

# The Fight for Peace – A Topical Discourse, yet Unprecedented in Romania’s Communist Period

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## Abstract

The political leaders of the Romanian communist space were so convinced of the veracity of the communist society, which they wanted at any cost to establish in all spheres of activity in our society, that they saw the presence of communism in contemporary society as a revolutionary transformation, as a new society, which would lead to radical changes in the thinking of the broad masses of working people, with repercussions on the whole of humanity. Thus, communist ideology would become the savior of humanity. There would have been no other way. And this revolutionary transformation would have brought both world peace and our national freedom and independence. The Church, on the other hand, used this opportunity to speak about world peace, bringing into the discourse both the benefits of the new society and the Church's own teaching about peace, freedom, philanthropy or salvation. It was a good opportunity for the Church at that time to continue the catechesis of the faithful and to pass on the Christian way to salvation in a society undergoing unprecedented changes.

**Keywords:** *Peace; freedom; independence; salvation; communism; Christianity; Church;*

Talking about peace today, in a global society plagued by a whole series of local military conflicts, which cause great suffering to the human communities involved, whether willingly or unwillingly, is a natural and normal thing to do. The fact that this theme of peace is being considered at all highlights the powerlessness of today's society to break out of this vicious circle of peace and war, a powerless society, but one that wants to be an evolved society, in which social justice and well-being are its overriding element.

The present study seeks to bring the struggle for peace, present with increasing intensity in Romanian communist society, a communist society which today takes on new dimensions, 35 years after its official disappearance from Romanian society. These discourses were present both in those of the Communist Party and in those of the Romanian Orthodox Church at that time.

The pacifist discourse was intensively used in the communist society, having mainly two objectives, one in the sphere of social reality and the other in the sphere of political ideology, objectives that often went together.

The one in the sphere of social reality emphasized that there is nothing better for a society than peace and that peace must be the master of all. There can be no rational argument against peace. From this point of view things were very clearly defined for any man of good faith.

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The second argument, in the sphere of political ideology, emphasized the superiority of communist society over capitalist society, and argued that capitalist society was continuing the arms race and wanted military conflicts at any cost, the main aim being pecuniary. This discourse was so well constructed, from a rational point of view, that one could not imagine a better society than the communist one, which would protect its citizens from the horrors of war.

Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the main communist leader in Romania between 1947 and 1965, was a typical example of this discourse. His speech did not lack key words such as imperialist circles, world domination, American imperialism, the shackles of imperialism, imperialist expansion or war-mongers, all of them criticizing the capitalist Western space. On the other hand, the key words for the appreciation of socialist society were of a different kind, the great socialist power, the countries of popular democracy, the path of peace and understanding between peoples, the states desiring peace and freedom.

Romania's social and political rapprochement with the Soviet Union was seen as the only way for Romania's social development, for advancing along the path of peace and friendship between peoples.

In his speech on the occasion of the return of the Romanian government delegation from Moscow on February 10, 1948, Gheorghiu-Dej announced the signing of a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Romanian People's Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This treaty was seen as bringing political, economic and military stability, giving the Romanian people a sense of confidence in their strength. This stability was given by the huge military, political and economic strength of the Soviet Union.

At the same time, this treaty consolidated the new communist order and dealt a powerful blow to the reactionary forces in Romania which wanted to return to the regimes of the past, when our country was dominated by imperialist powers which were alien to the interests of the Romanian people.

This speech stated that the only way for our country to assert itself was under the banner of Lenin and Stalin, on the path of peace and understanding between peoples, on the path of friendship between peoples, on the path of ensuring the independence and sovereignty of the state's desirous of peace and freedom (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1955, pp. 119-120).

In the Political Report of the Central Committee to the Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party of February 21, 1948, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej criticized the American imperialist circles, which through their international policy after the Second World War, wanted to conquer world domination and reduce all the weaker states to the status of satellites of the United States, including France and England, and at the same time this American imperialism was accused of playing the role of instigator in stifling and drowning in blood the democratic and, in particular, the workers' movements which were emerging in Eastern Europe, in the Communist camp. On the other hand, they were full of praise for the Soviet Union, which was counterbalancing the entire offensive of American imperialism and its allies.

Here is an excerpt from the above-mentioned Political Report praising the Soviet Union: The great socialist power, the Soviet Union, as well as the countries of

popular democracy, which have torn themselves from the shackles of imperialism and won their independence, represent in particular an insurmountable obstacle in the way of the imperialist expansion of the new pretenders to world domination... (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1955, pp. 124-125).

This report also includes accusations against the Marshall Plan, which, under the guise of a plan to help European countries, was a plan through which European countries would have lost their economic and political independence. The United States could thus dictate the composition of the governments and the internal regime of the allied European countries and, what is more, these countries were obliged to make their military bases available and even to subordinate their armed forces to the American War Department (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1955, p. 126).

We observe in this 1948 Political Report many similarities with the political discourses that are present today in the Romanian space. Even today there is talk in the Romanian social sphere about the negative influence that the United States has on our political, economic and military independence.

Gheorghiu-Dej's successor at the head of the Romanian Communist Party was Ceaușescu, who witnessed the end of the social and political experiment of communism in our country.

In the Report of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party to the Ninth Congress, which presented the Party's activity in the period between the Eighth and Ninth Congresses of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu affirmed the need for the independence of each nation and the consolidation of peace, all of which are necessary so that each nation can choose its own path of economic, social and political development unimpeded and so that each nation, large or small, can affirm its national being and solve its own affairs (Ceaușescu, 1966, p. 100). With this speech Ceaușescu wanted to consolidate his position as leader in the chariot of the Romanian Communist Party. It was a known fact that the Romanian people could not choose their own way unhindered. Everything was controlled by the party and the security, and Ceaușescu's speech was not in line with the social and political reality in a communist country.

Talking about the building of a multilaterally developed socialist society, a series of meetings were held in 1971 to draw up proposals for the improvement of political-ideological work. For all this, for the implementation of all the proposals and the forging of that society, the work of transforming people's consciousness had to be taken into account. The people must consciously act to solve all the problems arising in the process of building a multilaterally developed socialist society, consciously shape their future (Ceaușescu, 1971, pp. 36-37).

At the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party in 1971, Zaharia Stancu testified that the ultimate aim of the Communist Party, or rather of communism, would be to reduce the difference between them and to make people's lives as beautiful as a masterpiece, and that the new man, penetrated by the transformations present in communist society, shows that success cannot come unless it is closely linked to the ideology of the Party. To all this we add a phrase that makes any comment unnecessary: allow me, dear comrades, to say that if I

personally have written a successful page in my life, it has not come out from under my pen untouched by the ideology of the Party (Stancu, 1971, p. 179).

Almost 20 years later, Ceaușescu was still going ahead with the struggle for peace and with the consolidation of his leadership position within the Romanian Communist Party. In his Report to the 13th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, in the chapter on the International Situation, the Foreign Policy of our Party and State, he stated that it was necessary to intensify the struggle for disarmament and vehemently condemned the intensification of the militarization of outer space, especially by the Americans. At the same time, he also came up with a proposal that was a savior for those times and still has credibility today. This proposal advocated reducing the military character of the two blocs, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, which would eventually lead to their dismantling. The dismantling of the military blocs would represent a huge conquest, a decisive step on the road to disarmament and peace (Ceaușescu, 1984, pp. 77-78).

If in 1984 it was proposed to dismantle the two military blocs, at the same time as nuclear disarmament and the use of outer space for peaceful purposes only, at the end of 1989, on October 24, Ceaușescu emphasized in an *Exposure*<sup>2</sup> that disarmament had to be carried out on the principle of equality and respect for the social order of each country, leading to the development and progress of each nation. Moreover, he advocated multilateral cooperation in all fields, opening the prospect of a united Europe of free and independent nations (Ceaușescu, 1989, pp. 67-68).

We can see how Ceaușescu came up with a project of a united Europe, imposing his own rules and relying on the fact that in some international situations socialist Romania had made an active contribution to their solution (Ceaușescu, 1989, p. 65). Thus, in their speeches, the Communist Party leaders supported the struggle for peace and nuclear disarmament in order to maintain a certain political support from the other communist political forces in the other countries under the influence of the Soviet Union, as well as political support from within our country. It is interesting that this discourse of the struggle for peace, which fell within the sphere of international politics promoted by the P.C.R., was appreciated then, and even now, by the Romanian people, even though it was ideologically controlled and oppressed with maximum intensity. From a certain social and political perspective, it can be said that this desire for world peace, which was fiercely supported by the communist forces in Romania ever since their emergence in the Romanian political arena, was mainly aimed at consolidating them as uncontested political leaders, but on the other hand it also masked a certain inability to keep up with scientific research in the field of military techniques, which required, on the one hand, scientific rigor and, on the other, a certain economic and financial capacity, which could not be developed in a communist society dominated by corruption and endemic incompetence. This rhetoric of peace became a way of countering communist society's inability to keep pace with Western capitalist economic and social development.

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<sup>2</sup> The exposition has a rather long title, which highlights once again the fact that for him the only saving doctrine for the Romanian people is the communist one - Exposition on the problems of socialism, of ideological, political-educational activity, of the development of revolutionary consciousness, of the formation of the new man, of a conscious builder of socialism and communism in Romania.

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Going on with our analysis of the struggle for peace in the Romanian spiritual space, we notice that it was also present in the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Even though Romania was a totalitarian state, the Romanian Orthodox Church managed to make its presence felt through an authentically Orthodox discourse, in which the struggle for peace found its arguments in both Church doctrine and party doctrine. It was thus possible to speak about Christ and salvation, with the struggle for peace as an adjuvant, which was to be found both in the Holy Scriptures and in the writings of the Holy Fathers.

In 1952, the fourth volume of Patriarch Justinian's social work, *Social Apostolate*, was published by the Publishing House of the Biblical and Orthodox Missionary Institute of Bucharest, under the title *Pilde și îndemnuri în lupta pentru pace* (Parables and exhortations in the struggle for peace). A title that had arisen out of a social and political necessity of the times. Even then the fear of the outbreak of the Third World War was present in all national and international social and political discourse.

Even in the Foreword to this volume, Patriarch Justinian stated that mankind was at the very crossroads of its existence, divided into two totally opposed camps, one of which wanted peace and the other which wanted a new world war, a new slaughter.

The enemies of peace, since the "Setting Sun" - in their insatiable lust for the domination of the whole world and the subjugation of all peaceful peoples, who wish to lead their lives in freedom and national independence - are rattling their weapons of death ever more loudly, with which they threaten mankind, and Patriarch Justinian goes on to affirm that in all this enormous tension the Righteous Church of the East, according to the sacred mission entrusted to her by Christ, the Lord of Peace, joins the fighters for the victory of peace († Justinian, 1952, p. XVII).

In the irenic letter sent to all the sister Orthodox Churches after his enthronement as Patriarch, Justinian confesses that according to the teaching of St. Paul the Apostle, we are bound to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3), keeping that which is entrusted to us (I Timothy 6:20) and preaching the word (II Timothy 4:2).

In an article published in the official Bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchate, The Romanian Orthodox Church, in 1969, Patriarch Justinian emphasized that the new order in our country had granted the Romanian Orthodox Church the right to govern itself independently, according to its own rules, and that the Church's ministers, no longer anchored in the political struggles between the parties, were devoting all their energy to pastoral-missionary activities. He also recalled that the Romanian Orthodox Church had developed relations with other Churches abroad, and within the framework of these relations peace and friendship between the peoples of the whole world was promoted, being convinced that in this way it was fulfilling one of the most important commandments of our Savior Jesus Christ, to strive for peace with all its being († Justinian, 1969, p. 647).

Patriarch Justin, in his 1984 Pastoral Letter on the Resurrection of the Resurrection of Our Lord, mentioned that the actions for peace that we must take must be coupled with fervent prayers, because only on the path of peace can we encounter God in our prayers. We need peace and prayer every day. This duty of ours to defend peace becomes a holy duty because the threat of a new war with the most terrible weapons of destruction hovers in the air, and for this reason we have no other holier duty to fulfill than the defense of peace and by this, the defense of our own life, the defense of the lives of our fellow men, the defense of all the goods existing on earth († Justin, 1984, p. 157).

Analyzing the speeches of political and religious leaders during the communist period, we observe on the one hand the interest to consolidate their position as political and religious leaders in the Romanian social and political space, but at the same time these speeches for peace keep their topicality and rationality even today.

At the same time, the communist society still retains unsuspected perspectives for us today. It was a society filled with a social-political magic that still fascinates us today. And this magic is intertwined with an equally fascinating nostalgia. If we read all those speeches, programs and words now, more than three decades after its disappearance from the stage of history, they have a special effect on us that is hard to explain. The speeches were almost seamless, anchored, of course, to the international issues of the time, which are not much different from today.

On the other hand, the credibility of the peace speech, like all speeches about anything in the communist period, required huge efforts for that society. Contrary personal opinions had to be known almost in detail, reported and then eliminated or minimized at worst. The onus fell primarily on the security systems, which were doing the job for which they were appointed. The periodical *Securitatea* can be consulted on the website of the National Council for the Study of Security Archives<sup>3</sup>.

In the last issue of this periodical, available on the above-mentioned website, it was mentioned that the State Security Department's cadres have the duty to take all measures to prevent hostile actions from outside the country, as well as from within, who are fighting to disseminate anti-communist, reactionary, nationalist, chauvinist and even mystical ideas and attitudes, and who aim at the moral and intellectual pollution of the socialist society in our country. It was also necessary to combat the reactionary propaganda, which denigrated the social and political values of the socialist society, as well as the great achievements of the Romanian people under the leadership of the Party, which were essential moments in the history of our homeland (Editors, 1989, pp. 8-9).

It had reached the point where everything was listened to analyzed measured and meticulously reported almost every moment of the day. You expected the person next to you, even in your own family, to be a collaborator of the Party's surveillance, control and security services<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.cnsas.ro/periodicul\\_securitatea.html](http://www.cnsas.ro/periodicul_securitatea.html)

<sup>4</sup> Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga in her work *Our Contemporary Sophocles and the Human Condition*, published by Albatros Publishing House, in 1974, highlights the fragility of communist society, in that you could expect anything, but also the profound spirituality of Romanian society, which could not be

Eventually we got used to them and considered them as a normality of social life. You were educated from a young age and taught to measure your words against everything.

The human person was educated and self-educated to become a credible social actor of the communist political regime. A continuous "perfecting". It even happened, on certain issues, to act according to the party's precepts in particular situations. You wondered why you acted and reacted in the same way as the "precious" teachings of the "comrade". However, Romania during the communist period did not remain isolated from the cultural and artistic phenomena of the free world<sup>5</sup>, even if there were voices advocating the promotion of the new man, penetrated by the transformations of socialist society.

Every society, including our current society, wants to form a new, submissive and obedient man, using all means, from artistic or religious, to economic, political or socio-cultural. Moreover, today a new interpretation of history<sup>6</sup> is also produced, depending on the ideological interests of the moment, as happens in each historical period of each and thus we see how history changes with the political regime that is in power.

This is how our past changes, not only the present and the future, or from another point of view, the past is the same only that we understood it differently yesterday and today new perspectives in the social and political field open our minds to understanding who we really are today, where we come from and where we are going. To understand this, we must accept the change in our consciousness, to become new people again. Perhaps study also fits into these perspectives, which want us to understand the world in which we live.

With all these challenges, the Romanian Orthodox Church managed to transmit during the communist period, but also today, despite all the accusations that were and are still being made against it, a religious discourse, an authentic Orthodox

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eliminated by any materialistic ideology: It is true that apart from the thought that the gods can bring ruin to anyone, especially to the happiest and most highly placed, the phrase with the highest recurrence in Sophocles' tragedies is "Expect anytime, anywhere" (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, 1974, p. 183). A phrase that is valid in any society, be it communist, Christian or of any other orientation. With Sophocles, a phenomenon occurs that is specific only to great creators: by giving of their own substance, they remain eternally equal to themselves in substance. Inexhaustible in connotations, they pass from generation to generation, appear and disappear and reappear again, untouched by the ravages of time, shining with the light of general truths that can be applied to any stage of evolution. Historical connections are easily made if a deep, underlying ambiguity opens the work towards the future as a perpetual present (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, 1974, p. 174).

<sup>5</sup> Here is what the art critic Dan Hăulică, coordinator of the magazine *Secolul 20*, declared, in 1971, during the Plenary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, which can be seen as a gateway to updating and anchoring modern culture and art from the communist period: Re-examining the activity of the magazine I work on, together with my collaborators – *Secolul 20* – I realized what a wide field of activity exists in contemporary art creation and what arguments it can offer, also from capitalist countries, not only from the socialist world, for the indissoluble union between politics and aesthetics (Hăulică, 1971, p. 360).

<sup>6</sup> See: Liliana Corobca (Editor), *Panorama of Postcommunism in Romania*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2022; Oliver Jens Schmitt, *A History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2023; Gabriel Liiceanu, *My Jesus*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2020; Gabriel Liiceanu, *What Does God Think?*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2022. R. Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2024.

Christian discourse in a communist society, which had a systematic Marxist-Leninist education program, exclusively materialistic and atheistic. One could observe the trials and tribulations that the Church went through during that period. It was not easy for anyone, not even for those who overnight became atheists, agitators or propagandists of the communist regime. A regime that slowly, gradually encompassed all spheres of activity, all social spheres in our country.

The discourse of the Church, even if it was made known directly only to those who attended the Church, radiated in communist society and developed certain attitudes even among communist agitators and propagandists. This can be seen even today, 35 years after the disappearance of communist society, when we see people who were active in the party's propaganda during the communist period, now close to the Church.

For us, the difference between the communist period and the current one is that we now have the freedom to express ourselves freely in relation to any social, political or military action present in the Romanian social space. Today, the military alliance of which we are a part is the continuation of the alliance criticized by the communist states of the past, and this alliance is considered today, from an official point of view, as the one that guarantees us democracy, economic and social well-being, freedom of expression, religious freedom and freedom of movement, in a real way.

It is not easy for the generations that were born during the communist period in Romania, to understand and accept today's official discourse of the state, which sees Euro-Atlantic integration as the only path to economic, social, political and military development. Even though those times of communism were full of prohibitions and frustrations, the nostalgia of those times, full of promises regarding our economic and social well-being, is quite strong and contagious. Practically the two societies, the communist and the capitalist, from a theoretical point of view are equally credible and viable, and this produces a social confusion in the Romanian space today that is difficult to understand.

The fight for peace is a mission in which all the political, social and spiritual forces of a nation must be involved. It is one of the most serious problems that humanity has faced for some time now. The article highlights several sequences of the peace discourse from the former Romanian communist space, which are unique because they are strikingly similar to some current pacifist discourses, which see the solution to peace by leaving the N.A.T.O. alliance by Romania. Even though almost eighty years have passed since the establishment of communism in our country, communist ideology is more current than ever. Moreover, this ideology is intertwined on certain political and social levels with a certain Eastern Orthodox Christian spirituality.

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