



# CULTURE AS BRIDGE BETWEEN FRANCE AND ROMANIA IN THE EARLY PERIOD OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME

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## Abstract

The establishment of the communist regime in Romania led to the country's diplomatic isolation in the first years after 1948. Western states were considered enemy states from an ideological point of view, therefore diplomatic, economic and cultural connections were greatly diminished. Some changes in the dynamic between the two blocs can be observed in the mid-50s, when the Cold War seemed to become an accepted reality and the desire of the two sides was, first, to improve their economic collaboration and, second, to use cultural exchanges as a connecting bridge between the East and West and a practical tool of soft power. Among western countries, France was one of the states with which Romania had the richest and longest cultural, educational and intellectual connections until the advent of the Cold War. In this article we propose to analyze the dynamics of Romanian-French cultural relations in the first years of the communist regime, with a particular focus on the French perspective regarding Romania's cultural landscape at that time.

**Keywords:** *Eastern Europe; Western Europe; Cold War; French-Romanian relations; communism; cultural exchange; soft power*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the consequences of the Cold War was the emergence of a communication rift between Eastern and Western Europe. The ideological polarization, the radicalization of political positions, and the postwar deadlock in establishing a sustainable peace – the one that would calm tensions and foster natural reconstruction and development – contributed to the deterioration of diplomatic relations between states.

But the death of Stalin in 1953 and the policy of *détente* initiated by his successor, N. Khrushchev, prompted renewed interest from France in the political and cultural evolution of Romania, and vice versa. Additional external factors played a role in this gradual shift, including Romania's accession to the United Nations in 1955, the withdrawal of the Red Army from Austria and later from Romania, the reconciliation between N. Khrushchev and Josip Broz Tito, and the prioritization of disarmament in the agenda of the Warsaw Pact Council. These developments signaled a transformation in the perspectives of the two blocs and the cautious re-emergence of diplomatic channels. In the specific context of French-Romanian relations, although diplomatic ties were never officially closed, the activity had been suspended for a time. However, with the initial signs of *détente*, both nations actively sought to reestablish dialogue and reopen avenues for cooperation.

This study begins from the premise that, despite the Cold War placing Romania and France in opposing ideological blocs, both states pursued a foreign policy that reflected a consistent effort to restore traditional forms of diplomatic, economic, and cultural cooperation. The deep-rooted cultural and intellectual ties historically shared by the two nations made cultural collaboration particularly resilient—even during a period of pronounced geopolitical tension. In fact, within the broader framework of Cold War hostilities, cultural exchange emerged as one of the most accessible and viable avenues for engagement.

Hence this paper aims to examine the cultural relationship between France and Romania during the 1950s, with a particular focus on the French perspective regarding Romania's cultural landscape. It seeks to analyze the motivations behind France's efforts to strengthen cultural collaboration with Romania, to explore how French authorities conceptualized this engagement

towards Romania at that time and, last but not least, to reflect on the actual content of cultural exchanges in the early years of the communist regime.

## 1. RESUMING RELATIONS AFTER THE ONSET OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME

From a diplomatic standpoint, initially in 1949 both Romania and France withdrew their accredited Ministers, but did not formally close diplomatic relations<sup>1</sup>. In accordance with the Treaty of Friendship signed between Romania and the Soviet Union, Romania was required to consult the USSR on foreign policy matters. As a result, following the events of 1948, France came to be categorized by Romanian authorities as part of the ideologically hostile Western bloc (Cătănuș, 213).

In 1948, Romania unilaterally denounced the Romanian-French cultural treaty originally concluded in 1939, arguing that it was no longer in accordance with the “social realities” of postwar Romania (Raport, AMFA, 403/1957, 50). The agreement also covered the activity of the French Institute of Higher Education in Romania, which included a substantial library, an elementary school, and a high school. The Institute maintained branches in several Romanian cities, including Iași, Timișoara, Cluj, Sibiu, Brașov, Turnu Severin, Arad, Lugoj, and Brăila, employing around 60 French teachers and civil servants. In contrast, France hosted only one Romanian institution—the School at Fontenay-aux-Roses—which, after the war, functioned primarily as a dormitory for Romanian students residing in France (*Notă asupra relațiilor franco-române după 23 August 1944*, AMFA, 401/1957, 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Diplomatic relations between Romania and France remained officially open—and at times relatively active—even during the Second World War. Despite Romania’s alignment with Germany through a formal alliance, much of the Romanian political and intellectual elite remained francophone and anglophone in orientation. This cultural and educational background fostered a strong underlying interest in maintaining positive relations with France and, more broadly, with the Allied powers. Many Romanian intellectuals and political figures sought to preserve diplomatic channels and cultural ties with France, reflecting a long-standing affinity that transcended the wartime political alliance with the Axis.

Diplomatic tensions had been rising because of some incidents: Romania's refusal to compensate for the nationalization of French-owned property, the arrest of French citizens on Romanian land, and increasing restrictions placed on the movement of French diplomatic personnel inside Romania. These factors contributed to a significant decline in bilateral economic exchanges (Măță, 36). An emblematic episode occurred in 1951, when a Romanian folk music and dance ensemble conducted a tour in France; due to provocations and protests by Romanian émigrés, several performances in provincial cities were canceled. Although the Romanian Legation lodged formal protests, the French authorities declined to intervene, a stance that further strained relations and provoked irritation in Bucharest (*Raport*, AMFA, 403/1957, 53). Throughout the 1950s, the Romanian government grew increasingly aware of France's tacit tolerance of the critical tone of information campaigns about Romania's new political regime.

Cultural relations were significantly reduced, being limited largely to activities organized by the Romanian Legation and the French-Romanian Association. The latter made efforts to translate Romanian literary works aligned with the ideological tenets of socialist realism—such as *Mitrea Cocor*, *Descult*, *Negura*, and *Nicoară Potcoavă*—into French. It also engaged in publishing brochures promoting Romania and organized modest cultural events, including film screenings and exhibitions of folk art (*Notă asupra relațiilor franco-române după 23 August 1944*, AMFA, 401/1957, 1). However, these initiatives were limited in scale and often subject to restrictions by French authorities.

A slight thaw in relations could be seen in 1953, amid a brief period of international *détente*. Both states reinstated diplomatic missions in Paris and Bucharest, with trade emerging as a central area of renewed interest. In December 1954, a Trade and Payments Agreement was concluded following the release of several French citizens convicted in Romania and the granting of exit visas at the request of the French Legation (*Notă*, AMFA, 403/1957, 50).

In 1955, at Romania's initiative, both countries agreed to exchange military attachés. That same year, following the signing of a Joint Declaration in August, commercial deliveries between the two states resumed. The declaration also made reference to the need to conclude a cultural exchange agreement (*Ibidem*, 51), marking the beginning of a cautious cultural *détente* between Romania and France.

In the cultural area, starting in 1954 France began celebrating the “Month of Franco-Romanian Friendship”,<sup>2</sup> while in 1955 Romania initiated the “Romanian-French Friendship Days” in Bucharest. These events typically featured exhibitions, musical and theatrical performances, book fairs, and other cultural displays designed to promote mutual understanding and goodwill.

In October 1955, formal discussions were started between the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (RICRFC) in Bucharest to develop a joint cultural exchange program (*Notă asupra relațiilor franco-române după 23 August 1944*, AMFA, 401/1957, 2). These talks resumed in January 1956 and led to concrete actions. As a result, several French singers – including pianist Nicole Henriot, cellist Bernard Michelin, violinist Janine Andrade, pianist Monique Haas – performed in Romania. These marked the first French artistic appearances in Romania since 1948, symbolizing a significant step toward renewed cultural engagement. The bureaucratic logistics for these visits were managed directly by the French Legation in Bucharest. Following these initial exchanges, Romania established the Office for Artistic Performance and Tours, a new institution intended to facilitate ongoing artistic cooperation and to streamline the organization of cultural events. (*Ibidem*, 2) However, tensions emerged concerning financial arrangements: the French side expressed dissatisfaction that their artists were paid significantly less than the Romanian counterparts performing in France.

Beyond these musical exchanges, several other cultural initiatives were organized during 1955–1956. The French theater troupe *L'Atelier* performed a tour in Romania, while the “I.L. Caragiale” National Theater of Bucharest participated in Paris at the “Festival of Dramatic Art” with the plays *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*) and *Ultima Oră* (*The Last Hour*). Romanian folklore ensembles also participated in festivals in Lille and Nice, and young Romanian conductors were invited to perform in France (*Ibidem*, 14). RICRFC further coordinated six Romanian art exhibitions in various French cities throughout 1956. Romanian musicians also began to be mentioned more frequently in French media: Radio

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<sup>2</sup>This included a Romanian folk art exhibition, visited by over 4,000 people; a conference about Romanian author I. L. Caragiale and a performance of one of his plays; a conference about Romanian literature; in some libraries in Paris articles about Romanian literature could be seen and read.

Paris broadcasted select Romanian performances and the pianist G. Halmos gave a concert in Paris, showcasing the increased visibility of Romanian cultural production in the West (*Ibidem*, 14).

In the realm of publications, efforts to re-establish cultural dialogue were increasingly evident by the mid-1950s. In 1954, a brochure titled “French Culture in the People's Republic of Romania” was published in France in 3,000 copies, marking an official attempt to present an image of cultural developments under the Romanian socialist regime. Simultaneously, Romanian publishing houses issued translated works by prominent French literary figures such as Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, and the poet Louis Aragon—whose alignment with leftist ideology made him particularly compatible with Romania's cultural policy at the time. In 1955, another Romanian-produced brochure promoting the country was published in France in a significantly larger print run of 10,000 copies, signaling increased interest in cultural diplomacy. That same year, Romania published „Buletinul Societății Pedagogice Franceze” (Bulletin of the French Pedagogical Society), with a circulation of 40,000 copies, further illustrating the state's commitment to cultural and educational exchange through mass publication (*Ibidem*, 14).

Scientific collaboration also began to improve during this period. In 1956 alone, Romanian scholars and scientists participated in approximately 20 international congresses, technical workshops, and specialization courses across various disciplines. Intellectual and artistic exchanges accompanied these developments, with Romanian cultural figures such as composer and philosopher Mihail Șora, conductor Constantin Silvestri, composer Alfred Mendelsohn, and writers Eugen Jebeleanu, Demostene Botez, and Mihail Ralea making visits to France. These exchanges were largely reciprocal, as Romania also hosted French writers, mathematicians, and representatives from the scientific community, reflecting a mutual effort to cultivate cross-border intellectual cooperation amid the broader political constraints of the Cold War<sup>3</sup> (*Notă asupra relațiilor culturale dintre Franța și RPR, AMFA, 401/1957, 3-4;17*).

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<sup>3</sup> In Romania, French intellectuals participated in the Congress of Mathematicians and the Congress of Writers. Also, some were just visiting the RICRFC; individual visits were made by writer Robert Merle, university professor Pierre Georges and filmmaker Louis Daquin.

## 2. THE YEAR 1956 – A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON FRENCH-ROMANIAN CULTURAL RELATIONS

The year 1956 was marked by intense discussions, diplomatic negotiations, and notable shifts in bilateral relations among states, although these developments were marked by significant fluctuations. Two important events within the Communist bloc contributed to a prevailing sense of insecurity and mutual distrust, both among the bloc's members and in their relations with external actors.

The first major event was the “secret” speech delivered by Nikita Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR, in which he openly condemned the political abuses perpetrated under Stalin's regime. Khrushchev's speech signaled a potential ideological shift, promoting a more moderate form of socialism, often referred to as “socialism with a human face.” This new direction raised different reactions across the Communist bloc. In particular, intellectuals and segments of the general population in Poland and Hungary started to raise their voice against their governments, which led to the second major event of 1956, the social revolts from these two countries.

Despite this sign of an ideological opening, USSR was determined to maintain its hegemonic control over the Eastern bloc. The popular uprising in Hungary, which was ultimately suppressed by Soviet military intervention, demonstrated the limitations of the new policy. Consequently, member states of the Communist bloc, including Romania, adopted a more rigid political and ideological stance in order to reinforce internal discipline and prevent further unrest. The faint hope of an ideological *détente* melted away immediately after the autumn of 1956. However, Western partners were closely following the internal political developments and the relationship between Romania and the USSR in order to be able to foresee and outline future agreements.

Regarding the relation between Romania and France, some issues regarding French properties in Romania remained unresolved, but Romania began to grant exit visas. For 1956, 85 visas were issued, most of them for permanent departures. Also, even if the juridical situation of the French church „Sacre Coeur” from Bucharest or the Romanian Church from Paris were not yet

solved, the French legation members were allowed to use the church in Bucharest and had the key on their disposal<sup>4</sup>. (*Notă*, AMFA, 403/1957, 55).

Cultural relations were maintained through the participation of Romanian representatives at different events in France such as: Cannes International Film Festival and International Film Days (G. Macovescu, Iscovici, I. Fintișteanu); UNESCO Meeting on the Problems of Higher University Statistics and the Use of Diplomas in European Schools; International Meeting of Filmmakers (George Macovescu and Boros); International Festival of Dramatic and Cinematic Art; Dramatic Art Festival (delegation from "I.I. Caragiale" theater); Meeting of Producers of Cultural Radio Programs Organized by UNESCO (David Nicolae); 6th Besançon Young Conductors Competition (Sergiu Comisana, Paul Popescu)<sup>5</sup>. (*Tabel cu evenimentele naționale și internaționale organizate în Franța, la care a participat RPR în 1956*, AMFA, 401/1957, 38-39).

However, the Romanian government considered that the exchanges were not well balanced in the case of TV broadcasting and cinema, since the French side did not seem sufficiently involved. Most of the time, the costs of the French guests' stay in Romania were covered by the Romanian government, and so were the costs of the Romanian visits in France. The compensations requested

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<sup>4</sup> The Sacre Coeur Church in Bucharest belongs to the St. Vincent de Paul hospital, which had been nationalized in 1948. But the church was not taken over by the Romanian authorities, and the French wanted their ownership of the building to be recognized. Similarly, the Romanian church in Paris was taken over by a group of Romanians in exile, and the French state did not want to recognize the authority of the Romanian government over that place of worship.

<sup>5</sup> Other participations of Romanian scientists were in events like: Meeting of the Understanding Committee of the International Federation of Education Trade Unions; International conference organized by the International Association of Legal Sciences under UNESCO in order to examine the legal aspects of peaceful collaboration between states and peoples; Congress of Miners in France; Congress of the National Federation of Public Services; International Congress of Medical Radiography; Meeting of the Council and Executive Committee of the International Union of Geology and Geophysics; International Congress of Infectious Pathology; Meeting of the Association of Physiologists; 16th Session of the International Conference of Large Electric Networks; International Congress of Automation; Congress of Psychology; International Congress of Rheumatism.

by the French side for French singers were higher than those offered to the Romanian singers. In general, French culture in Romania was much more popular than Romanian culture in France. For example, between 1951-1956, over 80 titles of French fiction were translated in approximately 10.000-40.000 copies each (V. Hugo, La Fontaine, H. de Balzac, Molière, Anatole France, Jules Verne, E. Zola, Al Dumas etc.). In France, only a few Romanian titles were printed, at the expense of the Romanian government. The Romanian Philharmonics and Romanian theaters had French plays in their repertoires (*Notă asupra relațiilor franco-române după 23 August 1944*, AMFA, 401/1957, 6). Faced with these observations on the inequity of cultural exchanges and representations, the French side noted that Romania promoted only classical arts and new communist artists, suggesting that was not to the taste of French public. Hence the negotiations and discussions that took place during 1956 were likely to redress this balance and further Romanian-French cultural relations.

The French approach to re-establishing cultural relations with the states of the Communist bloc was characterized by a more nuanced and strategic perspective in the mid-50s. French policymakers operated on the assumption that, despite ideological divisions, there remained a significant and enduring interest in French culture across Eastern Europe, and especially in Romania. This perception shaped France's cultural diplomacy during the period. A report issued by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in August 1956, addressed to the French Minister in Bucharest, explicitly emphasized the importance of seizing emerging opportunities in the region. The report noted: "We must not let the opportunity that is offered to us slip away, because we risk other Western nations replacing us"<sup>6</sup> (*Relations culturelles avec l'Est, 11 August 1956*, DAMFA, Nantes, box Supplement, 2, no page). This statement underscores France's recognition of cultural influence as a form of soft power and its awareness of the competitive nature of East-West engagement in the context of the Cold War. As an overview of international politics in that time, starting with 1956 western

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<sup>6</sup> This kind of competition could be observed, also, in 1963, as the French legation was elevated to Embassy level in Romania. In that time, French diplomacy also made the observation that Great Britain took some further steps, especially in economy, in relation with Romania. Thus, some kind of competition could be observed among the Western states in 60s in order to deepen their ties with Romania.

states as France, Great Britain or USA started to apply a differentiated approach towards the states of Eastern Europe, to pursue a particular interest and propose specific objectives in bilateral relations, overcoming politics from block to block. Even if it was not defined as such at that time, *this differentiated policy* can be best observed in the foreign policy of the USA towards the states of Eastern Europe starting with the 60s (Pechlivanis, 19). There were also some European theories which imposed the necessity of developing bilateral relations between different states belonging to the two ideological blocks, such as the theory of Willi Brand and Charles de Gaulle (Preutu, 259-260).

The same report emphasized that France had a significant interest in re-establishing cultural relations with the states of Eastern Europe. This initiative was not driven by the intention to attract socialist countries toward the capitalist camp or to impose an alternative political ideology. Rather, it reflected a pragmatic recognition of the geopolitical realities in postwar Europe. France acknowledged that the existence of a Communist bloc was an established fact that could no longer be disregarded and thus cultural engagement needed to be recalibrated within this new paradigm.

The report also noted that, since 1953, French authorities had been studying the evolution of political and social structures in Eastern Europe. These analyses produced both positive and negative assessments, but were ultimately inconclusive in determining a common policy according to which France could export cultural influence within the region. The Yugoslav case, often cited as an example of divergence within the Communist bloc, was not representative for the other countries. Therefore, the French Minister in Bucharest proposed a three-stage process for re-engaging with the Eastern bloc on a cultural level: 1) reopening French Institutes, which would serve as a gesture of goodwill toward the Eastern governments; 2) appointment of a professor tasked with managing the cultural mission and overseeing the activities of the Institute; and 3) resumption of educational programs, designed to appeal to a new audience by offering advanced courses in French language, culture, and civilization. In order for these agreements to constitute a solid basis for collaboration and not just a propaganda tool, the French side wanted to have some concrete cultural achievements. One of the main interests of the cultural agreements would have been to ensure the good functioning of the French Institutes and to establish the rules for lecturer exchanges. This would have worked on a reciprocity basis. To

this end, it was seen as necessary to establish "joint declarations" that would outline the future collaboration (*Relations culturelles avec l'Est*, 11 August 1956, DAMFA, box Supplement, 2, no page).

In the field of technological exchange, the French Minister to Bucharest, Pierre Francfort, observed that Romanian authorities demonstrated a strong interest in acquiring French "know-how". At the same time, he recognized that Romania maintained active relations with other developing countries in East Asia and the Middle East, suggesting that Romanian technological developments could also be of value and interest to those regions. In a report addressed to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as in a public radio broadcast in Romania Francfort stated that, at that particular moment, France was not in a position to demand a reciprocity clause in the field of technological cooperation (*Les échanges culturelle et technique franco-roumains*, Bucharest 23 Mai 1957, in DAMFA, box Supplement 2/1957, no page).

This statement raised concerns among Romanian officials, prompting them to seek clarification during a bilateral meeting in July 1956. During that discussion, with a representative of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Francfort clarified that his remarks reflected his personal viewpoint and not the official policy of the French government. The same meeting, which was convened to refine and negotiate shared provisions to be included in a future cultural agreement, also addressed issues of literary exchange. Francfort emphasized that, in order to strengthen bilateral cultural ties, Romania should promote a more diverse selection of French literature. From his perspective, Romanian cultural policy at the time was overly focused on publishing and disseminating works by French leftist authors, limiting the broader cultural potential of French literary heritage in Romania (*Notă de audiență între I. Drinceanu și Pierre Francfort, Ministru al Franței*, AMFA, 401/1957, 52/v).

In various other discussions carried by Pierre Francfort with different representatives of Ministry of Romania Foreign Affairs along the summer of 1956 he expressed the interest of the French side to open a library in Bucharest, since there were many people in Romania who read and spoke French. Similarly, a Romanian book collection would be made available in French translation within an institution in Paris. Unlike other discussions about opening of the French library in Bucharest, in which the French insisted that the management of the library and, possibly, the management of the French institute, if reopened,

should be ensured by the French side, this time they expressed their agreement that a French library in Bucharest could have a Romanian director. Also they proposed that the selection of the French book collection to be brought to Romania should be the task of a mixed commission (*Ibidem*, 56-57).

However, the French vision was shaken by the events in the autumn of 1956, so the French Ministry came up with the following rectifications regarding relations with Communist bloc. With regard to the USSR, cultural, scientific, and technical exchanges were temporarily suspended, except those based on pre-existing long-term agreements. In particular, exchanges along party lines, between trade unions, for political and propaganda purposes were stopped. It was proposed that France's policy toward the USSR be reassessed within a three-month timeframe.

In contrast, France decided to pursue a differentiated approach toward the other states of the Communist bloc, based on each country's internal political developments. In this context, the French government expressed a strong interest in deepening cultural relations with Poland, where the political climate was seen as relatively more favorable, while in the case of Hungary, a more cautious approach was deemed necessary in light of recent political instability. As for Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed to continue the existing strategy: to promote rapprochement in the cultural and technical spheres while deliberately postponing the signing of any formal cultural agreements. Regarding Albania, since local authorities prevented the development of relations with France, the French authorities did not want to force things. And for Yugoslavia, the existing ties and agreements were to be maintained (*Problèmes de relations culturelle entre la France et les pays de l'Est, Paris, 1 Décembre 1956, DAMFA, box Suppliment, 2/1957, no page*).

### **3. FIRST CULTURAL PROTOCOL BETWEEN ROMANIA AND FRANCE AFTER 1948**

In the beginning of 1957, the reality of cultural exchanges with Romania did not stand very well from a French point of view. Diplomatic reports mentioned that there was not enough French literature in Romanian libraries and that Russian translations still dominated the market. Moreover, the rare French books were not very representative for French culture, as most of them were by leftist writers

(*Relations culturelles Franco-Roumains, Buharest 9 Mai 1957*, DAMFA, box Supplement 2, no page). Regarding the few French theater performances, such as the tour of theater “L’Atelier” in Romania, failed to reach general audiences, as two thirds of the tickets were distributed to different officials. The French ministry in Bucharest, Pierre Francfort, had quite a sharp opinion regarding the consistency of authorities in Bucharest in spreading French culture to the entire society, which was rather seen as a tool to improve the image of the communist government (*Relations culturelles Franco-Roumains, Buharest 9 Mai 1957*, DAMFA, box Supplement 2, no page)

Even so, the French Foreign Ministry sent a message to Bucharest in January expressing the intention to prepare a meeting with representatives from Romanian Foreign Ministry and to establish a mixed commission that would see to the fulfillment of the proposed cultural and scientific plans (*Relațiile franco-române după 23 august 1944*, AMFA, 401/1957, 7).

Finally, a joint meeting took place on May 2-24, 1957, in Paris, between a delegation led by Mihail Ralea<sup>7</sup> and one chaired by Roger Seydoux, Director General of Cultural and Technical Affairs within the Ministry of French Foreign Affairs. The discussions focused on the promotion of academic, cultural and artistic exchanges as the foundation of a future agreement. Among the key issues raised was the exchange of books and periodicals, the translation of literary and scholarly works, and the mutual dissemination of publications between universities and prominent intellectuals, with the aim of fostering awareness of each country's cultural and intellectual developments. Additionally, proposals were made to organize a “French Film Week” in Bucharest in the autumn of the same year, as well as corresponding “Romanian Film Days” in Paris—initiatives intended to enhance mutual cultural visibility and engagement through cinema. Radio exchanges were also targeted, especially for music, opera singers, orchestras, theatre groups and painting exhibitions. The project also included proposals for exchanges in the technical and scientific fields, targeting steel, transport, electricity, medicine, and the food industry. Both parties agreed that in the near future they would open institutes and libraries in Paris and Bucharest, on reciprocal terms. This specification was included in the Protocol

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<sup>7</sup> The other members of delegation were: M. Bălănescu, Constantin Prisnea, Demostene Botez and P. Dumitriu; M. Neculce and V. Iliu were experts.

annexed to the agreement on cultural and scientific collaboration. The Protocol referred only to the functioning of the future libraries and specified that the management was to be ensured by committees composed of scholars, artists, and specialists - citizens of the country in which the respective library operates. Under the leadership of these committees, various translation projects, the organization of conferences, musical auditions, and other cultural events could be carried out (*Raport, Paris, 24 mai 1957*, DAMFA, box Supplement 2, no page).

In order to establish norms and rules for cultural collaboration, after this round of discussions a first protocol was signed on May 24, 1957, and then renewed annually. Until the conclusion of the cultural agreement, which was signed in 1965 and was much more complex, the main axis of operation was the development of the French language education network. French authorities would have been interested in opening a French library in Bucharest too, but while Romanian authorities seemed interested in the topic, nothing concrete happened. At that time, French authorities considered that the Romanian government was waiting for Moscow's reaction after the NATO session<sup>8</sup>. One year later, the French side noticed a stepback of Romanian authorities regarding the opening of the French library in Bucharest, and, as a general atmosphere, French authorities noted that there was a strengthening of political and ideological discourse in the cultural field (*Rapport cultureles franco-roumanins*, DAMFA, box Supplement 2/1957, no page). They also noted that the Romanian side wanted to impose their point of view regarding their cultural relations and to control the French cultural actions in Romania.

In any case, it seems that after the May meeting, contacts between the two countries became more dynamic. In June 1957, for example, pianiste Monique Haas had 3 concerts in Bucharest and Timisoara. She was singing also one of the songs of her husband, Marcel Mihailovici, of Romanian origin, which encourage some positive feelings among the Romanian public (*Concert Haas-Mihailovici et orientation culturelle*, FDACN, box Supplement 2/1957, no page).

On November 12-25 the „Week of French Film” was organized in Bucharest and Stalin city (today Braşov) and 7 French films were broadcasted.

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<sup>8</sup> In December 1957, in Paris, the first NATO summit of Heads of State and Government was held. The Summit focused on reaffirming the Alliance's principles, improving coordination of forces, and fostering closer economic ties.

The event was a good opportunity for French artists to come to Romania and meet Romanian artists, discuss and be informed about artistic life in Romania, but also to see and experience Romania. On that occasion a reception was organized for almost 100 people – artists, writers, and various personalities – who were able to discuss with the members of the French delegation (*Informare „Săptămâna filmului francez”, AMFA, 394/1957, 51-53*). The French artists met professors and students from the Art and Cinema Institute from Bucharest and visited the Ballet and Opera Theater. The event was well promoted in Romania and the opening of the festival was attended by the Minister of Culture, Athanase Joja, Constanța Crăciun, M. Ralea, I. Pas, A. Mălnășan, A. Lăzăreanu, M. Macovei, etc. The French delegation was received at the Ministry of Culture and a press conference was held (*Ibidem, 54-55*).

The editorial plan for translations from French included authors such as: H. de Balzac, E. Zola, R. Rolland, Diderot, P. Eluard, Corredor, Al. Dumas, J. Verne, Baudelaire, Fr. Villon, Ch. Perrault, Montesquieu, Corneille, Boileau etc. (*Notă, AMFA 401/1957, 49*). Also, for theatre performances French plays were prepared: Molière (*The Bourgeois Gentleman; Tartuffe; Scapin's Wiles; the School of Wives, The Imaginary Invalid*), Al. Dumas (*the Three Musketeers*), Racine (*Fedra*), J. Girandoux (*The Madwomen from Chaillot*), J. Cocteau (*Infernal car*), etc. (*Ibidem, 51*).

One of the most successful cultural outcomes were the scholarships offered by the French government for young Romanian people to study in France. Starting with 1956, the granting procedure was established for these scholarships, which became really popular in the next years. Many Romanian scientists and doctors had the chance to visit France, to acquire exchange experience or to participate in conferences.

A variety of events and visits were organized in 1957 and made Romanian-French cultural relations a reality. In May, Romania participated in Cannes Festival with a cartoon, *Scurtă istorie (Short History)*, which won a gold medal (1957 – *Romania presence in France, AMFA, 403/1957, 52*). Romania organized a pavilion at the Paris International Fair, and in July a Romanian delegation was sent to the National and International Folklore Festival organized in Nice (*Notă, AMFA, 391/1957, 3*). In Romania, in August 1957, when the Mărășești battle (1917), was celebrated, a delegation of former French combatants on the Romanian front, led by Victor Petin, former chief of staff of the Berthelot Mission, visited Romania.

In the economic domain, trade between France and Romania was conducted under the framework of the bilateral agreement signed on January 1, 1955, which was set to remain in force for three years, thus requiring renewal in 1958. Although the volume of trade increased notably during 1957, the Romanian side expressed dissatisfaction with delays in the delivery of certain goods by France. Despite Romania fulfilling its contractual obligations—particularly regarding the supply of petroleum products—French deliveries of sugar, rolled metal products, and a television broadcasting station remained pending (*Notă, AMFA, 402/ 1957, 2*). Romanian officials acknowledged the competitive pressure that Romanian exports faced on the French market, but remained committed to expanding economic cooperation. In this context, a delegation of French economic experts visited the “Petrol-Export” Company in the autumn of 1957 to familiarize themselves with Romanian petroleum products and technologies.

In the political field, in May 1957 the Romanian-French Parliamentary Friendship was established, counting 45 members from various parties, under the leadership of Lucien Begouin (*Raport, AMFA, 403/1957, 9-15*). By the end of 1957, the overall assessment of Franco-Romanian relations appeared to be optimistic and marked by constructive engagement. Romanian authorities proposed some initiatives to deepen diplomatic and cultural ties: the organization of reciprocal parliamentary visits, the elevation of diplomatic missions from legation to embassy level, the renewal of the trade agreement, the signature of a cultural agreement or at least a cultural exchange protocol, and the establishment of French and Romanian libraries in Bucharest and Paris, respectively (*Despre relațiile româno-franceze, AMFA, 402/ 1957, 9*).

## CONCLUSIONS

The early years of the communist regime in Romania had a profound impact on the country's foreign relations. As in other Eastern European states, the establishment of a communist government was followed by a period of radical internal transformation, often accompanied by violence and political repression. In terms of foreign policy, this shift translated into a general withdrawal from engagement with Western countries. Although France had been one of Romania's principal diplomatic partners and among its oldest allies, after 1948 the cultural and economic exchanges, as well as official diplomatic

communication were significantly halted. Nevertheless, there was no formal closure of diplomatic ties.

Following the death of Stalin in 1953, a shift in the international political climate, combined with the internal consolidation of politics in both France and Romania, created the conditions for a cautious resumption of bilateral relations. Despite ideological differences, France regarded Romania—alongside Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria—as one of the key Eastern European countries with which a deeper cultural and economic relationship could be pursued.

In line with the adoption of a more nuanced policy toward the communist bloc, both France and other Western European countries began to explore opportunities to strengthen ties with Romania. As demonstrated through the analysis presented in this article, it is possible to identify several phases in the gradual deepening of Franco-Romanian cultural relations. The discussions held in the spring of 1956, followed by the signing of a protocol in 1957 marked the first significant steps in the resumption of cultural relations and laid the groundwork for a formal cultural agreement, which would eventually come into force for a five-year period beginning in 1965.

However, an examination of the cultural exchanges carried out during this period reveals an imbalance: French culture enjoyed greater visibility and institutional support in Romania than Romanian culture did in France. This asymmetry suggests that, while bilateral engagement intensified, it did so within the broader framework of France's strategic interests and soft power ambitions in Eastern Europe. In the same time, with this difficult rebound after the 1948, cultural exchanges were the vanguard of deepening diplomatic relations between the two states starting in the mid-1960s, which will once again make the two states two reliable partners even in the difficult context of the Cold War.

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