

The Visit of President Richard Nixon In Bucharest, 2-3 August 1969

Anamaria Lepcaliuc (Popescu)¹

Abstract: The main objective of this article is to show that the visit that American President Richard Nixon made between 2-3 August 1969 in Romania, the first of an American president in a socialist state, was a great success for the Romanian Communist leader, Nicolae Ceausescu. This visit raised the international prestige of the Romanian leader at odds unequalled by another Communist leaders in Eastern Europe. In addition, internally, the popularity and trust that the Romanians have shown them, have now reached the highest level of the last 25 years that Ceausescu has led the PCR and Romania. This visit was a huge success for Nicolae Ceausescu's personal image, as a leader who wanted to assert himself on the international arena, but also on the internal legitimacy of Romanian adherence to the leader policies and initiatives in Bucharest. The international equations of the visit have greatly contributed to the shaping of the image of a Romanian leader with personal and firm opinions that can not be influenced by other major power centers of the communist world, a leader who had a well-defined purpose in dealing with the US.

Keywords: Richard Nixon; Romanian-American relations; Nicolae Ceaușescu; Cold War.

1. Introduction

The initiative of this visit belonged to Nicolae Ceausescu. The Romanian leader aspired to take advantage of the good impression he had made to Nixon in 1967, then an American citizen, but who enjoyed a good reception in Bucharest.

Thus, in February, Nicolae Ceausescu instructed Ambassador Corneliu Bogdan to invite Nixon to Bucharest. The invitation was not written, being repeated in the months that followed. (Harrington & Courtney, 2002, p. 273)

¹ PhD Student, University "Ștefan cel Mare" of Suceava, History Specialization, Romania, Address: 13 Universitatii Street, Suceava, Romania, Tel.: +40 230 216 147, Corresponding author: anamarialepcaliuc@yahoo.ca.

At first, President Nixon refused, preferring to try to persuade the Soviets to get involved in the effort to find peace solutions in Vietnam.

Under these circumstances, Nixon decided to “sneak” the Soviets, “to give them over to the Russians,” as Corneliu Bogdan has exposed (Harrington & Courtney, 2002, p. 277). They disagreed with this initiative by the American Administration. The State Department feared that visiting a state that claimed to be independent of Moscow would be damaging to US-Soviet relations and SALT negotiations. (Kissinger, 1979, p. 193) Nixon was not convinced to give up. Thus, Nicolae Ceausescu enjoyed the success of the one whose actions irritated Moscow, had he been chosen by Nixon to make this demonstration to the Soviets. (Harrington & Courtney, 2002, p. 276).

Although his external initiatives had the role of reducing tensions between the two superpowers, he chose to visit precisely that East European country demonstrating its reluctance to Moscow.

Nixon and Professor Stephen Fischer-Galati of the University of Colorado advised each other. Moreover Professor Stephen Fischer-Galati asked Nixon about the details concerning the Romanian domestic and foreign policy.

The visit to Bucharest was the last stop of a long tour that included several Asian countries. Nixon witnessed the landing of Apollo 11 in the Pacific on July 24, then visited the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, India and Pakistan. He stopped in Romania at the invitation of Nicolae Ceausescu¹.

In Romania, the visit was announced on July 4, when the US interim commissioner in Bucharest had a participation at a talkshow at the Independence Day TV station². Thus, it was a premiere for an American official to address the Romanians on television³.

The “World” made weekly announcements regarding the foreign policy, Nixon's visit through a page about political biography of the president (of the university

¹*Foreign Relations: From Manila to Bucharest*, in “Time”, July 4, 1969. The weekly articles were consulted online at <http://www.time.com/time/> and therefore I could not quote the pages at which are in the printed version.

²*US National Holiday reception* in “Scântea”, No. 8116, Saturday July 5, 1969, p. 7.

³*Romania Will Allow US Envoy to Address Nation on TV Today*; in *The New York Times*, July 4, 1969, p. 2.

training, military experience during the war and political career of Senator, Vice President and President)¹.

Some US analysts did not think too well of Romania and were not too excited about the announcement of this visit, which they considered to be a wrong move.

James Reston said in an article entitled "*The art of running away from problems*" that "*the first thing that the Romanians have made after hearing that President Nixon agreed to visit Bucharest was to announce the Soviet government, and the second one was to publish an ample material about the Romanian-Soviet friendship.*"². In his opinion, this represented the measure of Romania's "independence" towards the Soviets.

There were many rumors in the US that the visit did not appeal to the Soviets. During the preparations, there was a question of the attitude that Moscow had. The Romanian ambassador did not agree with the rumors that Moscow was irritated and characterized the visit as "*a natural phenomenon in an era of global travel by prominent leaders.*"³

From the first official visit of the Romanian leader, they believed that Romania "*wants to develop better relations not only with the United States, but with all states, regardless of the social system.*"⁴

Regarding the Romanians' mood at the announcement of the visit, the American journalists said they were happy and "it is all about what is being said in Bucharest, the news "*struck a bomb*".⁵

Ceausescu met with a group of teachers from the United States, members of the seminar of peace teachers, before Nixon arrived in Romania.⁶ The Romanian leader sent a message of peace in the talks with them. He said that the Romanians are "*animated by the sincere desire to develop cooperation and friendship with the*

¹ *The Visit to Romania of US President Richard Nixon* in "*The World*", 32 (301), 1969, p. 11.

² James Reston, *The Art of Running Away from Problems*, in "*The New York Times*", July 2, 1969, p. 42.

³ *Romania denies Soviet Objects to Nixoris Visit*, in "*The New York Times*", July 10, 1969 "p. 11.

⁴ *Ceausescu Implies Visit by Nixon Will Aul Peace* in *The New York Times*, July 14, 1969, p. 9.

⁵ *In Romania, the News of the Visit is Fantastic to Man in Street*, in *The New York Times*, July 1, 1969, p. 16.

⁶ *Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu received a group of US professors* in "*Scântea*", No. 8143, Friday 1 August 1969, p. 9

Americasn, as with all peoples of the world to live with all states in peace and understanding.”¹

One important thing was that President Nixon's close visit was part of the same peace effort. Members of the American Teachers Group considered Ceausescu as one of the “*great leaders of the peace struggle in the world.*”²

Thus, from the diplomatic preparation stage of this visit, it was remarkable that the Washington leader saw in Ceausescu an interlocutor who deserved the privilege of being the first to receive the American president in a communist country.

2. The Purpose of the Visit

Leaders have proposed to clear about a few points in the agenda during this meeting, which was quite different.

The reasons why Nixon accepted Ceausescu's invitation and the goals he wished to fulfill were of the nature to emphasize the prestige of the Romanian leader.

Nixon wanted to talk to Ceausescu about major issues for US foreign policy.

But Ceausescu appreciated Romania's distinct position within the Soviet bloc.

Thus, some journalists from “The Times “ magazine interpreted the visit to Bucharest as “*the fact that the United States do not accept the “Brezhnev doctrine” promoted by Moscow after the invasion of Czechoslovakia to motivate the Soviet intervention in any independent communist state in its sphere of influence.*”³ But the Secretary of State William Rogers wanted to point out that this visit “*should not be interpreted as an anti-Soviet move*”.⁴

Romania was considered as a channel of discussion with the Soviets and other socialist states. The point expressed by Mihai Botez, the representative of Romania at the UN, in 1994: “*It should not be neglected the opportunity, the benefit that the Americans see as gaining, to have through the Romanians a pragmatic and direct contact with the decision-making center of the Warsaw Pact, whose full member*

¹Statements made by Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu during a conversation with the group of American professors in “Scânteia”, no. 8143, Friday August 1, 1969, p. 1.

²Statements made by Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu during a conversation with the group of American professors in “Scânteia”, no. 8143, Friday August 1, 1969, p. 1.

³Foreign Relations: From Manila to Bucharest, in Time, July 4, 1969.

⁴Romania: Getting Ready for Nixon, in Time, July 11, 1969.

was Romania. The interest in such a channel of information and communication could only appear to be entirely justified.”¹

Ceausescu's and Romania's prestige allowed him to be considered by the Americans as fit for such an intermediary role.

The journalists noted that President Nixon would address the talk of relations with China, mentioning what were the Soviet intentions in their relations with the US. Romania has affirmed many times for China's right not to blindly obey Moscow's plans, because Romania (among the East European communist countries) had the best relations with China.

Given that Washington did not recognize the Beijing regime, it needed an intermediary, and Romania fitted well with this role; it was a “*gateway to China.*” (Harrington & Courtney, 2002, p. 277) This was one of the US foreign policy issues, and Ceausescu was considered fit to play a role in solving it.

Another point in the talks was the Vietnam situation,² considering that the White House leader “*would say some confidential things about Vietnam that Ceausescu would send to Hanoi.*” (Rijnoveanu, 2005, p. 19)

Another reason for President Nixon to come was to give Moscow a “*shot*” for her refusal to cooperate in finding acceptable solutions for Vietnam, and this “*blow*” could give it a visit to a socialist country.

Thus, there were three important issues on the US foreign agenda - relations with China and the USSR and the Vietnam War - to be addressed at the Ceausescu meeting, a privilege that many Communist leaders could not enjoy.³

The American journalists predicted that it would raise questions about the development of bilateral trade, the growth of the US investment in Romania, and especially, the economic objectives.⁴ It was also heard that Ceausescu would

¹Apud, (Durandin, 1998, p. 319)

²Romania: *Getting Ready for Nixon*, in *Time*, July 11, 1969.

³ It is no less true that the US editorialists felt that the president would also show a certain amount of detention because “the Romanian leader, despite his (...) dependent foreign policy, leads a repressive state.” *Romania: Getting Ready for Nixon*, July 11, 1969.

⁴Benjamin Wells, *Nixon to Discuss Trade in Romania*, in *The New York Times*, July 3 and the position, the US reaction in the event that the Soviets would try an action against Romania like the one in Czechoslovakia.

investigate discreetly the US position in the event that the Soviets would try an action against Romania like that in Czechoslovakia.¹

3. Official Discussions

The note of the official discussions² indicated that four major themes were approached. At least two of them - the relationship between the US and China and the Vietnam War – managed to strengthen the good image Ceausescu.

The US president appealed to “good offices”, asking Ceausescu to play the role of an intermediary, a communications channel with Vietnam and China.

Opening the discussion about China, Nixon explained why the US did not recognize The People's Republic of China and opposed its admission to the UN “*not because we do not like its internal policy but as a consequence of its policy toward its neighbors.*” He also accepted that in the future relations between the US and China could have normalized and, in this perspective, they needed to keep “*channels open to China*”.³

Ceausescu pointed out that it would be more useful in the interest of peace if the United States had renounced “*their current attitude towards China, including in terms of admitting and recognizing the UN.*”⁴

President Nixon made a short presentation on Vietnam situation from an American perspective, referring to the 35,000 soldiers already lost in this conflict. He also referred to the fact that the US had stopped bombing for about 9 months, and Hanoi was not willing to negotiate on the merits the conditions of peace and the impasse at which the negotiations in Paris took place.

Nixon ended the presentation, saying that although he wants peace, “*I will never accept a defeat. I will never allow the United States to be smothered in Vietnam.*”⁵

Nixon's worry came from the fact that North Vietnam was trying to postpone the negotiations in Paris, continuing the struggles at the same time.

¹Romania: *Getting Ready for Nixon*, in *Time*, July 11, 1969.

²ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

³ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

⁴ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

⁵ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

Thus, Nixon decided to propose to Ceausescu to mediate the transmission of important messages between the two sides. It needed “*a channel of direct communication between us, if we wanted to communicate things of the greatest importance, to have the guarantee that we could talk as if we were talking directly. I would prefer not to use for such communications the usual diplomatic channels, which introduce dozens of people on the circuit and eventually the news reaches 60 capitals.*”¹

During the talks Ceausescu said that Hanoi had requested Romania to have the same intermediary role: “*They also asked us to use the relations we have with the US to insist on reaching a political solution and as fast as possible.*”²

Finally, President Nixon decided to talk to Nicholas Ceausescu about the most important US dossier: China and Vietnam.

Nixon proposed to the Romanians a mediator role in China's relationship with the role of transmitting messages in relation to the North Vietnam. Being the best proof of the prestige enjoyed by Romania, in general, and Ceausescu, in particular, from the point of view of foreign policy and of the position in the international relations as a whole.

The main gain for Ceausescu following this visit was one of prestige and notoriety. Ceausescu saw the perfect opportunity to give an impuls to the economic exchanges between the two countries.

In the official discussions with Nixon, Nicolae Ceausescu raised several issues in this regard, saying that “we are interested in benefiting from some licenses and equipment produced in the US,” and for this he identified two issues that the US side resolve: “*to give approval for their delivery to Romania and to find the means for EXIMBANK to provide credits to cover these deliveries.*”³

In the end, they reached the difficult problem, Romania had to provide export to the US so as to cover these imports, and Ceausescu has called for the “*most favored nation clause to be granted or, at the very least, for facilities to help our trade.*”⁴

¹ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

²ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

³ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

⁴ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

But Nixon, whose opposition to liberalization of East-West trade was known (Harrington & Courtney, 2002, p. 277), gave Ceausescu a refusal well covered by the US trade law.

Even if he said that he personally pronounced “*for Romania to be given the most favoured-nation clause*” in favour of “*granting loans to Romania*,” Nixon explained that there are many political obstacles. He categorically told Ceausescu that the “*clause*” would appeal to the Congress, “*and at that point*,” it would be difficult to get Congress's approval now in order to grant the “*clause*” of a nation trading with Vietnam, especially when it came to strategic goods.¹

Henry Kissinger referred to EXIMBANK, saying that “on one hand, the Bank is forbidden to finance exports to the Communist countries, and on the other hand there is an amendment that refers to any country that deals with North Vietnam”.²

To Ceausescu's disappointment, Nixon did not promise or guarantee the granting of the “*clause*”.

Thus, the American press felt that the chances for an intensification of trade between the US and Romania were weak, and the President's intention to look for new ways to expand it was hitting economic and political obstacles.³

Thus, an important objective that the leader from Bucharest had set for this meeting was not fulfilled. Strengthening his image and Romania's in the eyes of the American interlocutors was easier to achieve.

In discussing the nature of the bilateral political relations, President Nixon and Ceausescu had an opportunity to affirm their position within the socialist bloc. The leader of the White House affirmed the interest of his Administration in developing the relations between the two countries “in the mutual interest of the Romanians and the Americans”.

However, he expressed concern about the effect that these Romanian-American relations might have on Romania's relations with the USSR and the rest of the socialist states.

Nixon asked Ceausescu whether the “*Brezhnev doctrine*” was an element that could create difficulties in developing relations (...) with the US? “Nixon said - at

¹ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Department, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

²ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Department, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

³*US-Romania Trade Hope Slim*, in “*The New York Times*”, August 8, 1969, p. 3.

least at that moment¹ - that he did not want Romania to be put “in a delicate or detrimental situation in the relations with its neighbours” and gave as an example a series of speculations that were made in the preparatory steps of the visit”² in the sense that the USSR would not have agreed to this visit “Thus, the ultimate goal of US external action was to encourage dissent within the bloc of the socialist states. (Rijnoveanu, 2005, p. 19)

This was an opportunity for the Romanian Communist leader to expose his own vision of the relations with the US ,on the one hand, and relations with the socialist states, on the other.

Ceausescu began by saying that “*we look at the relations with the USA as relations between two states (...) which want to develop normal relations of cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual benefit*”, but more importantly, “we consider that our relations with the US must be conditioned by anything but the common desire that they correspond to mutual interests ...”³

Further, as an argument that these contacts with the US could not harm his country, Ceausescu emphasized that Romania had relations with other democratic states in the West, such as France, England, Italy. These countries “have not bothered and can not bother anyone.” As for the “Brezhnev doctrine,” Ceausescu stressed that “for us it is not valid” and concluded, in order to be well understood by his guest, that “when it comes to Romania’s involvement , *we want to decide here in Bucharest and no one else in Moscow, Washington or Peking, nor Paris, nor London, nor elsewhere.*”⁴

Thus, the exchange of views on the conditions in which the Romanian-American relations were developing represented by Ceausescu a new gain in the personal image and foreign policy plan that Romania was taking at that time.

¹Certainly, in 1975, when the “clause” for Romania was being discussed, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger contradicted the former president, saying in a private discussion with a group of American Jews that “we are trying to we divide Romania from the Soviet Union”. (Kissinger, 1981, p. 194)

² ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

³ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

⁴ANIC, DC CCR Fund - Foreign Relations Section, file 51/1969, ff. 113-166.

4. The Echo Of The Visit

The echo of the meeting in Bucharest between Nixon and Ceausescu had the subsequent interpretations by the historians who gave to the event and the reactions from the American press further strengthen the personal image. The visit has greatly contributed to shaping the image with personal and firm opinions that can not be influenced by other major power centers of the communist world.

Another argument is that this event sparked favourable echoes in the free world, but almost no concrete result¹ for the immediate signing of bilateral agreements.

Thus, at the end of the visit, in the statement Nixon made before leaving, he thanked the Romanians for their friendship, for the warmth and enthusiasm with which he was received, saying that *“of all the countries I visited, none will be remembered as Romania(...), because of the conversations I have had with you, Mr. President, talks that will be recorded in history (...) I enjoyed a very warm welcome from the Romanians wherever I went.”*²

He resumed the lectures for Romania and the American press on arriving in the US at Andrews military base, where he said that *“we still still have in mind the memories related to the visit in Bucharest. This was the most emotional experience I've ever had in the over 60 countries of the world I've visited.”*³

From these statements Nixon pointed out that the visit to Romania had, first of all, *an emotional impact on the American president, known for his weakness for the country after the 1967 visit.* (Harrington & Courtney, 2002, p. 273) Second, he also appreciated the quality of the discussions he had with Ceausescu, and his remark that these consultations *“will be recorded in history”* was beneficial for the enhancement of the personal fame of the Romanian leader.

H. R. Haldeman, one of the US president's councilors, noted in his diary that *“the president considered Ceausescu extremely dicky and smart and was very impressed by him.”* (Constantiniu, 2008, p. 503)

Henry Kissinger, noted in his memoirs, the extremely warm atmosphere with which Bucharest received Nixon. The description he made is one of the most convincing: *“The overwhelming exuberance of receiving Nixon was of course*

¹Except for an agreement to open an American library in Bucharest and a Romanian library in the US

²*The end of the United States President's visit to Romania, Richard Nixon, “Scântea”, No. 8146, Monday, August 4, 1969, p. 1*

³*Results of Talks Please The President, in The New York Times, August 4, 1969, p. 1*

inspired and organized from the center. But even if this reception was prepared, it remains an extraordinary demonstration of Romania's independence from the Soviet Union. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for any government to create the emotion, the joy, the human quality exerted by this public demonstration. It was deeply moving the response given by the population of a communist state..." (Kissinger, 1979, p. 194)

The American press was surprised by this aspect of the visit, the treatment enjoyed by Nixon, who enjoyed "a warm prize from hundreds of thousands of Romanian flags waving."¹ In the journalists' opinion, this vibrant reception² and the goodwill shown by the Romanians was "beyond the communist type of demonstrations".³

5. Conclusion

So the visit of the American President to Socialist Romania has contributed tremendously to Ceausescu's international prestige, but moreover he gave him "a legitimacy in the internal life that the other Communist leaders in the area could not even dream about." (Câmpeanu, 2002, p. 145)

And internally, Ceausescu was chosen with added legitimacy, image and much confidence. The non-participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia a year before, and now the friendship that the Romanian leader shows to the United States - even if interested, "represent actions of a political direction initiated by power, the quasiunanimity of the population is not limited to accepting them, so ready to actively support them." (Câmpeanu, 2002, p. 251)

This visit was not regarded by the Soviet side at all, although it was beneficial to Ceausescu's image in the Western countries. Because, two days after the visit, the Communist Romanian leadership expressed its hope that "the Soviet Union will correctly grasp the constructive aspects of President Nixon's visit and will not interpret it as a politically hostile act."⁴It was not so.

¹ *Nixon in Romania, Stresses Desire for World Peace*, in *The New York Times*, August 8

² *Results of Talks Please The President*, in "The New York Times", August 4, 1969, p. 16

³ "The New York Times," August 5, 1969, p. 36.

⁴ *Rumania Confident on Soviet View of Nixon Visit*, in *The New York Times*, August 5, 1969, p.4

A Soviet representative denounced the “*terrible tactics*” of building bridges that would undermine the “socialist countries' cohesion in Eastern Europe on 8 August. This statement was understood as a clear criticism of President Nixon's visit.¹ “The New York Times Daily” commented that the White House leader's visit was “implicitly” attacked in *Izvestia*.²

Another comment on the same issue appears on August 10, when US editorialists wrote that the recent visit was so disturbing “*from a political and ideological point of view for the Soviet Union that only four days away was used by the PCR Congress attacked The United States, accusing it of perpetrating bridges in Eastern Europe.*”³

The clearest evidence of Soviet dissatisfaction came at a distance of eight months in a meeting that Brezhnev and Ceausescu had in Moscow. The Soviet leader could not abstain himself and accused the Romanians of doing so.

The terms used were the toughest. Nixon's presence in Romania was considered “a challenge to progressive humanity.” The moment of the visit was considered totally inappropriate, because “just when Vietnam is rioting, Americans are making a dime in Vietnam”.

Brezhnev reproached the postponement of the 10th Congress of the PCR to conduct this visit, a situation in which he could no longer participate in the visit.⁴ Moscow's reproaches also contributed to improving Ceausescu's image from the perspective of Western countries. They were - these reproaches - a further proof of the fact that the Romanian leader was not always responding to the Soviet imperatives.

In the “World” publication, the echo that this visit brought to Romania and Ceausescu was caught in a Washington correspondence by Constantin Alexandroi.

Many Americans expressed themselves in positive terms about Romania: Cyrus Eaton, a well-known American industrialist, declared himself “deeply impressed by the intelligentsia, imagination and energy of the Romanians, the determination to make his country one of the most developed and prosperous in the world.”He

¹Tod Szulcs, *Russian, in Romania, Hints Displeasure at Nixon Visit*, in *The New York Vs*, 8 09 1969, p.1

²*Izvestia Assails Nixon Trip*, in *The New York Times*, August 9, 1969, p.6

³Moscow Frowns on Romania Flirtation with America in “*The New York Times. The Week*”, 10 09 1969, p. 3

⁴ANIC, CC Fund of the PCR - Chancellery Section, file 59/1970, f. 3

adds that "Romania has many friends in the United States who are fighting towards the ties between the two peoples "especially in economic terms". (Alexandroaie, 1969, p. 20)

John Richardson, a Boston economist, felt that "today's Romania manages to make all its preconceptions collapse." (Alexandroaie, 1969, p. 20)

Also, an unnamed US Senator had words of praise, saying that "Romania's international prestige is on the heights that it never reached before. It is a deserved reward for its diligent people and for its wise leadership." (Alexandroaie, 1969, p. 20)

Beyond the propaganda aspect of this correspondence in America, positive appreciation and improvement of Romania's image in the eyes of the Americans can be attributed to the visit made by Nixon.

In conclusion, the main gain of the Romanian leader following this historic meeting was the image capital he acquired.

All the diplomatic preparations that were made for the visit, the purposes stated by the American side for this meeting, the official talks and, finally, the echo generated all lead to this conclusion.

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