



## CZECHOSLOVAK CRISIS OR THE MOST TENSE MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF ROMANIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS

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*Romania's posture in the Czechoslovak crisis, the supporting attitude that Nicolae Ceaușescu showed towards the leadership in Prague and the independence that the Romanian leader expressed in foreign policy made it possible for him to predict that a similar invasion would take place at the borders of Romania immediately after the invasion of Czechoslovakia.*

*As a result, Romania took several measures to defend the national territory, and the Romanian people were alerted to the real war. Thus, the Romanian armed forces began to mobilize, the secret services launched specific operations, the Romanian people were enlisted, the territory of Romania was prepared and a new military doctrine was initiated, all those actions being intended to defend the national territory.*

*Keywords: 1968 Czechoslovak crisis; Nicolae Ceaușescu; military measures; Romanian armed forces; national territory;*



### INTRODUCTION

The arrival of Alexander Dubček<sup>1</sup> and his team to the leadership of Czechoslovakia, although it was seen by the Czechoslovak people as the most favourable way for the economic recovery of the country, raised a deep concern among the leaders of the Warsaw Treaty Organization/Warsaw Pact member states. Apart from Bucharest, in the other capitals of the organization there was a fear that Czechoslovakia would betray the communist cause and embrace capitalism, falling into the trap of Western imperialism. That concern was supported by the idea that Czechoslovakia had a common border with the Federal Republic of Germany/FRG, and Dubček had an interest in rekindling diplomatic relations with both the FRG, as well as the other capitalist states. In fact, Czechoslovakia had just signed a contract during that period to build a highway that was supposed to link the towns of Nuremberg and Prague (AMAE, file no. 1238/1968, p. 56). It was clear that the Czechoslovaks were no longer content with the little offered by the USSR and the communist ideology.

### TRANSITION TO A NEW TYPE OF SOCIALISM. PRELIMINARIES OF THE WARSAW PACT TROOPS INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Czechoslovakia had entered, in the last years of the regime of Anton Novotny (since 1960), an economic crisis that reduced the level of comfort with which the Czechoslovak people were accustomed. The situation immediately produced social movements and split-ups within the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In that context, starting in 1965, a reformist wing (Cașu) was formed inside the party, having as members, among others, Alexander Dubček, Josef Smrkovský, Ota Šik, Martin Dzúr, Otokar Riřrj, Oldrich Cernic and Ludvík Svoboda (Pascaru, 2023, p. 325).

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Dubček (1921-1992) was a Slovak politician, secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.



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The reformists aimed at transforming the communist regime in Czechoslovakia into a more bearable regime, a regime with “human face”. It was extremely difficult to hide the reality that some neighbouring states, such as the FRG and Austria, countries with which Czechoslovakia could once compete in terms of living standards, had become well above the standard of living of Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak people, although obstructed by censorship, got information about the evolution of neighbouring countries, finding out that the standard of living was better and it was freedom there, which was only adding frustration. The reformist wing took power in the party and in the Czechoslovak state with the Plenary session of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party in January 1968. A new government was established under the leadership of Oldrich Cernic, with Ludvík Svoboda as president, instead of the very powerful Novotný, and Alexander Dubček as general secretary of the party. In April 1968, a “Program of Action” was implemented to recover the Czechoslovak society and economy. That programme, imposed by Czechoslovak reformists, provided for the following: a greater freedom of the press, free speech and cultural freedom, the possibility for the Czechoslovakian citizen to come up with initiatives on economic development, freedom of citizens to establish political clubs (Stykalin, 2005, p. 26), freedom of movement of the population, limitation of influence and power of the political police (StB), a multiparty political system, the freedom of the citizen to access political life, economic reforms aimed at reviving the economy etc. With regard to the press, it is true that the state no longer had control over it.

The arrival of Dubček as the head of the Czechoslovakian state did not have any significant repercussions in Moscow, Berlin, Warsaw, Budapest, or Sofia. Novotný was no longer supported by the Kremlin, as he criticized the change in Moscow's leadership in the fall of 1964 (Diplomacy: Spring in Prague). The first accusations began to emerge when those loyal to Moscow were replaced with members of the reforming camp, leading to the Soviet Union's feeling of losing control of the Czechoslovak state. Throughout 1968, several meetings were held between the leaders of Czechoslovakia and those of the Warsaw Treaty Organization member states, such as those in Budapest, Bratislava, Moscow, Karlovy Vary, Dresda and Komarno. In all those meetings,

the Soviets only reproached and accused, and the Czechoslovaks listened. Romania was not invited to any of those meetings, although it was a member of the organization.

Tensions continued to rise, and with the “Sumava” military application, in June 1968, the Soviets brought numerous troops to the borders of Czechoslovakia. On 21 August, over 500,000 troops belonging to the USSR, DRG, Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland invaded Czechoslovakia. The communist leadership was raised and sent to Moscow, and the Soviet armed forces were set on Czechoslovak territory, where they remained until the fall of communism (Oşca et al., 1999, p. 34). With Gustáv Husák at the head of the country, Dubček's reforms were removed. Czechoslovakia was brought back under obedience and occupation.

However, the Czechoslovak crisis had a great significance for Romania as well, and in the following we will see what that moment meant for the recent history of the Romanian people.

### AUTONOMOUS POLICY PROMOTED BY ROMANIA IN RELATIONS WITH THE USSR SINCE THE '60s

In full political crisis, on 15 August 1968, Nicolae Ceauşescu paid an official visit to Prague, occasion on which he renewed the Romanian-Czechoslovak Treaty of Friendship, which had just completed its 20-year validity period (AMAE, 1968, fasc. 1, p. 44, apud Preda, 2009, p. 275). Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980) did the same thing earlier that month. The Kremlin leadership, seeing the visits of the two leaders to the Czechoslovak capital at distances of only a few days, may have asked two questions. The first one: “Would Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia seek the revival of the Little Entente from the interwar period?”, namely an alliance within the Warsaw Treaty. And the second question may sound like this: “Could Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia create a nucleus of the communist world, to which other states from the Soviet sphere of control could adhere?”. These two questions may well have accelerated the decision that Czechoslovakia would be invaded to put an end to the liberal trend that swept this country. It is worth mentioning that neither Dubček nor any other communist leader that came to power with the Czechoslovakian CP in January 1968 stated that they wanted to abandon the communist



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ideology or, worse, to leave an alliance whose leader was Moscow. They just wanted to build own socialism (Oșca et al., p. 41).

The construction of socialism by each individual state, depending on its specificity, needs and possibilities, without the need for the intervention of “a big brother”, was also the leitmotif of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s politics. It should be noted that, in Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu had long applied some political ideas that Dubček aimed for the development of socialism in his country. Nicolae Ceaușescu’s politics, however, had repeatedly attracted criticism of the Kremlin. In fact, 1968 proved to be the hottest year in Romania’s relations with the Soviet Union.

Romania had begun a careful and subtle departure from Moscow as soon as Soviet troops left the Romanian territory in the summer of 1958. In the time of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, other episodes followed, which showed that Romania completely stopped obeying the orders of the Kremlin, all culminating with the “*declaration of independence*” of April 1964. Among those moments we can list: the abolition of “*Maxim Gorki*” Research Institute in Bucharest, the decision to introduce Western languages into Romanian education or the refusal to adopt the Valev Plan. In the summer of 1962, when the leader Nikita Khrushchev paid an official visit to Romania, he expressed, in his characteristic way, rebuking everyone in the leadership of Romania, dissatisfaction with Romania’s attitude (Scurtu, 2022). We have to mention that, during 1962-1964, the USSR had infiltrated its undercover agents in the Romanian territory, just as it had infiltrated the states that the socialist camp considered enemy: USA, FRG, France, UK etc. (Troncotă). Also related to espionage actions, we specify that, starting in the ’60s, after the moment of glory of Mihai Caraman, not all the information gathered by Romanian agents on mission in the territories of states considered enemies, but only Romanian syntheses and opinions reached to Moscow, after being thoroughly analysed (Pascaru, 2018, p. 88). It greatly disturbed the Kremlin, which led to some strain on bilateral relations.

Relations continued to strain with the arrival of Nicolae Ceaușescu at the head of the Romanian state. Although they knew Ceaușescu to be far more rebellious and disobedient than his predecessor, the Soviets

did not oppose his coming to power, although they could have easily imposed a submissive and zealous leader, such as Gheorghe Apostol. In his memoirs, Apostol mentions that even Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej would have named him successor, a few days before leaving this world (Apostol, 2022, p. 174).

The first tense moment in the Romanian-Soviet relations in the Ceaușescu era was in 1967, with the signing of the embassy-level relations between Romania and the FRG. The Soviets harshly criticized the action of Romania. Not long ago, Romania strained relations with the Soviet Union by its position on the Arab-Israeli war of the same year. Not only did it not break relations with Israel, as did all the states in the Soviet sphere of control, but it helped Israel with Soviet ammunition for the Soviet tanks they captured following attacks on the territories of Arab states (Buga, 2015, p. 2).

Since 1956, with the destalinization initiated by Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev at the Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, an ideological war between the Soviet Union and China began in the socialist camp. In that geopolitical context, Romania strengthened relations with China at the highest level. It would make Romania, around 1968, be perceived by Moscow as one of China’s most important friends, which ignited even more the already tense relations between the two sides. In May 1968, the French president Charles de Gaulle came to Bucharest on an official visit, which was again interpreted as an offense against the Kremlin (Stanciu, 2011, p. 129). Relations with France also materialized through the acquisition of French helicopters by Romania. When they wanted to study them, the Soviets faced a categorical refusal from the Romanian officials. All those successive moments led to the unprecedented strain of relations between the two states.

Romania’s position on the Czechoslovak crisis, the supportive attitude that Nicolae Ceaușescu manifested towards the leadership in Prague, and the independence that the Romanian leader expressed in foreign policy made him consider, immediately after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, that a similar invasion could take place on the border of Romania take place.



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## AN OUTLINE OF A SOVIET INVASION OF ROMANIA. MEASURES TAKEN BY THE REGIME IN BUCHAREST TO DEFEND THE NATIONAL TERRITORY

The first clear signs that Moscow pursued an action similar to that of Czechoslovakia came from the Romanian intelligence services (ANIC, file no. 129/1968, pp. 155-161, apud Betea, 2018, p. 91), that informed the Bucharest leadership, on 5 August 1968, that the Soviets brought some troops to the Romanian borders, immediately after the *Sumava* ended. Nicolae Ceaușescu did not pay attention to that information, considering that the intelligence services fell into the trap of disinformation and suggested them to investigate further. Before that news, also through the secret services, an information arrived in Bucharest that in the next period Czechoslovakia would be invaded, after which Romania would follow. The information came from a Polish officer, who was a member of the Warsaw Pact's narrow circle, where crucial decisions were discussed and where Romania, although it was a member of the pact, did not have access. Through the liaison officer Ion Bichel, the Polish officer warned Romania that it was in the Kremlin's sight. It happened in May 1968 (Watts, 2011, p. 367).

Information about the invasion of Romania came also from the Dutch espionage which, in November 1968, announced to Bucharest that the invasion was preparing for 22 November 1968, 4 o'clock in the morning (Ib., p. 362); also for November, information came from the British Foreign Office, which announced that "*Soviets prepare for quick military action against Romania. We believe it is right for Romanians to be informed about our appreciation. This must be done at the highest possible level and in strict confidentiality.*" (Ib.), it was shown in the discussions within the Foreign Office. In parallel with those reports, some statements by European communist leaders such as Todor Zhivkov further strained the situation. He stated the following: "*We are obliged to take measures to introduce order in Czechoslovakia as well as in Romania. After that we will also introduce order in Yugoslavia.*" (Ib., p. 361).

The call from Prague to Bucharest, announcing the invasion of Czechoslovakia, alerted the Romanian authorities. "*Now it is my turn!*", Ceaușescu would have said (Pacepa, 2014, p. 147). In the following

hours, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party met urgently to establish Romania's position. After long discussions, which lasted all night between 20/21 August 1968, Romania took the position to criticize in harsh terms the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The next day, in front of the Central Committee, a large number of people witnessed the energetic speech of the Romanian communist leader. In harsh terms, Nicolae Ceaușescu criticized the invasion of Czechoslovakia, speaking in favour of diplomacy and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. At the same time, Ceaușescu announced the arming of the population to defend the national territory, Romania being ready to fight, to meet the invaders with fire. At the military parade on 23 August 1968, 51 battalions of patriotic guards, equipped and armed, marched in front of the USSR Embassy in Bucharest (Gheorghe, Soare, 1999, p. 47).

On 21 August 1968, the Order of the Ministry of the Armed Forces no. OK 00355 announced the real state of war alarm in which Romania was found. The next day, the Minister of the Armed Forces issued the directive for the troops to open fire without waiting for the orders of the superiors, if the invading troops entered the territory of Romania and overstepped a certain alignment (Retegan, 2004, pp. 12-13).

On the hot days we refer to, namely 20-25 August 1968, more troops arrived at the borders of Romania, on the territories of the SSR Moldova, Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria, as well as in the Black Sea. Simultaneously with bringing those troops to the borders of the country, both in Bucharest and in other large cities in Romania, the number of tourists had risen sharply. Most were unmarried men, aged between 25 and 40, with an athletic body, who were actually soldiers (Ib.). Apart from those aspects, a fierce anti-Romanian campaign was initiated by the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, who dreamed of a union of Transylvania with Hungary.

What measures could be taken under those conditions? The military leadership in Bucharest made a common front with the state leadership, seeking both internal and external aid. Internally, it was decided to urgently establish several military units, for all groups of forces, to cover the entire national territory, especially the key points such as Focșani Gate and Ardeal (Ib.) More attention



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Another measure initiated by the political leadership in Bucharest for national defence was the preparation of the national territory to face an invasion. The analysis of the communication routes, the situation of roads, railways and bridges, and everything that could be used by the Romanian armed forces to wage war with the invaders.

was paid to the defence of Oltenia, as Nicolae Ceaușescu hoped to create a passageway for the Romanian armed forces on Yugoslav territory. We will see, in the following, the position of Josip Broz Tito regarding the situation of Romania.

Returning to the establishment of new military units, we list some of those created: an order of the Minister of the Armed Forces announced, on 11 September 1968, the establishment of the 57<sup>th</sup> Tank Division, subordinated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (AMNR, file no. 2696/1968, vol. I, p. 80) and, on 24 September 1968, another order of the minister announced the establishment of the 67<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division (Brăila), the 81<sup>st</sup> Mechanized Division (Dej) and the 70<sup>th</sup> Aviation Division (Timișoara) (ib., p. 82). On 17 October, the Ministry of the Armed Forces ordered the establishment of the 2nd Mountain Brigade (Rădăuți) and, a year later, the establishment of the 4th Mountain Brigade, with the garrison at Curtea de Argeș, and the 1st Mountain Brigade, with the garrison at Bistrița (Uszkai). All those military large units were composed of subordinate structures such as regiments, divisions and battalions.

In addition to the establishment of those military large units and units covering the entire Romanian territory, it was ordered the deployment of troops from one side to another of the national territory. It was the case of the 88th Tulcea Dragons Division, deployed in Giurgiu (AMR, file no. 2696/1968, ib., p. 91), among other such cases. Special attention was paid to the reorganization of military education (Stănescu, 2009, p. 63). The political leadership in Bucharest realized that there was an urgent need for a new military thinking, a new class of people able to lead an army, but it could not be done overnight.

Another measure initiated by the political leadership in Bucharest for national defence was the preparation of the national territory to face an invasion. The analysis of the communication routes, the situation of roads, railways and bridges, and everything that could be used by the Romanian armed forces to wage war with the invaders. The Armed Forces leadership asked the Ministry of Agriculture for a report mentioning all forests, all waters and all geographical elements that can be used in a defence campaign (AMNR, file no. 2783/1969, p. 3). It was also started the construction, as a matter of urgency, of ammunition and food depots (ib.).

All the force groups in the Romanian Armed Forces entered the state of alert. Romania was ready to defend its territory and, when I say Romania, I refer not only to the Romanian Armed Forces, but also to the Patriotic Guard troops. The year 1968 also meant the imposition of a new military doctrine of the Romanian people, that of the “*War of the Entire People for the Defence of the National Territory*”<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of that ardent period, an extremely difficult and meticulous mission was carried out by the intelligence services. Both the espionage and the counter-espionage had the mission to gather information on Romania from the territories of the possibly aggressor states (the “*Badea*” problem) and to expose the agents infiltrated in key points of the leadership, working for state services “*Badea*” (Photo 1-5).

The code name “*Badea*” represents the five states that invaded Czechoslovakia and were pursuing the same thing in Romania. It is worth noting that the Securitate’s counterintelligence service revealed several GRU<sup>3</sup> agents in Romania who were in the leadership of the Romanian Armed Forces: Ioan Șerb – commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, Vasile Petruț – commander of the Border Guard troops, Floca Arhip – responsible for the deployment plans of the Romanian troops on the national territory and the man who gave the Soviets crucial information about the Romanian armed forces, Nicolae Militaru etc. (Neagu, Stănescu, 1999, p. 30). The Security Troops also entered an accelerated preparation for the war.

Those were the political and military thinking decisions in Bucharest meant to immediately defend Romania. Moreover, medium and long-term decisions were made to prepare the Romanian Armed Forces for a possible defence war. As it was clear that at any moment it could be attacked by the USSR and its allies, Romania initiated a comprehensive programme for the development of the military industry.

Yet, after the Second World War, the Romanian military industry was decimated. Romania, as a defeated state, was forced to dismantle most of its munitions and weapons factories. Only two factories remained functional, the ones in Sadu and 30 Decembrie, meant

<sup>2</sup> More details about the Romanian military doctrine in Pascaru (2023), pp. 191-204.

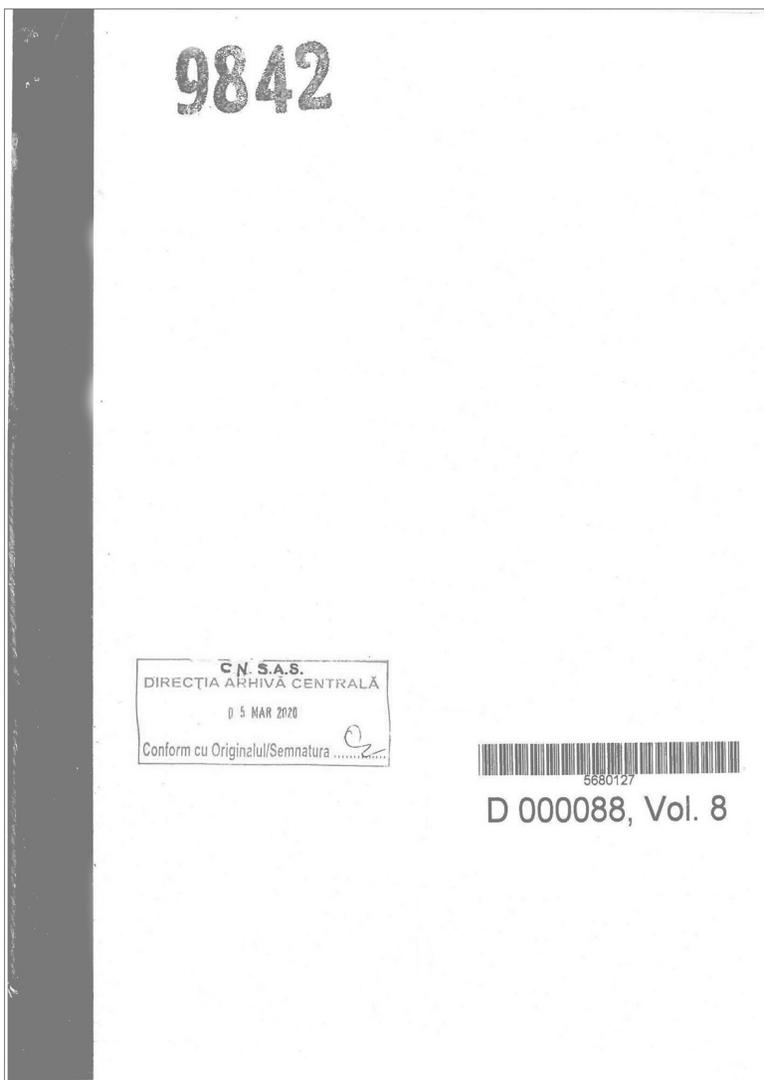
<sup>3</sup> Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravlenie – Organization of the USSR Main Intelligence Administration.



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to build ammunition for the domestic peacekeeping forces (Oprîș, 2007, p. 8). In the post-war years, Romania was obliged to respect the Paris Peace Treaty and pay war compensation to the USSR, and the development of the Romanian military industry was conditioned by the clauses of those treaties.



CONSILIUL SECURITĂȚII STATULUI

- Direcția III-a -

STRICT SECRET  
2 decembrie 1968  
Ex.nr. 1

C.N. S.A.S.  
DIRECȚIA ARHIVĂ CENTRALĂ  
05 MAR 2020  
Conform cu Originalul/Semnatura *Cz*

N. O. T. A.

cu problemele ce trebuie avute în vedere cu ocazia îndrumării și sprijinului ce se va acorda Inspectoratelor județene pe linie "B A D E A".

- De problemele "BADEA" se ocupă și răspunde nemijlocit inspectorul șef, care să antreneze posibilitățile întregului aparat;
- în funcție de volumul de muncă, să fie repartizat un număr corespunzător de ofițeri;
- asigurarea deplină a conspirativității în jurul acestei probleme.

1./ Cu privire la baza de lucru:

Vor fi incluse în baza de lucru următoarele categorii de persoane:

- a.- Fosta și actuala agență a organelor de informații "BADEA";
- b.- reprezentanții oficiali care lucrează temporar în țara noastră;
- c.- cetățenii (rezidenți) țărilor "Badea" domiciliați în R.S.România;
- d.- cetățenii români care întrețin legături suspecte cu persoane din țările "BADEA":
  - legături diplomați, tehnicieni, ziariști, comercianți, turiști etc.;
  - vizitatori ai ambasadelor și consulatelor "Badea";
  - persoane care poartă corespondență suspectă cu cetățenii din țările "Badea";
  - persoane care vizitează frecvent țările "Badea", în scop oficial sau particular și au comportare suspectă;

. // .

2.-  
e.- cetățeni români care au studiat în țările "Badea" și continuă să întrețină legături neoficiale cu instituții sau persoane din aceste state;

f.- cetățeni români repatriați din țările "Badea";

g.- suspecții din rîndul turistilor și vizitatorilor la rude veniți din țările "Badea".

- Cazurile mai deosebite din baza de lucru să fie analizate periodic de către inspectorul șef, stabilindu-se măsurile corespunzătoare;

- asigurarea supravegherii informative a bazei de lucru, în care să se țină seama de:

- prevenirea oricăror acțiuni de amestec în treburile noastre interne;

- imprimarea unui caracter ofensiv activității de contracarare a acțiunilor ostile țării noastre;

- verificarea multilaterală și temeinică a informațiilor obținute, indiferent de sursă, pentru a preveni eventualele provocări sau acțiuni de dezinformare a noastră;

- documentarea multilaterală a activității celor urmăriți pentru a putea proba sau demasca oricînd acțiunile lor potrivnice țării noastre;

- crearea de condiții pentru realizarea unor contacte operative între ofițerii cu posibilități în acest sens și reprezentanții, tehnicienii, delegații sau alți cetățeni ai țărilor "Badea" care se află temporar în teritoriu.

## 2./ Cu privire la crearea rețelei informative:

În scopul depistării persoanelor care desfășoară activitate potrivnică țării noastre și contracarării oricăror acțiuni ostile, este necesară formarea unei rețele de informatori capabili prin care să asigurăm supravegherea întregii baze de lucru.

a.- În recrutarea de noi informatori să avem în vedere, în primul rînd, următoarele categorii de persoane:

- intelectuali și specialiști, cunoscători de limbi străine (profesori, medici, ingineri, cercetători, ziaristi, oameni de cultură și artă etc.);

- persoane cu rude sau prieteni în țările "Badea";

- cetățeni români din rîndul minorităților naționale pe linia problemei "Badea";

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2.-  
- cetățeni români căsătoriți cu persoane din țările "Badea";

- unii rezidenți ai țărilor "Badea", însă numai după o verificare minuțioasă și cu aprobarea conducerii Consiliului Securității Statului;

- legăturile salariaților reprezentanțelor diplomatice și economice ale țărilor "Badea", inclusiv vizitatorii acestor obiective;

- salariații instituțiilor frecventate de către diplomații și cetățenii statelor "Badea";

- cetățeni români care au urmat studii în țările "Badea" sau au lucrat un timp în aceste state și au legături ori pot cultiva relații cu persoanele aflate în atenția noastră;

- persoane care au colaborat cu serviciile de informații "Badea".

b.- În instruirea și dirijarea rețelei informative să avem în permanență în vedere:

- cunoașterea temeinică a principiilor politicii P.C.R. în relațiile cu statele "Badea" și orientarea rețelei informative în lumina acestor principii.

N o t ă: De precizat caracterul contrainformativ al activității noastre, fapt de care trebuie să se țină seama în instruirea informatorilor ce fac deplasări în exterior.

- Educarea fiecărui informator pentru a înțelege just activitatea ce o desfășurăm pe această linie și a învinge teama unora de a ne sprijini cu toată convingerea;

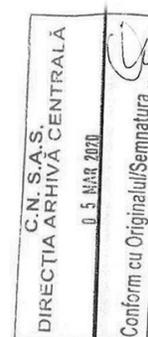
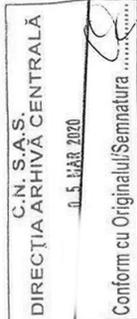
- grija pentru ca informatorii noștri să nu comită provocări sau să fie atrași în asemenea acțiuni;

- verificarea continuă a rețelei informative și controlarea activității acesteia folosind toate mijloacele mijloacele muncii de securitate.

- În instruirea informatorilor să fie fixate sarcini care să ducă la obținerea de date cu privire la:

- problemele pentru care reprezentanții și tehnicienii țărilor "Badea" manifestă interes, metodele și mijloacele prin care încearcă să le obțină, cetățenii români pe care se sprijină în activitatea lor ostilă R.S.România;

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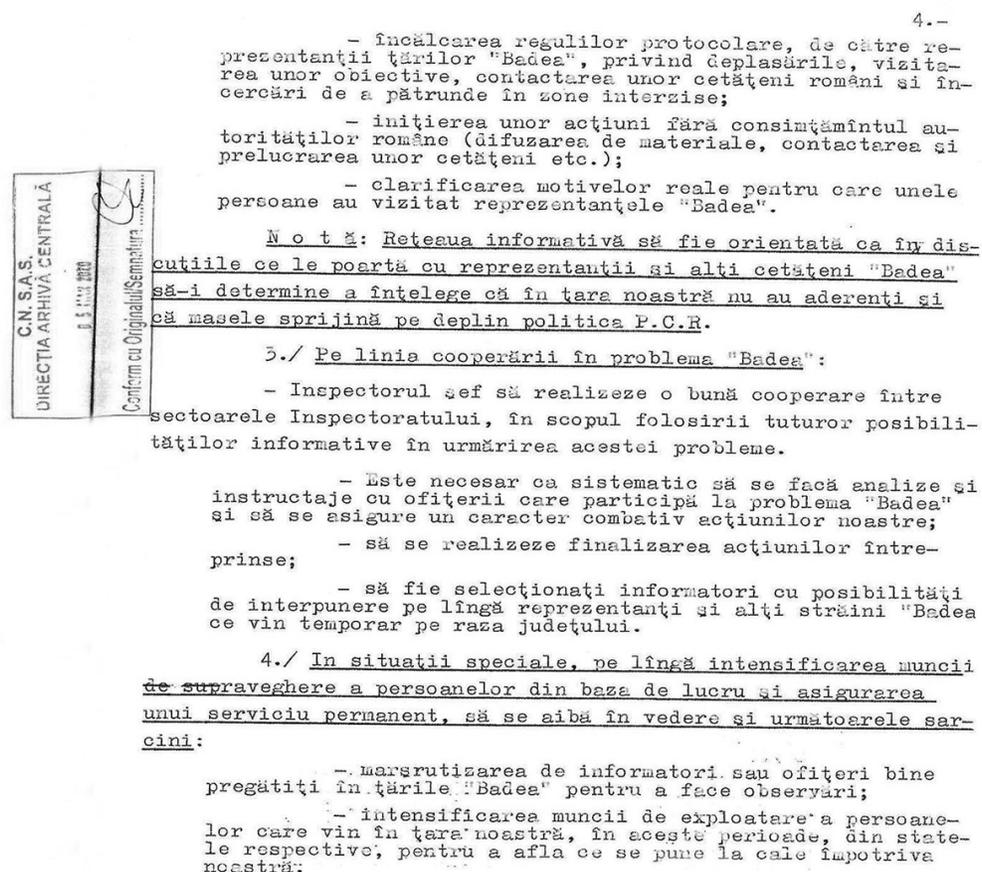


Photo 1-5: Measures taken by the State Security Council in relation to "Badea" (ACNSAS, Documentary Collection, File no. 88, vol. 8, pp. 50-53).

Nevertheless, the reality of 1968 was quite different from that of the years '45-'50. The Paris Peace Treaties "expired", and Romania could achieve, as far as the economy and Moscow allowed it, a military industry. A number of munitions and weapons, as well as combat machines factories were developed. Among the most notable Romanian achievements, we list the upgraded AK-47, the TABs,

the TR-77 tank and the IAR 93 plane (made in collaboration with Yugoslavia) etc.<sup>4</sup>.

So far, we have presented "own forces" with which Romania could defend itself in the event of a Soviet invasion. Could it receive help from outside? Was there any hope? The USA, China, France and Yugoslavia were the main hopes for the political leadership in Bucharest. It was clear that there could be no military aid, not even with weapons, this hypothesis being excluded from the beginning. However, a statement would have been moral support. One of the statements came from President Lyndon Johnson himself, who referred, in San Antonio, on 28 August 1968, that "should not untie the dogs of war" and that a Soviet attack on Romania would have unforeseen consequences (Public Papers, 1970, p. 946). Moreover, the American secretary Dean Rusk sent a letter to the Soviet prime minister Andrei Kosygin, saying, among other things: "Twice in my life and yours the world wars have started in Eastern Europe. I would like your government to abstain if a military action is planned against Romania or any other country in Eastern Europe." (Ghiurco&TVR). Dean Rusk also called on the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Anatoli Dobrinin, to report, asking what the Soviets intended by bringing troops to the borders of Romania (Dobrinin, 2016, p. 237). Therefore, we can conclude that the Americans put all kinds of declarative pressure on the Soviets not to attack Romania.

China was the second country in which Romania set its hopes. China was in an ideological war with the USSR, fighting for the status of first power in the socialist camp. China was not afraid of the Soviet Union, with Chinese communist leaders criticizing Moscow on every occasion. However, although China and Romania had very good relations, military aid was excluded. Indeed, Chinese Prime Minister Ciu En Lai had announced that he would publicly criticise Soviet actions against Romania and that he could help Romania even with cannons, however, warning: "attention, that the near fire does not go out



ROMANIAN  
MILITARY  
THINKING

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<sup>4</sup> All the achievements of the Romanian military industry in the period 1968-1975 can be found in Pascaru, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-275.



*with the far water*”, thus urging Romania to be cautious in relations with Moscow (Cătănuș, 2005, p. 43).

As regards France, although President Charles de Gaulle visited Romania in May, apart from a few warnings to Moscow, no other measures were expressed. The last hope was Yugoslavia. On 24 August 1968, Nicolae Ceaușescu, hoping for an alliance with Josip Broz Tito against the Soviet Union, secretly paid a visit to the neighbouring country. The meeting with Tito took place in the town of Vârșeț. Josip Tito did not want to expose himself to a Soviet attack, knowing very well how the Soviets acted in relations with the other socialist states, as he himself found in Ceaușescu’s situation in the ’50s, when only Stalin’s death escaped Yugoslavia from invasion. Returning to the meeting in Vârșeț, Tito exposed to Ceaușescu the situation in which his country was, having problems with Italians at the northern borders, adding that he did not want a conflict with the Soviets, especially since the Bulgarians had expansionist tendencies, targeting parts of Yugoslavia (Scurtu, 2002, pp. 94-114). All that Ceaușescu obtained from Tito was the possibility that the Romanian armed forces, disarmed, could enter the Yugoslav territory to reorganize, and political leadership could take shelter in the territory of his country (Ib.). Like the leaders in Pekin, Tito asked Ceaușescu to be more moderated in relations with the USSR. Tito disagreed with the supply of the Romanian armed forces from Yugoslavia.

Seeing himself overcome by the situation, with the country surrounded by Warsaw Pact troops, in real danger of being invaded, probably also for fear of having the fate of the Hungarian prime minister Imre Nagy in 1956, on 25 August 1968, Nicolae Ceaușescu had a discussion with the Soviet ambassador in Bucharest, A.V. Basov. At the end of the meeting, Basov transmitted to Moscow the following: *“I spoke to the commander. He will not bark!”*, words intercepted by the Security (Betea, pp. 229-233).

We do not know why Brezhnev gave up the invasion or whether he just wanted to scare the leadership in Bucharest. What we do know is that although the Romanian communist leader behaved like a rebel inside the socialist camp, often violating Moscow’s directives,

the existence of the socialist system, social, political and economic, in Romania was not in danger. Nicolae Ceaușescu ruled Romania with an iron hand and there was no danger that it would abandon socialist ideology.

What happened after the hot moments of August 1968? Internally, the cult of the leader was born, a cult that, at some point, would overwhelm Nicolae Ceaușescu. In August 1968, Ceaușescu lived his moment of glory and many dissidents, such as Paul Goma or Adrian Păunescu, voluntarily entered the party. People would have willingly defended Romania. In my appreciation, it was the first and last time in the history of communism in Romania when the people sincerely supported Nicolae Ceaușescu.

In foreign policy, Romania started a positive period, marked by its accession to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Romania established diplomatic relations with most states, and the dream of obtaining the most favoured nation clause from the USA began to take shape. Nicolae Ceaușescu, however, detached himself, in the ’80s, from the realities that encompassed the whole world. He would end up as the last Stalinist in Europe, in a reality he no longer understood (Fălcan).

## CONCLUSIONS

The speech by Nicolae Ceaușescu criticized the invasion of the Warsaw Treaty Organization troops in Czechoslovakia to end the liberal reform program, adopted by the Czechoslovak Communist Party in the summer of 1968, leading to the maximum strain of the Romanian-Soviet relations. Romanian-Soviet political relations had been strained since the first years of the seventh decade of the last century, first Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and then Nicolae Ceaușescu adopting an increasingly autonomous attitude in bilateral relations and in the socialist bloc.

Romanian and foreign archive documents have shown over time that only once the USSR would have pursued an invasion in Romania, to finish with the independent *“circus”* of Bucharest, but in August 1968, Romania was in the most dangerous moment in the history of relations with the Soviets. They deployed numerous troops along the border



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*In order to face an invasion, all the structures of the Romanian Armed Forces entered the mobilization, the espionage and counter-espionage services intensified their specific activity, the people joined in turn the mobilization, by voluntarily joining the Patriotic Guards, re-established on 21 August 1968.*

with Romania, helped by both Hungarian and Bulgarian neighbours, who did the same. Hungary wanted, as a reward for the zeal shown to Moscow, at least part of Transylvania, if not the entire intra-Carpathian space. Bulgaria longed for possessions from Yugoslavia, which was also shown by Tito in his discussion with Ceausescu, from Vârșeț.

In order to face an invasion, all the structures of the Romanian Armed Forces entered the mobilization, the espionage and counter-espionage services intensified their specific activity, the people joined in turn the mobilization, by voluntarily joining the Patriotic Guards, re-established on 21 August 1968. New military large units and units were established, while others were deployed throughout the national territory. Regarding the national territory, on 21 August 1968, it began its preparation for a war of defence, by making maps with all sorts of aspects and features that could be used.

21 August 1968 represented the moment of glory of the Romanian leader, an apotheosis, "his finest hour", as academician Florin Constantiniu (2011, p. 500) pointed out, and it opened many doors for Nicolae Ceaușescu and for the subsequent Romanian foreign policy.

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