

**The fall of communism in the Spanish Press
(*Abc* and *La Vanguardia*, 1989-1990): Romania and Bulgaria**

José Manuel Azcona Pastor*

Juan-Francisco Torregrosa Carmona**

Este trabajo analiza el tratamiento periodístico que dispuso la prensa española de referencia a la caída del comunismo en dos países del Este de Europa: Bulgaria y Rumania. Se han recopilado más de un centenar de textos, tanto informativos como de opinión, publicados por los diarios *Abc* y *La Vanguardia* durante los años del final de la Guerra Fría 1989-1990. A partir de esta base documental, se considera la relevancia que tuvo la transición política hacia la democracia en estos países en el contexto de los cambios ocurridos en fechas cercanas anteriores y posteriores, con especial atención a la URSS y Alemania.

Palabras clave: Caída del comunismo, Perestroika, prensa española, Abc, La Vanguardia, 1989, 1990, Rumania, Bulgaria.

This work analyses the coverage given by the above-mentioned Spanish newspapers to the fall of communism in two Eastern European countries: Bulgaria and Romania. Over a hundred informative as well as opinion articles, published by the Abc and La Vanguardia newspapers during the end years of the Cold War 1989-1990, have been compiled. From this starting point, a look is taken at the relevance that the political transition to democracy had in these countries, within the context of the changes that took place immediately before or after this period, with special emphasis on the USSR and Germany.

Keywords: Fall of communism, Perestroika, Spanish press, Abc, La Vanguardia, 1989, 1990, Romania, Bulgaria.

Ce travail analyse la portée journalistique que la presse espagnole a fait de la chute du communisme dans deux pays de l'Europe de l'Est; la Bulgarie et la Roumanie. Nous avons recueilli plus d'une centaine de textes, soit informatifs soit d'opinion et qui ont été publiés par les journaux ABC et La Vanguardia pendant les années de la fin de la Guerre Froide 1989-1990. À partir de cette base documentaire, nous avons étudié l'importance que la transition politique a eue vers la démocratie dans ces pays-là et dans le contexte des changements survenus aux dates précédentes et postérieures, surtout en URSS et en Allemagne.

Mots-clés : Chute du communisme, Pérestroïka, presse espagnole, Abc, La Vanguardia, 1989, 1990, Roumanie, Bulgarie.

*Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. E-mail: josemanuel.azcona@urjc.es

**Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. E-mail: juanfrancisco.torregrosa@urjc.es

INTRODUCTION

The fall of communism in the Eastern European countries brought about a radical change in the political scene as regards not only the Old continent but also the whole world. 1989-1990 saw the profound changes that followed Gorbachev's perestroika in the USSR.

The changes reflected in the Spanish Press by way of the information provided, over twenty years later, constitute a source of information which serves amongst others, for comparison of the outlook and forecast contained in the said newspapers with what eventually occurred in the countries which no longer belonged to the Soviet bloc.

The present study aims at taking a look at the way in which the mentioned newspapers treated the revolutionary events in two of these countries: Romania and Bulgaria which had similarities and the main difference being that, in the case of the former, the violence sparked a bloodbath as compared to the general model of transition characterised by grave obstacles and tension but which was peaceful. The analysis of the news coverage as well as the opinion articles, published between 1989 and 1990 by two major Spanish papers will make it possible to check the degree of attention, the general tone and the most relevant issues. The Eastern media helped the Rumanian revolution as can be gathered from information provided by Agence France Presse (AFP) for Abc:

“The news agencies TASS, of the Soviet Union, MTI, of Hungary, BTA, of Bulgaria, ADN, of the Democratic Republic of Germany, CTK of Czechoslovakia and Tanjug of Yugoslavia are clearly against Nicolae Ceausescu's regime, providing detailed information on the first demonstrations against the Head of State and the Romanian

Communist Party following a demonstration in support of the dictator which ended up as a serious rebellion, finally crushed by the tanks”¹.

The vital role played by television in Bulgaria after the change is widely recognized, as well as in Romania in particular, by way of live broadcasts of the bloody event leading to Ceausescu’s fall from power. In line with most of the authors, we shall take a look at later, we believe that the said broadcasts contributed heavily to the creation of a collective awareness in the neighbouring country aimed at avoiding, at all costs, a repetition of the tragic events which devastated the country of the Carpathian Mountains.

1. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SOURCES²

The present research analyses the end of communism in Europe, without forgoing an informative look at how the Spanish press covered this period. Accordingly, as well as going over the most relevant scientific works, first class Spanish newspaper sources were consulted. Specifically, two papers with a wide circulation and with a reputation for quality were chosen. These were the *Abc*, founded in 1903 and *La Vanguardia* in 1881³. In both cases, they are flagship papers in Spain regarding free access to their entire library archives. The Catalan paper was also the first paper in Spain to make available provide fledgling

¹ *Abc*, December 25, 1989.

² This article is part of the research related to academic work being carried out by the authors and information acquired at the University of Bucharest and the University of Babes-Bolyai, of Cluj-Napoca (Romania 2010) and in the New Bulgarian University, in Sofia, and Veliko Tarnovo University (Bulgaria, 2011).

³ The two newspapers were family concerns, which was characteristic of the nineteenth century press and the outset of the twentieth century. The *Abc* was connected to the Luca de Tena family, while *La Vanguardia* was connected to the Godó family.

documentation services in 1920s. As sources for the present article, as part of the documentary methodology, 126 independent newspaper articles (65 from the *ABC* and 61 from *La Vanguardia*) published during 1989 and 1990 were analysed⁴. Of the total number, 97 are of an informative nature (articles, reports, interviews and others of a similar nature); while 29 are of an interpretative kind or clearly opinion articles (editorials and column articles).

2. FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE FALL OF THE SOCIALIST CAMP

The period of history of humanity from 1914 to 1945 was catastrophic. From 1945 to 1989 the world experienced the Cold War during which time until 1973, the western countries as well as the former communist and socialist republics enjoyed the greatest era of growth, welfare and standard of living. The 1973 oil crisis ushered in a period of uncertainty and changes that lasted until the end of the Cold War in 1989, while from 1990 until present-day economic globalisation of capitalist values lent political, international and personal relations on the entire planet a general bent. At that time, the developed world was immersed in a grave economic crisis that had begun in 2008.

Authors like Y. Vanden Berghe believe that the Cold War began with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, but many of those who have carried out research on this subject matter, place the outset at the end of the Second World War and specifically in May 1945. Senator Bernard Manes Baruch, the American financial and political advisor coined the term Cold War in 1947, although it was the American journalist Walter Lippman who made it popular. The terminology adopted by Baruch is the most pertinent, as normally war is the

⁴ Comments or support for a news item are not taken into account, since as it is well known they form part of the same item although they are dealt with differently from a illustrative and newspaper design point of view.

prolongation of politics and bad policies. The philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, claimed that war not only consists of battles, or in the fight in itself, but can also be considered to be a temporary parenthesis during which the willingness to go into combat is widely known. The fall of eastern Europe under Soviet control between 1945-48 gave rise to the coining of another term defining the division of the world by Winston Churchill, during a speech in Fulton (USA) when he said: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent".

The historical period referred to as the Cold War was not homogeneous nor did it consist of a single period. It had transversal axes, such as the structure of a rigid bipolar system in the USSR and the USA. (Churchill's iron curtain) which generated permanent tensions between both superpowers in the search for strategic balance. Pereira Castañares (1999) asks: "Does continuity exist between the «Cold War» and the 1989/1991 revolutionary cycle?" For this well-known authority on International Relations, "undoubtedly the Central-European break-up will result in the disappearance of the most prominent symbols of the international bipolar system which emerged in 1945: the *iron curtain*, the *Berlin Wall* and, finally, the *Cold War*. In fact, when on August 2, 1990, the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, decided to invade Kuwait, the tiny territory with a wealth of resources, thereby starting the Gulf War in a geo-strategic region vital to Western interests leading, in turn, to the greatest war mobilisation since the World War II led by the USA, and with the direct participation of the UN, mention was already being made of the *first post Cold War conflict*"⁵.

In recent years, as had occurred in other stages of history, the destinies of Romania and Bulgaria have run parallel since joining the European Union on January, 1 2007. Many

⁵ Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares. "Un siglo de cooperación y conflicto. Las relaciones internacionales desde la perspectiva del presente". *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 1999. Issue no. 21, 17-62.

of the economic and political problems that have beset the two countries have been common to both. However, the case of both nations shows that the transformation and change brought about by the eastern European countries in 1989-90 were not always of a homogeneous or symmetrical nature. It will be necessary to study Poland's special reality, Hungary's search to find its own path towards socialism or Czechoslovakia's renewed illusion for democracy in the latter months of 1989, twenty years after the frustrated "Prague Spring" of 1968⁶. As the journalist Felipe Sahagún maintains, "three objectives had ruled USSR relations with western Europe during the Cold War: maintain a glacis or defence belt in eastern Europe against the West, break the umbilical cord which had linked USA with western Europeans from 1945, and slow down, as far as was possible, the European Union project so that Europeans could not become a rival superpower in the future, including military-wise, on Eurasian terrain"⁷. Regarding the Balkans, on several occasions the area had been branded as "Europe's minefield", citing instances such as the terrorist attempt that set off the First World War or the problems of excluding nationalism⁸.

⁶ As regards the latter event and its coverage by the Spanish Press, refer to the article by Emilia Martos Contreras (2010): "La Primavera de Praga en la prensa franquista", in *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 65. La Laguna (Tenerife): Universidad de La Laguna, pages 410 to 420 retrieved on July 10, 2011 from http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art2/909_Almeria/31_Martos.html

DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-65-2010-909-410-420

⁷ Sahagún, Felipe. *Europa ante el siglo XXI*. Universidad de Granada, 1992, 18.

⁸ For information on the historical reality of several nationalist movements in Europe, see the work coordinated by Ramón Luis Acuña Cátedra UNESCO Chair entitled *Nacionalismos, Minorías y Culturales Transnacionales: La porfía de los nacionalismos*. Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1998. As Alejandro Muñoz-Alonso wrote in his

3. AMPLE HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS

The rise and fall of communism has been dealt with by numerous authors who we mention together with their subject matter, with the aim of serving as a guide for whoever may be interested in the subject matter of our research. This article does not constitute an exhaustive analysis or a typical historiographic debate. Nevertheless, we are aware of the bibliographical possibilities of this sphere: J. R. Adelman, G. Ackerman, I. Nedev (eastern Europe); A. Aganbegyan (Perestroika); W. Allensworth (nationalism, modernisation and post-communism in Russia); J. Ancel y P. Barte (the Balkan peoples and nations); V. A. Andrlé, A. Ashund (economic reforms in Russia); G. N. Atiyeh (eastern countries), as well as I. Banac. Other specialists of interest are the following: F. Barry y A. Tiraspolsky (the Hungarian economy); K. Bartak (risks of the Caucasus region); J. Baywall (Gorbachev's revolution); M. Beissinger and L. Hajda (nationalism in Eastern Europe), a geographical region also dealt with by I. T. Berend. As to L. Berghach and G. Zotti, they analyse regional ethnic problems, while R. Berton-Hogge and R. Crosnier works concern the disintegration of the USSR from the perspective of its decentralisation and its influence in the eastern countries. Along the same lines are T. Bideleux (the Balkan region), R. Blackburn, J. Blaha, E. Lhomel, T. Schreiber, H. Bogdan, O. Bogomolov, J. Boillot or R. Bouchoux on the GDR and the remaining socialist nations.

column "La nueva Europa" in *Abc* (November 26, 1990, 21) "it is not only in the Soviet Union, but also practically everywhere -especially in Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria y Czechoslovakia- where the problems of nationality and the minorities have a great capacity for sparking conflicts."

From the more economic slant, are the excellent results presented by R. Breton, J. P. Brisacier, J. F. Peretri-Watel, P. Brunot, A. Callinicos and I. Capagna. H. Carrere d'Encausse deals with the triumph of nationalities and the end of the Soviet empire and transition processes in eastern Europe. This has also been studied by Ricardo Martín de la Guardia and Guillermo Pérez, with the former focusing on the Hungarian revolution of 1956.

P. Casanova writes about the rebellion of the Baltic Republics and E. Champseix about Albania. Concerning opposition to real socialism, we may fall back on works by J. Chiama, J. F. Soulet, A. Chubarov, F. Claudin and S. F. Cohen. Specialized information on the Russian Federation can be obtained from M. A. Crosnier as well as F. G. Dreyfus, while M. Dowling focuses on Czechoslovakia, as do F. Festo and J. Rupnik, analysts of popular democracies.

B. Geremek and J. Lukowski present Poland's transition from communism to democracy. On the other hand, R. Girault, M. Ferro, P. Glotz, G. Goettle, J. C. Goldtarb, M. Goldman, C. González Enriquez, V. Gosset, V. Fedorovski, L. R. Graham, G. Grass, F. Gray, G. Grossman, T. Sustafson, D. Yergin and R. Hutchings analyse the collapse of the Soviet model and the satellite European countries falling within the boundaries USSR's economic failure. J. Gow y C. Casmichael address the Slovene case J. Gyorkei and M. Horvath that of Hungary. The very Mikhail Gorbachev's impressions in print or those of Vaclav Havel also serve our purposes. In 1985, Ch. Jelen wrote about what he defined as the voluntary blindness of the socialists in the face of the birth of the Soviet myth. An in-depth study of Baltic issues are dealt with by P. Joenniemi and P. Loret.

A viewpoint highlighting international relations is held by M. Kaldor, K. S. Karol, M. Kaser, J. Zidinsky, J. Keep, P. Kende, A. Smolar, P. Kenez, J. Kornai, M. Kossok, J. Kuron, M. Lavan, M. Lavigne, Y. Requin, J. Maillard, M. Lesage, F. Leshe, J. Leverque, M. Lewin, T. Scilreiber, M. Malia, T. H. Malleret, M. Delaporte and A. Matejko. As to the setting of the

Cold War, D. S. Mavon may be recommended while P. Loret and C. Stalvan analyse the Baltic revolts.

Specific transition models towards democracy can be found in the work of M. Myrant, F. Nicolás, H. Stark, M. Niqueux, C. Nootboom, J. Oloughilin, H. Wustfn, J. Parker, V. Partal, D. W. Paul, R. W. Penthbridge, G. Pérez Sánchez, H. Peyret, R. Pipes, Y. Plasseraud, R. Poch de Feliu, A. Politkovskaya, B. D. Porter, R. M. Rey, J. Rothschild and J. Sapir. The Hungarian transition is written about by L. Szekely, D. Newbery and T. Szende. Regarding transition in Albania, see work by M. Uckers. Carlos Taibo has written extensively about the disintegration of the USSR and the processes of change in eastern Europe. The conflicts in the Ukraine are brought to light in the works of A. Wilson y P. R. Magocsi.

The ravages of the secret services in the countries pertaining to the socialist camp have been treated by J. O. Koehler, R. Service, V. Shentalinski and A. Wood, and B. Guetta. Yugoslavian conflict and drama are given prominence in the work of B. Magas, S. K. Pavlowitch, A. Popovi, A. Rojo, D. Rusinov, C. Samary, C. Taibo and J. Lechado. For a more global historical perspective concerning end of the twentieth century refer to works by R. Pipes, E. Hobsbawn, R. Kagan, P. Watson, J. J. Bremer and G. Friedman. A more critical point of view vision regarding communism, can be found in work by S. Courtois, N. Werth, J. L. Panné, A. Paczkowski, K. Bartsek or J. L. Margolin.

4. THE ROMANIAN REVOLUTION

Historically speaking, Romania was a Latin island in the Balkans. Out of all the Eastern countries which set out, from Perestroika, on the road to democracy, Romania –with one of the lowest standards of living in the region- was the country to go through a violent transition. Popular mobilisation, on December 17, 1989, was suppressed by the “Securitate”.

The secret police of the communist government left a trail of terror in its wake thus bringing about the downfall, the trial and the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena Petrovna, on December 25. However, those harsh days during the Romanian winter did not serve to consolidate the liberalization process that was gradually taking root in a peaceful manner in other countries belonging to the Soviet sphere. The long isolation of Romania, its bids for independence internationally, its trajectory of economic failure, its interethnic conflicts –in particular in Transylvania between Hungarians and Romanians–, all constituted liabilities which appeared to make Romania singular. The lack of democratic culture, subdued violence and rise to power of Ion Iliescu, heir of the State apparatus and of the communist party, gave rise to fresh clashes between the people and the new “Securitate”. These confrontations gave the world cause for worry regarding fragile Romanian democracy in June 1990. In fact, the newspapers under study reflected the fear of a civil war felt by the European countries⁹. In 1989, the Romanian Communist Party re-elected Ceausescu as Secretary General in November. Around this time, members of the “Securitate” killed over forty people in Timisoara. This sparked a national uprising and on December 25, 1989 the dictator and his wife were shot by firing squad. The National Salvation Front (a group of political bodies of anticommunist ideology) appointed Ion Iliescu interim president of the country. In 1990, the NSF (National Salvation Front) outlawed the Romanian Communist Party making it illegal and, in February of the same year, it allowed business freedom where with a minimum of twenty workers to a company. With Iliescu as the nation’s president, after winning the elections, Petre Roman (whose mother was Spanish) was appointed prime minister. In 1991 privatization is introduced and the Romanian authorities permitted the sale of a third of the State concerns. At the end of the year, a new constitution provided wider

⁹ Abc, January 31, 1990.

powers for the presidency, guaranteed human rights and ethnic diversity and banned the death penalty and torture. In 1992 King Michael of Hohenzollern returned from exile to a tumultuous popular welcome. Iliescu won the elections again reminding the people that the country would never return to a monarchy, vetoed by a constitutional mandate¹⁰.

Ramón Luis Acuña affirms that, “internally, there was no sign of liberalization in socialist Romania, nor was any special consideration given to minorities. On the contrary, in Transylvania, for example, a massive “romanisation” took place, moving Romanians uprooted from other regions of the country, or who had arrived from abroad, from Moldavia for example. People belonging to the German minority, who had remained after the 1945 expulsions, were pushed to emigrate. Even better still, Western Germany, in need of this type of labour with a German culture, was charged ten thousand marks per every German Romanian. Due to this repressive and standardising attitude, it is not surprising that the 1989 rebellion –the trigger that turned the situation around- burst out in the Transylvanian city of Timisoara. When the police opened fire on the crowd on December 17, 1989 it did not only provoke the uprising of an entire city, but also the rebellion of an entire nation, fed up with a farcical dictatorship. As had occurred in many eastern nations, time had stood still in the country of the Carpathian Mountains for over forty years, from 1947, when Michael of Romania was forced to resign after elections won by the communists, and in which it was believed that partiality has been in play, until the pathetic summary trial which arbitrarily sentenced Ceausescu to a brutal and hasty death, in order to prevent a proper public trial with all its consequences from taking place. Time stood still then and it did not move forward especially where human rights were concerned and the rights of the minorities died out”¹¹.

¹⁰ See D. N. Nelson (ed.). *Romania after Tyranny*. Boulder, New York, 1992.

¹¹ Acuña, Ramón Luis. *Las tribus de Europa*. Ediciones B, Barcelona, 1993, 193.

The newspapers reported the dictator's statements where he acknowledges the fact that the only serious opposition to his government revolved around Michael of Romania, in exile in Switzerland¹². At the same time, Ceausescu, in an unusual move, which reveals his waning power, a few weeks before being overthrown admits to "failures and mistakes" in the Communist Party (CP) as well as within the Romania's State bodies¹³. For detailed information on Romania's political and social events, one may refer to academic works such as those by Silvia Marcu (2006, 2010). We highlight a full-page story in the international section of *Abc* entitled¹⁴: "A family business goes bankrupt. The Ceausescu family governed Romania like a private estate". The information, signed by the Documentation Service, includes support or excerpts with the country's basic time line from the Second World War up to the riots in Timisoara Square "suppressed with blood and shooting by the Army" on December 17, 1989. The introduction of that article is worth looking at:

"Head of State, of the CP, chairman of the National Board of Defence, chief commander of the Armed Forces, chairman of the Front for Democracy, of the Supreme Board of Economic and Social Development, of United Socialist Front, of the Academy of Social and Political Sciences, *hero of the Romanian Socialist Republic*, Ceausescu has heaped all the highest posts in Romania on himself and on members of his family".

The news item ends in the following manner:

"As in the rest of the eastern European countries, in Romania, all that was needed was a spark to bring about the fall of the regime. The flame that was lit in Timisoara

¹² *Abc*, December 16, 1989.

¹³ *La Vanguardia*, December 3, 1989.

¹⁴ *Abc*, December 3, 1989.

took three days to reach the capital and to spread to the other main cities. The tragic difference resided in the “madness” plaguing the dictator who dragged down thousands of innocent people during his fall. Ceausescu did not want to accept like Jaruzelski in Polonia, Kadar in Hungary, Honnecker in the GDR, Jakes in Czechoslovakia or Yivkov in Bulgaria, that the changes and the winds of reformation were unstoppable and although there may be scares and possible moving backward movements the communist situation in Europe was irreversible.”.

The battlefield that the streets of the main Romanian towns turned into were portrayed graphically in the following headlines:

“The army and the people fight side by side in the bloody battle of Bucharest” (“The number of possible victims estimated by the Hungarian Agency MTI, up to Saturday midday came to 12.000 people dead in the uprisings”)¹⁵.

“The new Romanian government orders a ceasefire” (“The Salvation Committee has taken measures to normalise the country and prevent civil armed groups of civilians prolonging civil war”)¹⁶.

“Gorbachev considers sending *medical or aid of a different kind*” (“Moscow denies military intervention”)¹⁷.

At the end of 1989 and at the beginning of 1990, the gradual return, fraught with difficulties, to a normal state of affairs in Romania, is reflected in the following news items:

“Iliescu, communist reformer, appointed new Head of State. Christian politicians and the Hungarian minority create two parties”¹⁸.

¹⁵ La Vanguardia, December 24, 1989.

¹⁶ La Vanguardia, December 25 and 26, 1989.

¹⁷ La Vanguardia, December 24, 1989.

¹⁸ La Vanguardia, December 27, 1989.

“Romania returns to normal and it receives the global backing of the world’s countries. Iliescu, satisfied with acknowledgement by Gorbachev”¹⁹.

“The Hungarian minority in Romania emerge”²⁰.

“Prime Minister Roman announces the desire on the part of Romania to join the EC in Paris.”²¹.

“ Opposing atomisation smoothens the way for Iliescu’s victory in Romania. Almost a hundred groups take part in Sunday’s elections.”²².

“Washington and the EC willing to help Romania. If Bucharest begins democratic reforms, the United States promises *substantial aid and backing*”²³.

Europe united at the moment is willing to help towards the consolidation of the transition of the Eastern countries. This is manifest in the international consensus reached for the rapid creation of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (ERBD). In order to achieve this, the twelve countries of the European Community (EC) contributed half of the founding capital for the financial institution set up specifically to help eastern Europe.²⁴ Likewise, the ministers of the 23 member countries of the European Council agreed in to

¹⁹ La Vanguardia, December 29, 1989.

²⁰ La Vanguardia, January 14, 1990.

²¹ La Vanguardia, February 18, 1990. This goal was met in 2007. The paper reported on a survey (March 11, 1990) according to which European businessmen would accept their eastern neighbours into the EC apart from USSR, Bulgaria and Romania. Spain was reported to view the process of economic opening up to Eastern European countries with some amount of scepticism and detachment.

²² La Vanguardia, May 18, 1990.

²³ La Vanguardia, December 23, 1989.

²⁴ La Vanguardia, January 17, 1990.

lend their democratic experience to the East, although the joining of the USSR in the body was controversial.²⁵ The *Abc* as well as *La Vanguardia* referred to 1989 as “the year of the East”. In a leading article under this title, the latter paper expresses the following opinion²⁶:

“The toppling and death of Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian “Conducator”, has brought an extraordinary year to a close in a dramatic manner for the peoples of eastern Europe. The accelerated collapse of the communist system throughout Moscow’s six allied member countries of the Warsaw Pact in 1989 has ended the turbulent era of East-West relations”.

According to the Catalan newspaper, the changes indicated hope in an imminent democratic future for the eastern countries leading to the creation of a new international climate, of a new era in East-West relations, as president Bush and Gorbachev expressed at the summit held in Malta at the time. The eighties ended on a note which was a radically different note from the one struck at the beginning, when the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the dispute regarding the euro-missiles plunged the world into another phase of the Cold War between the blocs. The paper considers that the reconstruction of the East presents several uncertainties, especially as it continued without having resolved the issue of the “master key” to the entire operation: the restructuring or “Perestroika” of the USSR. The “boost” given by Gorbachev to the change in the former satellite nations in 1989 was considered decisive, even though it is held that the climax of the process depended on the change within the Soviet Union and its becoming part of the international system. It must be

²⁵ *La Vanguardia*, March 25, 1990.

²⁶ *La Vanguardia*, December 30, 1989. The paper reported in a news item on January 23, 1990 that the dictator and his wife Elena died riddled with 120 gun shots.

borne in mind that all the unknown elements of the Soviet case, which still remain hidden, threaten to multiply the painful obstacles which the rest of the East must face up to²⁷.

The Madrid newspaper, reported that broadcast of the trial and death of the Ceausescus managed to disarm the ambushed snipers. It further stated that the couple had been buried in a cemetery on the outskirts of Bucharest, together with the rest of the numerous victims of the clashes at the end of December. The suppression of the military uprising resulted in, according to the Romanian National Salvation Front the death of 60,000 victims. The new Government of Iliescu put emergency decrees in place to overturn the most delirious political initiatives of the former regime. Among the first steps taken, was the ultimatum given to the members of the "Securitate", who had fled, to turn themselves in to the Army. There would be special tribunals in all the provinces to try the supporters of the "conducator". The press believed that harshness would reign and that many people would suffer the same fate as the dictator and his wife, a possibility that no Romanian appeared to find shocking, according to accounts which reflected the "dog's life" that the ordinary people had led until then. Meanwhile, the television screens mounted in public places broadcast, several times a day, the images of the fresh tragic events with crowds forming around them. Nevertheless, normalcy returned, confirmed by the fact that private and public cars returned to the streets of Romania, repairs were begun and broken windows replaced²⁸.

Other news reports focused on the unfair trial of the Ceausescus presided by anonymous judges, as broadcast by Romanian television. This decision can be attributed more to the Army than to the incipient civil power. The new Government admitted that it might have been a political mistake, although it claimed the proceedings were justified, this was done "out of necessity". On taking up his post, the prime minister, Petre Roman, stated

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Abc, December 1989.

that the “Securitate” was getting too close to where the dictator was being held and it was possible they might free him²⁹. With respect to the ethnic conflicts, after the first few months in the new government, fear among the Hungarians of Romanian Transylvania continued³⁰:

“Transylvania which was returned to Romania after the Second World War, continues to be the main *black spot* marring relations between Bucharest and Budapest, inhabited, like the latter, by six million Rumanians and two and a half million Hungarians”.

The ethnic minority condemned, and considered it a provocation, the fact for the first time in fifty years the Romanians had publicly commemorated the anniversary of the invasion and annexation of Transylvania and the later slaughter and deportation of intellectuals, Jews and Gypsies .

The Spanish press reported, a few weeks after tragic and bloody events, that on December 17, four days after his fall, Ceausescu resigned as leader of Communist Party. According to the article by la Vanguardia correspondent, Ricardo Estarriol, the dictator felt slighted when the Head of Defence refused to shoot the people. In fact, Ceausescu realized that the heads of the armed forces had not instructed the troops to open fire on the people in Timisoara. His resignation would undoubtedly have avoided bloodshed, but it was not accepted by the members of the executive committee of the Communist Party. Neither his wife Elena nor his most loyal collaborators allowed him to resign.³¹. Indeed, it was the much fearsome “Securitate” which opened fire against the demonstrators in Timisoara. This “secret and all-powerful police serving working in the interests of suppression” challenged

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Abc, August 31, 1990.

³¹ La Vanguardia, January 17, 1990.

the Romanian Army and the rebels. The police of the Communist Party, created immediately after the communists came to power in Romania, were both political and military:

“The two branches, military and civil, depend on the Ministry of Interior. The military branch have over 50,000 men, according to estimates provided by Romanian military men who had emigrated, and they were dressed in uniform and have considerable military equipment at their disposal: tanks, armoured cars and helicopters. These are the only armed units considered trustworthy by Nicolae Ceausescu, and who shot the demonstrators in Timisoara. The sophisticated weaponry available to the “Securitate” contrasts with the precarious state of the means at the disposal of the Romanian Army. The civil branch -the political secret police- which has a network of dozens of secret informants throughout the country, sees to actions abroad, as shown by its previous attempt in France against Paul Goma and Virgil Tanase, exiled Romanian writers. The “Securitate” arranges for spying mechanisms to be put in place, in addition to overseeing the suppression of the dissidents and conducting interrogations with a marked brutality, according to accounts from emigrants like Paul Goma”³².

The scope of the changes in the period and the countries under study is also evident in the didactic effort made by the papers to include graphs and timelines. An example is Abc’s article “Romania in figures”, dealing with the most relevant incidents in the country of the Carpathian mountains starting from the latter years of the Second World War.³³

³² La Vanguardia, December 24, 1990.

³³ Abc, December 23. For more detailed chronological studies on the period, see work by J. L. Neila and A. Moreno “Cronología de la transición en la Europa del Este” (1985-1992). *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*. Universidad Complutense, issue number 15 (1993), 235-246 (on the transition of eastern Europe).

5. BULGARIA

Bulgaria's secular history has been characterized by the domination of other peoples, in particular that of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, this has not made cohabitation between the minor and major ethnic groups easy, the country suffered due to its participation in successive Balkan wars and in the world wars (in the Second World War it was positioned alongside the powers of the Axis for most of the time), due to which its borders underwent frequent modifications.

“Upon withdrawal of the Ottomans from Bulgaria, after four hundred years of domination lasting from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, remnants of the Turkish population remained in some south-western parts of the country. They stayed there for decades and decades. They settled definitely. [...] Little did it occur to anyone that these very Turks, with Bulgarian nationality, would one day act as catalysts of the history of Bulgaria by being the first to rebel against the communist dictatorship, in 1989”, Acuña points out³⁴. He further asserts that the issue of the Turks can be likened to “adding yeast to communism” by trying to forcibly bring about the assimilation of the community in the eighties. In fact, the so-called “bulgarisation” policy banned one million of the country's nine million inhabitants from using their language in public and practising the Muslim religion. They also had to drop their family surname and use a Bulgarian one. This gave rise to clashes in the cities and set the collapse of the communist system in Bulgaria in motion. The uprisings of the Transylvanian Hungarians took place in the same way, in a regime similar to that of Romania. In an era in which the anticommunist trend was spreading in the entire communist world, the Turkish rebellion seemed to remind the Bulgarians that they were living an

³⁴ Acuña, op. cit., 205.

oppressed life and this could not be sustained for much longer³⁵. Bulgaria, after twenty five years of sustained growth (5% yearly according to official sources), went into decline in 1987. The winds of renewal, fanned from the Soviet Union, reached the Bulgarian society and its communist party. A tentative period of democratization and decentralisation of power began, coming up against the resistance of regional bureaucrats. The changes began in the neighbouring countries influenced the direction the communists took.

The change in name of the official BCP (Bulgarian Communist Party) to Bulgarian Socialist Party, the constitution of a negotiation table with the opposition forces and, the designation of an interim president imbued with the spirit of renewal of “Perestroika”, were the moves preliminary to the convening of the first free elections to be held in four decades. The said elections were won by the new Bulgarian socialist party against a coalition of opposition parties who could not halt the effectiveness of the tried and tested machinery of the former communists³⁶. The chronology of events regarding transformation in Bulgaria dates back, in particular, to 1990, although there are very relevant previous points in time like December 1989. Such is the case of the renunciation of monopoly on the part of the Communist Party on giving the national Parliament the go-ahead to strike its monopoly off the Constitution³⁷.

The press also reported on the problems arising from anti-Turk nationalism and compounded by the regime of president Todor Zhivkov³⁸. As ex-president, he was arrested

³⁵ A work of interest is Hidalgo's *La revolución búlgara de 1989-1990. El surgimiento de la sociedad civil*. Madrid, 1991.

³⁶ See Fundef, “Bulgaria”, in Held, J. *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. New York, 1992.

³⁷ *La Vanguardia*, December 14, 1989 and ABC, January 16, 1990.

³⁸ *La Vanguardia*, January 9, 1990.

by the Bulgarian authorities and charged with “inciting hate and ethnic hostility, with unlimited stockpiling of public property and embezzlement of shocking proportions”³⁹.

The Spanish newspapers made reference to a “European reunion” and Bulgarian poets and intellectuals were interviewed, as well as the most outstanding politicians, at the time. Worth of note, is the significance conveyed by the leader of the Democratic Forum and professor of Spanish History at the University of Sofia, Dragomir Draganov, who reveals several symmetrical patterns in both countries:

“We are all southerners and we have a common history marked by secular dominations. In your case, that of the Arabs; in ours that of the Turks. We are southerners and we live in the outermost parts of Europe. In short, (our interest lies in) the contemporary history of Spain and, above all, in an exemplary transition.”⁴⁰.

After Zhivkov was toppled in November 1989, the Bulgarian opposition became sharply divided. The most important groups came to no fewer than eighty political organizations within the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)⁴¹.

In the meanwhile, the secretary general of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Mladenov, at a special party renovation conference held in Sofia predicted there would be “social catastrophes and anarchy in Bulgaria”⁴². On February 3, 1990, the communist renovator Lukanov took over in Bulgaria, after being named new head of the government by the National Assembly. The press described him as “a reformer and an ally of Moscow”⁴³. In the following weeks, *La Vanguardia* published interviews with the ministers of Foreign Affairs

³⁹ Abc, January 19, 1990.

⁴⁰ Abc, January 21, 1990.

⁴¹ *La Vanguardia*, January 28, 1990.

⁴² Abc, January 31, 1990.

⁴³ *La Vanguardia*, February 4, 1990.

and of the Interior. Statements by both clearly point to the new political cycle and its historical transcendence. Following are their respective statements: “We have to move towards Europe to cement the transition”⁴⁴ and “The former State Security no longer exists”⁴⁵.

These affirmations are far-reaching because, even though the fear of civil war breaking out was less palpable than in Romania, in Bulgaria it was still noticeable after the first democratic elections⁴⁶. The following headlines in the *Abc* and *La Vanguardia* make reference to the bright and shady aspects of the elections and the tentative consolidation of democratic transition in Bulgaria:

“The Bulgarian opposition acknowledges the results of the elections. Bulgaria holds its first democratic elections today”⁴⁷.

“Shelev, leader of the Bulgarian opposition, becomes country’s new president”⁴⁸.

“The Bulgarian Minister of Interior resigns after the collapse of the SP” [Bulgaria’s Socialist Party, former Communist Party]. “Parliament confirms Lukanov is prime minister”⁴⁹.

“Head of Government refuses to step down and condemns the opposition”⁵⁰.

In an in-depth article, José Luis Ortiz indicates how the change to a free economy would constitute a great challenge for the new Bulgarian government. He is of the opinion

⁴⁴ *La Vanguardia*, March 6, 1990.

⁴⁵ *La Vanguardia*, March 26, 1990.

⁴⁶ *Abc*, August 31, 1990. “La creciente crisis política y económica precipita a Bulgaria en el caos. Facciones rivales se preparan para una guerra civil”.

⁴⁷ *La Vanguardia*, June 10, 1990.

⁴⁸ *La Vanguardia*, August 2, 1990.

⁴⁹ *Abc*, August 31, 1990.

⁵⁰ *La Vanguardia*, November 23, 1990.

that “ecologists and the ethnic conflicts hastened change in Bulgaria”, as well as “fear of a outcome similar to that of Romania Romanian took the edge of the political transition”. Among the opinions expressed mention must be made of the article entitled *Aprender del pasado* [Learning from the Past] penned by King Simeon II of Bulgaria, who lived in exile in Madrid, in 1955, after being forced in 1946 to abdicate and leave his country. Years later, he would manage to steer Bulgarian political destiny after the democratic transition. He affirms that:

“Today we see how fear of the ancient and grim border disputes among the Warsaw Pact countries emerges, as the common denominator of Soviet domination is removed.”⁵¹.

The press also shed light on the mobilisation of neighbouring Albanians against the regime in Tirana, unfolding not only in the country’s interior. Prior to that, on the contrary, the so-called National Union of Albanians living in exile in several European countries, draw the attention of world public opinion, from Paris, requesting that “Tirana’s Stalinist regime be put on the spot”⁵².

6. THE WORLD AFTER THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, several people believed that the Hegelian notion taken up again by Francis Fukuyama regarding “the end of History”⁵³ had been endorsed. As to present-day viewpoints expressed by critics, regarding German unification twenty years

⁵¹ Abc, January 25, 1990.

⁵² Abc, December 28, 1989.

⁵³ Marsi, Luca. “Después del derrumbe del Muro de Berlín, ¿El fin de la Historia? Principios y criterios del neoliberalismo”, *Revista de Historia Actual*, Vol. 8, No. 8 (2010), 153-165.

onwards, is the viewpoint of Günter Grass, the Nobel Literature Award laureate: “We cannot avoid citing other examples which reveal what is being neglected, and, furthermore apart from other things, continues to fall to the lot of journalists: to rub salt in the wound while it is still fresh. I am referring to the consequences of the hasty putting together of German unity, exclusively in line with the interests and criteria of Western Germany. Over twenty years have gone by and self-glorification was followed by timely celebrations. However, whoever takes note of this or, is ready to sit up and notice it, will see that what was already foreseeable has, nevertheless, become reality but to a greater extent: the East belongs to the West. The social degradation of the citizens of the former German Democratic Republic and of their descendants to second class Germans has become a reality where, increasingly, more young people are leaving their communities and cities -be they large or small- to go to the West. Some areas are becoming deserted. Furthermore, too often, those people with radical right leanings are the ones who stay behind, become entrenched in hordes and set the tone of the abandoned regions, in an unmistakable manner. Public opinion is hardly aware of this when it, and when it does become aware it does not do so fully”⁵⁴.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the revolutions in the east, were followed by great confusion, great division and a feeling of disenchantment according to Felipe Sahagún. “Events in Russia at the end of August 1991 crown the revolutionary process which took place in 1989-1990 in the east and, in 1990-1991 in the Baltic area and the Soviet republics.

Until this moment, in the East, although it had occurred in an uneven manner, the five pillars of the former communist system had come crashing down: the party, the ideology, the

⁵⁴ Grass, Günter. “La piedra de Sísifo”. *El País*, Sunday, 24 July 2011, 12-13. [Speech made on 2 de July 2011 in Hamburg, during an event with the Association of German journalists Netzwerk Recherche].

army, the security services and the administration. On the other hand, in Russia, only the ideology and the PCUS, partially, had diminished in importance. The army, the KGB and the bureaucracy maintained strong decisive roles. Fortunately, one of the factors that explain the failure of the coup against Gorbachev in August was the divide in the said forces, the first clear indication that within the forces themselves, ideas regarding change had taken root.⁵⁵

August 19, 2011 was the twentieth anniversary of the coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev. The coup was organised and carried out between August 19 and 21, 1991 by a group of high-ranking leaders from the USSR who intended to do away with “Perestroika”, the reformation plan thought up by Gorbachev to open up the nation. Events over those three days, propelled by the so-called “August putsch”, despite the failure, “undermined the legitimacy of the Communist Party (CSU) and Gorbachev’s own prestige, leading to the later disintegration of the USSR”⁵⁶. The dream of liberty and change of the nineties, a period described by the media as extremely chaotic, contrasts today with the uncertainty and the disillusion regarding the present. Currently, 43 percent of the Russian population are of the opinion that the Coup was a power struggle amongst the elite; 36 percent, nevertheless, believe that it was a tragedy that brought about the fall of the nation. Another 8 per cent think that it was a case of democracy triumphing over communism.⁵⁷ The collapse of the USSR clearly demonstrated that Soviet communism had failed by supporting the weight of the economy, on completely state-owned means of production and the nation’s natural and technical resources, controlled by centralised planning which embraced everything without paying any heed to market mechanisms nor prices. This incapacity to generate global wealth

⁵⁵ Sahagún, Felipe. *Europa ante el siglo XXI*. University of Granada, 1992, 88.

⁵⁶ “Rusia hoy”, supplement by *Rosíyskaya Gazeta* (Russia), distributed by *El País* on August 24, 2011.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

and welfare revealed to the world in a raw manner in 1989-1990 also undermined the aspirations of socialism (utopian Marxism) thus driving all the political formations that had still not made the move, towards social-democratic or euro-communist positions.

Positions that accepted liberal democracy, a multiparty system and free trading, to finally jettison the ideology regarding state control of the inner workings of the economy. Nevertheless, adjustments have to be made as regards direction –by all means- and policy social equity policy and the fight in favour of the weaker sectors in line with social-economic boundaries in its respective countries. It is therefore paradoxical, that from 1945 until 1989, so many cruel wars accompanied by bloodshed have been waged as a result of sustaining two models of thought (Marxism-capitalism) with all its variants and that, this has sunk its root into the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSIONS

The national press played an important role in the fall of the communist regimes in the eastern European countries, showing, in the main, a strong opposition to the former systems after the disappearance of the Iron Curtain and revealing to the world the yearning for change in the respective countries.

With respect to the historical dimension, the press reflected the transcendent nature of the changes in those nations, with wide coverage especially throughout December 1989. On some days, four entire pages were used up to cover events in both newspaper and in additionally special envoys were deployed, while the use of graphic resources such as maps and large photographs.

From the informative perspective, the fall of communism was featured extensively, in line with the far-reaching effects of the political changes, reflected not only by the number of articles published in the two newspapers on Romania and Bulgaria, but also by the fact that about almost one in every four articles expressed opinion and reflection including several leader articles in which the newspaper's ideology was present. The newspapers under study, reveal a focus on economy, military security and the political and diplomatic consequences of the new situation at the European as well as global level. A portrayal is made of the negative influence the Gulf War (1990) had on the already battered Rumanian and Bulgarian economies, as occurred in neighbouring countries, which helped to consolidate the recent democratic revolutions.

One name worthy of mention is that of the Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev. Acknowledgement is unanimous regarding the role he played in the opening up and transparency policies of the USSR, which has been considered unequivocally as a ground-laying phase making the democratic transition of the Eastern countries possible, as seen in the cases of Romania and Bulgaria.

This is why the Spanish newspapers rejoiced when the mentioned politician was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The *Abc*, in a leading article, referred to it as an act of justice that had filled the whole world with joy. Throughout 1989 and 1990 the two newspapers highlighted news such as the announcement of the significant withdrawal of conventional armed troops (those of the Soviet Union doubled that of the NATO countries, according to the press) or the reestablishment of all the political rights to all those people suffered reprisals under Stalin.

Regarding strictly journalistic aspects, the general nature of the news was evident in both papers, which relied on their own correspondents and special envoys. In other words,

they relied on their own sources. This contrasts, twenty years later with the present-day progressive widening to embrace the major international agencies even in the best papers, which leads to a greater homogeneous nature of the news and less difference in headlines. Likewise, there is a higher quality in the maps and illustrative resources regarding the Abc as well as the La Vanguardia. The two publications feature drawings of the principal figures in the news thereby, enriching the visual aspect of the news and opinion articles. However, almost all the photographs appearing in both papers belong to agencies (mainly Efe, Reuter y AP).

Twenty years after the events, the study of the press archives confirms that a new phase of international politics came into being between 1989 and 1991. The sinking of the bloc of countries belonging to what goes by the name of “real socialism” brought democracy to Eastern Europe and to the peripheral republics of the USSR, which had been deprived of it for almost half a century. In Romania, gaining freedom was impossible without bloodshed. The Iron curtain rose and the knock-on effects of the Second World War appeared to begin to disappear: Yalta became a part of History, once and for all.

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