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**DAILY LIFE UNDER  
COMMUNISM.  
THE CASE OF ROMANIA**

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**Abstract**

*After the Second World War, Central and Eastern Europe was discovering the communist influence. The communist ideology changed the political regimes of the countries from the region, but most important it changed the society and the mentality of the people living in Central and Eastern Europe. The countries experienced censorship, lack of private property, repression, secret police abuse, religious bans, poverty, food rationalization, lack of privacy, massive industrialization and many other abuses which are typical for a totalitarian regime.*

*This article focuses on daily life aspects during communist Romania, because it is one of the most revealing cases of the post-communist countries. Romania had one of the most abusive and obsolete communist regime.*

*The methodological approach is based on the case study method, which will be validated with empirical data. This article will also emphasize the legacies of the totalitarian recent past over the contemporary evolution of the Central and Eastern European societies, with an accent on the Romanian case.*

## Introduction

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the political events in the countries of Europe took a dramatic pace. In the summer of 1944, the Red Army entered Eastern Europe in its westward push towards Berlin. The Soviets freed these territories from the Nazis, but did not leave them behind. On the contrary, taking the help of local communists, they implemented the communist system patterned on the Soviet model. In the countries that the Red Army liberated, communist-dominated governments took over the power. They made sure that they established control over the army, set up a secret police force and hunt their opponents. By 1949, all the governments of Eastern Europe, except Yugoslavia, were strict Stalinist regimes.

Romania, initially part of the former Soviet Bloc, in the 1950s asserted progressive independence from the Soviet Union and established a “national” path to Communism. The communist government went through different phases before its collapse in the late 1980s. What is it so special about the Romania’s case? For most of the countries, communism represented no more than a political movement. Romanian people saw communism as a way of life, for some it was their archenemy, for others it is still that enormous force that have passed through Romania and affected their relatives, their models, their principles. All in all, communism is a page of history that has drastically influenced the lives of many Romanian citizens.

How was communism perceived by the average Romanian citizen? What was the daily life of Romanians during this time in history? By focusing on the country of Romania, this article will address the key aspects of the daily life as experienced by its citizens. A case study as a method of research will facilitate our understanding on communism through real life situations and it can provide the basis for the application of ideas and further

methods. Special attention will be given to the relationship between state and society, and between everyday life and political theory. Our scope is to provide an empirical inquiry that studies the historical phenomenon of communism within its real-life context, using individual citizen experiences.

In our study, we will first examine some propositions of classical theories as they apply to the history of communism. For this purpose, we are going to revisit the theoretical approaches of nationalism, marxism and rational choice, which provide us with the conceptual perspective of the historical events to follow. Nationalism, on one hand, emerged as a modern phenomenon in the aftermath of the French Revolution and was regarded as “the existence of symbols and beliefs which are either propagated by elite groups, or held by many of the members of regional, ethnic, or linguistic categories of a population and which imply a community between them” (Giddens, 1981). Marxism, on the other hand, early suggested the inescapability of a communist society, which would emerge when economic forces caused the class war; marxist ideas soon came to rule left-wing thought and went forward under the name of socialism. Lastly, the development of the rational choice theory advocated the actions taken by rational individual decision-makers can interact in different ways to generate stable collective outcomes. To the extent that our effort is successful, this study will give us the opportunity to make comparisons, to find a better fit between theory and facts and to reach to a conclusion that anticipates future political systems.

Recent studies showed that nearly 25 percent of the young Romanian people surveyed say they have never discussed the communist period in Romania in school (Bran, 2012). All post-communist societies faced major problems in confronting their traumatic past. An efficient democracy, though, cannot be

based on lies, denial, and amnesia. Romania's exit from communism has resulted in a hybrid quasi-democratic regime, with former communists maintaining influential positions and opposing a genuine break with the past (Tism neanu, 2008). This article aims to define experiences and characteristics of communism in Romania, from the daily reality to people's obsessions, aided by historical narratives. The content of this article also aims to offer examples of the past that will help make conclusions for the future. Ultimately, reinventing the past is an easy way to handle the future.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Social Development**

Trying to chart the philosophical trends developed in Eastern Europe from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will help us understand the framework within which major political changes have occurred. We have chosen to provide an analysis of these socioeconomic developments through the theories of Social Marxism, the Nationalism and Rational Choice theories. This will help us recognize, on a historical sequence, the dynamics that enabled the embracement of the Romanian communist revolution, the inherent nationalist trends among people that lead to its downfall, as well as the necessity for modernisation and social diversity of the society. Social Marxism offers a system of analysis based on social classes, which is a consistent way to analyse the Romanian society. Nationalism provides us with theoretical tools to approach issues such as market freedom and consumer needs. At last, the Rational Choice theory puts the individual in the spotlight. All of the above need to be addressed in our case study. From the East European Marxist philosophy, through Nationalism to Rational Choice, an important number of European states experienced a great range of social and economic changes that influenced their lives and marked their national identity.

### **Revolutionary communism**

Since 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution that emerged in the start of the previous century, a new socioeconomic system featured the world development driven by radical political forces. "The lines dividing Mensheviks from Bolsheviks, Leninists from social democrats, Stalinists from Trotskyists, anarchists from statist, theorists of 'state capitalism' from theorists of 'bureaucratic collectivism', Maoists or anti-Maoists, Eurocommunists from traditional communists, have in large measure been drawn according to whether the Soviet Union, and the later system of East Bloc states, were seen as model or as an anti-model, and if the latter, of what kind" (Callinicos, 1990). Accordingly, the political transformations that went after the following decades, derived from, but also challenged the left theory. It is vital here to mention that, regardless any intellectual differences - and there were many - all philosophical diversities found common ground and mutual heritage in Marxism. It is not an overstatement to say that one's analysis of the Eastern Bloc, and the corresponding political events, lay on the analysis of Marxist socialism. The bases of social Marxism lay in Karl Marx's most widely read work, the Communist Manifesto, despite the fact that following works of the philosopher provide a better and more detailed understanding to his social thought. Published in 1848, it offers the theoretical framework of a society with i.e. explanations of how society works, how the form of the productive system is determinant to all aspects of the society, he draws the relations between the productive forces of the capitalist system and introduces the discussion about social struggle of the classes (Wolff, 2011). Finally, it envisages the end of world as became known, when the working classes unite in a communist revolution that will eradicate the ruling classes and eliminate the class system of the society: "Let the

ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!" (Marx, 1848).

The first impact of Marxism was felt in continental Europe already by the late 19th century, but the success of the revolutionary socialists (thereafter called Communists) in the Russian Revolution contributed to its worldwide standing. The establishment of an authoritarian communist state in Russia, however, split the philosophical movement to an extent that many socialists denounced the Marxist theory. Communists regarded Marxism as their official dogma, and it is mainly due to their labors that it spread through the world, although its notion of class struggle have helped to determine alternative policies of welfare and development in many nations. However, no matter how useful as a revolutionary moral and also as a frame of reference and/or policy, Marxism has found far less practical application than is often assumed.

The practice of communism developed by Stalin marked an era of widespread authoritarianism, departing from its sophisticated origins, featuring a rather nationalised pronouncement of "socialism in one country", which he imagined as a world economic system (Das, 1988). Many scholars recognise the philosophical doctrines of Stalin as the driving force of the communist system's maintenance. "Stalinism had one great advantage. It has as it's disposal universal world outlook, claiming to be able to definite answer to any question in the realm of philosophy, history, the social sciences, political economy, economic planning and even in many domains of the natural sciences, not to mention political life. That omniscience became omnipotence through the fact that such definite answers were furnished by by a single authority, by means of which any controversy whatever could be resolved at a word" (Kolakowski, 1970).

### **Inevitable nationalism**

The wave of national restorations followed the gradual collapse of communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, across Eastern Europe and the former USSR, and it is the most notable consequence of the communist recession. And the consequential disorder has been intense and sometimes devastating. Why nationalism sometimes had disastrous effects for several states has divided scholars and common opinion but is part of a different discussion; what they all agree with is the justification of nationalism and its predominance.

Nationalism can be defined as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation" (Smith, 1991). This definition introduces the concept of the 'nation', which would occupy the later world development in several ways. In the academic context, it mainly indicates "a group of people who feel themselves to be a community bound together by ties of history, culture, and common ancestry" (Kellas, 1998).

However, "in common language, the term 'nation' is often used in several other ways - most often as synonymous with the term 'state'" (Bollerup & Christensen, 1997). We preserve the idea that is the core of nationalist ideology, namely the idea of national autonomy, unity, and identity. The common use of 'nation' as a state populated by one nation-group, captured by the term nation-state.

The first expression of nationalism appeared with the French Revolution in 1789. The political and constitutional changes that followed the aftermath of the French Revolution led to the transfer of sovereignty from the monarchy to an assembly of French citizens. The revolution declared the direct link between the people and the constitution of the nation, and their influence to the identity of the state. The ideas of Liberal Nationalism, in early 19th century,

involved concepts of national unity, individualism, equality before the law and freedom of access. The ideas of sovereignty and national identity expanded to lead, in memorable cases during the beginning of the 20th century, in fatal national conflicts.

Several Western European states experienced and developed throughout the nationalist movement, while Eastern Europe found itself under the communist collar, and it is only before the collapse of the communist demise, in the end of 1980s, that we notice massive mobilisation towards national identification. As a matter of fact, this nationalist force is identified by scholars as the driving force that led to the downfall of the communist regime. “Behind the desire in 1989 for freedom stood the desire for national sovereignty. In this sense, 1989 in eastern Europe was not merely a series of revolts against communism as a repressive political and social system; it was also a series of national revolts against Soviet domination, and as such closely related to the same revolt that, by autumn 1989, had already become widespread within Soviet society itself. Precisely because nationalism was an underlying factor in the demise of communism, the process of collapse largely spread along the two institutional forms that were used to structure multinational and international control” (Beissinger, 2009).

Thus, nationalism played a key role in the breakdown of the soviet communist regime. Mark R. Beissinger, in his work *Nationalist Mobilisation and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, gives us three reasons why: “First, nationalism played an important role in structuring the way in which the collapse of communism unfolded (...) Second, nationalist mobilisation during this period was not a series of individual nationalist stories (...) Third, while clearly structured, acts of nationalist mobilisation did not simply reflect a pre-existing logic of institutions, structures and identities. Rather, acts of

mobilisation also played independent roles in transforming institutions, structures and identities, so that while the collapse of communism is often portrayed as a structurally overdetermined drama its manifestation depended on myriad acts of defiance and contention whose outcomes themselves were hardly predetermined” (Beissinger, 2009). Therefore, not only did nationalism play a central role in a direction which the collapse of communism occurred, but also the numerous national identity struggles that trailed the outcome of the collapse remains central for the understanding of individuals and their relationship to political power.

### **Diversity and Rational Choice**

The dominant school of thought in political science in the late 20th century seems to move towards the rational choice theory. For rational choice theorists, history and culture are unrelated to the explanation of political behaviour; instead, it is important to understand the actors’ interests and to assume that they pursue them rationally. Crucial to all forms of rational choice theory is the assumption that difficult social phenomena can be explained in terms of the basic individual actions of which they are composed. This perspective, called methodological individualism, holds that: “The elementary unit of social life is the individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals” (Elster, 1989).

In rational choice theories, individuals are seen as motivated by the wants or goals that express their ‘preferences’. “They act within specific, given constraints and on the basis of the information that they have about the conditions under which they are acting. At its simplest, the relationship between preferences and constraints can be seen in the purely technical terms of the relationship of a means to an end. As it is not possible for individuals to achieve all of the various things that they want, they

must also make choices in relation to both their goals and the means for attaining these goals. Rational choice theories hold that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them. Rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction” (Scott, 2000).

But does rational choice theories have any application in the main political developments, during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And if so, how do they help us understand the evolution or events before or after the collapse of Soviet Communism? “Rational choice, like constructivism, should be understood as a broad approach to social theory, capable of generating an array of specific theories and testable hypotheses about range of human behaviors. Over the past two decades, rational choice theories have made rapid inroads into the study of EU politics, most notably through the application of rational choice institutionalism to the study of EU decision-making” (Pollack, 2007). Thus, a better knowledge of the rational choice theory facilitate the understanding of European integration and enlargement, enormous forces that served as a counterweight to a nationalist outrage of Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In dispute with the rational choice practice since the formation of the European Union, many argue that a rational choice confines the development of constructive bilateral relations between the European Union and post-Soviet Russia. Timofei Bordachev argues that the EU should broaden up the dialogue with Russia, in order to achieve the maintain her as an allie. “A rational choice in conditions of global disorder is not openness and orientation toward multi-party regimes, but building strong walls, setting up areas of influence behind them, and making periodic forays into ‘enemy territory’. All this has become part and parcel of both European and Russian politics in recent years (...) A new rational

choice would be a big deal - a strategic union between Russia and the rest of Europe - is possible only if the parties try to achieve a common goal or find answers to challenges equally important for both partners. The main challenge is the need for a serious revamping of relations between the state and business (Bordachev, 2008).

Exploring the work of Western political theorists on social and political models provided us with a vital tool in understanding and interpreting the drastic developments that arised in Eastern European history. Communism as an answer to authoritarian political systems of the 18th century offered an opportunity for restoration of the class equilibrium and economic equality. When its application led in a totalitarian reality for the entities that found themselves under the communist establishment of the Soviet Union, an old-new concept of national identity emerged.

The recent development of political theories reminded us that the concept of ‘nation’ is not sufficient enough to explain such major world developments. A point of view that takes the individual behaviour into consideration is vital and evidenced in current political affairs. In the following chapter, we refresh our memory of the most crucial political events that marked the history of communism in Romania.

### **Milestones in the History of Romanian Communism**

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Romanian Communist party was rather small. “It scored a few but minor successes among railway workers, but on the whole it failed to take advantage of the various crises of the period” (Chirot, 1978). During World War II Romania sided with the Germans and invaded the U.S.S.R., so when the Soviet army sided Romania, because of the country's role as a German ally, the Western powers were hardly in a position to protest. In 1945, Moscow imposed a Communist government on

Romania. After two years of fairly cautious maneuvering to strengthen the Communists, waiting to see if the United States would intervene in Eastern Europe, the U.S.S.R. finally imposed full Stalinist rule in 1947 (Ionescu, 1958). This is when the years of fear and oppression began and which systematically transformed the Romanian society.

### **From the SovRom to Gheorghiu-Dej**

In December 30th 1947, the official declaration of the Romanian's People's Republic (Partidul Muncitoresc Român, PMR) followed the forced resignation of King Michael I. At the outset, the communist regime kept tight bonds with the Soviet Union by allowing, for example, Romania's limited resources to be drained by the SovRoms, new tax exempt Soviet-Romanian companies that aided the Soviet Union to control Romania's major sources of income (Chiot, 1978). Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was the first party Secretary and ruled with Anna Pauker, Vasile Luca, and Teohari Georgescu. According to Ionescu (1958), the last three were Soviet agents, and it was Pauker and Luca, Jewish and Hungarian, respectively, who were the most powerful. Gheorghiu-Dej, an authentic Romanian worker, was at first a 'façade' secretary-general. In the 1950s, however, Romania's communist government began to claim more independence until the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Romania by 1958. Gheorghiu-Dej, a firm Stalinist himself was opposed to Nikita Khrushchev's liberal government of the Soviet Union and questioned the supremacy of the Soviet Union, following a rather nationalist route (Eyal, 1989). In the domestic sphere, however, his Stalinist-inspired industrialisation of the state was not suited to the Romanian economy, which caused the standard of living among workers to stagnate (Roper, 2006). During the last years of his life, Gheorghiu-Dej exploited the Soviet Union-China dispute

to tighten up Romania's relations with China, a line that was followed by his successor, Nicolae Ceau escu.

### **Ceau escu and systemisation**

With the death of Gheorghiu-Dej in March 1965, Nicolae Ceau escu became leader of the party, and then president of the State Council, in 1967. In August 21<sup>st</sup> 1965, the name of the country was changed to 'Republica Socialist România' (*Socialist Republic of Romania, RSR*) and the party's old name was restored to 'Partidul Communist Român' (*Romanian Communist Party, PCR*) (Petrescu, 2009). His government featured an open and independent foreign policy, evidenced by uncommonly good relations with the Western countries (Eyal, 1989; Ban, 2012). However, it demonstrated a huge refusal to internal liberal reforms. The secret police (*Securitate*) maintained control over the media, and tolerated no internal opposition. In the 1980s, a considerable amount of Romania's agricultural and industrial production was exported in order to cover the foreign debt. The enormous volume of exports resulted in internal shortage and made the everyday life of Romanian citizens a fight for survival (Eyal, 1989). Due to lack of basic consumables, Romanians experienced food shortages and reasoning for which a more detailed analysis will follow on the respective chapter. Beginning in 1972, Ceau escu instituted a program of systematization i.e. a program of urban planning and re-construction. Sponsoring a national way to build a 'multilaterally developed socialist society', the program of demolition, resettlement, and construction began in the countryside, but culminated with an attempt to completely remodel the country's capital (Danta, 1993). Over one fifth of central Bucharest was demolished so that the city could be rebuilt in a socialist style.

### **Repression and downfall**

The severe austerity measures programmed to repay Romania's national debt caused large-scale and widespread poverty and made Ceau escu unpopular (Petrescu-Petrescu, 2005). The December of 1989 was marked by a series of events that became well known as the Romanian Revolution. The Romanian Revolution started in the city of Timisoara, but rapidly spread all over the country. On December 17th, Ceau escu's regime ordered regular military forces and the secret police to fire on anti-Communist demonstrators in the city of Timi oara, an event that led to his 24 years-rule to collapse five days afterwards (Ban, 2012). Following Ceau escus' joint trial and execution, a new political structure emerged. The National Salvation Front government under Ion Iliescu, a former member of the communist party, assumed control over the state with its protagonist maintaining central role in the political scene until the beginning of the 21st century (Pop-Eleches, 2008). The decades that followed 1989's demise were featured by increasing press freedom. "From a sociological point of view it can be seen that a free press creates a society where people feel they can share their ideas, opinions, without being punished for it, this issue being a big plus in any state" (Quffa, 2012). In the following chapter, we will examine in detail the sectors of the Romanian society challenged by the communist administration and we will focus on the aspects of daily life that influenced Romanian lives and shaped their culture and identity.

### **Aspects of Daily Life in Communist Romania**

The history of Romania since the establishment of the communist regime in 1947 led the country but also the society through diversified phases that challenged both its national history and identity. Whether or not we can review a communist political system based on the politics sphere is difficult to say, since

high politics in communist countries received little attention. It is at the social level where the meaning of communism for the citizenry is most directly and constantly evident. In the present chapter, we will examine the different aspects of the society that were influenced by the gradual social control of the communist governments.

### **Propaganda, Censorship and Freedom of Press**

Most of the communist regimes of the 20th century in Eastern Europe involved policies of censored mass communication. The communist rhetoric sees this tactic as a form of protection from the Western, capitalist ethics. In a broad sense, the term 'press' means any means of mass communication, whether it's about journals or periodicals (written media), or radio or television (audio-visual media). The press is the most appropriate and also the most used field for expressing the freedom of expression (R dulețu, 2008). During communism the one and only press owner was the communist party. First, in order to gain total control over mass media, the totalitarian party obtained the "in amonte" power by nationalising mass communication means. Therefore, the state-party started to use its monopoly over press material and financial basis (Coman, 2010).

The Romanian Communist Party, along with Nicolae Ceau escu, have successfully taken advantage of the power they had over the press, regardless of its form, and have used it especially to indoctrinate the Romanian people. As long as, at that time, the freedom of the press didn't exist, the right to information was also absent, because the individuals received as news only the things agreed by the leader, actually not having an accurate and solid information (Quffa, 2012). Before the revolution of December 1989, the press was subject to the interests of the party and of the head of state. Romania had many cases to the European Court of



Human Rights for violations to freedom of expression. Cases of convictions against journalists that criticised the communist government were revealed in the post-communist era (Predescu & Udriou, 2008). After 1989, the Romanian society suffered a series of transformations - and the press was one of the things that have changed considerably; it suddenly became free, having the possibility of not being subdued to a party, an idea or a personality, but however developing chaotically (Quffa, 2012).

Razvan T. Coloja, a Romanian writer, describes his experience as a child raised in communist Romania: “I remember the propaganda. Each morning, as students, we had to stand up facing the portrait of Nicolae Ceausescu that was hanging in each public room of each institution and chant our national anthem. Each manual I had in school had the same picture on the very first page. Almost every poem we learned had something to do with the glory of our nation, the bravery of soldiers, the working class or the future of our communist youth that will bring on the flame of science and hard work. About twice a year, every schoolchild had to attend public marches and hold up signs bearing either the portrait of our beloved leader, either slogans praising the Communist Party. We didn't know what they meant but we were hearing them a lot so we took them for granted” (Coloja, 2011).

From Petre Mihai Bacanu's point of view, a journalist that was sentenced to prison, for the publishing of an 'illegal' newspaper, political propaganda was inescapable: “Political freedom was not allowed in Romania during the communist regime. Neither was freedom for press or speech. The television programme lasted only two hours every day and was full of political propaganda. The personality cult of president Ceau escu was omnipresent. The TV and radio programmes and the newspapers were full of comments about how good president Ceau escu was, what a

genius he was, how the entire world spun around him and how the entire Romanian people loved their president. This kind of propaganda was present even in schools, where children learnt songs that glorified president Ceausescu” (Bacanu, n.d.).

“The cultural life was strangled by the political regime. It was almost impossible to find a good thing to see on TV. The censorship was present even in music. The communist authorities rejected different kinds of music (rock, for example), not necessarily for political reasons; they just did not like them (i.e. rock artists). Consequently, they were very rare in TV or radio programmes. The history was falsified in schools and newspapers. One direction of falsifying history was to increase the role of the communist party and president Ceau escu in some historical events. Old books were not available in libraries, exactly for the reason of hiding the past. Even literature was censored. Writers whose works were not 'politically correct' from the communist point of view were not allowed to print their books. Translations from other languages were very few, and of course, only 'politically correct' works were translated. Because of the strict control over everything that was printed there was a shortage of good books to read or good movies to see, even about themes not related with politics. Even the classic Romanian writers were forbidden” (Bacanu, n.d.).

Correspondent of Deutsche Welle, Zack Baddorf, interviewing Anca Sandu that lived in communist Romania reports: “The problem was that we weren't allowed access to information. We weren't allowed to read writers who didn't have Ceausescu's approval. We weren't allowed to travel abroad, or have friends from abroad. On some days, we weren't even allowed to drive” (Baddorf, 2009).

Another unknown consequence of the communist propaganda was the influence on athletic life. During the communist rule, sports were used as a

means of propaganda and the regime often assumed athlete's achievements. In 1976, at the Summer Olympics in Montréal, Nadia Comaneci became the first gymnast to be awarded a perfect 10 in an Olympic competition. She also won several other golden medals for the individual all-around, beam and bars titles. Following her performance, the Bucharest regime awarded her with the title of "Hero of Socialist Labor". Multiple Olympic, European and international champion, Nadia Comaneci retired in 1980 and remains one of the best athletes of the 20th century. Unable to follow her dreams under an abnormal political regime, Nadia flees the country in November 1989 and asks for political asylum in the United States (Istoria Comunismului în România, 2011).

### **Collectivization, Industrialisation and Trade**

Starting from 1949 the process of agriculture collectivization takes place. This process represented the confiscation of private agricultural properties and their merging in state-run farms. For Romanian peasant - obliged to surrender the land, animals and equipment held - this meant the dispossession of land ownership and rights for which he had fought in two world wars. Many peasants (both wealthy and poorer) opposed this action and the communist government resorted to violent repression, deportation, imprisonment, confiscation of all fortunes of those involved, and even summary executions. Because of the peasant resistance to collectivization, the operation became much slower in 1953 but resumed in the second half of 1950, and at last completed in 1962 (at which time 93% of the agricultural heritage of the country had already become state property) (Istoria Comunismului în România, 2011).

That allowed Ceausescu to control domestic production and even use it as a guarantee for the country's debt repayment. Indeed, in 1971 Ceausescu

demanded a radical revision of the five-year plan that would make the early payment of foreign debt the chief priority of economic policy. As investment in industrial expansion was set to continue, all imports had to be cut drastically and the export volume increased. That led living standards to collapse. This owed to the fact that all strategies meant to amass the dollars necessary for eliminating foreign debt by the end of the 1980s were on the table, including the engineering of a massive drop in domestic supply of staples and consumer goods. Overall, between 1981 and 1989 the supply of food staples was nearly halved (Ben Nér & Montias, 1991). The production of consumer goods was also nearly halved during the same period and, to make matters worse, its share in exports was increased.

The practical outcome of the macroeconomic planning was food shortage and rationing: "I remember food shortages. Basic food that westerners took for granted was handed out in rations during the Romanian Communist regime. About twice a month my father would get up at 4 a.m. in the morning, get dressed, get a bag and start his way to the closest food distribution center where a long line was already forming. By 5 in the morning, there were at least 30 people standing in line to get their rations of sugar, milk, rice or cooking oil. Cooking oil was especially hard to get by 1988. Bananas were sold only on the black market and by the time the Revolution came I was priding myself of having eaten three in my entire life. In the country side, most people have never even heard of bananas and most thought they were some sort of deformed, yellow watermelon. Oranges, lemons were also hard to come by, as was any other chocolate that was not Romanian - made or imported from Communist China" (Coloaja, 2011).

Ceausescu refused to draw the lessons from this failure. Instead, he resolved to repay his \$10bn foreign debt as soon as possible. The decision to repay the

debt in accelerated stages was not dictated by Romania's financial condition. It was entirely dictated by the preferences of the President and the calculation that any rescheduling or bridging loans negotiations would undoubtedly entail discussions with foreign bankers on Romania's investment priorities. Every effort was directed towards repaying the debt. Exports were maximised with little reference to prices, profitability and market targets in a furious attempt to gain foreign currency. That deteriorated the internal market situation even more. Food was exported at considerable cost to the Romanian consumer. Most import orders were cancelled, even if this entailed foregoing the purchase of much needed machinery for industry (Eyal, 1989). Anca Sandu also remembers: "And then there were the food rations. No more than half a loaf of bread, not too much meat, or sugar, and so on" (Baddorf, 2009). Anca's husband, Vio, chopped potatoes and cooked them in a frying pan, while Anca was talking to Deutsche Welle's correspondent. Twenty years ago, if he'd been cooking at 7:00 pm, he would've been cooking by candlelight. That's because the communist government cut off electricity from 6:00 - 8:00 pm each night across the country to preserve energy (Baddorf, 2009).

One would consider the proclaimed industrialisation as one of the positive attributes of the communist system in general, and the nationalised communist system of Romania specifically. However, the industrialisation policies started with the Gheorghiu-Dej's government did not result in any considerable economic development. From 1950 to 1974 Romanian per capita net national income grew at the rate of 5.3 percent per year, or 68 percent per decade. This is a very good, but not surprising, rate of economic growth (Chirot, 1978). In other words, the capitalist economies of southern Europe grew at about the same per capita rate as Romania's economy, somewhere between

60 percent and 70 percent per decade. This is not to say that the Romanian economy has performed poorly, but only that it has not been as miraculous as one might expect from reading the Bucharest press. What has been extraordinary has been the emphasis on industry, and the consequent neglect of other sectors. In social terms, rapid industrialization in Romania has involved most of the changes that have occurred in other industrializing societies, but always with an interesting twist (Chirot, 1978).

The second observation that one would make is that despite the common assumption that workers and communist regimes to 'get along', they don't. From Gdansk to Shanghai, evidence accumulates that communist parties find their most consistent opposition among their supporters. In 1977 a study of twelve workers' councils found that all 215 members were Romanian Communist Party members (Nelson, 1982). In Romania, millions of workers attended general assemblies in their enterprises across the country. But their attendance proved little other than that their physical presence in a meeting hall or stadium lends itself to mobilization. But governance, or even interest in it, was associated strongly with party membership (Nelson, 1982).

Whether the industrialisation policies, to a certain extent, had created new opportunities for the Romanian citizens is also debatable. A lot of Western jobs were non-existent in Communist Romania. "There was almost no purpose of learning English since no one was allowed to leave the country and no one came in to visit. The few movies in English were all subtitled or had a Romanian narrator that translated everything the actors said. The computers we had were few and of Russian make and there was no Internet at the time to connect people the way it does today. Basically, the best job you could have at the time was either being an engineer or a doctor. Engineers had high state pay and doctors

got more bribes than the guards at the border did. In communism, everyone is taught to be content with what they have and never yearn for more. So, normally, doctors didn't try to do their best and had to be 'stimulated' by other means to do their job. You wanted a kidney examined? You had to shelf out some bills and pass them to the nurse under the table. Had a molar that was bothering you? Pay the doctor and he would take care of it, or even might throw in some anesthetics" (Coloja, 2011).

The communists have utilised the job sector in an effective way of keeping control of the society. Any person who wanted a good job had to be a Communist Party member. As a result, many people joined the Communist Party for opportunistic reasons, without believing in the communist ideology. This could be seen during the Romanian Revolution, when members of the Communist Party could be found among the people who fought against the regime. Of the whole 23 millions Romanians, 3 millions were members of the Communist Party. As Romania had a state-owned economy, almost all jobs were under government control. In a free-market economy, a person in conflict with his boss has the chance to find a better job somewhere else. In communism, the government rules everything. A person who is on the 'black list' of the authorities has no chance to find a good job, irrespective of his or her professional results. It was not necessary to criticise the government openly in order to see your name on the 'black list'. It was enough to avoid participating in demonstrations in favour of the regime (Bacanu, n.d.).

Part of the economic stability was that the rapid industrialisation of the country had left other services sectors underdeveloped. Cultural opportunities, stores, restaurants, and other services, including medical care and schooling for children were distinctly inferior outside of a few big cities. The rapid rate of

industrialisation and urbanisation of the country have left neither time nor available investment for such amenities. Rather, urban services throughout most of the country, and even in the new suburbs of the large cities, are aimed at mass needs. Basic schooling and medical care, minimal recreation facilities, too few stores with too few goods, scattered restaurants with bad food and almost no service these have been provided (Chirot, 1978).

### **Systemisation Means**

Bucharest had been only moderately affected by Leninist-Stalinist planning in 1965 when Ceau escu came to power. He launched a transformation that lasted until his downfall in 1989. The first phase, to 1980, altered the outer zones and surrounding villages of the city, changed the administrative districts, enlarged certain penetration boulevards, and intensified the construction of standardised apartment blocks. During the second phase, 1980-1989, large areas of the center of Bucharest were razed to make way for monumental structures and routes, as well as the completion of the subway system. Post-revolution Bucharest is burdened with unfinished buildings (Danta, 1993).

In urban planning, Ceau escu's main undertaking of the 1980s was the complete transformation of central Bucharest. The law of urban and rural systematization of 1974 created a real estate disaster in the 1980s for Romania. The devastating earthquake of 1977 was another incentive for Nicolae Ceau escu's urbanistic plans (Istoria Comunismului n România, 2011). Motivation was threefold. The first stemmed from socialist ideology, specifically the concept of monumentality (i.e. creating buildings that served as monuments). In this case, monumentality in architecture and art was used to anchor collective cultural aspects of the landscape as an expression of liberation (Church, 1979). The second aim was to rewrite the history of the country in Ceau escu's image by destroying the visual past in the

center of Bucharest (Lykiardopol, 1991). The third aim was to replicate in Bucharest the symmetrical, artificial landscape he had seen in Pyongyang (Behr, 1991).

Andrei Pandele, a 65 year old photographer, known as the only photographer who shoot the Ceau escu era in Romania during the 1970s and 80s, held a vast pictorial archive of the city hardship. Talking to a magazine in 2012, Pandele explained that when Ceau escu began demolishing churches and whole neighborhoods, he wanted to immortalize the Bucharest he loved and it was disappearing in front of his eyes (Moldoveanu, 2012). As seen in Figure No. 1, Figure No. 2 and Figure No. 3 the demolition of some of the old buildings was made for the creation of new standardized apartment blocks following the socialist urban planning.

### **Gender Equality, Sexuality and Family Planning**

At first, following the Soviet example, the communist party had a clear strategy of involving women in the public arena, as a practice of the communist rule of equality among all individuals. “Although communist political ideologies were similar in many respects, the way they were implemented across Eastern Europe was rather diverse. Concerning the position of women, two aspects distinguish the Romanian context from other communist countries in Eastern Europe. First, following the Soviet example, the communist party had a clear strategy of involving women in the public arena. Organizational structures parallel to the communist party (but closely associated with it) were created and women were offered ample support concerning access to (higher) education, improved childcare systems, and extended maternity leave” (Curseu & Boros, 2011). “Another institutional norm was that departments with a large majority of women employees were to be managed by women and that women should have representatives in

leading positions within the communist party as well as within the organizational boards and unions” (Jinga, 2008). “Second, Elena Ceausescu, the wife of Nicolae Ceausescu, played a very active role in politics and organizational life. This had a strong impact on gender equality in Romania, which was in itself a widespread idea across other communist regimes in Eastern Europe” (Metcalf & Afanassieva, 2005). However, in the social sphere several legal reforms of the Ceau escu regime led women to a physical and ethical wretchedness.

Three years after becoming the country's supreme leader in 1965, Nicolae Ceau escu introduced Article 200, which, together with an earlier sweeping pro-natal programme, was part of a larger campaign to increase the available workforce, regulate sexual behaviour, create the new socialist man and woman and rid the country of what he considered unacceptable behaviour. For decades gays and lesbians in Romania had to keep their sexual orientation secret for fear of prosecution, and many endured long prison terms for the slightest trespassing of the communist moral code (Turcescu & Stan, 2005).

Abortion was prohibited in September 1966 by the unpopular Decree no. 770 in order to achieve demographic targets and fulfil Ceau escu's megalomaniac ambition of ruling over a populous nation. The prohibition of abortion resulted in an almost doubled birthrate in 1969, but the gains were not sustained in the long run, with most of them being lost by the late 1980s. Lack of alternative family planning programmes, condoms and pills, sharply deteriorating living conditions, and the state's unwillingness to recognise the existence of family and medical forced Romanian women to undergo illegal abortions, even at the risk of losing their lives, giving birth to malformed children or going to jail if the interrupted pregnancy was discovered (Kligman, 1998).

Adopting Decree 770 of September 29th, 1966 to regulate abortion is now considered the moment of pro-natalist policy debut in Romania. Spread over a period of almost 23 years, this policy included several demographic aspects, including: the adoption of repressive laws on abortions, tightening the requirements for divorce, income taxes applying to people without children. This regulation has created numerous problems in the medical, social and institutional, economical and last but not least, morally fields, many of them felt till today.

The deaths of thousands of women due to complications caused by illegal abortions are the most dramatic consequence of Ceau escu's demographic project. The increase of the number of unwanted children, of children abandoned in orphanages, born with malformations, with hereditary diseases, as well as the spread of AIDS among children in institutions, the number of the women presenting physical and psychological trauma, represents the tangible effects of Ceau escu's demographic policies. Unrealistic natal policies of the communist regime in Romania, in the absence of socio-economic infrastructure necessary to prefer incentives rather than coercive means to increase the birth rate, singularized Romanian case in Central and Eastern Europe area (Istoria Comunismului n România, 2011).

### **Xenophobia and Puritanism**

The morality imposed on the daily social behavior of the population, though it has a great deal in common with the puritanism, even prudery, so common in communist societies, is less logically connected to Marxism; and in Romania it has been pushed to an extreme unique in the European Communist world in at least one respect, demographic policy. We may one day see similar policies adopted in other European Communist states, but for the time being, Romania stands out as the only European, or even fairly

industrialized, society that has pursued such a harsh pro-natalist line (Chirot, 1978).

Nothing illustrates more fully the Romanian leadership's attempt to mobilise the population behind its anti-reformist ideology by encouraging xenophobia than the message addressed by President Ceau escu to a symposium held in Bucharest to mark the centenary of the death of Romania's national poet, Mihai Eminescu (Scântea, 14 June 1989). The Romanian President quoted several poems by Eminescu, and the choice was certainly not accidental. Citing from Eminescu's 'Emperor and Proletarian', Ceau escu seemed to be reiterating his determination to avoid any deviation from revolutionary ideology: "Hurl to the earth their scheme founded on greed and wrong, this system that divides, making us rich and poor! Since there will be no prize in death awaited long, demand the rights today that do to you belong, and let us live in equal brotherhood secure!" (Shafir, 1989).

Nowdays, when Romania still confronts its past, criticism over the communist regime has taken place with a constant view to compromise, consensus, reform, and working through the past (Tism neanu, 2008). But the most imperative way to achieve a progressive future is to learn from the blunders of the past.

### **Conclusions**

Ceausescu's Romania was a unique case in Socialist Eastern Europe. That was mainly due to the establishment of a dynastic form of Socialism; heavily reliant on his own personality with power concentrated in the hands of his close. The collapse of Ceausescu's regime was significant not only for Romania but for the entire Eastern Europe in general; and it's regarded by historians as the crucial moment of a long process of post-communist transition for the Romanian society. The critical uniqueness of the Romanian revolution was that, because of

the horrendous life conditions, because of hunger, frost, and the lack of any hope for the future, public opposition rose to the point where the internal cost of preference falsification was higher than the external cost of getting into the streets and openly protesting against the regime. This was a revolutionary occurrence, beyond which people in Romania decided to risk their lives by engaging in spontaneous collective action, having little to lose and everything to win (Ivanes, 2003).

The majority of Romanian people experienced property collectivization, heavy industrialisation initiatives, media censorship and human rights negligence policies that halted their financial, cultural, social and personal progress and at times threatened their physical existence. It is clear that Ceausescu's Romania was an unquestionably efficient police state. The lives of many Romanians were dominated by fear. The crimes of murder, brutality, coercion, deportation and genocide were all associated with the leadership and with the notorious Securitate, right up until the dying days of communism in 1989. Most notably, a communist era that lasted forty-two years influenced drastically the entire society, which was left with series of historical communist legacy, urban heritage and many personal traumas. It might be that not all young Romanians are interested in the history of their country during communism. But all young Romanians should know that they now live in a country once governed by persecution, censorship, surveillance and other forms of state control. The need to preserve the Romanians' history, and to let those that lived through these times to be heard, is essential for the nature of a progressive society. Ultimately, the learnings of the past serve as a useful guide for the future.

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*Appendices*



**Figure No. 1. ROMANIA, Mosilor Av., Bucharest,09.1982.  
Olari Church is moved and hidden behind a block of flats.  
© Andrei Pandele. Source: EST&OST.**



**Figure No. 2. ROMANIA, Drumul Taberei, Bucharest,12.1987.  
Sunset between apartment blocks.  
© Andrei Pandele. Source: EST&OST.**



**Figure No. 3. ROMANIA, Calinescu Street, Bucharest, 12.1986.  
Demolished neighbourhood - diagonally, to Armeneasca Street.  
© Andrei Pandeale. Source: EST&OST.**