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# An Uneasy Triangle: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Greek Colonels and the Greek Communists (1967-1974)

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the rapprochement between Ceaușescu's Romania and the dictatorship of the Greek Colonels (1967-1974). Specifically, the paradoxically positive attitude of Ceaușescu towards the Greek Junta is approached not only on a bilateral level but also through the lens of an emerging Balkan cooperation spirit and most importantly in relation to its reception by the Greek Communists. By focusing on this triangle this study demonstrates how ideological differences were at times at odds with Cold War realities. Based on Romanian archival material, the contextualization of this unseemly Balkan cross-bloc cooperation offers new insights and a better understanding of the uses of ideology and political expediency in the pursuit of authoritarian legitimacy in the South-Eastern European theatre of the Cold War.


## KEYWORDS

Authoritarian regimes;  
Balkan cooperation;  
Ceaușescu; cold war; Greek  
Junta; Romania

## Introduction

'Republic in Greece' exclaimed the title of the correspondence from Athens in the Romanian weekly *Lumea* on 7 June 1973.<sup>1</sup> The report focused on the abolition of Monarchy which, as the author claimed, had been expedited after the Greek authorities neutralized a conspiratorial ring within the Greek navy that was planning a pro-royal coup. The subsequent proclamation of the Hellenic Republic and the promise for elections by the end of 1974 by Georgios Papadopoulos, the strongman of the Greek Junta, were presented as a natural reaction to (self-exiled) King Constantine's machinations. From that story, the average reader in Bucharest could easily get the impression that Greece had turned a new page towards a post-dictatorial democratic political environment. However, this was far from reality. Rather than a factual representation of the Greek political situation nevertheless, this news piece reflected Nicolae Ceaușescu's attitude vis-à-vis the regime of the Colonels. The present study examines the rapprochement between Ceaușescu's Romania and the dictatorship of the Greek Colonels (1967-1974). Specifically, the paradoxically positive attitude of Ceaușescu towards the Greek Junta is approached not only on a bilateral level but also through the lens of an emerging Balkan cooperation spirit and most importantly in relation to its reception by the Greek Communists.

This peculiar development stood in stark contrast with the existing Cold War divisions in the region as they were established after the end of the Greek civil war (1946-1949). The defeated

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Greek communists would either be persecuted or find refuge in the socialist regimes of the Balkans and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the democratic deficit of the rule of the victorious royalist right-wing forces emerged from the narrative of the communist *menace from the north*. This threat perception was inflated due to the shared northern borders with three communist states (Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria), constituting Greece a Cold War 'frontline state', and culminated as the *raison d'être* of the military dictatorial regime.<sup>2</sup>

Under these circumstances the Greek Communists depended on assistance from the communist bloc for their survival and for the continuation of their anti-dictatorial struggle. At the same time however the Eastern European regimes' development of working relations with the Colonels and the broader framework of the emerging *détente* between the East and the West, posed certain challenges. The Greek Communists were caught in the middle and found themselves in the uneasy position of having to reconcile their ideological principles and survival with the pragmatist policy of their comrades' 'peaceful coexistence' with the junta.<sup>3</sup> *Détente* in the seventies witnessed an increase in cooperative initiatives among neighbouring Balkan states, which have been a topic of interest for recent research.<sup>4</sup> In order for this regional micro-*détente* spirit to emerge however, the development of working bilateral relations was necessary as a groundwork for any further tangible cross-bloc cooperation. This study aims to shed light on one of the most intriguing rapprochements of this period, that between Bucharest and Athens during the time of the Colonels, and to examine how and on what grounds it was possible for it to emerge.

The latest literature on Romania's foreign policy in the Cold War has been examining its role within the communist bloc and especially Bucharest's efforts to assert an autonomous stance beyond the soviet sphere of influence.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, an increasing amount of historical research has focused on the Greek experience under military rule.<sup>6</sup> The Colonels' coup introduced new elements in the already Cold War divided Balkan peninsula. However, even though one would expect a rupture in the relations of the socialist regimes with Greece at that time, recent research shows that after the caution and uneasiness of the first months working relations resumed normally as it can be seen in the cases of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and even got a new, but rather limited, impetus as in the case of Albania.<sup>7</sup> The large consensus within the literature is that Greek-Balkan relations during the dictatorship were characterised by a continuity of development rather than a disruption of the policies before the junta.<sup>8</sup> The case of Romanian-Greek relations during that period has attracted less attention nonetheless. A notable exception is Sotiris Wallden's seminal but broader study (in Greek) on the relations of the junta with the communist bloc, emphasising the Colonels' willingness to open to the Eastern regimes for economic gains. Moreover, studies providing insights into the history of Greek political refugees in Romania and communist interparty relations examine Greek-Romanian relations from a low-politics and societal perspective.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the ideologically adverse authoritarian regimes of Bucharest and Athens have been studied comparatively in the context of American propaganda policies, hinting at their similar character and behaviour but without addressing their direct relations nonetheless.<sup>10</sup>

Within this historiographical context and based on recently declassified material from the Romanian National Archives and the Romanian Diplomatic Archives, this article examines Romanian-Greek relations by bringing to the fore the dynamics of the triangle of Ceaușescu, the Colonels and the Greek Communists. By taking into account that Romania and Greece were firmly integrated within their respective military alliances (Warsaw Pact and NATO) and the inevitable constraints this entailed, this study argues that the rapprochement between Bucharest and Athens may have been enabled by the foundations of the pre-dictatorial period but it was Ceaușescu's agency and disregard of the ideological differences with the Greek junta that brought the two regimes so close despite the opposing stance of his Greek communist comrades. This relationship serves as an example of the complex interplay between ideology and political expediency in the pursuit of international recognition and legitimacy by authoritarian regimes during the Cold War. By doing so, it contributes to the literature on cross-bloc

exchanges which eventually allowed a 'perforating of the Iron Curtain' in this periphery of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup>

## Romania and Balkan cooperation

While the Balkans were not the epicentre of world politics, they could be viewed as a microcosm of the Cold War. There were members of the Warsaw Pact (Romania and Bulgaria), NATO (Greece and Turkey), the Non-Aligned Movement (Yugoslavia) and even occasional friends of the People's Republic of China (Albania). This diversity enabled the development of a political 'microclimate' where Cold War developments were filtered out regionally. The Romanian policy regarding the Balkan peninsula forms a good example of how smaller regional actors tried to accommodate international changes such as *détente* on the local level.

One of the biggest fears of Romanian foreign policy between the mid-sixties and mid-seventies was that the emerging *détente* between the United States and the Soviet Union had the potential of reinforcing hegemonic tendencies at the detriment of small and medium countries.<sup>12</sup> Romania, first under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and then under Ceaușescu, developed a non-conformist profile within the communist bloc. Already in 1964 the Romanian Worker's Party issued the so-called Independence Declaration in which the Romanian leadership propagated the idea that every Communist Party possessed the right to formulate and pursue its own way towards the accomplishment of a communist society.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, there were at least four more cases where the Romanian leadership clearly challenged the uniformity of the socialist camp in the late sixties. First, Romania kept a neutral stance in the Sino-Soviet split. Then Bucharest maintained diplomatic relations with Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967 and it recognised and established formal relations with West Germany. Most significantly, Ceaușescu made a name for himself internationally by refusing to participate in the soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia suppressing the Prague Spring in application of the Brezhnev doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time the very relaxation of tensions at the superpower level, which *détente* brought about, provided certain room for manoeuvre to lesser powers and especially the potential for developing trade and economic relations across both blocs.<sup>15</sup> The initiatives of Western European countries and the EEC to approach their Eastern European neighbours are quite representative of this spirit.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Bucharest had to carefully accommodate these circumstances in its attempt to assert a more autonomous and assertive position at the international stage. The Balkan neighbourhood was the most contingent theatre for the pursuit of such a policy. Once the 'powder keg' of Europe, especially after the sixties it had acquired a stable character which was remarkable, given its history. The effect of the Cold War bloc mentality had put ethnic conflicts into hibernation (with the exception of the Greek-Turkish conflict over Cyprus). Irredentism and national rivalries were still there but in a dormant state as they were not significant enough for the two superpowers to mess with the delicate balance in the peninsula. For example, issues such as the Macedonian Question, irredentism regarding Dobruja between Romania and Bulgaria or disputes about the scattered minorities within the Balkan states were mostly used for domestic purposes.

Starting from this relative stability then, Romania and Nicolae Ceaușescu wanted to create an environment where Balkan cooperation could flourish as a counterweight to any potential hegemonic tendencies that could disrupt this balance. Ceaușescu's favourite way of developing cooperation was through the pursuit of a vast network of bilateral relations with other states - as can be attested by his at times frenetic record of state visits. In the case of the Balkans however he envisaged a multilateral cooperation that would supersede Cold War divisions with the ultimate goal of transforming the region from a powder keg to an exemplary zone of peace in Europe.<sup>17</sup> In particular, after the project of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) got on track with the active involvement of Romanian diplomacy, Bucharest developed a regional cooperative agenda in which the Balkans could be viewed essentially as a

more integrated local branch of the CSCE.<sup>18</sup> It goes without saying that the well-being of his neighbourhood was not the sole goal for Ceaușescu. On the contrary, a development towards an institutionalised regional ‘micro-détente’ in the Balkans would serve as an extra means of strengthening Romania’s sovereignty by limiting the role of Moscow in the area.<sup>19</sup> This foreign policy direction was in concert with Bucharest’s opening to the United States and the West in general and its neutrality in the Sino-Soviet split.<sup>20</sup>

Romanian initiatives with a Balkan perspective before Ceaușescu’s reign can be traced back to the Stoica Plan for a denuclearised Balkan peninsula in the fifties.<sup>21</sup> Following this the Romanian interest in regional cooperation revived in the late sixties. Together with the ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) leadership engaged with certain low intensity proposals on promoting initiatives regarding cultural, press, youth and sports exchanges in the framework of the Balkan Games.<sup>22</sup> On a higher level the Romanians were mostly thinking out loud when they were referring to a nuclear free Balkan zone in various bilateral and multilateral settings. For something like this to work however, the participation of both NATO (Greece and Turkey) and Warsaw Pact (Romania and Bulgaria) members was necessary. Bucharest was willing to reach out to everyone including the regime of the Colonels. As long as these proposals remained at a vague theoretical level no one was opposed, in principle. In fact, even the Greek junta for its own reasons was in favour of a developing Balkan détente.<sup>23</sup> The Greek minister of foreign affairs Panagiotis Pipinelis had proposed a ‘Balkan code of good conduct’ and it was he along with Christos Xanthopoulos-Palamas, senior diplomat and later alternate Greek minister of Foreign Affairs, who were the architects of the opening towards the socialist states.<sup>24</sup> The Colonels embraced this policy as the pressures from the West were increasing. Meanwhile, the regime was forced to self-withdraw from the Council of Europe (CoE) resulting to further isolation from Western Europe.<sup>25</sup> As will be shown below, the Colonels’ attitude was welcomed cordially by Ceaușescu.

Nevertheless, the Romanian visions of multilateral cooperation were inherently limited since inevitably NATO and Warsaw Pact commitments would have to be considered before any meaningful and tangible progress could take place.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it was extremely difficult for Bucharest’s plans to materialise. As has been argued, a ‘shared fear of marginalization’ prompted the insecure Balkan countries to make a stance against the ‘excesses of bipolarity’ even though in the end they fully acquiesced to it.<sup>27</sup>

Within this context of a well-intentioned but stillborn idea of a multilateral Balkan ‘micro-détente’, a rather surprising and paradoxical rapprochement emerged. Ceaușescu’s Romania and the Greek Junta under the leadership of Georgios Papadopoulos would develop their relations despite their stark contrast in their ideological provenance. In addition, considering the close history of the RCP with the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the persecutions that its members suffered by the Right in Greece (culminating with the imposition of the Junta) we are looking at a story that transcends the traditional bipolar narratives and reassesses the role of ideology in the conduct of the Cold War in the south-eastern part of Europe.

## Romania and the Greek Communists

Since the end of the Greek Civil War in 1949 the Greek Left remained politically active under the auspices of the illegal KKE (Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas-Greek Communist Party) and the legal United Democratic Left (Eniέα Dimokratikí Aristerá, hereafter EDA).<sup>28</sup> Due to its illegal status, the KKE was structured in a rather peculiar way. The leadership of the party along with thousands of political refugees found shelter in the fraternal People’s Republics of Eastern Europe. The exiled Central Committee (CC) settled in Bucharest from where it supervised and controlled not only the Greek communist diaspora throughout the communist bloc but also those party-members in Greece who were active underground (when not arrested and exiled to Greek islands). This

structure however undermined the party's efficiency and, gradually, discrepancies developed between the exiled leadership and its surrogate in Greece.

Under the repressive conditions of the post-civil war political landscape, the Greek Communists found an alternative way to participate in Greek politics. In 1951, the United Democratic Left (EDA) was formed as a coalition of the Leftist forces in Greece; an initiative supported by KKE. EDA would manage to become the major opposition party after the elections of 1958 and until 1961. While EDA was initially created as a means to bypass the illegality of KKE, it gradually acquired a voice of its own, distancing itself from the guidance of the Soviet sponsored KKE Central Committee.<sup>29</sup> This detachment would become even more visible with the emergence of the reformist ideas of Eurocommunism in the late sixties.<sup>30</sup> The main point of friction among the Greek communist leadership, especially between 1964 and 1968, was the form of the reorganisation of the communist forces in Greece. General Secretary Kostas Koligiannis, in alignment with Moscow, favoured an increasing popular struggle with a view to the de facto legalisation of KKE, whereas reformist factions through EDA were open to the idea of larger alliances with centrist socialist forces such as the Centre Union led by Georgios Papandreou.<sup>31</sup> Therefore the Greek communist left was torn by a constant ambivalence between an opening to a larger part of society and a return to traditional Marxist-Leninist principles, a condition which would fatefully lead to the split of the KKE.<sup>32</sup> This divergence took place in a time of 'tectonic changes that the global 1968 brought to the communist parties', as seen at the Prague Spring and the pursuit of a socialism with a human face. Nonetheless, recent research shows that the internal Greek Communist split was mostly part of an internal power struggle under ideological guise.<sup>33</sup>

## The Greek Communist split of 1968

Romania's role in this story was quite pivotal since it not only hosted the leadership of the CC of KKE but also provided the infrastructure for the broadcasting of the party's radio station 'Voice of Truth' in Bucharest. Furthermore, the party's archive was hosted in special facilities provided for that purpose in the town of Sibiu.<sup>34</sup>

Some ten months after the coup d'état, the leadership of the party, under Secretary General Koligiannis, convened in Budapest during the 12<sup>th</sup> plenary of the CC which took place between 5-15 February 1968. The agenda included internal issues and an assessment of the new situation in Greece under the dictatorial regime of the Colonels. The plenary consisted of forty-one members of the CC (all from abroad) whereas none of the twenty-three members located in Greece at the time could attend. During the session Koligiannis reiterated the positions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as they were expressed in a letter from Mikhail Suslov. At that point the dissenting opinions within the party surfaced sparking a fierce debate, in which a faction led by three members of the Politburo (Mitsos Partsalidis, Zisis Zografos and Panos Dimitriou) expressed its open disagreement with the acute dependence of the party on Moscow and argued in favour of more autonomy and reform. The core of their argument was, that after so much time abroad, the leadership had lost its touch with the realities of the struggle in Greece and therefore a reassessment of the Party's policy was needed. Consequently, the decisions of the plenary were not voted unanimously leading to the cancelation of the member status of the dissenters and inevitably setting the scene for the split of the Party.<sup>35</sup>

Immediately after, the Partsalidis group returned to Bucharest and after a rather cinematographic operation on 17 February 1968 in which they occupied the radio station, transmitted an open letter addressed to all members of the KKE openly accusing the leadership of Koligiannis and the decisions of the 12<sup>th</sup> plenary. The split within the circles of the Greek Communists was official.<sup>36</sup> From that point on, there were two KKEs; KKE which was recognised and supported by Moscow and the rest of the Soviet bloc and KKE-Interior led by the dissenters.

Both sides resorted to Ceaușescu to gain his support and to have the opposing fraction condemned.<sup>37</sup> Despite being persistently asked to by Koligiannis, the Romanian leader avoided condemning Partsalidis as he stated that the Romanians did not wish to interfere in any way in their internal affairs. However he made it clear that he could not take any measure against the dissenters as they still enjoyed their rights as political refugees and they could continue being active in their antifascist struggle against the Greek dictatorship.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, he ordered the shutting down of the radio station until a solution was found.<sup>39</sup> Ceaușescu officially kept a neutral stance in the conflict but at the same time he maintained the funding towards the Partsalidis group. While this favoured KKE-Interior, it was also in his own interest as it matched his own policy of increasing autonomy vis-a-vis Moscow.

Not surprisingly the leadership of the KKE was not satisfied with this development and in a heated meeting with Ceaușescu in April they blamed the Romanian authorities for the disruption of the party's activities due to their tolerance and support of the dissenters of the KKE-Interior.<sup>40</sup> Ceaușescu did not change his attitude and eventually Koligiannis moved the seat of the Greek Central Committee to Budapest along with the rest of the party apparatus. From that point on, Bucharest would remain the base of the KKE-Interior, which would later become associated with the reformist movement of Eurocommunism and in particular with the Italian Communist Party (PCI).<sup>41</sup> The Romanian Communist Party (RCP) officially confirmed its stance in its tenth Party Congress in August 1969 where the KKE-Interior was invited. Koligiannis, the secretary general of KKE, found this unacceptable and decided to boycott the event. The timing of this Congress was quite significant. Just a few days before, American President Richard Nixon had visited Bucharest where he had been enthusiastically received by both the state apparatus and the Romanian population.<sup>42</sup> In addition it was close to the first anniversary of the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the shadow of the Brezhnev doctrine was still looming over Eastern Europe. Naturally, the Greek split was interpreted in terms of the division between pro-Moscow and reformist tendencies within the communist parties. The representatives of KKE-Interior were treated as pariahs by the socialist states (with the exception of Yugoslavia), whereas they held fruitful discussions with their comrades from western Europe and especially Italy and Spain.<sup>43</sup> The RCP was clearly siding with the reformist tendency in accordance with its already manifested policy of balancing off the influence of the Kremlin. Their position vis-a-vis the Greek communists would add to Romania's close contacts with the Chinese and its refusal to participate in the crackdown of the Prague Spring. Ceaușescu was personally annoyed with Koligiannis and blamed him for the lack of unity within the KKE. He believed that the Greek secretary general 'wanted at all costs to force things and be considered the only [true] Greek communist', undermining not only the unity of the party but also the struggle against the dictatorship.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the period of the dictatorship the Romanian leader would have direct consultations not only with party delegations but also with other prominent figures of the Left such as the internationally acclaimed composer and political activist Mikis Theodorakis.<sup>45</sup> Other personalities of the Left such as Manolis Glezos (renowned journalist and activist with established credentials in the antifascist resistance) would be in contact with the RCP through the embassy in Athens.<sup>46</sup>

## **Romanian – Greek relations and the rapprochement with the Colonels**

Traditionally Romania and Greece enjoyed cordial relations due to the presence of a flourishing Greek community in the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia before and after the Greek War of Independence in the nineteenth century. The only thorn in their relations was the issue of the Aromanian (Vlach) population in Greece and the Romanian claim of patronage on this ethnic community (the 'Koutsovlahiko' issue). Nonetheless, the absence of common borders and thus the absence of any irredentist claims downgraded the importance of the issue, despite the constant interest of the Romanian authorities in the wellbeing of this community.<sup>47</sup> After the

upheaval of the two world wars and the establishment of the communist regime in Bucharest, bilateral relations were disrupted. In 1956 the two countries resumed diplomatic relations and with them a very modest trade flow. These revived relations were further strengthened in 1966 when the Romanian Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer visited Athens (the first from a Warsaw Pact member to do so) and nine bilateral accords were signed.

The coup d'état under the collective leadership of Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos, Brigadier Stylianos Pattakos, and Colonel Nikolaos Makarezos on 21 April 1967 put a temporary halt to this path. The Colonels' regime imposed a dictatorship which would last until 1974. The initial Romanian reaction was to condemn the establishment of a 'US backed' military dictatorial regime in the region, a perception widely shared within the eastern bloc.<sup>48</sup> Recent historiography has shown that the United States had no previous involvement with the Colonels' coup as the CIA was primarily suspecting the higher ranks of the army to intervene in the highly unstable political climate of Greece, especially after the political crisis of 1965.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the belief that the US were involved was embedded among a large part of the Greek population and nurtured an increasing anti-Americanism.<sup>50</sup> In any case, the subsequent American tolerance and co-operation with the Junta helped in perpetuating this perception.

Francisc Pacurariu, the Romanian ambassador in Greece, had been in Romania at the time of the coup and his return to Athens was postponed until July 1968. Rather than a strong gesture against the legitimacy of the Greek dictatorship however, this delay was caused by his serious illness and an incident which resulted to the arrest and expulsion of a Romanian diplomat on espionage charges in September 1967.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the reactions to the coup coming from Bucharest were one of the mildest, if not the mildest, among the ranks of the socialist states.<sup>52</sup> This was aided by the surprisingly benevolent approach of the Greek regime towards the socialist states and especially Romania. A few months after the coup, the Greek Government ratified the nine bilateral agreements signed in 1966 and expressed its willingness to further pursue mutually advantageous relations.<sup>53</sup> In this spirit, the Greek minister of Commerce Epaminondas Tsellos visited Bucharest in 1969 and one year later his counterpart Cornel Burtică met with Georgios Papadopoulos, the strongman of the dictatorship, who reaffirmed the traditionally friendly relations between the two nations stating that 'no kind of ideology can erase history'.<sup>54</sup> By 1971 bilateral trade had reached a volume of US\$36.3m, more than double compared to the US\$15.5m in 1967.<sup>55</sup> In 1971 foreign minister Corneliu Mănescu paid an official visit to Greece holding wide range talks with Papadopoulos. The most significant outcomes of these discussions were twofold: first, the decision to institutionalize the framework of cooperation between the two countries. The establishment of a mixed inter-governmental commission at the ministerial level was decided, which would oversee any relevant cooperative initiatives. The first session of the commission took place in Bucharest in 1972 and resulted in the signing of a protocol which provided for the intensification of commercial, cultural and tourist exchanges, as well as the development of economic and scientific cooperation through 'concrete' actions envisaged in bilateral agreements. The second and more symbolic outcome was the reiteration of an already pending invitation from 1966 towards the Greek prime minister to visit Romania, preferably within 1972 'in the interest of the continuation and expansion of contacts between statesmen from both countries'.<sup>56</sup> The jovial spirit of this meeting was also attested by Xanthopoulos-Palamas in his memoirs:

Corneliu Mănescu, a friend. In Athens along with his graceful wife in 1971. Conversations productive, useful, efficient. Greece and Romania have no political differences. Widescale economic cooperation. Technical difficulties from the fact that Greece has a free economy whereas Romania state planned [...] Economic, technical issues were left out of the political problems. The general political problems. Because bilateral controversial issues did not exist. Serious at least.<sup>57</sup>

Naturally, Papadopoulos gratefully accepted the invitation since this could be used as a publicity stunt against the increasing international isolation of his regime. The chances of Papadopoulos spending several days abroad was not an option though for fear of the destabilizing effects that his absence might have had. Throughout his reign he never left Greece. Stylianos Pattakos, the



Junta's number two, was responsible for representing the government abroad. Thus, the Greek side tactfully avoided arranging a specific date for such a visit. Nevertheless, the deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Phaidon Anninos Kavalieratos did visit Bucharest in November 1972, where he was warmly received by Ceaușescu. The two men explored the potential for closer cooperation within the framework of the preparatory stages of the CSCE in an attempt to form an unofficial bloc for the promotion of stability and peace in the Balkans.<sup>58</sup> With regards to economic cooperation Ceaușescu also stressed the Romanian interest in a long term agreement for the use of the Greek commercial fleet for the development of its external trade, especially in oil products.<sup>59</sup> The opening of a charter office of the Romanian enterprise Navlomar at the port of Piraeus in 1972 had created reasonable expectations in Bucharest. In their joint communique, which was followed by a very positive coverage by the Greek press, both sides reaffirmed the positive level of cooperation between them and their mutual desire for further fruitful engagement.<sup>60</sup> Even so, this visit was more of a symbolic gesture than anything else as it was 'long on publicity and short on substance'.<sup>61</sup> In the same vein, Greece supported Romania's entrance to GATT and the IMF aligning with the rest of the West in luring Bucharest further away from Moscow.

Bucharest was following the political developments in Greece with great interest. Despite the authoritarian anti-communist character of the regime, the Romanian analyses of several initiatives taken up by Papadopoulos were quite moderate and at times seen in a favourable light. The abolition of the monarchy and the institution of a nominal Republic in 1973 were greeted immediately, Ceaușescu being one of the first to congratulate Papadopoulos for assuming the office of the President of the Hellenic Republic. The establishment of a civilian government headed by the conservative politician Spyridon Markezinis was perceived as a victory of Papadopoulos. With this move, according to a rather light-hearted analysis by the Romanian ministry of Foreign Affairs, he 'deprived the opposition of the argument that the country is ruled by "a dictatorship of the colonels", but nonetheless he was careful enough to install loyal people, of trust, in key government positions'.<sup>62</sup> By then Papadopoulos had also proclaimed an amnesty and most political prisoners were released in August 1973, adding to the positive image that the Romanians had portrayed of him.

The favourable disposition towards Greece on the Romanian side can be explained by the sharp distinction that was made between internal and external affairs. Even though the position of Athens within NATO was non-negotiable, Bucharest appreciated the efforts of the Greek regime to 'maintain and widen the possibilities of an independent manoeuvre guided by the national interest'.<sup>63</sup> This conclusion was drawn based on the development of relations not only with the Soviet Union and the neighbouring Balkan socialist states but also with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Of course, such an opening towards the two main pillars of the socialist world was not such a revolutionary move since it fitted within the general spirit of détente between the East and the West and especially in the case of China, this opening was in perfect alignment with the policy of the main backer of the regime, the United States. Nonetheless, the openly expressed interest of the regime in the project of Balkan multilateral cooperation and the adoption of positions similar to the Romanian ones, made Athens one of the most promising partners in the area. In addition, the constant evocation of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs as the foundation of Greek foreign policy by the Junta mirrored the rhetoric of Bucharest's foreign relations. In this context, it comes as no surprise that the Romanian ambassador in Athens reported that 'in the conduct of this foreign policy, the Greek government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Greek diplomacy proved their competence and ability'.<sup>64</sup>

### **A step too far? Ceaușescu's determination to visit Athens and the Greek Communists**

Shortly after the visit of Kavalieratos, Ceaușescu received Antonis Brillakis and Nikos Karras, members of the Central Committee of KKE-Interior. The original purpose of the meeting was an

appeal for more (material) support from the Romanian Communist Party to enable the KKE-Interior to cope with the constant challenges they were facing after the split of 1968. While discussing the latest developments on the state of affairs within the communist bloc and the political situation in Greece, Brillakis and Karras were presented with some surprising news. Ceaușescu informed them that he had an open invitation for an official state visit to Greece and that he was seriously thinking of accepting it.<sup>65</sup> Being aware of the discrepancy between the internal and external policy record of the Junta, Ceaușescu tried to downplay its importance stating that such 'contradictions can be found in other countries, too'.<sup>66</sup> He further justified his decision by placing this visit within the broader framework of European security, comparing it to his previous visit to Belgium, and especially within his vision of the Balkans as a zone of peace and disarmament. The close cooperation of the Greek and Romanian delegations in Helsinki in the framework of the CSCE had also convinced the Romanian leader that the Junta could be a regional partner, always on the basis of the favourite principles of the two regimes: respect for sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. To the astonishment of his interlocutors, he added that any positive signs such as the willingness of the Colonels to develop relations with the socialist states should be 'supported' and that in the long run this improvement of relations would 'correspond with the interests of the progressive movement in Greece' and that 'eventually an accentuation of the course towards détente and collaboration will also be reflected in the internal life' of Greece.<sup>67</sup>

It is remarkable that this line of argument mirrored exactly the Western and especially American justification for détente and the policy of differentiation towards Eastern Europe which favoured cooperation with certain socialist regimes despite their domestic policies.<sup>68</sup> Brillakis, was quite surprised and expressed his disagreement with such a move. Even though he was not against the development of bilateral interstate relations he, unsuccessfully, warned Ceaușescu that an official visit would send the wrong signals as it would provide a façade of legitimacy to Papadopoulos and would assist in further stabilizing the regime.

Preparations for the visit would continue in a low-key mode through diplomatic channels. Bucharest was taking Papadopoulos' statements about his wish to lead a transition towards electoral politics and the abolition of martial law at face value. As part of his gradual 'liberalization' process Papadopoulos had abolished the monarchy (the king being in self-exile since 1967) in June 1973 and appointed himself as President for an eight-year period. This presidential republic would be such only in name, since the accumulation of powers to the office of the President were still to the extent of a dictator. All this was scheduled to be officially endorsed by the Greek people in a nominal referendum in July 1973. At the same time, Papadopoulos actively attempted to approach conservatives from the pre-dictatorial era in order to appoint a prime minister and create a cabinet staffed by politicians and thus add an extra layer of democratic legitimacy with a view to lead the country to elections at some point in 1974. This overture nonetheless was ignored by the political world with the exception of the conservative Spyridon Markezinis who would eventually be appointed prime minister.<sup>69</sup> In addition, all political parties which were still illegal, decided to boycott the July referendum.

A few weeks before the referendum Ceaușescu met once again with a delegation of KKE-Interior, headed by Brillakis, in the summer resort of Neptune by the Black Sea. There the Greek comrades presented in strong ideological terms the state of the anti-dictatorial struggle and the future prospects of a more active opposition of the masses against the regime of Papadopoulos. They made it clear that for them the dilemma 'monarchy or republic' imposed by the referendum was a false one. In addition, they informed Ceaușescu that they were in contact with representatives of various political forces, left and right, with a view to reach an understanding regarding the situation after a potential collapse of the Junta, the minimum common denominator being the holding of free democratic elections open to all, including the Communist Party.

Ceaușescu had a different opinion, however. Acknowledging the fact that the results of the referendum would be favourable to Papadopoulos, he urged his comrades to speak in favour of

the abolition of the monarchy as it was associated with the equally oppressive environment for the Left before 1967. In fact, throughout the discussion, he assumed the role of Papadopoulos' advocate highlighting the announced liberalization measures and especially the proclamation of the Republic. He went as far as saying '*what's wrong if the first president is named Papadopoulos? He might be even better than Kanellopoulos*', exclaiming also that the Greek dictator 'was in need of support'.<sup>70</sup> After comparing Papadopoulos with Nasser, Peron and even De Gaulle, the Romanian president advised in favour of supporting this turn towards the normalization of political life in Greece and taking advantage of the opportunities that the current regime was offering. It is safe to argue that Ceaușescu, having a first-hand knowledge of the internal disunity among the ranks of the Greek communists, did not believe that they had the capability to provoke a radical shakedown of the regime.<sup>71</sup> The final stroke for his interlocutors came when he announced to them that he would visit Athens after the referendum, probably in autumn. The shocked Greek delegation expressed its strong disagreement in a rather heated debate but due to their dependence on the assistance from the RCP, they settled agreeing to disagree.<sup>72</sup>

Right after the expected prevalence of the 'pro-republic' vote and the official inauguration of Papadopoulos as President, the Romanian embassy was among the first and few to send a rather warm congratulatory telegram with a personal message from the Romanian president.<sup>73</sup> In addition the Romanians were compiling a rich agenda as they envisaged this visit not only as public relations stunt but also as an opportunity to agree on tangible measures regarding the expansion of bilateral relations. Thus, a number of accords were under preparation focusing on trade and economic cooperation in the fields of energy, oil and maritime transports with the most important being a long-term ten-year agreement on economic, technical and scientific cooperation.<sup>74</sup>

In the meantime a change of guard took place in the Romanian embassy in Athens, when Ion Brad replaced Francisc Pacurariu, to the surprise of many including the new ambassador himself.<sup>75</sup> Brad was a writer with no previous diplomatic experience and the preparation of Ceaușescu's visit would be his first substantial diplomatic task.

Brad was instructed by Bucharest to get in touch with members of the opposition and survey their attitudes about the upcoming visit. The inexperienced diplomat took this one step further and arranged in the draft schedule an open working lunch for Ceaușescu and the unofficial representatives of the political parties including KKE-Interior. Once the state and party authorities in Bucharest took notice of this, they immediately reprimanded the ambassador urging him to be extremely careful not to embarrass their hosts given the illegality of political parties at that point.<sup>76</sup> The news of the official visit which would take place on 21-24 November was released to the press on the 10th.<sup>77</sup> Even though the reactions in the diplomatic circles in Athens ranged from lukewarm to indifferent (the Soviet ambassador completely ignored the issue in a meeting with his Romanian counterpart), the forces of the Left were alarmed. Ilias Iliou the leader of EDA, and one of the most prominent and respected figures of the Greek Left, visited Brad at the Romanian embassy to express his and his comrades' objection to the visit and explain that such an initiative would not be received well by the Greek public. Despite Brad's efforts to reassure him and convince him about the long-term positive effects of the trip, the experienced politician insisted that the only effect of Ceaușescu's presence in Athens would be to 'give a certificate of good conduct to Papadopoulos, who imposed a dictatorship on Greece'.<sup>78</sup> In another manifestation of his lack of experience Brad chose to omit these harsh reactions from his report to Bucharest 'so that [they] would not get upset, knowing that a decision by Ceaușescu could not be doubted by anyone', as he stated in his memoirs.<sup>79</sup> Indeed the telegram that reached the ministry in Bucharest referred only to a few potential perplexities and objections within the circles of the Greek Communists in an otherwise rather cordial exchange of opinions.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, on 16 November Antonis Brillakis of the politburo of the KKE-Interior presented himself to the Embassy and requested to travel to Bucharest as soon as possible to speak directly with RCP officials regarding 'some problems related to the visit'.<sup>81</sup> Despite his intentions Brillakis would never make it to Bucharest as on 17 November the widespread student protests at the Technical

University of Athens (Polytechnio) culminated in an uprising and its brutal suppression by the regime and the re-imposition of martial law. Under these circumstances and with the agreement of both sides Ceaușescu's visit was postponed indefinitely.<sup>82</sup> Thus Papadopoulos missed a chance to increase his limited international legitimacy as Ceaușescu would have been the first European head of State to visit Athens since the coup in 1967. Nevertheless, this would prove a minor concern for him. The uprising of the 'Polytechnio' was perceived as a sign of weakness by the hardliners of the regime headed by Brigadier Dimitrios Ioannidis (chief of the Greek Military Police) and a preview of the imminent instability that the 'liberalisation' experiment entailed. Therefore, on 25 November a coup was staged overthrowing Papadopoulos and Markezinis and replacing them with the puppet government of President Phaidon Gkizikis and Prime Minister Adamantios Androutsopoulos.<sup>83</sup> Ioannidis would continue to control the regime from the backstage, earning the nickname the 'invisible dictator'.

The Romanian image of Papadopoulos' regime as stable and in charge of the political situation in Greece was shattered in a most precipitous way. The reassuring reports regarding the general political climate and the faith in the controlled transition to electoral politics turned out to be unfounded. Ambassador Brad was praising his good fortunes on the fact that these events unfolded before and not during the visit, which he knew would have had catastrophic consequences for the prestige of the Romanian leader and his own career.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the ousting of Papadopoulos and Markezinis, relations between Bucharest and Athens did not change significantly. Naturally, the positive momentum that was building up until November was halted but there was no disruption in the bilateral relations. Bucharest recognized the new puppet government and the working relations continued as usual focusing on lower level economic issues. The regime of Ioannidis however showed a reckless engagement in foreign affairs and orchestrated a coup against the President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, aiming at the unification (*enosis*) of the island with Greece. This development led to the Turkish invasion of the island with the pretext of the protection of the Turkish-Cypriot population. This dramatic series of events set the Eastern Mediterranean on fire once again and above all resulted in the fall of the military regime and the restoration of democracy in Greece. A full-scale war between Greece and Turkey was averted but Bucharest was worried that this tension between the two NATO allies could have a spill-over effect in the Balkans and thus affect the prospects for further regional cooperation. The Romanians were eager to follow the situation closely and Ceaușescu sent a special envoy, Mircea Maliia, to Athens, Ankara and Nicosia to consult with the parts involved.<sup>85</sup> Ceaușescu kept a reserved stance and he was critical of the Turkish invasion and the assault on Cypriot sovereignty.

With the restoration of democracy under the leadership of Konstantinos Karamanlis in the summer of 1974, Romanian-Greek relations continued to evolve. The Greek Prime Minister visited Bucharest in 1975, with a three-year delay, and Ceaușescu eventually went to Athens the following year where he was warmly received under a democratic regime this time.<sup>86</sup> These exchanges were not only aimed at reaffirming the close relations between the two countries, but they were also informed by the common desire to pursue a multilateral road towards cooperation in the Balkans. Influenced by the euphoric environment of the CSCE and the Helsinki Accords, both countries were eager to initiate such a process. Therefore in 1976 the Athens Balkan Conference took place which as a British historian put it 'was significant not so much for what it did, which was little or nothing but for the fact that it existed'.<sup>87</sup> In other words, because of its symbolic value this event would serve as a further manifestation of the Helsinki spirit within a Balkan context.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

This article examined the rather peculiar opening of Ceaușescu's Romania towards the Greek military dictatorship of the Colonels. The rapprochement between a communist People's

Republic, on the one hand, and an anti-communist right-wing Junta, on the other, might initially sound odd but is not inexplicable. Both regimes shared an authoritarian identity regarding their rule. This lack of domestic democratic credentials led them to pursue legitimacy in international affairs evoking convenient principles of international law such as the sanctity of the respect of each state's independence and sovereignty along with non-interference in domestic affairs. Within the Cold War framework of that period, these principles were quite often reduced to nothing but diplomatic platitudes especially when they were used by dictators such as Ceaușescu and Papadopoulos. In this sense, both regimes mirrored each other despite their different ideological provenance. The inherent insecurities of their authoritarian rule would trump their ideological justifications and thus result in a prioritization of the self-perceived national interest in their international conduct. Even though this predominance of realism and cynicism is not surprising, this article aims to contribute to the existing literature by shifting the focus on the close relations between two opposing authoritarian regimes during the Cold War. In this way it goes beyond the traditional study of the dynamics between such regimes and the two super-powers and thus enhances the 'pericentric' approach of the new Cold War history.<sup>89</sup>

The Romanian-Greek case provides us with intriguing elements in the perennial debate within Cold War history regarding the prevalence of ideology or national interest in realist terms. Ceaușescu and the Romanians were no strangers to the intricacies of the Greek political environment. On the contrary, due to their close relations with the Greek Communists they had a first-hand overview of the situation and the challenges that their comrades faced. This affinity however was not enough to prescribe a cautious and ideologically principled approach towards the Greek Colonels. One would expect that Romania and the Eastern bloc in general would join the struggle against the Greek dictatorship emulating the firm stance of the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands for example. Quite the opposite, Ceaușescu would become one of the proponents of cooperating with the regime, as his determination to visit Athens in 1973 shows. The equally positive attitude from the other side created a mutual understanding between the two regimes which they were expecting to flourish under the favourite credo of dictators; mutual respect of their authority and non-interference. This shared recognition was perceived from both sides as an asset for the affirmation of their international legitimacy, despite the oppressive conditions within their countries.<sup>90</sup>

Caught in the middle of this Realpolitik approach were the Greek Communists, especially the KKE-Interior, who were dependent on assistance from Romania. By focusing on the triangle of Ceaușescu, the Colonels and the Greek Communists, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how ideological differences were often at odds with Cold War realities. The contextualization of this unseemly Balkan cross-bloc cooperation, especially as seen through the examination of Ceaușescu's agency, offers useful insights and a better view of the uses of ideology and political expediency in the pursuit of authoritarian legitimacy in the South-Eastern European theatre of the Cold War.

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