create a credible military alliance. All the Bucharest 9 states were under Soviet influence or even part of the Soviet Union in the past. They are all part of NATO today. Among other objectives, they have sought to meet the 2% of Gross Domestic Product investment in defense (Gerasymchuk, 2019, pp. 5-6). The format has not been popular and has not been viewed favorably by Western European leaders. At the other end of the spectrum, Washington looked favorably on the idea. This again raised fears that the initiative would serve the interests of the overseas state more than those of the continent. However, in line with Umland & Rotaru's (2017) observations, the Bucharest 9 format is indistinguishable from NATO missions. One of the B-9 objectives is also to improve security and stability in the region. It is

precisely from this point of view, I find, that it is important to identify the main factor for the revival of regional consolidation projects related to Intermarium.

3. Related to the Russo-Ukrainian War?

The war in Ukraine is historically framed between 2014 and the present. In summary, Ukraine's pro-Russian president has opted to reject deeper ties with the European Union. He was removed from power following violent protests. A pro-Western government has taken power in Ukraine. The Russian Federation responded by annexing the Crimean Peninsula. In addition, the Russian state has started to support separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk. The eastern regions of Ukraine as well as the whole country have become unstable. The ongoing military conflict has resulted in thousands of deaths. Western countries have united in sanctioning Russia over its activity in Ukraine. Later, Russia has amassed large numbers of troops on the Ukrainian border. On 24 February 2022, it launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian state has occupying various territories. Western states tightened their sanctions and openly supported Ukraine through various means including the sending of lethal weapons while Belarus, on the other hand, sided with Russia (Walker, 2023).

According to The Joint Statement on the Three Seas Initiative (2016), Central and Eastern European countries would become more secure by expanding cooperation in energy, transport, common development of digital communication and of economic sector. One of the targets of this cooperation is therefore security. However, it is presented as necessary within the framework of the EU and NATO, complementary, not opposed. Soroka & Stępniewski (2019, p. 20) noted that several projects were subsequently launched, including the construction of offshore liquefied petroleum gas terminals, pipelines, oil pipelines and other facilities necessary for the development of industry and energy sector infrastructure. This necessity implies the security component as the 3SI states were dependent to varying degrees on energy supplies from providers associated with the Russian Federation. If energy supplies were dominated by Russia and diversification was the goal, the clear objective was to reduce dependence on the Russian Federation. The emergence of 3SI following the annexation of Crimea supports this hypothesis. Measures to diversify energy resources are justified as the dependence of the „between seas”

states on the Russian Federation were greater than that of the rest of the EU in this respect (Zbińkowski, 2019, pp. 110-111).

The evolving tensions between Russia and Ukraine have revealed internal IST divergences. Both the Trump administration and the Biden administration have sought to support the diversification of the 3SI states' energy resources (Tchakarova & Benko, 2021, pp. 1-2). The Baltic States, Poland and Romania have shown a major willingness to cooperate with the US. Poland, on the other hand, could not agree on anti-Russian mobilization with the Visegrád member states even though it had positive cooperation with them on immigration policy. Hungary, for example, has shown a friendly attitude towards the Russian state. For these reasons, Górka (2018, p. 60) argues the view that Poland attempted a discreet political arrangement that included Balkan states with similar problems. The TSI's goal of diversifying energy resources, he says, is similar to Poland's goal of reducing Russian influence in the region, ensuring energy security and strengthening the US presence in the region in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea. The diversification of energy resources in the context of the monopoly held by the Russian Federation in the 3SI states sends a clear message, but the subsequent information chronologically completed clarified the anti-Russian character.

In a communication from Derek Chollet (2022), Advisor to the US Department of State, he said his state has been a strong supporter of the TSI Investment Fund to increase the resilience of companies in the region to Russian and Chinese economic pressure. Of the five proposed internal objectives of the Three Seas Initiative (2022), one addresses the geopolitical component. It aims to strengthen ties between the Initiative countries and to strengthen the transatlantic link in a violent geopolitical context. Also, the focus on the energy component remains in the template of mentioning the geopolitical environment. "Resilient" energy infrastructure is listed as a top priority.

Sprūds & Vargulis (2022, p. 203) confirmed the statement. They framed the national perspectives on the priorities targeted by each state in relation to the Initiative. The first or secondary priority for most countries was the dimension of energy security. On average, the component is primary for 3SI. The only state to rank 3 out of 4 was Estonia. It placed the geopolitical dimension first. The information is important if we consider the securitization

approach proposed by Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998). It suggests focusing on the discourse of the problem indicated as security. Securitization information contrasts with the Russian import monopoly. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 confirmed the fears of most of the 3IS states and the need for regional cooperation.

In the preamble to the Joint Declaration of the Seventh Summit of the Three Seas Initiative (2022), there is information of particular concern about the geopolitical and economic context shaken by the invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. The preamble condemns the military activity undertaken by the Russian state and, typical of most NATO states, urges the withdrawal of military troops from Ukrainian territory. Among the statements signed by representatives of the 12 TSI states, Russian aggression is strongly condemned. The TSI has shown itself to be willing to get involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine and to engage it in its projects. Internal EU cooperation and transatlantic ties also appear as a leitmotif. Ukraine was present through representatives as a special guest. The message is clear: developing digital infrastructure and services enhances security. Security is therefore not only important in the energy component. The partnership supports the EU and the US, and the threat that generates the need for cooperation is the tense geopolitical context generated by the Russian Federation.

Presented as a sub-set of the TSI, the Bucharest Format (B9) specifically addresses the issue of security (Soroka & Stępniewski, 2019, p. 24). Joint Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 (2015) strictly addresses the security component of NATO states in the 3 seas region. The act invokes security issues in the South and East and recalls Russia's aggressive activity in Ukraine, territorial annexations, mobilization and destabilization of regional security and stability. The founding motions are aimed at strengthening the military capabilities of allied states in the region. It is Russia's continued aggressive policy that dictates 'concern' and requires firm responses. The Platform is presented as remaining open for consultations, projects, and common approaches due to challenges and threats.

Subsequent B9 summits have reinforced the original position. A year after the Bucharest summit, the foreign ministers of the B9 states highlighted again the unprecedented security problems. The first of these is the activity of the Russian Federation which endangers the security of the whole of Europe. The leaders expressed their support for the sovereignty and

territorial integrity of Ukraine. The same was reiterated in 2017 when a new meeting was held between the foreign ministers of the Bucharest Nine. Moreover, it called for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. Russian aggression was also a constant leitmotif in the joint statements of 2018 and 2019 (Gerasymchuk, 2019, pp. 5-6). To address the security challenges on the Eastern flank, the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 meeting (2018) proposed to ensure a coherent response focused on the region supported by a NATO command structure, strengthening maritime and air positions to discourage the enemy. The 2021 Summit was also attended by the US President. In the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting (2021), criticism was strongly directed at Russia accused of military build-up on the border with Ukraine or hybrid activities threatening security undertaken.

The statements are indeed not only specific to the B9 format. However, to answer the research thesis it is essential to note that the states between the Baltic and Black Seas have coalesced to have a common response posture. In the Joint statement by the leaders of Bucharest Nine (2023), state leaders agreed that the Russian state is the most significant threat to allied security. Among the points listed is support for countries such as the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia which are said to be at risk of being destabilized by Moscow. To deter the wider escalation of Russian Federation activity, the B9 states have set themselves the goal of increasing the military presence of NATO troops and equipment on their territory.

Beyond the meetings that reconfirmed the B9 format meeting, the Forum states have increased defence spending or made sure they diversify their defences to ease the pressure of the Russian Federation (Gerasymchuk, 2019, p. 9). The events of 2014 are important in this respect. From the economic crisis of 2009 until 2014, the future B9 states have had to cut back on defense investment. The creation of B9 changed the trend by creating a common upward ramp for security spending. By 2017, countries like Latvia and Lithuania had doubled their military investment. Romania invested 50% more than in 2014. The other countries had increased their defense budgets with percentages between 15% and 30% in the period 2014-2017. Among the other measures to increase defense through budget investment, we can identify

the increase in the number of soldiers and the modernization of military technology (Terlikowski et al., 2018, p. 3).

Some Western states were fueled by the idea that countries like Poland or the Baltic States were Russophobic. Meanwhile, B-9 members have shown the need and necessity for US involvement in the region (Banasik, 2021, p. 28). The intention was, as Banasik pointed out, to deter Russian aggression and defend the strategic interests of the states between the three seas. Central and Eastern European states have started to look for solutions to their security problems. Compared to some powerful NATO countries such as Germany or France, the countries of the Baltic-Pontic area do not have the same financial and human resources. Therefore, they have not had a major chance to influence decision-making at the overall NATO level. The issue of the lack of influence of Central and Eastern European states mattered because not all NATO countries saw the Russian Federation as a major threat (Calmels, 2019, pp. 13-14).

The B9 states are both EU and NATO members. However, the historical experience and international aggression of the Russian Federation have spurred these states to cooperate and voice their concerns within the larger alliances. The desire for a common response and rapid response to the international crisis provoked by the Russian Federation gives a higher degree of regional security to the Intermarium states. The states of the New Bucharest format sought to provide a defense adjacent to the US presence that would be insufficient in the event of a violent attack by the Russian Federation (Banasik, 2021, p. 45). It is true that the perception of the Russian Federation is not the same across the Format. While some states view the Russian state as an imminent danger, others are only concerned with strengthening security (Calmels, 2019, p. 2). In any case, the Russian aggression that began in Ukraine has brought NATO member states in Central and Eastern Europe together in the Bucharest-9 format (Umland & Rotaru, 2017), and these are aiming for a common position that provides security for the entire region.

Conclusions

The results of the investigation confirm that Russian aggression in Ukraine is the main external factor that led to the materialization of cooperation projects of some Central and Eastern European countries. Projects such as the Three Seas Initiative or the Bucharest Nine format have

brought together countries between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas. These have often been interpreted as a revival of the interwar Intermarium projects. Some scholars have attributed the revival of these projects either to the conservative vision of Central European states, to the desire for US involvement on the European continent, or to Russophobia. On the other hand, some authors have tried to highlight the positive aspects of such projects for European security. Despite speculation, the initiatives have been aimed at strengthening both EU and NATO ties.

The Three Seas Initiative aimed at cooperation in several areas such as energy, transport, digital development and improving the economic level. The notion of security has been emphasized behind this cooperation. One of the main objectives pursued in this direction was to reduce dependence on the Russian Federation. This has been particularly visible in the measures taken regarding energy supply, which is seen as the main priority by the 3SI countries. Central and Eastern European states were more dependent on the Russian Federation than the rest of the European Union. Through various statements, the Initiative states have fervently pointed to the Russian threat and mobilized against its aggression. The Bucharest Nine format was strictly focused on the security component of the Intermarium states. The countries „between the seas” perceived the Russian state as a danger to a greater extent than the countries of Western Europe. B9 was set up to deter the enemy and strengthen NATO's eastern flank. In the end, the leaders of the Format states agreed that the Russian Federation is the main security threat. Although there are different perceptions, the B9 states are pursuing a common position to strengthen security because of the threat from the East. Therefore, the aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine has been a real leitmotiv in the formation and development of joint projects in the Intermarium area. Both 3SI and B9 arose out of the desire of states to ensure the security and resilience of the Eastern flank of the Western World.

In terms of cooperation, the 3SI and B9 projects are marginal. It is true that they can be effective in reducing dependence on the Russian Federation. Therefore, it can be considered that cooperation between the Intermarium states can strengthen regional prosperity and security. Ukraine, unable to join NATO and the EU, could be included in a regional structure. But while energy, digital or infrastructure collaboration are beneficial, decision-makers in countries such as Hungary are not as keen on deterring Russian aggression. Therefore, even the war in Ukraine

reveals the limitations of cooperation and the diverging perspectives of the "between the seas" states.

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“DEMOCRACY” IN INTERWAR AND POSTWAR ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Towards the end of the Second World War, political life was beginning to reorganize itself and seek the path to democracy. But the new path led the country towards a new type of "democracy", a new totalitarian regime, which, like any new regime, will rewrite history, being prepared even to redefine terms, an example of this being the term "democracy". This article aims to capture Romania's transition from the expectations of a democratic regime, to the establishment of an extreme left "democracy", with an emphasis on the way in which the term "democracy" was used in the communist discourse in the press of the time. We will use samples from the most important publications of the time, including the press of the opposition parties, to capture the differences between the definitions given to the same term. "Democratization" according to the communist dioptrics was possible in an internal context unfavorable to a communist regime, due to the fact that, on the way to power, the fragile Romanian Communist Party would be supported externally by Moscow, while internally it led a constant effort to legitimation, being always willing to assume events, redefine terms or rewrite history. Because the success of any regime lies mainly in political practice, in the way this system imposed itself on the whole society, we will insist on the event of August 23, 1944, which, initially, meant the return of Romania to the interwar status, with the exception of the legislative institution. But subsequent events will shape Romania's future contrary to expectations.*

Keywords: Romania, communism, democracy, dictatorship, press

Introduction

In the fall of 1944, the Communist Party was a "pocket party", with about 1000 members. Founded on May 8, 1921, from the transformation of the Socialist Party into the Communist Party of Romania, affiliated to the Third Communist International (April 11, 1924), PCdR was banned by the liberal government, being accused of "anti-Romanian actions", promoter of Soviet interests in Romania. Despite the ban, in the interwar period, the communists also tried other variants of front organizations, such as the "Worker-Peasant Bloc" (founded in 1925) or the "Labour League". The WPB was more successful than expected in the 1931 elections, managing to gather over 2.5% of the votes and send five deputies to parliament, including Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. However, procedural defects were invoked to

invalidate all five communist deputies en masse and, after the Grivița strikes in February 1933, the WPB was banned, at which point its role was taken over by the "Labour League", also prohibited after one year of existence. The communists were left to work within non-profit organizations (Silivestru, 2017). The outlawing of the CP provided the authorities with the legal framework to take action against this party. Working illegally, many communists were imprisoned until the end of the war, among them the future leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (escaped on August 12, 1944 and sheltered by members of NPP) (Silivestru, 2017; Cioroianu, 2014; Copilaș, 2018). The low number of party members was therefore the consequence of the party going underground, but in August 1944 many communists escaped.

Towards the end of World War II, given the victories of the Soviet army, the communists in Romania, although few, became very vocal. Inspired and supported by Stalin, the Communists behaved like an elite paramilitary formation. They acted disciplined and made intelligent use of propaganda and the weakness of traditional parties. They were the first to launch a sustained struggle to punish the so-called war criminals, collaborationists, fascists and chauvinists who had been active during the war, as the local social and political landscape had to be cleared in order to be occupied by communists or by those who pretended to be communists. The "bill" of the war had to be paid, and they were very willing to identify the culprits. Thus, many people fell victim, especially those who opposed the Communist Party, being brought down by accusations of fascist crimes, when, in reality, their fault was that they belonged to an undesirable social group, were affiliated with a traditional political party, or simply because they were too popular in the local communities.

To capture the reality of this period, in this article we used the historical method through the study of documents, archives and press. In this regard, we have undertaken a comparative approach between edited, official sources, from the period under study and up to now, and unofficial ones, some ined (archival), using Romanian and foreign sources. The focus is on the discourse of the elites of the Communist Party, of the political leaders of the opposition and its effects on the masses, with an emphasis on the main source of information of the era, the press.

I. RCP in the Struggle to Define the Term "Democracy"

I.1. Historical Context: the Act of August 23, 1944 – An Important Step Towards Legitimizing the Romanian Communist Party

The transformations produced between 1944 and 1948 in Eastern Europe led to the same result: the seizure of power by the communist parties, allied or not with other sympathetic political forces and the establishment, in this way, of "people's democracy". In Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia the

communists and their allies gained power quickly. By the end of 1945 in these countries the communist regime was already strongly and irreversibly implanted.

The communist regime was not established by a revolution, but by coups d'état or civil war. The thesis of the revolutions, however, was firmly supported by the communist regimes, because the communist leaders needed legitimization through a success story (Marin, 2017), by imposing a state of alert and by highlighting a solution given by the communists in the context of an exhausted society, impoverished of resources and eager for a better life. Communist practices, imposed by "a minority", deserve to be studied, because the success of the communist regime was due to the techniques it used to seize power, and then to keep it.

Taking Romania as a case study, the documents reveal the fact that in the spring of 1944, the political groups in Romania, which opposed the war and Antonescu's dictatorship, became more daring. The need for coordination of the traditional parties, affected by the dictatorship of Charles II, by the fascist regime of the legionnaires, then by the authoritarianism of General Ion Antonescu, led the National Peasant (NPP), National Liberal (NLP), Social Democratic (SDP) and Communist (CP) Parties to create, at the beginning of June, the National Democratic Bloc (NDB), with the objective of concluding the Armistice with Allies, withdrawing from the Axis and supporting the Allied war effort, overthrowing the Antonesian dictatorship and replacing it with a democratic regime (Bărbulescu et al., 2007: 390). However, the rapid succession of events took the democratic opposition by surprise. Although within the NDB discussions had been held regarding the form and composition of the new government and the military aspects of the planned coup d'état, it was not until August 20 that the day of Antonescu's overthrow was established. Iuliu Maniu, from the National Peasant Party and Constantin I. C. Brătianu, from the National Liberal Party, collaborating with King Mihai, the main organizers of the coup, set the date for August 26, but finding out that the Marshal was going to leave for the front on August 24, they opted for the 23rd.

The first step was taken by King Mihai, who summoned Antonescu to the Palace. Refusing the immediate conclusion of the Armistice, the king ordered the arrest of the marshal, the same fate shared by his other collaborators (Bărbulescu et al., 2007: 391-392).

Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was the first party representative to reach the Palace after the arrest of the Marshal, and those who were arrested were guarded by the Patriotic Guards, the communist militia organized by Emil Bodnăraș, a Soviet officer parachuted into Romania. The representatives of the traditional parties, NPP and NLP, could not be found. These facts were used by the communists to support

their claim of having played a leading role in the coup (Deletant, 1997: 37; Gheorghiu and Roman, 1956: 20-21).

If some see in this action a personal decision of King Mihai, others are of the opinion that the role of the communists in making the decision was much more important than it seems at first glance, the entire scenario being written in Moscow. The communists themselves tried to deny the merits of the king and the main "historical" parties in the coup d'état, assuming them exclusively, thus claiming the legitimacy of their regime (Deletant, 1997: 37). Moreover, after the communists took over all the power, in addition to the fact that the act of August 23 was presented as being exclusively the work of the Communist Party, "the leader of the popular masses", the communist press wrote that the King would have been forced to sign the insurrection "under the pressure of the revolutionary struggle of the masses". "Studies" and "documents" based on this idea will abound after December 1947.¹

Lavinia Betea states that there are serious arguments in favor of the version that the events of August 23 were not directed by Moscow, but took place without Moscow's knowledge, at the initiative of some national forces, with the king at the head (Betea, 1997: 53-54). In the proclamation to the country on August 13, broadcast on the radio, the king assured the Romanians that *"the dictatorship has ended and with it all oppression ends. The new government means the beginning of a new era in which the rights and liberties of all the country's citizens are guaranteed and will be respected [...] With full confidence in the future of our Romanian nation, let's step resolutely on the path of building the Romania of tomorrow, of a free, strong and happy country"* (Rusan, 1997:45-46).

Fully confident in the King's words and full of hope, the Romanian people awaited the establishment of a new era in which rights and freedoms would finally be guaranteed. To support this promise, King Mihai decreed, on August 31, 1944, the affirmation of the rights of Romanians within the framework of the Constitution of 1866, along with the amendments made on March 29, 1923. This Constitution represented the interwar period in Romania and was characterized by a mixed economy with elements of capitalism and state intervention. Although it allowed for private ownership and entrepreneurship, the state played a regulatory and interventionist role in key sectors. This was a period

¹ See R. Florian, "The armed insurrection of August 23, 1944 - the beginning of the popular revolution in our country"; F. Părcălab, Gh. Timofi, "From the struggle of the workers from Cluj and its surroundings, under the leadership of the communists, for the defense of the destruction and evacuation by the fascists of the enterprises and institutions in the period August 23-October 12, 1944"; Gheorghe Moț, V. Ștefănescu, "From the contribution of the youth of our country, led by the Uteicists, to the RCP struggle, for the victory of the armed insurrection of August 23, 1944"; "Documents regarding the preparation and execution, under the leadership of the RCP, of the August 23 armed insurrection", in *Annals of the Institute of Party History attached to the Central Committee of the P.M.R.*, Year V, No. 4, 1959, pp. 21-51, 92-139.

marked by political instability and social inequalities, which posed frequent challenges. The system had elements of equity but was plagued by corruption and social disparities.

Romania becomes now a constitutional state by law, but it lacked the parliament and the communal councils for a full constitutional life. The political parties that had been dissolved on March 30, 1938, and after September 6, 1940 restricted their activity, are being reorganized. Also, on August 23, 1944, taking into account the fact that it was still involved in the war, Romania was a well-organized state, with an intact administration, with a healthy economy, with a strong army, being the fourth military power in Europe, after Germany, England and the Soviet Union. Benefiting from these advantages, he had every chance to be reborn. According to Focșeneanu, nothing was missing to become a truly democratic state, if it were not for communism. But from the first moment, gradually, but tenaciously, the Soviet and communist pressure began to be exerted in the sense of disregarding the Constitution, continuously claiming derogations and "modifications" of it, pretexting, in the absence of other arguments, reasons for war. It took two stages for democracy to be destroyed: 1. the removal of the opposition represented by the historical parties and the annihilation of the army, in order to isolate the king; 2. the overthrow of the monarchy and the banishment of the king (Focșeneanu, 2008:138-140).

I. 2. The Rise of the Romanian Communist Party

The USSR was, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, behind the Stalinization of all Eastern European countries that were integrated into the Soviet geopolitical orbit after the end of the war. It did not matter the size or strenght of the communist parties in these countries, as long as they had Moscow's support. Some historians believe that the rise of the communists to power, after August 23, 1944, based on the support of the USSR, was a surprise even for the communists. This insignificant party was not ready to take over the machinery of the state. Realizing that the lack of qualified personnel is enough to block their access to the key positions of the country's leadership, the communists accepted in their ranks "companions", "bourgeois" opportunists ready to become the executors of Moscow's orders in exchange for often illusory privileges.

After the arrest of Marshal Antonescu, the king appointed General Constantin Sănătescu, a participant in the act of August 23, as prime minister, in turn appointing the members of the government. The government was composed mainly of the military, with the relatively ornamental addition of the leaders of the four political parties: Iuliu Maniu (NPP), Constantin I. C. Brătianu (NLP), Constantin Titel Petrescu (SDP) and Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu (CP.), with the role of to guide the new government from the

National Democratic Bloc (Bărbulescu et al., 2007: 391-392). Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was the only civilian who was granted a portfolio, that of Justice.

The main problem of the government, after the liberation of Bucharest from the German troops, was that of signing the armistice with the United Nations as quickly as possible, "to give legality to the international status of the country, to participate in the fight against Hitler's Germany" (Faur, 1995: VII).

I.3. The Armistice Agreement with Romania. The Beginning of the End of the Hope for True Democracy

From the first days after August 23, 1944, Romanian problems were, in fact, those of the Soviet Union. The international situation of Romania after this date depended decisively on the secret agreements concluded between the major partners of the United Nations. In August 1944, the countries of South-Eastern Europe had already been divided into spheres of interest, through inter-allied agreements of a temporary character, renewed in October 1944 in Moscow and maintained after the end of the general conflict. Numerous documents from Romanian and foreign archives highlight the continuous deterioration of Romania's international status immediately after August 23, 1944.

The removal of the Antonesian dictatorship automatically coincided with the cessation of Romania's state of belligerence on the side of the fascist Axis, a fact immediately made known by the Royal Proclamation, and during the night of August 23/24, 1944, with the *de facto* enrollment of our country in the United Nations camp, situation established *de jure* on August 24, 1944, by the official declaration of war of the Constantin Sănătescu government, broadcast by radio stations. At the same time, Romania pledged to immediately sign the armistice with the powers of the United Nations (USSR, USA and Great Britain), which officially sanctioned the end of hostilities with them. The Armistice Convention was signed on the night of September 12/13, 1944 in Moscow.

Article 1 of the Convention recognized the fact that "from August 24, 1944, at 04:00 a.m. Romania completely stopped military operations against the USSR, in all theaters of war, left the United Nations war, broke relations with Germany and its satellites". But art. 3 highlighted the obligation of "the government and the High Command of Romania to provide the Soviet forces and the other allies with facilities for their free movement on Romanian territory, in any direction, if required by the military situation.

Worth mentioning is Article 11, which obliged Romania to pay 300 million dollars payable within 6 years in goods (oil products, cereals, maritime and river vessels, cars, etc.) (Armistice Convention, 1944). Since the Soviet Union held the monopoly of its interpretation, the Armistice

Convention became a mechanism for capturing Romania (Deletant, 2010: 54). This seizure resulted from the interaction of two elements: while the fighting continued on the front, the Soviet army needed order behind the front, but in Romania the only order acceptable to the Russians was the one guaranteed by the Romanian Communist Party. His role was to prevent the regime established after the coup d'état from establishing order in other terms. This requirement involved, first of all, the neutralization of the means of maintaining social order, i.e. the army, the judiciary and the police, and their restructuring on the Soviet model. Secondly, it aimed to create mass support, which the Communist Party was completely lacking, and which would have provided the new regime with the necessary theoretical legitimacy. Both actions claimed a reliance on terror, which would have led to the destruction of the vestiges of support for the "western" monarchy and democracy (Deletant, 2010: 54).

Returning to the Armistice Convention, it is worth noting that between September 12, 1944 and October 30, 1947, more than 60 legislative acts were drafted, which, through their transposition into practice, established a legal framework for the general effort to implement the provisions of the Armistice Convention both at national and local level. For a period of time, this Convention was the fundamental act on which the relations between Romania and the USSR were based, and the problem of Northern Transylvania represented one of the landmarks of Romania's foreign policy. Although liberated, the territory of Northern Transylvania had for several months a status of quasi-autonomy guaranteed by the Soviet military leadership and managed through the local administrations of the National Democratic Front (Popescu-Tanasie, 2012: 115).

The 20 articles and 6 annexes of the Armistice Convention offered the Russians the opportunity to intervene in the political, economic and administrative field of the country, something proven by the situation that Northern Transylvania went through between November 1944 and March 1945.

Until the development of the necessary legal framework, the Convention will be at the basis of the purification of the entire society from "fascist" and "Hitlerist" elements.

I. 4. The Birth of the National Democratic Front, the Collapse of the National Democratic Bloc

The Communists tried their best to convince the country that its recovery depends entirely on the close relationship with the Soviet Union, that "*the backbone of the connection between us and the USSR it is formed by the loyal application of the Armistice Convention*" (Faur, 1995: XXII). But for this to happen, a government agreed to by the Soviet Union was needed. The Sănătescu government and the Soviet occupation authorities found themselves in a permanent conflict, despite the collaboration on the

front, especially due to the fact that those who decided the direction of Romania's political development were the Soviet advisers, both civilian and military.

The internal conflict between the traditional (historical) parties and the Communist Party was growing in scale. The main content of the struggle between the self-titled "democratic" communist forces supported by the Soviets and the so-called "reactionary", historical forces (NPP, NLP), confident in Anglo-American support, was the problem of political power. In this sense, the fall of 1944 was a period of mobilization for all these political parties. Suffering from the interruption of their normal activity during the Carol and Antonescu dictatorships, they now concentrated all their energy on re-establishing national and local organizations and increasing their membership. This effort resulted in the dismantling of the National Democratic Bloc coalition, under the pressure of contradictory political ambitions.

Just one week after the overthrow of the Antonesian regime, the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party declared its intention to transform the NDB in a mass organization, calling on the workers to organize their own political committees, under the auspices of the Bloc (Bărbulescu et al., 2007: 392-393). In turn, NPP and NLP they also worked intensively for the revitalization of the organizations in the capital and in the province. Even now, the socialists and communists were laying the foundations of another political alliance, called the *National Democratic Front* (NDF), accusing the historical parties of supporting the government of generals and technicians presided over by Sănătescu, of maintaining and strengthening the state apparatus left over from the fascist dictatorship. Maintaining the Sănătescu government, the communists loudly declared, "seriously endangered the democratic development of the country" (Savu, 1961: 70).

Officially established on October 12, the National Democratic Front (NDF), the new political coalition promoted by the PC, led to the termination of collaboration with the former partners in the National Democratic Bloc, which put an end to the coalition that had overthrown the Antonesian dictatorship. The NDB, the communists believed, constituted an obstacle to the concentration in a single front of all "democratic" forces. In addition to communists and socialists, the coalition includes the Ploughmen's Front, an organization of poor peasants, founded by Petru Groza in 1933, in Transylvania.

The NDF got off to a strong start. Through the press, manifestos, in the framework of numerous meetings organized in cities and villages, the communists intensified the work of "exposing" the government and the bourgeois parties, of clarifying to the masses about "*the grave danger that the fascist remnants represented for the fate of democracy in our country*". A real assault on Romanian society will begin. "*Following the call of the communist party, the workers in numerous enterprises drove out the*

fascist elements, in the villages the peasants went on to conquer town halls in which they installed democratic authorities, chosen from among themselves." (Savu, 1961: p. 71).

The next step, the withdrawal of the communist and socialist representatives from the government, on October 18, 1944, "*made it easier for the masses to see the anti-popular character of the government and contributed to the intensification of the fight for its overthrow*" (Savu, 1961: p. 71). Therefore, the "merit" of the overthrow of the first Sănătescu government, according to the writings of the 60s, belongs to the popular masses led by the communists. Under the guise of the "popular masses", P.C. he tried to hide his own ambitions.

On November 4, 1944, a new government was formed from the representatives of the political parties, whose president continued to be General Sănătescu. In the new government, the NDF held the vice-presidency of the Council of Ministers, 6 positions of ministerial secretaries of state (in the ministries of: Communications, National Education, Justice, Labour, Social Insurance, Minorities) and 3 undersecretariats of state (*Tribuna Ardealului*, 1944: 1).

The NDF was conceived as a front to convey on the political stage the image of a front of parties and representative structures, at a time when the communists represented an insignificant minority in the political landscape, which could only rely on the support of the Soviet Union and its army who had occupied Romania. The NDF will also have branches in Northern Transylvania, having been established on December 25, 1944 (*Plugarii*, I/5, 1944: p. 3).

The Role of the Romanian Communist Party in the Sovietization of Romania: 23 August 1944 – 6 March 1945

The period 23 August 1944 to 6 March 1945 includes three governments. The first two of General Constantin Sănătescu (August 23 – November 4, 1944 and November 4 – December 6, 1944) and General Nicolae Rădescu (December 6, 1944 – February 28, 1945) were marked by considerable efforts of the democratic forces, represented by the historical, traditional parties, to establish and preserve the democratic regime, in the face of the accelerated offensive of the communists, under the shelter of the numerous Soviet troops present in the country. to seize the main levers of power. The Red Army's contribution to the installation of communism in our country and to the removal of opposition while stationed on Romanian territory was a fact acknowledged by the leadership of the CP: "*The presence of Soviet armies on the territory of our country, without interfering in our internal affairs, paralyzed the actions of reactionary forces.*" (Gheorghiu, Roman, 1956: 23).

Following a visit to Moscow, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Ana Pauker were ordered to request access to power. Therefore, the next step was the forced dismissal of Rădescu, presented as fascist and philo-German, dismissal preceded by a virulent campaign to discredit his government, accused of *"lamentable failure to fulfill the obligations imposed by the armistice"* (Rothschild, 1997: 158-160). Reluctant to the actions of the Communist Party, he was accused of shooting at the people, a strong accusation that led to his dismissal. Another accusation concerned the decision to unleash a civil war (Gheorghiu, Roman, 1956: 35), on the occasion of the speech of February 12, 1945, in the "Aro" hall in Bucharest. (*Annals of the Institute of History...*, II/5: 87).

In this context, in the country the "people's forces, led by the PCR.", conquered numerous local state bodies, prefectures and the municipalities, and installed at their head representatives "elected by the people" (February-March). Thus, according to the communist speech, *"the power of reactionary elements in the central apparatus was seriously limited."* (*Annals of the Institute of History...*, II/5: 86-87).

The "Democratization" of Romania Between March 6, 1945 and April 13, 1948.

The First Pro-Communist Government: "The Government of People's Democracy"

On March 6, 1945, after unsuccessful attempts to form a new government, in the context of the visits of Andrei Vishinsky, assistant to the Soviet Foreign Minister, the presence of the Red Army and under threat of abdication, and with the tacit consent of U.S. President Roosevelt (who did not consider Romania a good place to compete with the Russians), King Michael approved the new government of Petru Groza, fully NDF, despite the protests of opposition representatives, Iuliu Maniu and Constantin I.C. Brătianu. The Red Army disarmed and disbanded any military unit Romanian which could oppose the communist seizure of power, measures that were part of the general Soviet policy in the occupied areas, in order to support the communist parties in their total seizure of power.

Thus, after three transitional governments, a pro-communist government is appointed, for the first time in Romanian political history. Illegal until August 23, 1944, here in a short time the communist political discourse receives a substantial bonus in the legitimization of its political capital, which would become, in a short time, the only discourse available (Ștefan, 2001: 48). However, it should be mentioned that in Romania's neighboring countries or in the immediate area, the situation was similar. Bulgaria was ruled from September 1944 by the Fatherland Front (led by the Bulgarian Communist Party). In Yugoslavia, the communists were already ruling since November 1943, as well as in Poland,

Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Unlike these, however, the Romanian Communist Party was only the formal representative, in the government the communists had only 5 of the 18 ministerial portfolios, of which two were decisive: the Ministry of the Interior, headed by Teohari Georgescu, and the Ministry of Justice, headed by Lucrețiu Patrașcanu.

Worth noting is the fact that the number of members of the CP increased very quickly, so that on March 6, 1945, the Romanian Communist Party already had over 30.000 members.²

From the very first days, the new government tried to consolidate its position by channeling its efforts towards the fulfillment of several objectives: the reinstallation of the Romanian administration in Northern Transylvania, the installation of a "popular-democratic" state apparatus and agrarian reform. Legislation of the agrarian reform was necessary, this being one of the accusations brought by the communists to the Radescu government, but also due to the fact that the NDF had requested, as early as February 10, 1945, the division of the large properties, which led to the occupation and division of some properties by the activists of the Ploughmen's Front, an action that would escalate after March 6.

The concession of March 6 was not without a reward, materialized on March 9, 1945 by the return of the Romanian administration in Northern Transylvania. This action represented a great advertisement for the National Democratic Front government. The official "Pravda" glorified the liberating Red Army on this occasion as well, which expelled the German invaders from Romanian land. Cleaned by the Hitlerites, Romania thus gained the possibility of a free development of the State. *"The Red Army also expelled the German-Hungarian troops from Transylvania, on whose territory the Romanian administration began to function"* (Sântea Ardealului, I/21, 1945: 5).

The Romanian communist press copied the model, avoiding, however, to publish the true role of the presence of the Red Army on Romanian territory, as Stalin himself stated in a meeting with a Yugoslav delegation, that *"to ensure the installation of the communist regime in the occupied territories"* (Brucan, 1993: 58-59). In addition, with the help of the Red Army, the Romanian military and security system was transformed according to the Soviet model. The maintenance of Soviet troops on the territory of the people's democracy states was aimed at ensuring control over them, using them to repress any attempts

² If on August 23, the RPC had only 80 members in Bucharest and less than 1000 in the whole country, including those in prisons and concentration camps, during three months, until October 1944, the RCP had reached a number of members between 5,000 and 6,000. In February 1945, the RPC already had 15,000 members, and by April 23, 1945, their number had reached 42,653. Iosif Rangheț, head of the organizational section of the Central Committee of the RCP, indicated these figures at a meeting with the active party that was held between April 25-27, 1945. Rangheț also stated that the PCR already had 55,253 members at that time, while the Communist Youth Union (UTC) had 62,925 members (The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, *Final Report*, 2006, Bucharest, p. 35, available online, https://www.juridice.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf, accessed on 10.03.2023).

at dissent within the system, as well as to ensure the necessary force for the communist bloc to "*defend itself against imperialist aggression in Europe*" (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1946: 17).



"The Red Army Comes to Us as a Friend and Ally", in *Gazeta Poporului*, National Democratic Organ, Year I, No. 14, September 14, 1944, p. 1.

The Groza government consisted mostly of RCP and SDP members, to which were added several positions occupied by NLP dissidents Gheorghe Tătărescu (foreign minister) and NPP dissidents Anton Alexandrescu (minister of cooperation). It is known under the generic name "*The Government of People's Democracy*".

March will be full of important events. The day after the return of the Romanian administration to the liberated Transylvania was announced, on March 10, the Workers' University of the RCP was inaugurated in Bucharest, initiated by the CC of the RCP and following the guidance of comrade Ana Pauker. It did not want to become an isolated scholarly body, "broken from the great battle that is going on around us", but it aims to fulfill and increase the "commanding posts of the proletarian battalions" with those elements which, before venturing into the realm militant writing and speech, they will prove their qualities of courage in the "theatre of social battles", proving skills and determination that some commanders necessarily need. Those enrolled at this University had to be equipped "with that indomitable theory and tactic which is Marxist-Leninist doctrine." At the head of those who taught at the Workers' University were "the greatest teachers of mankind": Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin. The novelty of the "first theoretical school for workers" consisted in its content: "working class philosophy" and "dialectical materialism" (Chiciuc, 2006).

Also on this day, the purges from the local public administration began, which affected the prefects, mayors, assistant mayors, praetors, notaries, along with the other officials appointed by the previous governments.

It was followed, on March 13, in Cluj, by the solemn meeting of the Romanian government on the occasion of the establishment of the Romanian administration over the whole of Transylvania, the legislation of the agrarian reform (March 23), the decree-law for the purification of the public administration (March 29), the promulgation of Law no. 271 for the purification of the public administration, education, the press, media institutions (March 30), used to eliminate from public life numerous valuable intellectuals.

Another measure of the Groza government, immediately after the installation, was the action directed against Iuliu Maniu, put under police surveillance, his house being searched three times (*Patria*, XXVII/17, 1946: 1). An attempt was even made against him, but without success. The NDF press started a campaign to denigrate the peasant president, never before seen on that scale in the Romanian press.

This government, the communist publications will write 10 years later, was radically different from all the governments that came to power before March 6, 1945. *"While the frequent changes of government that took place in bourgeois-landlord Romania did not constituted nothing more than the replacement of the leadership of one group of representatives of the exploiting classes by another, the installation of the democratic government based on the class alliance of workers and peasants, under the leadership of the working class, marked the transfer of decisive political positions from the hands of the exploiting minorities to the hands of the overwhelming majority of the people."* Thus was established *"popular power, capable of ensuring a real and broad democracy for working people, to defend and develop the conquests of the working people"* (*Annals...*, 1957: 5). About the same "alliance", non-existent in reality, Pavel Bojan, a member of the Cluj Regional Plowers' Front, opined in May 1945, just two months after the installation of the Groza government: *"the ploughmen see only Bolsheviks in the workers, who are persecuting them"* (*Fond Regional Committee PMR Cluj*, 1/1945: 65).

II. Democracy – A Manipulated Definition

During Romania's short existence until the period we studied, we find elements of similarity between the fascist and the communist propaganda, and there are also similarities between the way the "historic parties" and the carlist regime used communism and fascism in their own propaganda to gain legitimacy.

At a closer look, both fascist and communist propaganda emphasized a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism. Both communism and fascism portrayed their respective ideologies as the true representation of the nation's interests and glorified their leaders as saviors of the country. Fascism was presented as a solution to the increasingly visible decay of the parliamentary democratic regime in Romania. Both regimes developed propaganda machinery to spread their ideologies and utilized state-controlled media, censorship, indoctrination, and cultural events to disseminate their propaganda and control public opinion. Both propaganda narratives depicted enemies or perceived threats to the regime in a demonized manner. Whether it was political opponents, minority groups, or Western influences, they were presented as adversaries seeking to undermine the nation's well-being. Both propaganda promised a utopian future under their respective ideologies. They painted a picture of a society free from class struggle (in communism) or a racially pure and powerful nation (in fascism) once their ideologies were fully embraced.

The "historic parties" also utilized communism and fascism to manipulate public perceptions. They portrayed these ideologies as threats to the existing social order, urging people to support the "historic parties" as their protectors.³ By highlighting the dangers of extreme ideologies like communism and fascism, the "historic parties" positioned themselves as the moderate and responsible choice. They argued that supporting the established parties was crucial to maintaining stability and avoiding the chaos associated with these radical ideologies.

The "historic parties" sometimes engaged in political bargaining with extremist factions, using the specter of communism or fascism to gain concessions or form alliances. This strategic maneuvering helped them maintain a semblance of control and power.

The manipulation of historical events in the interest of the ruling party's propaganda has often caused confusion in the interpretation of events, which is why official documents will never be able to reflect reality in its entirety. During the communist regime, however, the manipulation included not only facts and events, but also established terms such as "democracy".

The established definition of democracy, the power of the people, the rule of the people by the people or *the way of participation of the members of a state community in the exercise of power, having*

³ At the center of the national-peasant doctrine was the idea of protecting the less favored categories of Romanian society, the idea of compensating the injustices suffered by the majority of the Romanian people and which, having been frustrated for centuries of elementary rights, had to be put back afloat through a special protection granted until the leveling of the gap between the Romanian peasantry and the other social groups. The liberals represented the bourgeoisie of the cities and the people of this country higher in terms of income, while the peasantry was not a social class, but a category composed of infinite social classes (Corneliu Coposu (1996) "Confesiuni: dialoguri cu Doina Alexandru", Ed. Anastasia, p. 31).

as its essence the establishment of political equality between the members of the respective community, was interpreted by the Communist Party according to its own recipe, which sounded inviting to some, but materialized in terror for others. Thus, the establishment of the Petru Groza government under Soviet military pressure, followed by the formation of a new government, in which the key ministries were owned by communists, meant the country's entry into a new era of history, of setting itself on the "right" path of "democratization", according to the communist discourse. "Democratic" or "true/real democracy" included any person or act/event that aided the usurpation of power by the Communist Party. People with a compromising past were welcome, provided they were prepared to work unconditionally for the Communist Party, following the same logic, according to which anyone who opposed the Communists, regardless of his action against the Nazi Reich, could be considered a "fascist". Thus, the main criterion of appreciation became the desire to obey and act according to the orders and directives of the new regime. As trust could be proven and verified only by being a member of one of the "democratic" political formations, all those who had, as Ion Zainea will write, a conscience to sell, wash or transform could access important positions. The others, those who kept their verticality, were mostly removed from services and positions (Giurescu, 1996: 156-157; Zainea et al., 2004: 319).

III. Communist Type "Democracy" vs. "Bourgeois Democracy"

On the way to the establishment of communist-type "democracy", the Communist Party monopolized the hope for a better world, fought the existence of a bourgeois democracy, identical to the democracy of the so-called historical parties, due to the opposition between the dominant exploiting classes, which held the political power and the dominated, politically oppressed and economically exploited classes. This opposition was motivated by their differences in private ownership and the means of production. The Communist Party expressed its conviction that political equality between social groups remained a wish and could never be a reality before the establishment of the communist regime. By its nature, the political power specific to societies based on exploitation prevents the establishment of authentically democratic relations in social life in general, not only in political life, these societies being incompatible with a democratic reality.

Nevertheless, communism came to accept the existence of certain democratic freedoms before they came to power, but it remained on the idea that the fundamental democratic rights - regarding freedoms of political choice or real participation in decision-making in the system of state administration - were annulled by the system of social relations. For example, they continue, *"the access of working people to the macro-social decision was prevented"*, certain categories of working people being excluded

from voting or in the event that the participation in the political life of some revolutionary parties of working people was formally admitted in the various countries, their participation in the exercise of power was practically excluded, these parties failing to participate in governance. It was the bourgeois state that gave up limited democracy and opted for a fascist-type dictatorship when it felt *"threatened by the working people, due to their conquest of the majority position in the parliament"* (Tudosescu, Cazacu/1983: 11-15).

Although the actions undertaken to remove dictatorial regimes took part alongside working people and some sections of the bourgeoisie, the re-establishment of organizational structures with a "democratic" character did not eliminate the "limits of bourgeois democracy", its restrictive and formal character. The exit from bourgeois democracy, continued the communist discourse, entailed the revolutionizing of social relations, primarily the removal of the essential differences between citizens from the point of view of their position in relation to the means of production - the abolition of private property, which, in addition to economic inequality, led to political and social inequality, as well as economic and cultural inequality (Tudosescu, Cazacu/1983: 11-15).

Along with the mentioned "benefits" of communist democracy, unlike fascism, the new "democracy", the communist press continued, was "organically linked" to science and culture. If fascism put a barrier between the intellectuals and the mass of the working people, if culture was decreed the prerogative and exclusive work of an elite separated from the people, communist "democracy" was the one that "brought the masses closer to culture and culture to the masses", allowing them access to public life (*Contemporanul*, XXI/10, 1946: 1).

The major dissatisfaction consisted in the fact that the "reactionaries" of the past and present, cataloged by "Scântea" as "the Pharisees of democracy" (*Scântea*, III/XVI/531, 1946: 1), in the person of the opposition leaders, were refractory to "democratization" and implicitly to the actions of the National Democratic Front: *"Due to the anti-popular policy carried out both in the government and outside the government by reactionary elements in the ruling circles of the national-peasant and national-liberal parties, by preventing the absolutely necessary economic-social reforms - our country is still in a serious situation today and is threatened with economic and national collapse. [...]"*

The experience from August 23, 1944 until today clearly demonstrates that the country and the Romanian people need a true democratic government, emerging from the concentration in a single front - NDF - of all democratic forces" (Plugarii, II/19, 1945: 3). The communists declared themselves convinced that they had exclusivity in solving all the problems faced by the country: *"Only an NDF government will be able to break the distrust of the Soviet Union and its allies. Only an NDF government*

will be able to put an end to specula, expensiveness, economic chaos and remove an hour earlier the sufferings of the popular masses: workers, farmers, officials and intellectuals. Only an NDF government can bring the security of normal activity for all factors of the national economy willing to collaborate in the economic and financial recovery of our countries: industrialists, traders, craftsmen, etc. [...] The NDF government [...] will be able to achieve that Romania becomes from a defeated country, an equal member in the great family of democratic countries, thus ensuring the independence, sovereignty, security and economic advancement of the Romanian State." (Plugarii, II/19, 1945: 3).

The objectives of communist-type democracy were exposed, in the middle of the election campaign, by Vasile Dima, a journalist at "New Transylvania": consolidating the success achieved in Paris (the return of the territories of northwestern Transylvania to Romania), through determined actions against chauvinism, the fight for peace, combating the effects of the drought through a vast aid campaign, and "*vigorous support of the Bloc of Democratic Parties in elections against the Manisto-Brachianist reaction*" (Dima, 1946: 1).

At the opposite pole, the "reactionaries" from the historical parties, the supporters of burgeoise-type democracy, stigmatized the so-called "democracy" of the RCP, considering the use of this word as a pretext for the anti-democratic actions of the communists. In the name of the so-called democracy, the Communist Party undertook a series of actions contrary to this term. Referring to this, Transylvanian university professor Onisifor Ghibu accused Petru Groza of having set out by deceiving the people with the formula of "democracy", of the rule of the people, in order to actually introduce the most cursed dictatorship, not only political, but also economic and cultural. Instead of freedom, the professor continued, communism introduced slavery and terror, in all their cruelest aspects, making Romania a huge prison for the absolute majority of its citizens. The communist regime turned the country into the most sadistic exploiter of its own sons, mocked the country as neither the odious fanariots of the past, nor the foreign rulers under which the country was doomed to groan for centuries, allowed themselves to do (Ghibu, 1992: 113).

The same opinion was shared by the journalist Nicolae Carandino, a member of the National Peasant Party, who wrote in one of his articles in "The Justice": "*The most significant and dangerous effect of the F.N.D. government will remain, when all balances are made, the compromise of the democratic idea among the masses*", *because it will remain in memories, linked to this regime, a pejorative notion of democracy... If for some doctrinaires there are two kinds of democracies, the political and the social, for the man in the crowd a third kind was born - fruit of experience - namely the camouflaged dictatorship*". From the opposition's point of view, public liberties have remained textbook

values, terror is felt in very wide circles and the surveillance of everyone by everyone has made important progress. Or, under these conditions, one cannot speak of democracy (*Dreptatea*, XXI/ 21, 1946: 1-2).

After a few days, the "Patria" newspaper, in the words of Gheorghe Ohăbeanu, again criticized the so-called communist democracy: "*Democracy means etymologically: the rule of the people. But the people cannot rule in their collectivity and permanently, but will elect their representatives. The representatives of the people are those who received the majority of votes. In the final analysis, therefore, democracy is nothing but the validity of the majority representative system [...] we ask ourselves, can we speak of a democratic regime in Romania today? The FND do not want to hear about the elections and the people*" (Ohăbeanu, *Patria*, XXVII/13, 1946: 1). All these "reactionaries" will be punished for the courage to stand against the current in the same way in which during previous regimes the communists were, in turn, punished.

Conclusions

During the interwar period, Romania experienced a complex socio-political and economic landscape. The system during this time was not a true, pure capitalism or socialism; rather, it had elements of both and could be categorized as a mixed economy. It was the period when the country faced political instability with frequent changes in government and political coalitions. Various parties representing different ideologies were present, contributing to a dynamic political landscape. Corruption and clientelism were challenges during this period, affecting governance and economic fairness. Some segments of society, especially the elite, had disproportionate influence and access to resources, and there was a considerable gap between the wealthy elite and the majority of the population, especially in rural areas. It was the perfect context for labor movements, and the working class began to organize and demand fair treatment, advocating for workers' rights and better conditions.

Karl Marx's communist project envisioned that in all countries under the Soviet umbrella the proletarians exploited by the capitalists - represented by all those who opposed the regime - would establish a dictatorship of the proletariat from which all would benefit. But because the proletarians did not want or failed to impose a revolution, they decided to set up a party of "professional revolutionaries" so that the party would establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in the place of the proletariat. After that, there was no more talk about the dictatorship of the proletariat, but about the dictatorship over the proletariat" (Marin, 2017). The recipe was particularly applied from country to country, region to region.

In Bulgaria, for instance, shortly after Soviet troops entered Bulgaria on September 8, 1944, the communists from the Fatherland Front started a general insurrection and the following night seized

power. A government of the Patriotic Union was formed in Sofia, which signed an armistice with the commander of Soviet troops, and decided to participate in military operations against Germany. The new government immediately proceeded with a radical purge. Members of the royal family and governments that ruled the country after 1941, members of parties that did not accept collaboration with the communists, and senior officials were arrested. Officially, between December 1944 and April 1945, there were 11,122 people, of whom 2,138 were executed, including the three regents (Bichicean, 2023; Znepolski et al., 2019: 58).

The elections of November 18, 1945 were a success for the Fatherland Front, which received 88% of the vote. The opposition, convinced of the electoral fraud of the communists, challenged the election results in vain. Following this success, the government began reforming institutions. This was followed by a referendum of 8 September 1946, in which 92.7% of Bulgarians voted for the Republic, the monarchy was abolished (15 September 1946), the communist Vasily Kolarov became the first President of the Republic of Bulgaria, and the Constitution of 4 December 1947 made Bulgaria de jure a popular democracy (Bichicean, 2023).

In Romania, the act of August 23 is a controversial subject, but almost 70 years after the execution of this act, King Mihai described the course of events in several interviews. It is certain that August 23, 1944 will become the country's biggest holiday for the next four decades, the beginning of the "people's revolution" in our country, a "revolution" initiated and supported by the Soviets, through a process of social and political transformation, through purges, expropriation, expulsion, arrests and executions meant to eliminate the opponents.

The communists thoroughly dealt with the punishment of fascists, nazis and chauvinists, which they seriously compromised, using it, as Ioan Roșca said, as an alibi for triggering the destruction of Romania (1995). All the protests of the "historical babes", as the communists liked to call the opposition parties, will be quickly suppressed for the next decades. By eliminating these innocent people, whose "fault" was only their refractory position to the new regime, the Communist Party perverted the work of punishing the true fascists, hitlerists or chauvinists, whose destructive activity should not be minimized. We must not forget the ordeal that Romanians and Jews from Northern Transylvania went through during the Horthy regime, and especially that most of the guilty escaped unpunished. However, their punishment did not evaporate, but fell, in many cases, on the backs of the same victims. The same people who suffered from the ethnic purging undertaken by Horthy's regime had to go through a second purging, this time on political grounds. The whole of Romania would go through a dictatorship camouflaged under the name of "democracy".

From the advantageous position of the present, the question "*Did people believe in the ideology on which communism was based?*" is a legitimate one, since in Romania the regime was maintained for over 4 decades. The answers given to this question are many. Thierry Wolton, for instance, opines that the opportunism of some and the servitude of others seem to have mattered more than the creed. Adherence to communism was a means of social success, communists had advantages, they had special shops, etc. The success of communism was also due to the opportunism of party members. But there was also a voluntary servility of those who prospered under communism, which is one of the reasons why there were no large-scale riots.

However, some sincerely believed in the promises of the communists, in a better world, a uniform world, in which the social class differences, present in capitalist societies, disappear (Balas, 2000: 52-54). Communists appealed to *egalitarian passion based on human mechanisms such as envy, which Communists used, promising "perfect equality,"* a lie, Wolton opines, because leaders never lived like ordinary people. The defects of capitalism, especially the exploitative side and the cyclical crises, did nothing but encourage the new regime in the so-called innocent dimension, "the struggle of good to defeat evil."

Of course in Romania, similar to the other states on which the communist regime was imposed, there was resistance, but it was not widespread as it was in other countries. For instance, in Poland there was a strong anti-communist resistance, of over 300.000 people. Churchill believed that there should be no intervention. A false judgement, says Wolton. The Soviets did so, with the approval of some Western leaders: they invited 12 Polish resistance leaders to Moscow to negotiate. The 12 disappeared without a trace and there was no protest from the West. And the resistance movement was suppressed over time (Brîndușa, 2022). In Romania, as a whole, people accepted their fate, even if the number of victims was consistent.

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