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Johanna Granville. "Hungary, 101: Seven Ways to Avoid a Revolution and Soviet Invasion of Romania." *Cold War History* 10:1 (February 2010): 81-106.

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Review by **Stefano Bottoni**, University of Bologna

The 1956 Hungarian revolution had an outstanding impact on the internal dynamics of the communist system of neighbouring Romania. The unforeseen and dramatic collapse of all main Hungarian power agencies alarmed the Bucharest party leadership. The first party secretary Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej put the army, the intelligence and the diplomatic corps on highest alert. Hungarian-speaking cadres Valter Roman and Aurel Mălnășan were also sent to Budapest with the task to gather insider information on the ongoing events. The two envoys' account, given to the party's Central Committee upon their return, played a major role in Bucharest's response to the unpleasant challenge of anticommunist revolution in a neighbouring country. Since 1956, well before Nicolae Ceaușescu's seizure of power in 1965, the official party line asserted the struggle for economic independence, the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation army and an increasing effort to "nationalize" the country by limiting the cultural rights of its most sizeable ethnic minority, the Hungarian one. The Romanian harsh reaction to 1956 also offers an excellent starting point for a more general discussion on the opportunities and limits of a policy of relative autonomy within the Soviet bloc.

Since the crucial relationship between ideological intolerance, massive judiciary repression and restrictive minority policies has been neglected by scholars,¹ Johanna Granville's research on the long-term consequences of the Hungarian revolution is

¹ The first documentary collection was published as late as 1996 (C.M. Lungu–M. Retegan eds., 1956. *Explozia. Percepții române, iugoslave și sovietice asupra evenimentelor din Polonia și Ungaria* (București: Univers enciclopedic, 1996) and was followed by first-hand accounts such as Ioana Boca, 1956. *Un an de ruptură* (București: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001); A. Andreescu - L. Nastasă - A. Varga eds., *Maghiarii din România (1956-1968)* Cluj-Napoca: CRDE, 2003); Michaela Sitariu, *Oaza de libertate. Timișoara, 30 octombrie 1956* (Iași: Polirom, 2004).

welcomed as a major achievement.² However, the final result of this effort is not entirely convincing. Granville argues that the Romanian communist leadership benefited greatly from the 1956 crisis for the following reasons: 1) it succeeded in preventing or repressing at an early stage any internal unrest; 2) it showed maximum loyalty to the USSR in order to allay Soviet suspicions about the occurrence of what Mark Kramer calls the “spillover effect”; and 3) it taught Gheorghiu-Dej and his followers how to rule the country and loosen the Soviet guardianship. According to Granville, the “seven lessons” learned by the Romanian communists were to avoid isolation from the masses by creating new party units, to close ranks and prevent the formation of factions, to stop rehabilitations and curb free speech, to maintain tight control over the press, to take military precautions, to make some economic concessions in order to strengthen popular loyalty, and last but not least, to perform both during and after the Hungarian crisis as an independent actor rather than as a mere Soviet puppet.

Granville’s article includes some valuable and stimulating points that merit special attention. Although most contemporary Western analysts dismissed the Romanian communist regime as unpopular, Gheorghiu-Dej massively relied upon the support of ordinary citizens, particularly industrial workers. His calculation proved quite correct: the widespread fear of territorial claims by the Hungarian “counterrevolutionaries,” fuelled by party propaganda and the secret police, prevented any serious disturbance. Indeed, negative comments circulated among the population, yet unlike the ethnic Hungarians of Transylvania most ethnic Romanians reacted passively to the scattered news coming from neighbouring Hungary. Moreover, 1956 stimulated a wave of Romanian patriotism and the instinct towards self-defence. In this regard, a parallel can be drawn with the Romanian reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when Ceaușescu’s support for the Prague Spring transformed his image from a grey apparatchik into a national hero. Analysis of the political exploitation of the post-1956 challenges is a worthwhile endeavor, one that can surely help us locate the roots of Romania’s maverick, semi-independent policy during the Ceaușescu era.

However, the key issue is whether Romania’s increasingly nationalist course can be explained only by the “lessons learnt” by the Romanian communist leadership in 1956. Granville’s factually rich account at times falls short when it comes to a broader historical analysis on the impact of these events. Relying on reports drawn by the party apparatus

² Among the studies Johanna Granville has recently published on this subject, one should mention “Dej-a-Vu: Early Roots of Romania’s Independence,” *East European Quarterly*, vol. XLII, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 365-404; “Temporary Triumph in Timișoara: Unrest among Romanian Students in 1956,” *History*, Vol. 93, issue 309 (January 2008): 69-93; “Forewarned is Forearmed: How the Hungarian Crisis of 1956 Helped the Romanian Leadership,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 62, no. 4. (2010): 615-645.

and the internal intelligence service, Granville seems to accept as evidence the official explanation of post-1956 overreaction, namely that counterrevolutionary actions started by opponents of the Romanian communist regime endangered the regime's political stability. In fact, no mass actions or armed disturbances took place in Romania during the Hungarian revolt, not even in the most densely Hungarian-inhabited regions (a student rally held on October 30–31 in Timișoara was an exception, not the rule). Communism may have been unpopular among ordinary citizens, but most Romanians tolerated it as an immutable reality. Uncritical reference to archival documents can be also misleading, such as reports of popular voices on the imminent arrival of the “Americans.” The belief that the “free world” was going to rescue captive Eastern Europe was by no means peculiar to these troubled days. On the contrary, the US non-reaction to the Hungarian crisis put an end to this widespread system of illusory hopes. In addition, when seeking to explain the role 1956 played in Romanian political history, the author overlooks some of the more recent scholarly contributions³ to the topic and only touches upon the crucial issue of Imre Nagy's detention in the Romanian locality of Snagov.

The absolute dominance of historical nuances and overly-detailed description of events leads to a further shortcoming when Granville refers to post-1956 repression in Romania (p. 84) but fails to mention available statistical data on the massive wave of repression that led to the imprisonment of nearly thirty thousand across the country and the politically motivated jail sentences for tens of thousands of others. Moreover, Granville does not engage in the ongoing debate on the social sources of Stalinist power in Romania. According to Dragoș Petrescu, 1956 was an identity-shaping experience that deeply influenced the political culture of Romanian communism over the following decades. One could argue, however, following the brilliant analysis of Pavel Câmpeanu, that Gheorghiu-Dej and his followers did not need an external event to maintain their rigid internal policy, since Romania remained unaffected by de-Stalinisation after the Stalin's death in 1953 or after Khrushchev's “secret speech” at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union in 1956. It would be interesting to know the author's position on this issue, especially if we compare the Romanian reaction during the 1956 crisis to the Czechoslovak one in 1968. In southern Slovakia, where a sizeable Hungarian minority lived, strict security measures were taken in late October but no subsequent mass repression was carried out among ethnic Hungarians or potential opponents. Finally, some disappointing factual errors must be noted. János Kádár's visit to Romania took place in February 1958 and not 1959; Gheorghiu-Dej was not born in Dej but in Bârlad, and he only worked in Dej as a railwayman; and the intellectual Mihai Beniuc was not an ethnic Hungarian but a proud Romanian and influential president of the Writers' Association.

³ Zoltán Szász, „Romania and the 1956 Hungarian revolution” in L. Congdon, B. K. Király, K. Nagy (eds), *1956: The Hungarian revolution and War for Independence* (Boulder (CO): Atlantic Research and Publications, 2006), pp. 128-148; Dragoș Petrescu, „Fifty-Six as an identity shaping experience: The case of the Romanian communists” in Rainer-Somlai, *The 1956 revolution and the Soviet Bloc countries: Reaction and Repercussions* (Budapest, The Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution, 2007), pp. 48-68.

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