

**UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI, FACULTATEA DE STUDII EUROPENE**

**ROMÂNIA ÎN POLITICA EXTERNĂ AMERICANĂ (1945-1970)  
(REZUMAT)**

**ROMANIA IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY (1945-1970)  
(ABSTRACT)**

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## ***Keywords***

Diplomacy, relations, anticommunism, correspondence, telegrams, foreign policy, Romania, U.S.A.

## ***Synthesis***

Our demarche consists of evoking Romania's reflection in U.S. foreign policy, while emphasizing the diplomatic relations between the two countries, as well as the activity of American diplomatic personnel in Romania and, respectively, of Romanian diplomats in the U.S.

The events are scrutinized in their historical context, that of the Cold War, yet without allowing the emphasis shift towards the relations between superpowers evoked in previous historical works we have quoted while setting the general framework, but insisting upon the direct contacts between Romania and the U.S., as resulting from documents of those days, from the archives of the State Department and the U.S. Congress, as well as from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

## ***Abstract***

Our study attempts at offering an extensive overview of U.S.-Romanian relations between the end of World War II and that of the seventh decade of the twentieth century. In order to offer a comprehensive, yet condensed view of the events, let us in the following round up the key moments evoked throughout our demarche , highlighting the most pertinent interpretations of the facts we have scrutinized, as well as underlining what we deem as the major points of our inquiry.

Since it would be near-impossible to speak of a certain period without placing it in the broader historical context, we have started by underlining that contacts between Romania and the U.S., while dating back a long way into history, have increased in scope in the period starting World War I. As, besides, it is commonsensical nowadays that modern Romania owes its existence to a high degree to the Wilsonian designs of the postwar world order.

Given the status of the two envisioned countries – a global power and, respectively, a small Eastern European nation – it is manifest that it would be American decisions that would impact Romania and not the other way around, hence our approach focused mainly on the American perspective of things.

We have relied in our overview of U.S.-Romanian relations not only on scholarly sources, but willing to take things one step further, upon archive material, both in edited and unedited form. While a part of it has inherently been used previously by historians, we have tried offering a new approach, reading it in the overall context available to ask nowadays – including the latest interpretations of events, literature and expressions of opinions.

An even more important aspect is that whenever there were aspects uncovered by previous researches, we have tried digging into them thoroughly, both by a rereading of the envisioned documents and by finding out others at which they pointed to. Thus, on more occasions, we have not contented ourselves with the quotation from one source, but tried identifying where it stemmed from and quote it extensively, while trying to place that piece of information within the general framework.

Moreover, we have benefited from the fact that our work comes at a later stage than the previously published ones, this way more primary sources, recently declassified, being available for our study. Thus, as highlighted throughout our work, there are periods and facts the documents regarding to which have hitherto never been used in scholarly works before, this constituting the main aspect of novelty brought by our work.

In order to avoid redundancy, we shall refrain from depicting once more all the events we have covered throughout our study, but simply make inferences based on their development.

Therefore, resuming the flow of events, we may see there were cases in which Romania benefited from the grand designs of American foreign policy – as was the case of the Versailles Treaty, and others in which it incurred losses, as in the case of German liabilities, which the U.S. agreed to be lowered, practically at the expense of more victorious nations.

However, the U.S. would always retain an aura of respect and admiration from behalf of the Romanian public and would inspire the philo-democratic forces within the country, both during World War II and in the period after its conclusion. Thus, as we have seen on repeated occasions, the U.S. would at least morally endorse the Romanian dissidents, initially against the fascist rule and then against the Communists, all in the name of the principles of democracy and rule of law promoted by the U.S. worldwide.

Besides, American involvement in foreign politics was always to a varying degree, characterized by a dose of idealism, consisting of promoting the values the American democracy stood for, all in the idea of exceptionalist<sup>19</sup> inspiration that what is suitable for America is suitable for the world.

However, as we know since as early as Thucydides politics cannot be waged by principle and morality alone. Therefore, there would be occasions in which the U.S. would act in precisely the same manner they were condemning the Soviets for acting, albeit they were doing it in order to limit their contenders' attempts at consolidating their position to degrees exceeding the provisions of the concluded treaties.

For instance in this respect, we have identified the way in which while the American political representative to Romania was complaining of the way the King was treated as vassal by the Russians, it would be the same Burton Berry who would pressure Premier Rădescu not to resign at the moment he would have desired it.

The U.S. would soon realize that communism would become the norm in the region and that it held a disadvantageous position, from which it would be increasingly difficult to influence the events. However, from the early stages of 1947-1948, U.S. envoys to Romania would warn that in spite of all political differences, it was better to maintain contacts with the Communists having taken power, and thus be able to influence them, than to break ties and thus lose any form of leverage in the region.

This significant shift in the balance of powers in Eastern Europe was due not only to the *fait accompli* posed by the presence of the Red Army in the region, but also to certain vacillations of American policymakers, who at first refrained from challenging the Russians head on, until it became too late, as they had the time to install puppet governments throughout the U.S.S.R.'s hinterland, and to the program of demobilization, which was needed for considerations of appeasing the public back home, but also had a detrimental effect, as the U.S. practically forfeited its main instrument it could have used to pressure the Soviets.

This constituted an unfortunate fact, for at the time the Romanians were holding the U.S. in awe, and were reluctant to the Communists and their Russian backers – as was the case during the last celebrations of King Michael's anniversary of 1945, when American Military Representative Cort Schuyler was hailed by the crowds, and the Communists had to use thugs to disperse the pro-monarchic and pro-American rally.

Other problems which would later on prove impossible to redress would stem from the appeasement policy waged by the U.S. towards the Soviet Union during the Paris Peace Conference, the moderate attitude adopted by Secretary of State James Byrnes practically constituting an acknowledgement of the situation, which placed the Soviets as the *de facto* masters of Eastern Europe.

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<sup>19</sup> The issue is extensively described in Henry Kissinger and Seymour M. Lipset's works we have previously quoted, as well as in Marius Jucan (ed.), *America azi. Studii de americanistică*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tribuna, 2010.

However, the U.S. would succeed in achieving a small, yet significant breakthrough for Romania: by placing a high, yet limited cap for the liabilities the former inimical country had to pay, the U.S. offered Romania the possibility of resuming development in the future, after all dues were paid.

Thus, unlike the Soviet approach, which aimed at exploiting its new “dominions” indefinitely, the U.S. was promoting a far more legalistic approach: the evil doers had to pay up for their misdemeanors, and were afterwards allowed to use their energies to their own development. While this approach may appear as purely idealistic, it is actually a pragmatic one, as it determines the settlement of the outstanding claims, without creating any long-term antagonisms – which, as it had been the case with the vanquished of World War I, only led to a resurgence of revengeful feelings.

The U.S. would also demand limitations of foreign troops stationed in Romania after World War II, being it obvious that the high effectives requested by the Soviets were not intended at simply preventing a fascist resurgence, which would have been normal, but at being a genuine occupation force, meant at strengthening the local Communists – who would have never become a significant political force in the absence of the Soviet aid. However, as we have seen – and as the American diplomats in Romania would realize – the Soviets observed the limitations in theory, but in practice circumvented them by sending special forces and intelligence operatives instead of the regular soldiers.

Moreover, while initially differences existed only between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, Romania being but an object of their dispute, with the gradual returning of sovereignty to the authorities in Bucharest – who were closely following the direction of Moscow – the conflict (or, more precisely, the hostile attitude, for it would be improper of speaking of a full-fledged conflict in the purest meaning of international law), would become one directly between the U.S. and Romania.

Thus, while the U.S. would have desired normal relations with postwar Romania, the consolidation of a Communist government in Bucharest would gradually lead to a deterioration of relations: the Communists would launch a series of provocative actions, meant at harassing the American diplomats and at hampering their activity.

Thus, in blatant violation of international customs and practices of courtesy, in June 1946, the Romanian authorities would arrest Elvira Olteanu, a Romanian citizen serving as accountant of the American Mission to Bucharest, invoking Romania’s state sovereignty as entitling it to act as it pleased with its citizens. Moreover, they would proceed at harassments of anyone contacting the American Mission or even its cultural center, accusing them of espionage or treason.

These practices, along with the constant bullying of the democratic, pro-American opposition, would draw the Romanian Communists the characterization of being “not a government, but simply a gangster police force”<sup>20</sup>.

Under these circumstances, it is interesting to remark the highly ambivalent attitude of the U.S. delegates at the Paris Peace Conference. Thus, on one hand, they would reject recognizing the status of cobelligerence for Romania’s involvement on the Allied side in the latest phases of the war, as, had it been granted, it would have constituted a significant diplomatic victory for the Groza Government, recognizing the

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<sup>20</sup> The Representative in Rumania (Berry) to the Secretary of State (Telegram 871.00/6-546 of June 5, 1946), in *FRUS, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union (1946)*, Volume VI, pp. 599 sqq.

merits of the Communists; on the other, the U.S. would support Romania in what concerns the economic clauses of the forthcoming peace treaty, remaining consistent to the idea it is counterproductive to ruin a country.

It is also visible at this stage that the U.S. did not desire full-fledged confrontation with the Eastern world, but, on the contrary, Secretary James Byrnes was pleading for all nations to “live together in peace”, relying upon the model of American states<sup>21</sup>; nevertheless, his reaffirming of the idea that “human freedom and human progress are inseparable” would inevitably place the U.S. on an antagonizing position with the Communist world.

One of the first major collisions of the kind would be represented by the Aide-Memoire jointly sent by the U.S. and U.K. to the Romanian authorities, deploring the inequities of the 1946 Electoral Law, which severely disadvantaged the democratic opposition parties. Moreover, political representative Roy Melbourne would show that the U.S. was aware of the methods used for forging the elections and therefore their result could not be accepted as legitimate by the U.S.

It is interesting that, when in their advantage, the Communists invoked democratic principles: they would rebuke the allegations uttered by the two democracies, qualifying them as meddling in a country’s domestic affairs, a practice in blatant violation of state sovereignty – though, let us remember, this argument was a far-fetched, fallacious one, as the incumbent Communist government had agreed to observe the principles of democracy stipulated in the Peace Treaty and in its preceding conventions.

The attitude of the Communist administration having consolidated its grasp on power after the elections of 1946 is visible from the proceedings of the first Assembly of Deputies, convened on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Then, the King was forced into cheering the Soviet Union, and while the reestablishment of relations with all Allied powers was duly saluted, only those with the Soviet Union were termed as being of “sincere friendship”; in what concerns the Western democracies, their resumption is barely mentioned.

As we would see on repeated occasions throughout our demarche, the U.S. would prefer resuming, at least to a limited level, relations with Romania, not as an endorsement of its government, but precisely as having a way of influencing it to a higher degree than it would be possible without maintaining any ties with it.

Thus, in January 1947 Secretary Byrnes would welcome Minister Ralea for an audience, during which though he would present his Romanian interlocutor America’s objections to the “manner in which the Rumanian elections had been conducted”, he would accept the filmy explanations provided by Mihai Ralea and would agree to offer food aid to Romania, provided this would be used exclusively for humanitarian purposes.

The main goal of the American administration for the following period would consist of “preventing the Soviet Union from establishing complete control over”<sup>22</sup> Romania, to which avail efforts had to be directed at keeping the opposition alive in Romania. Aware of this fact, the Communists would crack down against their opponents as soon as they had the occasion, the summer of the 1947 being characterized by broad trials of the opposition leaders.

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<sup>21</sup> Report by Secretary Byrnes, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

<sup>22</sup> Department of State Policy and Information Statement (Document 711.74/5-2247 of May 22, 1947), in *FRUS, Eastern Europe; the Soviet Union (1947)*, vol. IV, pp. 482-488.

To this, the U.S. could reply by a series of measures, including radio broadcasts informing the people of Romania of the state of facts and not of what the Communists presented them, as well as by issuing notes condemning the developments taking place in Romania, addressed both to Bucharest and Moscow.

It became obvious that the U.S. was in a delicate position in Romania and had lost most of its leverage there; nevertheless, as recommended by Chargé Charles Durbrow, the U.S. had to continue its efforts in the region, as they had a “retarding effect” upon the communization of the country, and there still were hopes the time lapse gained this way could be useful.

In what concerns the person of King Michael, forced by the Communists to abdicate, the U.S. held an ambivalent position: on one hand it supported him and appreciated his role as a prominent figure of the anti-Communist resistance, but on the other the U.S. did not want to risk provoking the Soviets to the extent of granting him political asylum in their country. Moreover, they would reject for long the idea of him issuing from American soil a proclamation condemning the hostile act which had been imposed onto him, and only agreed with the version of King Michael delivering an interview to an American magazine.

American policymakers would also maintain close contact with prominent figures of the Romanian opposition in exile, in the hope that this way they could keep anti-Communist feelings alive. However, it is visible once more that they had a reserved attitude and did not want to risk acting to provocatively: thus, while supporting the main figures of the opposition, welcoming them frequently at the State Department and at the Pentagon, the U.S. would refrain from pronouncing itself upon the opportunity of the forming of a Romanian government-in-exile, as it had been the case in Poland<sup>23</sup>.

The fact that the U.S. had not acted with sufficient resolve when it should have, would determine it into a position from which there was little it could do anymore. Another problem was that the policymakers at the State Department were not always taking into account the warnings and messages of their diplomats in the field until it was too late.

Thus, one should not be surprised that in March 1948 Minister to Budapest Selden Chapin, in a cable titled “U.S. Interest in the Balkans”<sup>24</sup>, would warn that there was “nothing barring miracles” that could save Eastern Europe from Communist domination. Subsequently, the idea of protesting against the communization of Eastern Europe by the breakup of all diplomatic ties with the governments in the region would be raised once more, being abandoned only in order not to lose one of the last remaining instruments of influencing the development there.

It is interesting to remark that in a manner somehow reminding of George Kennan, Minister Chapin argued that the Soviet Union had reached “a high water mark” of its expansion in Eastern Europe and that it was unlikely the Soviets would attempt other expansionist endeavors.

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<sup>23</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Southern European Affairs (Barbour) (Document 871.001/1-1948 of January 19, 1948), in *FRUS, Eastern Europe; the Soviet Union (1948)*, vol. IV, pp. 397-399.

<sup>24</sup> The Minister in Hungary (Chapin) to the Secretary of State (Telegram 864.00/3-1248 of March 12, 1948).



Therefore, from this point onwards the U.S. had three alternatives: to wage war against the Soviet Union – the least practical of the available options – to hold its ground in the hope that containment would finally succeed, or to negotiate a political settlement. In this latter case, there were hopes that at least some countries could be drawn off Moscow's orbit, Chapin recommending that Hungary and Czechoslovakia constitute the main interest for the U.S., and Soviet primacy be recognized in exchange in Bulgaria and Romania.

This approach, reminding of the Churchill-Stalin agreement of percentages, is relevant for the way at least some of the American diplomats viewed Eastern Europe at the moment: its main objectives were the curtailing of the Communist advance and the snatching of as many countries as possible away from Moscow's orbit, and if that meant some countries – with which ties were already in poor shape – had to be abandoned, this was a price worth paying.

At the same time, the U.S. was to intensify the activity of its intelligence services in Eastern Europe, both for the collection of on-site data and for the staging of clandestine operations meant at undermining Communist primacy and supporting any opposing trends.

While this approach had indeed been suggested earlier on by key figures of the CIA, as Frank Wisner, the fact that it was demanded more vocally from a diplomat acting in the area is relevant for its stringent implementation – one of the first breakthroughs being the acquiring of copies of the secret protocols for economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and Hungary and Romania, which severely disadvantaged American companies in the region, as the Russians would buy Romanian oil at artificially low prices. This way, the fact the U.S. knew from due time of the envisioned protocols, it could act in the (at least partial) safeguard of its interests.

It is interesting that from this early stage, the cable recommended at least equitable, if not cordial relations with the Eastern European countries, arguing that differences stemming from “their totalitarian policy” should be left aside, for the sake of safeguarding American economic interests in the area. And while this policy would gain traction mainly starting the second part of the 1950's and 1960's, the fact it was first enounced back in 1948 is relevant for the long span the U.S. devised at least some of its foreign policy designs.

At this stage, American businesses operating in Romania would incur significant losses – first, from the constant chicanery of the government, dictating either the prices or the wage level, and afterwards from the nationalizations cheered as successes of communism, and for which the granting of compensations would take more than a decade.

We must also remark that it would take a while between the moment the Communists had started their relentless takeover of all state structures in Eastern Europe (practically as soon as the Red Army had driven the fascists out) and the one in which the U.S. would impose trade restrictions onto the respective countries – in August, 1948. Then, Secretary Marshall, aware of the fact the Soviet Union and its satellite countries were American high-tech equipments imported from the U.S. for strengthening their military, would issue a set of measures preventing the sale of double-usage equipment.

These restrictions would remain in place well into the 1960's, and would only be relaxed partially, when the U.S. would want to reward the political behavior of certain

countries – and, as we have illustrated on more occasions in our study, Romania would be a frequent beneficiary, at times of even the most advanced bits of technology available.

The late 1940's and early 1950's would also be characterized by mutual harassments, respectively, between the governments in Bucharest and Washington and their corresponding diplomatic missions. Thus, the Romanians, fearful of the anti-Communist activities of the U.S. Legation, would frequently harass its personnel, impeding the appointment of new diplomats, withholding visas, or even accusing some of spy craft – as was the case in September, 1948, when four Legation employees were arrested.

In order to deter the local populace from acquiring what they regarded as subversive propaganda material, the Communists would also require the closing of the U.S. Information Service, an act which vividly denoted Romania's rejecting of anything of American provenance, even as inoffensive as cultural materials.

Subsequently, the State Department would retaliate by declaring high-ranking officials from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as *personae non grata*, which, in turn, would determine the Romanians to institute a very low cap for the number of American diplomats operating in their country. This diplomatic tit-for-tat would continue, the U.S. deciding in May 1950 to impose travel restrictions and define forbidden zones for the personnel of the Romanian Legation, to which the Bucharest government would reciprocate.

Had it not been for the State Department's 1949 Policy Statement<sup>25</sup>, which stipulated that the U.S. should continue the efforts at bolstering the morale of the antiCommunist elements in Romania, at countering the Soviet presence there and vocally promoting its principles in the area, it is most likely that a complete shutdown in relations would have taken place.

It is also interesting to mention that the same document of 1949 mentions for the first time the idea that the Communist bloc was not a monolith, and subsequently the State Department should focus on identifying the crack lines appearing onto its surface, and exploit them accordingly, to undermine Soviet power.

It thus becomes evident that many of the future undertakings of the U.S. in what concerns Romania would be dictated by this assumption – that the overall strength of Soviet communism could be undermined by practicing different policies to different Communist countries – and, later on, by supporting local, “heretical” Communist leaders who tried to part from the Muscovite orthodoxy, with the final goal of spurring the development of “tolerant regimes congenial to the Western world”.

The deterioration in bilateral relations would visibly continue during the following years, as it would be only with the beginning of de-Stalinization that the trend would reverse itself. However, as early as 1951, Chargé James Watson Gantenbein would report mixed gestures from behalf of the Romanians, who had expressed the first signs of courtesy towards the American diplomats, though the harassment undertakings were well underway. Thus, his conclusion was that, at this stage, the Romanian Communists were

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<sup>25</sup> “Principal problems in the relations between the United States and Romania”, Department of State Policy Statement (Document 711.71/1-1449 of January 14 1949), in *FRUS, Eastern Europe; the Soviet Union, vol. V (1949)*, pp. 521-535.

not acting against the U.S. as part of their own foreign policy design, but simply in order to please their Soviet suzerains.

Another key issue where Romania would be affected by the grander designs of foreign policy of the U.S. would be that of its accession to the U.N. It is interesting that while on other occasions the Russians had preferred isolating their satellites from the international community, in this case they insisted on bringing the Communist countries into the U.N. family, as the satellites were going to vote in favor of their proposals in the General Assembly.

Secretary Byrnes would thus be offered the perfect motive to object the en masse enlargement – with 14 new members in one single wave – by arguing that “each applicant is entitled to separate consideration on his merits”. This way, the U.S. would succeed in delaying the accession of the Eastern European countries from 1952 up to the end of 1955 – when Romania would be accepted, in exchange for the Soviets’ acceptance of the Italian application.

Even after Stalin’s death U.S.-Romanian relations remained tense at first, the newly-appointed Minister to Washington, Marin Ionescu being deliberately kept in waiting before being received to present his accreditation before Acting Secretary Bevel Smith; moreover, the U.S. would demand, in May 1953, the removal from the country of yet another Legation employee, accused for “activities incompatible with his diplomatic status”.

By now, however, Romanian diplomats in the U.S. could distinguish between the moderates and the hardliners in American foreign policy, and subsequently would try courting the former and limiting the clout of the latter, by unmasking them as warmongering. Moreover, the Legation to Washington would be involved in contacting journalists favorable to the Romanian position, in a propaganda move aimed at showing that the socialist ideas had adherents even in the U.S.

One should not be surprised then that U.S. counterintelligence operatives would retort by harassing Romanian diplomats; while no direct action against the latter was taken, their trackers would always act in such a way as to make them aware of the ongoing surveillance, so that they felt insecure and under constant pressure.

The U.S. would also attempt to infiltrate intelligence agents in Romania itself, whose task was to spread anti-Communist pamphlets; their capture would serve the Communist propaganda machine, which thus got an excellent occasion for smearing the image of the Western power, as imperialistic and infringing the sovereignty of peaceful nations. Besides, this kind of public lynching of allegedly hostile elements would constitute a constant practice of the Communists, who thus would attempt bolstering their legitimacy, claiming they were the righteous ones and were under attack from behalf of the West.

Nevertheless, by 1954 U.S.-Romanian relations would warm a bit, the first postwar contracts for the sale of American chemical products being concluded between the Mohrwood Trading Co. and the Romanian Government. While economic exchanges would remain limited throughout the Cold War, trade would continue to increase and, what is even more important, would constitute an instrument of promoting rapprochement – though we must underline the two countries had different motivations.

Specifically, the U.S. would try, with the aid of economic incentives, prodding the Romanian Communists into relaxing their domestic pressure and adopting a position

farther from Moscow and closer to Washington on the world arena, while the Romanians would find it profitable to make non-essential political concessions in exchange for certain gains it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to acquire elsewhere.

However, while it is possible to speak of a warming in relations by 1954-1955, at this early stage, diplomatic frictions remained the norm and moments of warming constituted only the exception. It is noteworthy that, just as the Cold War had been initiated because of the Soviets' desire to impose communism in spite of the previously-concluded agreements of allowing each country to freely choose its form of government, diplomatic incidents between the U.S. and Romania would be caused by the latter's fault, and not by a lack of good will from the American part.

Such was the case with the radio relay at the Romanian Legation to Washington, installed in clear violation of American regulations for telecommunications (since its main use was to circumvent the dispatch of messages through couriers prone to interception, we must add that it was not only the Romanians, but also the Americans who were infringing international customs and practices, as the diplomatic courier is by its status inviolable).

Subsequently, after requesting the immediate dismantling of the relay, the U.S. would retaliate by instituting more customs inspections upon the luggage of Romanian diplomatic personnel. We may appreciate that this yet another humiliation, infringing the principle of the inviolable character of the diplomat, was meant at signaling that no hostile action was going to be tolerated, and if principles were infringed by the first party, it could not hide behind them to escape retortions.

We have already mentioned the fact that the conduct of the U.S. towards Romania was shaped by the overall context of the United States' broader approach to foreign policy, as dictated by the Cold War. Subsequently, it should not come as a surprise that the next wave of rapprochement would come after the meeting of the two former comrades-in-arms, Eisenhower and Zhukov, which sparked a limited, yet visible détente, starting the spring of 1955.

This occasion would prompt the Romanians to acting in a more courteous manner, this being the first occasion that the head of Presidium, Petru Groza, would send a congratulation letter to President Eisenhower, for America's National Holiday of July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1955. The new wave of friendship would continue with the organization of reciprocal cultural exhibitions, exchanges of delegations of scientists, and, probably more importantly for the American public, with the welcoming in May, 1956 of *New York Times* reporter Cyrus Sulzberger.

It is interesting to remark that while the Communists generally tried courting journalists from visibly left-leaning publications, who expressed standpoints similar to those they endorsed, in this case the prestige of the newspaper overrode these considerations, and the American public could thus get access to probably the most objective recounts of the situation in Romania drafted by someone outside the diplomatic corps.

At this stage, however, the trend towards mutual rapprochement was still marked by numerous ups-and-downs: thus, while in the aftermath of the Legionnaire attack of Romania's Legation to Berne, the U.S. Government voluntarily granted the Romanian Legation to Washington guards to protect it against a similar terror strike, a year later the

Voice of America News cheered the aggressors of Bern, characterizing their undertaking as “a legitimate revolt against the regime of R.P.R.”<sup>26</sup>.

We must underline here an interesting trait of American foreign policy, namely that while pursuing certain principles in the long run, it has more than once compromised by dealing with extremist factions simply because they were the enemies of the United States’ enemies. Thus, not only would they endorse the Romanian Legionnaires – i.e. overt right-wing extremists, of fascist affiliation – responsible for the attack in Switzerland, but their leader would be welcomed in the U.S. clandestine service. This practice is more reminding of the welcoming of Nazi rocket scientists into the U.S. space program, than to the endorsement of freedom fighters, as no argument can support the fighting of one form of totalitarianism in order to simply replace it with another.

It is also interesting to mention that from talks with leftist journalists, the Romanian diplomats would come up with a position regarding international relations similar to that promoted nowadays by the revisionist school of the Cold War, arguing that responsibility for its initiation was shared, and that there had arisen certain occasions for its ending, but considerations of domestic U.S. politics had determined its unnecessary prolongation. Moreover, minor incidents between Romanian diplomats and U.S. counterintelligence operatives and reciprocally, between American diplomats and the Romanian secret services, would recurrently happen, straining the thin line of barely-initiated rapprochement.

The cultural dimension would play probably its most determining part in creating occasions for the betterment of bilateral relations, the most notable case being that of the Walt Whitman centenary of 1956, celebrated extensively in Romania and at the Legation to Washington. Moreover, Romania would start opening to American culture, albeit in a timid manner, refusing to allow the reopening of an American library, and only accepting, for more than a decade and a half, only a fund of books to be managed by Romanian personnel.

We must also highlight the importance of terms used in the diplomatic dialogue – where, at times, a properly-used euphemism can save face and defuse a deadlock. Such was the case with the American invitation for Romania to send observers to the 1956 presidential elections – which, had the Communists accepted, would have constituted an implicit endorsement from their behalf of the American democratic way of staging periodical, free and non-tampered elections.

And, if the Communists refused, they would have offered American policymakers an excellent occasion for accusing them of being antidemocratic. Thus, unwilling to determine a deterioration of bilateral relations, the Government in Bucharest would agree to send a group of scholars, to “document themselves and be able to inform the public opinion”<sup>27</sup> of the conduct of the elections, and to reciprocate for the Romanian parliamentary elections of the following winter.

The fact the U.S. was increasingly differentiating between the socialist countries, and was trying to pursue a policy of fostering ties with certain satellites, in the detriment of the Soviet Union, is visible in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956: the U.S. would decide to break the cultural exchanges agreement with the U.S.S.R. in protest for the brutal repression of the revolution, but would take no such step against Romania,

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<sup>26</sup> MAE către Washington (Telegrama 22163/28.03.1956).

<sup>27</sup> MAE către Washington (Telegrama 8471/20.10.1956 (reg. 15114)).

thus implicitly thanking it for its relatively passive stance (even though, let us not forget, the Dej government would soon involve itself in aiding the Soviets, by holding the heads of the Hungarian revolution in custody).

This time, it would be from behalf of Bucharest that a cooling in relations would take place: fearful of a significant American presence in the region so shortly after the Hungarian Revolution, the Romanian Government would cancel all invitations for American official delegations. Subsequently, at the beginning of 1957, Chargé Iosif Dolezal would cable the Central, suggesting them to return to a normal program of exchanges, which had to continue if Romania was to maintain the “positive advancements”<sup>28</sup> of the previous years.

Nevertheless, we must remark that the Romanian Communists would recur to an astute practice, consisting of approving only a few delegations, so that they defused the accusations they rejected them all, but would still delay the return to a full-scale program of exchanges. This would be a constant of the Communists’ dealing with the westerners: while conveying the appearances of acting in good faith, not infrequently they would only approve token measures, so that their affirmations could not be refuted, but without actually being committed to the envisioned values.

Or, when welcoming American delegations, the Romanians would draft their guests’ timetable in such a manner that they could visit only those sites that were convenient for the Communists to display; another example would be that of refusing to accept being visited by three journalists – whose activities would have been harder to track – and welcoming a single journalist to represent more publications at once. Thus, we may appreciate, the Communists were cultivating rapprochement only on the surface, and as long as it served their interests.

This approach also explains the reasons behind the welcoming to Romania of Senator Allen Ellender, in October, 1957: since he was interested in visiting the factories recently equipped with American technology, the Communists wanted to court him in the hope of receiving more similar benefits in the future – as it was Congress which had to approve the lists of goods which could be sold to Eastern European nations.

The fact that the Romanians were honoring their American guests only when it was in their interest of doing so is also visible from the fact that they did not bother giving the due honors to Minister Robert H. Thayer upon his departure from his post, at the end of 1957.

In spite of incidents of the previously-mentioned kind, we may remark that rapprochement would continue through the following years; moreover, realizing that supporting the Romanian dissidents-in-exile was counter-productive for its interests of fostering ties with the Government in Bucharest – and that by maintaining ties with the latter the U.S. enjoyed the best leverage upon the events in Romania – starting 1958, the State Department would forsake once and for all the policy of fostering ties with the dissidents residing on American soil.

We must remark that the Communists were also interested in establishing contacts with the Romanian diaspora, albeit with a different segment of it: the apolitical migrants to the U.S., who might be interested in visiting relatives in Romania – and who thus

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<sup>28</sup> Legația Washington către MAE (Telegrama 5501/02.01.1957 (reg. 79)), in AMAE, Serviciul IV Secretariat, Telegrama cifrate intrate de la oficiul Vashington (sic!), Vol. I, Nr. 33, S 12 (Ianuarie-Aprilie 1957) (239 u.a.).

could represent a source of hard currency – or those nurturing leftist sympathies, who could provide valuable intelligence tips which the diplomats could put to the use of the Party's interests.

There would also be points in which certain achievements of the Soviets would raise American interest for Romania, yet from a different perspective than the strategic one: impressed by the launch of the Sputnik, American policymakers would be increasingly interested in studying the Eastern educational systems, in order to identify what had rendered them able of such scientific performance. And since it would have been near-impossible to demand that to the Soviets themselves, the U.S. would turn towards Romania. Self-interest would be once more the catalyst, as the students were sent through touring agencies, and the Romanians were paid for their welcoming – a profitable undertaking, therefore.

While generally the U.S. was preoccupied in keeping a close eye upon the latest developments in Eastern Europe, certain events would go, if not unnoticed, at least plaid down in their importance. Such was the case with the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania, decided in 1958 as a sign of gratitude from behalf of Khrushchev for Gheorghiu-Dej's support in detaining the leaders of the Hungarian Revolution.

While the Soviets were wrong, in thinking that since communism was well-entrenched by then in Romania, the country would remain loyal to Moscow's direction – which it would not, but would develop a national, individual form of communism – the Americans were wrong in underestimating the importance of the event, arguing that “anyway the Soviet troops remain close by”<sup>29</sup>. This inference would delay American policymakers from making the moves towards drawing Romania closer to their position – and, thus, while rapprochement would continue, it would do so at a slower pace than opportune and, thus, its achievements would be more limited than they could have.

Nevertheless, the U.S. would continue moving closer towards Romania, 1958 marking the highest attendance of State Department officials at the August 23<sup>rd</sup> National Holiday ceremonies held at the Legation to Washington, which basically represented if not an endorsement of the Government in Bucharest by the American one, at least a sign of recognition and respect (until then, while the ceremonies may have been attended by members of Congress, the State Department had tried tacitly ignoring the invitations, in order not to allow the American Government to be associated with a ceremony held by a regime it viewed as not friendly).

Moreover, the U.S. Government would convey a signal of trust to its Romanian counterparts, allowing it to install a radio station at the Legation to Washington, if it reciprocated towards their Legation to Bucharest. It is interesting that while the offer was covered under an economic argument – the reduction of costs with the cables – it was practically meant as a reversal of the ban of 1955, and constituted a sign the U.S. was willing to make the first step in the betterment of bilateral relations.

Our demarche has also focused, whenever needed, upon the informative function of diplomatic missions – consisting of providing the home government with detailed accounts of the events it witnessed. Such was the case with Minister Brucan's reports regarding the 1958 visit of Vice-Premier Anastas Mikoian to the U.S., which are noteworthy as containing insights regarding the potential détente which could have stemmed from the talks between the Soviet and American leaders.

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<sup>29</sup> Legația Washington către MAE (Telegrama 3219/27.05.1958 (reg. 8595)).

While the envisaged non-aggression pact between NATO and the Warsaw Pact did not materialize itself, the visit nonetheless had an indirect betterment effect for U.S.-Romanian relations: approached by American Congressmen demanding him the settlement of the fate of more political prisoners from Eastern Europe, Vice-Premier Mikoian would forward their requests to the Romanians, who would heed them. This mediation would be profitable for the Romanian Communists who, for a small price – the allowing of a handful of dissidents to flee the country – would strengthen their ties both with Moscow and Washington, from a single move.

We must also remark that the downward trend in bilateral relations, initiated practically with the Communist takeover of Romania, had also prompted a more than a decade and a half delay in the settlement of the issue of liabilities for American property in Romania, be it destroyed by the war or nationalized afterwards. It would be only in 1959 that the Romanian Government would offer to “reconsider the question”<sup>30</sup> of its dues and mandate Minister Silviu Brucan to invite an American delegation to Bucharest to negotiate a lump sum payment. Though it would take until March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1960 before the final settling of accounts through a Financial Agreement, it is noteworthy that this step clearly expressed Romania’s desire for better ties with the U.S., and that it was willing to incur the necessary expenses to this avail.

However, we have already highlighted that the process of the betterment of relations was far from being a smooth one; on the contrary, it would still be marked by certain incidents: thus, while exchanges of delegations would continue, for 1959 the two countries would fail reaching a formal agreement and subsequently exchanges would have a spontaneous character, being devoid of an official framework.

Moreover, certain events must be considered from a double-sided perspective: thus, the meeting of Minister Brucan with Senator J. William Fulbright, while paving the way for future exchanges of scientists, also had a detrimental effect, leading to a standoff between the Romanian diplomat and the American statesman. Thus, the former would be defending the righteousness of the Communist system, while the latter would accuse the Communists as having imposed their system “also to peoples not having wanted it”<sup>31</sup>.

While the standpoint expressed during the previously-quoted discussion did not engage the American Government in any way, it is relevant for the fact that the U.S., even while making concessions to the Romanian Communists in pursuit of its grander foreign policy goals, was consistent to its principles and guiding lines, of promoting the freedom of choosing everyone’s political system.

Therefore, one should not be surprised that the early 1960’s were characterized by a mixed attitude from behalf of the U.S.: while, on one hand, rapprochement continued, the two Governments concluding formal agreements financial, commercial and cultural agreements for 1961 and 1962, and talks were initiating to raise the two countries’ diplomatic missions to embassy status, the significant cooling in East-West relations spurred by the situation in Cuba (first, its significant leaning leftwards, then the missile crisis) determining at least a period of “stagnation”<sup>32</sup> in U.S.-Romanian relations.

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<sup>30</sup> Legația Washington către MAE (Telegrama 97.A/28.03.1959 (reg. 5321)).

<sup>31</sup> Convorbirea S. Brucan cu sen. W. Fullbright, președinte al Comisiei de Relații Externe a Senatului (17.06.1959), in AMAE, Direcția IV Relații, problema 217, anul 1959, țara S.U.A. (6 documente, 15 u.a.).

<sup>32</sup> Stadiul relațiilor între R.P.R. și S.U.A. (07.02.1962), in AMAE, Fond S.U.A., Problema 220/1962, ff. 7-10.



Thus, we may appreciate that the continuing of economic and cultural ties was not inasmuch a token of appreciation for the Communist government in Bucharest, but rather a way of maintaining contact with it, in the hope of prodding it in the direction desired by Washington – which would use a carrot-and-stick approach towards the Communist country.

And even though the sticks were immaterial, they were there – as was the case with the Captive Nations Week celebrations, where Romania was smeared as infringing the personal liberties of its citizens, or with the delaying of accepting agreement for a new military attaché, as a rebuttal of Romania’s condemning the embargo imposed by the U.S. against Cuba.

But what constitutes probably the most important development in U.S. foreign policy towards Eastern Europe in general and Romania in Particular was the issuing of Bromley Smith’s NSC 5811/1<sup>33</sup>, which argued the U.S. should focus upon the “vulnerabilities in the dominated nations”, as these offered opportunities for sapping Soviet preeminence in the envisioned countries.

NSC 5811/1 suggested that the U.S. should appeal to both the leaders, and to the subjects of Eastern Europe: while the latter were to be tempted with the prospects of better living standards if they shed communism, the former were to be inoculated the idea of independence, of acting on their own feet, being no longer subjected to the discretionary will of Moscow.

We may appreciate the main purpose of the U.S. was to profit from the void created by Moscow’s pullback from the region; to this avail, it had to “continu[e] to expand our direct contacts with the dominated peoples”, so that, when the time was right, it could step in and more actively promote its interests in the region.

We may also remark that the U.S. was not making the fallacy of dealing with the Communist governments in Eastern Europe as monolithic entities – for even Communist societies are notorious for their centralism, decisions are still taken by people, belonging to various persuasions and aggregating in factions. Thus, Bromley Smith’s report recommended intensifying the offering of economic incentives to Romania, but in such a way as to favor those domestic factions which proved more receptive to America’s position.

Another incentive the U.S. was willing to offer as a token of its desire for rapprochement – and, at the same time, as a way of prodding the Romanians into reciprocating – was the partial alleviation of travel restrictions for diplomats, which would take place in September, 1961. Though certain limitations remained in place, it did constitute an important step towards the normalization of bilateral ties, and certainly represented a statement of friendship – for, let us remember, it was the U.S. which offered to remove restrictions which it had imposed only as retaliation for the mischievous behavior of the Romanians, in the first place.

This tendency must be viewed in the grander framework, where the State Department devised a strategy of supporting those Communist regimes “having

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We must add it was a characterizing feature of the Communists not to mention elements which were disadvantageous for them, or at least to hide them under the guise of euphemistic terms. Thus, “stagnation” should rather be read as “setback”.

<sup>33</sup> Report on Soviet-dominated nations in Eastern Europe (NSC 5811/1 of July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1960), in *FRUS, Vol. X, U.S. Policy towards Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe*, pp. 118-122.

nationalistic overtones”, as these were ready and willing to make a stand against the Soviets. And since Romania was the country where this tendency was most manifestly visible, the U.S. would focus most of its energies in supporting the Romanian Communists.

However, we must underline that while the facts were as the Americans perceived them, the motivations of the recipients of their aid were far different from what they expected: Gheorghiu-Dej, and later on, his successor, Ceaușescu, did indeed promote a national form of communism, but they did not do it because they disavowed with the principles promoted by the Soviet Union, but simply because, on one hand, they wanted to genuinely lead, not merely be in office and receive directions and, on the other, in order to consolidate their grasp on power, to the detriment of the internationalist Communists, whom they had to definitively sideline if willing to remain in office. We must also add that this process was well underway by the time the U.S. decided to take advantage of it, and all the State Department did was to pick a side when it was clear to which direction the balance of domestic Romanian politics was tilting.

The most significant concessions used to signal America’s lenience towards the Romanians would consist of alleviating the trade restrictions for chemical products and industrial equipment, in August, 1963. While trade would still remain limited for the following years, it would be highly beneficial for Romania, which would thus gain access to numerous technological samples, while for the U.S., it would constitute an opportunity of maintaining ties with a regime it wanted to influence, while having an outlet for certain of its products, as well.

We must remark that economic exchanges per se may mean little to politics; economic exchanges conducted at the appropriate moment may make a significant difference: thus, American diplomats remarked that Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was having a dispute with Khrushchev about the building of the Galați steel mill, which the Soviet leader refused to supply with machinery claiming it was not viable economically, while the Romanian Premier desired its completion for considerations of national prestige.

Subsequently, the U.S. would step in, and even convinced the British and French to sell themselves equipment to Romania, thus providing it with an alternative to purchasing industrial equipment from the Soviet Union. It is obvious this undertaking was less dictated by purely pragmatic considerations – as not infrequently the Romanians would have to be offered permissive credit lines in order to be able to make the purchases – but rather by strategic ones, the U.S. being clearly more interested in drawing Romania off the Soviet orbit than in the pecuniary side of dealing with the Romanians.

Looking retrospectively at the development of events, it is interesting that the removal from office of Nikita Khrushchev and his replacement by Leonid Brezhnev was viewed by the State Department as a sign of the gradual “whittl[ing] away”<sup>34</sup> of Soviet control over Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, this assumption, flawed as it may seem nowadays, when we know the “Brezhnev doctrine” of limited sovereignty plaid the most important role in the brutal repression of the Prague Spring, did serve a purpose, in stiffening American resolve in attempting to draw Romania close to the West and off Moscow’s orbit – and thus engage in more intense contacts – especially since the U.S. viewed Romania as “the most daring exemplar of the new trends” in Eastern Europe.

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<sup>34</sup> Special Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, No. 10-65, February 18, 1965, National Security File, Country File, Eastern Europe.

In this respect, it is relevant to mention that the U.S. held the figure of the new leader in Bucharest, Nicolae Ceaușescu, in high esteem, viewing him as “anti-USSR and [supporting] pro-Rumanian nationalism”, and therefore deemed him as worth being provided support.

Probably the element which convened most to U.S. policymakers from Ceaușescu’s discourse was that of the significant denuding of attributes of the Warsaw Pact, which was, in his desire, to shift from a supra-national organization dominated in practice by the U.S.S.R., to a loose alliance, in which every country holds its own national interest as paramount. Had his approach been actually implemented, it would have significantly have served the American interest, as it would have diluted Soviet military might – which basically explains the Americans’ support for the new leader in Bucharest.

Moreover, speaking of the military dimension of international politics, we have to remark that Romania would play a game of duplicity once more: on one hand, while in 1965 it was supplying about a fifth of the oil needed by North Vietnam for the latter’s war efforts against the U.S., but on the other, unlike it had done during the Korean War, and unlike the other socialist countries, would refrain from condemning the American military effort against the Hanoi regime. We may appreciate this constituted a way of signaling the U.S. that while Romania had to fulfill its obligations as a socialist state and was looking for outlets for its products, it also wanted amicable relations with the United States and therefore was not going to make any political gestures against it.

Soon enough, it would be thanks yet another antiwar gesture that Ceaușescu would reach the climax of his appreciation by the West: when realizing the liberalization of Czechoslovakia was threatening the very fabric of socialism, Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev decided to use the military might of the Warsaw Pact against Alexander Dubcek (we may infer that while probably the Soviet forces stationed in East Germany might have sufficed for crushing a peaceful revolution, appealing to the entire Warsaw Pact was meant as a bonding experience, a manner of rallying the support of all socialist leaders to the defense of their system, as well as of testing their resolve). Then, Nicolae Ceaușescu, in a bold move, decided not to send any troops against what he described as his Czechoslovak friends, and neither to allow the passage of Warsaw Pact troops on Romanian soil.

This bold stance obviously entailed the risk of drawing a Soviet retaliatory strike, Ceaușescu facing the prospect of being deposed from power in a similar manner as Dubcek. With events in Eastern Europe precipitating themselves, the U.S. diplomatic corps would keep a close eye upon their developments and, conversely, the State Department would maintain close consultations with the Romanian diplomats in the U.S. concerning their views of the facts.

Besides, as our study has shown, it was largely due to this close U.S.-Romanian contact that an aggravation of the 1968 crisis did not occur. To sum up, President Johnson’s repeated condemnations of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, as well as his appeal that the “dogs of war” be unleashed no more – and his more direct warning, conveyed through Secretary Dean Rusk that, should the Soviets attack “another country” – i.e. Romania - “they would risk a fundamental breach of relations between the USSR

and the West”<sup>35</sup>, would determine (along with the Chinese endorsement of the Romanian dissidence, let us not forget) Brezhnev to back off and refrain from attacking. (For, we may appreciate, while the first attack could go as an over-reaction, a second one would have clearly signaled that Russia was willing to go to any lengths to prevent any dissidence in its hinterland).

Another important part played by the U.S. in defusing the crisis was represented by its indirect mediation of the dispute: specifically, by passing on reports of the Soviets’ intentions – which its foreign service officers acquired from discussions with the Russian diplomats – to the Romanian diplomats in the U.S., they would tranquil them that the Soviets were not going to invade and, therefore, Bucharest should also mollify its statements. Subsequently, after more than a couple of months, the crisis would be finally defused, with Romania accepting token concessions and agreeing to adopt a lower international profile in the following period, and the Soviet Union pledging to observe its state sovereignty and to allow a greater margin of maneuver for its ruling class.

Apparently, the U.S. should have been the most pleased with this outcome: not only had it succeeded in blocking the Soviets from perpetrating a second bloodbath in Eastern Europe, but it also strengthened ties with what looked like a reliable ally in the struggle against Soviet communism. Subsequently, in the following years the U.S. would embark upon a set of undertakings cheering Ceaușescu as a hero, and would reward him lavishly – both with international honors and with economic benefits - for being a friend of the West.

Looking retrospectively, one might consider that it would have been impossible to predict that this policy course would prove flawed, and the very leader cheered as a reformer of communism and a genuine promoter of de-Stalinization would, within a matter of years, turn into the archetype of the neo-Stalinist. Nevertheless, as our study has shown it, the signs were there as early as December 1968, only that major U.S. policymakers tended to overlook them and acted according to what they wished things would turn, rather than they actually were.

We have in mind Ambassador Richard Davis’s Airgram<sup>36</sup>, which warned that it would have been impossible for Romania to play the card of blatant dissidence long in the face of Soviet pressure, but also that the Soviets were not the only ones to blame: were Ceaușescu to remain in office, he could not “go very far down the road of [democratic] concessions”. Basically, Ambassador Davis meant that Ceaușescu would, sooner or later, have to tighten his grip on power, and if he could not act as a prominent figure on the international arena, he would have to adopt a firmer stance domestically.

Both predictions would fulfill themselves, proving – if anymore needed – that in the game of international politics, it is not what one idealistically hopes the other would do that matters, but what actually the opponent actually does, or at least, what can be accurately estimated he would do, based on realistic calculations – and that mistakes are made always at one’s own peril.

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<sup>35</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, October 1, 1968, Department of State, Conference Files: Lot 70 D 418, CF 320.

<sup>36</sup> “Where Does Romania Stand Three Months After Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia”, The Ambassador to Bucharest to the Department of State Airgram, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

Having reached the end of our inquiry, let us express hopes that we have succeeded, at least partly, in shedding more light upon the subjects we have tackled with, and that the information we have catalogued, compiled and analyzed herein constitutes an interesting read, be it for the scholar, student, or, why not, the general public.