

Political determinants of the participation of the Romanian representation in the XXIII Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984

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Summary

The fact that Romania did not obey the decision of the party authorities of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries has until today caused many controversial opinions and speculations. This fact is often quoted, also in academic discussions, as an example of unique heroism and independence of the Romanian authorities from the Soviet political domination. It is known that the sole decision-maker in this case was Romania's famous "red dictator", Nicolae Ceaușescu. His long-year rule led the Romanian society to extreme poverty, even for the standards of the socialist countries. However, this did not stop him from conducting a relatively independent and expensive foreign policy and presenting himself as a leader of international importance. For a long time presidents and prime ministers of Western countries confirmed his belief, sparing no praises or various honours, hoping for a political schism among the countries of the Warsaw Pact. For many years it allowed Ceaușescu to achieve his propaganda objectives in the international arena.

The situation was similar with the participation of the representation of Romania in the XXIII Olympic Games in Los Angeles. However, it was only a short-term episode in the political confrontation between the East and the West. Also in this case Ceaușescu received substantial financial support from the United States, IOC and the Olympic Organising Committee (LAOOC). However, he was not to enjoy this success for long. After a few more years of his dictatorship-like rule he was sentenced to death by a court decision and executed by a firing squad together with his wife Elena.

Key words: Ceaușescu, Olympic Games, Romania, Los Angeles, United States, IOC, Soviet Union

Introduction

The fact that the Polish Olympic representation did not participate in the XXIII Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984 constitutes until this day a sore wound in the history of the Polish Olympic movement. The reasons for the political authorities of the Polish Peoples' Republic taking such a decision, which was then formally sanctioned by the board of the Polish Olympic Committee, have been quite thoroughly described in Polish academic literature and memoirs (Roman 1994, p. 47-49; Olszański 2004, p. 159-160; Miklas 2012, p. 52; Pasko 2012, p. 418-420; Słoniewski 2016, p. 266-271). However, relatively few important documents from that period have been preserved. It is probable that they had never even been prepared. Luckily, the minutes from the meeting of the board of the Polish Olympic Committee from 19th May 1984, when the decision was made not to send the Polish team to Los Angeles, have been discovered after many years. The authorities of the Polish Olympic Committee have until today not declared the decision from back then as wrong and so very unfair towards both the sportsmen and sport fans. Such a declaration was requested by, among others, Józef Lipiec already in 1989 (Zbiór 1989, p. 22).

From time to time the recurring doubts are voiced in the Polish sports circles – was the Polish Olympic Committee's decision really inevitable or could the party, state and Olympic Committee authorities have followed Romania's example and mustered up the courage to send the Polish representation to the Olympic Games despite the negative stance of the USSR authorities and other socialist countries? In order to answer such questions it is necessary to analyse the factors that influenced the internal and foreign policies in Romania at the beginning of 1980s, which were different from Poland. The unique and long-lasting – even for the realities of the Eastern bloc after World War II – career of Nicolae Ceaușescu has been the subject of academic research and many interesting publications (Pacepa 1990; Burakowski 2008; Klein 2013; Arendt 2014; Kunze 2016).

The attitude of the west towards the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu

Nicolae Ceaușescu became the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party already in 1965, at the age of 47. From the moment of his election he consistently

strove towards achieving absolute power. Although he did not have higher education, he especially enjoyed foreign policy, creating his own image as a statesman of international importance. The interest of numerous politicians from the Western states strengthened him in that purpose. Many of them perceived him as the only leader of a socialist state who was sometimes able to disagree with the official position of the USSR authorities.

Already in 1967 the governments of Romania and the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations. In the same year Romania, as the only country of the Warsaw Pact, did not condemn Israel for the so-called Six-Day War with the Arab states. However, this decision had its financial background. Romania was generously rewarded by Israel, having received payments for agreeing to allow the members of the Romanian Jewish community to leave the country. A year later the Romanian army did not participate in the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops on Czechoslovakia, and Ceaușescu himself openly condemned this intervention. He was not a supporter of the Czechoslovakian reforms, but he believed that the socialist states should have the right to decide about their own development (Wegs, Ladrech 2008, p. 343). Some authors suggest even that the behaviour of the secretary general of the Romanian Communist Party regarding the Czechoslovakian issue had been contrived in advance with the authorities in Kremlin (Kunze, op.cit., p.190-191). In his foreign policy Ceaușescu paid special attention to maintaining good contacts with the US administration. This sentiment was reciprocated, as the White House hoped to break up the unity of the satellites of the Soviet Union. Romania's exceptionally friendly relations with the United States hoisted Ceaușescu to the position of a leader of international importance. It is therefore no wonder that he attempted to play the role of an intermediary in ending the Vietnam War. On their part, the Americans promised to extend the most favoured nation clause towards Romania (which they in fact did in 1975). The relations with the People's Republic of China constituted another field of cooperation between these two countries. Unlike Romania, neither of the nuclear superpowers could at that time say they had good relations with China. The shrewd Nicolae Ceaușescu promised to help the Americans in this matter. He made his promise during an official visit paid by Richard Nixon, president of the United States, in 1969 in Bucharest. From that moment onward the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party could consider himself a player of global politics (Ibid, p. 196). The USSR party authorities, despite the external pretence of Ceaușescu's insubordination, did not show too much concern about such an attitude of their ally. They even expressed quiet acceptance of this specific Romanian external politics, as they fully controlled it in the strategic aspects, and treated the megalomaniac and nationalistic style of Ceaușescu's government as a kind of political extravagance. Also, they knew perfectly well that the Romanian leader, trained in Moscow, was a typical Stalinist satrap and his country was completely dependent on the deliveries from and economic cooperation with the USSR.

The internal politics in Romania was to a large extent influenced by the visits Nicolae Ceaușescu had paid to the PRC and DPRK at the beginning of the 1970s. The Romanian leader was fascinated with the governing style of Mao Zedong and Kim Il-sung. Under their influence Ceaușescu strengthened the cult of the leader in his country even more, and when it comes to ideology he used more elements of Marxism, nationalism and chauvinism. In internal politics he carried out staff cleansings and a cultural revolution. He strengthened the oppression apparatus and various forms of repression towards the society. However, these actions did not discourage the United States from continuing their preferential treatment of Romania in their politics towards other Socialist states. In 1972 Romania, as the only country of the Eastern bloc, enjoying the support of the White House, could join the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Also, its trade exchange with the Western countries and Iran increased. The world offered Ceaușescu many proofs of its appreciation and international recognition: Pope Paul VI welcomed him at an audience in Vatican in 1973; the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim came to visit Bucharest; Ceaușescu and his wife Elena were given red carpet treatment in Washington and Bonn. Apart from holding talks at the White House, the Romanian head of state also addressed both houses of the American Congress. It is therefore no wonder that Ceaușescu, revelling in his international position and his close contacts with the leaders of the most important countries in the world, even expected to be given the Nobel Peace Prize. At that time he even dared to voice a bold – and for the USSR quite heretical – suggestion of simultaneously dissolving the Warsaw Pact and NATO. However, even this thesis of the Romanian leader was received by the Russians with a surprising calmness, as if Kremlin had come to terms with Ceaușescu's excessive ambitions in international politics. At the same time, he was not very highly valued in Moscow (ibid, p. 240-241). Even more so as he allowed himself to criticise the Soviet army that entered Afghanistan in 1979. Soon the personality cult of "the Genius of the Carpathians" and his wife Elena reached an almost grotesque scale with its dire consequences for the standard of living of the Romanian society. The violations of human rights were accompanied by wrong investments, acute supply shortages and the quickly growing national debt.

The growing problems of the Romanian society stood in clear contrast with the huge fortune of the Ceaușescu clan and their love for lavish lifestyle and luxury. The Romanian dictator, like Stalin – whom he had always admired – was a megalomaniac and had an obsession about achieving his goals irrespective of the human costs (Calvacoressi 2002, p. 340). Nevertheless, the Western countries did not reduce their contacts with the Romanian president. At the end of the 1970s, when the bilateral relations between the nuclear superpowers reached the lowest level, Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena paid an official visit to Jimmy Carter, while the French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and German chancellor Helmut Schmidt visited Bucharest. During his visit in London Queen Elisabeth II welcomed

Ceaușescu among the nobility by granting him the title of the Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of Bath (Kunze, op. cit., p. 294-295). At that time the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party strengthened the friendly relations with Muammar Gaddafi, Reza Shah Pahlavi from Iran, dictators from the countries of the Sub-Saharan Africa, and above all with the leaders of the PRC and DPRK.

Ceaușescu, drunk on all these international successes and at the same time conducting a destructive economic and social policy, was the reason why the Romanian government had to declare the state bankrupt in 1982 and conduct debt conversion. In response, the Western countries refused to grant the loans they had previously promised to Romania. As a consequence, Ceaușescu ordered a faster repayment of the entire Romanian foreign debt without taking any new loans (ibid, p. 320-321). This caused serious financial consequences for the already poor Romanian society. Romanians found themselves in a dramatic financial situation, worse than in any of the other socialist states in Europe. The last years of Ceaușescu's dictatorship constituted a period of his complete alienation and growing international isolation of Romania. In 1988 the country lost the most favoured nation clause in its trade relations with the United States. A year later Romania was on the verge of economic and social collapse. This in turn caused riots and mass protests. The dictator, attempting to save his regime, ordered the police to shoot at the protesters in Timisoara. 97 people died (Gaddis 2007, p. 287). Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were soon arrested and after a short trial executed on 25th December 1989.

The importance of sport in internal and international politics of the Romanian Socialist Republic

The model of managing physical fitness in Romania, including professional sports, did not differ much from similar solutions and standards adopted in other socialist countries in Europe (Lipoński 2016, p. 25). The National Council for Physical Education was established in 1967. The Council and its regional branches functioned basing on the law from 28th December 1967 adopted by the Great National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Romania. The main aim of this organisation was to promote the development of physical education among children and youth as well as the recreational and professional sports. The latter task was mainly the responsibility of sports clubs (Jaworski 1985, p. 27-31).

The entire organisation of sports and physical education in Romania was, like in other socialist states, subordinate to programmes and national institutions controlled by the Romanian Communist Party (Riordan 1978, p. 5). The successes of Romanian sportsmen, including those participating in the Olympic Games, were supposed to play a special role in strengthening the international position of Romania and personally of President Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Even though the Romanian Olympic Committee was established as early as in 1914 (as the 20th committee in the IOC history), Romanians did not achieve any significant international results in the interwar period. During this entire time they only won one silver medal in 1936 and one bronze Olympic medal in 1924. After World War II Romania's position in the summer Olympic disciplines improved steadily, starting already from the XV Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952 (Vinokur 1988, p. 52-55). Taking into account the relatively small population of the country (approx. 20-23 million citizens) and the modest financial capacities, the sports achievements were considerable especially in artistic gymnastics, rowing, athletics, canoeing, wrestling, shooting and fencing.

Already during the XXI Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976 Romanian sportsmen won 27 medals and thus achieved the sixth place in the unofficial classification. The 15-year-old gymnast Nadia Comaneci, who won five medals including three gold ones, became a national heroine (Porada *bdw.*, p. 166-167). The Romanian Olympic representation continued their success also four years later during the XXII Olympic Games in Moscow by winning 25 medals, including six golds. The representation achieved the highest rank in the Olympic rivalry during the XXIII Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984. Romanian sportsmen won 53 medals altogether, including 20 gold ones! They won the third place in the unofficial ranking, placing right behind the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. They achieved such a success partly thanks to the absence of the other representations of socialist states during those Olympic Games. Another Romanian gymnast, Ecaterina Szabo, who won five medals, including four gold ones, became another star of those Olympic Games.

Romania's exceptional sport achievements during the summer Olympic Games continued practically until the fall of Ceaușescu's dictatorship. The Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988 brought another 24 medals, seven of them gold. This placed Romania on the 10th position in the unofficial ranking. The enormous Olympic successes of Romanian sportsmen during the long period of the rule of the Romanian Communist Party and Ceaușescu family could be seen as a unique phenomenon, incompatible with the economic position of the country. This could explain the special "care" the party and state authorities extended towards professional sports as well as the propaganda meaning they attached to them internationally. Romania's Olympic successes were to strengthen the position and role of Nicolae Ceaușescu in global politics (Vinokur, op. cit., p. 54-55).

The political circumstances of sending the Romanian Olympic representation to the XXIII Olympic Games in Los Angeles

The participation of the Olympic representation of the Soviet Union in the Games in Los Angeles in 1984, after

the well-known boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games four years earlier by the United States and many other countries, remained uncertain during the entire period preceding the Olympics. One could hear opinions, also among the members of the IOC management, that the probability of a Soviet “revenge” for the “humiliation” the organisers of the 1980 Olympic Games experienced because of the US administration had to be taken into account. The leaders of the Soviet Union made their decision in this matter dependent to a large extent on the current state of the geopolitical relations, especially the bilateral relations with the United States. And those, after Ronald Reagan had assumed the office, were very bad indeed. The new president had declared confrontation with the Soviet “evil empire” on all possible fields to be the main objective of his foreign policy. In the military area he realised the project of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which gained media popularity under the name “star wars”.

The years 1983-1984 brought about a particular increase of international tension between the two nuclear superpowers. It was accompanied by the growing armed conflicts in the Middle East and Central Africa (Lebanon, Grenada, Nicaragua). In September 1983 a Soviet fighter shot down a Korean Air passenger plane over Sakhalin. 269 passengers died in this tragic event. The incident was widely condemned across the world and gave a pretext to carry out a social campaign in the United States against the participation of the Olympians from the Soviet Union in the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. The US decision to dislocate new missiles in Western Europe caused the American-Soviet negotiations regarding the reduction of strategic arms (START) to be ceased indefinitely at the end of 1983 (Słoniewski, op. cit., p. 219). The deterioration of the bilateral relations was also influenced by the death of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Yuri Andropov, in February 1984 and the election of Konstantin Chernenko as his successor. In those circumstances it was the foreign minister Andrei Gromyko – who already hated the Americans – who was the sole decision-maker when it came to the foreign policy of the USSR (ibid, p. 222-223). At that time the relations with the United States became a priority for Nicolae Ceaușescu in terms of Romanian foreign policy. For the White House Romania could become a factor that could undermine the unity of the Warsaw Pact, especially in the face of the upcoming date of signing a new agreement prolonging the functioning of the pact in 1985. It was because of these reasons that the American government prolonged Romania’s most favoured nation clause in 1983, despite the ever more numerous signals from the American diplomats about the violations of human rights in Romania (Burakowski, op. cit., p. 286). The visit by Vice-president George Bush, who previously served as chief of the CIA, in Bucharest in September 1983 confirmed the good bilateral relations. 1984 witnessed the highest turnover in the foreign trade between the two countries. Furthermore, preparations began for the official visit by the president of

the Socialist Republic of Romania in the United States planned for 1985 (however, the visit never happened).

The ever friendlier relations between Romania and the US had to result in the new tensions between Bucharest and Moscow. They were aggravated even more by Ceaușescu’s megalomaniac behaviour in the international arena, such as for example the address he had sent to both leaders of the nuclear superpowers regarding the mutual withdrawal from the concept of deploying mid-range missiles in Europe and freezing their arms budgets or his demonstrative refusal to meet the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact army, Marshal Viktor Kulikov, during his visit in Bucharest. Nicolae Ceaușescu also refused to send his representative to the Moscow consultations of the central committee secretaries for ideological and foreign issues in December 1983. At that point the USSR leaders seem to have come to terms with the fact that Ceaușescu tried to conduct the politics of independent yet insignificant power within the Warsaw Pact and boycotted some of Moscow’s actions (ibid, p. 288). The weakening of Romania’s relations with the USSR was accompanied by Bucharest maintaining good relations with the PRC and its leaders. It happened in the time of the ever more strained relations between Moscow and Beijing and the simultaneous improvement of the latter’s relations with Washington. Such international implications had to have a bearing on the decisions regarding the participation of the Romanian sportsmen at the XXIII Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Once again, Olympic sports were appropriated by politicians and their actions. The final decision about the participation of the remaining representations of socialist states in the Olympic Games depended on the will of the Political Office of the Central Committee of the CPSU. An appropriate resolution was passed in Moscow on 5th May 1984; basing on this act the Olympic Committee of the Soviet Union decided – only three days later – not to send its team to Los Angeles. The violation of the Olympic Charter by the hosts of the Games was quoted as a justification for this decision, including the need to provide safety to the Soviet sportsmen, trainers and activists (Landry, Yerlés 1996, p. 118-120; Senn 1999, p. 196-202; Słoniewski, op. cit., p. 248-258).

However, the real reasons were completely different than those presented by the Soviet Olympic Committee in the statement. They were of geopolitical nature and resulted from the ever more strained relations between the two nuclear superpowers. Sport became once again an instrument in the global politics. Once the decision was taken, the Soviet side had to convince the authorities of the other socialist states as quickly as possible to share its position and force their national Olympic committees to make similar decisions regarding not sending their sportsmen to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Achieving unity of positions among all socialist states would have certainly strengthened the decision’s international overtone and would have constituted a significant weakening of the importance of the upcoming Olympic Games. For this purpose the representatives of the communist and workers’

parties as well as the heads of the sports committees from the socialist states were invited to a special meeting in Moscow on 10th-11th May. Twelve delegations participated in the consultations, including a three-person delegation of the Romanian Communist Party. It was headed by Julian Plosztaru, member of the Central Committee of the RCP and at the same time deputy head of the Central Committee RCP Department. The delegations participating in the consultations quite unanimously declared their understanding and support for the position of the Soviet Olympic Committee and informed that they would not send their own representations to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles either. Only the representative of the Romanian Communist Party declared that his mandate was limited only to hearing out the positions of the other delegations and reporting on them to the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party for them to make the final decision (Słoniewski, op. cit. p. 259-260). Undoubtedly, it was only a tactical subterfuge, as a couple of days earlier during Juan Antonio Samaranch's visit in Bucharest Nicolae Ceaușescu had already confirmed the participation of Romania in all events organised by the IOC. This statement allowed the spokesman of the Romanian embassy in Vienna to declare as early as on 9th May, i.e. before the party consultations in Moscow, that Romania would be participating in the XXIII Olympic Games, although the final decision was to be made by the President after his return from the trip to Pakistan (Hill 1992, p. 181). At that time the authorities of the United States, the Olympic Organising Committee (LAOOC) as well as the IOC did everything in their power to undermine the meaning of the decision of the Eastern bloc about not participating in the Olympic Games by making sure Romania would take part in the event.

Alexandru Siperco, a Romanian national, held an important position among the IOC members, being one of the longest-serving – since 1955 – members of this body. He was a peer of the IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch (both were born in 1920) as well as one of his deputies and closest co-workers. Speaking six foreign languages, he held responsible positions in Romania's state apparatus dealing with sport issues as early as the 1940s and 1950s. Between 1952 and 1959 he served as the President of the Romanian Olympic Committee (Biographies 1997, p. 4). His full sports biography was published some years after his death in 1998 (Ionescu 2012). He had certainly had an important influence on the decisions made by the IOC President. However, it does not seem like he had had a similar role in relation to the Romanian president. "The Genius of the Carpathians" knew best what he had to do and he needed no special advisors. It was confirmed, for instance, by a small detail from the statement by Juan Antonio Samaranch himself, who, when recalling his visit to the Romanian leader, emphasised that his Romanian deputy at the IOC waited outside as he was not invited to take part in the meeting (Miller 1992, p. 90).

A special meeting of the deputy heads of the sports organisations of the socialist countries took place on 16th

May 1984 in Sophia and was devoted mainly to the organisation of the "Friendship-84" competition as a form of compensation to the sportsmen who did not participate in the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. The representatives of Romania once again did not express their opinion nor did they inform the other participants about the decision regarding the upcoming Olympic Games. Another round of consultations of this kind, yet this time with the participation of the President of the IOC, took place in Prague on 24th-25th May 1984. It was precisely during that meeting that the head of the Romanian delegation officially confirmed the participation of the Romanian representation in the XXIII Olympic Games. Romanian sportsmen followed the example of their Chinese colleagues who submitted their participation already on 12th May, for the first time in 32 years. The Olympic Games in Los Angeles broke an absolute record in terms of participation. The unity of the socialist states in that matter was thus successfully broken. The decision of the Romanian authorities significantly weakened the argumentation position of the remaining socialist countries towards their own sports circles. It also undermined the credibility of the alleged rationale for the refusal to participate in the Olympic Games due to security reasons. It openly discredited the decision of the other states of the Eastern bloc. The leaders of those countries did not conceal their anger and deep disappointment with the decision and stance of Nicolae Ceaușescu (D'Agati 2013, p. 137-138).

The XXIII Olympic Games took place from 28th July until 12th August 1984. 6735 sportsmen from 140 countries participated in the event and the Romanian participation received an especially warm welcome already during the opening ceremony (Minkiewicz 1993, p. 204). The fact that other socialist states did not participate in the event had significantly lowered the level of rivalry and had an impact on the results in many disciplines. The hosts achieved a great success by winning a record number of 147 medals, including 83 gold ones. But the greatest beneficiary of the Games was precisely the small (127 sportsmen) representation of Romania, as their sportsmen had stood on the top place on the podium 20 times. The Romanian Olympic team received far-reaching help from the IOC and LAOOC both before and during the Olympic Games. The Organisational Committee treated the Romanian representation at all times as guests of special importance. No other Olympic team received such comprehensive assistance. It was even made sure that the Romanians could follow a TV transmission of the Olympics (Ueberroth 1986, p. 292). Still on 29th May President Samaranch sent a four-person delegation to Bucharest in order to agree the details of the transmission (Reich 1986, p. 229). The Romanians also received a significant reimbursement of their participation costs. Both the IOC and LAOOC granted them one third of the incurred costs i.e. 60,000 USD each (Hill, op. cit., p. 181).

The IOC also awarded Nicolae Ceaușescu with the Olympic Order, which was generally criticised not only

in the sports circles. Juan Antonio Samaranch explained later that the Order was awarded not as an acknowledgment of Ceaușescu's internal politics in Romania, but for breaking the boycott action undertaken by the communist countries, which was extremely important for the future of the Olympic Games (Miller, op. cit., p. 90). However, the fact of participating in the Games and the benefits – both in terms of sports results and image boost – constituted only a short-lived success. They could not change the situation of the country that was plunging into deep and constant social and economic crisis. Also the decisions of the remaining socialist states which, unlike Romania, refused to participate in those Olympic Games, did not bring any signs of success. Quite on the contrary, the absence of their representations during the event in Los Angeles brought deep disappointment and regret not only in sports circles, but above all in the entire societies. Contrary to the expectations no medals were won; at the same time, this decision allowed the American sportsmen to achieve great successes in the field their Soviet counterparts considered to be their own domain. Apart from that the organisational and sports success of the Olympic Games strengthened the position of Ronald Reagan and contributed to his re-election as US President. In today's Russian Federation it was admitted after many years that the decision not to participate in the Olympic Games was a mistake (Прокуменщиков 2004, p. 221; Штейнбах 2015, p. 248). It was for these reasons that no one spoke of further non-participation of the teams from the Soviet Union and other European socialist countries in the Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988 – the last Olympics in the world divided between two opposing poles.

Conclusion

The decision of the political authorities of Romania, or rather the individual decision of its “red dictator” Nicolae Ceaușescu, to send the national representation to the XXIII Olympic Games in Los Angeles despite the unified position of the USSR and other socialist states had several reasons. First of all, Nicolae Ceaușescu had for years tried to conduct a foreign policy which would be independent from the Soviet Union. He often gave expression to this wish through surprising statements and non-standard actions. It is therefore no wonder that for years he had enjoyed the support and recognition in the eyes of the American administration, which in turn hoped for creating a split among the member states of the Warsaw Pact. Such an eventuality, however, could have only had a symbolic meaning, as neither the Romanian army nor the country's economic potential had any greater meaning in the context of a potential military confrontation. It is worth noting that Romania was the only country among the socialist states in Europe where the USSR army did not have any military bases. The support of the West for Ceaușescu's regime and the lavish honours that were bestowed upon him personally

only caused an enormous increase of his megalomania, leading to his auto-creation as a politician of global significance. This “transformation” took place during the times of the particularly terrorising actions carried out by the infamous political police – Securitate, persecution of national minorities as well as general poverty of the larger part of the Romanian society. It was not the European standards, but the ones applied by Mao Zedong in PRC or Kim Il-sung in North Korea that constituted the examples to follow for the Romanian authorities when it came to internal politics.

In taking the decision about the participation in the Olympic Games in Los Angeles Nicolae Ceaușescu saw a chance of additionally strengthening his international prestige. The Olympic successes of the Romanian representation were to confirm the effectiveness of his internal politics and bring financial benefits such as, above all, the United States extending the most favoured country clause and the West granting possible further loans. Ceaușescu was known for his slyness and greed, when it came to even the smallest financial gains, so he did not reject the somewhat humiliating reimbursement of the costs – 120,000 USD from the IOC and LAOOC for the participation of the Romanian sportsmen in the Olympics. The decisions made by Romania – to participate in the Olympic Games – and by the Soviet Union and other socialist states – forbidding their sportsmen from going to Los Angeles – in the end brought neither side any success, because – as the history of the Olympic movement has proven – the boycott of the Olympic Games, regardless of the reasons, has never brought any measurable benefits to the boycotting side. The organisers, so the LAOOC and, personally, Ronald Regan – who managed to demonstrate to the American society the energy and potential of his country thanks to the unbelievable successes of his Olympic sportsmen – turned out to be the main beneficiaries of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Soon after that Regan was re-elected as the president of the United States. Paradoxically, the Russians who perceived him as their arch enemy helped him immensely in achieving this goal.

As for the answer to the important question – could Poland or any other socialist country in Europe have followed Romania's example and taken part in the Olympics of 1984? – there is only one reply. Taking into account the geopolitical situation and the complete, unconditional dependence of the party and state authorities of those countries from the USSR it would have been practically impossible. Even if we assume that the Polish Olympic Committee or any of the other national committees decided to vote on a motion to participate in the Los Angeles Olympics, it would have been annulled under any pretext or the board would have been exchanged in a flash to vote on the decision again, this time in line with the will of the political authorities. The sport of that time acted according to the existing possibilities, limits and, not so rarely, simple extortions.

This was the reality of those times and any other hypothetical solution options find no justification.

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