

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMANIA AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES DURING THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME (1965-1980)

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Abstract: *Present article is trying to analyses the transformations of the African society, the interactions in the globalized world, and the mutations of the political structures. The appeal to the history is used for a better understanding of the contemporary evolutions of the African continent and society, in a world where interdependent relations have a greater value then national trends or state politics.*

Keywords: Sub-Saharan Africa, History of Africa, Communism, International Relations, Development.

International framework

The Communist International, abbreviated as Comintern, also known as the Third International (1919–1943) did not paid too much focus on African countries at the beginning. The only communist party was the one founded in 1921 in South Africa¹. For the most part, the mission of infiltrating colonial mandates and implementing marxists theories was entrusted to communist parties from Western Europe. After the Second World War, the Soviet policy towards African continent experienced two major periods. The first one began in 1945 until in 1955 when Soviet Union interests in his struggle for colonies was a marginal one. Ideologically speaking, the soviets utilised the concept of “colonialism” to reprobate the Western Europe in front of the United Nations, trying in this manner to divide the allies, pretend a brutal domination of Europeans in their African colonies. However, the communism will triumph over Africa when capitalism will be felt in Europe².

The second phase of Soviet Union activity in Africa started along with Bandung Conference in 1955. Moscow became aware of the need to coordinate their policy according with anti-colonial movements, if it wants to extend its influence in Asia and Africa. In this second phase the soviets permuted their focus from organising Africa

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¹ I. Greig, *The communist challenge to Africa: an analysis of contemporary Soviet, Chinese and Cuban policies*, Southern African Freedom Foundation, Sandton, 1977.

² G. R. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa. The diplomacy of interventions and disengagement*, Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, 1990, p. 145-167.

through communist parties of Western Europe to creating local organisations by themselves.

The decade 1950-1960 was featured by a strong fight for emancipation and freedom, considering that only three states from African continent were independent (Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa). The ideological perspective that Soviet Union tried to dictate on this geopolitical space had no roots³.

From strategic consolidation point of view, the main instrument of the Soviets, beside the ideological one, was the economic sector. They started to offer major loans for the African states, with extremely advantageous conditions. These will be paid back during the independence movements, when the Soviets encouraged and upheld several local leaders, preferably from the army because are more stable and predictable⁴, and the Soviet interference in domestic issues generated in some states as Congo, Guinea and Kenya real diplomatic disasters. The techniques used in extending the Soviet influence in Africa were similarly to those from everywhere: local peace movements, cultural front and youth unions, worker's associations, scholarship programs in Soviet Union or in another socialist country in Europe, students exchanges, technical and diplomatic missions. In this period the African weapon markets had been opened not only for the Soviet Union, but also for all communist countries interested in this dimension, given the statistical numbers. The military exchanges with personnel coming from Europe raised from 400 persons in 1960 to 5.300 in 1980 in sub-Saharan Africa⁵.

Romania's political involvement in African Countries

The installation of a Soviet-styled communist regime brought Socialist Republic Romania in economic evolution that faithfully followed the Stalinist pattern. Adopting a centrally planned economy under the firm control of Romanian Communist Party (RCP), the country followed the large-scale economic development like the other communist regimes of Eastern European, but with a peculiar preoccupation with economic independence.

In 1965 Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power and shortly after that RCP leaders reassessed the next development strategy. They concluded that Romania needs a rapid rate of economic growth generated by an efficient and modernized industry. Economic growth during the first twenty-seven years of communist rule was impressive. Industrial output increased an average 12.9 percent per year between 1950 and 1977, owing to an exceptionally high level of capital accumulation and investment, which grew an average 13 percent annually during this period. But with

³ K. Jowitt, *New world disorder. The Leninist extinction*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993, p. 67-89.

⁴ C. Stephens, *Soviet Union and Black Africa*, London, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976, p. 221-229.

⁵ W. Omitoogun, *Military expenditure data in Africa* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 14.

the concentration of resources in heavy (the so-called Group A) industries, other sectors suffered, particularly agriculture, services, and the consumer-goods (Group B) industries⁶.

Simultaneous, since 1965 Romania has rapidly augmented his ties with Black Africa. This was reinforced by Nicolae Ceaușescu visit in 1972 to eight African countries and he embarked on long African tours almost every year thereafter. Ceausescu travelled to nearly every African country except South Africa on several occasions. These annual tours gave him the opportunity to appear as an international statesman, and they resulted in general trade agreements.

Some of the industrial goods coming from Romania are to a large degree unmarketable on Western markets. Therefore Romania's interest in African continent will be initially mostly economic, given the fact that these countries has large, relatively non obstructed supplies of natural resources that Romania wants in exchange for its industrial goods. Also, the world oil crisis increased Romania's interest in Africa as a new source of fuel supply.

The trade exchanges between Romania and African countries intensified – 502.100.000 lei in 1970 to 2.650,1 million lei in 1977, according to Statistic Yearbook of Socialist Republic Romania from 1978. If in 1970 the Romanian-African inter-trades summarised about 2.2% of Romania's total foreign trade, in the next seven years the percentage will be about 3.8% (Table 1)⁷.

Ceaușescu advocated that people “under colonialist domination” have a legitimate right to make an all-out effort (including the military one) to achieve their desired independence, and Romania won't spare no efforts to support the national liberation movements. One of the main outcomes of visiting African countries was the establishment of a new State Commission for the Co-ordination of Economic and Techno-scientific Cooperation with African Countries⁸.

Table 1. Romania's trade with Africa (rounded to the closest unit, in million lei)

Category/ Year	1965	1970	1973	1977
Romanian exports	158	332	562	1781
Romanian imports	129	168	428	869
Trade with Africa	267	500	990	2650
Romania's trade surplus	29	164	134	912
Africa's share of Romania's total foreign trade (in per cent)	2.2	2.1	2.8	3.3

Equally, Ceausescu's tour as a whole is designated by two dimensions. Firstly, it reasserts Ceausescu objective to be a conspicuous and distinguishable personality in the international arena. The main interests are focused to the developing countries

⁶ G. Trond, *Modernisation in Romania since World War II*, London, Praeger Publishers, 1975, p. 89-101.

⁷ „Statistic Yearbook of Socialist Republic Romania”, 1970-1980.

⁸ National Newspaper „Scinteia”, 19 April 1972; Romanian Situation Report/15.

with which Ceausescu identifies himself. Whatever the manner of structuring his speeches and his own observations considering the governments or the national movements from these countries, the Romanian leader never missed a chance to underline his posture on the international affairs as a friend and well-wisher of the African continent⁹.

Secondly, most of the time during his visits Ceausescu stipulated the strategic position held by his country as the main reason for that Romania cannot be impassable and dismissive to developments in Middle Eastern affairs.

When his implication goes beyond that statement? Historically speaking, Ceausescu was one of the few leaders from Soviet bloc that has kept terms with Israel and the Arab world. Even if Ceausescu did not specifically announced Romania's support for a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, he always suggested that an eventual agreement needs to include both sides demands and wishes.

In June 1967 took place the Six-Day War between Israel and the neighbouring states of Egypt (known at the time as the United Arab Republic), Jordan, and Syria and the outcome was decisive Israeli victory. Israel took effective control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. In one of Ceausescu's visits to the Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, according to the final statement of this meeting, they have approached some international items, the majority of them about the conflict between Arabs and Palestinians and how a lasting peace can occur, based on Israel's withdrawal from all occupied territories during the Six-Day War. Also, Ceausescu framed a completion of the Palestinian problem based on self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Ceausescu has not followed the direction signalled by the Warsaw Pact allies in denouncing the Sadat-Begin agreement which was signed by Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, witnessed by United States President Jimmy Carter. The treaty represented the mutual recognition of each state by the other, the cessation of the state of war that had existed since the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the complete withdrawal by Israel of its armed forces and civilians from the Sinai Peninsula. The agreement notably made Egypt the first Arab state to officially recognize Israel¹⁰.

As part of the agreement, the United States began sending economic and military aid to Egypt. From the Camp David peace accords in 1978 until 2000, the United States has subsidized Egypt's armed forces with over \$38 billion worth of aid. Egypt received about \$1.3 billion annually. It is obvious the opposition and the disagreement of the Soviet bloc regarding this treaty. Even so, Ceausescu kept his

⁹ A. U. Gabanyi, *The Ceausescu Cult: Propaganda and power policy in communist Romania*, Bucharest, Romanian Cultural Foundation, p. 80-134.

¹⁰ H. L. Wagner, *Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin: Negotiating Peace in the Middle East*, Infobase Publishing, New York, 2007, p. 84-97.

own opinion in this matter and he did not follow the Moscow's directives¹¹. Furthermore, he visited Sadat at a difficult time when he becomes deeply unpopular across the Arab World, even if in 1978 he won a Peace Nobel Prize. But he always had on this topic a neutral public strategy because he was neither endorsing, nor opposing this document. He just signed with Sadat an official document which stipulates that their perspectives on different international aspects were "identical or close". So, Ceausescu had a supportive attitude towards Egypt, but without disconnecting with the other Arab states.

Egypt is just one of the African countries where Romania, represented by his leader, had not just a supportive attitude, but also deep political implications. Mozambique is another example. During his meeting with President Machel, Ceausescu introduces again the Romanian support for the Mozambique's national independence struggle and expresses his concern about the increase in armed conflicts among African states which act as an impulse to reactionary forces. Also, keeping his neutrality, in Angola, Ceausescu condemned the South African rule in South-West Africa (Namibia) because it does not reflect the people's will and will bring no peace to this territory, and in Zambia he reprobated and denounced the Rhodesian internal agreement and demanded to the international actors not to recognize the election.

The dynamics of trade exchanges between Socialist Republic Romania and countries from the African continent

The political topics that marked Ceausescu's meetings with African leaders during 1965-1980 come along with the economic strategies. With Egypt the Romanian delegation engaged also a "framework for economic cooperation" that includes taxation and the exchanges of crude oil and refined products. Because in Romania oil processing capacity goes far beyond the national oil production, this economic framework provides for Romania oil exploration in Egypt and joint ventures in petrochemical projects (also in tractor production)¹².

In Sudan, during two meetings in Khartoum and Bucharest was also signed a friendship and cooperation treaty, followed by an agreement on the development of economic and industrial cooperation, a program on trade exchanges and a protocol to avoid double taxation. In Sudan the supreme leader since May 1969 was Colonel Ja'afar Muhammad Numayri, through a coup d'état, full of socialism ideological enthusiasm, Numayri was determined to transform the country's economy. The regime took immediate radical measures in order to control economy. All the private enterprises were nationalized with little to no compensations given to the owners. Regrettably, the plan faltered in creating a strategy and in execution. Those

¹¹ H. Hurwitz., Y. Medad, *Peace in the Making: The Menachem Begin-Anwar Sadat Correspondence*, Jerusalem, Gefen Publishing House, 2011, p. 289.

¹² Romanian National Archives (infra: RNA), Fund - Central Committee of Romanian Communist Party (CC of PCR), Section Chancellor, folder 101/19 77- Prototcol no. 1.

charged with running those newly generated corporations were inept and turned the companies to running at no profits.

When he had to choose between the Capitalists West and Communists East, Numayri's regime turned to the East. The majority of Sudan's diplomatic relations with Eastern countries materialised in millions of dollars in soft loans. Also, Numayri decided that his country can allow only imports from the Communist Eastern countries. Romania was one of these countries and beside the agreements mentioned before, the engagement between Ceausescu and Numayri generated an accord on mutual promotion and guaranteeing of investments, an agreement for mutual accreditation of educational certificates and scientific titles, cooperation agreements on tourism and civil air transport and a consular convention.

Burundi is another African state to which Socialist Republic of Romania paid a special attention and the first initiative took place in 1970 when Ceausescu met the President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, finalised with a trade agreement and an economic technical cooperation accord. Romania sent to Burundi trucks, buses, special vehicles, textiles etc. They have also two joint companies called Somiburom and Agriburom. The settlement was not different from the other countries and he embeds the famous friendship treaty and the joint communiqué that stipulates Romanian presence in the exploitation of associated metals (mostly nickel deposits) in Burundi and technical assistance in geological research and mining.

The first country visited by Ceausescu in his African tour was Libya and his meeting with Mu'ammār Qadhafī tackled with an economic dimension between the two countries and context of the Middle East. It was followed the same pattern of cooperation actions in order to expand commercial exchanges, with the focus this time on building industrial and farm units and in civil construction (also crude oil for Romania). Also, Bennett Kovrig said that Qadhafī signalised his criticism towards Egypt for signing a Sadat-Begin treaty with Israel and his support for imposing sanctions against Egypt. With his renowned neutrality and conciliatory spirit, Ceausescu underlined the need to "consolidate the unity of all Arab countries"¹³. In 1978 in Libya were 3000 Romanian experts, building houses, official buildings, roads, houses etc., in exchange for oil, without being mentioned other details quantities or costs. Also, the statistic shows that since his last visit in Libya, the amount of trade between Romania and Lybia increased from 532.200.000 lei in 1974 to 2.000 million lei in 1978 (about 55% per cent of Romania's total African trade)¹⁴.

The uranium and manganese resources were obtained from Gabonese Republic. Firstly, Ceausescu visited manganese and uranium mines, and the protocol will be signed during President Bongo visit to Romania in 1975 that stipulates Romanian participation in the Somifer iron mines enterprise. Begin with 1986, Romania will

¹³ B. Kovrig, *Of walls and bridges: the United States and Eastern Europe*, New York, New York University Press, 1991, p. 119-186.

¹⁴ RNA, Fund CC of PCR, Chancellery Department, folder 58/1977, 1st volume.

have a each year delivery of 150 tons, more with 100 tons than the previous¹⁵. As the nuclear plans are demanding more and more uranium resources, Romania needs to import major quantities. Most of the cooperation actions focused on building a Trans-Gabonese railway, Romania being charged with a distinctive sector of it¹⁶. Also, Ceausescu is interested of oil industry from Gabon.

Angolan President Agostinho Neto considered properly to sign a cooperation agreement between their parties, Romanian Communist Party and Angolan Labour Party¹⁷. The volume of Romanian-Angolan trade was still very low, 27.900.000 lei in 1977. With Mozambique the economic cooperation is more developed based on a number of understandings and agreements, mostly regarding civil air transport, technical cooperation for the cultivation of cotton, gas industries. These relations were extended even to cooperation programs between the Romanian Union of Communist Youth and the Pioneer's Organization and the Youth Organization of Mozambique and an understanding cooperation between the Romanian Radio and television and Radio Mozambique.

Conclusions

Romania had a multidisciplinary and multifaceted economic and political approach in Africa, for example, Romanian media. It propagates the involvement in supporting liberation movements (the fact that Romania was the first state that recognized Guinea-Bissau's independence). Also, in the Angolan civil war, Romania kept relations on good-terms with all Angolan liberation movements. Ceausescu affirmed confidently the need to withdrawal the South African troops from Angola and for cessation of all foreign intervention. The media from Romania never published any information about foreign troops supporting any of these liberation movements. A relevant example is the visit paid by the Angolan Prime Minister Do Nascimento in 1978 to Romania when he manifests the Angolan people's gratitude for the Romanian support in fighting for their independence, but no official information about this aid is available.

Another main feature of Ceausescu's involvement in Africa is his total disapproval for apartheid system, considered as the most brutal violation of "fundamental human rights". In 1980 Romania develops diplomatic relations with 47 African countries. Who is not on the list? Basically, those with apartheid system like Rhodesia and South Africa and two new arrived small states: Malawi and Swaziland. Ceausescu considers that Romania's accession to the "Group of 77" and the

¹⁵ *Official Friendship Visit of President Nicolae Ceausescu in Arab Jamahiria Lybia*, 7-9 April 1970, Bucharest, Politic Publishing House, 1979.

¹⁶ RNA, Fund CC of PCR, folder 86/1977, Protocol 23: Railway Construction.

¹⁷ C. Botoran, G. Unc, *Tradiții de solidaritate ale mișcării muncitorești și democratice din România cu lupta de emancipare națională și socială a popoarelor din Asia, Africa și America Latină*, București, Edit. Politică, 1977.

nonaligned movement does not contradict its obligations as a member of the Warsaw Pact because solidarity among the developing countries will strengthen the national independence and sovereignty of each state.

The various official visits paid by Romanian delegations, directed by the leader Nicolae Ceausescu, to African, Asian and Latin American states were conducted by some objectives. Firstly, to obtain raw and other materials for Romania's rapidly expanding industry, according to the economic development plans that have fixed high targets. Romania's natural and domestic resources are insufficient for this ambitious goals, so that Ceausescu seeks in African countries a form to supply these requests.

Secondly, Western economies were less and less interested in Romanian industrial products, most of them not based on quality materials and having a mass production. Romania consider itself in 1980 a developing country. In the 1972-1974 it reestablishes its position in the communist world with the main aim of building a multilateral developed socialist country, given the plan of becoming a medium-developed country by 1985. So that the African markets seem to be a viable solution for this industrial products, rejected by the European markets.

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