Corina (Pălășan) Doboș (University of Bucharest / University College London), World Population Conference, Bucharest 1974: Politics and Demographical Concerns

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Abstract: The World Population Conference, organized by the United Nations in Bucharest in 1974, at the invitation of the Romanian government, was the first international conference to discuss the postwar “population problem” and the practical measures to be implemented by national governments, calling for urgent governmental intervention through national and international family planning programs. These measures were synthesized in a World Population Plan of Action, adopted by the consensus of the 137 countries represented at the Bucharest Conference. My presentation explores what seems to be the paradox of organizing a family planning debate in a country where at the time very restrictive pronatalist measures were implemented, with no consideration given to family planning or modern contraception. I argue that these tactics are better understood when contextualized within the particular dynamics of the communist regime in Romania: what appeared to be an open, democratic foreign policy actually concealed a domestic Stalinist regime. Looking for international recognition, Ceaușescu, the “wonderboy” of the Soviet bloc in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, was ready to organize the World Population Conference in Romania. Following his pronatalist ethos, he used his host position not only to gain diplomatic prestige but also to influence the final resolutions taken in Bucharest, so that the pronatalist policy of Romania could continue undisturbed, as the Romanian hosts managed to formalize the prerogative of deciding over the number of a family’s or an individual’s children as a governmental and not a personal privilege.

Bio: Corina (Pălășan) Doboș holds a PhD in History from the University of Bucharest, where she is currently a research assistant. Corina is also a PhD candidate at University College London, with a thesis titled Scientific representations of the ‘body of the criminal’ in modern Romania (1859-1940), focusing on the manner in which the ‘body of the delinquent’ was constructed within the medicalisation process of the juridical sphere in Romania between 1859 and 1945. Her main research interests include bio-politics, the history of criminology, the imaginary of the body, medical semiotics. She has published extensively on these issues, including three books about communist and post-communist policies and memories, i.e. Corina Doboș (ed.), Politică pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu. O perspectivă comparativă / Pronatalist Policies of the Ceaușescu Regime in Comparative Perspective (Polirom, 2010); Corina Doboș, Marius Stan (eds.), Politics of Memory in Post-communist Europe (Zetabooks, 2010); Cristina Jinga, Florin Soare, Corina Doboș, Cristina Roman (eds.), Politică pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu. Instituții și practici/ Pronatalist Policies of the Ceaușescu Regime. Institutions and Practices (Polirom, 2011).