

## THE IMPACT OF THE EVENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA (1968) ON EASTERN EUROPE AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

*Vasile Pușcaș - Marcela Sălăgean*

PUȘCAȘ, Vasile – SĂLĂGEAN, Marcela: Vplyv udalostí v Československu (1968) na východnú Európu a medzinárodný systém. Historické štúdie, 2013, roč. 47, pp. 299 – 304. „Československý rok“, tak nazýva Neal Asckerson reformačné hnutie z roku 1968, ktoré malo významný vplyv na štáty komunistického bloku. Invázia do Československa bola charakterizovaná ako časovaná bomba. Bola výsledkom aplikácie Brežnevovej doktríny, ktorá mala ukázať, že akákoľvek inovácia v krajinách východnej Európy sa bude považovať za nebezpečnú pre ZSSR a povedie z jeho strany k vojenskej intervencii. Čo sa týka Rumunska, rok 1968 priniesol Nicolae Ceaușescovi vnútornú aj vonkajšiu prestíž. Jeho správanie počas Pražskej jari mu získalo sympatie. Politika socializmu s ľudskou tvárou, ktorú presadzovalo československé vedenie, nepritáhala Ceaușesca svojim politickým obsahom, ale bol to skôr prejav vlastnej predstavy o práve každej strany určiť si svoju orientáciu. Čo sa týka rumunsko-sovietskych stykov, v roku 1968 Bukurešť aj Moskva prejavili zdržanlivosť. Pre sovietsku stranu bolo zbytočné zasiahnuť rumunský konzervatívny režim, hoci zastával liberálnu zahraničnú politiku, pretože nebol dostatočne vplyvný na to, aby ohrozil miesto ZSSR v medzinárodnom systéme.

History. West- East confrontation. Rumanian position. Prague spring.

Contemporary historiography researched on the events of 1968, both from local and European/universal sources. In Romania, the topic of “Prague Spring” was mostly debated. A decade ago, Mihai Retegan published a volume in which he discussed Romania’s external policy in relationship to Eastern Europe, in 1968, and, especially, the events from Czechoslovakia. Ever since that period, essential documents of the “*Fond of the Romanian Communist Party’s Central Committee*”; today, the access to such sources (shorthand reports, minutes, syntheses, informing documents, action programmes, etc) is possible through the National Archives. The same author used the documents of the Archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry (in Bucharest), but he mainly focussed on the telegrams and reports which had come from Prague and other countries, of which he analysed an echo of the events in Czechoslovakia.

At present, beside the abovementioned fond, the Archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry also offer researchers “*The Special Files Fond – Problem 244/1968/Czechoslovakia 1.*” Thus, one can see how society of that time saw the participation of the five socialist states, members of the Warsaw Treaty, in the military intervention of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, the same fond contains reports and records about

the position of Communist and workers' parties towards the "democratization process" and the military intervention, about the meetings of the Communist states' leaders in Dresden, Budapest, and Bratislava. Among the archive sources we should also mention the documents of the Romanian Military Archives, especially those of the "*Operations Direction Fond.*" Of course, it is interesting to see the military attachés' reports, but also the plans of the High Major State which can be analysed in comparison with the political discourse of the leaders from Bucharest.

Although "oral history" has not been studied yet on the abovementioned topic, it appears briefly in the published memories of certain participants in the political decision-making process (internal and external) from the Romania of that time. Lavinia Beta's volume grants increased attention to the thematic interviews of certain important political leaders.

As far as Romania's status in the analysed period is concerned, its individualization inside the Communist bloc became more obvious in 1967, via two actions on which the Western press also insisted. First of all, it was Romania's refusal to abide by the Soviet decision to break up Israel, following the war of June 1967. Secondly, was the episode of the relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and Willy Brandt's visit (Deputy Chancellor and Foreign Affairs Minister at that time) to Romania (August '67). With these occasions agreements were signed, which allowed the German and Jewish minorities to emigrate. Romania's relations with Federal Germany and Israel made it a "maverick of the Soviet bloc" and attracted the attention of Western capitals to Bucharest.

During that period, Romanian-American relations were very important, as they improved visibly. After having been treated "indifferently" during a visit to Moscow, the former US Vice-President, Richard Nixon, made a stopover in Romania. Ceaușescu received him with honours, which had important consequences two years later. In the same framework of Romanian-American relations we can include the meeting of the American President, Lyndon Johnson, and the Romanian Prime Minister, I. Gh. Maurer, during the summer of 1967.

As a consequence of the favourable perception of Romania in the West, and especially in the USA, Foreign Affairs Minister Corneliu Mănescu, was elected in September 1967 as President of the UN General Assembly. For Romania, and others, this represented an unprecedented moment in post-war international relations: the representative of a Communist country occupying such a position!

This external policy was associated at the internal level with a "new evolution," which made the leader in Bucharest popular. The peak of this policy was the Plenary Session of the Central Committee in April 1968, which was considered the most important moment in Romania's de-Stalinization. At the same time, Ceaușescu's internal and external prestige increased in the spring of 1968 due to General de Gaulle's visit to Romania. The French President came to Bucharest after stopping over in Moscow and Warsaw. The French leader was convinced that, through his visit to Romania, he offered consistence to his favourite slogan "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals," while Ceaușescu seized this occasion to consolidate his prestige. In fact, as it had been demonstrated both during this meeting and in the following period, de Gaulle was the

perfect sounding board to Nicolae Ceaușescu's declarations in favour of abolishing political and military blocs and of a United Europe.

However, all of these internal and external approaches of Nicolae Ceaușescu were outrun by what remained in history under the name of "the Prague Spring." The policy of "humane socialism," promoted by the Czechoslovak leaders, attracted Ceaușescu less for its political content, but rather for the manifestation of every party's right to choose its orientation.

Characterised by Westerners as an "ongoing incident," the invasion of Czechoslovakia was a violent manifestation of the "Breznev Doctrine": every time socialism experiences danger in a country of the socialist bloc, the other states within the bloc have the right to intervene in order to save the regime. Practically speaking, the Soviet Union assumed the right to send in its troops every time the countries from its sphere of influence were moving away from the Soviet model. The invasion of Czechoslovakia showed other countries in Eastern Europe that every innovation, considered dangerous in Moscow, could lead to the intervention by Soviet troops. Simply remaining in the limits of "Marxist Orthodoxy" meant taking from the Kremlin the reason for military intervention! However, as far as Romanian-Soviet relations were concerned, in the summer of 1968, both Bucharest and Moscow proved reserved. For the Russians, it was useless to turn upside down a conservative ideological regime (Ceaușescu's regime), with liberal views in its foreign policy, but not enough influence to endanger the USSR's position in the international system, as it had evolved after the Second World War.

The events of 1968 in Prague, or "Czechoslovakia's Year," as Neal Ascherson calls the Eastern movement towards reform, had a significant effect in Poland, too. We mention this country as it played a very important role inside the Eastern Bloc. The Soviets paid attention to General Mieczysław Moczar's influence, as they considered that he intended "to transform Poland into another Romania," thus developing an anti-Russian rhetoric, as well as an "independent" solution with respect to the Warsaw Treaty. Although he experienced Polish October in 1956, Gomulka did not like Dubček's proposals. Although the Polish students invoked the name of the Prague leader, Gomulka oriented popular emulation towards a kind of counter-revolution, by offering the troops of the Warsaw Treaty for the intervention of August 1968 in Czechoslovakia. This is why Neal Ascherson estimates that, in 1968, in Poland "grotesque events" took place, which led to dislike towards the Czechs and the Slovaks (except for intellectuals and students). However, beside some unnatural effects, a consequence of the events of 1968 was a change in the nature of the opposition of Poland. If students and intellectuals were in a separate and even isolated situation in those moments of crisis, workers were indifferent. In such an emotional context, intellectual opposition towards the party increased and a historical component, which Communists had tried to separate from the social, was explored. Since then, opponents have turned more and more towards the Catholic Church.

The events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, both before and after the military intervention of the Warsaw Treaty, had consequences in the East, but also in the West. Historians of international relations underline the distinctions between 1956, 1968, etc.

Duroselle and Kaspi state that the “Czechoslovak phenomenon was very different from the Hungarian phenomenon of 1956 and from the Romanian phenomenon.” Charles Gati underlined that the “humane socialism” of “Prague Spring” intended to bring changes inside the Communist system, while Hungary wanted to change the system. Anyway, a conclusion after 1968 was that the “Soviet model” proved difficult to apply in the countries of Central Europe; even if Moscow considered that the Czechs and Slovaks were traditionally Russia-oriented, which supposed a behaviour based on the “Socialist legality,” the year 1968 demonstrated that the Czechs and Slovaks adopted the attitude of the Poles, the Hungarians, the Romanians and the East Germans of not accepting all that came from the Soviets.

Obviously, international circumstances explain this attitude. Western Germany’s Ostpolitik, and the more flexible attitude of the Soviet Bloc towards the West, encouraged the specific aspirations of the countries and peoples of Central Europe. The so-called “differentiation” policy, which Washington had proposed practicing towards the states within Moscow’s orbit, contributed to the weakening of the “unity” of the actors in their relations with the Soviets. The openness shown by the Kissinger-Brandt tandem during the second half of the seventh decade led to support of “Prague Spring” by the leaders of certain states of in the area (see the case of Romania), to the manifestation of Soviet incoherence, during the first months of 1968, and to the problems occurring at the level of influence and the decision-making processes of the Warsaw Treaty.

Brejnev’s Westpolitik started from the premise that the existence of Western Europe was a destabilising element in Eastern Europe, as J.F. Brown stated. That is why Moscow was determined to support the policy of the sphere of influence, together with detente and coexistence, at the level of the international system. The launch of the “Brejnev Doctrine” at the end of 1968 was a new attempt to impose recognition of Soviet intentions in achieving the coherence of the Eastern Bloc by the “direct consensus” method, a revival of the Comintern tradition. After the “Czechoslovak crisis,” Moscow tried to reinstate “Pax Sovietica,” but, in fact, it proved incapable of managing the crises which intensified at the level of the “sub-system.”

The article in “Pravda” (26 September 1968), which announced the “Brejnev Doctrine,” was called “Sovereignty and international obligations of Socialist countries.” De facto a restoration of “limited sovereignty,” the “Brejnev Doctrine” underlined the importance of “Socialist internationalism,” by its two perspectives: 1) East-European states were sovereign; 2) however, they could not have a direction contrary to the Bloc’s “common interests.” We should add that defining “common interests” was the USSR’s prerogative. In other words, the “Brejnev Doctrine” intended to explicitly reconfirm Moscow’s post-war policy towards East-European states. However, this “restoration” did not insist anymore on uniformity based on a common ideology, but rather it tried to re-establish relations of economic and political dependence. This happened in a context in which East European countries had started to develop economic interdependence with the West.

Among the multiple effects of the events of 1968 on the evolution of international relations, we mention the formulation of what the political discourse of the ‘70s called

the “Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.” Vojtech Mastny estimated that the remarks of Kissinger’s collaborator meant the recognition of geopolitical realities, which expressed the Soviets’ main interest in Eastern Europe, but did not exclude the existence of “centrifugal forces” in the region, which might “explode sooner or later, causing the burst of the third world War.”

The “Sonnenfeldt Doctrina” was interpreted differently by those who saw the development of the international system centred on the relationship of the USA and the USSR, and by those who only referred to US policy towards the USSR and the East Bloc. Sonnenfeldt’s speeches (1975) were interpreted as supporting the post-Yalta status-quo, given the fact that the year 1968 showed the Soviet style of reaction; this would have justified the attention granted to the USSR’s sensitivity, which, from the point of view of the external factors, would have been more significant than Moscow’s vulnerabilities. The American officials reaffirmed the “differentiation” policy towards the states of the Bloc, by which they demonstrated a first attitude towards the work preparing the Final Act in Helsinki. Maybe the association of long-term objectives with immediate political action was more convincing. Thus, Nixon intensified dialog with the USSR after the first year of his presidential mandate, in parallel with the development of direct relations with the governments of East-European states (the first visits of a US President in the region were in Romania, Yugoslavia, and Poland). Moreover, the concept of “revolutionary changes” (Brzezinski) was illustrated by encouraging the Ostpolitik-ului, but also by the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the procedure of granting the most-favoured-nation-clause, as well as by the criteria of guaranteeing export credits and an emigration policy towards East-Europeans.

Apart from the multiple interpretations of the “Sonnenfeldt Doctrine,” it is obvious that the USA was also obliged to revise and clarify the policy of its relations not only with the USSR, but also with other East-European countries. This allowed a more consistent construction of Reagan’s Eastern policy, but, at the same time, a development of the consequences of “perestroika,” which favoured the political movements of 1989.

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## VPLYV UDALOSTÍ V ČESKOSLOVENSKU (1968) NA VÝCHODNÚ EURÓPU A MEDZINÁRODNÝ SYSTÉM

*Vasile Pușcaș – Marcela Sălăgean*

Rumunská dobová žurnalistika a historiografia používajú na označenie reformného úsilia v Československu termín „československý rok,“ hoci sa pod ním vníma dlhšie obdobie 60. rokov, nielen rok 1968. Československé udalosti z roku 1968 pred aj po vojenskej invázii mali vplyv tak na Východ, ako aj na Západ. Historici zaoberajúci sa medzinárodnými vzťahmi upozorňujú na rozdiel medzi udalosťami rokov 1968 a 1956 a medzi československými, maďarskými a rumunskými udalosťami. Charles Gati hovorí o Pražskej jari ako o socializme s ľudskou tvárou, ktorý mal na zreteli zmeny vnútri komunistického zriadenia. Neprírovnáva ho k udalostiam v Maďarsku v 1956, lebo tam sa pokúšali o celkovú zmenu systému. Nasledujúci vývoj, ako post-1968 obdobie, ukázal, že sovietsky model nemožno aplikovať na štáty strednej Európy, hoci sa po československej kríze Moskva usilovala nastoliť tzv. *Pax Sovietica*. V skutočnosti sa však dokázalo, že nebola manažérske schopná kontrolovať krízy, ktoré silneli vnútri systému. Tieto okolnosti sú prejavom medzinárodnej situácie. Východná politika Západného Nemecka a pružnejší postoj sovietskeho bloku voči Západu podporili nádeje krajín strednej Európy; pochopenie zo strany tandemu Kissinger-Brandt podporilo Pražskú jar. Na druhej strane, Brežnevova západná politika vychádzala z tézy o západnej Európe ako o destabilizujúcom činiteľi pre východnú Európu. Brežnevova doktrína sa usilovala o obnovu povojnovej politiky zo strany Moskvy voči štátom východnej Európy. Takáto reštaurácia sa už nezakladala na udržaní ideologickej jednoty, ale snažila sa upevňovať hospodársku a politickú závislosť krajín východného bloku v podmienkach novovznikajúcich hospodárskych kontaktov so Západom. Účinok roku 1968 na medzinárodné vzťahy a v 70. rokoch hlásanú *Sonnenfeldtovu doktrínu* bol d'alekosiahly.

Translated by Adina CORNEA,  
Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca  
Modern Applied Languages Department

*Prof. Dr. Vasile Pușcaș, Institute for International Studies, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, M. Kolgălniceanu 1, 400084 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.*

*Conf. dr. Marcela Sălăgean, Facultatea de Istorie și Filosofie, Napoca 11, 400084 Cluj-Napoca, Romania*