

LESSONS OF ‘VELVET REVOLUTIONS’: FROM ROMANIAN “DECEMBER 89” TO MOLDOVAN “APRIL 09”. MOLDOVA: QUO VADIS?

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Abstract: *The article of Dr. Ceslav Ciobanu, Professor of Economics at Virginia State University, USA, ex-Ambassador of Moldova to the United States of America (1999-2002) and former advisor and interpreter of Mikhail Gorbachev (1987-1991) to practically all his meetings with Romanian counterparts from January 1987 to August 1991, is based on his presentation at the International Colloquium “1989 en Europe medieane: 20 apres”, organized by the French National Institute of Eastern Languages and Civilization (INALCO). Dr. C. Ciobanu is focusing on some of the most important issues of the Central and East European ‘Velvet’ Revolutions of 1989, on lesser known and meditated aspects of the Romanian Revolution, particularly, on the last meetings of Soviet leader with N. Ceausescu, Romanian dictator. The author is addressing the questions formulated by Dr. Catherine Durandin, INALCO Professor and coordinator of the event, from his own experience and memories in Gorbachev’s team, which make his article original and insightful [1].*

It should be also mentioned that Dr. C.Ciobanu is making en-premier historical parallels between the situation in Ceausescu’s Romania and evolutions in Moldova during the eight years of communist regime headed by the last President Vladimir Voronin. Is the collapse of this last communist regime in Europe the “End of History” that American political economist Francis Fukuyama foresaw twenty years ago? The author is trying to investigate the importance of lessons of Velvet Revolutions for the post-communist Moldova which is again on a cross-road facing the same question that Romania did in 1989: Quo Vadis?

Keywords: *‘Velvet’ Revolutions of 1989, December 89 in Romania, Gorbachev, Ceausescu, Iliescu, Moldova’s ‘Twitter revolution’ of 2009, constitutional crises, stabilization and economic recovery of Moldova*

1. The overall view of Ceausescu’s Romania as seen from yours and your friends at the *Staraia Ploshchad’*. Attitudes among you and your colleagues toward Ceausescu and his government.

The Moscow’s *Staraia Ploshchad’ (Old Square)* for many years was the residence of the most powerful person in the Soviet Union – the General Secretary of the Communist Party. The saying “When Moscow sneezes, Eastern Europe catches a cold” is related to this place. For several years it was Mikhail Gorbachev’s residence, as well as the office of my colleagues and I in the Foreign Affairs Department. How had Ceausescu’s Romania been seen from this square during that time?

I think, it was a mixed picture: deep sympathy for Romanian people, reduced to beggars in Ceausescu’s “golden époque”, curiosity for what trick will Ceausescu play next, and disgust about the Romanian palatial press that idolized the “beloved *conducator*” (ruler). I would like to mention a few key points, based on my own experience and memories.

For more than two decades Ceausescu had been *L'Enfant terrible*, an “incorrigible dissident” of communism, being *de facto* more orthodox and devoted to the communist cause than a lot of his foreign colleagues, suppressing aggressively any manifestation of independence in his own country, especially of opposition. He had always been seen by Kremlin as a troublemaker with his “special”, “separate”, “different” position, sometimes radically opposed to that of Moscow. In 1967, for example, he initiated diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and refused to break those with Israel in spite of the so called “coordinated approach” of the Soviet and other Warsaw Treaty leaders. In 1968 he not only refused to join the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, but spectacularly condemned it. This unquestionably was the apotheosis of his political career and of the popularity of his communist regime, as observed Andrew Janos, Professor at the University of California, Berkley [2]. A year later, in 1969, during the turbulent times of the Cold War, Romania was the first and the only European Soviet block country visited by an American President (Richard Nixon).

As once during an unofficial dinner Elena Ceausescu joked (or maybe not), “Romania is too small for such a great leader as you, Nicolae is”. Ceausescu always irritated Moscow by his extravagant initiatives in the international affairs, particularly related to the Non-Alignment Movement. Having warm relations with Maoist China, with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, he tried to play the role of “mediator” between Moscow and Beijing, and that of “peacemaker” in the Middle East. I attended a luncheon offered by him for Arafat in a villa at Moscow's *Leninskie Gory* (Lenin's Hill) in 1987 when both of them were invited to attend the 70th anniversary of the Russian October Revolution. They had a very warm meeting, as friends united by a common mentality, common cause and common fate. I thought then that if Ceausescu would wear the same Palestinian head scarf, they unmistakably could be identified as brothers. By the way, Ceausescu had warm relations with another Arab friend of his – Sadam Hussein, whom I saw in the presidium of the last XIVth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party not far from the Ceausescu couple.

It should be mentioned that the Romanian leader was quite successful in playing on contradictions between the West and the East, especially during the first period of his rule (1965-1971), when he got political dividends from what Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu called the “original synthesis of desatelizeation and destalinization” [3]. This, by the way did not stop him from asking the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev at their meetings for the additional 5-10 million tons of oil to support the Romanian economy, which was built according his grandeur's ambitions and not on the principle of self sustainability. Surprisingly for me, he usually received what he was asking for.

I would also like to emphasize Ceausescu's jealous reaction to the popularity of Mikhail Gorbachev and his path breaking reforms. Initially N.Ceausescu tried to ignore them as “something that Romania did a long time ago”, or belittle their importance, insisting that “there is no interest in Romania in either *perestroika* (restructuring) or *glasnost* (transparency)”. For instance, the information about one of the most important speeches of Gorbachev to the January 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, appeared just as a brief summary in the Romanian press after a three days delay under an excuse of “difficulty of translating it from Russian” [4]. It was nothing else but the classical maxim about the virtues of gaining time, wait-and-see: *habet tempus, habet vitam*.

But as time passed and Gorbachev's reputation on the international arena was increasing, Ceausescu modified his behaviour. He tried to get political dividends from the popularity of the Soviet leader. There is a Russian expression: *royali v kustah* – “fortepiano in the bushes”, which means to find something or someone to be in a totally unexpected place and at a totally unexpected time. My colleagues and I were amused by

the ability of Ceausescu to appear “unexpectedly” near the Soviet leader at international conferences, to change a few words at those “unexpected” meetings and of course to offer to the Romanian press, which “unexpectedly” was “in the right place and at the right time”, an opportunity for a few pictures with Gorbachev. All of those *petite mis-en scenes* were very well orchestrated by Ceausescu’s assistants and widely reflected in the Romanian mass-media to create an impression that “Mikhail Gorbachev is taking into consideration Ceausescu’s opinion and suggestions” [5].

2. Reactions among you and your friends to the events of 1989 beginning with the Hungarians opening of the border, to the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, including the Fall of the Wall.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on the night of November 9, 1989 marked a turning point for Europe and for the World: the End of the Cold War and triumph of democracy and human freedom.

I found out about the fall of the Berlin Wall in the morning of November 10 as many in the Soviet Union did and, I suppose, my former boss Mikhail Gorbachev as well. We, his young advisors, and Mr. Gorbachev himself, perhaps, were poor prophets on the topic of unification of Germany and fall of the communism in Eastern Europe. During President Gorbachev’s visit to West Germany in the Summer of 1989, when he and the then German Chancellor Helmut Kohl were asked at the press-conference about the possibility of German unification, both leaders answered that this question would be addressed as history evolved... in the 21st Century... It happened just a few months after this meeting.

I learned later on that the Soviet leaders and their advisers were not the only ones to be caught by surprise. In 1987 President Reagan addressed a crowd of about 20,000 in West Berlin, near the Brandenburg Gate, challenging the Soviet leader: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this Wall”. His National Security Adviser, Frank Carlucci, remembers thinking: “It’s a great speech line. But it will never happen” [6]... It happened just two years later.

I would stress that just a few European leaders welcomed then the change brought by the fall of the Berlin Wall. For example a French novelist captured the general spirit in his country, including that of Francois Mitterrand, the French President at the time, by mentioning that he loved Germany so much that he was glad there were two of them. Not much different was the reaction of Margret Thatcher, the then British Premier. She dismissed the German unification as “the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard of” [7].

Tearing the Wall down had yet other meanings, however. It had a very negative impact on Russians, especially the elite: the humiliation from the loss. In the opinion of hard-liners, who represented the majority in the Soviet Party, this meant nothing other than a defeat of the Soviet Union fifty years after its victory in the World War II that cost 27 million lives. Not only was the myth about “the historical superiority of socialism over capitalism” falling apart, but also the whole socialist bloc considered monolithic. The fall of the Wall initiated a “domino effect” - a cascade of anti-communist “velvet revolutions” in Central and Eastern Europe. The end of the Soviet Union was expected soon,- “an empire gathered drop by drop over thousands of years”, as Vitali Vorotnikov, the leader of the Soviet delegation to the 14th and last Congress of the Communist Party of Romania in 1989 said in a moment of frankness at a dinner in Bucharest.

The key factor of the peaceful transition from communism was Mr. Gorbachev’s firm intention and conviction that he would not use force to suppress the democratic aspirations of the people of East Germany and other East European countries, as his predecessors did many times in the past: 1953 in Berlin, 1956 in Hungary and Poland,

1968 in the Czechoslovakia and so on. He was a new type of leader, perhaps the greatest personality of the XXth Century along with President Reagan. It was his policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, a new political thinking that he launched after he became the Soviet leader, the last one. I am proud that I was close to Mr. Gorbachev at that time, in his team with other colleagues of mine, including Georgy Shakhnazarov, Valerii Musatov, Andrei Grachev, Andrei Gorlenko and many others that supported the Soviet leader by providing profound analysis of the situation in Eastern European countries, choosing between alternatives and making consistent recommendations that de facto served the base for Gorbachev's historical decisions.

Just imagine what could be the consequences of an alternative suggested by Gorbachev's hardliner opponents: to use the force to prevent the German unification and "save the communism": in East Germany alone there were more than 300,000 Soviet troops armed to the teeth – elite troops, specially selected! I want to stress also that it is not just by chance that Reagan's greatest success in putting an end to the cold War was achieved not through the use of force but by persuasion, dialog and diplomacy. I think it is not at all an accident that Nobel Prize for Peace was awarded in 2009 to the U.S. President Barack Obama. Mr. Gorbachev, who was awarded this Prize in 1990 and welcomed this decision of the Nobel Prize Committee, has said that "Obama is a person who has expressed hopes" and his election as U.S. President, according to Gorbachev, "is the most important event of this year" [8].

The leadership, as the history teaches, must not only manage crises but first of all avert them. Mr. Gorbachev, as most analysts and historians agree, played a pivotal role on the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall when he abandoned the so-called "Brezhnev Doctrine of limited sovereignty" and replaced it with what Genadii Gerasimov, a former Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, described as "Sinatra Doctrine", based on the singer's song "My way". In other words, East Germany, like Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European communist countries were free to choose their own political and economic way, their own fate.

I want to point to one very important fact, mentioned by Mr. Gorbachev in his recent interview for the American magazine "The Nation": if President Reagan and President Gorbachev had not succeeded in signing crucial important disarmament agreements and normalizing Soviet-American relations in 1985-88, the late developments, including the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany and the end of the Cold War, would have been unimaginable [9]. The alternative would have been mutual guaranteed destruction of both superpowers, taking into consideration that the United States and Soviet Union held at the time 99% of all nuclear armaments.

Last, but not least. The map of today's World is totally different from that of 1989. On the ashes of the Soviet Union emerged 15 independent sovereign states. Former Soviet satellites – East and Central European Countries chose freedom and democracy, market economy and capitalism. Ten of these countries became members of the European Union and the majority of them – NATO members. The repercussions of the events of 1989 we saw in recent years in the so-called "colour revolutions" in the former Soviet states: "Rose Revolution" in Georgia and "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine that brought to power new democratic and market oriented forces that pledged for their countries integration into EU and aspired for NATO membership. The latest in a series of such events happened in the Spring and Summer 2009 in Moldova, the so-called "twitter revolution". The democratic forces and first of all young people, struggling for "some changes in our country... any kind of changes", confronted the corrupted authoritarian regime, headed by the unrestructured communist party led by V.Voronin, a baker and Soviet militia general, and got rid of the communists at the July 2009 elections.

3. Your understanding of the reaction of M.S. Gorbachev and his colleagues to the Ceausescu in general, and the events at the Fourteenth Congress of the Party.

I attended the congress as an advisor to V.Vorotnikov, the member of Politburo and the head of the Soviet delegation and I accompanied him to his meeting with N.Ceausescu. This trip had several highlights that I remember.

First of all, significant in its stupidity was the slogan of this event: “the Congress of the great victories and triumph of socialism, of the independence and full sovereignty of Romania”. Only days remained before the party’s fall and the execution of its General Secretary, but Ceausescu nonetheless continued to be glorified by the attendees, with long standing ovations. I remember that they applauded him for more than 40 times during his report. At a signal from his wife, or from the Second Secretary of the party Emil Bobu, the whole hall was transformed into a concert of dithyrambs to the “beloved *conducator*”, the “Carpathian Genius”, the “strongest oak of oaks”, “the father of all Romanian children” as he was idolized in the palace press at that time. Just three weeks later at the mass meeting convened by Ceausescu in order “to strengthen cohesion with the people” tens of thousands of Romanian citizens with the same unanimity protested against Ceausescu’s dictatorship. The gap was obvious between the communist government and a society that had reached the limit of its patience, and the explosion was inevitable. I realized it clearly at that Congress.

4. Your reading of the “body chemistry” between Gorbachev and Ceausescu.

On December 4th, 1989, a freezing day in Moscow, I saw the Romanian dictator for the last time. Nicolae Ceausescu was the only “old guard” remaining among the new leaders of the Warsaw Treaty invited by President Mikhail Gorbachev to Moscow to brief them about the results of his meeting with the U.S. President, George H.Bush in Malta. The new faces of Eastern European leaders reflected turbulent changes in these countries generated by Gorbachev’s path-breaking transformations in the Soviet Union and his “new thinking” in foreign policy. My colleagues and I, who prepared, assisted and mediated these meetings particularly that of Mr. Gorbachev and Nicolae Ceaușescu, were impressed by a few things [10].

At this last meeting with M.Gorbachev the Romanian *conducator* was unusually exited and nervous, stammering, frightened by the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the unhappy fate of his good friend, Erich Honnecker, the former leader of East Germany, frightened by all the revolutionary transformations in the socialist countries. Those changes *volens-nolens* affected his own country, the last bastion of Stalinist type of socialism in Europe cultivated for more than two decades by Ceausescu and his accomplices. Maybe he had a presentiment that his country would be the next in this “domino falling” of the East European communist regimes.

Ceausescu came to Gorbachev with an unexpected proposal: to hold a conference of the communist and labour parties “to address the new challenges of the times”, to elaborate “new guidance” and “new modalities on how to save socialism and communist parties”, to act as Lenin did in 1903 when he “raised the flag of socialism and revolution”. My feelings were that Ceausescu was ready to accept an intervention of the Soviet Union just to stop the process of erosion of socialism, although he mentioned to Gorbachev that he did not mean a military intervention [11]. To hear this from Ceausescu, the only leader of socialist countries who did not join the Warsaw Treaty invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, who always distanced himself from the Soviet Union and its Communist Party’s collective initiatives and coordinated actions of communist and labor movement, was

totally unexpected. Even Ceausescu's assistants were caught by surprise, as one of them who worked for him for many years (Gheorghe Stoica) mentioned to me later on.

My feelings were that Ceausescu was desperately looking for an interlocutor, a partner to share his concerns and visions about the state of socialism, the future of communist parties, the future of his own country and his own fate. He saw Mikhail Gorbachev as such a partner, who was able to listen to him and advise what to do. Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev himself confirmed these thoughts of mine fifteen years later, during my brief meeting with him on November 11, 2002 at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington D.C. where he had a lecture on global environmental problems.

I do not think that Gorbachev was very patient with Ceausescu. He was an opponent rather than a partner for him. During this meeting Gorbachev talked about Honnecker of the German Democratic Republic and Yackesh of Czechoslovakia, who, in his opinion, "wasted their time and lost their chances to bring the long expected democratic transformations and reforms to their countries". It was an attempt to make Ceausescu understand that this is all about him. As a Romanian proverb says: "Bit the saddle if you want the horse to understand" ("*Bate șeua să înțeleagă calul*"). But in this particular case, as the American proverb says, "the saddle was put on the wrong horse". It was too late to change something and Ceausescu, consciously or not, felt it. His fate was predetermined.

Twenty one days after this meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow, Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena were captured shortly after they had fled the party's Palace surrounded by an angry crowd, put on trial and executed by a firing squad on Christmas Day. Two years after the day of Ceausescu's execution, on December 25th 1991 Mikhail Gorbachev, the first and the last President of the Soviet Union, signed the decree of the official end of the existence of the U.S.S.R.

I would add just one more personal trait to this picture. I recollect it from a private dinner offered by the Ceausescu couple for Raisa and Mikhail Gorbachev after the last session of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty in Bucharest in July 1989. I was Gorbachev's assistant and interpreter during this opulent private dinner at Ceausescu's residence "*Primavara*" near the gorgeous *Herestrau* Lake. In spite of the hot summer night the fire place was put on, like some where in the cold capitals of the West, and all windows were draped with heavy curtains. Ceausescu was afraid of draughts and interceptions even by his own guard.

I remember very well Ceausescu's ardent attempts to demonstrate to his guests that successful "self-administration and revolutionary democracy" implemented through a set of administrative and territorial reforms "changed the image of the country", "solved the problem of housing for every family", and "paid off all the external debts even before they were due". In his words all off these "historical performances" were achieved "without any painful shock therapies" and were "inconceivable without the leading role of the Party".

Gorbachev's angry comments left Nicolae and his wife Elena speechless: "I know very well the situation not only in my country but also in Romania"- Gorbachev replied. "Do you really think, dear Comrade General Secretary, that I do not understand that what I saw--for instance at the "23rd August" factory, where the workers were pretending to be completely satisfied with their lot--is just a show window that does not correspond at all to reality?". The more serious Gorbachev's replies were, however, the more impetuous and full of reproaches Ceausescu's comments became, something that irritated the Soviet leader to a great extent. By the end of this "friendly" dinner, the parties remained hostile to

each other and I remained ...hungry. I did not even have time to try the tasty dishes prepared in the best Romanian tradition and the best wines from Cotnari [12].

5. Your personal reaction to the events of December 20-25?

My personal reaction I can formulate in just three words: Quo Vadis Romania? Let me draw a historical parallel. I saw the results of the recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall that clearly show a retreat of democracy in the former Soviet bloc, starting with the overwhelming majority of Russians that deplore the end of the Soviet Union (in the words of V.Putin, Russian Prime-Minister, - "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of XXth Century"), with a massive 42% drop in support of democratic changes in Ukraine (from 72% in 1991), and finishing with an unexpected 72% of Hungarians who consider that life was economically better under communism than it is today [13].

I can compare this with a truly sad story of a man from Moldova's small town of Călărași, who spent years in prison. Being released, after a few months of freedom he suddenly realized that "freedom becomes a burden", in the words of Vaclav Havel. In a short amount of time this man committed 22 small crimes (stole chickens from neighbours, broke the locks to their cellars etc), just for one purpose - to be returned to the prison. People in Moldova and other former Soviet countries have been imprisoned for so long, they just don't know what to do with their newfound freedom. The moral is: if the lessons of 1989 will not be learned, Moldova and other new democracies in the East and Central Europe will be doomed to repeat them. It is too early to put a period on communist nostalgia and relax because of the triumph of hope and democracy. I don't think that we should comply ourselves with the achievements of the Revolutions of 1989 and the conclusions of some experts that "communist nostalgia should not be taken too seriously" [14].

6. Your personal reaction to the Iliescu-Gorbachev meeting.

I was the person who accompanied Iliescu from the *Vnukovo 2* airport in Moscow to the hotel and later on to the meeting with President Gorbachev, I think, in March (or April) 1990. The meeting with Gorbachev, in which participated also Petre Roman, the then Prime-minister, was a very warm and friendly one. Iliescu exposed his vision of what happened in Romania, of the role of the National Salvation Front and was very proud to be its leader. I was impressed by Iliescu's openness and his profound understanding of the difficulties of post-Ceausescu Romania. He did not pretend that he had solutions and a clear strategy on how to address the new Romania revival problems, but Iliescu was very thoughtful in his observations and remarks. Both leaders looked like old friends and colleagues who understand each other perfectly and who appreciate each others ego although they never met before. It was a real constructive dialog (interrupted by the way many times by Petre Roman's interventions and not always with a good reason), totally different from those with Ceausescu. It was the only meeting, as I remember, with Gorbachev during Iliescu's short visit to Moscow.

I want to address in this context a myth that persisted for years: "the export of revolution by *KGB* agents from Moscow". This was one of the topics of Gorbachev and Iliescu's meeting. I remember very well the atmosphere of the meeting, which was in complete contrast to the atmosphere of the meetings with Iliescu's predecessor. There were no psychological barriers between the two leaders and no hidden thoughts. President Iliescu analyzed the situation, referring to the crisis in December, when the Front for National Salvation was created. According to his comments, everything ended unexpectedly fast; the events were provoked by Ceausescu himself by convoking a "meeting with the people". Incredible chaos and uncertainty dominated. "If there were

an outside plot," Iliescu continued, "things would have evolved in a more organized scenario". Commenting on this subject, Gorbachev mentioned that it is an insult to the Romanian people and society to consider that "the revolution was imported by KGB agents".

I would make a little deviation here: this myth started with Ceausescu, who felt that Moscow was behind all the protest demonstrations; he even broached this notion with a representative of the Soviet embassy when the protests began in Timișoara. One thing surprised me. I visited Bucharest with my colleagues in early 1990, immediately after the revolution. We had a number of informal meetings with average citizens, and several activists who had realigned themselves with one of the new/old parties. I attended the first free elections in Romania as an International observer. At many of these meetings, people congratulated me, when they found out that I was "part of Gorbachev's team", for what "Gorbachev did for Romania", namely "the revolution and the overthrow of Ceausescu". "You should have done this before; the Romanians would have been grateful..." The idea that Moscow instigated the Romanian revolution (through the KGB and other institutions) was deeply embedded in people's conscience. Trying to argue the opposite that the people of Romania should be proud that they themselves overthrew the dictatorship, would have made them think that "you are an agent", rather than believing your arguments and facts.

I remember a piece of advice given to me by Dumitru Diacov, my good friend, former Speaker of Moldovan Parliament, founder and one of the leaders of the Democratic Party of Moldova. He was a successful journalist in Bucharest, the head of the TASS agency, who knew the situation very well. Stalin exiled his parents and grandparents to Siberia and he did not even try to hide his abhorrence of Ceausescu, KGB and the security services, although some considered him an "agent". I talked to him about the strange reaction that I received from people. He told me back then: "don't even try to convince people here. They want to believe in myths. That is how they were educated. One myth disappears and another appears. It is possible that they will idolize Ceausescu for a long time" [15].

There are lessons to be learned from the accomplishments of the revolutions of 1989 as well as from their mistakes. I will try to identify some of these lessons for my native Moldova, where the "twitter revolution" of April 2009 led to the demise of Europe's last communist regime. Why did it take twenty years for my own country Moldova to realize that communism is a dead end and not the salvation, to get rid off the corrupted regime of Vladimir Voronin, a Soviet era baker and militia general, who reigned in Moldova as a communist czar for eight long years? He never hides his deep hatred of Gorbachev, whom he considers the "terminator of the great country – Soviet Union".

The great revolutions of 1989 were the first ones ever in which almost no blood was shed. As John Lewis Gaddis, Professor of Yale University mentioned "There were no guillotines, no heads on pikes, no officially sanctioned mass murders...In both its ends and its means then, this revolution became a triumph of hope. It did so chiefly because Mikhail Gorbachev chose not to act, but rather to be acted upon" [16]. Never before has liberation come to so many people – millions of Eastern Europeans, and never has a revolution been accomplished so swiftly and so peacefully by ordinary people, but rather by fanatics with guns. With just a few exceptions [17].

In Romania, the communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu attempted to hold the line by force. He tried to follow the Chinese Tiananmen Square example when he ordered the army to shoot down the demonstrators in Timișoara. Ninety-seven people were killed. Proverbial in his stupidity, just a few days after these events Ceausescu called a meeting in Bucharest's central square to "prove to everyone in the country and outside" how "strong" is the cohesion of the "beloved *conducator*" with the people. This was the last drop that put an end to his "golden époque". Tens of thousands of Romanians turned

unanimously this manifestation against Ceausescu's dictatorship. It was the worst scenario chosen by Ceausescu, which confirmed the conclusions of me and my colleagues in Moscow: Ceausescu lost the sense of reality and he brought himself and his regime closer to the end.

Twenty years later, on April 7th 2009 after preliminary parliamentary election results showed that the communist party had won again a majority of votes, 10,000 to 15,000 young Moldovans flooded the central square of the Moldovan capital Chisinau – *Piata Marei Adunari Nationale* – in anti-communist demonstrations. According to Andrew Wilson, a senior fellow at the European Council of Human Rights, this was not much a protest against an election that was allegedly stolen, but an outcry of young people desperately struggling against the corrupt communist government, for “some changes in our country...any kind of changes” [18].

I would mention that the protests turned to be violent after the devastation of the Parliament and the Presidency buildings deliberately provoked by the authorities. As V.Voronin, the then President, mentioned in an interview for *RIA Novosti*: “We decided to cede to them [to protesters, called by him “fascists headed by leaders of opposition parties and supported by Romania in an anti-constitutional “putsch”] for one day all that in their imaginations represents the government power: president's and speaker's offices, parliament's sessions hall, telephones and computers” [19]. The next day hundreds of young people were arrested, cruelly beaten and tortured by police. Three of these young people lost their lives. The communist prime-minister Zinaida Greceanii was sent by V.Voronin on television to warn that “the police would shoot rioters...” It was a shock for everybody. It reminded me that the “spirit of Ceausescu” is still alive, that V.Voronin, Moldova's communist party's first secretary who after these elections (5 April 2009) added to his title of President that of speaker of Parliament, being elected by the then communist parliamentary majority, lost the sense of reality like Ceausescu, and did not learn the lesson.

Any authoritarian regime has at least two phobias – fear meticulously induced into the society and the external enemy that is the “evils' evil” and should be blamed for all the bad things that happened to the people. Both these characteristics along with a terrible winter cold in the Romanian apartments penetrating to the backbone, I discovered during my first working visit to Ceausescu's Romania (February 1988).

Herta Muller, the recent Nobel Prize winner in Literature in “The Land of Green Plums” described the time of Ceausescu as living “every day with the fear in the morning that in the evening one would no longer exist” [20]. During the first and the only official visit of President Gorbachev to Romania (May 26, 1987), at the meeting with the “representatives of the youth” at the Polytechnic Institute, the Soviet leader approached the young people and tried to speak to them directly and informally as he usually did on such occasions. But he failed to do so, probably for the first time in his experience. Young people just automatically and loudly repeated the slogans “Ceausescu-Gorbachev, Ceausescu-Gorbachev...”, as if they were zombies without any reaction to his words.

In those dark days really the “Light came from the East” for the Romanians, in the words of XVIth century chronicler Miron Costin. The interest for Gorbachev's *perestroika and glasnost* was overwhelming in Romanian society despite attempts of the official propaganda and fierce *securitate* (security service) to limit access to information about the new and inspiring hope linked to Gorbachev's policy. Even the word *perestroika* was paraphrased by ordinary Romanians as “*ferestruica*” (window) and it was the first time when people's most solicited source of information were Moldova's radio and TV stations. For Ceausescu changes in the Soviet Union were nothing but a nightmare, and he tried desperately to dissociate himself from Gorbachev's path, to prevent the people of Romania from being “indoctrinated” with this unknown, unexpected and dangerous

“political virus” from the East. I understood then why in Ceausescu’s Romania no typing machines existed without being registered at *securitate*, no contact with foreigners even from the USSR and other socialist countries was permitted without being reported and accepted by the respective agencies [21].

Twenty years later to my and everyone’s surprise the same fear and external enemies’ phobias dominated the social, political and even private life in Voronin’s Moldova. This time the Moldovan boss played on fears of the danger of the “unification with Romania”, that, in his opinion, opposition leaders brought with their victory in the last parliamentary elections (July 29, 2009). Having lost 12 seats after the repeated elections (from 60 mandates in the 101 seat legislature on the April 09 elections), and correspondingly – lost majority in Parliament, lost position of Speaker and prospects to maintain his party and clan in power, V.Voronin accused Brussels, Washington and Bucharest of pumping “very serious resources and openly purchasing the voters”. He declared the Romanian Ambassador and his Deputy Persona non-grata, closed the border with Romania by installing a strict visa regime despite earlier signed agreements with the EU.

In an interview about these events in Chisinau. Vladimir Tismaneanu, Professor at University of Maryland and one of the best experts on the “Revolutions of 1989”, stressed: “Being hostages of conspiracy theories, appropriate for totalitarian forms of thinking, Voronin and his supporters invented external plots to avoid any endogen explanation of this crisis. Being raised in the cult of secrecy, sectarian discipline and violence, they used terror to annihilate their critics” [22]. Just two decades after the Revolutions of 1989, Voronin and his clique followed without fear on Ceausescu’s steps.

Not accidentally these events were the subject of headlines in the world press, perhaps for the first time on this scale since Moldova became independent in 1991. The European Parliament condemns the massive campaign of harassment against journalists (Freedom House placed Moldova on the 150 place out of 195 countries monitored – a country with no free media), against civil society representatives and opposition parties, grave violations of human rights and other illegal actions carried out by the Moldovan government in the aftermath of parliamentary elections (Resolution 1666, April 29, 2009) [23].

I would add to this just one personal touch, based on two conversations that I had in those days of Moldova’s Revolution: one with my retired parents, whose combined experience as teachers in the rural schools of Moldova is almost 100 years, and who survived the WWII atrocities, Stalin’s repressions and famine, Khrushchev’s thaw, Brezhnev’s stagnation and Gorbachev’s *perestroika*. They asked me just not to speak about politics and not to mention the President’s name because they thought the phone calls were intercepted and they were afraid that this could cause serious troubles for all of us. On the next day, after the communist government arrested a few hundred young people in Chisinau, I saw on the Internet that my youngest son, Cristian, a graduate of George Washington University, was among the organizers of the anticommunist protests at the Moldovan Embassy in Washington D.C., where I used to be Ambassador from 1999 to 2002. I tried to warn him due to the possible consequences for him personally and for our family as a whole if Voronin’s secret service would find out about his role. I was surprised and puzzled by his answer: “Voronin and his accomplices already won over you regardless of the votes. They injected fear in your generation”.

The basis of the strictly vertical rigid authoritarian political system - in Romania with Ceausescu’s clan at the top [24], serves the command-administrative economy. Initially he was guided by good intentions – to build a self-sufficient export and consumer oriented economy. It should be mentioned that during the first half of his rule (1965-1977) the average annual growth rate of output exceeded 5% (5.2% in 1961-70 and

5.3% in 1971-80) [25], one of the highest among the socialist countries. Life in Romania became better off with plenty of food, fruits and vegetables in the grocery stores and peasants' markets, qualitative and cheap light industry products, relatively good education and medical care, and most importantly – stability, safety and certitude for the future. I visited Romania for the first time in the late 60s as a child with my parents on an invitation of their relatives. I curiously discovered Romania as if it were another planet, in my imagination - from Saint Exupery's "The Little Prince". And this faraway good looking "planet" just across the little river, called Prut, was separated from Soviet Moldova by barbed wire, armed Russian borders guards and ferocious German shepherds.

Later on, especially after Nicolae Ceausescu's visits to Maoist China and North Korea (May 1971), in Romania, in the words of the American anthropologist, professor Katherine Verdery, "far from being sped up, time was being gradually slowed down, flattened, immobilized, and rendered nonlinear" [26]. Ceausescu's increasing authoritarian inclinations were catalyzed by these visits being later on "immortalized" in grandiose projects: *Casa Poporului* (People's House), second largest administrative building in the world after the Pentagon; the boulevard *Victoria Socialismului* (victory of socialism) in Bucharest; the Danube – Black Sea canal that reminded me of Stalin's "Belomor canal", built on bones of political prisoners; the "agro cities" a la "Potemkin's villages" in the Katherine the Great Russia; the so-called "systematization plans" that led to the destruction of hundreds of churches, architectural and historical monuments etc. His attempts to build a diversified economy with machine building, petrochemical and extractive industries at its core, were based on draining capital surplus from the desperately underdeveloped Romanian country-side. Despite Ceausescu's exalted dreams of industrialization and technology, he remained until the end the hostage of the Romanian peasant self-sufficient household model of organizing and managing the economy, society and policy. Andrew Janos, Professor at the University of California at Berkeley, observed "The ends may have been those of Adam Smith, but the means were those of Stalin and Preobrazhensky, a mismatch that explains the unusually disastrous course of subsequent Romanian developments" [27].

I would remind that in the last phase of the "golden époque" (1981-88) Romania's annual growth of GNP averaged a – 0.1% (negative) rate, the "record" among the former socialist countries. Romanians spent hours in endless lines for any products that were strictly rationed: 10 eggs, 100 grams of butter, 500 grams of wheat flour, 500 grams of chicken and 1 kg of pork or beef per month and 300 grams of bread per day etc. Romanian cities were covered by dark in the night because of severe restrictions on the electricity supply (43 kWh of electric power per month and 153-203 cu.m of natural gas per month per head) [28]. At that time it was illegal for villagers, for example, to kill and eat their own calf or pig, because it was ordered to sell them for cheap to the state farm for export to pay the debts. Romanians joked then that "the best way to pay off the debts is by selling the "golden époque". And they got rid of it in December 1989.

Twenty years later, in the midst of the most severe financial crisis that hit the world, in Voronin's Moldova just a few months before the elections one could hear: "What crisis? There is no financial or economic crisis in Moldova and there are no factors that might provoke it" [29]. Vice-versa, "not reduction of economic growth but rather its expansion by a healthy 3% in 2009. This is our target and real possibility for now", declared the communist prime-minister at a press-conference on April 1 2009 [30]. Was it a fool's day joke, or had the head of the government lost any sense of reality?

In spite of the rosy communist forecasts, Moldova was hit unprecedentedly hard by the global economic crisis. According to the recently published IMF report on the world

situation, Moldova is the only country where no growth is expected in 2010 [31]. The economic and political crises have been aggravated, in the opinions of local and international experts, by poor quality of governance, significant deterioration of the business environment (the country ranks 158 out of 176 economies in the Doing Business Dealing with Construction Permit indicator), worsened and widespread corruption (Transparency International corruption index placed Moldova on 109th place, 30 positions down from 2006). The IMF estimations show that after a robust 5.5% per year annual increase in GDP since 2000, the Moldovan GDP is expected to fall by at least 9% in 2009 (in contrast with 3.5% growth projected by the government), being dragged down by more than 20% decrease in exports, over 30% reductions of remittances from Moldovan workers abroad that constituted more than 40% of GDP (second in the world after Tajikistan) [32], 25% decrease in the monetary mass and a 40% drop in foreign currency reserves [33]. The effect of the crisis will be long-lasting and can lead to monetary, bank and currency collapse, considers an EBRD representative [34].

In short, Voronin after 8 years of dictatorial governance left behind him a broken economy, facing a long struggle to reestablish its equilibrium, a society artificially divided into “patriots” and “traitors”, a nation in a desperate search for a common sense of identity. The only exception is his own Family with his son Oleg who after eight years of his father’s undisputed rule became the only billionaire in Moldova - the poorest and most corrupted county in Europe with the most unhappy people in the world, as Eric Weiner, an American journalist found in “The Geography of Bliss” [35].

In conclusion:

First, Reflecting on alternative futures from 1989, Marie Elise Sarotte in the just published “1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe”, mentioned: “The West chose a future that perpetuated a divided Europe and left Russia [I would add: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and so on] on the periphery” [36]. I think this assessment could be applied also to the internal evolutions of ex-Soviet society, particularly to the revenge of nostalgic (communist) forces that came to power on the waves of democratization and on speculation on the discontent of people with the high social cost of reforms without visible improvement of the living standards.

In this respect I would mention the insistence of the Western organizations and their visiting delegations for a “civil dialog” between communists and opposition in Moldova. The election of V.Voronin as President for a second term in April 2005 was a result of good intentions to start such a dialog under the recommendation and pressure of the West. But real dialog never happened. As a Moldovan proverb says “the road to Hell is paved with good intentions”. In Voronin’s Moldova authorities never accepted de-facto any dialog with the opposition. What has been taking place was a simulation of dialog without any real changes, as it was a mimicry of reforms, distortion of democracy called by some experts “a wannabe democracy’ where elections served as a cover for perpetuating an authoritarian regime” [37], a simulation of European integration etc.

I was impressed by the emotional and sincere reaction of Dorin Chirtoaca, the young mayor of Chisinau, to the recommendations of the European Parliament delegation for dialog and conciliation just after the atrocities of the communist regime last spring. He mentioned: “conciliation... one billion euro credits for the Republic of Moldova...Let’s silence what’s happened and go forward? But this is not right! This party [communist] and this “governance” should be disqualified for what they did...by ordering to use force, to kill, to beat, to torture and this came from the head of state, minister of interior, members of Parliament, Prime-Minister...” [38]. Any culture of civil dialog has increasingly gone missing in the negotiations between the Alliance for European Integration and the Communists, as stressed recently Ambassador Louis

O'Neill, former head of the OSCE mission to Moldova [39]. This culture should be created, enforced, in my opinion, by treating communist leaders exactly in the same manner as they did with their democratic "partners for dialog". I would mention here that V.Voronin, just before the elections of April 09 bravely announced that the general prosecutor's office opened law suits against 34 members of opposition parties, including 3 law suits against Vlad Filat, the leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party, current Prime-Minister of Moldova. A Moldovan saying says: "Cui cu cui se scoate" – "One fire drives out another".

Of course, there are still some chances for reconciliation and progress in Moldova and I fully subscribed to the proposed recommendations by John Todd Stewart, former U.S. Ambassador to Moldova and good friend of mine, for approaching the most pressing issues of the day: broadcast media, print media, Internet, the electoral system, the courts and prosecutors, anticorruption measures [40]. But a true engagement requires that both parties are able and willing for such a dialog.

Second, the new Moldovan democratic authorities have already started to clean up the mess left by the communists, particularly by removing the new "Berlin Wall" erected by V.Voronin and his acolytes between Moldova and Romania, canceling of visas, signing the Convention on Small Traffic on Borders, recalling the note of expulsion of the Romanian Ambassador, etc. This is really important because Romania today could become Moldova's "window" to the West tomorrow.

I remember my meeting as the Ambassador of Moldova in 2000 with Zbignev Brzezinski at which he told me: "If you, Moldovans, really want to be integrated into Europe you need a "locomotive". And such a "locomotive" could not be France, nor Russia, nor Ukraine, but Romania". We lost a decade to understand it. Unfortunately, the EU's ambivalence, as G.Dura and E.Gnedina, experts of the Center for European Studies emphasized, may have sent the wrong signals to Moldova's President [V.Voronin], who is hoping to get away with repression and abuses" [41]. The instruments of European integration are well known: European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership (EaP). Now it is time to put them in application and Moldova has very good and talented experts to do it, starting with Ambassador Yurie Leanca, Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, former colleague of mine. According to one recent poll 70% of Moldovans support European integration. But this path towards Europe is a two way road. It requires hard work and sacrifices from the governments and civil societies of these countries first of all, but also a consistent support and assistance from the West.

Third, in Moldova, as in any other former communist countries, you can always hear remarks from ordinary people like this: "If capitalism and democracy are so much better than socialism, why are our lives still miserable?"

A few years ago I was included in a team of experts that, at the request of the Moldovan Parliament, were selected by USAID to write a White Paper – "The competitive mandate for Moldova's state sector: privatization and performance". The subject was very close to my interest since I served for more than three years in the mid 90s as the first Minister of Privatization of Moldova and member of the government. Analyzing the situation I was surprised to find that the Program of Privatization that I and my colleagues elaborated for the period of 1997-1998 was still in action. What was the problem: either this two-year Program was so good that it lasted for almost a decade, or nothing really important happened in its implementation during this period? The progress of this important reform, which is the only foundation for a radical structural transformation of the economy, of its competitiveness and productivity, has been really negligible. The privatization has been effectively stalled, and in many cases reversed by the communist

government, particularly, more than 30 important cases of nationalization were registered, including joint businesses created with foreign partners or owned by them.

Some western experts consider that “despite the name, Voronin’s Communist Party has been largely reformist in the economic sphere, with a longstanding commitment to joining EU” [42]. I am just laughing when I am reading such assessments. Poor Ceausescu, he also was a reformer... In 2008, and in the first semester of 2009, the last period of communist governance, foreign direct investment to Moldova decreased nine times, number of unemployed almost doubled and the rate of absolute and extreme poverty, as well as misery index increased for the first time during the last three years.

Fourth, the new Moldovan Government approved a very comprehensive Program of stabilization and economic recovery of Moldova for 2009-2011 [43] based on a profound analysis of the situation characterized as “economic stagnation”, and on the realistic assessment of the sources of its implementation. It is encouraging that despite the economic and financial crisis, the international community found about \$2 billion overall funds for Moldova [44]. Moldova saw finally a light at the end of the tunnel, the hope that the new young, ambitious and competent government will bring changes; restore the credibility in democratic institutions, will bring stability and prosperity. It is not an easy task and there are a lot of stones on this way that could overturn the “cart”. Such a “stone” could be the failure of the Parliament to elect a new President. The legislature should be dissolved according to the Constitution and another election should be declared for 2010. This could throw Moldova into a new round of political battle. It is the first time since Moldova became independent in 1991, when the tradition of peaceful transfer of power through relatively free and fair parliamentary elections is disrupted due to irresponsible behaviour of the opposition communist faction in Parliament. This seriously undermines the country’s prospects for recovery and its European integration aspirations of Moldova for whom the question “Quo Vadis” is still the most pressing and important.

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