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**Romania and the Crisis of the Polish Communist Regime –
1980-1989**

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Abstract

After the imposition of the Iron Curtain and the entry of the two countries into Moscow's sphere of influence, the Romanian-Polish relations have never had a privileged status, but there were of a formal status. They were limited to an exchange of visits between the leaders of the two countries, and after the "April Declaration" of 1964 they became increasingly cold. As the depositary of the Warsaw Treaty and with strong ties to the Soviet Union, the Polish side viewed Bucharest's discordant stance within the socialist bloc with distrust. During the détente, both countries turned their foreign policy towards the West and the Western international organizations in order to obtain credits to improve their industrial production. Initially, this policy was a real success for both countries, but its limitations were immediately felt with the outbreak of the first energy crisis in 1973¹. In the case of Romania, the effects were not very strong, as its dependence on Western credits was not so big. In Poland's case, the situation was different, as its need for funds was growing alarmingly. The coup d'état in Iran and the 1979 oil crisis also affected Romania this time, which was dependent of cheap Iranian oil to maintain its rate of forced industrialisation. In this entire equation, the hardest hit was Poland, whose economy was brought to the brink of collapse, with only Western loans keeping it on track.

The energy crisis of the 1970s was accompanied by strong inflation, which led to the stagnation of the early 1980s and the sovereign debt crisis². The depreciation of the dollar meant that the loans of the socialist countries almost doubled in a short period of time, without any possibility of solving them in sight. At the same time, the economic problems have overlapped with a political and a social crisis. Detente, which began after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, ended with the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when the US and its Western partners launched a new arms race. In addition, disarmament talks - Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) - have been suspended and the Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe, after the colossal success of Helsinki, have stalled. So the 1980s began with several types of crises,

¹ For the effects of the 1970s energy crisis on the Western world, see Robert D. Lifest, „A New Understanding of the American Energy Crisis of the 1970s”, in *Historical Social Research*, vol. 39, no. 4 (150), 2014, pp. 22-42.

² For the causes and effects of stagflation in the 1980s and the sovereign debt crisis, see Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations. Economic Growth, Stagflation and Social Rigidities*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1982, pp. 181-239.

which followed one another at a breakneck pace, often overlapping, making it difficult to pinpoint their impact on the communist world.

All these shortcomings, present in the international economic and political environment, made their effects felt most severely in the Polish People's Republic (PPR). Faced with a cycle of crises – Poznań-1956, Warsaw-1968, Gdańsk-1970, Radom and Ursus-1976 – the problems inherent in the Marxist-Leninist communist regime produced a strong social explosion in Poland in August 1980. Among all the communist countries, the greatest ideological contradictions existed in the PPR. Here, collectivization was abandoned after Gomułka came to power in 1956, and the Catholic Church gained a strong autonomy from the communist authorities. Moreover, a small private sector was allowed in the economy, and the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) ruled alongside the Democratic Party (DP) and the United Peasants' Party (UPP). Even though the two parties were mere satellites of the PUWP, along with other factors they prevented the formation of a clear party-state identity and allowed the formation of an opposition, given that the crisis put the PUWP in a hopeless situation.

The central topic of this paper is the analysis of the Polish crisis and its impact on the regime in Bucharest. Given that it was both the product of a severe global crisis and the Marxist-Leninist communist system, the Romanian leadership's response to this situation provides a lens into Nicolae Ceausescu's perception of the 1980s crisis. Moreover, given the fact that Poland was in the "heart of Europe"³, on the border between a world open to globalization on the one hand, and a world dominated by political dogmatism on the other, the emergence of the "Solidarity" Trade Union in Poland was to represent the struggle between the two worlds, or more precisely, the struggle between two different systems. The last scene of communism was to be played out on the Polish stage, because, as George Bush pointed out during his visit to Warsaw in July 1989, if World War II broke out in Poland, it was also here that the Cold War and the division of the world would end. As a result, the importance of Nicolae Ceausescu's reaction to the Polish crisis results precisely from its nature; it was not merely a local crisis, but, in essence, represented the crisis of the entire socialist bloc, being a direct consequence of the global one. At the same time, the situation in Poland offers new insights into the development of the Romanian regime in the last communist decade. Therefore, the importance of Nicolae Ceaușescu's reaction to the Polish crisis results from the very nature of the crisis; it was not just a local crisis, but in essence, it represented

³ See Norman Davies: *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001.

the crisis of the entire socialist bloc, being a direct consequence of the global crisis. At the same time, the situation in Poland offers new insights into the development of the Romanian regime in the last communist decade. Since the most harmful measures were implemented during this period, such as full payment of foreign debt, food rationing, intensification of the cult of personality, increased repression, etc., we believe that the events in the PPR also contributed to this. Even if history, like other social disciplines, does not have the tools to quantify the impact of certain events, the identification of Nicolae Ceausescu's attitude towards the Polish crisis is an answer in this direction.

After all, the crisis in Poland in the 1980s was represented by the Free Trade Union "Solidarity" and its ideas, which polarized both the communist and the Western world. Dependent on Western credit, Poland could no longer be "saved" like Hungary in 1956, or Czechoslovakia in 1968, because Moscow could no longer afford the costs of such an intervention, and, in turn, it faced a strong economic recession. In addition, there was no unanimity among the socialist countries on the use of Warsaw Pact troops either, with Romania and Hungary opposing it, and those that supported it, such as the German Democratic Republic or the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, not assuming the subsequent costs of supporting the PPR. On the other hand, the emergence of the "Solidarity" Trade Union was seen as an opportunity for the new competition between East and West, which began after the Soviet troops entered in Afghanistan. For Washington, "Solidarity" became the lever through which it could exert pressure on Moscow, but also on the socialist bloc, using their dependence on credits, but also on human rights to get these countries out of the USSR's influence. In this situation, Poland became "God's Playground"⁴, more precisely, the ground for the struggle between communism and capitalism, between collective rights and individual rights, between a liberal and a socialist model. Ultimately, the crisis in the PPR can be described as a crisis of the system, seconded by a new competition between the two superpowers, whose shockwaves swept the whole world, the regime in Bucharest being no exception.

"Solidarity" was the last attempt to reform the communist system in the face of a hopeless crisis, and its success or failure would irreversibly influence the fate of the socialist bloc. Of course, all of this was unknown at the time, but the crisis of the system was obvious to all communist

⁴ See Norman Davies, *Istoria Poloniei. Terenul de joacă a lui Dumnezeu. Din 1795 până în prezent*, trad. de Carmen Barti, vol. II, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2014.

leaders and they had to identify immediate solutions. Any delay was equivalent to the loss of any chance of success. Stuck in their own ideology, which they served without questioning it, the leaders of the socialist countries did not understand exactly what “Solidarity” stood for, and so all their strategies were used to maintain power and the *status quo*. Thus, “Solidarity” was to be the chronicle of an announced failure of the one-party system, which began in August 1980 and ended with the June 1989 elections, when the PUWP was defeated and willing to share the power with the opposition.

Given the complexity of the international situation in the 1980s, but also the fact that the events in Poland were a consequence of it, we have divided the stage of research into three categories: papers and studies dealing with the response of the Romanian leadership to the Polish crisis, as well as the internal situation in the SRR; papers devoted to the Polish crisis and the “Solidarity” Movement; and papers dealing with the Cold War and the East-West relationship in this period. These categories are by no means independent of each other, but on the contrary, there is a close link between them, their role being to provide more methodological clarity when I will enumerate the main contributions.

Generally, in the Romanian historiography, the way in which the Romanian leadership perceived the crisis in Poland has been studied, for the most part, either in the beginning or in the end of the last communist decade, without understanding its evolution over all. Among the historians who have dealt with the early period of the crisis is Petre Oprea⁵, whose work is one of the most complex on the situation in the PPR from August 1980 to December 1981. Although the author provides many details on the evolution of the crisis in the 1970s, both in Romania and in the other socialist countries, the work uses only sources from the National Archives. Moreover, his analysis of the situation in the PPR stops in December 1981 once with the introduction of the martial law, despite the fact that the critical situation in the country was far from over. A small contribution is made by Constantin Morariu’s study⁶, but he uses only a telegram from the Archives of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs [AMFA], and the new line of research was not pursued further. An apparent exception is Ion Constantin’s work, *Poland in the Age of Solidarity*,

⁵ See Petre Oprea, *Criza poloneză de la începutul anilor '80. Reacția conducerii Partidului Comunist Român*, Ed. Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești, Ploiești, 2008. This paper is a continuation of the research done during his PhD thesis, which he defended in Iasi, in 2008: *România în Organizația Tratatului de la Varșovia (1955-1991)*, Ed. Militară, București, 2008.

⁶ Constantin Morariu, „România și criza poloneză din 1981”, in *Arhivele Totalitarismului (AT)*, nr. 3-4/2012, pp. 249-253.

1980-1989, which contains a chapter on Romanian-Polish relations in the 1980s, but in reality, like the other authors, he deals only with the beginning and end of the crisis⁷. The only real exception is the Polish historian Adam Burakowski's study of Jaruzelski's visit to Romania in June 1982⁸. Other works, which have dealt in a secondary way with how the Romanian leadership related to the situation in Poland, are those of Vasile Buga⁹ and, to a lesser extent, of Larry Watts¹⁰. Briefly, the Romanian-Polish relations have also been explored by historians who have dealt with Romania's evolution within the Warsaw Treaty, such as Mioara Anton¹¹, Dennis Deletant and Mihail E. Ionescu¹², Constantin Olteanu¹³, Alesandru Duțu and Constantin Antip¹⁴.

For the final period of the crisis, 1989, the situation is quite different. Nicolae Ceausescu's "Call" on the 19th of August to use any means to stop "Solidarity" from taking over the government sparked intense debates. Thus, the discussions were polarized between the opponents and the supporters of the idea of military intervention in Poland. The first category includes Larry Watts¹⁵, who claims that it was the result of disinformation created by Poland and Hungary, with the support of the Soviet Union, to discredit Nicolae Ceausescu on the international stage and remove the Romanian leader from power. Another researcher, who initially rejected this idea, was Vasile Buga¹⁶, but he gradually nuanced his ideas. He made further clarifications after he studied the

⁷ See Ion Constantin, *Polonia în epoca „Solidarității”, 1980-1989*, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului (INST), București, 2007, pp. 153-161. See by the same author another book: *Polonia în secolul totalitarismelor, 1918-1989*, INST, București, 2007.

⁸ Adam Burakowski, „Din istoria relațiilor româno-polone. Vizita lui Wojciech Jaruzelski în România, iunie 1982”, in *AT*, nr. 3-4/2015, pp. 145-156.

⁹ Vasile Buga, *Sub lupa Moscovei: politica externă a României, 1965-1989*, INST, București, 2015, pp. 111-133.

¹⁰ His works require careful reading, given the sometimes undeserved praise for the Ceausescu regime; see Larry Watts, *Cei dintâi vor fi cei din urmă. România și sfârșitul Războiului Rece*, Ed. RAO, București, 2013, pp. 275-305 și 651-8; *Oaia albă în turma neagră. Politica de securitate a României în perioada Războiului Rece*, Ed. RAO, București, 2018, pp. 366-402.

¹¹ Mioara Anton, *România și Tratatul de la Varșovia. Conferințele miniștrilor Afacerilor Externe și ale adjuncților lor. 1966-1991*, col. *Documente Diplomatice Române*, Institutul Diplomatic Român, studiu introductiv, notă asupra ediției și indice analitic de Mioara Anton, Ed. ALPHA MDN, București, 2009.

¹² Dennis Deletant, Mihail E. Ionescu (eds.), *Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1989, Selected Documents*, Ed. Politeia-SNSPA, București, 2004.

¹³ Constantin Olteanu is known to the public through the positions he held: Minister of the National Defence (1980-1985), Secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party [CC of RCP] (1988-1989), etc. He participated in numerous activities of all the political and military structures of the Warsaw Treaty, having the opportunity to know many details from inside, as recounted in his memoirs: *România, o voce distinctă în Tratatul de la Varșovia: memorii, 1980-1985. Dialog cu Dumitru Avram*, Ed. ALDO, București, 1999.

¹⁴ Alesandru Duțu, Constantin Olteanu, Antip Constantin, *România și Tratatul de la Varșovia. Istoric. Mărturii. Documente. Cronologie*, Ed. Pro Historia, București, 2005.

¹⁵ Larry Watts, *Cei dintâi vor fi cei din urmă*, pp. 651-8.

¹⁶ In 2012, Vasile Buga claimed that „Nicolae Ceausescu did not raise the issue of military intervention by the socialist countries in Poland either in December 1981 nor in August 1989 [...]”, in Vasile Buga, *Pe muchie de cuțit: Relațiile Româno-Sovietice – 1965-1989*, INST, București, 2013, p. 224.

report drafted by the Soviet ambassador in Bucharest, where he claimed that the Romanian leader had agreed to the use of Soviet troops stationed on Polish territory¹⁷, without “any call for joint armed intervention in Poland”¹⁸. Other authors who rejected the idea of military intervention were both Petre Opriș and Lavinia Betea. The former argued that the Romanian Army’s statute, adopted in 1986, was of a strictly defensive nature¹⁹, while for Lavinia Betea “in all the years of his power, Nicolae Ceausescu’s only initiative for armed intervention was against the Romanian people at the end of 1989”²⁰.

Among the historians who have supported the idea of an intervention are Ioan Scurtu²¹, but also Dennis Deletant²² or Mark Kramer²³. For the latter, the similarity between the Soviet debates of 1968 and Nicolae Ceausescu’s letter of August 1989 is a strong argument for believing that the Romanian leader tried to reactivate the Brezhnev doctrine, which the Soviets had abandoned. Gradually, a new category of researchers emerged, who adopted a more nuanced position towards this event, such as Adam Burakowski²⁴, Mihai Retegan²⁵ or Vasile Buga, whom I mentioned

¹⁷ “We consider (declared Ceausescu), at the same time, that in accordance with the official agreements that do not contravene international law, the USSR has its own troops in Poland”, in *AT*, nr. 1-2/2016, p. 286. See also Vasile Buga, „Documentele rusești clarifică: La 4 decembrie 1989 Ceaușescu nu și-a abandonat principiile din august 1968”, in *AT*, nr. 3-4/2016, pp. 295-303.

¹⁸ Vasile Buga, *Pe muchie de cuțit*, p. 282.

¹⁹ Petre Opriș, „Reacțiile lui Nicolae Ceaușescu față de criza poloneză (1980-1989)”, in *Revista Institutului Diplomatic Român*, anul IV, nr. II (VIII), Semestrul II, 2009, p. 42.

²⁰ Lavinia Betea: „A cerut Ceaușescu intervenția trupelor Tratatului de la Varșovia în Polonia?”, in *Jurnalul Național*, 15 iulie 2009; for online version, see: <https://jurnalul.antena3.ro/scinteia/special/a-cerut-ceausescu-interventia-trupelor-tratatului-de-la-varsovia-in-polonia-514819.html> (20.08.2020).

²¹ Ioan Scurtu, „Nicolae Ceaușescu și evenimentele din Polonia – 1980-1989”; for online version, see: <http://www.ioanscurtu.ro/nicolae-ceausescu-si-evenimentele-din-polonia-1981-1989/> (23.08.2020).

²² See Dennis Deletant, Mihail E. Ionescu (eds.), *Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1989, Selected Documents*, Editura Politeia-SNSPA, București, 2004.

²³ Mark Kramer’s article is actually a response to Larry Watts’ study of Ceaușescu’s “Call” from August 1989. It is also part of a larger debate on the subject hosted by the Woodrow Wilson Institute in Washington. For the full debate, see Dennis Deletant, Larry Watts, Adam Burakowski și Mark Kramer, „Did Nicolae Ceaușescu Call for Military Intervention Against Poland in August 1989?”, in *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, e-Dossier No. 60; for online version, see: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/did-nicolae-ceausescu-call-for-military-intervention-against-poland-august-1989> (20.08.2020).

²⁴ For the Polish historian “it is difficult to say with certainty whether Nicolae Ceausescu would have proposed an armed action of the Warsaw Treaty in the PPR in this way...”, but “he was prepared to defend communism (and its leadership) also by military means of force. He did not hesitate to call for a massive crackdown on protesters in Timisoara or Bucharest...”; in Adam Burakowski, Aleksader Gubrynowicz, Paweł Ukielski, *1989 – Toamna Națiunilor*, trad. de Vasile Moga, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2013, p. 332. See also Adam Burakowski, „Ceausescu’s Appeal to the Sister Parties”, in: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/did-nicolae-ceausescu-call-for-military-intervention-against-poland-august-1989#burakowski> (20.08.2020).

²⁵ In Retegan’s view, “we can assume that Ceausescu wanted the Soviet Union to be genuinely involved in resolving the Polish crisis in favour of the PUWP, in order to avoid having his own position questioned”, in Mihai Retegan, „Ceausescu’s regime and the changes in Poland. The summer of 1989”, in *On the Both Sides of the Iron Curtain, Acta of the International Conference „On Both Sides of the Iron Curtain. 1945-1989”*, (Bucharest, May 9-10 2000),

earlier. Therefore, in the Romanian historiography, the Polish crisis has been researched only in its periods of maximum intensity, ignoring its overall evolution and obtaining only a partial understanding of its impact on the Romanian regime.

In order to understand the evolution/involution of the Romanian regime in the 1980s, we used the works of Adam Burakowski²⁶, Cosmin Popa²⁷, Dennis Deletant²⁸, Vladimir Tismaneanu²⁹, Katherine Verdery³⁰, Adrian Cioroianu³¹, as well as the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania³². The memoirs of those who worked alongside the Romanian leader, such as Silviu Curticeanu³³, Nicolae Ceaușescu's chancellor, and Stefan Andrei³⁴, Minister for Foreign Affairs between 1978 and 1985, and those of dissidents who fought against the regime, such as Vasile Paraschiv³⁵, Doina Cornea³⁶, Pavel Câmpeanu³⁷ and Iulius Filip³⁸, are also useful. While not all of these memoirs seem congruent with the topic under discussion, the last category is intended to help us to understand how the leadership has acted internally to counter the effects of the crisis.

As far as the historiography of the Polish crisis is concerned, interest in it has not been confined to the Polish area, and many other aspects of the situation have been examined. Thus, the Polish historian Andrzej Paczkowski has written about the history of this event and the factors that

Colonel Petre Otu (coord.), Colonel Gheorghe Vartic, Lieutenant Colonel Mihai Macuc, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 260.

²⁶ Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu: 1965-1989. Geniul din Carpați*, trad. de Vasile Olaru, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2008.

²⁷ Cosmin Popa, *Elena Ceaușescu sau Anatomia unei Dictaturi de Familie*, Ed. Litera, București, 2021.

²⁸ Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu și Securitatea. Constrângere și disidență în România anilor 1965-1989*, trad. de Georgeta Ciocâltea, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1998.

²⁹ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie a comunismului românesc*, trad. de Cristina Petrescu și Dragoș Petrescu, ed. a II-a, București, Ed. Humanitas, 2014.

³⁰ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995.

³¹ Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc*, ed. a II-a, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2007.

³² „Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România – Raport Final”, București, 2006, p. 628. For the online version, see:

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf (20.01.2022).

³³ Silviu Curticeanu, *Meditații necenzurate*, Ed. Historia, București, 2007.

³⁴ Lavinia Betea, *Stăpânul secretelor lui Ceaușescu. I se spunea Machiavelli. Ștefan Andrei în dialog cu Lavinia Betea*, Adevărul Holding, București, 2011.

³⁵ Vasile Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru sindicate în România. Terorismul politic organizat de statul comunist*, Document, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2005, p. 388 p.

³⁶ Doina Cornea, *Scrisori deschise și alte texte, 1982-1989*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1991, 201 p.

³⁷ Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, anii numărătorii inverse*, Document, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2002, 309 p.

³⁸ Iulius Filip, *Între viață și moarte, 1981-1988*, vol. II, Ed. Napoca Star, Cluj, 2000.

led to its emergence³⁹. An important collection of interviews with the main actors of “Solidarity” has been conducted by Michael Szporer⁴⁰, and Timothy Garton Ash is also in the same category⁴¹. The question of the origin of the Movement has been the subject of much dispute⁴². The most important theories are the social⁴³, intellectual/elitist theories⁴⁴, but also those that seek a middle way between them⁴⁵, but there is no consensus. Abraham Brumberg has written about these tendencies, which dominate historiography⁴⁶. A framing of “Solidarity” in the context of the Cold War has been made by A. Kemp-Welch⁴⁷. About Western involvement in the crisis in Poland, both Gregory F. Domber⁴⁸ and Idesbald Goddeeris⁴⁹ have written, and about the pressures of the Kremlin and the socialist countries on the PPR, Malcolm Byrne, Paweł Machcewicz and Christian Ostermann of the Woodrow Wilson Institute in Washington have studied⁵⁰. Equally useful were the works of the annual symposiums organized by the Union of Poles in Romania in Suceava⁵¹, as

³⁹ See Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupied to Freedom*, translated by Jane Cave, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2003; *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Poland, 1980-1989. Solidarity, Martial Law and the End of Communism in Europe*, translated by Christina Manetti, University of Rochester Press, New York, 2015.

⁴⁰ Michael Szporer, *Solidarity. The Great Workers Strike of 1980*, foreword by Mark Kramer, Lexington Books, Washington DC, 2012.

⁴¹ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*, Random House, New York, 1985.

⁴² Jerome Karabel, “The Origins of Solidarity: Workers, Intellectuals, and the Making of an Oppositional Movement”, *Institute of Industrial Relations and Department of Sociology*, Berkeley, University of California, August 1992, pp. 1-56.

⁴³ See Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity. A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1991, and Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991.

⁴⁴ See Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, edited by Jan T. Gross, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, and David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Antipolitics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990.

⁴⁵ See Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against The Symbols of Power. The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*, University Park Press, Pennsylvania, 1994.

⁴⁶ Abraham Brumberg (ed.), *Poland: The Genesis of a Revolution*, Random House Press, New York, 1983.

⁴⁷ A. Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism. A Cold War History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008.

⁴⁸ Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering a Revolution. America, Poland and the End of the Cold War*, University of North Carolina, North Carolina, 2014.

⁴⁹ Idesbald Goddeeris (ed.), *Solidarity with Solidarity. Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980-1982*, The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series, Lexington Books, Washington DC, 2013.

⁵⁰ Malcolm Byrne, Paweł Machcewicz, Christian Ostermann, *Poland 1980-1982, Internal Crisis, International Dimensions. A Compendium of Declassified Documents and Chronology of Events*, National Security Archives, Washington DC, 1997. For the short version, see *Cold War International History Project: „New Evidence on the Polish Crisis, 1980-1982”*, in *CWIHP*, No. 11/Winter 1998, pp. 3-134. For the digital version of debates, see: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin11_p1.pdf (12.04.2022). The same category includes the work of Andrzej Paczkowski, Malcolm Byrne (eds.), *From Solidarity to Martial Law. The Polish Crisis of 1980-1981. A Documentary History*, CEU Press, Budapest & New York, 2007.

⁵¹ See: <http://dompolski.ro/lista-referatelor/6-lista-zestawienie-1999-2018/> (15.04.2022).

well as the volumes dedicated to the Solidarity Trade Union, published under the coordination of the Institute of National Memory in Poland⁵².

Regarding the last category of the research, the one dedicated to the Cold War and the East-West relations in this period, due to the very large number of papers, I will only focus on those that were necessary for the preparation of my PhD thesis. Therefore, in order to better understand the concepts of the Cold War and its evolution, the three volumes edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad⁵³, and published by Cambridge University Press, are very useful. The Norwegian historian Odd Arne Westad⁵⁴ and the American Simon Miles⁵⁵ dealt with the strategy of the two superpowers in the 1980s. At the same time, one cannot omit works dealing with the transformations that took place in the Soviet Union during the succession crisis, the most important contributions being those of Vladislav M. Zubok⁵⁶ or Chris Miller⁵⁷. Finally, a group of works somehow ignored in the Romanian historiography⁵⁸, but of particular importance for understanding the changes that took place in the last decade of the Cold War, is the one dedicated to human rights⁵⁹. In this regard, two essential works on the introduction of human rights in international relations and their use in the context of the Cold War are those of David P. Forysthe⁶⁰ and Daniel C. Thomas⁶¹.

⁵² Łukasza Kamińskiego i Grzegorza Waligóry (eds.), *NSZZ Solidarność*, Tom 1 – Próba Synteza, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN], Warszawa, 2010.; Tom 2 – Ruch Społeczny, 648 p.; Tom 3 – Polska Północ, 877 p.; Tom 4 – Polska Zachodnia, 681 p.; Tom 5 – Polska Środkowo-Wschodnia, 934 p.; Tom 6 – Polska Południowa; Tom 7 – Wokół „Solidarność”, 541 p.

⁵³ Melvyn P. Leffler, Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Origins*, Volume III, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010; Volume II, *Crises and Détente*; Volume III, *Endings*, all of them published in 2010.

⁵⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007.

⁵⁵ Simon Miles, *Engaging the Evil Empire: Washington, Moscow and the Beginning of the End of the Cold War*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2020.

⁵⁶ Vladislav M. Zubok, *A failed empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2007.

⁵⁷ Chris Miller, *The struggle to save the Soviet economy. Mikhail Gorbachev and the collapse of the USSR*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2016.

⁵⁸ An exception is the work of Patricia Alde Gonzales, but her sources are outdated; see Patricia Alde Gonzales, *Helsinki 1975. Începutul Sfârșitului. Degradarea regimului din România și singularitatea lui în blocul de Est (1975-1990)*, trad. Alexandra Reocov, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2008.

⁵⁹ Another exception is the study of Dan-Alexandru Săvoaia, “Romania and the Human Rights Issue within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1972-1983)”, in *Analele Științifice ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași*, Istorie, nr. tom LXV, pp. 615-629.

⁶⁰ David P. Forysthe, *Human Rights in International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

⁶¹ Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise of Communism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001. See the latest publication in this regard: Nicolas Badalassi, Sarah B. Snyder, *The CSCE and the end of the Cold War. Diplomacy, Societies and Human Rights, 1972-1990*, Berghahn Press, New York & Oxford, 2019.

This paper starts from the hypothesis that the Polish crisis represented by the Free Trade Union “Solidarity” was perceived by Nicolae Ceausescu as a threat to the communist regime. Given the incompatibility of the Movement with the Marxist-Leninist principles, which assumed the hegemony of the party-state over every aspect of life, its objective of leaving the Party’s tutelage was viewed with the utmost suspicion by the Romanian leader. Unlike the crisis in Czechoslovakia, which the Romanian leader saw as an opportunity in the process of distancing himself from Moscow, this time the crisis in Poland came when Romania was facing serious economic and social problems, conditions that could have triggered similar social explosions in our country. For this reason, Nicolae Ceausescu’s reaction was different from that of 1968. Now, he sought strategies to stop the possible effects of the Polish crisis, which could have affected the entire socialist bloc, and tried to a much lesser extent to show his distance from Moscow, putting the salvation of communism in the forefront, not his non-alignment.

In order to understand how the Polish crisis spilled over and threatened the regime in Bucharest, we first used Andrew Abott’s concept of the “turning point”. For the American sociologist, the turning point represents a break between the past and the present, between the previous and the subsequent evolution of the society, an evolution that takes an independent course in the relation to the elements that have formed the society until then. Thus, the turning point is an event or an action that changes the evolution of society, and becomes a founding moment around which the analyst must focus his attention in order to understand how the society develops afterwards⁶². Second, given that the events in Poland overlapped with a series of crises that swept across the international world, I also used Michael Devitt’s concept of the “causal theory of reference”⁶³. According to the Australian philosopher, in the process of identifying the cause, a causal chain is formed, which in turn generates a causal network, and by uniting the two elements, the causal chain and the causal network, we arrive at the basis of his symbol, which in this case was the threat perceived by the Romanian leadership in relation to the development of the crisis in Poland. Therefore, throughout the paper we will analyze the causal chain created by the crises of the 1970s, and afterwards, the causal network generated by the crisis in Poland, finally identifying the shockwaves caused by “Solidarity” and the changes implemented by the Trade Union in the

⁶² Andrew Abott, „On the Concept of Turning Point”, in *Comparative Social Research*, no. 16/1997, pp. 85-105.

⁶³ See Michael Devitt, „Singular Terms”, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXXI, no. 7, April 18, 1974, pp. 183-205; Dan Turner, „Devitt’s casual theory of reference”, in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 54, nr. 2, August 1976, pp. 153-7.

PRP. Together, the two concepts are meant to provide us with a more complex perspective on the impact of the Polish crisis on the outcome of 1989, as well as on the Romanian communist regime.

Because the situation in Poland has been treated in a fragmentary way, without being able to fully understand the completely different reaction of Nicolae Ceausescu in August 1989, a first objective of the paper is to analyze the Polish crisis entirely, namely its evolution during the 1980s. At the same time, because in the historiography the emphasis has been placed on the discordant note made by the Romanian leader in relation to Moscow regarding the “Solidarity” Trade Union, it has been neglected how he perceived the Movement in Poland and whether this perception influenced his actions in any way. Moreover, because “Solidarity” did not disappear with the introduction of martial law, but it continued its activities clandestinely, the second objective is to investigate how the Romanian leadership dealt with the crisis in Poland after general Jaruzelski took the power. Another objective, complementary to the first two, is to identify the measures implemented by Nicolae Ceausescu during the 1980s in order to counter the effects of the crisis, and to determine to what extent the events in Poland led him to introduce them. After I got an insight into the situation in PPR in the 1980s and the crisis that had engulfed the entire socialist bloc, my fourth objective is to identify the perspective of the Romanian leadership toward this complex situation and to establish the intention behind the “Call” of August 1989, in order to see whether Nicolae Ceausescu had put the salvation of communism first, abandoning his principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another state. Finally, the key objective of the paper is precisely to question the narrative built around Nicolae Ceausescu’s attitude towards the “Solidarity” crisis and to identify new paths of research on the evolution of the Romanian communism in the last decade.

With this paper, we will answer to the following research questions: what was the effect of “Solidarity” on the socialist bloc? What about the Romanian regime? How did “Solidarity” influence the policy of the Romanian leadership? What about the East-West relations? Did Nicolae Ceausescu feel the danger represented by the Free Trade Union? If so, what was his attitude? How did he try to counter the danger represented by the ideas of “Solidarity” at local and regional level? Did “Solidarity” represent the beginning of the end for the party-state? What was the Trade Union’s contribution to the end of the Cold War? What about the Ceausescu regime? What was at stake for the Bucharest leadership when it came to relations with Poland? Were they limited to meeting economic needs or were there other political objectives? Did Romania try to create a

position of “mediator” in the conflict between Poland and the Western countries or did it become a part of the conflict? How did the two countries manage to overcome political differences over the political model implemented in their own country? What was at stake in relations with Romania, in the view of the Warsaw leadership?

To undertake this approach, we used comparative and descriptive analysis, based on the exhaustive use of documents, edited sources and interviews with some of the actors of the studied period. The actual study of the information available in these primary and secondary sources was followed by their critical evaluation, the result being a synthesis of all the available material. Firstly, given the fact that the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMFA) remained almost unexplored, they were a starting point for the present work. Here, we considered the 1980-1989 funds, country Poland, Issues: 01 – Personnel; 10 – Protocol/Ceremonial; 20 - Activity Reports, Minutes; 200 – Press; 210 – Domestic Policy; 212 – Economic; 220 – Political-diplomatic relations; 241 – International Organizations and Bodies; 613 – Financial. A plus of these archives results from the fact that they contain telegrams not only from Warsaw, but from all important capital cities, which monitored the situation in the PPR. In other respects, they should be regarded with caution because of the ideological burden that forced the ambassador to self-censor when he expressed some opinions, but also because of the financial and personnel problems of the office. In order to understand the actions of the Romanian Embassy staff, we also followed the discussions of the Political Executive Committee (PEC), which concerned the situation in Poland, at the Central National Historical Archives (CNHA), Chancellery Section. Equally useful was the Foreign Relations Section – 1980-1981; 1982-1983; 1984-1986; 1987-1988; 1989 – which contains the transcripts of meetings between Nicolae Ceausescu and the Polish leaders or the Polish delegations. Correlating this information with both the PEC debates, and the embassy reports will give us a more nuanced perspective on the Polish crisis. Secondary, other useful documents were the discussions between the two countries in the Warsaw Treaty or in the COMECON, as well as AGERPRES press releases, which are also at the CNHA.

In order to identify the repercussions of the events in Poland on the leadership, but also the measures taken by the leadership on the domestic level, we used the Archives of the National Council for the Study of Security Archives (ANCSS). The Informative and Penal Funds provide us with information about the actions of the dissidents against the communist regime, what inspired their actions, but also the measures taken by the Romanian authorities against them. These are

important clues to see how the Romanian regime perceived any dissident activity, in order to understand how it related to the situation in Poland, beyond the official discourse. The image of the relationship between the Romanian leadership and the Department of State Security (DSS) is completed with the help of the Documentary Fund. These documents provide information both about the measures required by Nicolae Ceausescu as the situation in Poland worsened, such as the surveillance of the small Polish community in Bukovina, of the Polish tourists coming to or transiting the SRR, as well as to counteract any possible effect at home: intensifying the surveillance measures in the large industrial centers, closely monitoring the “moods” of the population, eliminating those who posed a danger by supporting human rights, etc. By comparing the official discourse with the measures implemented domestically we get a more complex picture of what the Polish crisis represented for the leadership in Bucharest.

To counterbalance the perspective of the Romanian archives, I used the political reports of the Polish Embassy in Bucharest for the years 1980-1983 and 1989, held in the Archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Archiwum Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – AMSZ], photographed during the Erasmus scholarship in Warsaw, October 2018 - February 2019. In addition, I also used consular reports to understand the causes of tensions between Romania and Poland regarding the Polish community in Bukovina and the Polish tourists. At the same time, during the research, I conducted a series of interviews. The first one was with Nicolae Mareş, who held several positions at the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw, including that of referent of the Directorate I of the MFA, in the 1980s, being often sent to the Polish capital city when the situation became complicated. I conducted the interview at Mr. Mareş’s home in Bucharest on the 19th of December 2018, and I recorded it on a tape recorder, which is in my personal archive. Although the information provided are often confusing, they have been corroborated with telegrams from the MFA to give me a more complete picture of the situation. In addition, the former secretary helped me to understand the circuit of the telegrams, but also when or how they reached Cabinet 1, giving me, at the same time, a brief description of the situation in Poland, but also of the Romanian embassy in Warsaw in the 1980s. The next interview I had with Radu Şerban, second secretary of the Romanian Economic Agency in Warsaw between 1983 and 1987, via email. I asked him a set of questions in a Microsoft Word document, and he gave me his answers also by email on the 30th of December 2018. The document is in my personal archive. Mr. Serban’s answers were more detailed, as he gave me a more complex description of the situation in the

embassy and of the crisis that Polish society was facing, information that could hardly be gleaned from the embassy's telegrams, which sometimes tried to hide it. As well via email I had discussions with Mr. Vasile Buga, referent at Directorate I of the MFA and the translator from Romanian into Russian of Nicolae Ceausescu during his visits to Moscow or within the Warsaw Treaty or COMECON between 1970 and 1980. The interview was on June 17th, 2019. With his help I clarified several aspects of the "Call" of August 1989, as he had access to the Soviet documents and to Nicolae Ceausescu's discussions with the USSR ambassador in Bucharest.

In order to find out the Polish perspective regarding their situation in the 1980s, we also organized a series of interviews with some Poles in Romania. There were phone interviews with Irisec Iosif and Barbara Breabăn on the 20th of January 2021, and with Bogdan Polipciuc on the 29th of January 2021. In the case of the small Polish community from Bucovina, the discussions with Mr. Irisec Iosif were very useful, as he presented me the situation and the relations with the Romanian authorities, but also with the tourists coming to or transiting the SRR. Also useful for the situation of Polish tourists was the interview with Mrs. Breabăn, who worked both in tourism in Constanta and as a translator for the Polish consulate in Bucharest between 1987 and 1989. From this position, she gave me more details about the worsening Romanian-Polish relations in the last years of the Ceausescu regime. Finally, discussions with the President of Dom Polski Bucharest, Mr. Bogdan Polipciuc, who visited Poland several times in the 1980s, completed the documentary sources I had on the Polish crisis.

This paper is divided into four main sections, following the evolution of the crisis in Poland during the 1980s. This division, although apparently arbitrary, corresponds to the political situation in the PPR and how the Warsaw authorities implemented solutions to overcome it. Along the way, we followed the events chronologically, but also genealogically, identifying the causes that led to the social implosions in Poland and their consequences in the socialist bloc. Thus, the first section is divided into two chapters; in the first one we analyzed the evolution of the internal situation in Poland, the successive crises of the communist regime and the factors that led to the emergence of the Independent Autocephalous Trade Union "Solidarity". At the same time, we also considered the elements that led to the end of the détente and the outbreak of the "Second Cold War". In the next chapter, we analyzed the international repercussions of the events in Poland and how they were perceived in Bucharest. Since in the Romanian historiography the focus has been exclusively on Bucharest's refusal to support Moscow's request for an invasion, we have questioned the

discourse of the communist leadership. Analyzing the official discourse and identifying the measures implemented by the RCP, we could observe a completely different attitude of Nicolae Ceausescu towards the “Solidarity” Trade Union. This discrepancy became much more visible during the “Solidarity” Congress, but especially after the introduction of martial law, when the Romanian leader fully supported Jaruzelski’s regime, deliberately ignoring the fact that this measure had been introduced as a result of the Soviet pressure.

The second section is divided into two chapters. Following the research carried out, in the first chapter we showed that the historical milestone for the end of the Polish crisis – 13th of December 1981 – is artificial. Even though the general initially saved the Warsaw regime, the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP) never recovered after the introduction of martial law. In the other chapter, I presented the reaction of the RCP after the formation of the Military Council of National Salvation (MCNS) and the relations between the two countries. Noticing the effects of the Polish crisis, in order to counteract its effects, the Romanian leader introduced a series of measures, such as the full payment of the foreign debt, the “Rational Eating Programme”, the intensification of the DSS activity, etc. In addition, although he was not satisfied with the takeover of power by the Army in the PPR, the relations between the two countries intensified because of the crisis they were both facing. The third section corresponds to the moment when both the crisis in Poland and the crisis in the socialist bloc reached their climax, with the two regimes choosing different solutions to overcome them. Thus, in the first section we examined the impact of the Gorbachev’s reforms on the communist countries and how general Jaruzelski facilitated their implementation. Further on, in a new chapter, I showed that the new situation was perceived by Nicolae Ceausescu as a threat to the communist order, the reason why relations between the two countries reached an impasse. In addition, the Brasov uprising of November 1987 and the increasing activity of the opposition in Poland led the Romanian leadership to be suspicious concerning the new political direction of the Warsaw government. In the last section, we looked at Nicolae Ceausescu’s accelerating isolation abroad and his refusal to accept the reform process around him. Thus, in the first chapter we presented the fast changes in the RPP, but also the fact that they got out of the control of the authorities, culminating in the victory of “Solidarity” in the June 1989 elections. Nicolae Ceausescu’s reaction to the events in Poland, which were unfolding at a breathtaking pace, is the subject of the last chapter. Nicolae Ceausescu’s “Call” and his plea for the use of Soviet troops stationed in the PPR are, in our opinion, the quintessence of his vision

regarding the Polish crisis, and also of the perception he has formed over time about the “Solidarity” Movement.

The apparently irrational measures implemented by Nicolae Ceausescu during the 1980s had, in reality, several causes. The first cause was the sovereign debt crisis, which affected all socialist countries economically. Another cause was the human rights issue and the implications of the Helsinki Accords, which have been particularly felt since 1980. The present work brings as a novel element a much broader perspective on Nicolae Ceausescu’s decision to [re]Stalinize the Romanian regime than previous explanations. A first factor is the “Solidarity” Trade Union and the dissolution of the one-party regime in the PPR. Seeing the effects of the economic crisis in Poland, but also of the concessions made to the West, Nicolae Ceausescu understood that the Movement was a result of these weaknesses, which is why he took steps to counter any possibility of this scenario being repeated in the SRR. Another novelty is the perspective that the Polish crisis of the 1980s gives us. It shows us the limits of the policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs promoted by Bucharest abroad. Given the insistence of the Romanian historiography on the discordant note made by the RSR in the 1970s in relation to the USSR, we believe that the investigation of the following decade is very important to nuance this topic. The information already identified shows that Romania’s distancing from Moscow occurred at a time when the Soviet-American tensions did not put pressure on the socialist countries. When this happened, the Romanian regime re-appropriated to the Soviet Union in order to reduce pressure from the Western countries. Finally, another advantage of the research is the use of the available sources, especially the Securitate archives, where I discovered that the resistance of the Romanian society against the Ceausescu regime was diversified and widespread among all social categories, even if it could not coagulate into a unitary movement. All these aspects represent new research directions for the last communist decade, explored in this paper.

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C. Interviews

- **Nicolae Mareş** – held several positions at the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw, as well as that of referent of Directorate I of the MFA in the 1980s, often being sent to the Polish capital when the situation became complicated. I conducted the interview at Mr. Mareş’s home in Bucharest on the 19th of December 2018, and recorded it on a tape recorder, which is in my personal archive.
- **Radu Şerban** – Secretary II of the Romanian Economic Agency in Warsaw between 1983 and 1987. I conducted the interview via email, where I asked him a set of questions in a Microsoft Word document, to which he provided his answers also via email on the 30 of December 2018.
- **Vasile Buga** – referent at Directorate I of the MFA and the translator from Romanian into Russian for Nicolae Ceausescu during his visits to Moscow or during the Warsaw Treaty or COMECON meetings between 1970 and 1980. Also via email I had discussions with Mr. Buga on the 17th of June 2019, regarding the “Call” of August 1989. The information is in my personal archive.
- **Irisec Iosif** – native of Poiana Micului, after finishing high school he received a scholarship from the Polish state to the Faculty of Mining and Metallurgy in Krakow in 1978, but his application for study was permanently rejected by the Romanian state. In 1982, he went to visit relatives in Poland and refused to return for several months. After his return, he was permanently denied the right to leave the country and was followed by the Securitate until December 1989, under the name “Irimia”. The interview was conducted by phone and recorded on the tape recorder on the 20 of January 2021.
- **Barbara Breabăn** – originally from Szczecin, she married with a Romanian engineer in Poland. In 1977, she moved to Iasi and in 1978 to Constanta. In the first half of the 1980s, she worked at various hotels in Eforie and at the “Turist” camp, interacting with many Polish tourists. In the second half of the 1980s, she was a translator, initially for the Polish company “Kopex” in Bucharest, and between 1987-1989 for the Polish consulate. After 1990, she was involved in the the Union of Poles in Romania (UPR), being the president of “Dom Polski” in Constanta. The interview was conducted by phone and recorded on tape recorder on the 20 of January 2021.
- **Bogdan Polipciuc** – born in Bucharest in a Polish family that emigrated from Bessarabia to Romania after its occupation by the USSR, he worked as a Polish translator for the Youth Guide

Offices in Constanta, and interacted with many tourists from Poland in the first half of the 1970s. After graduating from the Academy of Economic Studies in 1976, he worked for a Foreign Trade Company, through which he made a number of visits to Poland in the 1980s. After 1990, he was involved in the UPR, where he is vice-president and president of “Dom Polsk” Bucharest. Interview was conducted by phone and recorded on tape recorder on the 20 of January 2021.

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