

# **T**wo Visits to Romania which never took place: **Robert Kennedy (1968) and Leonid Brejnev (1969)**

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## **Abstract**

In a new document discovered at the Central Historical National Archives (Romania), there are some details of U.S. Senator Robert Kennedy's intention to make a trip to several countries in Eastern Europe, in January 1968. On that occasion, the members of the Permanent Presidium of the C.C. of R.C.P. agreed at the meeting held on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1967 that Corneliu Bogdan, Romania's ambassador in Washington, should inform the Senator Robert Kennedy that he was welcome in Romania.

R. Kennedy's intention shows that American politicians were interested in Romanian authorities' actions. This idea became obvious after one and a half year, when President Richard Nixon arrived in Bucharest (August 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>, 1969) and Leonid Brejnev postponed his visit to Romania and the signing of the new Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between the U.S.S.R. and the Socialist Republic of Romania.

**Key words:** Leonid Brejnev, Nicolae Ceaușescu, communism, Robert Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Romania, the Soviet Union, the United States of America.

On October 27<sup>th</sup> 1967, George Macovescu informed Nicolae Ceauşescu of the fact that Robert Francis Kennedy, brother of ex-president John Fitzgerald Kennedy (assassinated on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963, during a visit to Dallas), intended to undertake a journey to certain states in Eastern Europe, in January 1968. On that occasion, the American senator-Democratic Party candidate in the presidential election which were to take place in the USA in November-also wished to visit Romania, together with his wife, Ethel Skakel.

In an unpublished document found in the Central National Historical Archives, there are a number of details concerning Robert Kennedy's intentions, as well as the opinion of the Romanian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding the visit in question. On the basis of this document, the members of the Permanent Presidium of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party approved the Foreign Office's proposal during the meeting on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1967, the Romanian Ambassador in Washington, Corneliu Bogdan, being "authorized to inform the senator R. Kennedy of the fact that he was welcome in Romania" (our underlining)<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, the information on Robert Kennedy's planned tour of Eastern Europe, in which Romania was included, ends here because American senator's major concern consisted in entering his name in the campaign for the presidential election in the autumn of 1968. His public hesitation concerning the start of the campaign ended at the moment when the Viet Cong forces triggered the "Tet Operation" in the Southern Vietnam (January 30<sup>th</sup> 1968).

Robert Kennedy's attempt to become number one at the White House suddenly came to end in the night between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1968, when Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, a 24-year-old Palestinian, fired at him with a revolver, wounding him to death. The former General Prosecutor of the USA died in the "Good Samaritan" hospital in Los Angeles, 26 hours after the attempt on his life.

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<sup>1</sup>The Central National Historical Archives (from now on C.N.H.A.), fund of C.C of the R.C.P., The Office, the file no. 153/1967, f. 21.

Robert Kennedy's intention to visit Romania proves the fact that American politicians were interested in the internal and international actions taken by the Romanian authorities. This aspect became obvious one and a half year after Robert Kennedy's assassination, when Richard Nixon, Republican Party winner of the presidential election of 4 November 1968, arrived in Bucharest (2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1969), while Leonid Brejnev postponed his visit to Romania as well as his signing the new *Treaty of friendship, collaboration and mutual assistance between the U.S.S.R. and the Socialist Republic of Romania*.

As it is well known, during the meeting of Corneliu Stănescu and Leonid Brejnev (Moscow, 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1969), the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union gave the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs the impression that he had in view to accept Nicolae Ceaușescu's invitation made at the Budapest conference of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (17<sup>th</sup> of March 1969), to participate in Bucharest, in June or July 1969, at the ceremony of renewing the *Treaty of friendship, collaboration and mutual assistance between the U.S.S.R. and the Socialist Republic of Romania* – as a sign of reconciliation between Romania and Soviet states respectively, after the dramatic events of the night between the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1968, which resulted in the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet, East-German, Polish, Hungarian and Bulgarian military units, as well as the harsh blaming expressed by R.C.P. supreme leader for that operation<sup>2</sup>.

A month later, the members of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the P.C.R. decided that the meetings of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the R.C.P. should be held during the 4<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> August 1969 and obviously it was planned that Leonid Brejnev should attend those meetings. The discussions about that subject were held on 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1969 in the following way: “*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu*: Concerning the Congress there is the proposal that we should settle on the period of 4<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> of August, taking into account that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August

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<sup>2</sup>Cezar Stanciu, *The War of the Nerves. Disputes Ceaușescu-Brejnev (1965-1971)*, Cetatea de Scaun, Publishing House, Târgoviște, 2011, pp. 169-171; 194.

there will be the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our homeland liberation and we will have state delegations and therefore we need an interval so that we can make preparations.

So, this is the proposal regarding the state of [holding] the Congress.

*Comrade Gheorghe Stoica:* If this is the reason for other bourgeois states [delegations] to come too.

*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu:* We considered inviting other states too; still we have a national holiday, within the anti-Hitler coalition there were also the French, the English and the Americans, so that we will invite some of these, too. For this reason, we proposed in this sense to do like this. It is good that we should finish the Congress and have time to rest a little and make the other preparations too, and the prime secretaries should be able to go to their counties to make the necessary preparations.

Agreed?

(All the comrades agree)<sup>3</sup>.

After the discussions of Leonid Brejnev and Nicolae Ceaușescu (Moscow, 16<sup>th</sup> of May 1969), the Romanian leaders received through Aleksander Vasilievici Basov, the U.S.S.R. ambassador to Romania, a letter signed by the Secretary General of the C.P.S.U. and by Aleksei Kosâghin (24 June 1969). In this way, the Soviet leaders announced their agreement about understating their state visit to Romania, in order to participate in the ceremony of signing the *Treaty of friendship, collaboration and mutual assistance between the U.S.S.R. and the Socialist Republic of Romania* (event scheduled for the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1969). Nicolae Ceaușescu insisted that the visit should last longer and in agreement with Moscow, he managed to settle on the reception of the two Soviet guests in Bucharest for the period 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> July of 1969. According to a statement made by Paul Niculescu Mizil, during the talks of a delegation led by Ion Gheorghe Maurer with the Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and Li Xiannian (Beijing, 7-8 September 1969), the

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<sup>3</sup>C.N.H.A., fund of the C.C. of the R.C.P.- The Office, file no. 69/1969, f. 43.

Romanian and Soviet Treaty had already been prepared several months before the visit to Romania planned by Leonid Ilici Brejnev and Aleksei Kosâghin, only the signing of it being necessary<sup>4</sup>.

The situation changed radically after the president Richard Nixon publicly confirmed his intention to reach Bucharest (28<sup>th</sup> of June 1969). Two days before that notification, Nicolae Ceaușescu sent to Moscow a message in which he announced the visit of the American quest to Romania. The reply of the leaders in Kremlin arrived two weeks later (9<sup>th</sup> of July 1969), in a letter in which Leonid Brejnev and Aleksei Kosâghin informed that they were involved in solving important matters and were bound to postpone their visit to Romania. Consequently, the ceremony of concluding the Romanian and Soviet treaty was called off *sine die* and the Soviet Prime Minister signed it a year later (Bucharest, 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1970)<sup>5</sup>.

In a meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1969, the members of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P. discussed for an hour the results obtained at the twenty extraordinary conferences of the party organizations of the counties (held on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> July 1969). Throughout the country people were debating the Theses of the C.C. of the R.C. P. and the project of the „Directives of the 10<sup>th</sup> R.C.P. Congress regarding the five-year plan for the years 1971-1975 as well as the leading directions of the national economy for the period of 1976-1980”.

During the same meeting, Nicolae Ceaușescu presented the conclusions resulted from the visits he had undertaken in the counties Cluj, Maramures, Satu Mare, Bihor and Arad. At the same time, the party leader informed the members of the Executive

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<sup>4</sup>Romanian-Chinese Relations 1880-1974. Documents, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Archives of Romania; coordinator, the ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura, “The Official Monitor” Autonomous Management, Bucharest, 2005, p. 950.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Joseph F. Harrington, Bruce J. Courtney, Romanian-American Relations, 1940-1990, The European Institute, Iasi, 2002, pp. 276-278; Adam Burakoqski, The Dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989). The Genius of the Carpathians, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2011, pp. 127-129; Lavinia Betea, Cristina Diac, Florin-Răzvan Mihai, Ilarion Țiu, 21 August 1968 - Ceaușescu's Apotheosis, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2009, pp. 254-257; Cezar Stanciu, op. cit., p. 195.

Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P. about the fact that at the beginning of the following week they were to receive his draft report for the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the R.C.P. and an Executive Committee meeting was planned for the same week with the view to discussing and approving that document. Besides, Nicolae Ceaușescu suggested and the participants in the meeting agreed to postpone the visit of the Soviet Union party and government delegation to Romania until the autumn of that year.

During the discussion of 16 July 1969 Emil Bodnăraș insisted that they should reply to the Soviets proposal for setting the period of the visit, so that we should not give an “impression of resentment”. Nicolae Ceaușescu agreed to Emil Bodnăraș’ idea, and the meeting of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P. ended without any sign of the surprise that was to come<sup>6</sup>.

The next day, the program of Richard Nixon’s future visit to Romania having been completed (and approved during the Permanent Presidium meeting of 7 July 1969), Nicolae Ceaușescu summoned an urgent meeting of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P. in order to approve a two-day delay of the R.C.P. 10<sup>th</sup> Congress. How was that decision adopted, how long did the discussion last and who insisted on changing the starting day of the congress? These are questions that can be answered by means of the protocol and the shorthand record of the extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P. on 17 July 1969 (which we display in the Annex no. 2).

The importance of the visit to Bucharest undertaken by Richard Nixon was mentioned by him at the end of October 1969, during the meeting at the White House with the Apollo 11 astronauts (who reached the Moon in July 1969). Craig Nelson, ex-vice-president of the publishing house “Harper & Row, Hyperion and Random House”, wrote about that event as follows: “The men returned to the United States, first stopping at the White House where Pat Nixon

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<sup>6</sup>C.N.H.A., fund of the C.C. of the R.C.P.- The Office, file no. 98/1969, f. 2-3; 5-14.

gave them a tour of her husband's collection of historic gavels, and the president commented that night at dinner that Romania's President Ceaușescu had finally agreed to a state meeting in wake of Apollo 11, a diplomatic breakthrough that Nixon believed was worth the cost of the entire space program"<sup>7</sup>.

In his turn, during the discussions with Zhou Enlai and Li Xiannian (Beijing, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> of September 1969), the Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer declared the following things about President Richard Nixon's visit to Romania: "Comrade Ceaușescu informed you through your ambassador [in Bucharest] about the content of this visit. But I told the ambassador that there were aspects which could be better clarified during a direct discussion and that is why I am going to deal with this visit. Of course, during this visit a whole range of issues were discussed, because the talks with Nixon were fairly long. Some of them, such the European security, may not be of much interest to you; others are more familiar to you. First of all, Nixon unconditionally expressed his wish to find a way of normalizing the relation with China. He dearly spoke and asked us to give him the helping hand that we can give him (smiling); we told him that what we could do was to inform the Chinese leadership about this discussion. But we also told him that apparently there were a series of issues on which the Chinese leadership had already made a position and to which you had better find solutions and maybe while looking for solutions to these problems, you will find a way to tight and normal relations with China". One of these issues is Taiwan (Zhou Enlai laughed).

Certainly, we did not go into details about what should be done in the case of Taiwan and what should not be done; it is not our business to discuss it. If this is ever to be discussed, the talk will be between you and them, but the man expressed this wish.

Our impression was that wish was sincere, namely it corresponds with certain American interests which these people appreciate. Which

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<sup>7</sup>Craig Nelson, *Rocket Men, The Epic Story of the First Men on the Moon*, VIKING Penguin Group, New York, 2009, p. 321.

are these American interests corresponding to these wishes, we were not able to figure out. We know for sure that in the American public opinion the wish for normalizing the relations with China has been present for a long time. We have been told about this wish several times. At a certain moment, through [John Kenneth] Galbraith, we received the expression of Robert Kennedy's wish, when he was alive, to come and discuss with us this matter too, among others: what our opinion was about this situation. The visit did not take place then on account of certain circumstances; after that it did not happen because of [Robert] Kennedy's tragic end).

In the discussions with [William Averell] Harriman I found this concern to establish normal relations with China. I had a fairly long discussion with Harriman. [...].

In relation to this, the sharpening conflict between China and the Soviet Union was also discussed. Nixon definitely stated that by no means would he intend to support the Soviet Union if this had any aggressive plan against China"<sup>8</sup>.

In conclusion, Nicolae Ceaușescu's decision - approved by all the participants in the Executive Committee meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July - had an obvious anti- Soviet propagandist character, though the Romanian leader tried at the same time to avoid a mounting of his disputes with Moscow authorities. For the first and single time congress of a European Communist Party was delayed on account of an official visit undertaken by the „No. 1 public enemy” of communism to a country belonging to the Soviet bloc. For the political and military leaders in Kremlin, the changing of the date of the R.C.P. 10<sup>th</sup> Congress was another proof of the fact that Nicolae Ceaușescu represented a danger to the unity of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, and Leonid Brejnev was forced to call off his visit to Romania planned for the summer of 1969. Later on, the Soviet leader's attitude demonstrated that he did not agree to a number of important opinions and actions taken by Bucharest authorities in the

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<sup>8</sup>Romanian-Chinese Relations. 1880-1974. Documents, ..., pp. 945-946.



field of foreign policy, postponing for a very long time any kind of travel to Romania. During the same period, Nicolae Ceaușescu on various occasions tried to convince Leonid Brejnev of his good faith and of the Romanians' spirit of understanding, because several U.S.S.R. institutions repeatedly blocked the economic cooperation between the two countries, using various excuses.

**Annex No. 1**

**27<sup>th</sup> of October 1967**

A note of proposals drawn up by George Macovescu, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and sent to Nicolae Ceaușescu, regarding the intention expressed by the American senator Robert Francis Kennedy to visit Romania in January 1968, together with his wife.

THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA      *STRICTLY SECRET*  
THE MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
17/002220/1

*The Archives of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P*  
*No. 2893/14. XI. 1967*

*The Office of the C.C. of the R.C.P.*                      *No. 3392/28. X. 1967*

[Resolution]: *At the Presidium*

[Handwritten record:] *I-1 C*

**NOTE OF PROPOSALS**

Regarding: Senator Robert Kennedy's visit to Romania

On the occasion of a visit undertaken by the ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Romania to Washington to the senator Robert Kennedy, the latter expressed his intention to visit Romania during a journey around the Eastern European countries, together with his wife.

The visit might take place in January 1968, immediately after the winter holidays.

R. Kennedy mentioned that he would like to have some political discussions, meet personalities, visit a university and possibly talk to students.

Concerned with the possibility of running for President of the United States, R. Kennedy adopted a political line similar to that of the former president John Kennedy, which attracted the support of the American Democratic Party's liberal circles, as well as of other political factors with moderate orientation, being also the favourite representative of certain intellectual and syndicate circles.

Proposing a more flexible policy to correspond to a larger extent to the internal and external evolution, as well as trying to avail himself of certain political circumstances not favourable to the Administration, R. Kennedy often found himself in public contradiction to president Johnson both on some international issues (the war in Vietnam, the intervention in the Dominican Republic, etc.) and on domestic policy issues. Regarding Vietnam, R. Kennedy is in favour of stopping the escalating events and increasing the efforts meant to find a political solution.

Taking into account Senator Robert Kennedy's political personality, we propose:

1. The ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Romania to Washington is to be authorized to inform Senator R. Kennedy that he is welcome to come to Romania and that the Romanian party would like to receive specifications concerning the planned visit with a view to drawing up a suitable plan.
2. After setting on the period of R. Kennedy's visit to our country, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is to draw up the programme of the visit.

20<sup>st</sup> of October 1967

ss. George Macovescu

The note was sent to:

the members of the Permanent Presidium of the C.C. of the R.C.P.;

CC of the RCP Section for Foreign Relations.

*C.N.H.A., found of the C.C. of the R.C.P. the Office, file no. 153/1967, f. 21-22.*

Note:

1. The document was stamped and registered at the Office of the C.C. of the R.C.P. and the Archives of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P.. The resolution belongs to Nicolae Ceaușescu. In order to display these details, we used italics.

## **Annex No. 2**

**17<sup>th</sup> of July 1969**

The protocol and shorthand record of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P. on 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1969, during which they decided that the opening of the proceedings of the R.C.P.'s 10<sup>th</sup> Congress should be held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1969, as a result of the American president Richard Nixon's planned visit to Romania for the period 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1969.

THE ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

1787/1969

*The Archives of the Executive Committee  
of the C.C. of the R.C.P.*

*No. 397/21. 07. 1969*

Protocol No. 28

of the meeting of the Executive Committee [of the C.C. of the R.C.P.] of 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1969

The following comrades participated: Nicolae Ceaușescu, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Chivu Stoica, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Maxim

Berghianu, Constantin Drăgan, János Fazekas, Petre Lupu, Manea Mănescu, Leonte Răutu, Gheorghe Stoica, Vasile Vîlcu, Ștefan Voitec, Iosif Banc, Petre Blajovici, Dumitru Popa, Dumitru Popescu, Mihai Dalea.

The following comrades did not attend the meeting because they were in the territory in order to prepare the conferences of the party organisations in the counties: Gheorghe Apostol, Emil Bodnăraș, Virgil Trofin, Ilie Verdeț, Florian Dănălache, Gheorghe Rădulescu, Dumitru Coliu, Emil Drăgănescu, Mihai Gere, Vasile Patilineț.

The meeting started at 11.00 a.m. and ended at 11.30 a.m.

Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu presided.

At comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu's proposal, the Executive Committee [of the C.C. of the R.C.P.] decided that the opening proceedings of the RCP's 10<sup>th</sup> Congress should take place on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1969, at 10.00 a.m.

Concerning this, it was settled that during the 17<sup>th</sup> of July current year, the members of the Executive Committee and of the Secretariat of R.C.P.'s Central Committee who had not participated in the meeting, as well as the members and the substitute members of the party's Central Committee should be consulted.

At the same time, measures will be taken to announce the opening date of the RCP's 10<sup>th</sup> Congress to all the foreign parties and organisations invited to participate in the Congress proceedings.

ss. Nicolae Ceaușescu

*The Archives of the Executive*

*Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P.*

*No. 1398/21. 07. 1969*

The shorthand record of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the R.C.P.'s C.C. of 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1969

The following comrades participated: Nicolae Ceaușescu, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Chivu Stoica, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Maxim Berghianu, Constantin Drăgan, János Fazekas, Petre Lupu, Manea Mănescu, Leonte Răutu, Gheorghe Stoica, Vasile Vilcu, Ștefan Voitec, Iosif Banc, Petre Blajovici, Dumitru Popa, Dumitru Popescu.

Comrade Mihai Dalea was invited.

The meeting started at 11.00 and lasted for 10 minutes.

*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu:* Look, comrades, why I wanted us to have this short meeting.

As for the congress, we summoned it for 4 August. Maybe we [should] have a delay of a few days. I have been thinking of two options. To set it closer to 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, but several problems aroused. This would be one option. Another option would be to postpone it by two days, instead of 4<sup>th</sup> of August it could start on 6<sup>th</sup> of August, because [Richard] Nixon will be staying here for two days and it will be difficult for us to meet the delegations for the congress. Besides, there is also the problem of decorating.

*Comrade I. Gh. Maurer:* Maybe we had better postpone it by three days.

*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu:* Two days is enough. The delegations from the neighbouring countries are to come on Monday and Tuesday. The Yugoslavs, for instance, have already announced that they will come on the 3<sup>rd</sup> [August], so they will arrive on 5<sup>th</sup> of August.

Of course, [Richard] Nixon's visit calls for decorating, but we will decorate for the congress only on Monday and Tuesday.

First we should inform all the parties invited to the congress about this postponing.

Besides, I suggest that the other members of the Executive Committee should be consulted and today we should consult, on the phone, the members of the Central Committee. And the notification should sound like this: it was settled that the congress should start on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, at 10.00. So, we also give the hour.

Do you agree, comrades? (all comrades agreed).

*Comrade Petre Lupu:* Without giving a reason, just saying that the Central Committee has decided.

*Comrade Chivu Stoica:* It is good like this, because we do everything little by little.

*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu:* And we can also announce the foreigners, there is no problem.

The Chinese told us they had decided not to send delegations to congress any longer. Furthermore, they said that would create a difficult situation, because the Soviets will also be here. Of course, it would not be easy for them, but it would not be easy for us either.

*Comrade Chivu Stoica:* As for the delegations coming to the congress, are we going to invite them to the anniversary [of Romania's national day too]?

*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu:* Only the socialist countries should stay for 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, because if we invited some of the people, an infinite number of problems would arise.

*Comrade I. Gh. Maurer:* I also definitely [agree] to the idea of inviting only the socialist countries [to the anniversary of Romania's national day], because, otherwise, problems may appear; even if the Chinese and the Albanians do not come, the others will.

*Comrade Chivu Stoica:* The Albanians may come to the 25<sup>th</sup> national anniversary of Romania.

*Comrade I. Gh. Maurer:* Maybe.

*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu:* All these being told, we close the meeting.

Note:

1. The documents have been stamped and recorded at the Archives of the Executive Committee of the C.C. of the R.C.P.

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