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# The Violent Revolution: Nationalism and the 1989 Romanian Revolution

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Chet Emmons  
HST 413  
Professor Doellinger  
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The Violent Revolution:  
Nationalism and the 1989 Romanian Revolution

**Introduction**

Some of the most dramatic images of Revolutionary upheaval in Eastern Europe in 1989 came from Romania. While most of the Revolutions were peaceful, the Romanian Revolution was not. The authoritarian nature of the Romanian government made it appear that violence would be likely in the event of a rebellion or revolution, what is noteworthy is that two other authoritarian Eastern European states, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, had only initial violent governmental reactions before peacefully conceding power to the revolutionaries. The Soviet Union's relationship with each state spurred the different courses each nation took. Czechoslovakia had a history of political reform that ended with a Soviet-led invasion in 1968, and the Soviet Union propped up the authoritarian post-invasion government. East Germany had initially been occupied by the Soviet Union's military at the end of the Second World War and the only major upheaval prior to 1989, which occurred in 1953, was violently repressed by a joint-force of the Soviet and East German militaries. Meanwhile in Romania, the government under Nicolae Ceausescu isolated itself from the rest of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for decades. Nicolae Ceausescu pursued an independent path from the Soviet Union in directing Romania's domestic and international policies. As such, Ceausescu did not need to rely on the Soviet military. In fact, Romanian nationalism led Ceausescu to distrust other members of the Warsaw Pact and minorities within his own nation, a distrust that spurred his violent reaction to

the initial protests in 1989 which, in turn, led to the violent overthrow of Ceausescu's government.

Ceausescu's government frequently distrusted its fellow members of the Warsaw Pact. Ceausescu began to view the other members of the Pact as threats to Romania's sovereignty and to his own power almost as soon as he came to power in 1965, although later events helped cement his distrust of the other Pact members. One major example of the Warsaw Pact's ability to interfere in its member nations affairs came less than three years after he took power. When the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, the then-leader, Leonid Brezhnev, instituted the 'Brezhnev Doctrine' which declared that the Soviet Union had the right to intervene in the affairs of other socialist nations, namely the Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe, if the socialist government appeared to be under threat of subversion, or reform as was the case in Czechoslovakia. In 1989, however, the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, ended the Brezhnev Doctrine and removed the threat of Soviet intervention in other Communist nations. The Brezhnev Doctrine may have been a major factor in the retaining of Communist control in Czechoslovakia, whereas in Romania the potential for a Soviet intervention was very frightening to Ceausescu.

While the possibility of Soviet intervention became increasingly threatening to Ceausescu's government, at the same time as it became more comforting for other Warsaw Pact members. Czechoslovakia was not the only satellite state which the Soviet Union propped up; the Soviet Union was instrumental in defeating a major uprising against the East German government in 1953, which was likely a major factor in the East German government's later attitudes towards the Soviet Union, namely that the Soviets could be counted on to help defend

the Communist government. The Czechoslovak government was backed by Soviet support and when that support was removed, the government had no choice but to negotiate with protesters and like East Germany allowed free elections early that same year. Meanwhile in Romania, dissent was treated ruthlessly and the government was not dependant on the Soviet Union to prevent dissent. Nationalism had been a part of Romanian politics since the beginning of the concept of the Romanian nation, and nationalism helped create the climate in which the revolution turned violent.

The independence that Romania had when compared to other Soviet satellite states was noted in the decades prior to the collapse of Communism. Historians acknowledged nationalism that for centuries was a factor in the Romanian government's policies and, in fact, nationalist sentiment was what brought about the modern Romanian national identity in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The development of a distinct Romanian national identity began in the aftermath of the Napoleonic period. French literature on national identity spread into Romania and encouraged Romanian thinkers to view themselves as being distinct from their neighbors.<sup>2</sup> Historians have acknowledged that nationalism has been a major factor on Romanian politics even after they gained their own state. What historians tended to not discuss, however, was the nationalist policies of Ceausescu while he was still in power rather they focus on nationalism in the pre-Ceausescu period, although that lack of criticism from western sources began to disappear in his last years in power from people, such as Katherine Verdery. Ceausescu was viewed as a friend to the west for most of his regime, to the extent that dissidents "were perceived as enemies of the West because they were trying to distance President Ceausescu... from the U.S." which in

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<sup>1</sup> John Campbell, *French Influence and the Rise of Roumanian Nationalism* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, *French Influence*, 20-21.

turn meant that there was little political incentive for historians to criticize Ceausescu's government in Western scholarly circles.<sup>3</sup> By the mid-1980s, however, the perception of Ceausescu being a bridge between the east and west gave way, and Gorbachev began to take up Ceausescu's old spot in the western consciousness, as such, by the late 1980s historians, such as Katherine Verdery, openly criticized Ceausescu's policies and his use of nationalism against his own people.<sup>4</sup> This shows that by the end of his regime there was a great deal of criticism towards Ceausescu's government on the grounds of nationalist policies, but for most of the time he was still in power such criticisms were few and far between.

It was not until after the fall of Ceausescu's government that historians began to look closely at the nationalist policies that Ceausescu implemented. Following Ceausescu's downfall and throughout the 1990s, historians put more focus on the Ceausescu regime's nationalist policies both at home and abroad, to the detriment of the nationalism that guided Romanian politics prior to the Communists took power. Nineteenth and early twentieth century nationalism was downplayed in favor of focuses on the brutal policies that Ceausescu implemented. It was not until over a decade after Ceausescu was overthrown that historians began to more frequently examine him in the wider context of nationalism in Romania in the nineteenth century, during the Communist period, and after the Communist period, although there had always been a few historians who focused on the wider context.

An examination of all of these periods shows that, although Ceausescu's policies were extreme in many ways, nationalist sentiment against neighboring nations and against minorities were not unique under Ceausescu, nor did they die with him. During his rule, Western historians

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 205.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xi-xiii.

tended to focusing on the nationalism in pre-Communist period and did not give a large amount of attention to Ceausescu's own policies. In the years directly following Ceausescu's overthrow, historians tended to go in the opposite direction and ignore the pre-Communist nationalism while focusing on Ceausescu's nationalism. In the decades since Ceausescu's overthrow historians have examined his policies in context of Romanian nationalism both before and after his rule. Few articles have been written on the direct influence nationalism had on the violence during the 1989 Romanian revolution.

This paper will mostly be focusing on primary source records that include decrees from the Romanian government in the mid to late 1960s and 1989, official speeches by Ceausescu and other officials, diplomatic cables from the Romanian government to their embassies, and newspaper articles from the United States. The newspaper articles tend to be from western news sources in the late 1980s, while the government records come from Romania, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and the Soviet Union, with a focus on Romanian records, especially diplomatic cables and government speeches. The timeline of this paper will mostly be within the time-frame of Ceausescu's rule of Romania from 1965 until 1989, with an exception in the form of the 1953 East German rebellion. The East German and Czechoslovak portions of this paper will be done as a contrast between those two Communist states and Romania. The contrast of between Romania and the two other nations' reactions to Soviet occupation in the early years of Ceausescu's regime and then in the reaction to the protesters and reformers in 1989. The differences between East Germany and Czechoslovakia, when compared to Romania, in regards to those two factors will be important in examining how the interactions between the Soviet Union and the nations in question in the two decades prior to the revolutions correlate to the

reactions to the 1989 revolutions. Looking at Western newspapers will be used in disseminating some of the more obscure events or attitudes that were not written down by the government of those nations.

This essay initially examines how the Soviet interactions with East Germany and Czechoslovakia affected those nations attitudes, as well as how the Romanian government under Ceausescu perceived those same interactions and how it affected Romanian foreign policy. The Communist party hardliners in those nations had a dependence on the Soviet Union, which is a useful contrast towards the Romanian government's independence from the Soviet Union. Then the Romanian government's reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is examined, as this was a formative event in Ceausescu's distrust of the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw Pact. After that the nationalist policies that the Ceausescu government had towards the minorities living in Romania will receive attention. This helps show the anti-Hungarian sentiment that spilled into violence in 1989, it also illustrates how the same distrust of foreigners, such as the Soviets, spilled into the Romanian government's views of its own people. Then the focus is placed on the revolutions of 1989, firstly East Germany and Czechoslovakia's relatively peaceful reaction to the revolution, and then Romania's very violent reaction. This analysis illustrates some of the fears and distrust that Ceausescu had towards Romania's neighbors and minorities.

This essay argues that the Romanian revolution was greatly different from the other revolutions of 1989 because of Ceausescu's independence from the Soviet Union and his nationalistic distrust of Romania's minorities and the other members of the Warsaw Pact. This examination of the violence in the Romanian revolution as being a result of nationalism rather

than simply the attempts by the regime to retain power is not a common interpretation of the revolution. While Ceausescu's wish to retain power was certainly one of his motivations for the authorization of violence, his nationalist sentiment was sincere and influenced his decision to use violence. The historical loss of territory to the Soviet Union and Romania's weak claim to another piece of territory weighed on Ceausescu and made it difficult for him to trust it completely. Ceausescu's nationalist concerns for Romania and its sovereignty were exacerbated by his concerns regarding the amount of power the Soviet Union exerted over Eastern Europe.

### **Interventions, Invasions, and Romania**

Romania, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia were some of the most authoritarian states within the Eastern Bloc and their attitudes were formed over time thanks to their interactions with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union helped to back the two hardliners in East Germany and Czechoslovakia when uprisings and reform movements threatened to remove their power, but Romania never needed to rely on Soviet support to retain control. When he came to power in 1965, Ceausescu felt that the Soviet intervention in East Germany had the potential to set a dangerous precedent and the precedent set by the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia was viewed as a threat to Romanian sovereignty and his own power. While those three nations were the most authoritarian states in Eastern Europe, Romania was the only one that did not rely on the Soviet Union's power.

The 1953 Rebellion in East Germany was the result of a construction workers strike which quickly gained momentum into an outright uprising in opposition to the imposition of the Soviet economic system on the East German people.<sup>5</sup> The East German government was unable

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<sup>5</sup> "Situation Report from Andrei Grechko and Nikolai Tarasov to Nikolai Bulganin, received 6:30 p.m. Moscow Time (4:30 CET)," June 17, 1953, trans. Victor Gobarev. *Wilson Center Digital Archive*, accessed May 29, 2016, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112451.pdf?v=d85bbbe341232fd2698e017>

to respond to the mass rebellions which had spread throughout the nation. Soviet Generals Andrei Grechko and Nikolai Tarasov informed the Soviet Defense minister, Nikolai Bulganin that, “to restore order, the 2nd Mechanized [Soviet] Army... was brought into Berlin and given the task of restoring complete order in the city,” and other Soviet military units were brought into other cities to suppress the revolt.<sup>6</sup> The rebellion was defeated in less than two days as a result of the Soviet Army’s actions. This use of force sent a message to the East German government, as well as other European Communist nations that the Soviet Union would defend its hegemony. The Soviet Union expanded this commitment to the defense of other Communist nations. The Soviet Union eventually expanded even this commitment into one which attempted to defend Communism from reformist Communists, as was the case in 1968 when it along with other Communist nations, including East Germany, invaded Czechoslovakia.

The 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was condemned by Nicolae Ceausescu and his government. The invasion was spurred by Alexander Dubcek and the reforms that he began to implement in 1968. Dubcek’s reforms frightened hardliners in the Czechoslovak Communist Party as well as neighboring Communist nations so much that they sent a letter to Brezhnev, less than two months before the invasion occurred, characterizing Dubcek as a far-right agitator. They warned that Dubcek was “fomenting a wave of nationalism and chauvinism, and are provoking an anti-Communist and anti-Soviet psychosis.” The hardliners predicted that Czechoslovakia was headed towards a right-wing counterrevolution.<sup>7</sup> By August 1968 Brezhnev intervened, removing Dubcek from power, and installing hardliners as the heads of the

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<sup>6</sup> "Situation Report from Andrei Grechko and Nikolai Tarasov to Nikolai Bulganin."

<sup>7</sup>Alois Indra et al, "Letter from Czech Communist Politicians to Brezhnev Requesting Soviet Intervention in Prague Spring," trans. Mark Kramer, Wilson Center Digital Archive, accessed December 4, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114636>.

government. This was an important lesson for the Czechoslovak hardliners and the people of the Soviet Bloc. The Soviet government was willing to intervene to prevent reform movements. While some Communist governments may have been comforted by the idea of Soviet intervention, such as the new leadership in Czechoslovakia who owed their positions to the Soviet Union, Romania's leaders not only opposed the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, they refused to participate in the invasion.

In a speech to a gathered audience in the Republic Palace Square in Bucharest on August 21, the day after the invasion began, Ceausescu declared that "the entry of the five Socialist nations into Czechoslovakia constitutes a big mistake, it is a threat to peace in Europe, and threatens the future of Socialism all over the world."<sup>8</sup> Ceausescu's condemnation of the invasion was not merely lip service to the west, because the condemnation was also emphasized in the private meetings of Romanian officials with officials from other Communist nations. In an August 24 telegram from the Romanian ambassador to China, he declared the Soviet intervention an "Imperialist invasion," he stated that despite Soviet claims that the invasion was to protect peace in Europe, he claimed the Soviet Union had destroyed the peace "when they started the war."<sup>9</sup> This vocal opposition to the invasion was a major act of defiance, and endeared Ceausescu to the west. Ceausescu had displayed some minor acts of independence from the Soviet Union before, but his refusal to invade Czechoslovakia marked a major break from Soviet policy and such attitudes would continue to mark Ceausescu's career until his downfall in 1989.

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<sup>8</sup>Nicolae Ceausescu, "Ceausescu's speech of 21 August 1968," Youtube video, 2:31, posted by "Avocatul Poporului," accessed December 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2TQ3jYJzlk>.

<sup>9</sup>George Macovescu, "Telegrams from Romanian Embassy, Beijing, to Romanian Ministry of Foreign affairs," trans. Mircea Munteanu, Wilson Center Digital Archive, accessed December 4, 2015, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113289>.

Ceausescu viewed this first implementation of the Brezhnev Doctrine in a very negative light, even at the same time it was bringing hardliners to power in Czechoslovakia. Ceausescu's government viewed 1968, and the implications from the invasion, as a threat to Ceausescu's rule and for Romanian sovereignty as well. In his August 21st speech Ceausescu also states that the excuse of fighting counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia could be used to justify an invasion of Romania, and in the face of that possibility Ceausescu declared "the entire Romanian people will not allow anybody to violate the territory of our Homeland," Romania had good reason for being concerned about foreign nations violating their territory, especially the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> The Romanians already had some negative attitudes towards the Soviet Union due to its control over the region of Bessarabia that the Romanians felt they had a more legitimate claim to, as well as distrust of Hungary over the potential that they could claim the region of Transylvania.

#### **Bessarabia: Ethnic Romanians in the Soviet Union**

The regions of Bessarabia and Transylvania had strong positions in the national conscious of the Romanian people, as symbols of why neighboring nations and national minorities could not be trusted. Bessarabia has a sizeable Romanian population, yet it was taken by Russia and then once again by the Soviet Union. Transylvania has a sizeable Hungarian population and had traded hands between Romania and Hungary multiple times following World War I. These two regions increased Ceausescu's feelings that even other members of the Warsaw Pact were willing to take Romanian land and the intervention in Czechoslovakia increased fears that an intervention in Romania could be used to claim lands in Romania.

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<sup>10</sup> Nicolae Ceausescu, "Speech Made at the Popular Rally Held in Bucharest in the Republic Palace Square: August 21, 1968," *Romania: On the Way of Completing Socialist Construction* (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1969),384.

The region of Bessarabia had been a part of Romania a few times in Romania's history, and it had a sizable Romanian population, however by the 1960s it was within the Soviet Union. Romanians viewed this as being a threat to their national sovereignty as it showed the possible consequences of an invasion by one of its neighbors. This also led to a permanent issue that always prevented Romanian from having a close relationship to the Soviet Union.

The region of Bessarabia has a large ethnic Romanian population. Despite that fact it had been partitioned and annexed by Russia Russia for nearly one hundred years; the region briefly rejoined the rest of Romania in 1918 before being forced back into the Soviet Union in 1924.<sup>11</sup> Following World War II, the Romanians occasionally brought up the situation in Bessarabia, but less than a year after Ceausescu took power he directly addressed the situation by stating that the Romanian people's right to "self-determination" was being violated by the Soviets.<sup>12</sup> Ceausescu's government brought up the Bessarabian question more frequently and more aggressively during Ceausescu's years in power. The question lead to a certain amount of aggression on both sides of the border with the Soviet Union eventually publically declaring that "no serious or responsible politician' could raise the issue of the post-war borders." This meant that the Soviet Union told Ceausescu's government that the issue was settled<sup>13</sup>. This exchange also shows that the issues brought up so many sensitive feelings that the Soviet government was willing to resort to public insults towards their own ally. This illustrates the tensions that both sides had when discussing Bessarabia.

Bessarabia was a hot-button issue in Ceausescu's Romania and his government exploited that fact on multiple occasions. When the Soviet Union did something to upset the Romanian

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<sup>11</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 152.

<sup>12</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 156.

<sup>13</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 163-164.

government, Ceausescu used Bessarabia to stir up anti-Soviet sentiment, such as when the Soviet Union first implemented its glasnost policy to the disapproval of the hardline Ceausescu government.<sup>14</sup> Romanians viewed the loss of Bessarabia, in the national mind-set, as Russia taking their land for themselves and then attempting to erase the national identity of the ethnic Romanians still living there, and it contributed to a fear that their neighbors could enter Romania to take their land.<sup>15</sup> Ceausescu feared that an intervention by the Warsaw Pact members, similar to the one in Czechoslovakia, could be used to take more Romanian land. One region of the country, Transylvania, had a very real risk of being lost to Romania due to the fact that the majority of Transylvania's population was actually a national minority and had, in fact, been lost to Romania within living memory before being returned at the end of World War II.

#### **Romania's Minorities in Transylvania: Cultural Identity and Language**

There had been some hostility toward the Hungarian minority living in the Transylvanian region of Romania by the Romanian government since the first annexation of the region. Although the suppression of the minority ebbed throughout the century, during Ceausescu's rule the suppression became even more extreme. The 1989 Romanian revolution began in the Transylvanian section of the nation, which spurred a violent response from a government which had grown used to using violence to suppress the Hungarian minority. Although Ceausescu's policies did not exist in a vacuum, they had their origins in Romania's first policies in Transylvania.

Following the annexation of Transylvania in 1918 laws were passed in an attempt to suppress the Hungarians. While the initial committees that formed around making Transylvania a

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<sup>14</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 164.

<sup>15</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 153.

part of Romania wondered if “the union [was] to be unconditional...or [if it] was to be a conditional “marriage” on equal, clearly defined terms, in which Transylvania remained an autonomous partner,” pressure from Romanian nationalists rendered those questions moot and Transylvania was to be incorporated without autonomy.<sup>16</sup> The imposition of Romanian rule over Transylvania had a clear effect on the Hungarian minority, as their population declined from 1910 to 1930 by nearly three-hundred thousand.<sup>17</sup> Of course, this decline may have been as a result of the fact that the government no longer counted minorities as Hungarians if they adopted the Romanian language.<sup>18</sup> Because Romanian was the official language for the entirety of Romanian territory, people who lived in Transylvania would suddenly find themselves in a nation that did not support their language. While the suppression of the Hungarian language was attempted following World War I, the Communists did not attempt to suppress them to that extent until Ceausescu came to power.

Transylvania has a sizable Hungarian population, but it also had been in Romania for a short period of time. Transylvania only joined Romania after World War I, in 1941 it was retaken by Hungary, before being returned to Romania at the end of World War II. As a result of this, there was a sense by Ceausescu that Transylvania could be lost to Hungary again. Because of these fears Ceausescu placed pressure on the Hungarian minority, attempts to eliminate their cultural and linguistic characteristics. Ceausescu’s government was not the first Romanian regime to suppress the Hungarian minority, but it was the first Communist government to attempt it.

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<sup>16</sup> Irena Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 134.

<sup>17</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, 135.

<sup>18</sup> Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, 137.

The pre-Ceausescu Communist government of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej worked to suppress the national identities of both the ethnic Romanians and the minorities in accordance with socialist ideology.<sup>19</sup> Communist theory indicates that nationalism and national identity should be replaced with a sense of internationalism, thereby making attempts to suppress the Hungarians in favor of the Romanians antithetical to the Communist party's beliefs. There was a generalized view that no ethnic group would have their culture encouraged over any other.

During the rule of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the Hungarian minority enjoyed special privileges that did not exist in the non-Hungarian regions of the country in the shape of bilingual signs on public buildings.<sup>20</sup> The minority received a much higher amount of representation during the Communist period than they did prior to World War II. There were concerns about the Hungarians using the government's pro-minority policies, especially following the 1956 Hungarian uprising which "raised questions for the party leadership about [Hungarians] loyalty to the state," which in turn began a slow shift in the Communist party's policies even before Ceausescu came to power.<sup>21</sup> Due to the history of Romanian nationalist suppression of minorities could not easily be forgotten, and Ceausescu embraced it as a means of controlling Romanian society and accelerated the effort to make the Hungarian minority in Transylvania primarily speakers of the Romanian language.

Ceausescu himself held a great deal of distrust for members of the minority. When he took power in 1965 he declared that "any outsiders who tried to defend the national minorities were declared to be "infringing on national sovereignty," which was the first of many anti-minority declarations he took. He also prevented Romania's minorities from receiving

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<sup>19</sup> Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 110.

<sup>21</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 110, 112.

international aid.<sup>22</sup> This isolation of the minorities from the outside world was only the beginning of Ceausescu's campaign of suppression.

Ceausescu attempted to avoid referring to the Hungarians as a separate entity in his speeches, simply by calling all of the people within Romania, as Romanians. In a 1967 speech, delivered within the ethnically Hungarian Brasov region of the country, Ceausescu consistently referred to the "Romanians, Magyars, and the Germans," even when specifically referring to the folk culture of the Brasov region all three ethnic groups were referred.<sup>23</sup> Only referring to Hungarians, when coupled with Romanians could be considered an attempted erasure of the local Hungarian culture and society, by treating it as a part of the wider Romanian culture, however it could also be considered inclusive, a continuing example of the internationalism that Communist parties all over the world aspired to. It may not have been clear to Hungarians living in Romania what their new leader's intentions were; by the 1970s, it became impossible to argue that Ceausescu was interested in inclusion as both his rhetoric and his policies became increasingly focused on suppressing minorities, especially the Hungarians.

Throughout the 1960s, Ceausescu's government began removing the safeguards for the minority's language. Initially, classes for the Hungarian language in high Hungarian population centers would only teach Hungarian, but over time Hungarian and Romanian were taught in the Hungarian language classes.<sup>24</sup> In 1976, a teacher was murdered as he attempted to organize Hungarian language classes, although the murder was never solved it is generally assumed by

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<sup>22</sup> Sara Popham, "The Hungarians in Transylvania: Victims of Romanian Nationalism," *The Student Historical Journal* (1993-1994). Loyno University, New Orleans, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Nicolae Ceausescu, "Speech Made of the Meeting with the Party Active in Brasov Region: Held on the Occasion of the Visit Paid by the Party and State Leaders: June 18, 1967," *Romania: On the Way of Completing Socialist Construction* (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1969), 316, 317, 318. Magyar is an alternate name for Ethnic Hungarians.

<sup>24</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 116.

historians that Ceausescu's government murdered him.<sup>25</sup> Ceausescu's government attempted to prevent minorities from learning their own language and the murder of a teacher attempting to promote a minority language was one such method. The attempted erasure of the Hungarian language was another attempt to erase the Hungarian cultural identity, just as the refusal to acknowledge the Hungarians as being culturally different from ethnic Romanians. Another aspect that affected how the Ceausescu's government viewed their minority was due to Hungary's involvement in the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.

### **Hungary's Role in the Czechoslovak Invasion and Romanian Abortion**

Following the 1968 invasion and Ceausescu's harsh criticism of the Warsaw Pact, both the Soviet Union and Hungary responded by bringing up the issue of the Hungarian minority and indicated the possibility of returning Transylvania to Hungary.<sup>26</sup> The timing of this issue being brought up was an obvious attempt to intimidate Ceausescu into falling in line after his very public condemnations. Ceausescu became frightened that the Soviet Union would engineer unrest among the Hungarian minority to justify the toppling of his regime.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia terrified Ceausescu as he feared that any unrest in the nation would be used as a pretext for an intervention by other Warsaw Pact nations. As a result, Ceausescu placed pressure on the Hungarians preemptively to prevent any sort of unrest from emerging.<sup>27</sup> A lack of representation had led to unrest in Romania's past; there was never a severe rebellion in Transylvania but the government feared the potential for a rebellion existed. There was also a great deal of concern among the leaders of Romania regarding a falling birth-rate among ethnic Romanians, while the Hungarian birth-rate continued to rise. In 1966 the

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<sup>25</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 122.

<sup>26</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> Popham, "The Hungarians in Transylvania," 3.

government began to restrict abortions among the ethnic-Romanians in “Decree 770” which declared frankly that “abortion is prohibited,” although there were very limited circumstances where an abortion could be granted, such as if the mother’s life was at risk.<sup>28</sup>

There were two officially stated reasons for the adoption of the abortion law the first being the concerns over the “serious consequences towards women’s health” and the second being that a high abortion rate could “bring great harm to the natural birth rate of the population.”<sup>29</sup> Although the government did not directly state the entirety of the motivations for the law, either in the law itself or in government statements regarding the law, the implementation of the law reveals the government’s intentions for the law. Ceausescu hoped that the law would bolster a declining Romanian population to prevent the Hungarians from outbreeding them.

The abortion law revealed how great the fears of the minorities was for Ceausescu’s government, because it willingly restricted abortions, at the cost of the quality of life of the ethnic-Romanians and at the cost of a basic value that all Socialist nations held too. The abortion law was also ignored in Hungarian territory on occasion, in the hopes that it would reduce the Hungarian population or at least, reduce the growth rate of the Hungarian population.<sup>30</sup> In the end, Ceausescu’s concerns over a Soviet invasion were not well-founded by the late 1980s, as the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, began a major shift in Soviet military and foreign policy, a shift that would soon dismantle the Communist stranglehold on Eastern Europe.

### **1989: The Year of Revolutions**

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<sup>28</sup> “Decree 770,” October 1, 1966, Romanian State Council, accessed January 21, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> “Decree 770.”

<sup>30</sup> “Decree 770.”

The Brezhnev Doctrine, which had been used to bring an end to the Czechoslovak government's reform attempts in 1968 continued to be a source of fear for Ceausescu and his government until the new Soviet leader changed his nation's policies. In 1989, Gorbachev declared that the Soviet Union would no longer use the threat of invasion to prop up Communist regimes. Gorbachev replaced the Brezhnev Doctrine with the unofficially named Sinatra Doctrine after Frank Sinatra's song 'I Did it My Way.'<sup>31</sup> Soviet Spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov responded to the possibility that Eastern European countries reject Communism with little concern, saying "Take Poland... There are new faces there,"<sup>32</sup> illustrating that the Soviet Union hadn't intervened in Poland and that it wouldn't intervene in other Communist nations' affairs. This caused a great deal of concern amongst the governments of East Europe. The main trump card for the Communist governments had been lost and the main threat towards non-Communist opposition vanished. Real change was now possible in Communist states.

Some Communist nations, like Hungary and Poland pursued at the opportunity for reform, but other, authoritarian nations had little expectation of serious changes, such as Romania. The hegemony of the Communist party even began to be called into question when other authoritarian Communists, such as the East Germans, capitulated to pro-democracy protesters, East Germany became aware of the seemingly inevitable end of Communism in late 1988 and early 1989. Although there were initial arrests in November, the government soon began to cave to the demands of the protesters and the East German government opened its border with West Germany.<sup>33</sup> The opening of the border was the signal that the East German

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<sup>31</sup> "Sinatra Doctrine at Work in Warsaw Pact, Soviet Says," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1989, accessed December 6, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1989-10-25/news/mn-745\\_1\\_warsaw-pact](http://articles.latimes.com/1989-10-25/news/mn-745_1_warsaw-pact).

<sup>32</sup> "Sinatra Doctrine at Work."

<sup>33</sup> Guenter Schabowski, Press Conference in the GDR International Press Center, 9 November 1989, trans. Howard Sargeant, *Making the History of 1989*, accessed March 15, 2016.

Communist party knew that the Communist era was over, as the East German Communist party gave up its power and was dissolved within less than a month of the opening of the border. Other nations were less willing to accept the fall of Communism without a fight.

Despite the fall of East Germany and other Communist regimes business as usual appeared to rule in Romania. The Romanians held elections in November where, as the *New York Times* described it, “not a squeak of dissidence was heard,” even at the same time that Czechoslovakia’s Communists lost power.<sup>34</sup> When anti-Communist unrest broke out in Czechoslovakia and the hard-liners no longer had Brezhnev to call for aid, they realized that military force could not prevent the revolutionaries’ push for change. The unrest couldn’t be solved with violence. The Czechoslovak government decided to be open with foreign nations when major demonstrations began to demand reform<sup>35</sup>. However, as of November 20, the government still vaguely alluded to the potential use of violent repression against demonstrations on November 17.<sup>36</sup> Their claims to wanting a peaceful resolution to the conflict was therefore marred by internal contention amongst the party leadership. Despite unrest, the Czechoslovakian government was still willing to give foreign nations information about what was going on in the country. The same, however, could not be said for what was occurring in Romania.

The Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aurel Duma, sent a telegram to all of its embassies around the world in December of 1989, essentially telling them to keep quiet.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Alan Riding, “In Rumania, the Old Order Won’t Budge,” *The Collapse of Communism: By the Correspondents of the New York Times*, ed. Bernard Gwertzman and Michael T. Kaufman (New York: New York Times Company, 1990), 251.

<sup>35</sup>Prague Embassy “Prague Embassy cable, Demonstrations in Prague and Other Czechoslovak Cities November 20,” *Making the History of 1989*, accessed December 7, 2015, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/500>.

<sup>36</sup>Prague Embassy, “Demonstrations in Prague November 20.”

<sup>37</sup>Aurel Duma, “Telegram from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to all Embassies, December 1989,” *Making the History of 1989*, accessed December 8, 2015, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/693>.

Embassy personnel were instructed that “only in case you are asked...reiterate, with all clarity, that you have no knowledge such events,” said events being the massacre Ceausescu’s government perpetrated against protestors in the city of Timisoara.<sup>38</sup> If the foreigners persisted in questioning about the unrest, the personnel were ordered to state “We strongly reject any attempts to intervene in the internal affairs of S.R. Romania, a free and independent state,” thereby implying that the unrest was the result of a foreign intervention in Romania.<sup>39</sup> Ceausescu decided to use violence to control the nation and they would attempt to keep the unrest a secret from the rest of the world. The fact that Ceausescu was so interested in keeping internal unrest a secret illustrates the unwillingness of his government to entertain any reform. It used brutal methods on demonstrators and then attempted to cover up that there was ever any demonstration. The Ceausescu government may also have feared a possible Soviet intervention and the possibility that the unrest was engineered to justify an intervention.

By December of 1989 Romania was the last Communist dictatorship in Eastern Europe and rumors reached Ceausescu that the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact nations planned on intervening to topple its government. Ceausescu feared that the rumors were true, to the point that during a meeting between Romania’s Ambassador to Moscow, Ion Bucur, and Soviet Foreign Minister, I.P. Aboimov, Bucur accused the Warsaw Pact of being behind demonstrations in Timisoara as a pretext to intervene in Romania.<sup>40</sup> This illustrates the distrust that Ceausescu still felt towards the Warsaw Pact countries and that the same anti-intervention attitude of 1968

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<sup>38</sup>Duma, “Telegram from the Minister.”

<sup>39</sup>Duma, “Telegram from the Minister.”

<sup>40</sup>Ion Bucur, “The Possible Soviet Intervention in Romania,” *Making the History of 1989*, accessed December 8, 2015, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/204>.

was still in effect in Romania in 1989. The paranoia of a foreign invasion was one thing that led to the violence of December 1989 in Romania.

When the demonstrations that wracked the Communist world finally arrived in Romania, the government fired on demonstrators. The first protests began in the Hungarian sections of the country, especially the city of Timisoara. Ceausescu's government believed that their fears of unrest caused by the Hungarian minority could lead to an intervention by the Warsaw Pact. This fear illustrates that Ceausescu distrusted its own population. It felt that the Hungarian minority could attempt to encourage an invasion of the country. In addition, despite Gorbachev's 'Sinatra Doctrine,' Ceausescu believed that the Soviet Union was willing to intervene as well as the newly democratic members of the Warsaw Pact, such as Czechoslovakia or Poland.<sup>41</sup> Ceausescu feared there would be attempts to impose a non-Communist system on Romania.

The violent government reaction in Timisoara led to the rapid collapse of Ceausescu's government. The Romanian public rose up against Ceausescu in response to the Timisoara massacre and the new uprisings began to crop up in most of the cities and towns of the nation. The Romanian military and portions of the Communist government began to side with the Revolutionaries, by December 24, 1989, the *Securitate* were the only remaining pro-Ceausescu forces in the country.<sup>42</sup> Ceausescu and his wife were captured by pro-Revolution military forces during an attempt to flee the country. Ceausescu and his wife were executed on December 25, 1989 to destroy the will of the remaining Ceausescu supporters; this tactic was successful as the remaining Ceausescu supporters surrendered following the executions.<sup>43</sup> Less than two weeks

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<sup>41</sup> Bucur, "The Possible Soviet Intervention in Romania."

<sup>42</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 370-371. The *Securitate* were the Romanian Secret Police that thrived under Ceausescu.

<sup>43</sup> Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate*, 364

elapsed between the Timisoara Massacre and Ceausescu's execution. Ceausescu's paranoia and distrust of his national minorities and the other members of the Warsaw Pact led to his violent suppression of the Timisoara protest, which in turn led to his own execution. Despite his downfall being the result of the will of the Romanian people, both ethnic Romanians and Ethnic Hungarians alike, rather than the result of a Warsaw Pact conspiracy, Ceausescu never stopped believing that the newly democratic Warsaw Pact planned and orchestrated both the Timisoara protest and the unrest that followed.

Ceausescu believed up until his death the revolt against his rule was not orchestrated by pro-democracy activists within Romanian society, but rather by foreign agents out to topple his regime. During his own trial Ceausescu stated to his accusers, "I hope that you do not also work for the foreigners and for the destruction of Romania."<sup>44</sup> Whether he was saying that to justify himself is another matter. Nicolae Ceausescu was accused of genocide during his trial by depriving "the people of heating, electricity, and foodstuffs", he was also accused "killing children, young people and adults in Timisoara and Bucharest".<sup>45</sup> Even while the trial was going on there was still "shooting going on...they are shooting arbitrarily into the apartments...in all district capitals".<sup>46</sup> The shooting during the trial was most likely due to a struggle between Ceausescu's supporters and the proponents of a new regime. The indiscriminate violence against unarmed demonstrators that spread throughout Romania stands in contrast to all the other peaceful revolutions of 1989, and the violence. Ceausescu never felt the need to rely on Soviet support to hold onto control. He had his secret police, the Securitate, to hold onto the country for

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<sup>44</sup>Irina Livezeanu, "Transcript of the closed "trial" of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, December, 1989," *Making the History of 1989*, accessed December 8, 2015, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/690>.

<sup>45</sup> Livezeanu, "Transcript."

<sup>46</sup>Livezeanu, "Transcript."

him. In Czechoslovakia, the reliance on the Soviet Union's support was total, to the point that even high-ranking Communists knew that they couldn't hold onto power.

The leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party knew that it would be unable to hold back social changes, despite all their implied threats of violence. The leader of the Czechoslovak Communist party, Ladislav Adamec, was willing to negotiate with demonstrators by stating that he was in favor of a "political solution" rather than a violent one.<sup>47</sup> Having the leader of the party state that he was opposed to violence is a major factor in preventing the authoritarian government of Czechoslovakia from having a violent reaction like the authoritarian government of Romania would have less than a month later. While Adamec was not calling for an end to Communist rule, he was concerned because he felt, "the recent intervention of the forces of order has led to the radicalization of youth," and that force had damaged the authority of the Party, while also giving political ammo for the opposition to use against them. Adamec realized that there was no way for the Party to use violence without Soviet backing, so the hardline of the Party could no longer be in charge. It was essential for the Party to compromise and they did more than that, the negotiations between the Czechoslovak government and the opposition included a "proposal for a constitutional law by which the articles legally establishing the leading role of the CPCz and Marxism-Leninism as the state ideology will be expunged," this provision itself was quite shocking, but in early December the Communist Party resigned as the rulers of Czechoslovakia. The Communist Party peacefully surrendered power in the Czechoslovak Revolution, whereas Romania's Revolution was nearly a Civil War due to firefights between members of the Romanian military which left nearly one thousand people dead.

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<sup>47</sup>Ladislav Adamec, "Speech by Premier Ladislav Adamec at an extraordinary session of the CPCz CC, stating his preference for a political solution to the crisis," *Making the History of 1989*, accessed December 8, 2015, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/512>.

## Conclusions

The disaffection that led to the 1989 Revolutions did not begin in 1989; it had its origins in the decades before-hand, not only in the shaping of the opposition organizations, but in the views of the ruling party. The hardliners in the Czechoslovak Communist Party had learned in 1968 that the way to gain and retain power came from the Soviet Union, they didn't need to worry about compromising because the Soviets were there to help prevent any reform movement. The Romanians learned something different from 1968, they learned that the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact could invade and impose its own views on other Socialist nations, and Romania needed to be ready to defend itself from unrest on his own, because the rest of the Warsaw Pact could replace them with someone else. 1968 was not the only aspect of Romanian policy that contributed to the violent end of the war.

The loss of Bessarabia to Russia after World War I made later Romanian leaders such Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and, especially, Nicolae Ceausescu as more sensitive to the potential of losing territory, especially in an intervention similar to Czechoslovakia's, and to reduce the risk of another loss of territory the government focused on Transylvania. Romania's treatment of their minorities deteriorated during the rule of Nicolae Ceausescu and the distrust that Ceausescu fostered against minorities helped to justify the violence perpetrated against them in 1989. Years of suppression had been spurred by the fears of an intervention, as well as concerns about changing demographics within Romania. When the anti-Communist demonstrations of 1989 finally came to Romania, they first came to a region of the country with a large minority population. The combination of fears regarding minorities rising up and other members of the Warsaw Pact attempting a regime change helped encourage Ceausescu's violent response.

In Romania, Ceausescu never counted on the Soviet Union for defense against reformist mind-sets. When demonstrations occurred in 1989 Ceausescu's government used violence to bring an end to the movement and then tried to hide it from the international community. This is in contrast to the political situation in Czechoslovakia where the Communist Party had grown used to Soviet backing, so when they no longer had the Soviet Union to defend it from reform, so its initial acts of suppression against reformers were replaced with acts of transparency and calls for negotiation that led to a peaceful revolution. Ceausescu felt that minorities and foreigners had intentionally attempted to cause problems for the government, so Ceausescu felt justified in its violent reaction to the protesters. The fear of foreign intervention also spurred the Romanian violence, as Ceausescu had the perception that the Warsaw Pact caused the demonstrations to justify an invasion. When the East German rebellion and Prague Spring were ended by Soviet intervention, the Czechoslovak and East German Communists learned to count on the Soviets, and the Romanians learned to fear an intervention. As a result of the 1953 rebellion, the East German Communists assumed that they could count on the Soviet Union. As a result of the lessons of 1953 and 1968, the Czechoslovaks and East Germans were unprepared when the Soviets pulled out and so had smooth, peaceful transitions from Communism. Meanwhile because of its nationalist ideology, Ceausescu had never counted on Soviet support and so did what it had come to expect for decades Ceausescu relied on the Romanian military and in turn, they reacted violently.

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