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## C O N C E R T A T I O

# Romania's Foreign Policy in the Middle East during the Cold War

## The Communist Leadership's Quest for Legitimacy and the Origin of of Nicolae Ceaușescu's Wish to Win the Nobel Peace Prize

MIHAIL DOBRE

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*“President Ceaușescu is currently the only head of state who can objectively communicate messages or opinions between Arabs and Israelis.”*

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**T**HE COLD War years—with their rather curious feature given by the inability of the two superpowers to confront each other directly—led to an unprecedented increase in the im-

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portance of regional conflicts. Resolving such a regional conflict, or even merely achieving consistent progress towards its settlement, was likely to attract the attention of the most select circles of the international community. In this vein, the signing of the 27 January 1973 Paris Agreements, which ended the United States participation in the Vietnam War, rewarded the same year the United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, and the Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho with the Nobel Peace Prize (even if the latter refused the award).

At the other end of the vast Asian space, in other words in the Middle East, another conflict, this time between Israel and neighboring Arab states, awaited its “peacemakers,” with the same unspoken promise of rewarding the “daring” ones with an eventual Nobel Peace Prize. And there were quite a few initiatives of this sort, and they provided room for diplomatic maneuvering, including for the communist regime in Romania.

## **The Place of the Middle East Conflict in the Foreign Policy of Romania**

**S**INCE THE early 1960s, for almost a quarter of a century, communist Romania carried out a foreign policy relatively independent of the USSR, although Bucharest and Moscow in fact shared the same communist political ideology and were member states of the same alliance, the Warsaw Treaty Organization. For domestic reasons, the Romanian communists, and especially their leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, wanted to assert their own vision of international relations, which laid the emphasis on the respect for the independence and sovereignty of states even within a political-military bloc. Thus, Romania carried out a foreign policy distinct from that of the USSR.<sup>1</sup> The conflict in the Middle East provided a special opportunity for the foreign policy of the Romanian communists, all the more so as the USSR, in full bipolar competition with the USA, gradually dictated to its own allies in the Warsaw Pact to embark upon a political line further and further away from the principle of equidistance in relation to the Middle East conflict.

In the context of promoting this type of foreign policy, Romania also attracted the interest of the other Cold War superpower, namely the United States, and the Romanian approach to the Middle East conflict catalyzed the attention of decision makers in Washington. This explains the fact that on 23 November 1977, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, George Macoveșcu, was received at the White House by the President of the USA, Jimmy Carter, and the discussion that took place on that occasion went beyond the strict confines of the Romanian-American bilateral relations, focusing on the problems existing then between Israel and the Arab world. Such an approach was only natu-

ral, since the meeting in Washington took place less than a week after a huge event in the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict, namely the visit to Israel by the President of Egypt, Anwar al-Sadat, on 19 November 1977, and the ensuing dialogue of the Egyptian leader with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

In the report prepared by the White House on the Carter–Macovescu meeting, the Romanian Foreign Minister is credited with the following statement:

*We have no special interest, no strategic or economic interests in the Middle East. We do trade with the Arabs and with Israel but we have no special interests. Our main interest is the peace. We consider our security to be in danger if peace is not reached. We want peace and understanding in the Middle East and we are working hard for it but we are not mediators in the Middle East. We try to provide an open channel for the two parties to use, so that they can transmit ideas, can see each other's point of view, and we sometimes add our own, but we are not mediators.*<sup>2</sup>

Macovescu's statement, with its special emphasis on defining Romania's interests in addressing Israeli-Arab relations (and in that case especially the Israeli-Egyptian relations), was received as a fully acknowledged fact by the US president. About Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, President Carter is alleged to have said, verbatim: "President Ceausescu has played a constructive role in getting the meeting started." Moreover, the US side shared the same view in its dialogue with the Arab world. When Secretary of State Cyrus Vance met with Syrian Foreign Minister Abdel Khalim Khaddam in Damascus on 13 December 1977, and the latter explicitly questioned the role of the leader in Bucharest in strengthening the Sadat–Begin relationship (Khaddam said that "No one can believe that Ceausescu managed to convince Sadat to make this trip"), Vance simply reacted: "Sadat had made his own decision." However, it is worth mentioning that in the published form of the Damascus meeting report, the State Department introduced the following explanatory note: "Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu served as an intermediary for the Israelis and Egyptians as Romania was the only Eastern bloc country to maintain full diplomatic relations with Israel."<sup>3</sup>

## The 1967 War and the Emergence of Romania in Middle Eastern Affairs

**T**HIS PRECISE statement made by the US State Department referred to the Bucharest authorities' refusal to sever relations with Israel after the "Six-Day War" (5–10 June 1967), although there had been a request

to that effect made on 9 June 1967 at the Moscow meeting of the leaders of the communist and workers' parties and of the governments of some socialist countries. The Romanian leaders did not support the Moscow Statement, which condemned the "Israeli aggression" and promised support to the Arab states against the aggression and in defense of their independence and territorial integrity.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Bucharest leadership also formulated its own more nuanced position on 11 June 1967, in a Statement of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party and of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania Regarding the Situation in the Middle East. In this document, the Romanian side expressed its rejection of the use of force, while supporting the respect for the independence and the sovereignty of the states in the region, as well as for negotiations between the parties concerned, as a means of identifying the appropriate solutions.<sup>5</sup>

### **In 1967 Romania Was Under Tremendous International Pressure**

**A**S EXPECTED, the position of the Bucharest authorities triggered various reactions.<sup>6</sup> On one hand, the impact felt in the political, diplomatic and press circles in Tel Aviv and in the Western world was remarkable, Romania being unanimously appreciated for the courage to maintain an independent stand with reference to the conflict in the Middle East. The perception of the difference in attitude between Romania and the other socialist states was so evident that the Western ambassadors asked the head of the Romanian diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv, Valeriu Georgescu, "whether Romania would remain part of the Warsaw Pact."<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the Eastern European governments saw this distinct initiative of Romania as a form of undermining the solidarity of the socialist states. Last, but not least, in the Middle Eastern Arab states the views were heated, which put Romania under terrible international pressure. This situation was reflected by the content of the successive meetings that the Romanian Foreign Minister Corneliu Mănescu had, in the first half of June 1967, with the Arab ambassadors and with the Israeli ambassador accredited in Bucharest.

In such a framework, the moderate nature of Mănescu's position was clear:

*Romania cannot see how the refugee problem and other lingering problems between the Arab countries and Israel could be solved by extinguishing Israel, a United Nations member state with which my country maintains diplomatic relations. . . . The equitable solution to these problems can only be found at the negotiating table.<sup>8</sup>*

## Bucharest's Idea: To Assist the Parties "Which Cannot Yet Discuss Directly with Each Other"

ROMANIA KEPT its position unchanged at the Special Emergency Session of the United Nations General Assembly, which was convened on 17 June 1967, in New York, on the specific problem of the Six-Day War. However, one should note that, when reporting back to Bucharest after the first week of the Special Emergency Session, Corneliu Mănescu presented the positions of various states with reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and analyzed the trends that existed in the United Nations on that issue. It was in this context that he introduced the following idea with an obviously innovative character:

*The Western countries are thinking of a solution as a long process, to which the United Nations must contribute by assisting the parties which cannot yet discuss directly with each other, by appointing a mediator who enjoys authority over both the Arab countries and Israel. In informal discussions and press releases, Romania was frequently mentioned as a possibility, especially in connection with our country having the presidency of the next session of the General Assembly.<sup>9</sup>*

The telegram's remark on the need to assist "the parties which cannot yet discuss directly with each other" captured the meaning of the United Nations Security Council's reaction to the Six-Day War. This reaction, namely the Security Council Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967—a document which is still seen as a starting point for any peace initiative in the Middle East—has at least two specific features: *the first one* concerns the non-inclusion of a reference to Chapter VII<sup>10</sup> of the UN Charter in the preamble of the resolution, which traditionally invokes the legal basis for the action taken by the Security Council, the Council limiting itself to invoking Article 2 of the UN Charter, which refers to the Principles to be followed by the Organization and its Member States; *the second one* refers to the formulation in the operational part of the resolution of a compromise—which is, essentially, the only way to bring together the Security Council's Permanent Members with veto powers—, and that compromise was aimed at meeting the expectations of both parties to the conflict.

Thus, the first operational paragraph stated that:

*the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles: (i) Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories oc-*

*cupied in the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.*<sup>11</sup>

The first principle was consistent with the position constantly supported by the then Romanian authorities, whilst the second principle became the basis for Bucharest's efforts and initiatives with a focus on ensuring that the "parties which cannot yet discuss directly with each other" could practically do so.

### **Bucharest's Ambivalent Policy Began to Bear Fruit**

**R**OMANIA'S DECISION not to sever relations with Israel after the Six-Day War—as we have mentioned, a unique position among the Eastern European communist states (except, obviously, for the USSR)—was convergent with its political line aimed at developing relations with the authorities in Tel Aviv. Specifically, the opening of the Romanian leadership towards Israel, while maintaining ties with all parties to the conflict in the Middle East, but also the obvious desire of Bucharest to get closer to the Western powers that supported the Israeli state, took various forms, including *inter alia* the development of special relations with the World Jewish Congress (Fig. 1),<sup>12</sup> by allowing the Romanian Jewish Community to join this organization. Simultaneously with developing relations with Israel, the Romanian side strengthened relations with the institution representing the Palestinians, that is, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the first contacts at the highest level took place in Cairo in April 1972. After Romania officially recognized the PLO in May 1972, Bucharest hosted since March 1974 a permanent representation of the PLO.<sup>13</sup>

The ambivalent policy of the communist leadership in Bucharest quickly began to bear fruit. According to Egyptian sources, even before the Yom Kippur War (6–26 October 1973), there were various attempts to persuade Egypt to try to find ways to reach peaceful political solutions, and Ceaușescu "was among those leaders that signaled that it was possible for them to open channels of communication with Golda Meir, the then prime minister of Israel." Thus, in August 1973, an Egyptian delegation—which also included Ahmed Aboul Gheit, a future foreign minister of Egypt (2004–2011)—met with Ceaușescu in Mangalia, on the Black Sea shore, and the discussions focused on assessing "whether the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir has the strength and ability to negotiate, to accept withdrawal from Egyptian territory and to work for a fair

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September 23rd, 1972.

His Excellency  
Nicolai Ceaucescu  
President of the People's Republic of  
R u m a n i a

My dear Mister President,

Back from my visit in Bucarest, I want to thank you for your most charming hospitality and above all for the interesting talk I had with you and the time you granted me.

As I told you before my departure, it was one of the most fascinating conversations I have had in the last few years and I learned a lot from your clear and comprehensive analysis of the world situation generally and of the Middle East in particular. I will make use of it, without quoting you, in my talks with Israeli leaders, although - as I mentioned - I do not foresee any real change unless the United States defintes its new policy after the elections.

I want to thank you especially that you were good enough to react favourably to my suggestions concerning the cultural life of the Jewish community, with particular concern to courses for young people and the teaching of the Hebrew language, as well as to the problems of emigration to Israel.

As for the economic and financial problems we discussed, I will do my best, as soon as I am back from here, to establish contacts between your representatives and some of the influential financiers I mentioned to you, and will keep your Embassy in Paris informed about the reaction of the friends I will talk to, both in London and later on in New York.

I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again in the not too distant future, and repeat in the meantime my best wishes for the full success in dealing with the important and difficult problems in your decisive position.

With renewed thanks and best regards,

Very respectfully yours,



Dr. Nahum Goldmann

FIG. 1. Letter received by Nicolae Ceaușescu from the founder of the World Jewish Congress, Nahum Goldmann (23 September 1972).

SOURCE: ANR, file no. 8/1, p. 50.



Palestinian settlement, or whether she will continue to firmly insist on the same ideas of denying the existence of the Palestinian people.” Ceaușescu allegedly promised to send this message to Israel, but to no avail.<sup>14</sup>

It is worth noting that on 4–5 December 1973, during his visit to Washington, Ceaușescu had talks with President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and addressed the issue of the Palestinian representation at an eventual Middle East peace conference.<sup>15</sup> The same topic was also on the US–Romanian political agenda on the occasion of the subsequent high-level meetings, held in Washington (11 June 1975) or in Bucharest (2–3 August 1975), with the participation of President Gerald Ford.

## The Height of Romania’s Involvement in Israeli-Arab Relations

**T**HE INFLUENCE of the Bucharest authorities in Middle Eastern affairs increased in the second half of the 1970s. The peak was the year 1977, when Romania successively hosted the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin<sup>16</sup> (25–29 August 1977) and the Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat (29–31 October 1977).

### Menachem Begin’s Visit and Its Management in the Context of Foreign Affairs

**W**HEN ISRAELI Prime Minister Menachem Begin was Ceaușescu’s guest, the Romanian communist leader candidly told the head of the Government in Jerusalem that Israel’s conflict with the Arab world could not be resolved without the establishment of a Palestinian state, a message that—according to the instructions sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Romanian diplomatic missions abroad—was received with special attention by the interlocutor. The Israeli leader learned, on this occasion, about Ceaușescu’s vision of establishing a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which

*necessarily involves the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Arab territories occupied during the 1967 war, the recognition of the legitimate interests and aspirations of the Palestinian Arab people, including of its right to create its own national independent state, ensuring the independence and integrity of all states in the region.*



In his turn, Menachem Begin “repeatedly stressed that it is his personal and Israel’s desire to achieve peace, to avoid a war. Begin explained that achieving these goals is the only motive that animates his actions.” At the same time, “Begin did not reject the need to resolve the Palestinian issue peacefully,” but “his fundamental objection was that it is difficult to discuss with the PLO as long as this organization does not give up the idea of destroying the State of Israel.”

In the end,

*the Romanian side was left with the impression that Begin and his government, despite their rigid statements, are contemplating a revision of their positions in order to adopt reasonable attitudes, including on the PLO issue. . . . Begin finally stated that he would reflect very seriously on what was discussed and that he wanted to find solutions to all problems, in order to achieve peace.<sup>17</sup>*

The Romanian leadership proceeded with great caution when it came to presenting abroad the Israeli prime minister’s visit to Bucharest. There were separate sessions of information for states (USSR, USA, China, Yugoslavia) and groups of states (socialist states, Arab states, the latter being divided into two groups, out of which one consisted of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and the PLO), with contents adapted to the profile of the interlocutors. However, in the documents included in the files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive there was no mention of the idea that Romania had wanted to mediate between the Israelis and the Arab world. Moreover, the Romanian ambassador to Tel Aviv, Ion Covaci, was quoted by the France Presse Agency stating that “Romania is not a mediator, but is ready to offer its good offices to contribute to peace in the Middle East.”<sup>18</sup>

In their turn, the Israelis paid particular attention to strengthening the relationship with Bucharest, and they were not at all taken by surprise by the position Ceaușescu conveyed during the visit on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, since 1975 the Israeli ambassador to Bucharest, Yohanan Cohen, had clarified for his authorities the position on this matter of the Romanian leader:

*Ceaușescu’s support for the PLO is complete and most consistent. Ceaușescu is convinced that this is a state nucleus of the Palestinian people who has the right, like any other people (including the people of Israel) to its own state. The PLO’s extremism will disappear once a Palestinian state is established. Ceaușescu’s assumption is that such a state, that will be established in Judea, Samaria and Gaza will live in peaceful coexistence with Israel. Maybe in the future a federation will be established. He assumed that this is also Arafat’s view. No importance should be attributed to the Palestinian Covenant and to speeches. There is no basis to fear that the Palestinian state will serve as a Soviet base. Here too, Israel should make the first*

*step, to recognize the PLO and negotiate with it. There won't be any peace, as long as the Palestinian problem is not solved.*<sup>19</sup>

As a result, on 30 August 1977, Menachem Begin informed the Romanian ambassador to Israel that

*he will send letters and personal messages to the Romanian head of state and will make provisions for intensifying the political contacts with the Romanian side. In this regard, he will ask [Foreign Minister] General Moshe Dayan to inform the Foreign Minister of Romania in New York about the talks he will have with [US Secretary of State] Cyrus Vance, about new developments towards the political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.*<sup>20</sup>

## The Egyptian Anwar al-Sadat Also Came to Bucharest

**J**UST TWO months later, the Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat also paid a visit to Romania. At the end of the high-level Romanian-Egyptian dialogue, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed its diplomatic missions about this visit, limiting itself to remarking that

*most of the talks between the two heads of state were devoted to the current situation in the Middle East, with particular emphasis on making use of the current context that is conducive to triggering the peace negotiations mechanism. In this context, they emphasized the usefulness of resuming the Geneva conference as soon as possible, with the participation of all stakeholders, including the PLO, as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.*<sup>21</sup>

The purpose of this visit did not escape, however, the attention of the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Cairo. Shortly after the visit was concluded, the French ambassador to Egypt conveyed to his Romanian counterpart the view that, although

*it cannot be . . . a Romanian mediation, . . . President Ceaușescu is currently the only head of state who can objectively communicate messages or opinions between Arabs and Israelis, and Begin and Sadat's visits to Bucharest are a proof of this possibility.*<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, the Embassy in Tokyo reported that the 1 November 1977 issue of the *Japan Times* had published an article with the title “Sadat Confirmed

Ceaușescu's Role as Mediator in the Middle East,"<sup>23</sup> while the Embassy in Washington said that the news column of the 31 October 1977 print issue of the *Christian Science Monitor* published the information according to which "Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat spent the weekend in Romania, with President Nicolae Ceaușescu, who mediates between Egypt and the Soviet Union and between Arabs and Israel."<sup>24</sup>

## The Romanian Mediation and the Cable Sent by Begin

WHETHER OR not there was a Romanian mediation behind the rapprochement between Egypt and Israel, or it was just an intermediation of messages between the two states, this fact is less important. However, it is certain that on 17 November 1977—just two days before President Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem (19 November 1977)—the Israeli prime minister sent a cable to Ceaușescu (Fig. 2) with the following content:

*Now, having been officially notified that President Sadat will visit our country and come to Jerusalem on Saturday night, 19 November, may I Mr. President express to you my gratitude for all you have done to make such a meeting possible.*

*You contributed much, Mr. President, to this momentous event in the Middle East, which may perhaps influence international relations and open a road to peace, for which we all yearned.*

*I will be only glad if you decide, and the decision is up to you, to publish this cable.<sup>25</sup>*

Ceaușescu did not publish the cable received from Begin. However, he most certainly desired to be involved in the dialogue between the Egyptians and the Israelis. In this regard, it is relevant that shortly after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the US Embassy in Cairo informed the State Department about the assessment given by the Egyptian leader of that visit and about the further steps that were to be taken. In this context, Sadat allegedly said that the meetings on military and security issues between the Egyptian Defense Minister, Mohamed el Gamasy, and the Israeli counterpart, Ezer Weizman, were to take place in Romania "in order to please Ceausescu." However, the Egyptian president was inclined to change this agreement, so that after the first meeting in Romania the dialogue would take place in Egypt.<sup>26</sup>

EMBASSY OF ISRAEL



סניירות ישראל

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. NICOLAE CEAUSESCU  
PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA  
BUCHAREST.

NOW HAVING BEEN OFFICIALLY NOTIFIED THAT PRESIDENT SADAT WILL VISIT  
OUR COUNTRY AND COME TO JERUSALEM ON SATURDAY NIGHT 19 NOVEMBER,  
MAY I MR. PRESIDENT EXPRESS TO YOU MY GRATITUDE FOR ALL YOU HAVE  
DONE TO MAKE SUCH A MEETING POSSIBLE.

YOU CONTRIBUTED MUCH, MR. PRESIDENT, TO THIS MOMENTOUS EVENT IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST, WHICH MAY PERHAPS INFLUENCE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
AND OPEN A ROAD TO PEACE, FOR WHICH WE ALL YEARNED.

I WILL BE ONLY GLAD IF YOU DECIDE, AND THE DECISION IS UP TO YOU,  
TO PUBLISH THIS CABLE.

WITH MY BEST PERSONAL WISHES, YOURS SINCERELY,

MENACHEM BEGIN

JERUSALEM, 17 NOVEMBER 1977.

Fig. 2. The cable received by Nicolae Ceaușescu  
from Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.  
SOURCE: ANR, file no. 8/1, p. 74.

## **Possible Reasons for the Involvement of Communist Romania in the Middle East**

**T**HE YEAR 1978 saw important changes in the dynamics of the Middle East, following the Camp David Accords (September 1978), and they were based on the important progress made in the previous year, including with Romania's contribution. However, the same year, 1978, marked the weakening of Romania's relationship with this region and, in this context, with the main global power, the United States. It is maybe of significance that, despite maintaining the pace of the dialogue with the partners in the Middle East, the content of that dialogue remained within the scope of general views, and therefore the Romanian side was not informed about confidential developments in the relations between Egypt and Israel, especially about the prospect of reaching an agreement on the occasion of the tripartite meeting held at Camp David in September 1978.<sup>27</sup>

### **Carter Hailed the Role Played by Ceaușescu in the Relations Between Israel and Egypt . . .**

**C**HANGES TOOK place on the international arena, and the last visit Nicolae Ceaușescu paid to the United States, on 12–17 April 1978, was the moment for Romanian leaders to realize the direction of those changes. In fact, for geostrategic reasons, the issue of the respect for human rights gained a prominent position in the foreign policy of the Carter Administration (1977–1981), and this reconfiguration of Washington's priorities could not fail to produce consequences on relations with Romania. However, it should be noted that at the time of the visit the climate had not yet been affected by the shocking defection to the US of the head of the intelligence service of the regime in Bucharest, Ion Mihai Pacepa, in the summer of 1978.<sup>28</sup>

Under these circumstances, Ceaușescu's bilateral talks in Washington, held on 12–13 April 1978, naturally focused on bilateral economic cooperation in the context of the functioning of the Most-Favored Nation Clause. There were also discussions on issues regarding Romanian emigration and family reunification, as well as on the respect for human rights in general.<sup>29</sup> However, after the visit, President Carter was criticized for the confusion created by the gap between the exceedingly warm welcome extended to the Romanian leader and the real situation of the civil and political rights in Romania.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, the Carter–Ceaușescu dialogue in Washington substantially addressed the relevant issues on the international agenda, and these issues were summarized in the Joint Declaration signed on 13 April 1978 by the two presidents.<sup>31</sup> With reference to the Middle Eastern issue, the two sides nevertheless confined themselves to remarks of a general nature, merely expressing a desire for cooperation. The only distinct element, from this perspective, was given by the toast offered by President Carter at the official state dinner on 12 April 1978, when he pointed out that Ceaușescu “was responsible for the historic visit of President Sadat of Egypt to Jerusalem and Israel. . . . And we have seen that this ability of his has paid rich dividends to us.”<sup>32</sup>

### **. . . But What Was the Real Objective of Ceaușescu’s Activism?**

**S**TRICTLY IN relation to Ceaușescu’s last visit to the United States, one cannot lose sight of one fundamental question: what exactly did the Romanian communist regime wish to obtain, and in particular what did Nicolae Ceaușescu pursue through his exceptional involvement in Middle Eastern affairs, an issue that had ranked high on the foreign policy agenda of the great powers for more than half a century?

As indicated above, the Romanian officials were claiming that they had no special interests in the Middle East, and yet they were investing considerable energy and resources to make themselves useful on the sensitive issues of that particular region. Furthermore, we have also seen that they repeatedly stated that they did not want to be mediators in Arab-Israeli relations, knowing very well that such a role could be played only by a great power (or possibly a representative organization), but they seemed exhilarated by the various diplomatic and press laudatory comments that attributed such a function to them. More than that, as mentioned earlier, they had requested, during Sadat and Begin’s visits to Bucharest in 1977, that at least the dialogue on military issues between Israel and Egypt be hosted by Romania.

However, it is interesting to find that, in the file of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive dealing with the political aspects of Ceaușescu’s 1978 visit to the United States, there is a surprising annotation, handwritten in Romanian, on the back of the last page of the original version of the White House press statement referring to the toasts held at the 12 April official state dinner (Fig. 3). The annotation reads as follows:

*As I sincerely share President Carter's view, published in the press today, that Romania under your leadership has built bridges for peace in the world, today I have sent a telegram to the NOBEL Committee, in Stockholm, Sweden, nominating you for the NOBEL Peace Prize. I do not think there is anyone in the world today who deserves it more, given that the peacemakers, and not their adversaries, are worthy of such recognition.<sup>33</sup>*

Intimit sincer împărtășesc fuznetul de  
al Președintelui Carter, publicat astăzi în presă, că  
România sub conducerea dv a clădit poduri de  
păcii în lume, eu am transmis astăzi o telegramă  
Comitetului pentru premiul NOBEL, din Stockholm,  
Suedia, propunând ~~numele dv~~ pentru candidatul  
dv. la Premiul NOBEL pentru Pace. Nu cred că  
există astăzi cineva în lume care să merite  
mai mult aceasta, fiindcă costă ca fuznetorii  
păcii, și nu adversarii ei, săt deșuri de o anumită  
recunoaștere.

Al  
Nicholas Bucur

Fig. 3. Handwritten annotation referring to the visit of Nicolae Ceaușescu and Elena Ceaușescu to the United States (12 April 1978). Source: AMAE, coll. USA, Series 220/1978, file 2703.

The author of this annotation, so highly encouraging for the expectations of the Romanian communist leader, was Nicholas Bucur, none other than the president of a well-known organization of Romanian emigrants in the USA (the Romanian-American National Committee), an individual whose name and position had been featured in the documentary file prepared by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the presidential visit.<sup>34</sup>



It is well known that a Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 1978 for the progress made in resolving the conflict in the Middle East, but the recipient was not Ceaușescu. The prize went to the political tandem Sadat–Begin, thus rewarding the key actors of the historic September 1978 Camp David Accords. The dreams of international recognition harbored by the head of the communist regime in Bucharest crumbled as fast as they had appeared, despite the entreaties made by the presumably anti-communist representatives of the Romanian emigration in the free world. □

## Notes

1. A comprehensive analysis of the context and meaning of this policy in Mihail Dobre, *România la sfârșitul Războiului Rece: Statut geopolitic și opțiuni de securitate* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2011), 70–120.
2. Adam M. Howard, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States 1977–1980*, vol. 8, *Arab-Israeli Dispute, January 1977–August 1978* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2013), doc. 154, pp. 765–769 (Memorandum of Conversation, Summary of the President’s Meeting with the Romanian Foreign Minister, 23 November 1977).
3. Howard, doc. 174, p. 850 (Memorandum of Conversation, Secretary’s Meeting with Foreign Minister Khaddam, 13 December 1977).
4. Arhivele Naționale ale României (hereafter cited as ANR), coll. Comitetul Central al PCR—Secția relații externe (National Archives of Romania, coll. Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Foreign Relations Section), file no. 43 of 12 September 1967, pp. 1–39.
5. *Scînteia* (Bucharest) 36, 7368 (11 June 1967): 1.
6. *Convorbiri neterminate: Corneliu Mănescu în dialog cu Lavinia Betea* (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 172–173.
7. Victor Boștinăru, ed., *România–Israel: 50 de ani de relații diplomatice*, vol. 1, *1948–1969*, foreword by Victor Boștinăru and Avraham Millo, afterword by Valeriu Georgescu (Bucharest: Sylvi, 2000), 297 (document no. 142, cable from Tel Aviv diplomatic mission no. 85228 of 14 July 1967).
8. ANR, coll. Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Foreign Relations Section, file no. 114 of 13 July 1967, Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting of Foreign Minister Mănescu with M. F. Hamad, ambassador of the United Arab Republic, no. 17/00308 of 12 June 1967, pp. 11–12.
9. Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (hereafter cited as AMAE) (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), coll. New York, vol. 5, June–July 1967, pp. 169–178, cable no. 69798 of 26 June 1967, signed by Minister Corneliu Mănescu. He was president of the 22<sup>nd</sup> session (1967–1968) of the United Nations General Assembly.
10. Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Articles 39–51) deals with “Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression.”

11. The text of Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967, in United Nations website: [https://undocs.org/S/RES/242\(1967\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/242(1967)).
12. See ANR, coll. Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Foreign Relations Section, Alphabetic—Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965–1989), file no. 8/I, p. 50, letter received by Nicolae Ceaușescu on 23 September 1972 from the founder of the World Jewish Congress, Nahum Goldmann.
13. Cf. AMAE, coll. Palestine, 220/1974, Special file on the “The Establishment in Bucharest of the Permanent Representation of the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO,” p. 10 (circular cable nr. 02/04929).
14. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, “Witness to War,” *Al-Abram*, 9 and 10 January 2010.
15. Peter Kraemer, ed., Edward C. Keefer, gen. ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976*, vol. E-15, Part I, *Documents on Eastern Europe, 1973–1976* (Washington: United States Government Office, 2008), doc. 28 and 29, Memorandum of conversation of 4 December 1973, and cable no. 240920 State Department to Embassy in Romania, 8 December 1973, respectively.
16. Menachem Begin, newly elected Israeli prime minister at that time, came to Romania for his second foreign visit, after the one conducted in the United States in July 1977.
17. Circular cable no. 02/018725 of 8 September 1977, signed by Minister of Foreign Affairs George Macovescu, in AMAE, coll. Israel, Series 220/1977, file 1772, on “The visit to Romania of Prime Minister Menachem Begin,” pp. 144–146.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 66 (AFP Bulletin of 18 August 1977).
19. Cf. Yosef Govrin, *Israeli-Romanian Relations at the End of the Ceaușescu Era: As Observed by Israel’s Ambassador to Romania 1985–89* (London–Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), 138.
20. AMAE, coll. Israel, Series 220/1977, file 1772, p. 107 (Note no. 02/5643 of 30 August 1977).
21. *Ibid.*, coll. Egypt, Series 220/1977, file 1084, on “The visit to Socialist Republic of Romania of the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Anwar El Sadat, 29–31 October 1977,” pp. 78–79 (circular cable no. 02/022622 of 1 November 1977).
22. *Ibid.*, p. 53 (cable no. 028191 of 2 November 1977 from the Embassy in Cairo).
23. *Ibid.*, p. 89 (cable no. 078373 of 1 November 1977 from the Embassy in Tokyo).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 98 (cable no. 085389 of 3 November 1977 from the Embassy in Washington).
25. ANR, coll. Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Foreign Relations Section, Alphabetic—Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965–1989), file no. 8/I, p. 74. The Romanian translation of this cable was published recently by Florin C. Stan, *România-Israel: Relații bilaterale (1948–1991)* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2016), 401.
26. Howard, 8: doc. 155, pp. 769–775 (cable of 23 November 1977, Embassy in Cairo to the State Department).
27. Cf. AMAE, coll. Egypt, Series 220/1978, files 960 and 961, on “The actions taken by Egypt for a political solution to the Middle East crisis (Camp David Tripartite Meeting). The stage of the dialogue between Israel and Egypt. Romania’s position on the situation in the region” (vols. 1–2).

28. The tone of US-Romania dialogue changed considerably with the “Pacepa case.” See for instance the meeting Foreign Minister Ștefan Andrei had with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, on 30 September 1978, cf. Carl Ashley and Mircea A. Munteanu, eds., Adam M. Howard, gen. ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States 1977–1980*, vol. 20, *Eastern Europe* (Washington: United States Government Publishing Office, 2015), doc. 208, pp. 646–651 (Summary of Dr. Brzezinski’s Meeting with Romanian Foreign Minister Ștefan Andrei).
29. *Ibid.*, doc. 203, pp. 630–635 (Summary of the 13 April 1978 private meeting of President Carter with the President of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu).
30. William F. Buckley, Jr., “Human Rights and Foreign Policy: A Proposal,” *Foreign Affairs* 58, 4 (Spring 1980): 792.
31. The text of the Joint Declaration, in AMAE, coll. USA, Series 220/1978, file 2703, on “The visit to the US of the Party and State Delegation led by Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, President of the S.R. Romania, together with comrade Elena Ceaușescu, 12–17 April, 1978,” vol. 2, 182–188.
32. *Ibid.*, 2: 123.
33. *Ibid.*, 2: 127 verso.
34. AMAE, coll. USA, Series 220/1978, file 2702, on “The visit to the US of the Party and State Delegation led by Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, President of the S.R. Romania, together with comrade Elena Ceaușescu, 12–17 April 1978,” vol. 1, 185–186.

## Abstract

Romania’s Foreign Policy in the Middle East during the Cold War: The Communist Leadership’s Quest for Legitimacy and the Origin of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Wish to Win the Nobel Peace Prize

There are times when small nations can make “great history,” and after 1964 Romania made such a history for a decade or so. The communist government in Bucharest—and to a far lesser extent the Romanian people—benefited from the international perception that its foreign policy was able to generate in the specific environment of the Cold War. The honors with which Nicolae Ceaușescu was received everywhere in the civilized world were the most visible expression of this state of affairs. A key dimension of the Romanian foreign policy was its focus on the crisis in the Middle East. The Bucharest leadership was widely praised for intermediating the contacts between Israel and Egypt, which ultimately led to the signing of the 1978 Camp David Accords. The reasons behind this foreign policy of the Bucharest regime are investigated in-depth, as the Romanian leaders themselves surprisingly stated that they were not mediators in that crisis, while investing a great deal of energy and resources in finding a solution to it. One interesting explanation arose from the archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which ascribes Ceaușescu’s efforts in the Middle East to the elusive dream of gaining the international recognition brought by the Nobel Peace Prize.

## Keywords

Middle East conflict, Romanian foreign policy, Begin’s and Sadat’s visits to Bucharest, Begin’s telegram to Ceaușescu, Romania’s interests, the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize