

Dr. ALESANDRU DUȚU

THE REVOLUTION OF DECEMBER 1989

Chronology

Dr. ALESANDRU DUȚU

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Foreword

The breaking down of communist/socialist-communist¹ totalitarian regimes gave 1989 an exceptional importance in the history of Europe, making the passage from dictatorship to democracy possible, as well as the finalisation/beginning of ample reform processes in the political, economic, social domains. At the same time, it contributed to – within the new international context which led to the falling of the Berlin Wall (November 9th, 1989) – the end of the “cold war” and created the favourable conditions for the unification of the continent. In a relatively short period of time (1988 – 1989), the revolutions in Eastern Europe swept away the communist regimes which had taken power by use of force with the same rapidity, in the states under the influence/occupation of the Soviet Union, states which had rejected the communist experience² in the inter-war period, despite the attempts of Moscow to impose it in various places together with the activity of the III Komintern between 1919 – 1943.

Not before 27 years had passed, since communism was imposed in Russia, that the Red Army could cross, in March 1944, the eastern limits of the Soviet Union, to penetrate the territory on the western part of the Dniester, to Romania, then to Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Germany; even more importantly that was the moment when Winston Churchill signed with J.V. Stalin the terrible Percentages Agreement of 9 October 1944 through which Central, Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe were divided in spheres of influence, depending on the interests of the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom; only then could the Soviet Union impose not only its influence/ domination/

¹ Prof. dr. Ioan Scurtu considers that “*in the states of Central and South-Eastern Europe where the power belonged to communist parties*” did not exist a communist regime, but a “*socialist-totalitarian one*” (Romanian Revolution of December 1989 in the International Context, Editura Enciclopedică, Editura Institutului Revoluției Române din Decembrie 1989, București, 2006, p. 21-34). As the names and the appreciation that a party or a regime is communist are consecrated in historiography we will use them as such in the present work.

² Communism was established (at least theoretically) for the first time, in October 1917 in Russia, which became in 1922 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In 1924 the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party decided, as well, that Mongolia was to follow the way of non-capitalist development.

occupation in the respective areas, but also the communist regimes in the states where the Soviet military had set foot or not (Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Hungary as well as the future Eastern Germany) with the exception of Austria. This way, J.V. Stalin's words of April 1945 proved true as he was supposed to have said "*whoever occupies a territory imposes his own social system. You impose your own social system to the limit to which your army advances*"³ In Asia, except for Mongolia, countries such as the People's Republic of China, the Democratic Republic of Korea and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were to become communist, and so would do, sometime later, Cuba (1959) on the American continent.

If in 1939, when World War II broke out there were 170,000,000 people living in a communist regime (8-9% of the population on Earth); in 1949, when the communists had won political power in all the states under the domination of Moscow, there were 845,000,000 citizens of the planet living in a communist regime (almost 33%).⁴ The communist regimes in Europe, most of the times, were the result of force and terror.⁵ Initially, until 1948, for the new satellite states, future communist states, the term used was "people's democracy", then the term of "proletariat dictatorship"⁶ was imposed. As regards the number of party members, some communist parties in European states (Romania, Hungary, a.s.o.) were, at the end of the war, extremely weak and, at the same time, compromised by the anti-state activity which they developed during the inter-war period and during the war. In other states (Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia) the respective parties had won the support of the population by their anti-German resistance movement, thus taking power before the end of the war.⁷

Using different methods and taking advantage of the post-war situation (political, military, economic pressure on the part of the Soviet Union, the so-called role of liberator played by the Red

³ Ioan Chiper, Florin Constantiniu, Adrian Pop, *Sovietizarea României. Percepții anglo-americane [Romania's Sovietization. Anglo-American Perceptions] (1944-1947)*, Editura Iconica, București, 1993, p. 8.

⁴ Jean François Soulet, *Istoria comparată a statelor comuniste din 1945 până în zilele noastre, [Histoire comparée des États communistes de 1945 à nos jours, in original] Editura Polirom, Iași, p. 11.*

⁵ Joseph Rothschild appreciates that the world geomilitary security of the Soviet Union "could be guaranteed very easily through other means" (*Coming back to diversity. The political history of central and Eastern Europe after the WW II*, Editura Antet, Oradea, 1997.115)

⁶ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria contemporană a României [Romania's Contemporary History] (1918-2005)*, Editura Fundației România de Măine, București, 2005, p. 115.

⁷ *Marea conflagrație a secolului XX. Al doilea război mondial, [The Big Conflagration of the 20th Century]* Editura Politică, București, 1971, p. 147-162, 216-232, 332-354.

Army, the poverty which most citizens in the states under Soviet influence experienced, opportunism on the part of some non-communist elements, etc.) resulted in the increase in number of party members in the first years after the war, reaching in 1947, 1,300,000 in Czechoslovakia, 400,000 in Yugoslavia, 800,000 in Poland, 710,000 in Romania, 750,000 in Bulgaria.⁸ All this, in spite of the territorial pillage made by the Soviet Union (the case of Poland in 1939 – even if in 1945 they imposed the extension of the Polish-German border up to the Oder-Neisse line – and that of Romania in 1940) as well as the atrocities committed by the Soviets in some states (in the case of Poland in 1939 and in the case of Romania in Bessarabia and north Bukovina – in 1940 and 1941).

As the situation differed in each country, the local communists got to power through different means, being offered or overtaking the main ministries in the state apparatus which they used to eliminate the democratic bourgeois parties in the opposition or even part of an alliance (Socialist, Social-Democrat). In some countries, where the communists benefitted from a “respectable and indigenous”⁹ image, the prime-ministers were communists from the very beginning (Klement Gottwald in Czechoslovakia), while in other countries – only followers (Dr. Petru Groza in Romania). In every situation, the communists balanced the lack of popularity with the importance of the positions they held in ministries (Interior, Justice, Defence, etc.) as well as with the support they had from the Soviet Union.

During the period of 1944 – 1948, some coalition governments included personalities who had activated in exile, outside the Soviet Union (in Poland “the Londoner” St. Mikolajczyk was offered the position of prime-minister)¹⁰. In other cases, the coalition governments of 1945-1948 showed “moderation” towards their “bourgeois” partners (Czechoslovakia) or they acted in a tough way (Romania) aiming at the destruction of the respective political structures and even the physical destruction of their adversaries. At the same time, in their race to power, the communists controlled and managed, in almost every state, the mass organisations, the trade unions, etc.

In some countries, the communist parties consolidated their position following parliamentary elections which they controlled according to their desire - with some exceptions (Hungary, on 4th of November 1946, not to provoke the Anglo-Americans in the hope of

⁸ Teodora Stănescu-Stanciu, *Structuri politice în Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est [Political structures in Central and Southern-Eastern Europe] (19182000)*, Editura Fundației România de Măine, București, 2005, p. 80.

⁹ Joseph Rothschild, *op. cit.* p. 134.

¹⁰ On October 21st 1947 he ran away to the West.

getting some advantage at the Peace Conference of 1946) using terror, putting under arrest their opponents and the latter's supporters and falsifying the elections they had won, as a general rule, within a forced coalition (the National Front of Yugoslavia, the Fatherland Front in Bulgaria, the Democratic Front in Albania, the National Front in Czechoslovakia, the People's Democratic Front in Romania, the Democratic Bloc in Poland) after which they abandoned their allies. In Hungary, in November 1945, due to a "moderate" policy towards their political opponents, the communists got only 17% of the votes (to the dissatisfaction of Moscow) and in August 1947 only 22.3%. Only in May 1949, in a different historical context and when the vote was grouped on a single governmental list, did they get 95.6% of the voting polls. After 1948, with the aggravation of cold war, Moscow imposed communist/socialist-totalitarian governments in all countries, giving up the "alliance" policy used in the first post-war years. In Czechoslovakia, where the pluri-party system continued to function, including in the governing powers, advantage was taken of the resignation of 12 non-communist ministers (12th of February 1948), masses were brought out in the streets and a pre-revolutionary situation was created (similarly to that in Romania, in February 1945). In a few days, on the 25th of February, there was a communist government in power led by Klement Gottwald.

While political parties were getting rid of the "*exploiting classes*", the communists who were already in power imposed - in the majority of the states in the system - the process of "*unification*" on a Marxist basis, together with the social-democrat/socialist parties, which led to the establishment of: *the Socialist Unity Party of Germany* (21-22nd of April 1946/in the Soviet occupation area), *the Hungarian Working People's Party* (12-14th of January 1948), *The Romanian People's Party* (21-23rd of February 1948), *the Polish United Workers' Party* (15-21st of December 1948). In other states they changed their names, resulting in *the Albanian Party of Labour* – from *the Communist Party in Albania* (8-22nd of November 1948), *the Bulgarian Communist Party* – from *the Workers' Party* (18 – 25th of December 1949), *the Communists' Union of Yugoslavia* – from *the Communist Party of Yugoslavia* (November 1952).

During the same period, in conformity with the general scenario of getting the political power in the state, the majority of European countries (and not only) in the Soviet area of influence proclaimed themselves as a *People's Republic*: Yugoslavia – on 29th of November 1945, Albania – on 11th of January 1946, Bulgaria – on 15th of September 1946, Romania – on 30th of December 1947;

Hungary – on 18th of August 1949. Some called themselves a *Democratic-People's Republic* (in the case of Czechoslovakia on the 9th of May 1948) or *Democrat* (in the case of the eastern part of Germany, on 7 October 1949). Later on, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania took the name of *Socialist Republic*. At the same time or later on, *Constitutions* were adopted after the Soviet model: on 31st of January 1946 in Yugoslavia, on 11th of March 1946 in Albania, on 4th of December 1946 in Bulgaria, on 9th of May 1948 in Czechoslovakia, on 7th of October 1949 in East Germany, on 13th of April 1948 in Romania, on 18th of August 1949 in Hungary.

Even after getting the power in the state, in many situations there were tensions both in the communist parties as well as between the leading centre in Moscow and some of the smaller parties (Yugoslavia) or even bigger ones (China). Often, the leaders in power managed to eliminate their real opponents or imagined ones, which resulted in arrests, trials and long-term imprisonment, sometimes even death.

In *Czechoslovakia*, after he managed the “*purification*” (supported by Klement Gottwald), Rudolf Slansky was himself a victim of a resounding process, between the 12th and 27th of November 1952, when he was tried, together with other 13 communists, as “*Trotsky-Sion-Nationalist-Bourgeois spies and saboteurs, enemies of the Czech nation, of its popular-democratic order and of socialism*”.¹¹

In *Hungary*, the trial of the former Minister of the Interior Laslo Rajk (March 1946 – August 1948) who, after fighting to get the Hungarian communists to power in a more rapid way than the one desired by J.V.Stalin, was arrested, in June 1949, tried and killed by hanging in September of the same year.

In *Romania*, after the communist scholar Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was politically eliminated in 1948 (and physically in 1954) there came the turn of the Ana Pauker – Vasile Luca group (both “*Moscovite*”) and that of Teoharie Georgescu.

In *Bulgaria*, the “*nationalist*” Traicho Kostov was eliminated (March 26th 1949) who, after being arrested (on June 25th) was tried, sentenced to death and hanged on December 16th 1949.

In *Albania*, Koci Xoxe was tried for treason and sentenced to death.

In *Poland*, Wladislav Gomulka was dismissed from his position of secretary general, excluded from the Central Committee (on the 21st of January 1949) and arrested on the 2nd of January 1951. The trials continued after the death of J.V. Stalin (in

¹¹ Joseph Rothschild, *op. cit.* p. 198.

Czechoslovakia in May 1953 and April 1954, in Romania in 1954). Even if the majority of European communist parties accepted from the very beginning the supremacy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the principles of marxist-leninist ideology, there were cases and situations where some leaders tried to find and adopt “*their own ways*” to socialism (J.B. Tito in Yugoslavia,¹² Wladislaw Gomulka in Poland). “*Being under permanent supervision*” they would be accused of “*right wing and nationalist deviations*”, even if, in Poland, for example, J.V. Stalin did not brutally intervene in imposing the Soviet model.¹³ Some of the communist leaders who angered in a way or another the “*leader*” in Kremlin were to be “*excommunicated*” (J.B. Tito), others were dismissed as leaders of the respective parties and arrested, although they did not contest the essence of the communist system (Wladislav Gomulka¹⁴), and even executed (Traicho Kostov). The only one who was kept in power was J.B. Tito in Yugoslavia.

Where it was considered that the leaders and communist parties had overcome “*the limits*” generally accepted by the leading centre in the building of socialism, Moscow intervened brutally, used armed forces (In *Hungary* in 1956 and *Czechoslovakia* in 1968) using in the Czech case armed forces of the Warsaw Treaty (with the exception of the Romanian ones). However, there were cases when, by using the favourable international context, some communist leaders promoted, without putting in danger the appartenance to the communist system, a domestic policy of liberalisation and separation from the Moscow policy on a foreign level (Nicolae Ceaușescu temporarily) or even domestic liberalisation (Janos Kadar). They all felt the danger of the application of the “*Brejnev doctrine*”, adopted after the events in *Czechoslovakia* in 1968 which included a rapid armed intervention, to reestablish the “*values*” of socialism, where they had been threatened. A moment of change in the destiny of the Soviet Union, and of communism¹⁵ in general, had to be produced in the spring of 1985 when, as J.Fr. Revel showed, following the elections of M.S. Gorbachev as Secretary General of the CPSU and the changes proposed within the programme known as “*perestroika*” (reconstruction), “*glasnosti*” (transparency) and

¹² In 1953 he abandoned collectivization and adopted (on January 13th) a different Constitution from the one of 31 January 1946, which he had copied almost completely from the Soviet one.

¹³ This thing allowed for a “softer” attitude towards Church, the peasantry, the conservation of traditions and national emblems, etc.

¹⁴ The Polish communist leader was released in December 1954 without being politically rehabilitated.

¹⁵ Teodora Stănescu-Stanciu, *op. cit.* p. 131.

“*uskorenie*” (acceleration), “*the wave of democratisation started to shake the whole communist universe*”. Slowly, but surely, the change made room, even if the new Soviet leader wanted to get the totalitarian socialism out of the crisis¹⁶. Especially so, after the replacement of the “*Brezhnev doctrine*” with the “*Sinatra doctrine*” which involved, for the first time, the non-intervention of the Soviet Union in the domestic affairs of the states in its area of influence and the implication of the western democratic states in sweeping away the “*empire of evil*” and its consequences.

In this favourable international context, the majority of states in eastern Europe were going to get rid of communism – following ample reforming processes (Hungary and Poland), through a “*velvet revolution*” (Czechoslovakia), through a very troubling revolution (Romania) or through the peaceful stepping down of the communist leaders (state coups) in Bulgaria and East Germany – as rapid as the ones imposed in 1917 in the Soviet Union and between 1945 – 1948 in the states under Soviet influence.

The start was made in *Poland*, where, for the first time, at the beginning of the 80’s, a communist government had to negotiate with one trade union (“*Solidarity*”) which was not controlled by the communists or by the representatives of the power. And still there, over a decade, General Wojciech Jaruzelski – the one who, in December 1981, had proclaimed the Martial Law and had outlawed “*Solidarity*” – had to accept (on August 26th, 1988) “*a round table*” with the opposition and to appoint a reformed communist (Mieczyslaw Rakowski) as head of government, an adept of the Gorbachev politics. One year later, following the elections won by the opposition, the same Wojciech Jaruzelski appoints Tadeus Mazowiecki, adviser of “*Solidarity*” as head of government, on August 19th 1989, a government with a majority of the opposition and a minority of communists. This strange situation was to be accepted by M.S. Gorbachev.

The reformers had success in *Hungary* as well, where Kadar Janos, leader of the *Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party* in 1956, had adopted a more liberal policy than in other states in the system. Even so, the Hungarian communist leader was to be replaced on the 22nd of May 1988. Moreover, in the Extraordinary Congress between October 6-9th, 1989, the new leadership of HSWP needed to accept and to declare that the “*historic role*” of the party had ended and to decide a change of name into the Hungarian Socialist Party. In the new international context and benefiting from the encouragement and support of western states, especially the United

¹⁶ Ioan Scurtu, *1989 - an revoluționar în istoria Europei* [1989-Revolutionary Year in the History of Europe], „Clio 1989”, București, 2005, p. 15-64.