



# Compatibilities and Incompatibilities in the Political Doctrines of Communism and Nationalism

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**Abstract.** Some would say communism and nationalism are the most influential political doctrines and ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changing not only history itself, but the institutional, political, cultural and social framework of the Central and Eastern European states. Many of the scholars, taking in consideration only the early incompatibility of the two, argue that their simultaneous appearance, such as in the case of Romania of the 1970s and 1980s is an interesting anomaly, a particular deviation from the pattern, which needs to be studied separately from the whole. This paper argues that the relationship between communism and nationalism evolved gradually from a palpable incompatibility in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a perceptible compatibility at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, the concurrent appearance of the two doctrines does not represent a particular case, but it is rather the result of an organic ideological development which was triggered by the problems met by Marxism in deconstructing nationalism.

**Keywords:** communism, nationalism, national question, political theory, Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Romania

## Introduction

Some would say communism and nationalism are the most influential political doctrines and ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changing not only history itself, but the institutional, political, cultural and social framework of the Central

and Eastern European states. Beyond this, Marxism – the theoretical basis of the socialist doctrine – has become one of the leading analytical schools and methodologies in current social sciences and philosophy.

Many scholars, taking in consideration only the early incompatibility of the two, argue that their simultaneous appearance, such as in the case of Romania of the 1970s and 1980s, is an interesting anomaly, a particular deviation from the pattern, which needs to be studied separately from the whole. Even more, several social scientists who study Central and Eastern European nationalisms of the 1990s, explain this revitalization as a result of the communist repression of national feelings, making the disappearance of the regime the main trigger for the observed processes. This paper tries to argue against the above-mentioned hypothesis, showing that the relationship between communism and nationalism evolved gradually from a palpable incompatibility in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a perceptible compatibility at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, the concurrent appearance of the two doctrines does not represent a particular case, but it is rather the result of an organic ideological development, which was triggered by the problems met by Marxism in deconstructing nationalism.

The study has the following structure. In the first part I briefly introduce the most important works that deal with the studied topic. The second part presents the two doctrines separately, underlining their particularities along three theoretical aspects. The third part analyzes how early Marxist literature tries to incorporate nationalism, by examining the most important works of Marx, Engels, Otto Bauer and the Austro-Marxists, Lenin, Stalin, some texts from and about Brezhnev and the Romanian or Polish communists, showing the possible organic changes occurred in their perceptions of the movement. The fourth part of the study synthesizes its findings not losing sight of the main hypothesis.

## **Communism and nationalism – a rather understudied topic**

Although there are several scientific works that study the relationship between communism and nationalism, many of them have a strong ideological charge as they were written in the 50s or the 60s, in the middle of the Cold War. However, in the 80s and after, when the scientific world overstepped these difficulties, several wider studies appeared. Many of these works study the relationship of the two doctrines from theoretical perspectives, from philosophical point of view, (Szporluk 1988; Nimni 1991) some of them concentrate

on one country or period (Connor 1985; Verdery 1991; Mevius 2005 and others) and only a few try to develop a comprehensive theory incorporating in their inquiry political theory and history as well (Zwick 1983; Kemp 1999).

As the goals of this paper are similar to the ones formulated by the authors in this last category, in this chapter I will present only these two works, focusing on their main arguments and conclusions. *National Communism*, a book written by Peter Zwick in 1983, was probably inspired by the puzzle of the events occurred in Poland in 1981, which topped a long line of anti-Soviet activities in communist countries. The author argues that there was “no inherent contradiction between national and communist sentiment”, nationalism being the one that kept communism alive. Moreover, he believes that the only form of communism capable of surviving is national communism (Zwick 1983: 2). In order to prove this, he reaches for historical facts, presenting documentation on the nationalization of the Peoples’ Parties of the different Central and Eastern European States, and examines political theory as well. Zwick argues that even Marx, Lenin or Stalin had nationalist arguments. They believed that the best way to reach communism is through nationalism, thus communism has a different path in every state and it is linked to the specificities of the nation (Zwick 1983: 3-11). An important flaw of Zwick’s theory was shown by history. In a few years, most of the communist states vanished, showing lack of viability of the communist state. Many consider that it left its place to nationalism. Therefore, national communism can be considered as a period of communism, but does not prove to be a general theory of the relationship between the two doctrines.

Another important work that tries to explain the relationship between nationalism and communism is *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Basic Contradiction*, a book written by Walter Kemp in 1999. The puzzle that the author tries to decipher is how the fall of communism can be explained and what its relationship to nationalism is? Kemp argues that the relationship between the two can be explained as recurrent. Communism tried to widen its legitimacy by supporting the self-determination movements of different nations. After getting popular support, they centralized the state, repressing and neutralizing national movements. The negative approach had as result an increasing pro-national sentiment, which caused the strengthening of nationalism and left communist parties with decreasing support. The lack of legitimacy compels communists to try a new reconciliation with nationalism (Kemp 1999: 83). One of the main traits of this reconciliation is the separation of the cultural and political aspects of nationalism. Communism kept cultural nationalism – language, literature, cultural recon-

struction, identity –, but oppressed its political characteristics, shaping this latter to its own views (Kemp 1999: 39). This, in Kemp’s opinion, was the key of their failure because the two aspects of nationalism cannot be separated, the existence of one side strengthens the other. Beyond this, the need for reconciliation acted as a centrifugal power, distancing them from each other until communism was outpaced by nationalism. As Kemp puts it, the widening gap between the two, “which manifested itself in a cyclical pattern of action and reaction (...) pulled the regimes ever farther from legitimacy,” breaking them in the end (Kemp 1999: 173).

## **Communism, nationalism – birth, development and particularities**

In the following chapter I synthesize the main characteristics of the two doctrines by focusing on three important theoretical aspects: 1) historicity of the two, 2) their relationship with power, and 3) their influence on the individual social actors.

### **1. Theoretical aspects of nationalism**

Most of the scholars who study the phenomenon of nationalism agree that its birth is related exclusively to modernity. However, some authors think that it reaches back to pre-modern social structures and cultural myths<sup>1</sup>. Despite the fact that these critics have their own part of truth, in this paper I focus on the modernist paradigm as the referential time in which nationalism – similarly to communism – started to incorporate the masses as a direct result of the technical and social changes generated by industrialization.

A central point of national development is its relationship to power. From this point of view, one can distinguish two important strategies which focus on the state and its authority. In the first case, the representatives of the national project already have state control, which they use to “create the nation” by uniting the people of the controlled territory. This was an important step from their perspective: linguistic and cultural homogenization legitimized power, cultural similarities consolidated the political ties, creating a sentiment of solidarity. Moreover, this cultural and linguistic homogenization was an important

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<sup>1</sup>More on this conception can be found at the so called ethno-symbolists and perennialists, who argue that the essence of nations has been formed in the Middle Ages, modernism gave this essence a structural context (see Anthony D. Smith 1999).

condition for economic and technological development. As Gellner points out, the division of labor and its technical complexity stimulated the standardization of education and the reduction of social distance between different layers of the society (Gellner 1998: 25-29).<sup>2</sup>

In the second case, the elites do not control the state, only the means of cultural production and group solidarity. In other words, the group which they lead identifies itself as a nation. The political objectives in this case are related to the creation of an own sovereign state. This can manifest itself in several strategies: secession, the seizure of power, or unification (Breully 1993: 9)<sup>3</sup>. Although these strategies are much diversified, they have several common points. First, group ascription is not related to territoriality but to collective culture, therefore it has a stronger cohesive force than the territorial case, and second, the creative power of the elites is not focused on nation creation, but on the justification of their claims of being state founders. They focus on the “invention of such traditions”<sup>4</sup> that would legitimize their claims by connecting the group to the territory. Similar findings are underlined by Ronald Grigor Suny, who by studying historiography argues that the main ideological tool for inventing traditions was the connection of the group to the territory by particularizing historical narratives from a national perspective. These narratives not only present the crystallization of national histories, but they legitimize the nation’s claims as well (Suny 2001: 337; 345-348).

Even though the two situations can be related to different processes or strategies, one important similarity can be observed: the political agenda of nationalism develops in its relationship to state – or state-like territorial – power without the need of universalization.

A last theoretical aspect which needs to be clarified is the relationship between nationalism and the individual. Nationalism changed individual relations; by its integrated perception of group solidarity it created a strong collective identity, which slowly replaced or overwrote the traditional identities. Moreover, it changed the old social relations of the Middle Ages – the rigid impenetrable social classes –, and introduced horizontal social relations and equality between all members of the society (Bakk 2008).

Another aspect of individual relations is the capacity of people to imag-

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<sup>2</sup>The study on the process of nation-building can be found in the work of Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm & Rangers (1992) or Weber (1976) as well.

<sup>3</sup>Although Breully mentions three cases, one could talk about other national projects which do not have state-formation as their final objective. In these particular cases they want to control only a territorial part of a country, such as territorial autonomies or federalisms.

<sup>4</sup>More on the invention of tradition see Hobsbawm and Rangers (1992).

ine the boundaries of the nation not only from a spatial but from a cultural perspective as well (see Anderson 1991). Although this border-construction can be found mostly in Frederik Barth's anthropological theory on ethnicity (see Barth 1969 and 1994), I will use the similar theory developed by Miklós Bakk, who introduces a new concept in border construction: the concept of dual boundary, which signifies the productive tension between different types of national boundary constructions, such as political-administrational or cultural. Although these categories appear in several theories on nationalism, the novelty introduced by Bakk is that he considers the two types present at the same time and in continuous interaction, modelling the future projects and horizon of the "nation" (Bakk 2008: 166-177). This interaction is shaped by the different discourses and political interactions of the society.

## 2. Theoretical aspects of communism

Before analyzing the communist doctrine according to the above-mentioned three theoretical categories, one must clear some probable misunderstandings. From an analytical point of view, there is a difference between communism as a doctrine – in the classical sense, developed by Marx – and Communism as a political system with the ideology constructed to support it. This separation is important on the one hand because this latter one is a practical usage, a development of the former, and on the other, because some parts of the original doctrine were modified by the institutional framework constructed on it.

Like nationalism, communism in its modern usage was formed in modernity, in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a response to the massive social changes generated by industrialization<sup>5</sup>. A large mass of people found itself with no political rights, with neither social nor economical instruments. Social idealism was born as a reaction to these changes "as a huge petition for justice, as a revolt against exploitation, as a hope that progress can be achieved rapidly, for everybody" (Zăpârțan 1994: 345). Marx considered that the only possible remedy is the instauration of communism. In his conception communism would have "fulfilled human liberation" by introducing a "society without classes, with no private property whatsoever, [where] the means of production would belong to the community" (Whitefield 2001: 84-85). This liberation can be achieved only through revolution, the revolt of the exploited, who reached the consciousness

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<sup>5</sup> Although similar socio-political ideas can be found in the Middle Ages – Liviu Zăpârțan is talking about almost one hundred utopist writings in the 16th-18th centuries (1994, 347) – , none of these can be compared with the theoretical bases and complexity of the one developed by Marx.

of their own power. In Marx's perspective this class consciousness is a natural development of capitalism<sup>6</sup>.

Compared to nationalism, communism uses a different concept of power. While the political agenda of nationalism focused on state power, communism sees state authority as a tool which would help to achieve its universal objectives. In other words, reaching for power in one state would attract – as in domino theory – the other states into the class struggle between bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The premises of Marx and Engels' theory at this point are very important. In their perspective, the capitalist economic development has already reached globalization – through world market and other similar institutions – and the civilized countries are tied to each other (Engels 1847: 19<sup>7</sup>). Therefore, the extension of the revolution would be natural process, leaving the nations to “dissolve themselves, just as the various estate and class distinctions must disappear through the abolition of their basis, private property” (Engels 1847: 22).

Another example of the relationship between state and communism in the Marxian thought is given by David McLellan in the Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought. Examining the ideas of Marx in *The Critics of Gotha Project*, one can conclude that the author did not excel in presenting the insides of a working communist society. However, one thing is sure, the “need for the political will disappear from its organization” (McLellan 2006: 485). These ideas appear later, in the Soviet version of communism as well. Trotsky in *The Permanent Revolution* affirms that the “proletarian democracy” as a result of the “socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena” (Trotsky 1931: 10).

The premise of the communist revolution, therefore, was an extreme polarization of the society between those who controlled the means of production and those who were propertyless and were obligated to sell their labor to the first category (Engels 1847: 4). The two are in a continuous tension, the organization and activation – in other words class consciousness – of the working class will lead to the socialist revolution and the instauration of communism.

The communist individual was formed to identify itself against the Other; this resulted in polarized identity structures called by Koselleck asymmetrical

<sup>6</sup>This idea appears most strikingly in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, where he uses a deterministic approach to the development of human history and considers that capitalism will have similar fate to Feudalism, which was abolished by the bourgeoisie, who reached for power (Marx and Engels 2008: 6-22).

<sup>7</sup>In the case of online sources references are made to the chapter where the original texts can be found.

counter-concepts (Koselleck 1997: 7-9). In his conception, the existence of the Other is not only needed for the self-identification, but it is a generalizing term for everybody who is not included in Our group, filled with contradictory and negative meanings. Thus, the Other is not only an important element of our identifying and value system, but is vital in this identification. The idea of the socialist revolution from this perspective becomes ambiguous, on the one hand it forms a Koselleckian identity-pair, but on the other hand it is destroying itself by an auto-induced crisis in its objectives: the abolishment of social classes. Another close related problem is the fact that the practical implication of the classless system dreamed by Marx and his epigons was never explained in totality (Singer 2001: 78). These two flaws led to the development of the theory of permanent revolution, which kept the state – already led by communist elite – in an artificial state of revolution, where newer and newer “enemies” would be localized.

This ideology of class struggle shaped individual relations as well, although one must differentiate the normative and empirical implications of this relationship. From a normative point of view, Liviu Zăpârțan observes correctly that most of the known socialist utopias have a rigorous organization of power, “letting the state use it for the perfection of the new social organization” (Zăpârțan 1994: 348). Likewise, in the Marxian conception, communism would change the ethical bases of society, would abolish private property, and greed, egoism or envy would disappear (Singer 2001: 81).

From an empirical point of view, the two normative postulates have become possible through the technical-scientific developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The communist power used these findings to closely control its subjects, Stalinism – the extreme form of communism – had chosen a maximal implication, not only degrading interpersonal relationships, but introducing a permanent relativity in the conception of the future. The communist individual needed to trust nobody – everybody could have been an agent of the secret service, everybody could have become the “enemy of the state”. This uncertainty generated a state of alienation (Thom 1996: 160), an even bigger one than described by Marx in the case of the capitalist system. Moreover, communism wanted to create a new type of man, one without individuality and controlled totally by the system (Boia 1999: 122-123).

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Before analyzing the relationship and interaction of the two doctrines, a conclusion of the findings is needed. Taking into account the three theoretical



aspects, one could say that communism and nationalism are incompatible from several perspectives.

First, from the point of view of their relationship to state power. Nationalism has state formation as its objective or the conservation of state power, it is not interested in expanding its influence over other territories or states until these do not interfere with its political agenda. On the contrary, communism uses state power as an instrument in order to spread its doctrine worldwide. In their conception, the globalization of economy tied states together in such a way that communism from one capitalist state would expand to others in a very short time. Second, considering the relationship between the two doctrines and the individual, one can conclude that both doctrines wanted to reshape mankind. However, while nationalism had a clear agenda on how to reformulate social configuration – creating horizontal social structures, equality and strong group cohesion –, early communism did not develop clear strategies, the main focal point of the doctrine remained class consciousness of the proletariat and social revolution with its self-destructive and ambiguous objective.

Last, taking into account the historicity of the two, although both doctrines were structured mainly in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the mass-support of nationalism rooted earlier in the states and societies of Europe, leaving communism just a marginal role for a large period of time.

## **Marxism, communism and the national question**

This chapter studies the attempts of Marxist authors to incorporate or explain the national question. I analyzed some selected works of Marx and Engels, Otto Bauer and the Austro-Marxists, Lenin and Stalin, Brezhnev and, last but not least, the Romanian and Polish communists, focusing on the compatibility and progression within their writings.

### **1. Marx and the national question**

The great scholar of nationalism, Walker Connor in his study on the relationship between communism and nationalism argues that from a philosophical perspective the two are incompatible because their world views are in contradiction. While nationalism imagines the world in vertical segments – the nations of the world divided by boundaries –, communism – with the classes in conflict – constructs it from horizontal ones (Connor 1985: 5). It is clear, however, that their development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could not have happened isolated, without reflecting to each other. Examining Marx's work from this perspective,

Connor divides it into three main periods: *classical Marxism* – before the year 1848, *strategic Marxism* – takes into account the national question, supporting the self-determination of some nations which would sustain the communist cause, and *national Marxism* – where nations are seen as the principle actors of history (Connor 1985: 20).

Although in time Marx recognized the importance of nations, it has to be mentioned that he remained anti-national and anti-nationalist. This is stated already in the Manifesto of the Communist party, where he names the national character a bourgeois concept constructed to attract the masses to fight against the hegemony of the aristocracy. However, as a result of the constant extension of the means of production and capital, a new class was born, the modern working class, “who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital” (Marx and Engels 2005: 8). Moreover, in Marx’s conception, this new class, the proletariat will become conscious of its power and will organize itself politically. In this posture it will need no national framework because it will unite to find the common oppressor and to achieve universal political supremacy. Only the communists can lead the proletariat because they can see the “common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality” and they “represent the interest of the movement as a whole” (Marx and Engels 2005: 13). This universalism can be reached at a certain point of capitalism, thus, because not all nations are at the same level of development, they need to be approached with different strategies.

Despite these ideas, Marx underestimated the power of nationalism and the nations. In his early period he considered them just byproducts of capitalism, an ephemeral evolutionary stage toward a higher stage of development. In the second period he looked at them just as at strategic means of reaching the desired evolutionary stage. He supported some of the national movements, but only those of the historical nations<sup>8</sup> (Nimni 1991: 17). Thus, he considered that the national self-determination of bigger and stronger nations would be favorable for the proletariat’s goals as well.

In his last period Marx recognized the historical importance of the nation state, but still did not reframe his ideology according to it (Szporluk 1988: 177). He recognized the role of nationalism and its connections to power or its border-constructing capacity, but saw this phenomenon inferior to the ones

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<sup>8</sup>In Marx and Engel’s perception historical nations are those who managed to form or are close to form their nation-state, while nationalities or non-historical nations are those nationalist movements that did not manage to form their states until a certain period of time. These, in Marx’s idea, will never be able to do so (Nimni 1991: 23-27).

generated by communism<sup>9</sup>. As Kemp points out, the problem was that Marx and Engels saw nationalism as “something that was not really worth coming to term with” (Kemp 1999: 22). In their opinion, nations and states would gradually disappear as the proletariat and communism installs in power.

Anderson, however, has a different point of view. He considers that the problem is not related to the fact that Marx ignored the importance of nationalism, but to the fact that in Marxist theory “nationalism has proved an uncomfortable anomaly and has (...) been largely elided, rather than confronted” (Anderson in Szporluk 1988: 67).

Marx failed to give a feasible explanation to nations and nationalism despite the fact that he believed that communist doctrine would be a stronger social organizer. However, the proven viability of nationalism and the lack of guideline developed for the practical usage of communism left no choice for Marxist writers but to “face” the nation.

## **2. Otto Bauer and the Austro-Marxists**

One of the most interesting Marxist approaches to the national question was developed by the Austro-Marxists as a resolution of the increasing tensions created by the national movements in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These concretized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and have become the central problem of the empire as a result of the increasing political activity – struggle for national self-determination and political rights – of different national elites.

Otto Bauer, one of the most important representatives of the Austro-Marxists, considered nationalism – similarly to Marx – a bourgeois weapon: national culture was produced by modern capitalism for the people as a whole in order to mobilize the masses in combating feudalism (Bauer 2000: 85). Later, by stressing the national specificity of the state and by dividing the proletariat into different nations, the bourgeoisie tried to protect the existing social order (Bauer 2000: 131).

Despite these ideas, there is a novelty in Otto Bauer’s work. He recognized the importance and the power of the nation and nationalism, and stated that if social-democrats took out the nationalist wind of the sails of the bourgeoisie by resolving the question of national self-determination, there would be no obstacle in front of the proletariat to follow their objectives (Bauer 2000: 249).

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<sup>9</sup>A rather peculiar fact related to these beliefs is the fact that he never developed a practical usage for his theory, nor images about the world and society after the revolution, except maybe some general ethical ideas related to the behavior of the social actors (Singer 2001: 78-81).

The exact strategy would be to grant national-cultural autonomy for every nationality, in which “each nation, wherever its members resided, would form a body that independently administrated its own affairs” (Bauer 2000: 281).

This autonomy concept is closely related to Bauer’s own definition of the nation, which likewise lacks territoriality: the nation “is a community of character that has grown (...) out of a community of fate” (Bauer 2000: 101). As Nimni interprets it, “nation [is] a process, rather than a fixed one-dimensional relation of causality” (Nimni 1991: 165). Therefore, national development has to be seen as a dynamic process – not a static fact –, which acts as a great integrating force on the social actors.

The Austro-Marxists recognized the power of nationalism and its dynamics compared to socialism, and, as Kemp puts it, they did not try to destroy the nation as Marx did, they tried to enhance it (Kemp 1999: 35). In other words, they recognized that national aspirations were higher forces than the one generated by class struggle. They thought that the resolution of the different problems of national self-determination would clear the way in front of the proletariat, leaving them to focus on the universal problem of the socialist revolution. Moreover, they believed that this would occur faster in a strong state. Therefore, by defending the unity of the empire, socialism would be easier to approach (Kemp 1999: 38). Some authors use this argument to point out the national affiliations of the Austro-Marxists. This, however, is only half true. One could argue that Bauer and Renner believed that the only way to reach socialism is through the political nationalism of a strong Habsburg state, which needs to be kept together at any price.

### **3. Lenin and Stalin about the national problem**

Another interpretation of the national problem is the one given by Lenin and Stalin in the case of the Soviet Union. Being in a different situation than Marx or the Austro-Marxists, Lenin found himself leading a strong communist movement which not only challenged but overturned the tsarist leadership in Russia. Two important questions were needed to be solved: the problem of the nationalities, which could decisively help the communists in their cause, and the seizure of power in the state; this last aspect was not taken in consideration by Marx when writing the Manifesto. When it was written, the worker movements were very weak or non-existent, they could not challenge state power (Kemp 1999: 23).

Therefore, Lenin had to rethink the communist theory by incorporating both of these puzzles in one coherent ideology, what made him – if we remain at the

typology introduced by Walker Connor – a strategic Marxist. In Lenin’s point of view, self-determination of nations is important because the nation state is the best formation that can foster societies to pass from an early capitalist stage into the period of “bourgeois-democratic society and state” and fully formed capitalism, which is essential for the cleavage and class struggle between the bourgeois and the proletariat (Lenin 1914: 2). Thus, the proletariat must support the national bourgeoisie only insofar as they fight the oppressor (Lenin 1914: 4). Moreover, Lenin believed that a number of small countries could be easily drowned into an integrating communist movement. Therefore, self-determination in his conception is the possible secession of cultural or ethnic groups from a multi-ethnic state, and it needs to be supported in every case. Small nation-states can be helped to reach the revolutionary stage a lot faster than strong capitalist empires. This new strategy had an immediate effect within the Russian Empire, the Bolsheviks “raised their prestige higher than the ‘white’ generals” (Kemp 1999: 57).

Following this new logic, Lenin criticized Bauer and his cultural autonomy in several accounts. First he believed that communism needed to be reached by revolution, not by reformation or reconciliation as the Austro-Marxists tried. In his conception, cultural autonomy was reconciliation with nationalism, which is not compatible with the universal objectives of communism, internationalism and “the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity” (Lenin 1913: 4). In other words, he considered Bauer’s conception a stabilization of the Empire, which is not compatible with Marxism. Although he criticized Bauer, Lenin saw the functional usages of the nation. His conception of internationalist culture is not non-national – the nation with its common language and relation-system is needed to spread this culture, and in every national culture there is a “democratic and socialist element”, which can be integrated (Lenin 1913: 2).

Similarly, Lenin did not reject autonomy altogether. The state, although strongly centralized as regards general economic and political decisions, needs regional autonomy in purely local, regional questions. National-territorial autonomy seemed to be the best solution but only from the point of view of an economic reasoning: “unitary national population is (...) one of the most reliable factors for free commercial intercourse” (Lenin 1913: 6). In other words, national-territorial autonomies would legitimate the communist movement. By stating the right to self-determination and granting territorial autonomy, he believed that the different nationalities could be kept in the empire, and they would not fight for their freedom in the Bolshevik regime (Kemp 1999: 51).

This, however, was not the case. Many of the nationalities opted for independence, giving a hard time to the Soviet Union to reincorporate them.

Although Stalin's conception is similar to the Leninist ideas presented above, there is an important aspect that needs to be underlined. After stabilizing the Soviet Union, the communist doctrine needed further adjustments in order to be usable in institutionalized form. Neither Marx nor Lenin thought about what a communist state should look like. Although the idea of self-determination offered some insight, it created a long line of problems with the different nationalities living within the borders of the Russian Empire. In order to deal with the new dilemma, Stalin pushed communism even further toward nationalism by re-evaluating the question of national self-determination. As Nimni correctly observes, the Stalinist conception of self-determination "is far less rigid" than the Leninist version (Nimni 1991: 93). The principle would apply to those nationalities that would prefer to remain in the bond of a multinational state. For these cases Stalin proposes the regional autonomy, similar to the one described by Lenin (Stalin 1913: 7). Moreover, as Kemp points out, he parries the exit option of the nationalities by pronouncing the right of the proletariat to consolidate its power, and subordinates the right of self-determination to this former one (Kemp 1999: 72-73), not only stabilizing state power but legitimating the later evolution of the Soviet Union. In other words, Stalin did not abolish the 'exit option' of the nations, but introduced a 'keep in' option for every national group.

Therefore, Stalin developed the "socialism in one country" paradigm, which tried to use the social structures created by nationalism to resolve the practical problems occurred when using the pure theoretical conceptions of Marx, who did not formulate any real solution for these cases. The solution delivered by the Soviet Union was "nationalist in form, socialist in content" (Lenin in Connor 1985: 37) and had three basic strategic principles (Connor 1985: 38):

- 1) support the right of national self-determination of all national groups with wide-ranging territorial autonomy for those who want to remain;
- 2) after securing power, end the 'exit-possibility', begin assimilation with the help of the created territorial autonomies;
- 3) "keep the party centralized and free of all nationalist proclivities".

Although this strategy could be one of a nation-state as well, there is one important aspect which one cannot leave out of consideration: the elites of the Soviet socialist party – even those of the regional leadership – could not identify themselves through their national identity, but in the prism of their

political one formed under a communist ideology. However, as Connor and Nimni observed, in reality this was very hard, almost impossible to realize<sup>10</sup>. Some scholars have chosen to analyze how communism stabilized in the different countries, and what the communist elite's relationship was to nationalism. Many of these argue that the "socialism in one country" policy and the new-born people's democracies kept a portion of national identity, some kind of "socialist patriotism" which was used by them as legitimizing power. Each and every communist party integrated itself in the national history creating an ideological patriotism, which would strengthen their power (Mevius 2005: 2). However, these patriotic discourses were rather communist than nationalist. The only analogy between the two is the fact that the communist system used the social and economical organizational structure of nationalism to keep state power. This argument is supported by the observations made by Kemp on the relationship between the different people's parties and Moscow (Kemp 1999: 123). In his opinion there is a basic contradiction and paradox in these relations. On the one hand the parties needed some sort of national commitment in order to legitimize their power, on the other hand they needed to keep their good relationship with the Soviet Union. Strengthening one of these policies jeopardized the other, leaving the party leaderships to control the usages of nationalism and their discourse to Moscow as well.

Therefore, the attitudinal change toward nationalism is more evident in the Stalinist and Leninist conception, they recognized and integrated the social and economic organizational power of nationalism, but rejected its cultural and ideological components. In other words, the ideological charge of the system is a universalist one, the national organization is used in order to integrate into the system the ethnic groups as a whole, not directly the individuals. This is an evident departure from the ideas presented by Marx, because in his conception nationalism as a bourgeois structure would disappear altogether, the individuals would be the ones who would connect themselves to the communist system.

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<sup>10</sup>Nimni shows nationalist rhetoric even in Stalin's position on national-territorial autonomy question: he talks about the solving of the national question by bringing the nations and nationalities under one common high culture, in this case the Russian one. One could argue, however, that this culture is a socialist internationalist one.

#### **4. Beyond Leninism and Stalinism – de-Stalinization and the Brezhnev-doctrine**

A further adjustment of communism to the national question – and a clear flaw of the Leninist-Stalinist theory – comes from the period of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. After the death of Stalin, a new reformulation was needed, not only of the two doctrines but of communist state-building as well. The political struggles within the Soviet nomenclature left Khrushchev, who just rose to power, with two strategic options: 1) to continue the Stalinist legacy by close centralization and control over the other communist countries, or 2) to delimit himself from Stalin and his coercive politics, formulating a new communist doctrine.

One of Khrushchev's first actions was the normalization of the Soviet-Yugoslav relations. Tito, when creating the post-World War II Yugoslavia, did not want to be influenced by Stalin and his imperialist politics, and found a different road slightly changing the doctrine: he did not touch nationalism on regional level, but created a strong federal Yugoslav identity based on social, political, and cultural aspects. This new loyalty was catching mostly for the young people, who already socialized in the Titoist era (Shoup 1968: 263). In other words, Tito introduced a trans-national federal Yugoslav identity, which would have gradually abolished the national ones, in the end forming "the national identity of the country". Stalin did not accept Yugoslav communism, leaving the two countries in an almost one decade conflict. Therefore, in order to 'bring back Yugoslavia' Khrushchev needed to recognize their ways. In a pact called the Belgrade Declaration, signed in 1955, the Soviet Union accepted "the right of each party to follow an independent path", however, within the Marxist-Leninist doctrine (Zwick 1983: 94). The declaration recognized the fact that there is not only one road for reaching Communism, each country needs to find its own ways.

As a direct result of the Belgrade Declaration, many communist parties chose a more nationalistic approach. The Soviet Union interfered only when this reconciliation reached a certain level, as Zwick calls it, when a party failed to develop its own form of socialism (Zwick 1983: 104). This was the case of Hungary and partly Poland in 1956.

When the Soviet leaders have seen the strengthening of nationalism against communism – as a probable result of the Belgrade Declaration –, they tried to remedy the situation in 1959 with the Moscow Declaration. As Zwick points out, this document laid down the basic principles of communism that all countries should accept (Zwick 1983: 105). This strategy had only one goal: to



limit the options of the different communist parties in their relationship with nationalism.

Another change came with the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev, in a discourse delivered for reasoning this action<sup>11</sup>, stated the following. By referring to the Leninist principle of fighting against “small-nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation,” he introduces several new lines in the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. First and foremost, he restates that “[e]ach Communist party is *free to apply* the basic principles of Marxism Leninism and of socialism in its country, but it cannot depart from these principles” (my italics). This is a clear shift from the classical Leninist interpretation of the nation because it allows a certain degree of freedom for the different national communist parties. Second, the phrasing itself is different from the classical vision, which usually referred to a single movement. In contrast with this discourse, the Brezhnev-doctrine lets the national factions choose their actions within their states as long as they act by Marxist-Leninist principles.

Zwick, in an interpretation delivered on this document, argues that the Brezhnev-doctrine not only limits national communism, but introduces a kind of collective responsibility, which orders all communist states – members of the Warsaw Treaty – to verify the politics of each other. In other words, the Soviet Union did not interfere in the policies adopted by one single state until it did not try to deviate from socialism. Therefore, party policy was not an issue until the country remained socialist in form and it declared and sustained “its adherence to the movement” (Zwick 1983: 114-115).

This conception is an evident withdrawal in the relationship between communism and nationalism. Brezhnev did not consider nationalism as an instrument of communism in order to achieve its universal objective, he rather acknowledged the fact that the doctrine of communism is not universally applicable, that it has become more an internal matter of every state. In other words, there is no universal communist movement, but several communist movements which coalesce in a single bloc and match their foreign policies. This shift is important because it is the first time when communism or communists really recognized and used the capacity of vertical boundary creation of nationalism.

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<sup>11</sup>The whole transcript of the speech can be found online in the Modern History Sourcebook, under the title 'The Brezhnev Doctrine' on the page <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1968brezhnev.html>. The quotes in this section are from this text.

## 5. Combining communism with nationalism – the birth of nationalist-communism

This last chapter presents the consequences of the Brezhnev-doctrine in two cases: Romania and the actions of the Romanian Communist Party and Poland and the workers' movement. Although the events in the two countries differ, there is an important similarity: in both cases nationalism manages to dominate the communist doctrine, leaving the two countries communist in form, but national in content.

A large number of scholars who focus on the research of Romania between 1945 and 1990 (Verdery 1991, King 1980, Gilberg 1990) agree that the shift of Romanian communism from the Marxist-Leninist doctrine to a slightly nationalist one had begun in the year 1964, and became more evident in 1968<sup>12</sup>. King argues that this shift has three possible causes: 1) the Romanian Communist Party was looking for public support and legitimization, 2) the nationalist discourse of the Romanian political elites was used as a strategy to break away from the Soviet Union, and 3) strategically seemed appropriate to stimulate economic progress (King 1980: 125).

Katherine Verdery, in a book published on Romanian communism from an anthropological perspective, argues that the Party engaged three strategies of legitimation: remunerative, coercive, and "symbolic-ideological" (Verdery 1991: 83-87). This latter one – the most important from our perspective – involves the saturation of consciousness "with certain symbols and ideological premises", which serve as foundation for the legitimacy of the system. These symbols and ideological premises, however, can take various shapes from classical Marxist class consciousness, through the importance of personal connections, even to the emphasizing of patriotism and sacrifice for the Nation (Verdery 1991: 86). In her point of view, these symbolic-ideological strategies have become pronouncedly nationalist after 1968, when different aspects of the Nation invaded the public discourse (Verdery 1991: 86).

Beyond this, Verdery presents the basis of this strategy: the usage of economic principles such as monopolization or maximization in cultural production. In the first step, the Party, by controlling the educational system, produced more intellectuals than its labormarket could take up. The surplus

<sup>12</sup>These dates are contested by Tismăneanu and Boia, who argue that nationalism settled in already in 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev declared the rupture of the Soviet Union with its Stalinist past. As a result of this "de-Stalinization", Gheorghiu Dej "cleared" the Communist Party from all non-Romanian elements, consolidating its power at the same time (Tismăneanu 2002: 31). This period, however, is an earlier one, the period of national communism or social patriotism mentioned by Mevius or Zwick.

forced the intellectuals to collaborate with the party, as a single chance of survival. Moreover, the limited space pressed them into a cutthroat competition, which assured the consumption of possible 'dissident' producers (Verdery 1991: 91-92).

A first step in the nationalization of the Party was the redefinition of its own past. Ceaușescu rehabilitated several purged communists of the end of the 1940s, who were charged with rightist behavior (Tismăneanu 2003: 199), denounced the party's interwar and 1940s politics, which was considered a result of the coercive power of the Comintern and the influence of foreigners on party strategies (King 1980: 123).

Parallel to these events, the party ideologists were trying to demonstrate the continuity of national history and party history. First, the role of the nation was recognized "in achieving progress and civilization in the world", and it was affirmed that only communism can help it to reach to the highest levels, not the bourgeois social order. This new approach not only reconciled communism with nationalism, but surrendered it to this latter one. Second, the role of the Communist Party was redefined by stressing its national and not its universal role (King 1980: 125). From this perspective, Ceaușescu's decision to openly confront the Soviet Union in 1968 on the issue of the Czechoslovak intervention was more an internal message than an international one.

The rewriting of the national history continued in order to combine the communist present with a nationalistic past. The reevaluation of the Daco-Roman theory, of the actions of some emblematic figures of Romanian history – Ștefan cel Mare, Mihai Viteazul, Vlad Țepeș –, or the accentuation of some smaller events that could be interpreted as similar to the communist history, such as peasant-uprisings like the one of Horea, Cloșca and Crișan (1784), or the Uprising from Bobâlna (1437-1438) were all part of the national contextualization of the Communist Party (Gilberg 1990: 175 or Verdery 1991: 224-240).

The third part of the nationalistic symbolic-ideological strategy was a strong assimilationist policy against national minorities and the different regional groups. The declaration of the unitary national state principle and the separation of the concepts of nation and nationality all demonstrate this strategy. In the official ideology, the Romanian socialist nation incorporates all inhabitants of the country, while nationality represented ethnicity (Shafir 1985: 164). In the promotion of this classification even some of the minority intelligentsia was involved. In a highly propagandistic book about the Hungarians of Romania edited in 1981, one of the ethnic Hungarian party members, Sándor Koppándi, demonstrates this strategy on the Hungarian minority.

By making the shift from minority to nationality he demonstrates the nationally unitary character of Romania in the following way:

*[After presenting the demographic data on the Hungarians from Romania he writes] “The above data show that Romania is a unitary national state, in which along the Romanians – the compelling majority – live other nationalities as well. Thus, in the case of our country, we cannot talk about a multinational state” [own translation] (Koppandi & Lőrincz 1981: 10).*

However, this ‘integrating policy’ was just a façade. The repression of the minorities continued (and in some cases accentuated) with strong assimilation and forced emigration. This could be best exemplified on educational and cultural level. The state limited minority language education: in the 1970s restricted the Hungarian higher education in applied sciences and appointed new Hungarian academic staff to the Babeş-Bolyai University in a much lower rate. Similarly, in 1973, the new educational law discriminated minority education by setting a minimal number of 25 children for class organization, while Romanian language classes were organized regardless the number of pupils (Schöpflin 1978: 10-11). Furthermore, the state started the Romanianization of Transylvanian history. This policy had a strong impact on the existing regional identities as well. The Romanian regional differences were abolished, the publication of regional studies was banned and the usage of the original names of the provinces was forbidden as well (Boia 1997: 162).

The repression of the minorities culminated in the second part of the 1980s. As Gilberg correctly puts it, the economic deficiencies radicalized the national discourse of the Party, pulling it to extreme chauvinism (Gilberg 1990: 179-180). In 1986, the proportion of Hungarian pupils studying in Hungarian dropped to 23% (from 60% in 1980) and Ceauşescu, with a ‘systematization’ policy, planned to destroy a large number of villages – mostly Hungarian ones – in favor of ‘agro-industrial towns’ (Schöpflin&Poulton 1990: 17-18).

In conclusion, after 1968, the whole party ideology was rewritten, nationalism becoming the main legitimizing force mostly as a result of the boundary-constructing capacity of nationalism. It corrected the ambiguities of the auto-destructive strategy of the communist revolution, leaving the communist elite to embrace nationalism.

Another important example for the nationalization of communism comes from Poland. In 1980, as a result of the economic problems encountered by the state, the Solidarity movement was born, a civil workers’ movement, which

openly protested against the policies of the communist party. However, Solidarity was not simply a social movement, but also a national one. As David Mason cites the movement's program, it is clear that beyond the material benefits, Solidarity fought for "democracy, truth, legality, human dignity and the repair of the republic" (Mason 1989: 52), all goals that can be associated with nationalism as well.

The activity of the movement created an awkward situation for the Polish party leaders. According to the Brezhnev-doctrine the Soviet Union would not interfere in Polish home affairs as long as they stick to communism and to the Eastern Bloc. However, by fighting for democracy the Solidarity movement would have jeopardized this as well. Therefore, the government interfered only when the movement reached the critical point of possible democratization (Zwick 1983: 126-135). The introduction of martial law weakened the movement, but did not break it. As history shows, several strikes, underground activities were organized, which had an increasing nationalist character. Analyzing the underground stamps issued by the Solidarity movement, Kristi Evans argues that most of its iconography was articulated around events concerning Polish resistance and Polish culture, in opposition to the official history promoted by the government, which – as the images argue – was not Polish (Evans 1992: 749-750). Furthermore, many stamps included the emblem of the movement, which can clearly be linked with the one of the prewar Polish state. Evans considers that this imagery legitimizes Solidarity as the "heir of the sovereign Poland" (Evans 1992: 760).

In both cases nationalism managed to dominate the political sphere nearly a decade before the democratization of the country. This, in my opinion, was a direct result of the Brezhnev-doctrine, the last major adjustment made by communists to integrate nationalism.

## Conclusions

The case studies show that communism and nationalism are not incompatible, they can be present at the same time in one country or can even be reconciled. This is a result of the deficiencies caused by the practical usages of the Marxist theory and of the need of doctrinal renewal imposed by the continuous socio-political development of the Central and Eastern European communist states. As the study tried to prove, this settlement was an outcome of a long and organic transformation as different Marxist authors – Otto Bauer, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Khrushchev or Brezhnev – in different phases of

development of the socialist doctrine tried to face the national question. The first communist theories considered nationalism an ephemeral phase in human history that will be dissolved by the class struggle and communism. Later, it was seen as a tool in the hand of communist leaders, which could help them to achieve their universalistic goals. In the following phase, when the doctrine needed to be implemented on state level, the communists recognized the social organizational and centripetal power of nationalism, and used it to legitimize their own leadership. However, in order to combine the two they needed to reevaluate the universalistic approach, nationalizing the movement itself; every communist party had the liberty to create its own Marxist-Leninist principles. This construction was nationalist in form but socialist in content. In the last phase also this settlement changed. In order to keep the unity of the communist bloc at any price, Brezhnev readjusted the doctrine, allowing it to become communist in form but nationalist in essence.

In my opinion, this linear shift from an evident incompatibility through an ideological compatibility to the domination of nationalism is rooted on the one hand in the incapacity of Marxism to explain the national phenomenon – neither Marx nor his followers could set up a working analytical framework –, and on the other hand in the different renewal capacity of the two doctrines. While communism is a rigid dogmatic construction, nationalism, with its horizontal social organization and dynamic development is capable of endless renewal. In other words, communism surrendered first the organizational power to nationalism and then the ideological control as well, dissolving completely in the end.

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