The Italian press on Romania’s solidarity with Czechoslovakia in 1968

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the discussions present in the Italian press, following Romania’s solidarity with the Czechoslovak cause, in the context created by the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact members, as a reaction to the Prague Spring. Nicolae Ceaușescu’s gesture signified the peak of his popularity abroad, being bypassed only by the Yugoslav leader, Josip Broz Tito. Still, different opinions with regard to this stance can be found in the 1968 press. While some saw in Ceaușescu an example of communist reformer, others believed that Romania’s support was also a political affair and an opportunistic gesture. These type of discussions can be found in L’Unità, Avanti!, Il Popolo, La Stampa and Corriere della Sera, the five Italian newspapers studied by this paper.

Keywords: Ceaușescu, Romania, Italian press, Czechoslovakia, Warsaw Pact, USSR

Introduction

One of the most bizarre military actions in history was the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968. It was the only military operation carried out by the Warsaw Pact, military alliance of the communist countries from Europe (excepting Yugoslavia and Albania from 1968), and, ironically, it was directed against one of its members, the Czechoslovak Republic. Romania was the only member of the Warsaw Pact that did not take part in the invasion, and, moreover, it supported Dubček’s Czechoslovakia, a fact illustrated by Nicolae Ceaușescu’s speech from 21 August 1968, in which he declared that “The penetration of the troops of the five socialist countries in Czechoslovakia constitutes a big mistake and a grave

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danger for the defense of peace in Europe, for the fate of socialism in the world”\(^1\). Interestingly, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, at that time prime minister of Romania, said, after the fall of communism, that Ceaușescu did not discuss with him about the speech and that the Romanian general secretary’s action was “an invitation to invasion because about resistance, with odds, it could not have been possible to think”\(^2\).

The Romanian dictator’s support for Czechoslovakia was not necessarily a surprise since he already continued the opening of the regime initiated by his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and sought to gain a larger independence from Moscow and thus improve relations with the West. Romania became the first country from the Eastern Bloc which established, in 1967, diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany. Regarding the Six-Day War, against the position of the Warsaw Pact states, Romania supported Israel and did not break diplomatic relations with this state. In these conditions, it is not surprising that Ceaușescu exploited at maximum the context created by the Czechoslovak issue. But, as Maurer, his own prime minister, pointed out, “Ceaușescu didn’t want to create a more liberal regime, he could not agree with what the Czechoslovaks had done, on the contrary, limited, by each day, the liberties from within the country. If he had something against the interference of the Russians in the internal affairs of the country, it was precisely to avoid his accounts getting spoiled”\(^3\).

Although the attitude of Western politics, media and population was primarily hostile towards the invasion of Prague, among the reactions of the West to Ceaușescu’s position different tones can be observed. Despite the fact that most of them supported entirely Ceaușescu’s position, opinions suggesting that the discourses of the Romanian dictator were proof of opportunism did exist. An approach to these reactions is very useful because Romania’s position could have been a crucial moment in the Cold War, since, according to secret British documents, Britain was decided to lunch military actions in the Balkans, if the

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\(^1\) “Cuvântul tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la adunarea populației din capitală în Piața Palatului Republicii”, in Principiile de bază ale politicii externe a României, Bucharest, Editura Politică, 1968, p. 11.

\(^2\) Lavinia Betea, Maurer și lumea de ieri, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 2001, p. 186.

\(^3\) *Ibidem*, pp. 186-187.
USSR would have tried to punish Romania and Yugoslavia for their attitude. Eventually, Romania was not invaded by Soviet troops and Ceaușescu managed, for the moment, to gain the support he was looking for.

Italy in the 1960s: politics and print media

An interesting case is Italy, where the communists had one of the strongest political parties from noncommunist Europe and enjoyed quite a large support from a part of the Italian population. Although the Italian communists dominated the regions Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Tuscany, they never managed to form a government. This privilege belonged from 1946 to 1994 to the Christian Democrats (DC), a catholic catch-all party, with a centrist orientation. Starting with 1963, the DC governed Italy along with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), thus switching the position of the governing coalition from a centrist stance to a centre-left position. This type of coalition would last until 1976, when The Historical Compromise between the DC and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) took place, suggesting the external support offered by the communists to the Christian democrats. It is important to note that from 1966 to 1971, the PSI formed a united party with the Italian Democratic Socialist Party (PSDI), named the Unified Socialist Party (PSU).

A feature of Italian politics was and still is the centrist and leftist tradition, the liberal parties enjoying little support. For example, in the 1968 general elections, the Italian Liberal Party (PLI) managed to obtain only 5.82% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 6.79% for the Senate. The invasion of Czechoslovakia was, as expected, condemned by the democratic parties and also by the communist party, but as we will see, the Czechoslovak issue was translated into the political sphere. The most interesting discussions were related to the PCI, which reached a very low point in terms of relations with Moscow and the other communist countries that invaded Czechoslovakia.

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A good index for the study of the perception of Ceaușescu’s position from 1968 is the Italian press. Newspapers such as *L’Unità, La Stampa, Corriere della Sera, Il Popolo* or *Avanti!* can offer an image of how Romanian’s decision to condemn the intervention of the Warsaw Pact in Czechoslovakia was perceived and understood. The political discourse is obviously reproduced partly in the media, referring here to the part of it that was controlled by political parties. *Il Popolo* was the official newspaper of the main government party, the DC, *L’Unità* was the voice of the Italian communists and *Avanti!* belonged to the socialists. These newspapers were the voices of the political parties they represented, their visions being subordinated to those of their parties.

Besides the party newspapers, one cannot overlook the importance of the historical newspapers in Italy. Thus, a more equidistant position is given by *Corriere della Sera*, owned at that time by the Crespi family, which possessed a strong textile industry. The newspaper played and still plays a big role in the Italian media with a centrist stance. However, this would change after president Saragat’s mandate expired and Spadolini, the editor of the journal, lost the most influential sponsor he had, the ownership changing the helmsman in March 1972 and choosing Piero Ottone⁷. The later would move the journal’s position to the left. Regarding *La Stampa*, the newspaper was owned at the time and still is by the wealthy Agnelli family, which also owns the automobile company Fiat. According to Vitorio Zucconi, Giulio De Benedetti, director of the journal from 1948 to 1968, was responsible for making the journal the only one in which the intelligentsia that was not clerical, but reformist and liberal could be recognized⁸. The average circulation of the two historical newspapers in 1966 was 522,365 copies for *Corriere della Sera* and 421,316 for *La Stampa*⁹. As a comparison, in 1975, the average daily sale for *Corriere della Sera* was 500,500 copies and only 361,100 for *La Stampa*¹⁰. The number of daily sales decreased for both journals, but the distance between the two increased.

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Although none of these newspapers criticized directly Ceauşescu, different tones among the journals can be observed when studying the articles that deal with the Czechoslovak issue. While the political newspapers are useful for the study of the perception of the main Italian political parties on the event from Czechoslovakia, the newspapers *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* offer more independent stances regarding the invasion and Romania’s solidarity with Czechoslovakia.

**Reactions in the Italian press**

Obviously, one of the most interesting study cases is *L’Unità*, the official newspaper of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). First, the stance of the PCI and thus of *L’Unità*, was pro-Czechoslovak and critical towards the invasion. The position of the PCI is useful to study since, although the Western communists were generally critical towards the invasion, pro-Soviet stances did exist, for example the Communist Party of Austria’s newspaper, *Volksstimme*, tried to justify the military intervention\(^1\). The stance of the PCI is clearly stated on the first page of the official journal from 22 August. In this sense, it is underlined that “The Political Bureau of the PCI expresses its serious disapproval”\(^2\). An approval of the invasion could have meant a decline in the next elections, while a condemnation of the aggression on Czechoslovakia could present the independent position of the PCI in front of the Italian electorate.

Moreover, the Italian communist Giancarlo Pajetta, who was also the director of *L’Unità*, went to Bucharest to meet Ceauşescu\(^3\). An article dedicated to a meeting between the party leaders suggested that “On this occasion, in a warm atmosphere, fraternal, were discussed issues related to the continuous development of the relations of the fraternal friendship between the Romanian Communist Party and the PCI, as well as current problems of the communist and workers’ movement.

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and of the international situation which concerns the two parties. The Italian communists were taking a different path than the one followed by Moscow, and thus the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) was seen as an important ally, as an example that has to be shown to the Italian electorate.

One of the main titles discussing the Czechoslovak issue quotes the Romanian general secretary: “Ceaușescu: full solidarity with the Czechoslovak people”, and presents a large description of the speech given by Ceaușescu on 21 August. In the same newspaper, an article entitled “Ceaușescu exalts the socialist society source of freedom”, underlines that “In several speeches the Romanian leader puts in the center of the problem of unity of the socialist countries, the respect of alliances, the internal autonomy and the development of democracy.

By portraying Ceaușescu as a good communist who supports the brotherhood of socialist states and their own way to socialism, the Italian communists suggest their own opinion about the crushing of the Prague Spring and therefore their will to follow a direction that is not imposed by Moscow. It is also an attempt to prove to the public that communism is not the property of Moscow and that an alternative socialist society to the one promoted by the Soviet policy can be found.

It is also useful to see the discourse present in La Stampa with regard to Ceaușescu’s position. La Stampa is a newspaper owned, as mentioned earlier, by the owners of Fiat, the Agnelli family, and has a liberal stance. The newspaper was also critical towards the Warsaw Pact aggression. As part of Romania’s support for Czechoslovakia, the situation of the Czechoslovak tourists present in Romania at the moment of the invasion is described in the following way: “Solidarity with Prague is expressed in a clamorous mode at Hungary’s border, where hundreds of Czechoslovaks who were here on vacation tried yesterday to pass through to return home. The Hungarian police had sent on the first groups in a kind of concentration camp at a short distance from the border; because of this, the others (there are several hundred) have decided to stay in Romania. The government has given

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14 “In tale occasione, in una atmosfera calda, fraterna, sono stati discussi problemi relativi ai continuo sviluppo delle relazioni di fraterna amicizia fra il Partito comunista romeno e il PCI così come problemi attuali del movimento comunista e operai e della situazione internazionale i quali interessano i due partiti”. Sergio Mugnai, “Colloquio a Bucarest...”.
15 Sergio Mugnai, “Ceausescu: piena solidarietà con il popolo cecoslovacco”, L’Unità, 22 August 1968, p. 3.
disposition to welcome and host for free. But meanwhile people from nearby villages had gathered around the cars of the Czechoslovak tourists, bringing sandwiches, fruits, cigarettes and offering to host them in their homes”\textsuperscript{17}. It can be easily observed the antithesis present in these affirmations about the Czechoslovak tourists. The Romanian government and even the Romanian population protecting the Czechoslovaks, compared to the more radical stance of Hungary, one of the invaders of Czechoslovakia, which was hostile towards the Czechoslovak tourists present on its territory. Moreover, considering the fact that the writer of the article, Sandro Viola, was reporting from Bucharest, most likely he found out about the Hungarian concentration camps from the Romanian side. The information is probably an exaggeration of the situation from Hungary.

Presenting the discourse of the Romanian general secretary from 30 August 1968, the following opinion is stated: “But it is the central passage of the discourse worthwhile reporting completely because it is possible that one day or another will be inserted in the most important documents of the process of «de-satellization» of the communist countries of Eastern Europe”\textsuperscript{18}. This is a clear expression of the positive way in which Ceaușescu’s position from 1968 was seen by a part of the Western media, his brave affirmation being considered historical and thus an important step towards the independence of the socialist states from Moscow. It is also an illustration of the hostility, directed against the Soviet Union, of \textit{La Stampa}. Surprisingly, the threat of invasion is described in a very positive way: “The government in Bucharest has avoided the worst with a policy of elastic resistance: an act of courage and a retreat, great care not to irritate Moscow, print

\textsuperscript{17} “La solidarietà con Praga si è espressa in modo clamoroso alla frontiera dell’Ungheria, da dove centinaia di cecoslovacchi che erano qui in vancaza, cercavano ieri di passare per rientrare in patria. La polizia ungherese aveva inoltrato i primi gruppi in una specie di campo di concentramento poco distante dalla frontiera, cui gli altri (sono varie centinaia) hanno deciso di restare in Romania. il governo ha dato disposizione per accoglierli e ospitarli gratuitamente. Ma intanto la gente dei villaggi vicini era accorsa intorno alle automobili dei turisti cecoslovacchi portando panini, frutta, sigarette e offrendosi di ospitarli nelle loro case”. Sandro Viola, “A Bucarest si dànno armi alla «guardia civile»”, \textit{La Stampa}, 23 August 1968, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{18} “Ma è il passo centrale del discorso che vale la pena di riportare per intero, perché è probabile che un giorno o l’altro dovrà essere inserito nei documenti più importanti del processo di «desatellizzazione» dei Paesi comunisti dell’Est europeo”. Sandro Viola, “Nuovo coraggioso discorso di Ceausescu”, \textit{La Stampa}, 2-3 September 1968, p. 3.
control”\textsuperscript{19}. Although these affirmations miss the goal and the characteristics of Ceauşescu’s foreign policy, they do illustrate how the Romanian dictator managed to keep his prestige and not become too irritant for the Soviets. Also, it is interesting that a liberal journal is mentioning the print control as one way of avoiding an invasion. Besides this, with or without the threat of invasion, the censorship would have existed anyway.

A more critical approach towards Ceauşescu’s attitude is given by \textit{Corriere della Sera}, an Italian newspaper which had at that time a centrist stance. Discussing the switch of tone present in the speeches of Ceauşescu, comes into notice the idea that “If the conclusions of what happened should be drawn today and nothing would change later, we should say that Ceauşescu comes out virtually as winner from the great competition”\textsuperscript{20}. History proves us how correct this affirmation was since Ceauşescu didn’t face a Soviet invasion of Romania and his popularity grew rapidly. With regard to the independent line promoted by the Romanian general secretary and which reached its highest point in 1968, the discourse present in \textit{Corriere della Sera}, seems to be less optimistic, and thus it is stated that “Whoever will be the future leaders of the Kremlin and regardless of the predominant opinions, it is certain that Bucharest will have to sooner or later reckon with Moscow”\textsuperscript{21}. In other words, it is suggested that the independence of Romania has its limits and that a disintegration of the Communist Bloc is unlikely.

The newspaper goes even further, pointing out that “The Romanian Communist Party leadership is clearly committed to a policy of formal détente but substantial rigidity. This attitude of compromise dictated by the experience of Czechoslovakia, becomes a model and a pretext for the future policy. It is no exception, in fact, to anyone that the Romanians seize at least for the moment, the positive fruits of the Czechoslovak misadventure”\textsuperscript{22}. These are arguments that

\textsuperscript{19} “Il governo di Bucarest ha evitato il peggio con una politica di resistenza elastica: un atto di coraggio e un ripiegamento, grande cura nel non irritare Mosca, controllo della stampa”. Sandro Viola, “I romeni non sono tranquilli”, \textit{La Stampa}, 7 September 1968, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{20} “Se le conclusioni di quanto è accaduto dovessero essere tratte oggi e nulla dovesse cambiare in seguito, si dovrebbe dire che Ceaușescu esce virtualmente vincitore dal grande confronto”. Alfredo Pieroni, “Sollievo in Romania”, \textit{Corriere della Sera}, 28 August 1968, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{21} “Quali che siano i futuri dirigenti del Cremlino e quali che siano le opinioni prevalenti, è certo che Bucarest dovrà prima o poi fare i conti con Mosca”. \textit{Ibidem}.

\textsuperscript{22} “La direzione del partito comunista romeno è chiaramente impegnata ad una politica di distensione formale, ma di rigidità sostanziale. È l’atteggiamento dettato dalla esperienza cecoslovaca, che diventa un modello e un pretesto per la politica futura. Non sfugge, infatti, a
present the attitude of the Romanian state towards the crushing of the Prague Spring as a sign of opportunism since Romania benefited from the Czechoslovak issue, rigidity and formality characterizing the stance of the PCR. Indeed, although Ceaușescu was officially open to reform and very vocal on the international arena, internally he did not change much and later even radicalized his regime. In other words, Corriere della Sera did not rush to praise Romania for its attitude towards the invasion, but rather tried to present a different face of the issue.

As the main voice of the PSU, the newspaper Avanti! presents a useful study case that illustrates the official position of the Italian socialists with regard to the Warsaw Pact invasion. The PSU was at that time part of the government coalition. As expected, the Italian socialists denounced the aggression against Czechoslovakia. A frequent discussion in Avanti! is the one concerning a possible invasion of Romania by the USSR. In this sense, it is pointed out that “Romania would have refused the request of Soviet conduct in its territory, joint military maneuvers of the Warsaw Pact. As it is known this rumor was accredited by various sources, but all unofficial. The spokesman of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, yesterday, declared that he knew nothing of such a request from the Soviet side. But, he underlines, had neither confirmed nor denied the speculations in this regard. Also about the refusal we have many rumors but they are absolutely not official. It is understandable the caution on the Romanian part. Also with Czechoslovakia, the action began with a request for joint maneuvers, and then came the occupation”23. This stance in considerably different from the one present in Corriere della Sera, suggesting the solidarity of the Italian socialists with the Romanian state which many considered to be, along with Yugoslavia,

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23 “La Romania avrebbe opposto un rifiuto alla richiesta sovietica di svolgere, nel suo territorio, manovre militari congiunte del patto di Varsovia. Come è noto questa voce è stata accreditata da diverse fonti, ma tutte non ufficiali. Il portavoce romeno del ministro degli Esteri, ieri, aveva dichiarato di non sapere nulla di una richiesta del genere da parte sovietica. Ma, si sottolinea, non aveva né confermato né smentito le illazioni in proposito. Anche per il rifiuto si naviga nelle indiscrezioni assolutamente non ufficiali. È comprensibile la cautela da parte romena. Anche con la Cecoslovacchia le cosa iniziarono con la richiesta di manovre congiunte, e poi avvenne l'occupazione”. “Bucarest avrebbe rifiutato le manovre sul suo territorio”, Avanti!, 30 August 1968, p. 2.
Moscow’s next target. Romania’s caution is attributed to the threat of Soviet intervention and not to opportunism as Corriere della Sera suggests.

The description of Ceaușescu’s caution and even his will to reconcile with Moscow goes even further. Regarding the position of Romania and Yugoslavia at the beginning of September, the journal states the following: „Ceaușescu willing to broad economic concessions and completely get back in the orbit of Moscow: however, stipulates as a condition the independence of the government from Prague – there are still high tensions in Yugoslavia, anyway it was declared that they are ready to face the worst without retreat”24. First, it is important to note that Yugoslavia maintained its firm position because it did not border the USSR as Romania did and thus it was less exposed, and also because it was a communist country that even Stalin realized it was lost after the Soviet-Yugoslav split from 1948. But it is important to note the underlining of Ceaușescu’s willingness to sacrifice his country for Czechoslovakia. The way in which Romania’s desire to reconcile with Moscow is presented can also be described as a paradox. This is because, in the way the socialists portrayed the situation, Ceaușescu is basically giving away his country’s independence in order to save Czechoslovakia’s independence, which is an obvious exaggeration.

Il Popolo is another important newspaper that needs to be analyzed since it was the voice of the Christian democrats, who formed the major government party. With regard to Romania, an article suggested that “Voices clearly contrary to those that come from countries «aligned» to the positions of the states of the «Warsaw Pact» are from Romanian newspapers. Which, this morning, dedicate their front pages to the press release issued at the conclusion of the joint meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian CP, the State Council and the government in Bucharest”25. This is a clear distinction made by the newspaper between the invaders of Czechoslovakia and friendly Romania, using as an argument the newspapers from these countries.

Moreover, it is stated that “Completing the front pages of the newspapers of the capital and the provinces, wide reportages on the popular demonstrations held in front of the palace of the republic (we calculated a presence of 100,000 people) during which the citizens of Bucharest expressed their unconditional trust in the policy of the government and the Romanian communist party. All the newspapers also report letters sent to their respective newsrooms, in which citizens of the various social strata express their feelings about the «responsibility of the Romanian people towards the destinies of the country, the cause of socialism and peace» and on the «full approval on the behavior of the Government on the Czechoslovak issue»”\textsuperscript{26}. The support of the Christian democrats for Ceaușescu and his foreign policy is obvious here, but it is surprising the description of the Romanian public opinion, which underlines the legitimacy of a communist regime, supported by a population that had the same view on the Warsaw Pact invasion as its leaders.

While Ceaușescu was portrayed by the DC newspaper as an example and his gesture was entirely supported, \textit{Il Popolo} and the Christian democrats seemed to have a totally different opinion on the position of the Italian communists. In this sense, Arlando Forlani, vice secretary of the DC, is quoted saying “That the group of PCI has felt the need not to defend the armed intervention of the Soviet Union, answer rather in terms of solidarity for the government and the Czechoslovak people is a fact based that has a target value independent of the motives that remain weak and contradictory”\textsuperscript{27}. The attack on the PCI can be explained by the growing fear among the Christian Democrats that the split between the Italian communists and Moscow could legitimize the PCI in front of the population and thus become an even bigger threat in the next elections. However, despite these

\textsuperscript{26} “Completano le prime pagine del quotidiani della capitale e delle provincie, ampi servizi sulla manifestazione popolare svoltasi di fronte al palazzo della repubblica (si è calcolata una presenza di 100 mila persone), nel corso della quale i cittadini di Bucarest hanno espresso la loro fiducia incondizionata alla politica del governo e del partito comunista Romeno. Tutti i giornali, inoltre, riportano lettere inviate alle rispettive redazioni, nelle quali cittadini dei più vari strati sociali esprimono i propri sentimenti sulla «piena responsabilità del popolo Romeno nei confronti dei destini della patria, della causa del socialismo e della pace», e sulla «piena approvazione sul comportamento del governo romeno in merito alla questione cecoslovacca»”. \textit{Ibidem}.

\textsuperscript{27} “Che il gruppo del PCI abbia sentito la necessità di non difendere l'intervento armato dell'Unione Sovietica, pronunciandosi anzi in termini di solidarietà per il governo ed il popolo cecoslovacco è un fatto base che ha un valore obiettivo indipendentemente dalle motivazioni che restano deboli e contradditori”. Mario Angius, “Il PCI non ha fatto la scelta di fondo”, \textit{Il Popolo}, 1 September 1968, p. 1.
accusations aimed at the Italian communists, the journal states in the same day about the Romanian general secretary that “Despite the need to find with the Soviets a solution that avoids the same fate for Romania that has befallen the Czechoslovaks, president Ceauşescu continues to maintain in his speeches an exemplary dignity and pride”\textsuperscript{28}. Overlooking the unconsciousness of Ceauşescu’s discourses, the journal regards his attitude as an example due to the high Soviet pressure that was on Romania at the moment.

Following the accusations from \textit{Il Popolo}, the PCI, through \textit{L’Unità}, responded with an attack on the DC, saying that “We still see before our eyes Moro who refuses to explain why, for years, has expressed no disagreement but «understanding» (namely complicity) for the military intervention and bloody American bombing in Vietnam”\textsuperscript{29}. The parallel with the crushing of the Prague Spring is obvious, suggesting the different way in which the Christian Democrats deal with foreign military interventions. The same article concludes that “«Il Popolo» should resign itself. It’s up to it, not to us, to show «more courage» to make «a step forward»”\textsuperscript{30}. This is how international affairs were translated into the Italian political sphere, both DC and PCI accusing each other, using their own media, of lack of attitude or even complicity with an invading state.

The Christian democrats feared that the already powerful PCI could gain even more support after its break with Moscow, and, on the other side, the Italian communists used the DC discourse on the invasion of Czechoslovakia against them, underlining the different tone used in the context of the Vietnam War. The situation was even more complicated for the Christian democrats since the socialists, the government partners, seemed to support the PCI. For example, following the critics from Poland on the Italian communists, \textit{Avanti!} wrote that “The organ of the party, then, published yesterday a long attack to the Italian CP,

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\textsuperscript{28} “Nonostante la necessità di dover trovare con i sovietici una soluzione che eviti alla Romania la stessa sorte che è toccata al cecoslovacchi, il presidente Ceausescu continua a mentenere nel suoi discorsi una esemplare dignità e fierezza”. “Sotto la minaccia dell’aggressione Bucarest sta cedendo al ricatto”, \textit{Il Popolo}, 1 September 1968, p. 3.
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\textsuperscript{29} “Abbiamo ancora davanti agli occhi il Moro che si rifiuta di spiegare perché, per anni, abbia espresso non dissenso ma «comprensione» (cioè complicità) per l’intervento militare e i sanguinari bombardamenti americani nel Vietnam”. Maurizio Ferrara, “Il dissenso del «Popolo»”, \textit{L’Unità}, 8 September 1968, p. 1. Aldo Moro was until June 1968 the Christian democrat prime minister of Italy.
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\textsuperscript{30} “Il Popolo si rassegni. Tocca a lui non a noi, dimostrare «più coraggio» fare «un passo in avanti»”. \textit{Ibidem}.
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unable to betray the embarrassment of a polemic with a party that until a few weeks ago had been presented as a model, sometimes even in opposition to the Soviets themselves"\(^{31}\). Despite the attack of the Christian democrats on the PCI, the PSU shows solidarity with the Italian communists.

Conclusions

As we have seen, Ceaușescu’s gesture not only legitimized his regime in front of the Romanian citizens, but it also managed to portray the Romanian dictator, in front of the Western public, as a reformist and a modern type of communist leader. Although his position could have cost him the independence of his country, Ceaușescu seemed to have made a wise decision not to support Moscow’s actions and instead speak for the independence of the Czechoslovak people. Moreover, by changing the tone of his discourses, he probably prevented an invasion of Romania.

In the case of Italy, after analyzing the discourses present in the main newspapers, we can conclude that the Romanian dictator’s popularity reached a pick, Ceaușescu being regarded as a new type of communist; one completely independent from Moscow, and his country was seen as an example of a modern socialist state. \(L'Unità\), as the official journal of the PCI, praised Ceaușescu for not invading Czechoslovakia and for his solidarity with the Czechoslovaks, since this was in accordance with the stance of the Italian communists, who, after the split with Moscow, needed a new communist ally and an example for the Italian electorate. The liberal newspaper \(La Stampa\) has also seen in Ceaușescu the image of a new type of communist, presenting his country, Romania, in opposition to the more radical states of Eastern Europe, the Warsaw Pact members that crushed the Prague Spring.

As in the case of \(L'Unità\), the journals \(Avanti!\) and \(Il Popolo\) mirrored the position of the political parties they represented. \(Avanti!\), since it was the newspaper of the Italian socialists, shows solidarity with Romania, which was facing a possible Soviet invasion, even praising it for a supposed willingness to

\(^{31}\) “L’organo del partito, poi, ha pubblicato ieri un lungo attacco al PC Italiano, non riuscendo a tradire l’imbarazzo di una polemica con un partito che fino a poche settimane fa era stato presentato come un modello, alle volte anche in polemica con gli stessi sovietici”. “Varsovia fedelissima di Mosca attacca i comunisti italiani”, \(Avanti!\), 10 September 1968, p. 2.
give away its own independence for the freedom of Czechoslovakia. In *Il Popolo* on the other hand, while presenting the legitimacy of the PCR, it is easy to spot connections between the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Italian politics. Thus, the support of the PCI for the independent line promoted by Dubček is perceived with skepticism and mistrust. Among the most important newspapers of Italy, the most critical journal towards Ceaușescu’s discourses about independence and non-interference in the affairs of other socialist states is *Corriere della Sera*. The newspaper avoids praising the Romanian dictator for his actions and is rather suggesting that opportunism is what pushed Romania to a pro-Czechoslovak stance.

All these being said, we can conclude that, broadly, Ceaușescu managed to induce among the Italian press that he is a reformist communist and supporter of independence of the socialist states in relation to the USSR. Even the skeptical articles that appeared in relation to his position had a cautious tone. Ceaușescu’s speeches paid off, despite the high risk he exposed his country at. Although it would not be long until the Romanian dictator would show the real face of his regime, which, especially after the seizure of power in the USSR by Gorbachev would start to collapse in the eyes of the West, Ceaușescu managed to give Romania an international prestige that was bypassed only by Tito’s Yugoslavia.

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