
THE ACCESSION OF THE TWO KOREAS TO UN IN 1991. AN ARCHIVE BASED STUDY

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Abstract: Whereas international system describes the sum of all existing national states, the concept of international society stands for a wishful intersubjective platform based on mutual recognition and mutual restraint. It tries to mitigate conflicts and submit cultural, political and economical divergences under a basic set of laws. Experience shows that even the most autarchic and so called <rogue states> are eager to be accepted within the fold of their peers. Such was the case with both Koreas during the 1980s. Pyongyang as well as Seoul indulged in a blame game in order to be recognised by the international community as the true embodiment of the Korean idea, casting the other one as an usurper or accident of history. After the end of the Cold War, Bush Sr.'s hailed New World Order became permeable to an ecumenical sentiment which accepted the dual entrance of Koreas as members of UN, fact happened in September, 17 1991. The study details the story based on a research in Romanian diplomatic archives.

Keywords: *South Korea, North Korea, UN, international society, social rationality*

With the fading away of Cold War, UN could finally emerge a truly global forum for solving problems between states and close the gap between reality and its founding Chart. No longer plagued by the veto game which had intoxicated the functioning of the Security Council for two generations, UN Charter had better chances to relegitimise its provisions as norm for interstate behaviour.

The first part of this article tells the common history of Korean Peninsula and postwar Organisation of United Nations. The second argues that 1991 double accession to UN should be seen within the wider frenzy of the international community which aimed to celebrate the end of Cold War by establishing a new legalistic world order. Third part dwells upon the notion of social reason and concludes that North Korean accession to UN, in spite of knowledge about a nascent nuclear program, can be explained through a desire to bring Pyongyang back to the fold of international society and thus, hopefully, curtail its extremist tendencies.

Cutting through the study will be Romanian contribution to the cause of inter-Korean dialogue and especially of UN disarmament policy in late 1980s and early 1990s.

The research benefited the telegrams found at the Romanian Diplomatic Archive from December 2014 till February 2015.

I. Korean Peninsula and the UN

In international relations theory one of the most enduring debate tries to find whether states construct international system or, on the contrary, it is the systemic pressure which actually moulds unit behaviour and influences the disappearance/birth of new borders.

In the case of modern Korean geopolitics, the post-1945 fate of the Peninsula was annexed by the higher dynamics of early US-Soviet divide.

Korea had been a Japanese colony between 1910 and 1945. Late WWII, what should have been a boastful sphere of co-prosperity ended as a shrinking iron ring against the Empire of the Sun. As Tokyo was expected to fall in near timeframe, both Soviet and American forces divided Korean Peninsula as a precondition to grant independence in the aftermath of hostilities. What should have been only a temporary demarcation line was recycled to hail a new state of crisis. Similar to Eastern Europe, Korean division was quickly followed by the imposition of victor's domestic regime for each side. In North USSR imposed a Stalinist regime under Kim Il Sen (Kim Il Sung) and created North Korean Peoples' Army. In South American backed the presidential administration of Syngman Rhee. After a period of border skirmishes, NKPA attacked South Korean perimeter on 25 June 1950. US garnered UN back-up, invoked the breaching of the Charter and assembled a multinational force to repel the North Korean invaders.¹ General MacArthur's masterstroke landing at Inchon, behind enemy lines was to be swiftly overturned by Chinese intervention in November, the same year. Repeatedly back and forth pitched battles ended in a stalemate, in itself a future proof of what the looming Cold War should have looked like.²

The Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953 with the aim to „*insure a complete cessation of hostilities and of all acts of armed force in Korea until a final peaceful settlement is achieved.*” The signatory parts were US Army general William Harrison Jr representing United Nations Command (UNC) and general NAM II representing North Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army. The document, indeed the closest thing reassembling a peace declaration cemented the establishment of a Demilitarized Zone and the repatriation of prisoners.

UN contribution came by several bodies:

- United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission (**UNCMAC**)- designed to guard the persistence of KDZ;
- United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea, was a body which oversaw elections in May, 1948. It was the country's first electoral exercise after Japanese conquer and was held in the presence of US forces.
- **UNCOK** – the UN Commission on Korea. Was created under General Assembly resolution 195 (III) of December 12, 1948. Its mission was to preside over the retreat of occupying forces from Korea, organise security forces and cut off any economic hurdle between North and South. USSR and North Korea did not accept UNCOK, therefore, since 1949 it was added another task: to report any military threats coming from the 38 parallel.³

¹ Anthony Leviero, *Truman Orders U.S. Air, Navy Units To Fight In Aid Of Korea; U.N. Council Supports Him; Our Fliers In Action; Fleet Guards Formosa*, The New York Times, 27 June 1950

² Michael Hickey, *The Korean War: An Overview*, BBC, March 21, 2011

³ Chi Young Pak, *Korea and the United Nations*, Kluwer Law International, Hague, The Netherlands, 2000, p.7

- **UNCURK** – the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea. After UN became embroiled in the peninsular crisis, the General Assembly created another body under the resolution 376 (V), October 1950: United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (disolved in 1973). Another subsequent body, United Nation Korean Reconstruction Agency (**UNKRA**) was submit to UNCURK. It was to coordinate it action with Economic and Social Council and help reconstruct Korean economy. United States contributed over 100 million \$ aid for South Korea. Disbanded in 1958.⁴
- **Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission** – has been created by article 36 of the Korean Armistice Agreement. Its functions consisted in carrying the provisions of articles 13 (c), 13 (d), and 28, namely forbidding the introduction of new military personnel or weaponry that might upset the balance between sides, and conducting inspections outside Demilitarized Zone where breach of Armistice has been signaled. The Commission's members were elected from countries which did not attend to Korean conflict in any manner: Sweden, Switzerland, Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁵

Judging the events as they laid on the canvas, it is fair to say that UN decision making was arrested by geopolitics and acted more like a part in the conflict than as a mediator.⁶ From another point of view it was perhaps one of the last kicks coming from a dying British empire, if one takes into account that nations such as Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand supplied the majority of units.⁷

Paragraph 60 of the Armistice Agreement provided that governments concerned were to organise a conference and settle the Korean matter peacefully. To implement the provision, representatives of United States, USSR, France and Great Britain met in Berlin (18 February 1953) and decided to convene a conference in Geneva from April 26 to June 15, 1954.

The fifteen Korean war participants wrote a final report and submitted it to the UN Secretary General on 11 November 1954. The General Assembly invited only South Korea to the public debate and rejected China's suggestion to receive North Korea also. UN General Assembly adopted Allied draft resolution and stated that: 1) approves the report on Korean Political Conference; 2) reaffirms the objectives of the United States to settle Korean conundrum by peaceful means, all colluding with the restoration of a unified democratic state.

⁴ For more information about UNCURK see the archives scanned and posted by the Wilson Center, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/>
See also Chi Young Pak, *op.cit.*, p.7-8

⁵ Observe full text of Korean Armistice Agreement: Text of the Korean War Armistice Agreement, Find Law, July 27, 1953, <http://news.findlaw.com/cnn/docs/korea/kwarmagr072753.html>

⁶ For an opinion about UN simulated multilateralism in Korean War see Ronda Hauben, The Role of the UN in the Unending Korean War. "United Nations Command" As Camouflage, *Global Research*, September 21, 2013
However, one must nuance the above statement, at least to some extent, as UN General Assembly has protested North Korean invasion and pointed fingers towards Security Council "because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members has failed to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in regard to Chinese communist intervention in Korea." See United Nations resolution calling on the People's Republic of China to cease all hostilities on the Korean peninsula, 332 plenary meeting, 5 November 1951, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116196> (accessed 10 February 2015)

⁷ The Armed Forces in the Korean War. United Nations Forces in the Korean War, <http://korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/armed-forces-in-korea/united-nations-forces-in-the-korean-war.php> (accessed 10 February 2015)

This Geneva 811 resolution will provide the legal basis for debating the aforementioned dossier within the boundaries of UN.⁸

In the following years, both countries have tried to use the UN rostrum to gain international acclaim and score points of prestige against each other. Nonetheless, their attitude towards the UN resources has been different: whereas Seoul aimed to keep the Korean dossier wide open and preserve it on the GA table, Pyongyang much preferred inter-Korean dialogue with as less outside interference as possible.⁹

II. Unity and disarmament

1970s acquired the reputation for strategic calm demeanour, at least at the ceiling of the system. Far from reassembling a long lasting peace, the relationship between superpowers hovered around appeasement, both of them styling a frere-enmity (Kenneth Waltz) or a minuet (I.Wallerstein) based on tamed security dilemma and mutual restraint. Underneath, at the lower floor, several issues: the growth of OPEC, especially in the postBretton Woods phase, the maturation of European institutions, the Iranian Khomeinist Revolution along with UN efforts to achieve disarmament sketched the megatrends beyond bipolar world.

Concerning the cause of disarmament, it is important to mention, for methodological clarity, that projects in this direction came from reductionist (national) level as well as from systemic (multilateral/multinational) level. Some of them happened through bilateral discussion, other had regional substance while other appealed to UN in order to achieve the utmost global visibility. Below, the strive to disarmament will be separated according to the two criteria listed above:

II A. Reductionist disarmament initiatives. Korean Peninsula

In this regard, the geopolitical climacterics in Korean Peninsula stood as an indicator for other moves both between Communist capitals and between two rival blocs. In 1971-1972 Nixon administration started courting China and exploited the gaps between Moscow and Beijing. Similarly, Pyongyang assumed a more flexible diplomacy with less concern for ideological colours. For those who read Romanian diplomatic archives worthy of not is

⁸ Chi Young Pak, *op.cit.*, p.9

⁹ For the importance many South Korean bestow on UN see the congratulatory speech of Han Seung-soo, former prime-minister: "I believe that the relationship between Korea and the United Nations is a special one, perhaps more so than any other nations in the world. Korea has had a very unique relationship with the United Nations from its birth.

Korea's first general election was supervised by the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) in 1948 and its government was recognized as the only legitimate government in the Korean peninsula at the 3rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in Paris in 1948.

When the Korean war broke out in June 1950, it was once again the United Nations which acted swiftly to repel the aggressor from the North through two important Security Council Resolutions 83(S-1511) and 164(S-1588), and succeeded in protecting Korea's freedom and independence.

Therefore, the freedom, independence, economic development, democracy, political liberties and human rights which we Koreans enjoy today all owe a great deal to the United Nations. I would not be exaggerating too much if I were to state that had there not been the United Nations, there would not have been the free and prosperous Korea today. In a sense, therefore, Korea can be said to be the child of the United Nations." Han Seung-soo, Congratulatory Speech at the International Seminar on "Korea in the UN – The Third Decade" organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of Korea's Membership in the UN, Shilla Hotel, Seoul, 12 July 2011

Romanian - DPRK rapprochement and the former eagerness to play the middleman between Kim Il Sung and Washington. For the North Korean dictator, extending a shaking hand towards the Americans should have represented the precondition for an attempt to reunify the Peninsula and cast away nuclear weapons. Romanian part extended its aid when it submitted to UN general-secretary, Kurt Waldheim the North Korean letter of intent to open a permanent mission in New York (July 16, 1973).¹⁰ Six month later, another letter send via Romania reached US authorities and Henry Kissinger. Its message repeated Pyongyang's desideratum towards opening and also the archplan for reunification qua demilitarisation of Peninsula.¹¹

Following these seminal steps, Kim crystallized another proposition that would make career all across the followind decade: in October 1980, during the Sixth Workers Party Congress in he launched the Confederate Republic of Koryo initiative. The Koryo plan ran against South Korean counter intuitive towards dual recognitions followed by dual accession to UN membership.¹²

Romania as well as USSR supported peaceful reunification. The former to gain prestige and the latter due to military-strategic reasons, as a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula would levied the pressure exerted by the Americans.¹³

II B. Systemic/Multilateral disarmament initiatives. UN activity

United Nations created institutional legal instruments to tackle the arms race since its very beginning.

In 1952, the General Assembly gave birth to the Disarmament Commission from two previous and separate commissions, with the synthetic goal to make proposals for a coordinated program of arms limitations and reductions of military forces, especially those equipments capable to inflict mass distruction. Initially covering the selective club of great nuclear powers, the membership was extended for all UN members.

In 1959, the major nations of Europe and the United States established the Ten Nation Committee on Disarmament to bridge the difference between East and West with regard to security matters. In 1962 it was further expanded and transformed into Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (ENDC), endorsed by the General Assembly. Eight of its

¹⁰ Mihail E.Ionescu, Carmen Rîjnoveanu, *Between the two Communists Giants. Romania and North Korea Relationship during the Cold War*, Center for East European and Asian Studies Association, Bucharest, 2014, pp.21-22

¹¹ Ibidem, p.23

¹² See in this regard Dossier No.20/ 1982/RSR, „Darea de seamă privind activitatea DR I pe anul 1982”, p.2 Also Dossier 220/1988, Problem RPD Coreeană. Vizita oficială a tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu în Asia, Telegrama 057814, 12. 10. 1988. Dossier 244, Problem 210, 1989, Referitor la relațiile intercoreene, Telegram 05506, 10.01.1989

It must be stated also that Kim Il Sung's Koryo plan satisfied his taste for showmanship and served as chip in the blame game with Seul, because in reality North Koreans feared the reunification with their much stronger conationals. A 1987 report of activity by Romanian embassy from Pyongyang details North Korean gross mismanagement of economic affairs and proclivity for „finalising ambitious yet unproductive objectives.” Report of activity and workplan of the Romanian Embassy from Phenian in 1987, Problem 20/1988, Chapter I, p.14. See also Rhee Sang-Woo, North Korea in 1991: Struggle to Save Chuch'e Amid Signs of Change, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 1991: Part I (Jan., 1992), pp. 56-63, esp. p.57

¹³ Soviet support for Koryo initiative in late '80s appears in Dossier 220/1988, Problema RPD Coreeană. Vizita oficială a tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu în Asia, Telegrama 057814, 12.10.1988

member were gathered amongst the Non-Aligned states. In 1969 this last initiative rebranded as the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) including 26 members (in 1975: 31 members within the ranks).

In all that period a cascade of initiatives came to add substance to an ever dynamic international regime suited to achieve disarmament:

- the 1959 Antarctic Treaty;
- the 1963 Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Atmosphere;
- the 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space (the Outer Space Treaty);
- the 1967 Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America (Treaty of Tlatelolco);
- the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons;
- the 1971 Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof (Sea-Bed Treaty);
- the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, usually known as the Biological Weapons Treaty.¹⁴

General Assembly 35/46 resolution of 3 December 1980 declared the second disarmament decade.¹⁵ The moment was bracketed by two sessions of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament – first in 1978, second in 1982.¹⁶

The life of all those enterprise would not have been possible only by the whim of great powers, absent the implication of smaller actors.

It is also the case of Romania which conducted a diplomacy above its eco-demographic scale. Romanian diplomats attended and formulated positions to numerous multilateral fora: Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Vienna Mutual Balanced Force Reduction or UN disarmament committees (UNDCs). Between 11-25 May 1983, UNDC's Working Group was chaired by Ion Diaconu.¹⁷ The importance given to UN by smaller capitals such as our country stems from two telegrams: the first warns about Romanian presence fading away within the Organisation late 1980s, while the second, written by Petre Tănăsescu to ministry of foreign affairs, Ioan V.Totu, speaks about the praise coming from Yabushi Akashi (deputy General Secretary) for Romanian activity in the matter of disarmament.¹⁸ Both texts are dated fall 1988, a period when Ceaușescu's regime approached its last breath and economic collapse, whereas internal illegitimacy and international isolation compounded a crisis not very different from other Socialist nations.

¹⁴ Derek Boothby, *The United Nations and Disarmament*, International Relations Studies and the United Nations, Occasional Papers 2002, No. 1, pp.3-5

¹⁵ Full text of the Declaration at: <http://www.worldlii.org/int/other/UNGARsn/1980/53.pdf>

¹⁶ Derek Boothby, *op.cit.*, p.6

¹⁷ Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era*, Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988, p.204

¹⁸ Dossier 1989 (Secret), Problem 241, 1988, Referitor la prezența României în Organismele ONU, Telegrama 076936, 29.12.1988

III. 1991: peace dividend over division

The collapse of Communism ended the divisive politics between East and West and stirred the dividends of peace in the service of global governance.

1991 may have been a pivotal moment for several motives, but it did not come out of the blue; instead it was a cumulative effort towards convergence- the wide shared political paradigm of the previous decade. Numerous agreements came to translate into action President Bush Sr's call for a legalistic new world order.

Thus, in 1991:

- NATO and Warsaw Treaty countries signed the Treaty for the Reduction of Conventional Weapons in Europe;
- Czechoslovakia became member in the Council of Europe;¹⁹
- NATO's twelfth summit drafted a new security strategy which extended the meaning of security beyond the realm of military issues according to tenets of Copenhagen School (Rome, 7-8 November, 1991)
- In December the same year the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 46/36 L on transparency in armaments. The resolution requested the General Secretary to establish a register of conventional arms and asked member states to provide annual reports about the status of their imports and export of military equipment. (The register would be established in January next year).²⁰
- Last but not least, both Korean states became UN members on September 17. Few month later, in December they signed A basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchanges, and Cooperation. Under that document, both parties pledge to end the mutual slender, enhance economic cooperation, work together to help reuniting split families and strive to end the 1953 Armistice.

Having presented all the above, one may asked oneself why did UN and the conclave of great powers accepted North Korean inclusion- a nascent nuclear actor²¹- at a time when general Noriega, Nicaraguan dictator was arrested by a US Navy commando or Saddam Hussein was severely punished for his regional expansionist ambition. Wouldn't have made more sense that Pyongyang was isolated and cut off from all economic, moral and military aid? Both realist balance of power theory and liberal collective security had plenty of reasons to council a concentric pressure against North Korea. By not mounting a concentric pressure against Kim Il-Sung aging rule, international community has only prolonged ad infinitum one of the most unsettling issues on the map.

¹⁹ Paul Dănuț Duță, Ion Panait, Teodor Frunzetti, *Operațiuni și misiuni OSCE. Studiu de caz: Moldova*, Tehno Media, Sibiu, 2008, pp.20-21

²⁰ Derek Boothby, *Disarmament: Success and failures* in Jean E. Krasno, *The United Nations: Confronting the Challenges of a Global Society*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Colorado, 2004, p.211

See the full text of the resolution at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r036.htm>

²¹ Kim Il Sung's craving for developing a nuclear program were known during late 1980 to the chagrin of USSR. See in this regard Dossier 244, Problem 210, 1989, Referitor la Relațiile Intercoreene, Telegram 050720, 21.09.1989

The explanation put forth here lies around what we baptised: social rationality. Before providing a operational definition a short detour through international relations alphabet of notions is needed.

For decades, one of the boon of contention between competing schools was the difference between anarchy and international society. The first is usually associated with the (neo)realist perspective and says that states remain the ultimate arbiters acknowledging no higher judge above their will. In such logic an international system cannot be more than the sum of its parts.

The second notion is usually associated with the English School as well as with liberalism. For its followers, a society may be described as a „*self-regulating system towards equilibrium or some strong normative structure to which members of society strongly adhere.*”²² For his part, Hedley Bull contends that : „*A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relationis with one another, and share in the working of common institutios*”²³. Albeit it remains a anarchical environment, without the hierarchy imposed by a government or a sovereign over his subjects, an international society witnesses how member-units develop rules of engagement. Corespondly, an international society goes beyond the sum of its parts.

In continuation of Kenneth Waltz we hold that states are still considered rational entities, but they understand rationality in a much more intimate manner in close connection with the behaviour of other peers. Seldom they proceed unwisely or foolhardy accordingly to Waltzian perspective because they archaim is not short term gain but participation to group activities and esprit de corps on longer term. Sociology discovered long time ago that humans care to be recognised to share ranks with other/ keep up with the Joneses no matter financial costs.

Summing up individuals let themselves guided by a social rationality. Thorstein Veblen’s theory about leisure class and conscious consumption bears the potential to explain many phenomenon unfolding in the international arena.²⁴

If we employ all said above, then North Korea’s acceptance within UN rank and file expressed a deep concern to bring a rogue member within the fold in order to mollify him, intensify the opportunities for dialogue and prevent eventual reckless play. We have seen from the pages of Romanian archives in the 1980s the reluctance of most Socialist fellow

²² Earl Conteh-Morgan, *Collective Political Violence*, Routledge, New York/London, 2004, p.52

²³ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*, Foreword by Stanley Hoffmann, MacMillan Press Ltd., London, reprinted 1995, p.13

²⁴ “*In order to gain and to hold the esteem of men it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence. And not only does the evidence of wealth serve to impress one’s importance on others and to keep their sense of his importance alive and alert, but it is of scarcely less use in building up and preserving one’s self-complacency.*” Thorstein Veblen, *The Leisure Class*, The Echo Library, Middlesex, UK, 2007, p.4

In international relationships, Veblen seems to assert solidarity qua prestige even more clear than when he talks about individual of the same nation: „*Patriotism may be defined as a sense of partisan solidarity in respect of prestige*”, *Ibidem*, p.20

For an employment of Veblen theory in studying international relations see Lilach Gilady, Big Science, Prestige and the Transits of Venus, Paper prepared for the 48 International Studies Association’s Annual Convention (February-March, 2007). Silviu Petre, Shopping as deterrence? India’s military acquisition policy, between improvisation and the pursuit of prestige, International Conference: Scientific Research and Education in Air Force, Braşov, 22-23 May 2013

countries to engage with South Korea out of ideological empathy and out of care not to offend Kim Il Sung.²⁵ Things turned in late '80 when the whole Warsaw Pact had passed its glory days and South Korean economic prowess became too irresistible.²⁶ Largely at the same time, South Korean president, Roh Tae-Woo Nordpolitik manifested the goal to bring Pyonyang in another kind of solidarity, one based on shared national and cultural bonds.

Unfortunately all hopes that socialising N Korea entails promises of normalization did not outlive Kim Il Sung. With the advent of his son, Kim Jong Il, the regime at Pyonyang resumed the same aggressive stance and continued to inflame regional stability to this very day.

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²⁵ Worthy of note the fact that even though Moscow opened an economic liaison office at Seoul, it displayed great care to avoid Pyongyang ire, as it is demonstrated by the visit of Eduard Sevarnadze in North Korea, 12-24 December, 1988, Dossier 244, Problem 210, 1989, Referitor la Relațiile Intercoreene, Telegram 044505, 03.01.1989

²⁶ Socialist Republic of Hungary opened diplomatic relations at both economic and political levels late 1987-early 1988. Romanian telegrams recurrently speak about the lashing out of different North Korean high-profile faces against those who „betray Socialist brotherhood”. Dossier 244, Problem 210, 1989, Referitor la Relațiile Intercoreene, Telegram 044808, 20.02.1989

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