

# Editor's Introduction: Socialist Solidarity and East-East Relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Abstract:** The current section of issues 12/2021-13/2022 of *History of Communism in Europe* deals with East-East and East-South relations among socialist countries and countries of the Global South. Exploring local specificities and global ambitions, the papers bring to light the beginnings of the socialist developmental projects, and bilateral relations that overcome the strict framework of the monolithic socialist bloc.

**Keywords:** socialism, humanitarianism, bilateral relations

Global Solidarity seems to be the new trend of research among academics dealing with the socialist past, and their findings are extremely rich and telling of how much there is still to be discovered on the functioning of the socialist bloc and its relations with the world. Some of the major themes researchers have put under scrutiny are: public health, education, military training, industrial development, architecture, women's activism, the building of the second world and its relations with the West and the Global South. Researchers tend to look at these topics in the context of decolonialisation and the new countries' need for an alternative model of development, opposed to that offered by the former metropolises. The socialist countries' own geopolitical and commercial interests are taken into consideration, as well as their struggle and support to build a "new economic order".

Despite the fact that the 1970s were shuddered by several economic crises, there was a widespread belief in the possibility of building a more fair world,

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nurtured by the alliances within the United Nations (i.e. G77 or the nonalignment movement) and the repeated joint declarations issued at the international meetings of the communist parties that pleaded for peace and solidarity with the decolonising world. Moreover, countries in the socialist bloc already possessed important experience in exporting/emulating an authoritarian developmental model. East-East solidarity with regard to training and implementing modernisation projects (i.e., infrastructure) was rather the rule and not the exception among countries of the socialist bloc.

The three articles in this special section of *History of Communism in Europe* look first of all at these East-East relations. Such is the work of Božica Slavković Mirić, “Drač-Elbasan Railway – ‘Railway of the Yugoslav-Albanian Brotherhood’”, in which the author tells the story of Yugoslav-Albanian cooperation, that began at the end of the Second World War. These relations concerned military and economic collaboration and resulted in the building of the Drač-Elbasan Railway by volunteers, before 1948, when the countries ceased their cooperation.

East-Global South relations are analysed in the paper “Romanian Solidarity with Countries of the Global South. Development, Trade, Training”. The article deals with both the discursive aspect and the actual actions socialist Romania took to develop political and economic relations with the countries in Africa and Middle East during the 1970s. The country’s commitment to assisting the developing world and implementing the new economic order, together with various humanitarian programs, are put under close scrutiny.

Chronologically situated at the exact opposite end of the timeline of the socialist bloc, at the beginning of the 1980s, Daniel Filip Afloarei’s paper explores another intricate aspect of East-East relations: the relationship of a socialist regime in one country with the minority group within its borders ethnically belonging to a “sister” socialist country, which perceives itself in crisis. The concerning countries are Romania and Poland, and the minority group is the Polish community in the northern county of Romania, Suceava. The suspicious Romanian authoritarian regime put the Polish community under tight supervision, while Polish-Romanian bilateral relations were also impacted.

As specific as the three stories are, they disclose important perspectives on how the relations among the countries of the socialist bloc began, developed and finally erupted in a crisis or ended altogether. Yet another proof of the mosaic the bloc truly was, despite its projected monolithic appearance, the papers shed light on the various interests, characteristics, relations and ultimately paths the countries took to “build socialism” and display “humanitarianism”.