1848, blew apart the apparent unity of the dissidents, who ended up moving into all the major parties (aside from the Party of Democratic Socialism). Socialism before November 1989 was the language of republican self-determination and was part of, though not identical to, the revolution itself—just as the Greek republicanism of American revolutionary intellectuals was part of the American Revolution. The dissident groups that formed during the 1980s were more than mere filters for the masses; they enabled collective speech acts to emerge in a clear and articulate manner (as Grix himself states well on p. 122). Finally, could one not say that certain members of the masses, by deciding to form groups, to express their opinions as part of a social collective, and to create a new, nonstate public sphere, actually became dissident intellectuals in their own right? The distinction is not as stark as Grix suggests.

This book, with its bottom-up approach, does a great job of rectifying the excessive focus on dissident intellectuals and structural causes of the revolution. It brings the people back in. Clearly written, well-argued, and employing a variety of interesting and original sources, the book is useful for scholars as well as for teaching.


Reviewed by Mary Ellen Fischer, Skidmore College

This book must be read by anyone interested in Romanian Communism or relations between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the middle third of the twentieth century, the period preceding the years covered by Dennis Deletant’s earlier, widely praised study, *Ceauşescu and the Securitate, 1965–1989* (London: Hurst, 1995). In this latest book Deletant makes extensive use of memoirs and secondary sources published after 1989, declassified Romanian security service documents and Foreign Ministry records, and interviews he conducted in the 1990s.

In the first chapter Deletant fills some gaps in our knowledge of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) before 1930, most notably by providing details on party leaders such as Boris Ţiţeşcu and Marcel Pauker. The second chapter brings the story up to 1944, focusing on leadership struggles within the RCP and Josif Stalin’s interference through the Comintern. Deletant includes much new information on individual RCP leaders in both the “Soviet” and the “home” factions of the party, analyzing the split in the latter group between those in prison (including Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceauşescu) and those who managed to avoid arrest (such as Ţeian Foriş and Lucreţiu Pătraşcanu). He describes in detail how Gheorghiu-Dej managed to remove Foriş as party leader and have him murdered, actions that began “a decade-long, mafia-like struggle for power within the party” (p. 33).

The third chapter focuses on the coup of 23 August 1944, demonstrating the crucial role of King Michael in dismissing Marshal Ion Antonescu and changing sides
in the war. Deletant clarifies the role of Emil Bodnăraș and the RCP and shows how the Communists’ “superior organization” and the “lapses” of the other major parties (p. 52) gave custody of Antonescu to the Communists and enhanced their status within Romania. The next chapter reveals how the presence of Soviet troops and the weak responses of Britain and the United States allowed the RCP to gain power in Romania. Deletant emphasizes divisions among the Communists, again debunking stereotypes about the “Soviet” and “home” factions of the party. For example, in March 1945 Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca (both “Soviets”) were willing to cooperate with non-Communist parties in forming a government, but the “home” Communist Gheorghiu-Dej, backed by Soviet deputy foreign minister Andrei Vyshinskii, refused.

As the first half of chapter five shows, the resulting government under Petru Groza initiated a long series of arrests and acts of intimidation that would transform Romania into a Stalinist system. The second half of the chapter focuses on the persecution of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the forced merger of the Uniate and Orthodox Churches, and the controversial cooperation of Patriarch Justinian with the regime. The sixth chapter discusses the organization, methods, and leadership of the Securitate in considerable detail, describing individual security officials as well as political controversies among party leaders. For example, Ana Pauker espoused a gradualist approach to collectivization, but the extremely rapid policy that was actually adopted—against her wishes—was later blamed on her. Deletant continues to focus on politics in chapters seven and eight, showing in considerable detail how Gheorghiu-Dej proved his allegiance to Stalin and used his own loyal supporters in the “prison” faction of the RCP to discredit Pătrășcanu and gain control of the Romanian political system.

Deletant’s chilling depictions of the Romanian gulag—the physical and mental torture of prisoners and reeducation techniques as horrifying as any in prison literature—form the basis of chapter nine. He describes the Danube–Black Sea Canal project in detail and discusses the treatment of various religious sects in Communist Romania, complementing the discussion in chapter five of the Orthodox, Uniate, and Catholic churches. In chapter ten Deletant focuses on the armed resistance of partisans in the Carpathian mountains, concluding that although post-1989 revelations “have dispelled the general impression that there was no opposition to Communist rule [in Romania],” they have also demonstrated that “resistance . . . was not widespread . . . and never threatened to overthrow the regime” (p. 234).

In 1952, as chapter eleven reveals, Gheorghiu-Dej moved from simply following Stalin’s orders to directing events himself. Orders from Moscow to purge “Zionists” (i.e., Jews) gave him the ideological justification to remove Pauker and Luca, thus continuing the RCP’s “pattern of internecine struggles” and intensifying “the culture of violence and fear” in Romanian society (p. 235). Deletant convincingly demonstrates that the basic conflict within the RCP was not between “home” and “Soviet” factions but between Gheorghiu-Dej loyalists and opponents. The book shows in considerable detail how Gheorghiu-Dej established his personal control of the RCP in 1952 and consolidated his position sufficiently to reject Moscow’s de-Stalinization policies fol-
ollowing Stalin’s death, to stave off RCP critics such as Miron Constantinescu after Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech denouncing Stalin in 1956, and to prevent overt violence in Romania during the Hungarian revolution later that year.

In chapter twelve Deletant traces Romania’s growing autonomy from the Soviet Union. He shows that Gheorghiu-Dej repeatedly acted on the basis of personal interest rather than ideology in removing Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi in 1957, persuading Khrushchev to withdraw Soviet troops (first suggested in 1955 and accomplished in 1958), and starting a new series of arrests and purges in 1958. Deletant sees the rift with the Soviet Union as “initially economic” and “fueled by the mutual dislike felt by Khrushchev and Dej” (p. 281), but never “so deep as to stop Romanian collaboration [with Moscow] in intelligence and security matters” (p. 287). Indeed, when Gheorghiu-Dej died in 1965, the security police “remained intact, unrefonned, and ubiquitous” (p. 288), ready to be used by his successor, Ceaușescu.

In his conclusions Deletant stresses that Gheorghiu-Dej created the conditions for the rise of Ceaușescu by eliminating any opposition inside or outside the party, by shaping the Securitate, and by terrorizing the population into submission or emigration. The volume contains a number of brief memoirs and documents, including an account by Emil Bodnar of his actions in 1942–1944, a 1947 Soviet report on the RCP leaders, a description of conditions in Aiud prison, and an unpublished attack on Ceaușescu written by Gheorghe Apostol in 1968. In sum, this book is extremely valuable, not so much because of any new or startling conclusions but because of its many new insights into individuals and personal relations within the RCP and its detailed, personal descriptions of regime terror.


Reviewed by Gaël-Georges Moullec, Robert Schuman Foundation (Paris)

This new book by Vladimir Shlapentokh, a sociologist at Michigan State University, looks back at Soviet “totalitarian” society from the perspective of the post-Soviet era “without placing moral judgments on the subject.” Maintaining—often, but not always—a balanced approach between a “totalitarian” description of Soviet society and an analysis of its functioning over a long period, Shlapentokh bases his work on four key premises: that “the society had a consistent structure and its main institutions remained largely intact after its emergence in 1918–1920”; that a distinction must be made between the Soviet regime centered in Russia and the “empire” that controlled non-Russians, in particular non-Slavs; that “USSR policies and socialist ideology were dedicated to the desire to catch up with and surpass the West”; and, finally, that “the official ideology was a complex construction, adapted to the regime and empire” and “should never be taken at face value” (pp. 3–4).