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Communism and Social-Democracy in Search for a Common Vision of Europe

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Abstract.

Recent researches undertaken by Maud Bracke, Silvio Pons and others have emphasized the fact that during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Italian Communists (PCI) have elaborated a new thesis calling for closer cooperation between Communism and Social-Democracy in the common struggle against Imperialism. The so-called “*allargamento*” (*enlargement* of the World Communist Movement) was aimed at legitimating electoral alliances between Western Communists and other leftist parties in the context of international détente. Also, as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe began its complicated route towards Helsinki, Italian Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer defined his party's international policy in terms of “active détente” – referring to the gradual overcoming of bipolarity in Europe. Both evolutions were strongly encouraged by the Romanian Communists, interested in undermining Moscow's patronage of the Eastern bloc. Drawing on recently declassified archives, this paper argues that Nicolae Ceaușescu, leader of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), adopted the Italian theses and tried to approach Socialists and Social-Democrats in Western Europe, much to Moscow's discontent. He argued that European security could not be based either on bipolarity nor sectarianism. Rather, PCR claimed, security in Europe can only be based on leftist bases, involving a close cooperation between Communists, on one hand, and Socialists and Social-Democrats, on the other hand. Both PCI and PCR used the idea of Europe for purposes of political emancipation, to fight off both Soviet and American domination of the continent. Ceaușescu defended Willy Brandt's course of *Ostpolitik* even from 1967 – against Soviet pressures – and often correlated PCR's position in world affairs with that of PCI's, trying to attract Western Socialists and Social-Democrats towards a common program. His efforts, as well as cooperation with PCI, helped pave the way for future Euro-communism and offered a leftist replica to Charles de Gaulle's vision of “Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals”.

Key words: Europe, security, Romania, Communism, Social-Democracy

International Communism, ever since the establishment of the *Komintern*, was infused with sectarianism, deriving from Lenin's theory of the party as an avant-garde of the proletariat engaged on a revolutionary path to transform the world. Since Leninism rejected reform as a way of improving social relations in favor of revolution, any advocates of non-revolutionary approaches to class conflict were deemed as “traitors” and “saboteurs”. Such a verdict was targeted especially at moderate left parties, mainly Socialists or Social-Democrats. The Leninist perspective was disseminated and perpetuated through the *Komintern* during the interwar years and gradually turned into a basic feature of political behavior in International Communism for decades to come, perhaps with the short-lived exception of the Popular Fronts period (Worley 2009, 9). Although ideological interpretations specific to N.S. Khrushchev's “thaw” placed less emphasis on the conflict with other leftist forces, Leninist sectarianism continued to remain a basic feature of worldwide Communist parties.

But the political and ideological turmoil characteristic to the 1960s led to important transformations in the world Communist movement, as well. In 1964, legendary leader of PCI (Italian Communist Party), Palmiro Togliatti passed away, leaving leadership to Luigi Longo. This change of leadership also marked the emergence of a new course: a transformation in PCI's internationalism aimed, among other things, at overcoming past sectarianism and germinate new forms of legitimacy. Recent

literature emphasized the connections between international détente and PCI's struggle for reform (Bracke 2002, 12-13). As the political climate relaxed during the 1960s, PCI grew progressively interested in government, but accession to power would have certainly been impossible for the party, unless the Communists joined a larger leftist coalition. Still, there was a major ideological obstacle to this: Social-Democrats were depicted as "traitors" of the working class and cooperation with them virtually impossible.

Starting from 1966-1967, Luigi Longo had strongly defended, on various circumstances, reconciliation between Communism and Social-Democracy, which was terribly inconvenient for Moscow (Bracke 2002, 26-28). During mid 1960s, international circumstances favored Longo's approach and obstructed the Soviets' negative reaction to it. Virulent polemics with the Chinese had considerably weakened the Soviet prestige and influence in world Communism. The Soviet Union was confronted with numerous fronds, as was the case with the Yugoslavs, Albanians and Romanians. Another Soviet vulnerability resided in the Soviet leadership itself, since Leonid Brezhnev had just replaced Nikita Khrushchev as general secretary of the party and time was needed for consolidation (Ouimet 2003, 17). Brezhnev inherited the conflict with Mao Zedong and was painfully aware of the destructive effects it had on Soviet prestige.

This is why Brezhnev was determined to find a way out of the Maoist trap by isolating China: gathering all Communist parties of the world in an international conference of the kind Khrushchev organized in 1957 and 1960 would have been a convenient and efficient way to demonstrate the unity of world Communism under Soviet leadership and place China in isolation. As many Communist parties were weary of such prospects – rightfully suspecting Brezhnev of trying to regain control over international Communism – Moscow had to move ahead carefully. Bullying other parties had the potential to ruin the project of anti-Chinese solidarity which is why Brezhnev was surprisingly reserved in criticizing the Italians for their "deviation". Luigi Longo's defense of a Communist-Social-Democratic cooperation was certainly rejected by the Soviets, but Brezhnev's aversion to such innovations was outrun by the need to maintain a fragile solidarity among parties.

International circumstances further complicated Brezhnev's endeavor. The Vietnam War was forcing the Soviet Union to increase its involvement in support of the North Vietnamese even though Moscow's primary interest was to find a *modus vivendi* with the Americans (Logevall 2001, 76). After the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the Soviets and the Americans had been involved in negotiations for arms limitations and Brezhnev was determined to succeed in reaching agreements with the Americans on this issue, since arming involved great costs. On the other hand, it was the Vietnam War which offered the pretext for the long-desired manifestation of solidarity. Brezhnev designed a plan to gather Communist parties worldwide in a conference with the aim of expressing support for the North Vietnamese or even coordinating support for their cause. China's predictable absence from such a conference would have been the most convenient way to isolate it.

Debates regarding Communist solidarity in front of imperialist aggressions represented the ideological framework which augmented Luigi Longo argument in favor of leftist cooperation. Solidarity in the struggle against imperialism – he argued – required the creation of a larger front, unifying all forces that are anti-imperialistic in their character: Socialists, Social-Democrats and also national liberation movements. Such a form of non-sectarian solidarity had the potential to sabotage Moscow's control over international Communism.

In his efforts to promote cooperation with other leftist forces, Luigi Longo found an unexpected ally. Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretary general of PCR (Romanian Communist Party) was interested to counter Soviet domination and assert his party's freedom of choice in what concerned both Socialist construction and foreign policy. The Romanian Communists had been engaged on a course of National Communism since 1964, when Ceaușescu's predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, contested Moscow's right to control other Communist parties (Radchenko 2009, 84). The Romanian dissidence in the Communist bloc became famous during mid 1960s especially due certain features of foreign policy: neutrality in the Sino-Soviet dispute, opposition to Soviet plans to reform both WTO (Warsaw Treaty Organization) and CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Aid), rapprochement with the West.

For Ceaușescu, Moscow's vulnerability was essential in order to preserve his party's freedom of maneuver. His predecessor counted on that Soviet impotence in responding to challenges when he decided to pursue autonomy in the bloc. Brezhnev's attempt to isolate China and regain control over Communist parties was therefore detrimental to Romanian interests which made Ceaușescu extremely interested in anything that might sabotage Brezhnev's project.

Nicolae Ceaușescu therefore became an active supporter of Luigi Longo's theory of *allargamento*. PCR developed strong relations with other Socialist and Social-Democratic parties of Europe, as well as with national liberation movements, especially those in Africa. After 1969, though, his support of cooperation with the Social-Democrats gained a new significance, in the context of emerging debates concerning a Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The idea of such a conference was first put forth by the Soviets, during a Warsaw Pact meeting in Bucharest, in July 1966. All other Warsaw Pact countries endorsed the proposal, although most countries had different views on European security. The Declaration adopted on that occasion called for a common system of security in Europe, involving the United States and both German states. This last condition was difficult to accept by most Western governments, since East Germany was not recognized by NATO member countries (Leatherman 2003, 59). Also, Moscow issued similar proposals in the past too, and most Western commentators had a tendency of seeing nothing more than Soviet propaganda in such initiatives. The German problem seemed at the time to be a major obstacle in the path of attaining a common structure of European security, but Bonn was reserving major surprises from this point of view.

In 1966, the West German Social-Democrat Party (SPD) acceded to government, in a coalition, and SPD leader Willy Brandt became vice-chancellor. In January 1967, his first major change in West Germany's foreign policy occurred: West Germany and Romania established diplomatic relations. That was the first step towards overcoming the Hallstein doctrine, also announcing the future *Ostpolitik*. The Romanians were very much interested in developing their relations with West Germany since it was its most important trade partner in the West, but both the East Germans and the Soviets saw it as a betrayal of Socialist solidarity. From this point on, Nicolae Ceaușescu turned out to be the strongest advocate of *allargamento* in the entire Soviet bloc.

The Romanian decision was vehemently criticized during a Warsaw Pact meeting in February 1967 which is why Nicolae Ceaușescu refused to participate in a Communist parties' meeting in Karlovy Vary, in April 1967. The meeting discussed the impact of the Bucharest Declaration of 1967 in the West as well as the reactions caused among Western governments. PCR's refusal to take part in the meeting was officially explained through the participants' reluctance to offer assurances that no Communist party would be subjected to criticism, but its meaning was significantly different (Mastny and Byrne 2005, 237).

Brezhnev intended the meeting as a preparatory step towards convoking his international conference of Communist parties, but the topic in itself involved risks for the Romanians, as far as Nicolae Ceaușescu understood. The risks were mainly related to the European security concept. The Romanians did agree to initiatives aimed at creating a common system of security in Europe and have even given their full support, but what PCR perceived as detrimental was Moscow's claim to lead these initiatives. In other words, PCR did not want to be part of a system of negotiation envisaged from a bipolar perspective.

Furthermore, PCR was beginning to develop its own concept of European security, radically different from the Soviet one. Central to the Romanian vision was the very concept of *allargamento*, meaning that security in Europe could not be achieved only by governments, but by the peoples of Europe, by the masses, which should – in Ceaușescu's vision – shape their governments' policies by active involvement. In a discussion with Spanish Communist leader Santiago Carillo, in May 1967, N. Ceaușescu explained his vision in the following terms: governments have a tendency to be reactionary, due to their class content, and this is why European security as a project for the future could not be left to their decision. On the contrary, Ceaușescu explained, it was a duty for all “progressive” and “democratic” parties and movements in Europe to become actively involved in the process and infuse a progressive spirit to it. Cooperation between Communists and Social-Democrats was essential to this, he stated.

Romanian discourse on European security was going to pay increasing attention to the prospect of cooperation between the radical and the moderate left. A careful analysis of PCR's international policy in the period of reference reveals the existence of two different stages: 1967-1972 and 1972-1975.

The first stage is encompassed by Romania's decision to establish diplomatic relations with West Germany (its first major step towards European Social-Democracy) and the emergence of the first meeting of the CSCE process. The dates include further significance as well. For example, in 1967 PCR first started to advocate *allargamento* and began developing its own vision of European security, different from the Soviet one. Still, at this stage, its advocacy of a “Europe of peoples” remained largely at rhetoric level, especially since the prospect of the CSCE seemed distant. In practical political action, the most significant development at this stage was PCR's strong support for SPD's *Ostpolitik*.

Willy Brandt's initiatives towards the East were initially met with skepticism, both at home and abroad, which made the vice-chancellor's task much more difficult (Sarotte 2008, 154). Moscow and East

Berlin closely followed by Warsaw, rejected Brandt's exploratory moves which they considered nothing more than "bourgeois maneuvers". In this context, Nicolae Ceaușescu did not hesitate to display publicly his support for Willy Brandt and even tried to convince others that SPD's initiative deserved attention. Ceaușescu had two major partners which defended similar points of view: Luigi Longo in Italy and Iosip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia.

N. Ceaușescu tried to convince L. Brezhnev that W. Brandt needed support and his exploratory moves should not be neglected during a meeting in Moscow, in December 1967. Ceaușescu was lecturing Brezhnev about Nazi Germany, warning him that similar attitudes existed in the 1930s too, when Europe saw Germany as Nazi at all levels, ignoring potential "progressive" forces that may have existed (such as Communists or Social-Democrats). Learning from that lesson, Ceaușescu advised, one should admit that not all forces in West Germany are simply "imperialist" and that there may also be "progressive" forces, as well, as he considered SPD to be. Brezhnev rejected that point of view vehemently and blamed Ceaușescu to be the victim of a fraud. SPD's policy towards the East, Brezhnev said, was only a disguise aimed to silence the naives but hiding the same revanchist goals as always.

This contradiction did not prevent Ceaușescu from raising the matter again, in the context of the preliminary meeting of Communist parties held in Budapest, in February 1968. Moscow had managed to convince most Communist parties to take part in an international conference scheduled initially for the Autumn of 1968 and a preliminary meeting – with the purpose of deciding on the conference's agenda – convened in Budapest, in February. Since PCR did not participate in the previous meeting, in Karlovy Vary, Ceaușescu's decision whether or not to participate caused great distress in Moscow. In the end he accepted to participate but, in front of all Communist parties which participated, the Romanian delegation reiterated the same issue of sectarianism.

As the conference agenda was focused on one topic in particular, the struggle against imperialism, PCR's official point of view was that only close cooperation between Communists and Social-Democrats could insure the success of the anti-imperialist struggle. Brezhnev was certainly discontent with such statements but, again, refrained from retaliation. N. Ceaușescu raised the issue again, in the aftermath of the meeting, in discussions with other Communist parties, in public statements and declarations and employed great efforts to improve communication with Social-Democrats and Socialists in Europe. In Summer 1967, for example, N. Ceaușescu had a long and interesting discussion with a delegation of the French Socialists, led by Guy Mollet.

As the CSCE initiatives were gaining momentum, after the NATO Council decided to accept the Soviet proposal and the subsequent Finnish memorandum of 1969 and to engage in discussions regarding European security, PCR's steps toward moderate leftist parties in Europe gained new significance. Towards the end of the first stage, PCR moved closer and closer to European Social-Democrats and Socialists, by establishing direct contacts and even by paying subsidies to some of them, in what became an apparent attempt to promote not only cooperation between Communists and Social-Democrats, but also a common vision of Europe. The crystallization of a specific vision on Europe evolved around an event perceived by PCR as being fundamental for the reorganization of international relations in Europe: the Soviet-American détente initiated by Richard Nixon's visit to Moscow, in May 1972.

A close analysis of PCR's international policy and of N. Ceaușescu's position – shortly before and especially after the Soviet-American summit of 1972 – reveals the fact that the Romanians perceived the event as the beginning of a bipolar arrangement aimed at world domination. In Ceaușescu's view, bipolar conflict was going to be replaced by bipolar domination. Romanians have manifested similar concerns before, during the negotiation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1967-1968, but Nixon's visit to Moscow – much more than his visit to Beijing – has increased the concerns.

Under such circumstances, the CSCE process gained new significance for PCR. N. Ceaușescu saw the CSCE as a potential manifestation of this new policy of bipolar domination and did everything in his power to prevent it. In this context, Europe gained a new meaning for him, instrumental in its nature but directed against bipolarity. Charles de Gaulle had tried to use Europe so as to oppose it to superpower domination, replacing the Iron Curtain division into blocs with a "Europe of nation states" regardless their social and political system, overcoming blocs. Following the same logic, N. Ceaușescu tried to promote a different concept, a "Europe of peoples" – concept which was not unfamiliar to Socialists – but having as its center core the cooperation among all leftist and anti-imperialist forces in Europe.

Noticing a real potential for anti-imperialist opposition among Europeans and being well aware of the disdain manifested by some Communist or Socialist parties against the American domination in

Western Europe, N. Ceaușescu presumed that such attitudes could be brought together with his own disdain for the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe in order to nurture a common leftist platform. His vision was certainly well inspired by Enrico Berlinguer's concept of "active détente" especially since relations among the two leaders were rather close and PCI worked together with PCR before in fending off Soviet control of world Communism.

In the early 1970s, Enrico Berlinguer, the new leader of PCI, described a different version of international détente, one in which a world of two superpowers would be gradually replaced by a world of many actors. The Cold War – and its inherent bipolarity – would become history, not by agreements or settlements of the two superpowers, as Brezhnev or Nixon saw it, but by the gradual emancipation of other states, who would claim their right to have a say independent of the two blocs. N. Ceaușescu favored this approach and tried to oppose it to Brezhnev's vision in the context of the CSCE.

At the time, Moscow saw the CSCE process in terms of bipolarity. L. Brezhnev was preoccupied with his Warsaw Pact allies' increasing interest in the CSCE, as was the case with Poland, for example. Poland had been asked, just as the other Warsaw Pact members, to explore the intentions of the Western governments on the topic of European security, but the Poles did much more than that, drafting their own version of a potential treaty on European security (Jarzabek 2008, 17-18). During the famous Crimean meetings which took place in the summers of 1972 and 1973, Brezhnev tried to bring this enthusiasm under control, emphasizing the importance of unity and solidarity among Communist countries in what concerned European security. N. Ceaușescu made it clear in repeated statements that European security could only be achieved by a gradual dismantling of both NATO and WTO.

The idea was not new and did not belong to him, but it was enunciated many years before by the Soviets themselves and remained one of the features of Soviet foreign propaganda. Its initial purpose was to disturb relations between the Americans and their West European allies. Under those new circumstances though, the concept had a real chance to be taken seriously on the conference agenda, which is why Brezhnev rejected it as inopportune (Rey 2008, 76). N. Ceaușescu has been stressing the idea with terrible persistence and even included it the PCR's congress resolutions of both 1969 and 1974 because he saw in it a chance to undermine the bipolar character of the CSCE, in the spirit of E. Berlinguer's active détente concept (Fasanaro 2012, 163). Brezhnev's was displeased with Ceaușescu's insistence, as he clearly mentioned during the Crimean meeting of July 1973. During the meeting with the other Warsaw Pact leaders, Brezhnev stated that Moscow did not support the idea at that time, hoping to discourage others from following it (Rey 2008, 76).

Between 1972-1975, PCR intensified its bilateral contacts with mostly all Socialist and Social-Democrats in Europe in order to explore their views on European security and try to forge a common leftist front. While Enrico Berlinguer was working hard towards PCI's participation in a governmental coalition – the core of future *compromesso storico* which ultimately brought PCI to government – N. Ceaușescu was meeting regularly with the Italian Socialists and advised them to look for ways to cooperate with the Communists. PCR even subsidized some of them, as was the case with the *Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria*, whose leader Lelio Basso often traveled to Bucharest and even dared to ask Ceaușescu for money during electoral campaigns. Ceaușescu was very active the other way around too: the stenographic records of his discussions with Enrico Berlinguer prove that he often expressed PCR's support for PCI's policy of allargamento and called upon Berlinguer to intensify his efforts to unite with the Socialists. He also advised the KPD (West German Communist Party) to try to work together with Willy Brandt's government. As the KPD was very close to the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*), its leadership was quick to catalogue Ostpolitik as „imperialist machination“, but Ceaușescu was very energetic in trying to convince them of the opposite.

PCR also developed strong relations with the Scandinavian popular socialist parties, especially those in Denmark and Norway. Popular socialism was a trend in Scandinavia starting from the late 1950s, represented by former Communists or Socialists looking for a middle way between the two doctrines and parties. N. Ceaușescu was in close contact with Finn Gustavsen, a prominent Norwegian socialist, one of the founders of SF (*Sosialistisk Folkeparti*) who often visited Ceaușescu. In 1971 for example, Ceaușescu was trying to convince Gustavsen that European security could not and should not be a responsibility only for the governments and that all leftist parties had a duty to mobilize the masses for a democratic form of European security, one that transcended narrow governmental interests and tries to unite all nations of Europe. By governmental interest, Ceaușescu was obviously referring to the obligations assumed by most European governments to NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Ceaușescu had close relations with Sigurd Ømann, chairman of the Danish popular socialists.

N. Ceaușescu's vision of Europe was best described by himself, in the following words: "we consider that the division of Europe in military and economic blocks does not correspond to the interests of the European peoples. In a certain sense, Europe has developed along history in a complete unity. The progresses accomplished by Europe are due especially to the existence of this cooperation. For Europe's present and future, it is necessary to develop a stronger unity, a new unity, based on the respect for the diversity of socio-economic foundations, but generated by the common interest to insure independence, socio-economic development, prosperity and peace for all European peoples. Only united will the European peoples be able to insure themselves a better future, of complete equality and liberty" (Ceaușescu 1970, 369-370)

His project of Europe emphasized the popular character and the pressures the peoples of Europe should have laid on their governments, for two basic reasons: to challenge bipolarity, which was being perpetuated by the governments in virtue of their military obligations, and also to challenge the customs barrier raised by the European Economic Community. Practically, Ceaușescu sought to undermine barriers in Europe – either political or military – and regarded popular pressure as the best method to achieve his goal. But that could only have been a common project, designed by the Communists and Social-Democrats together. As he repeatedly mentioned in discussions with West European leftist politician, his project was not utopist: the Americans were being forced to withdraw from Vietnam especially due to the pressures exerted by the American people itself, so popular pressures directed against government could indeed succeed. In his view, a framework of European security built on such bases was a guarantee that European security was designed for the peoples and not for the superpowers.

In the end, his project failed. The causes for this are multiple, both internal and external. On the internal side, one could notice from the very beginning the domestic repressive nature of PCR's policies. Devoted to a Stalinist model of autarchic industrial development, Ceaușescu's regime did not appeal much to other radical or moderate leftist forces in Europe, in spite the rather innovative and very dynamic character of his international policy. On the external level, one could also notice that Social-Democrats and Socialists were hardly united around a common platform. Willy Brandt's SPD was having difficulties in maintaining a delicate balance between the changes involved by *Ostpolitik* and the suspicions nurtured by the Americans and other Western allies in what concerned the limits of Brandt's concessions to the East. He was not interested in raising anymore suspicion among his allies. The British Labor Party was rather skeptical of the entire issue of European security and only reluctantly joined it, especially after Britain's accession in the European Economic Community. There were also countries where the left had great tradition in governing and was therefore non-reactive to projects directed against governments, as was the case with the Nordic countries. Also, there were countries where the left was strong, but the governmental domination of rightist parties was long and powerful. France was a good example to this. To conclude, the European left was too fragmented and Ceaușescu's project too ambitious to succeed. Nevertheless, PCR's ambitions were not in vane, in the sense that they did contribute to international détente, if only by casting one more stone against the bipolar vision of world affairs.

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Short bio

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