

How to cite this paper:

Rîndașu, M-M. (2025). The Transformations of the Romanian Leadership in 1965: Between Continuity and Change. *Perspective Politice*. Pages 105-124

<https://doi.org/10.25019/perspol/25.18.8>

Received: July 2025

Accepted: November 2025

Published: December 2025

Copyright: © 2025 by the author(s). Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

Article

The Transformations of the Romanian Leadership in 1965: Between Continuity and Change

Abstract: Managing an entity, regardless of its nature – public or private – involves assuming, developing, and implementing a set of skills. The ability to mobilise staff, provide them with a clear organisational objective, and constantly evaluate their performance are all elements that fit into the role and status of the leader regarding decision-making responsibilities. In studying organisations in various sectors, researchers have identified several characteristics and differentiators, summarised in what we call “leadership styles”. Politics is a unique field in which these typologies are engaged, adapted according to internal and external contexts and variables. This paper analyses the metamorphoses of communist leadership on social life in Romania, with an exclusive focus on the significance of the year 1965. This period of transition is a landmark in the literature, due to the vision changes brought about by Nicolae Ceaușescu. The shift in emphasis from subservience to Moscow to personalist leadership gives the research a relevant comparative character. Through the application of deductive thematic analysis, the main features that define the beginning of Ceaușescu's leadership (1965) will be highlighted, as well as the obvious contrasts with Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's model. The thesis will be structured in two analytical directions, using

Mălina-Maria RÎNDĂSU

Department of International Studies and Contemporary History, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeș-Bolyai University, PhD Researcher, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
ORCID: 0009-0008-0738-9772
malina.rindasu@ubbcluj.ro

political speeches found in the *Scînteia* newspaper. The first is represented by the changes imposed by the new leadership structure, publicly manifested in 1965, including the contrast with the previous leadership. The second explores the implications of these changes on social life within the same time frame. The relevance of this two-way analysis is reflected in the understanding of the impact of communist leadership on the institutional and social sphere, with long-lasting effects on the collective mentality.

Keywords: political leadership; personalistic leader; communism; political discourse; institutional changes; power transition

1. Introduction

In recent decades, political leadership has become a subject of interest for researchers in fields such as political science, psychology, group sociology, and even history. Understanding patterns of decision-making and action, and relationships with groups or societies, requires interdisciplinary analysis. However, the interpretation of leadership characteristics through a discursive lens is highlighted sequentially, especially in comparative studies.

This paper aims to complement the specialised literature that critically addresses the narrative traits of leaders in totalitarian regimes. By examining the activities and narratives of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian leader between 1965 and 1989, it aims to observe the institutional and social metamorphoses marked by the transition to a new leadership. To capture the transformations that were initiated, the political messages conveyed by the leader to the public through the newspaper *Scînteia* in 1965 were collected and analysed. This period is considered in historiography to be a reference point for everything that constituted change and, implicitly, the transition to a form of communism with national characteristics.

To conduct the analysis, we collected 40 speeches by the political leader. The data was collected exclusively from the press of the time and analysed using deductive thematic analysis. The thesis aims to provide an answer to the research question: ‘What changes did Nicolae Ceaușescu’s seizure of power produce in the style of political leadership in the context of 1965?’.

The relevance of the paper lies in its implications for the field of research, which lies at the convergence of leadership, history, and political science. Even though the year 1965 is often addressed in literature, the analysis of changes through the lens of leadership style is an original approach, through which the past is projected through the dynamics of narratives. Thus, the contribution brings to the fore the initial implications of building national communism, providing an explanatory framework that directs attention to the leader and the rhetoric addressed.

The three levels of analysis that attest to the incipient change (party, state, and society) summarise the purpose of the paper to highlight the dynamics of leadership in a multidimensional way. By correlating the spectrum of command function practice with the context of power transition, we wish to highlight the new leader’s relationship to the previous leadership, as well as the need for structural changes that would underpin the path of communist ideology and his own role in this process. In this way, we introduce the alternations of representation at the leadership level: continuity versus personalism with transformational tendencies.

At the party level, the analysis section will offer readers a correlation between the discursive area and the narrative processes of legitimising the power that was taken over. The identification of elements of continuity, as well as those of consolidating one’s own image, will express Nicolae Ceaușescu’s personalistic tendencies, in contrast to the initial collective leadership that was implemented. At the state level, the relationship between the leadership and the administrative-institutional sphere will be investigated. Although certain political realities since Dej’s time had articulated a distancing from Moscow, Nicolae Ceaușescu will transform, at the discursive level, this distancing into an opportunity to express sovereignty, decision-making autonomy, and the necessary reorganisation. Although these elements indicate a transformative trend at the leadership level, they will bring to the fore the materialisation of indigenous communism, ideal for strengthening relations between the leadership and society (by valuing aspects related to national identity). The last operationalised level, the social one, capitalises on the connection between the economy, standard of living, and unity, all

in a discursive manner. Ceaușescu's rhetoric about the portrait of the "new man," unity, and cohesion will indicate the relationship established by the leader between emotions, confirmation of identity, and fulfillment of the communist vision.

The first section deals with the theoretical framework of the paper, focusing on defining concepts and outlining the main analytical dimensions. The second part highlights the methodological elements, from the case study argumentation to the analysis method used (deductive thematic analysis). The analysis part operationalises the categories of analysis, with an emphasis on the metamorphoses assumed by the new leadership at the state, party, and society levels.

2. Literature review

Romania, like many other communist states, underwent a period of sweeping changes in all aspects of social life during the 20th century. These transformations were not limited to this area alone, as citizens' personal lives were directly impacted by the control that the state exercised over its population. This section aims to provide a theoretical framework for analysing communist leadership and the transformations that took place after 1965. We will systematically define the key concepts (political leadership, personalist leader, communism, and political discourse) and then review the specialised literature on this subject. The analytical framework outlines the main dimensions that will be analysed.

2.1. Political leadership

Political leadership is a type of leadership that, as the name suggests, is reflected in the public sphere, where citizens' interests converge with development initiatives. Unlike the organisational sphere, political parties have the mission of translating social issues into implementation initiatives, into policies that improve living standards. Whether we are talking about sectoral positions or those that affect the entire population, policies are a mechanism that parties use to attract voters and highlight their commitments. Complementing these efforts, narratives from representatives highlight the shortcomings of those in opposition, ensuring the premises of a democratic state. A multi-party system is a basic prerequisite for the existence of a democratic state, in which freedom of association is guaranteed (legislatively and empirically). History shows us that these characteristics were only theoretical aspects for totalitarian regimes, for those leaders who concentrated power around their charismatic personalities. For this reason, this section aims to briefly discuss several approaches to political leadership, with a focus on examples of totalitarian regimes.

Leadership and leader are two terms often used interchangeably in everyday language. However, the difference lies in how the leadership function or role is exercised. While the status of leader refers to a position of power, the sphere of leadership involves certain sectoral skills, behaviours, and relationships with followers, as well as tools for scaling performance. Leadership also refers to the ability of individuals to engage trusted teams around them, people who contribute to the achievement of objectives. Some researchers consider the 20th century to be a prolific one for leadership studies (Seligman, 1950), especially due to the vast examples identified in international politics. Leaders such as Churchill, Stalin, Hitler, and Nicolae Ceaușescu have shaped societies' views on what leadership represents, but also its major impact on shaping private life.

Political leadership in totalitarian regimes is characterised by a mix of traits designed to maintain power in its entirety. Thus, the process of excessive consolidation of power around a single person or a small group generates an inevitable tendency within this structure to defend and protect itself against the intrusion of disruptive elements. Due to the major impact, they have had on society, totalitarian leaders have received increased attention, especially from historians, anthropologists, and political scientists. The theorist Hannah Arendt even developed a special theory about this type of leadership, evaluating both the indispensable hierarchies within totalitarian regimes and the role of societies in legitimising them (Baehr and Walsh, 2017). She believes that “Without the masses, “the Leader is a nonentity” (...), an aspect that is evident in apathetic societies that have surrendered their civic responsibilities to a feeling of powerlessness (Arendt, cited in Baehr and Walsh, 2017, p. 222).

The personification of leadership in communist states is equivalent to great names that have shaped history, both through their accounts and through the reinterpretation of past truths. Actions taken in areas of major relevance to politics (economy, education, leisure) have strengthened leadership positions and increased control over those who could challenge authority. Because the main goal of this paper is to analyse the changes brought about by Ceaușescu's leadership in 1965, by the term “leadership” we refer to: “(...) the attitudes, role perceptions, values, behaviours, and intergroup interactions so important to political management.” (Welsh, 1976, p. 164). Some of these elements can be analysed through press articles, as well as specialised literature on the subject.

Political leadership in communist states can be defined as a leadership position that systematically concentrates power by removing political opponents and controlling society. Being the centre of attention, the communist leader manages to monopolize decision-making functions within the state, as well as the process of ideological identification at the elite and societal levels. In the specialised literature, there are reference styles that explain how a leader relates to his followers. The best-known models are found in the writings of Burns and Bass, who analyse transformational and transactional leadership (Jensen *et al.*, 2019). Relying on “inspiring efforts” to achieve goals, but also on developing skills (Jensen *et al.*, 2019), transformational leaders aim to create a climate of performance without pressuring their followers. At the opposite end of the spectrum, transactional leaders focus on positive and negative sanctions (financial and non-financial) applied to followers who meet or fail to meet certain requirements (Jensen *et al.*, 2019). An initial tendency to classify communist leadership can be represented using the transactional category. Common attributes can also be seen in the behaviour of the Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, around the delegation of powers and control over them. However, the applicability of leadership styles in former communist states is not limited to the paradigms mentioned above. Leaders such as Stalin, Lenin, and Nicolae Ceaușescu can be classified as what experts refer to as “the dark side of leadership” (Luthans, Peterson and Ibrayeva, 1998, p. 187).

Abusive through their control of social life, totalitarian versions of leadership subscribe to a particular dynamic, in which leadership is focused on “self-interest/self enhancement” (Luthans, Peterson and Ibrayeva, 1998) rather than national interests. In the study *The Potential for the “Dark Side” of Leadership in Post-Communist Countries*, we find a series of characteristics that help us decipher the relationship between communist leadership and society, the administrative apparatus, and power. In the table below, we have systematised the traits by categories of interaction to familiarise the reader with the mechanisms and methods of control.

One of the issues that emerges in the literature on “dark leadership” is its long-term impact on society. An example of this is widespread in Russia. Although evidence of the purges carried out on Stalin’s orders has been brought to the public’s attention, the leader still represents a benchmark of leadership for many Russian citizens (Luthans, Peterson and Ibrayeva, 1998).

Tributes or nostalgia for periods of totalitarian rule do not indicate an absolute relationship with leadership. Childhood or adolescence spent under such a regime, without points of comparison, can shape perceptions of apparent stability. Communist leaders, in their desire to maximise their power, resorted to both social control and the creation of illusions of prosperity. The lack of access to information from democratic sources contributed massively to the transformation of an immediate reality into a way of life.

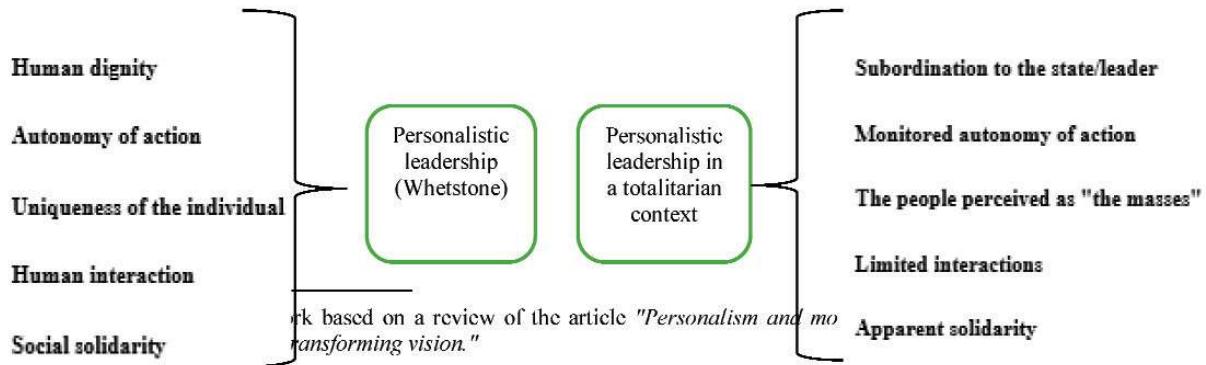
2.2. The personalist leader

Group sociology shows us different ways that communities, societies, or other organised structures pick a leader to represent them. However, this choice is often directly influenced by the prominence of a particular personality, by a process of recognition. The ability to easily engage people, extraordinary rhetorical skills, or even assuming the role of a “saviour” are all elements that can shape the delegation of representation rights. Personalist leadership is a combination of all these aspects, but *it takes different forms from one political regime to another*. Kostadinova and Levitt define personalism in terms of promises and favourable contexts:

Personalism is sometimes, but not always, marked by charismatic appeal, or by populist promises for prosperity in times of crisis, or by anticorruption pledges on the part of a leader claiming a higher moral authority.(Kostadinova and Levitt, 2014, pp. 483–484)

Personalism can also be identified as a trend within democracies, at the level of political parties that express populist views. Returning to the context of totalitarian regimes, personalism is associated with contrasting views in the specialist literature. On the one hand, authoritarian regimes, which revolve around the leader, can provide the most striking examples of personalism. In totalitarian contexts, this personalism can be operationalised at the level of tendencies, with examples of personality cults frequently exposed in studies.

Personalism and the personalist leader do not benefit from unified views in the specialised literature. However, both theory and practice revolve around individuals and the personal relationships they engage in (Whetstone, 2002). In this study, the personalist leader is configured in terms of characteristics through the vision portrayed by Whetstone. The author generates a list of traits by appealing to fundamental themes such as “(...) centrality of the person, subjectivity and autonomy, human dignity, the person within community, and participation and solidarity” (Gronbacher cited in Whetstone, 2002, p. 386). In summary, the personalist leader relies on the importance of human dignity, decision-making autonomy, the evolutionary role of interaction, but also on solidarity (Whetstone, 2002). The metamorphoses of meaning and context are essential in explaining the personalist leader in a totalitarian environment. The attributes are either transformed by attributing an absolute meaning to them or contested at the action level. By totalitarian personalist leaders, we mean a centrality of the leader as a person, social subordination to the leader and the state, and a mass vision, not one that values the individual. For better clarity in the research approach, Fig. 1 below illustrates the differences between the personalist leader described in the literature and totalitarian political leadership.

Figure 1. The personalistic leader in contrasting contexts¹

The literature on leadership presents contrasting characteristics regarding this typology depending on the political climate and field of reference. Although Whetstone's approach values the personalist leader as one focused on human dignity and the value of the individual within society, the historical realities of the 20th century transformed this model of leadership. The orientation towards building a cult of personality, the emphasis on controlling the masses, and the implementation of a limiting mindset have all directed the meaning of personalism towards control, monopoly of power, and centralisation.

2.3. Romanian Communism

Communism in Romania represents a historical period that is often mentioned in public discourse, specialised literature, and the international press. The reverberations of this period are systematically identified in the analysis of collective memory, from the regime's impact on private life to prison experiences, interactions with the Securitate, or reporting to centralized economic applications. As a summary term, Romanian communism can be explained as the period of implementation of the relevant ideology in Romania, with some differences from similar experiences of other state actors.

Vladimir Tismăneanu defines the term in a political-philosophical sense as follows: "Romanian communism was a subspecies of Bolshevik radicalism, itself born as a result of the engagement between the Russian revolutionary tradition and the voluntarist version of Marxism." (Tismaneanu, 2005, p. 3). The periodisation of communism in Romania is carried out (by a significant number of historians) in tandem with the leaders at the helm of the party: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu. The year 1965 is considered in historiography to be a moment of metamorphosis for the state and society. Distancing itself from Moscow was one of the key processes in this regard, with a direct impact on social life. The distancing process was built progressively, starting in the 1950s, with the establishment of a "national" path to communism (Irimie, 2014). The statement on the position of the Romanian Workers' Party on issues related to the international communist and workers' movement, adopted by the enlarged plenary session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party in April 1964, highlighted, even during Dej's time, a progressively more autonomous position of the Romanian leadership vis-à-vis international dynamics (Iacob, 2011). The importance of this attitude was not overlooked in the press and literature of the time. Some authors noted that, in

addition to its original approach to interaction between communist states, the Declaration on the Position of the Romanian Workers' Party also addressed the subject of the CAER and, implicitly, the application of the principles of equality and mutual advantage among members (Jowitt, 2021).

Romanian communism is more than just a totalitarian regime that evolved under the banner of national particularities. The impact of the leader and the single party on society was imminent and inexorable. Depending on personal experiences, collective memory presents schisms of vision. While the feeling of nostalgia mentioned at the beginning of this article is constantly brought to the fore, for other social segments, the communist period is equivalent to loss of life, deprivation, uncertainty, and absolute fear. In tandem with this latter view, some scientific contributions note:

Romanian people saw communism as a way of life, for some it was their archenemy, for others it is still that enormous force that have passed through Romania and affected their relatives, their models, their principles. (Irimie, 2014, p. 267)

By summarising the definitional approaches, Romanian communism represents in this paper a distinct historical period in Romania's evolution. It brings to the fore two types of leadership with varying characteristics: Soviet influence in the Dej regime and Nicolae Ceaușescu's personalism.

2.4. Political discourse

Both national and international politics impact individuals' lives. The sharp increase in interdependencies, the effects of globalisation, and the media coverage of messages propagated through technology all characterise the current environment for a significant number of cultural areas. However, communication (and political communication) has not always been characterised by such openness and transparency. The most telling example is the communist period and the methods used by the single party to convey messages to the people. Control over the press, radio, and television allowed for careful filtering of realities and, implicitly, their shaping.

Given the qualitative nature of the data collected for this paper (political speeches reported in the press at the time), we consider it useful to define the relevant concept. By "political discourse," we do not refer only to the result of communication by a decision-maker, but to the intersection between two disciplines that evaluate the implications differently: linguistics and political science (Kampf, 2015). Kampf proposes a working definition for the concept, encompassing a link between the context of communication, the subject, and the nature of the sender:

"(...) talk and text produced in regard to concrete political issues (language in politics) or through the actual language use of institutional political actors, even in discussions of non-political issues (language of politicians)." (Kampf, 2015, p. 1)

Political discourse can take many forms and have many meanings. Among these, we find the actual meaning (discourse) but also "(...) an analysis of political discourse as simply an example discourse type, without explicit reference to political content or political context." (Wilson, 2015, p. 398).

The process of constructing a discourse requires in-depth expertise on the target audience. The recipients of the message must understand both the main message and the leader's posi-

tion by it. Furthermore, the status of the political leader shapes the legitimacy of the messages conveyed. In the case of totalitarian regimes, the political leader is also the head of state (one-party system), which implies a lack of debate or potential for comparison.

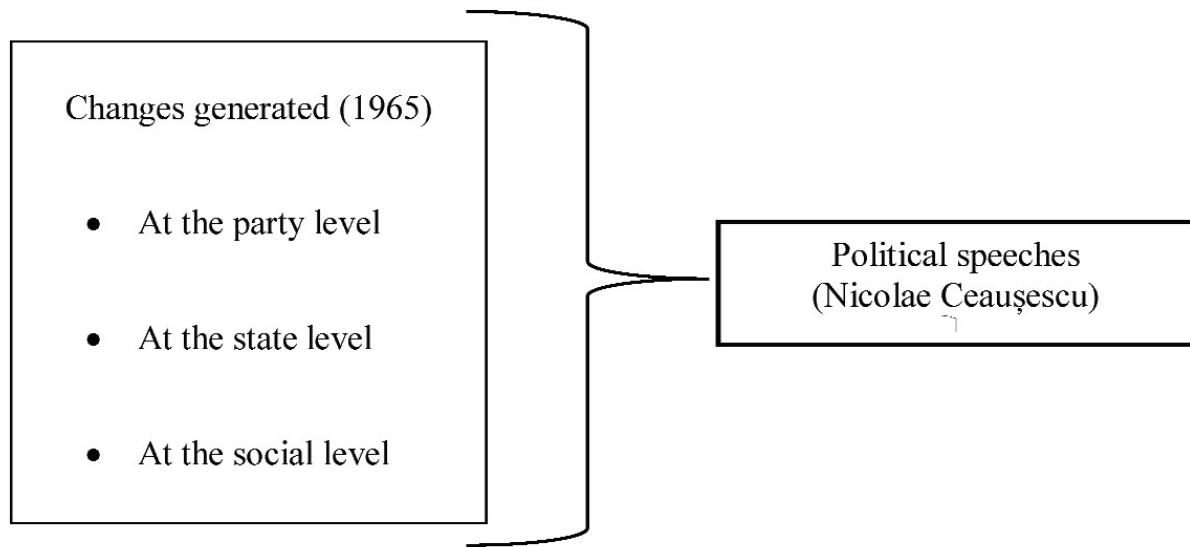
The communist totalitarian regime is associated with the social changes it brought about, from rewriting certain aspects of history to systematic violence against civilians. Although readers may not initially detect the existence of political discourse within these attested realities, a detailed analysis highlights the persistence and ideological motivation behind the actions. The subtlety of these ways of getting into people's lives shows how political talk was everywhere, spread by followers and institutions, all to keep the regime going. Political talk under communism was treated as a separate topic at the Soci School of Linguistics and Rhetoric (Vorozhbitova *et al.*, 2019). Because it presents and shapes a new worldview, this type of communication is defined as:

"The communist discourse perceived as a representation of a desired worldview is a heterogeneous phenomenon influencing the activities of the Socialist linguistic personality at different stages of its evolvement." (Vorozhbitova *et al.*, 2019, p. 742)

By combining motivations with the process of ideologization, political discourse during the communist period is a reference point for studies addressing totalitarian regimes or strategic communication within them. It is also a valid research tool for analysing personalistic leadership styles. In this paper, the political discourses analysed will be limited to the dynamics of 1965, as found in the *Scînteia* press. Through deductive coding of the specialised literature, the main analysis codes will be extracted to filter the corpus of texts. These codes highlight the frequency of certain discursive themes, as well as their actual role in the context of leadership change.

3. Analytical framework

Reviewing the literature and defining key concepts has allowed us to discover several aspects that characterise Romania's new leadership structure in 1965. In this paper, we will analyse the main features of leadership through Nicolae Ceaușescu's political speeches in the *Scînteia* newspaper. Furthermore, the implications of these changes on social life during the same time will be prioritized to identify the distance between the leader and the needs of the citizens. Fig. 2 outlines the analytical dimensions pursued in this paper, by the qualitative typology of the data collected.

Figure 2. Analytical framework of the paper²

In conclusion, this section of the article defined and outlined the boundaries of the research topic. By reviewing the literature, we have brought the nuances of interpretation to the forefront for readers. In the analytical framework, we have configured the main dimensions of analysis that will be operationalised in a separate section. The next part of the paper will present methodological elements that are useful in the processes of data collection and analysis.

4. Methodology

This section is dedicated to methodological aspects: case selection, data collection methods, and data analysis methods.

4.1. Case selection

The specialised literature addressing the selection of case studies indicates two types of approaches: the identification of a single case or several cases. In this paper, we focus on the leadership style of Nicolae Ceaușescu, essentially selecting a single case study. Although there will be some comparisons in terms of discourse and policies, the focus of the analysis remains on Ceaușescu's leadership, by the analytical dimensions mentioned in the section above. For clarity, we follow the definitional logic proposed by Gerring in defining a case study:

“Case connotes a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time. It comprises the type of phenomenon that an inference attempts to explain.” (Gerring, 2006, p. 19)

Case studies can be classified into several types: typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, crucial, path-dependent, most similar, or most different (for those works in which we find several case studies) (Gerring, 2006). The leadership analysis falls into the typical pattern when analysed within totalitarian regimes. As we concluded from reviewing the literature,

these regimes and their representative leaders generate a unique dynamic for everything related to values, behaviours, or policies. The classification within the sphere of personalistic leadership was also particularised in a specific sense, an element that draws attention to the conceptual metamorphoses involved in the analysis of a communist leader.

In summary, a representative (or typical) case study provides “(...) insight into a broader phenomenon, it must be representative of a broader set of cases.” (Gerring, 2006, p. 91). Specifically, in the example of this paper, the leadership proposed by Nicolae Ceaușescu is suggestive (in many characteristics) for other examples at the level of other state actors. Communist leaders share a common vision of what it means to build a cult of personality, systematically remove political opponents, and control the state, the party, and the personal lives of citizens. In some cases, we can also mention nationalism strategically used to increase social legitimacy.

The period chosen for analysis is 1965, representative of the transition of power and the progressive imposition of Nicolae Ceaușescu's personalist leadership. This study aims to highlight the metamorphoses involved in this change, but also its estimated impact on areas of major importance (party, state, and society). During the period mentioned, we can discuss a dual leadership, perceived as reformist for Romanian society. On the one hand, the prominence of leader Nicolae Ceaușescu is an essential element at the social level, to optimise post-Gheorghiu-Dej political stability. On the other hand, collective leadership generated a transformative perception for the political class, summed up by author Mary E. Fischer: “Collective leadership appeared to be a reality.” (Fischer, 2023, p. 70).

The study includes speeches given by leader Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1965, immediately after he took office as first secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party. These are systematically identified in the newspaper *Scînteia*, the main press organ in communist Romania. Access to the magazine issues was provided through the digital archive available on the *Ziarele Arcanum* website (<https://adt.arcanum.com/>) (*Scînteia, March 1965 (Anul 34, nr. 6545-6575) | Ziarele Arcanum*, no date).

4.2. Data collection method

The data collection process in this paper is carried out by selecting the political speeches of the leader Nicolae Ceaușescu during 1965. Their relevance is generated by identifying the favourite themes within the semantic structures: leadership metamorphoses and changes in multiple areas (party, state, society). The speeches are collected from the 1965 issues of the *Scînteia* newspaper. They reflect the leader's official positions on the themes, as well as on other topics of interest to the people.

4.3. Data analysis method

In this paper, the data analysis method used is deductive thematic analysis. The thematic term of the method describes a “(...) search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon.” (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). At the same time, the deductive principle indicates an initial orientation of the researcher towards the specialised literature to recognise patterns and categories, which he will use in filtering the collected data. While the themes are general within the study, the codes extracted from them indicate the specificity of a phenomenon. The code can be found in multiple

variants within the collected data, relying on the “(...) qualitative richness of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 83). To maximise the conceptual transparency of this scientific approach, we describe the process of selecting themes from the deductive thematic analysis as follows: identifying “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon.” (Boyatzis cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 83).

Interpreting data in qualitative processes is a real challenge for researchers’ subjectivity. Because more explanations are needed, clarifying and collecting data become overlapping actions to conclude (Alhojailan, 2012). Thematic analysis offers, as a method, the possibility of launching multiple interpretations of the data, both based on the data itself (inductive path) and based on the specialised literature (deductive path). Quantitative researchers’ criticism of this method stems from questioning the validity of the data and the filtering applied. However, this type of analysis leads us to an inherent mapping of the trends of a phenomenon. At the same time, it allows the identification of new trends based on information that is not explicitly relevant to a research path. For this reason, some authors note:

“Thematic Moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas. Codes developed for ideas or themes are then applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis, which may include comparing the relative frequencies of themes or topics within a data set, looking for code cooccurrence, or graphically displaying code relationships.” (Namey et al. cited in Alhojailan, 2012, p. 40)

To illustrate deductive thematic analysis, I will briefly analyse the political speeches of leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, found in 11 issues of the newspaper *Scînteia* (6569, 6579, 6613, 6623, 6624, 6638, 6647, 6648, 6651, 6654, 6658) (see table 1).

Table 1. Demonstrative example of theme coding³

Theme	Codes/ Subtopics	Sentences that match the codes	Newspaper number
Changes at the party level	Increase in membership	“(...) The Romanian Workers' Party (...) is a powerful political force, with over 1,400,000 members today, closely united around its Central Committee, indissolubly linked to the masses, loved and confidently followed by them, a party that combines the revolutionary fighting spirit of the working class with the progressive traditions of the Romanian people.”	Scînteia no. 6647/ June 12, 1965
	Organisational analysis	“Our Party has been strengthened through its uncompromising struggle against foreign ideas, opportunists, and factionalists.” “Over the years, the Party has trained and educated numerous cadres, devoted body and soul to the cause of socialism, combative communists, well prepared, capable of leading and organizing the masses, to skilfully carry out the tasks entrusted to them in all areas.”	Scînteia no. 6569/ March 25, 1965
Changes at the social level	Social homogenization	“Alongside the profound socio-economic transformations in our Republic, a new man is emerging, master of his destiny, consciously shaping his future, his history.” “Our Party – (...) – has proven itself to be a powerful force, whose policies are followed with boundless confidence by the entire people, and we are convinced that, under its leadership, the working people of our homeland will successfully fulfil the great tasks that lie ahead.”	Scînteia no. 6624/ May 20, 1965 Scînteia no. 6638/ June 3, 1965
	Economic measures	“The successes achieved in building a unified socialist economy and in the multilateral development of society have further strengthened the Party's ties with the broad masses of the people.”	Scînteia no. 6623/ May 19, 1965

5. Analysis – The Metamorphoses of 1965

The year 1965 is associated in the literature on communism in Romania as “(...) a milestone for the beginning of a new era, the ‘Ceaușescu Era’ or how it was called – the ‘Golden Age’ (Vătăman, 2018, p. 29). The metamorphoses initiated during this period were manifold, impacting both the party and the state (Vătăman, 2018), as well as society. In the following paragraphs, we will attempt to briefly address them in a three-dimensional analysis. The last section of the analysis will focus, in a comparative manner, on the structural differences and similarities between the two types of totalitarian leadership represented by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu.

5.1. Changes at party level

On March 20, 1965, the Romanian people received the news of the death of their leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. His funeral was scheduled for March 24 of the same year (moments of national mourning were organised in which citizens acknowledged the contribution of their late leader) (*Scînteia*, March 1965, no. 6545-6575) | *Newspapers Arcanum*, no date b). At the leadership level, March 1965 was a short transition period, with the party quickly mobilising to elect a new leader. After the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party (March 22) ended with the election of Nicolae Ceaușescu as first secretary, as well as other politicians to leadership positions (Chivu Stoica, Gheorghe Maurer) (Vătăman, 2018). The political dynamics of this context deserve a concrete view from readers to understand both the struggle for power within the party and the process of informing citizens through the *Scînteia* newspaper.

In the literature, the process of transferring power from one leader to another is referred to as the “Achilles’ heel” due to the lack of clear provisions or methodologies for selection (Fischer, 2023). Given this context, succession within a communist party is associated with numerous behind-the-scenes actions, some of which take place even before the need for a new leader is announced (Fischer, 2023). Obtaining support within the Political Bureau is complementary to the efforts made among “the Party apparatus, those full-time Party officials who oversee lower-level Party jobs as well as elections to the Party congress and Central Committee.” (Fischer, 2023, p. 67), Ceaușescu, like other communist leaders (Fischer, 2023), resorted to a systematic elimination of his opponents, a process that was not limited to the context of elections and internal negotiations. Another key factor in facilitating support for this leader was his opposition to the USSR’s policies, even if this was not explicitly stated. The clarity of this attitude became evident after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 (Fischer, 2023), when Romania refused to participate in the operation launched by the Warsaw Pact states.

In issue 6567 of the party newspaper dated March 23, 1965, Romanian citizens received news of the composition of the new leadership. Although the previous leader had not yet been buried (Vătăman, 2018), the communiqué from the plenary session marked a new political beginning which, as the newspaper reflected, would “steadfastly carry out the party’s policy.” March 24, 1965, was not only a major national event (the funeral of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej), but also an opportunity for the new leader to interact with the people and reassure them about the continuity and predictability of political action. The commemorative message delivered to the public by Nicolae Ceaușescu managed to combine the idolization of the greatness inherited from the previous leader with assurances of continuity. In issue 6569 of the newspaper *Scînteia*, Nicolae Ceaușescu’s speech attracts the attention of readers through the language used in the context of national mourning, alongside other speeches by politicians:

(...) Our party, deeply devoted to the principles of proletarian internationalism, perseveres in its struggle for the unity and cohesion of the countries of the world socialist system and the world communist movement – forces that exert an increasingly decisive influence on the evolution of contemporary society. (...) In accordance with the line set out in the April 1964 Declaration, drafted by the party led by Comrade Gheorghiu-Dej, Romania bases its international relations on the unshakeable principles of respect for independence and sovereignty, equality of peoples, mutual respect, and non-interference in internal affairs.

The excerpt from *Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu's speech* marks an overlap of messages sent to the people. On the one hand, it ensures the party's continuity in the political arena, by the principles outlined by the previous leadership. On the other hand, it highlights reporting in the sphere of foreign policy to state actors who share a common vision of socialism.

Although the messages conveyed publicly by the new leader ensured that the previously defined political line would be followed, changes were not long in coming. The Romanian Workers' Party Congress of July 1965 generated a series of changes, from renaming the party (to the Romanian Communist Party) to renumbering the congresses and changes in the organisational structure (Vătăman, 2018). Although these changes were motivated by social transformations and adaptability to new contexts (Vătăman, 2018), the new leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, imposed his vision on the sole political entity, reflecting a tendency toward a transformational style (even if not in the academic sense of the concept).

Another aspect of major impact on the party was the image of collective leadership and related responsibilities that marked 1965. At the Great National Assembly meeting on March 24, 1965, the (temporary) triumvirate of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Chivu Stoica and Ion Gheorghe Maurer (in the order mentioned) was defined (Fischer, 2023). Although Ceaușescu's election as party leader gave him legitimacy among the party apparatus and society in general, the existence of such a leadership generated a period of planning the concentration of power (Vătăman, 2018). Through his position as First Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceaușescu built loyalty among his followers and shaped the profile of those who represented an adversary to his leadership. At the same time, the policy of increasing the membership of new members in the PCR (Fischer, 2023) increased the political representativeness as well as the prestige of the single political party.

The collective leadership specific to the transition was characterised by the profiling of Ceaușescu's image “(...) as first among equals” (Fischer, 2023, p. 75). In addition to prudence and unanimity, the leader's prominence generated slightly differentiated views across the social and political spectrum. On the one hand, society's need for a leader was satisfied, eliminating fears of unpredictability and lack of representation. On the other hand, party members saw this collective leadership as a solid way of distributing power to curb potential excesses. To consolidate the status of collective leadership, Ceaușescu emphasised, at the 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, the continuity of “efficient control of state activity by the Party organs” (Fischer, 2023, p. 79).

At the discursive level, Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches, as reported in the *Scînteia* newspaper, covered a range of topics in 1965, from ensuring continuity to participating in public ceremonies. The leader's presence in the social sphere indicates both the process of establishing an unmediated connection with the people (which strengthens legitimacy) and the highlighting of his personality in the context of collective coordination. The portrayal of salvation (through his leadership, but also social reactions) is constantly recalled through references to external threats: “Our party has been strengthened in its uncompromising struggle against foreign ideas, opportunistic and factional elements.” This reference to external state and non-state actors implies multiple interpretations. On the one hand, it instils the idea of ideological interference that constantly threatens internal stability. The phrase “foreign ideas” has a broad coverage, from aspects related to cultural diversity that migrates (as an element of novelty) to implications of a political nature. It is widely known that totalitarian regimes exhibit partial cultural isolation. Although collective performances were used in what specialists' call “cul-

tural diplomacy,” frequent contacts with other cultures (from democratic spaces) were closely monitored.

On the other hand, the expression “opportunistic and factional elements” clearly delineates external intentions regarding Romanian society. These are perceived by the leader Ceaușescu, as factors that generate divisions, with a negative role in supporting the existing political elite.

In summary, the changes generated by Ceaușescu’s leadership at the party level are multiple, marking the need for change. Although in his initial speeches, Nicolae Ceaușescu ensured continuity, subsequent policies indicate a clear tendency to highlight his imprint. From an ideological point of view, the existence of external dangers that could distort the evolutionary path of the state and the party continued to be recognised. These were associated with the potential for altering indigenous values, focused on loyalty to the regime and its leader. The perceived devotion on the part of society articulated a logic of victimhood on the part of the communist leadership. To the detriment of forms of anti-communist resistance, the discursive emphasis is placed on a common struggle against all those who disrupt the socialist order and life.

5.2. Changes at the state level

The Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party had immediate effects on Romania’s legal and institutional framework. The 1965 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania indicated both a new name for the country and a “legal basis for the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu” (Vătăman, 2018, p. 29). This new framework led to the creation of a constitutional commission “(...) in the Grand National Assembly to check on the constitutionality of new laws” as well as a provision in the area of criminal procedural law: “a twenty-four-hour limit on the time that a citizen could be held without being charged; after that, a warrant would be necessary based on evidence of a crime” (Fischer, 2023, p. 74).

The changes brought about by the new leadership, as reflected in the 1965 Constitution, indicate an increasingly clear departure from the policies imposed by Moscow. Although the April 1964 Declaration emphasised a distancing that had begun during Gheorghiu-Dej’s time, the articulation of certain aspects paved the way for the personalistic leadership characteristic of totalitarian regimes.

The speeches collected and analysed confirm the frequent invocation of a synonymous relationship between the state and the party. This ambiguity is often found in historiography as well. Through the process of coding the specialised literature, we highlighted two main directions: external orientation and institutional review. The first dimension is evoked, at the rhetorical level, through the construction of the threat. The excerpt from the speech below confirms the tendency of totalitarian leaders to legitimise their actions by appealing to force, both in internal contexts (repression) and about state actors who do not share a “popular” vision:

“We must never forget that imperialism still exists in the world, and that is why we must take care, and we do so constantly, to strengthen the fighting power of our army and our country’s defense capabilities.”

The second dimension, institutional reform, refers to the constitutional project that renamed the state and formed new structures or departments. These transformations highlight both the vision of the new leader and the project of a communism with national characteristics. The increasingly visible distancing from Moscow allowed Romania to create a new model

of regime, in which the process of identification was not established through established elements (e.g., national identity), but through the construction of a new man who identified himself with the regime's goals.

5.3. Changes on a social level

Totalitarian regimes use violence to maintain detailed and systematic control over society. Individuals who publicly express preferences other than those representatives of the regime, political opponents, or those who demonstrate leadership abilities, even outside the political spectrum, are associated with threats to the supreme leader and the regime.

In addition to the above-mentioned aspects concerning political and institutional changes, 1965 also had a direct impact on the social and societal environment. One of these was the policy of increasing the number of new members in the PCR, a useful step towards ideologization in various strata of the population. The target groups for this stimulation were intellectuals and minorities. (Fischer, 2023). The argument stems both from their extensive capacity to interpret political actions and from the possibility of contrasting and collective positions towards the regime. To complete a landscape of relative liberalisation, scientific and cultural statements were marked by ambiguity (Fischer, 2023). This positioning created the idea of an environment more conducive to development, in tandem with the portrait of a leader more open to change.

Another issue that has impacted social life in Romania is suggested by the socialist economy and its intersection with the standard of living. The 1965 Constitution emphasizes "socialist ownership of the means of production" (Vătăman, 2018), an element that has generated numerous internal attitudes toward the party and the regime. Some specialist studies consider Romania to be a model of extreme restriction within the Eastern Bloc in terms of trade and business (Kirpalani, 2013). The contrast in this area highlights the imbalances between imports and exports:

"According to Department of Commerce analyses of Romanian trade, Romania has traditionally confined its purchases from the West to technology, installations, equipment, products, and raw materials necessary to carry out the directives of its five-year plans. Romanian export efforts in the West, on the other hand, were designed to earn the hard currency needed to pay for its imports and have traditionally been directed toward machinery and equipment, fuels and lubricants, chemicals, textiles, vegetable and meat products, wood products and lumber, clothing and footwear (Overseas Business Reports, Trading and Investing in Romania, September 1978, pp. 5-6, U.S. Department of Commerce)." (Kirpalani, 2013, p. 452)

Restrictions on imports of products from Western countries have multiple meanings for Romanian society. On the one hand, the nationalist nature of economic policies has built a collective identity in which national pride comes first, according to the leadership's perspective. On the other hand, such restrictions have led to Romania's cultural isolation from consumer goods (and not only), as well as to an increase in illegal activities related to their procurement and introduction into the country. Foreign products have gradually become an indicator of personal external relations, but also a major responsibility in terms of their possession.

The emphasis of Ceaușist narratives is often placed on the idea of collectivity and on how individuals can contribute, through integrated efforts, to the “achievement of socialist goals.” The rhetorical occasions on which Nicolae Ceaușescu portrays the importance of individuals (perceived as separate elements, not just as part of the collective) refer to the imminence of building a “new man.” This dual perspective, disproportionately operationalised in speeches, reflects two fundamental elements: encouraging citizens’ attachment to collective goals and building an identity harmonised with the values proposed by the communist leadership. Restructuring perceptions and empowering individuals remain a constant theme in Ceaușescu’s discourse. A relevant example can be found in Ceaușescu’s speech of May 19, 1965 (published in issue 6624 of *Scînteia* magazine):

“Alongside the profound socio-economic transformations in our Republic, a new man is emerging, master of his destiny, consciously shaping his future, his history.”

The new man, a concept inherent to communist ideology, a result of efforts mediated by political leaders and state institutions, represents a benchmark for Nicolae Ceaușescu. The emerging social change proposes, at the discursive level, a systematic transformation of the areas that impact social life, from literature and creativity to individual processes of awareness of reality. In the same speech mentioned above, Ceaușescu emphasises the important role of writers, who are given the responsibility of describing the aspirations of the political regime: “People of letters and art are the sons of their times, active participants in the creation of the new world.”

Starting from the premise that “those who can go to the spring should not go to the jug” (Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Scînteia* magazine, no. 6650, June 15, 1965), he propagates the idea of maximising potential through his speeches. The main motivation, besides the effective contribution to the development of the nation, is suggested by the exploitation of its own resources, a veritable tool for putting into practice the logic of the party and the centralised economic plan.

With a clear transformative tendency at the level of logos, Nicolae Ceaușescu describes society in terms of evolution, remodelling, and consciousness. Through such rhetorical elements, the leader legitimises both his leadership skills and the collective efforts devoted to the homeland, the party, and the leader.

5.4. Totalitarian leadership in Romania: contrasts and similarities

Although they operationalised, to varying degrees, relations of distancing from the Soviet Union, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu configured distinct types of leadership. The differences can be highlighted by comparing Dej’s activity since taking power and the discursive implications formulated by Ceaușescu in the reference year 1965. The plans reflect both the manner of imposing authority (towards the internal environment) and the external positions of interaction with other state actors in the communist bloc.

In the specialised literature, Gheorghiu-Dej is portrayed as a communist leader who exacerbated systemic violence against Romanian society during his term in office. Called by some a “mass murderer” (Țăranu, undated, p. 1), this leader implemented a coercive regime in which institutionalised violence was an effective means of controlling the population, opponents, and external monitoring forces. More associated with a transactional style (loyalty to the regime and the party was rewarded with advancement in the nomenclature), Dej showed an appetite

for control, monopoly, and concentration of power. Although these constants can also be found later in Ceaușescu's case, until 1965, these premises for action were transposed through successive bureaucratisation, internal order and subordinate institutions in various fields. Unlike Ceaușescu, Dej's political communication was subordinate to ideological aspects and marked by rigidity. In his case, the emphasis is placed more on organisational elements than on the effective transmission of messages to society. Ceaușescu's speeches, also analysed in this paper, succeed in conveying to the public the idea of belonging and contribution, as well as emphasising the active role of communities in achieving political objectives.

In summary, the leadership of communist leaders in 20th-century Romania marks a clear discrepancy in terms of typologies. In addition to the distinct stages of leadership that deepen the questions of legitimacy in different ways, the two leaders relate differently to society, the party, and the state. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej focuses his activity on centralised control over power, in which the leader is perceived as the supreme entity maintaining a monopoly on violence. Without renouncing coercive instruments, Ceaușescu outlines a personalistic, transformational leadership through the prism of the changes generated (argued by appealing to necessity). The profound transformations at the leadership level, marked by paradigm shifts and differentiations, are reflected in the sequence of events in 1935, the focal point of analysis in this paper. The transition from a rigid authority, with a technical discourse that was difficult for the public to understand on an ideological level (Gheorghiu-Dej), to a leader who capitalised on aspects of identity in a remarkable personalistic manner (Ceaușescu), highlights the visible difference in the communist leadership's relationship with the proletariat and the party apparatus. At the same time, institutional metamorphoses suggest a condensation, in Ceaușescu's vision, of the ideals of decision-making autonomy (vis-à-vis the Moscow regime).

6. Conclusion

The paper sought to explain the metamorphoses of 1965 at the leadership level in Romania by analysing Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches in the *Scînteia* newspaper. Forty speeches by the political leader were used to reflect the narratives from analytical angles: changes at the party, state, and society levels. The data collected reflects a negative, even deficient, view of the external environment (portrayed by both state actors and democratic societies), an argumentative process that provides motivations for the changes in transition.

Another result indicates the prominence of leader Ceaușescu in the ruling "triumvirate." This collective leadership is insufficiently addressed in specialised studies, with the primary focus being placed on the process of personification and removal of political opponents, and less on the feasibility of shared power. The findings generated by the analysis highlight the existence of concentrated power, which guides changes in all the axes of interpretation. Whether we are talking about the administrative apparatus, the supporters of the Communist Party, or society, Nicolae Ceaușescu represents a personalist leader (in the sense of a totalitarian regime, as we concluded by reviewing the literature), focused on the cult of personality, as well as on the prominence of his international endeavours. Although he viewed imperialist threats with concern for his leadership, Ceaușescu gradually distanced himself from Moscow, strengthening internal and external decision-making autonomy.

The limitations of the research lie in the fact that some metamorphoses need to be viewed as a whole, throughout their entire period of development, and not just at the beginning. As fu-

ture directions for analysis, the time frame can be extended to gain a deeper understanding of the political dynamics and how communist leadership was built over time.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the author

Mălina-Maria RÎNDAŞU is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of International Relations and Security Studies at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Her research interests lie at the intersection of populism, political leadership, and strategic communication, with a particular focus on how political narratives shape public perceptions and voting behaviour. Employing qualitative methods, her work investigates the role of political discourse in contemporary political dynamics, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.

Notes

¹ Source: Author's work based on a review of the article "Personalism and moral leadership: the servant leader with a transforming vision."

² Source: Author's work.

³ Source: Author's elaboration based on collected data (translation from Romanian).

References

Alhojailan, M.I. (2012) 'Thematic analysis: a critical review of its process and evaluation', in. *WEI international European academic conference proceedings, Zagreb, Croatia*, Citeseer.

Baehr, P. and Walsh, P. (eds) (2017) *The Anthem companion to Hannah Arendt*. London, UK New York, NY: Anthem Press (Anthem companions to sociology, 1).

Fereday, J. and Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006) 'Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), pp. 80–92.

Fischer, M.E. (2023) *Nicolae Ceausescu: A Study in Political Leadership*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Gerring, J. (2006) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Leiden: Cambridge University Press.

Iacob, B.C. (2011) 'Defining the Nation: History, Identity, and Communism in Romania (1964-1966)', *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai-Historia*, 56(2), pp. 1–31.

Irimie, R.C. (2014) 'Everyday life under communism. The case of Romania', *SEA—Practical Application of Science*, 2(03), pp. 266–283.

Jensen, U.T. et al. (2019) 'Conceptualizing and Measuring Transformational and Transactional Leadership', *Administration & Society*, 51(1), pp. 3–33.

Jowitt, K. (2021) *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kampf, Z. (2015) 'Political discourse analysis', *The international encyclopedia of language and social interaction*, pp. 1–17.

Kirpalani, V.H. (ed.) (2013) *International business handbook*. London: Routledge (Routledge library editions. International business, v. 23).

Kostadinova, T. and Levitt, B. (2014) 'Introduction to the Symposium: New Research on Personalist Leadership', *Politics & Policy*, 42(4), pp. 483–48.

Luthans, F., Peterson, S.J. and Ibrayeva, E. (1998) ‘The potential for the “dark side” of leadership in post communist countries’, *Journal of World Business*, 33(2), pp. 185–201.

Scânteia 1944-1989 | Ziarele Arcanum (no date). Available at: <https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/collection/Scinteia/?decade=1960>.

Scînteia, martie 1965 (Anul 34, nr. 6545-6575) | Ziarele Arcanum (no date a). Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/view/Scinteia_1965_03/?pg=92&layout=s.

Scînteia, martie 1965 (Anul 34, nr. 6545-6575) | Ziarele Arcanum (no date b). Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/view/Scinteia_1965_03/?pg=92&layout=l.

Seligman, L.G. (1950) ‘The Study of Political Leadership’, *American Political Science Review*, 44(4), pp. 904–915. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1951291>.

Tismaneanu, V. (2005) *Stalinism pentru eternitate: o istorie politică a comunismului românesc*. Iași: Polirom.

Țăranu, Liviu. n.d. ‘Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej În Istoriografia Actuală. Ce i Se Impută, Ce i Se Recunoaște’ published in “*Dosarele Istoriei*” (History Files), no. 7/2005, pp. 19-26.

Vătăman, D. (2018) ‘Romania during Ceausescu’s dictatorship: first period in power (1965–1971)’, *Romanian Journal of Historical Studies*, 1(1), pp. 29–38.

Vorozhbitova, A.A. et al. (2019) ‘Discourse of Communism and Socialist linguistic personality: Rhetorical perspective’, *Amazonia Investiga*, 8(23), pp. 739–748.

Welsh, W.A. (1976) ‘Elites and leadership in communist systems: Some new perspectives’, *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 9(1–2), pp. 162–186.

Whetstone, J.T. (2002) ‘Personalism and moral leadership: the servant leader with a transforming vision’, *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 11(4), pp. 385–392.

Wilson, J. (2015) ‘Political Discourse’, in D. Tannen, H.E. Hamilton, and D. Schiffri (eds) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. 1st edn. Wiley, pp. 775–794.