

**NEW CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WESTERN PRESS COMMENTARIES  
IN REGARD TO THE BUCHAREST IV<sup>TH</sup> WORLD FESTIVAL  
OF YOUTH AND STUDENTS (1953)**

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**Abstract**

The study analyses other Western correspondents' articles, especially the Swiss, West-German, British and American, present in Bucharest for the III<sup>rd</sup> World Youth Congress and the IV<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students.

The Westerners had different views about the Communist Romania upon visiting it. As the adepts of Human Rights, Democracy and Capitalism denied the effects of Communist rule in Romania, the Western pro-Communist papers took the opposite side; however, the leading newspapers in the West, that were among the former, presented the negative views.

**Key words:** *Cold War, Communism, Détente, Propaganda, Romania*

The study analyses other Western correspondents' articles, especially the Swiss, West-German British and American, present in Bucharest for the III<sup>rd</sup> World Youth Congress and the IV<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students; the study continues the first part of the research, already disseminated by the author in a previous issue of this review<sup>1</sup>.

The press articles, already translated into Romanian by the Romanian Press Agency "Agerpres", were found in Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej Collection belonging to the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party, now in the possession of the National Central Historical Archives in Bucharest. The limited papers with positive views about Bucharest and the Festival determines us to admit Gheorghiu-Dej was preponderantly sent the criticising articles (only two Austrian newspapers praised the Communist achievements while for the Communist or pro-Communist papers only some resumes were found).

Communist Romania, backed by the Soviets, mobilized huge human and material resources in order to build the necessary buildings for the Festival, and provided a more than enough quantity of food while Romanians had to endure the famine several months before it, noted also by the Western diplomats<sup>2</sup>. At the beginning of July, the regime

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<sup>1</sup> Marian-Alin Dudoiu, *Bucharest and the IV<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students (1953) in Western Press Commentaries*, in "Annals of the University of Craiova. History", Year XVIII, no. 1 (23)/2013, pp. 101-108.

<sup>2</sup> Florin Niculescu, *Festivalul Mondial al Tineretului, București, 1953*, in "Anale Sighet", Volume 7, "Anii 1947-1953: Mecanismele terorii. Comunicări prezentate la al VII-lea Simpozion al Memorialului de la Sighetu Marmației (2-4 iulie 1999)", Editor Romulus Rusan, București, Fundația "Academia Civică", 1999, p. 89; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Volume VIII, *Eastern Europe; Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, Editor in Chief William Z. Slany, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1988, doc. no. 28, Minister Shantz's Telegram no. 866.03/5-553 of

publicly admitted food shortages and took into consideration the improvement of the situation<sup>1</sup>. We think only the new crop and the preparation for the III<sup>rd</sup> World Youth Congress determined such an act.

The III<sup>rd</sup> World Youth Congress (25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> July 1953) took place in the Floreasca Hall where 80 countries sent 1200 delegates. Petru Groza, the Chairman of the Romanian People's Republic Presidium, was amongst the leading figures; Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Romanian Prime-Minister and Secretary General of the Romanian Workers' Party, missed the Congress. There were 1200 delegates, mostly Communists, from eighty countries. The speakers praised the Soviet Union and declared it again the second homeland for any Communist. Alexander Nikolayevich Shepin, head of Komsomol<sup>2</sup>, repeated the words of Malenkov, the new Soviet Prime-Minister, regarding the peaceful co-existence in the world on the basis of mutual understanding. The phrase became a light motif, being present in the speech of Jacques Denis, Secretary General of the Congress, and other speakers ("With a religious fervour, it was repeated in all languages, and not a single word changed from this Holy Text" – the journalist noted)<sup>3</sup>.

The Swiss journalist disapproved the two Communist observers' pressures upon the Swiss delegation regarding their delimitation of the Swiss Federal Council forbidding Festival posters. The Swiss delegation expressed in writing the hope of a higher support for the Youth Federation from the part of the Swiss Government but the organizers became alarmed and demanded a denial that came verbally the following day; the denial represented the proof that the Youth Federation was only a branch of Communist propaganda for which Swiss Government promoted bourgeois ideologies<sup>4</sup>.

The Festival, held between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August 1953, meant for "The New York Times" the presence of 30.000 Foreign guests from 102 countries and 40.000 Romanians. For the first time in more than five years, four journalists from the United States could visit Bucharest<sup>5</sup>. Workers and soldiers painted all buildings after three months of hard labour. The guests received free packs of food but the Western diplomats "whispered" the white bread was sold for the first time in Bucharest after the war!<sup>6</sup>

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5.05.1953 to the Department of State, pp. 58-60 (accessed at <http://digioll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=header&id=FRUS.FRUS195254v08>).

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, doc. no. 38, Minister Shantz's Telegram no. 766.00/7-953 of 9.07.1953 to the Department of State, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation for the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League – the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

<sup>3</sup> National Central Historical Archives, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej Collection (hereinafter: NCHA. GGD), Dossier no. 725, Volume I, Top Confidential News *O săptămână în spatele Cortinei de Fier*, published by Bernard Beguin, in "Journal de Geneve", of 08.08.1953 (the fourth of the series), ff. 93-94.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 96.

<sup>5</sup> See also Katharina Kilzer, *România anilor '50 în presa din R.F. Germania*, in "Anale Sighet", Volume 8, "Anii 1954-1960: Fluxurile și refluxurile stalinismului. Comunicări prezentate la al VIII-lea Simpozion al Memorialului de la Sighetu Marmației (2-4 iulie 2000)", Editor Romulus Rusan, București, Fundația „Academia Civică”, 2000, pp. 949-950.

<sup>6</sup> NCHA. GGD, Dossier no. 725, Volume I, Top Confidential News *România de o curățenie ireproșabilă în vederea "reuniunii" păcii. Bucureștiul îmbracă o haină de vară proaspătă în cinstea celor 30.000 de delegați din 102 țări*, published in "The New York Times", on 3.08.1953, ff. 147-148.

The correspondent Beguin disregarded the modern equipment of the Bucharest ultramodern typography, imported from the Soviet Union and ironically called the thinking works as it allowed the printing of five millions newspapers necessary for the five newspapers controlled by the party, as the Romanian people had a critically low standard of living<sup>1</sup>. Although the Romanian Press Agency received France Press and Reuter news, the ones that appeared showed war criminals released by the “bourgeois Governments” and the sacking of the latter from power (in order to demonstrate the instability in the West)<sup>2</sup>. The 30 Foreign journalists heard an infamous lie of Agerpres Director about the permanent presence of correspondents belonging to the Western Press Agencies, although the last of them had to leave several months before the Festival<sup>3</sup>.

The “Manchester Guardian” noted the anti-Western direct critics at the Festival as the organizers promoted “the fight for peace, liberty and national independence” but worried the slogans could affect the Western anti-Communist World and acted as a pill, especially at one event like that where amusement was supported by free food; the anti-Western tone appeared before, at the World Youth Congress, when Vasile Mușat, Romanian delegate, criticized the countries, without naming them or referring to their political regimes, that were spending a huge budget for military purposes and obliging the youth to wear military clothes but the correspondent wondered if the Communist Romania was among them as the youth had to fulfill a two year compulsory military service!<sup>4</sup> The organizers did not forget to remind the Yugoslav Youth’s refusal to honour the invitation but there was no mention regarding the forbidding by World Youth Federation for the Yugoslav Youth to participate to 1949 Budapest Youth Festival and the exclusion of Yugoslav Youth from the membership of World Youth Federation. Instead, in a leading article, “Izvestia” respected a political view and concluded the Congress and the Festival proved the youth was ready to fight against “the dangerous Imperialist aggressors”<sup>5</sup>.

William Ryan of “The Associated Press” characterized the Festival “as one of the most deceiving and dangerous forms of activity initiated by the first column of Moscow (the Communist Romania, author’s remark)” and considered the participating South-Asian and Middle East youth as a future core of Communist Parties in their countries (author’s translation from Romanian)<sup>6</sup>.

A Peace Carnival organized in the Stalin Park of Culture and Leisure on August 12<sup>th</sup> permitted to the 50.000 people, mostly foreigners, to dance and to see fireworks<sup>7</sup>.

“Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” published a lengthy article on the event. Disturbing many visitors, the customs control lasted for hours and repeated in each Communist

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, Top Confidential News *O săptămână în spatele Cortinei de Fier*, published by Bernard Beguin, in “Journal de Geneve”, of 10.08.1953 (the fifth of the series), ff. 144-145.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 146.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, Top Confidential News *Tineretul petrece la București*, published by “Manchester Guardian”, on 08.08.1953, ff. 148-149.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, The Associated Press Commentary by William Ryan (presented in a Top Confidential Agerpres Bulletin of 12.08.1953), f. 151.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, Top Secret News *Focuri de artificii în parcul de odihnă Stalin*, published in “The Times”, on 13.08.1953, f. 132.

countries under soldiers' surveillance, while the Romanian youth shouted "Peace and Friendship" in many languages; it was clear for Westerners the only unity in Eastern Europe lasted in "the powerful Soviet fist", while the sums needed for the travel expenses of 40.000 persons were acquitted by "you don't have to guess too much", as the East Berlin and Vienna committees of the Festival easily managed to succeed in sending thousands of West-Germans, even without passports, to Bucharest. What were the Westerners' reasons for coming to Bucharest? The British, the Dutch, the Norwegian and the Danish youth were the least interested in the Communist ideology and came for leisure activities, but the French and the West-German, especially the latter, came for ideological reasons<sup>1</sup>.

There were hilarious events around the Festival. Some well-trained West-German sportsmen were not allowed to participate at the games and they had to return too soon from Bucharest under the official reason of organization mistakes. When returning on the Dresden-Berlin night train, an East-German worker admitted he was going to West Berlin to buy food for his family<sup>2</sup>.

The Western Communist sympathizers returned cured as they sincerely believed before the Festival in Peace, Friendship and Détente, but, afterwards, they experience deceptions seeing too much propaganda (the speakers very often used the words "fight" and "preparation" which seemed disturbing), returned feeling empty-hearted and admitted "Still, the Festival was Communist".

The different opinions alerted the journalistic analysts to try to be more comprehensive. The Swiss Communist sympathizers kept their positive views while the non-Communist had rather negative views. The Swiss delegation comprised of 300 persons, and only one had been refused for disciplinary reasons but it seemed he had strong anti-Communist beliefs. The offered food was in large quantities not only during the Festival but also in the trains<sup>3</sup>.

The informant-participants also feared to reveal the identity of Romanians who gave the information since the latter feared for their private safety. The Swiss participants accepted to go to Bucharest as result of the promotion and articles appeared in the press. In Hungary, the trains were supervised by Hungarian police although in railways stations Hungarian youth delegations came and saluted enthusiastically the visitors with music and dances.

They received food in excess and some gave it to the railways workers who happily and quickly accepted it!

In Budapest, the visitors were disturbed by seeing badly dressed women at work on the railways maintenance.

In Romania the trip was seen more interesting as the Romanian authorities were specifically prepared although their trains, the bridges, the tunnels and the roads found in

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, Volume II, Top Secret News no. 3198, *O privire în dosul Cortinei de Fier. Vizită la București*, published by Hugo V. Sein, in "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", no. 1888 of 15.08.1953, ff. 53-55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 55-56.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, Dossier no. 727, Volume II, Top Secret News no. 3378, *Impresiile participanților genevezi la Festivalul Mondial al Tineretului: București 1953*, published in "Tribune de Geneve" on the morning edition of 27.08.1953, ff. 132-134.

the proximity of railways were guarded by soldiers and the delegations, provided also with other sources, took into account the existence of partisans in the Carpathians<sup>1</sup>.

According to a West-German journalist there was no program for the Festival. The participants got a grey coat, three blue shirts, two pairs of socks, a pair of boots and a suitcase; only the Western fighters for the People's Democracy received toothpaste, tooth brush, a razor, blades, comb and a cloth for the boots. In Romania people lacked elementary goods such a (photo) camera and they even wondered when seeing one. The former Royal Palace was transformed into the Pioneers' Palace and the guide, in an act of typical Communist propaganda for the innocent foreign youth, told the visitors the State helped not only the Romanian youth, but also their parents if they needed without receiving anything in return!<sup>2</sup>

The journalist deplored the decadence of the Orient-Express which after Vienna usually remained with only a few passengers (and those under the eyes of civilian secret police) as the famous train voyage lost its Romanticism due to the Cold War, during which Eastern Europe became a region of terror. During the voyage to the Festival, at the Austrian-Hungarian frontier the Hungarians searched the luggage, including train mirrors, pillows, cabinets, and light bulbs; also some secret agents got on to act as shadows in order to watch over the foreigners. In Budapest, a lot of policemen and soldiers made the train full and the missing restaurant-wagon obliged the unprepared voyagers to eat their own food<sup>3</sup>. At the Romanian-Hungarian frontier, another control happened and in Curtici the train was saluted by armed soldiers, which represented for journalist "the symbol of control in a police state, better instructed and more severe than in any other Eastern European Communist country, Soviet Union excepted"; there the Romanian police very seriously checked the trains carrying Westerners even to call that "the small Iron Curtain", as a terrifying symbol of the most obedient Soviet ally<sup>4</sup>.

"The Economist" noticed the presence of old Communist supporters such as the British D.N. Pritt and the infamous "Red Dean", Hewlett Johnson, and the payment of 200 lei in each of the last months as a "voluntary contribution" by Romanian workers for the Festival to which the foreigners represented 30.000 people from 106 countries. In the last five months there were built the 125 acres 23 August Park of Culture and Sports comprising of a 80.000 people stadium, a 4000 people open theater, a children, a 6 acres artificial lake, a 260 feet tower for parachuting, a 80 feet bridge, one thousand megaphons, 20.000 trees and 10.000 plants were planted. There were built an opera, open theaters and open cinemas.

The people had to take care of 1200 blocks and 10.000 house façades, 55 boulevards and streets were repaired, 600 streetcar wagons got a new paint and 25 new ones represented the means of transport<sup>5</sup>. There were plenty of food and juice, a real joy for

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 135-136.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, Top Secret News no. 3371, *Satul muncitorilor în 1950. Tovarășii aranjează totul. Trei săptămâni în 4 Democrații Populare. Vestul a văzut o altă lume*, published in "Bonner Rundschau", no. 201 of 29.08.1953, by Heinz Stuckmann, ff. 137-140.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, Top Secret News no. 3360, *Orient-Express fără Romanticism. Grănicerii unguri controlează până și becurile*, published in the West-Berliner "Telegraf" of 28.08.1953, by Richard O'Regan, ff. 163-164.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 164-165.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, Dossier no. 725, Volume II, Top Secret News no. 3210, *Pâine și jocuri în orașul București*, published in "The Economist" of 15.08.1945, ff. 131-132.

every Romanian. The visitors had flowers in their rooms and offered a present from voluntary contribution. The Romanian newspaper “Munca” (“The Work”) concluded regarding 700.000 hours of free labour done by 700.000 persons<sup>1</sup>.

As the official statistics for the second trimester admitted the lack of meat and sugar, beginning with 9<sup>th</sup> July state reserves provided the necessary products while prices went low by a quarter or more, a new cloth for trousers began to be produced after 24<sup>th</sup> July, visitors received flowers in their bedrooms and each of them were offered presents paid by “voluntary contribution” of Romanians<sup>2</sup>.

“Österreichische Zeitung” reacted and accused the journalist O’Reagan considering him as pro-American, creator of dirty stories<sup>3</sup>. The newspaper made use of the tactics of diversion as it accused the United States Government of imposing almost a forced residence to a Soviet chess player but the newspaper was right when writing about the fact O’Reagan did not present the cultural and sports activities<sup>4</sup>.

The positive views in regard to the Festival were assured also by other Communist and pro-Communist papers (a leading role being played by those from the German-speaking countries), especially by bringing the presence of youth representing the African and Asian colonies or former colonies<sup>5</sup>.

The Western correspondents focused mainly on the political matters not only seen on Bucharest but also the Westerners’ delegates and participants. The Westerners received packs of food during the train trip (especially in Romania, where even the railways stations and Bucharest buildings had had a new paint and the Romanian people greeted them enthusiastically).

The Communists built constructions for cultural and sports activities which lasted for decades but with the price of a tremendous amount of free work done by Romanians who had to endure several months of lacking elementary food products such as meat and sugar.

A disturbing matter within the study regarded the number of foreign participants (the foreign presence in the press articles, varied from 30.000 to 40.000, while the countries varied from 102 to 106, while it seemed it had been 111 countries). Finally, a vast majority of the latter concluded to reject the Communist model in the Western World.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 133-134.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*. Also Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fund Anglia, Box Anglia T.C. 1953, Dossier no. 28 (Telegrams cifrate primite de la Oficiul Londra, iunie-iulie 1953), Decyphered Telegram no. 87450 of 30.07.1953 sent from the Legation of the People’s Republic of Romania in London to Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed Babuci 1651, f. 278.

<sup>3</sup> In the matter of O’Reagan’s article, see details to M.A. Dudoi, *art. cit.*, in *loc. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> NCHA. GGD, Dossier no. 725, Volume II, Top Secret News no. 3208, *Cea mai mare escrocherie a tuturor timpurilor*, published in “Österreichische Zeitung”, no. 189 of 18.08.1953, ff. 125-126.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Resumés in the Agerpres Bulletin no. 2641 (The Roma “Il Paese” of 12.08.1953, the London “Daily Worker” of 14.08.1953, “Szabad Nep” no. 227 of 15.08.1953, “Szabad Ifsjusag” etc.), f. 103. *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Resumés in the Agerpres Bulletin no. 2671 of 21.08.1953 (The Linz “Neue Zeit”, no. 186 of 14.08.1953, the Düsseldorf “Freies Volk” no. 191 of 17.08.1953, the East-Berlin “Neus Deutschland”, no. 191 of 16.08.1953, “Vorwärts Neues Deutschland”, no. 33/64 of 17.08.1953, “Österreichische Volkstimme”, no. 189 of 18.08.1953, the London “Daily Worker” of 17.08.1953, the Roma “Avanti” of 13.08.1953, and the Geneva “Voix Ouvrière” of 17.08.1953), ff. 40-41.

As the North-Western youth came for leisure activities, the Communist organizers had no chance to find new adepts. We consider that in the matter of French and West-German youth, some sympathy for Communism existed thanks to the Communist members of the Résistance or to the idea of German reunification under Communist auspices.

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