

THE “RENAULT” BUSINESS AND THE VISIT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN TRADE FROM FRANCE, CHARLES DE CHAMBRUN (1966)

Antoaneta Laura SAVA*

Abstract: Because the representatives of the “Renault” and “Volkswagen” companies did not show any interest, in the period 1973–1976, for a collaboration in the direction expected by the authorities from Bucharest, Nicolae Ceaușescu agreed on the prime minister Manea Mănescu signing a contract and several industrial and financial collaboration agreements, with the purpose of producing, at Craiova, under French licence, the models “Citroën Visa Spécial” and “Citroën Visa Club” (called in Romania, “Oltcit Special” and “Oltcit Club”).

Meanwhile, the collaboration of Romania with “Renault” National Administration continued according to the intentions expressed by the prime minister Raymond Barre and Manea Mănescu in Paris (the 17th of December 1976), and the Romanian-French agreement concluded in the summer of 1978 (Bucharest, the 12th of June 1978), having the purpose to certify the continuation of “Dacia 1300” production, along with certain subsets, electric engines, dashboard instruments and components for the machines used in the car industry from Romania.

Keywords: fields, authority, car manufacturing industry, Renault company, development.

In the last decade, were written, both in Romania and abroad, several studies and analyses that refer to the success registered by “Renault” French company, on addressing “Dacia Logan”, “Dacia MCV”, “Dacia Sandero” and “Dacia Duster” car makes. First produced at the Colibași plant, they had, since the beginning, a low selling price, as compared to other makes of renowned companies.

Due to a special interest manifested for understanding the manner in which “Dacia” products reached the commercial success during the period 2004–2014, we are to present, further on, the beginning of the cooperation between the authorities from Romania and the “Renault” company.

At the beginning of the ‘60s, the authorities from Bucharest analysed the possibility to start the mass production, in Romania, of an average class car, (approx. 40,000–50,000 cars a year). In other states from Europe, the production

* 3rd Degree Scientific Researcher, PhD. The “C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor” Institute for Research in Social Studies and Humanities from Craiova, of the Romanian Academy; E-mail: savaantoaneta@yahoo.com

levels, reached in the first decade, were 693,672 (Italy, 1961), 32,000 (Yugoslavia, 1962), 64,325 (Czechoslovakia, 1962), 78,000 (Czechoslovakia, 1965), over 200,000 (USSR, 1965), 25,000 (Poland, 1965) and 36,000 cars made a year (D.R.G., 1965)¹.

The research on the car characteristics, expected by the Romanian authorities, ended on the 7th of December 1965, and the calls to tender were sent to some renowned companies in this field: “Renault”, “Peugeot”, “FIAT”, “Volkswagen” and “British Motor Corporation” (that was producing, among others, “Austin Mini Morris Mark I”, “Austin 1100” and “Morris 1100”). Moreover, other projects appeared too, preceded by “Alfa Romeo”, “Leyland Motor Corporation Limited” (that launched in London the model “Triumph 1300”, in October 1965) and “Ford” (model “Ford Taunus 12M”)².

The French companies initially presented the “Renault 10” and “Renault 16” models, respectively “Peugeot 204”, while the Italian brands proposed the models “FIAT 1100 D” and “Alfa Romeo Giulia 1300”.

After a thorough research, Nicolae Ceaușescu agreed on the offer for producing “Renault 12”, starting with the first semester of 1969. The contract between the two parties was signed at Bucharest, on the 6th of September 1966, and the Romanian version of the model was renamed “Dacia 1300”. Ten days later, the Ministry Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania adopted the Decision no. 2004, in which was mentioned the name of the company that they were to cooperate with, the place for the positioning of the plant (next to “Vasile Tudose” machine parts factory), and the number of vehicles that were to be made at Colibași: 55,000 cars a year, from which 11,000 had to be vans, inspired by the standard model.

This decision came as a surprise for both the Italians and Mr. Cornel Burtică (the Romanian ambassador to Rome). The ministry of the External Affairs, Mr. Corneliu Mănescu, paid an official visit in Italy (5th–7th of September 1966) and discussed, among other topics, with the “Alfa Romeo” company representatives, about their offer: the licensed production, in Romania, of “Alfa Romeo Giulia 1300” model, and the delivering of a bus production line. In the same time, Corneliu Mănescu communicated to the Italian company representatives that the

¹ Valentina Fava, *Motor vehicles vs. dollars: selling socialist cars in neutral markets. Some evidence from the Škoda Auto case*, European University Institute, Max Weber Programme, Italy, EUI Working Paper MWP, No. 36/2007, p. 7; Idem, *COMECON Integration and the Automobile Industry: the Czechoslovak Case*, European University Institute, Max Weber Programme, Italy, EUI Working Paper MWP, No. 18/2008, pp. 12; 20; Marko Miljković, *Western Technology in a Socialist Factory: The Formative Phase of the Yugoslav Automobile Industry, 1955–1962*, Budapest, Hungary, Central European University, 2013, pp. 78–79; 96; Valentin Vasile, “Sub imperiul ispitei”. *Autoturismul, românii și Securitatea în anii '70–'80*, in “Caietele CNSAS”, year VI, no. 1–2 (11–12)/2013, Bucharest, CNSAS Press, 2014, p. 259.

² Valentin Vasile, *op. cit.*, p. 260; Nicolae Macovei, *Povestea unui succes. 50 de ani de la producerea primului autoturism Dacia*, in “Magazin istoric”, year LI – new series, no. 9 (618), September 2018, p. 38.

final decision had not been adopted yet by the Romanian authorities³. This affirmation was an unpleasant surprise for the hosts, considering the circumstances that “Renault” and “Industrialimport” Romanian company announced that they had signed a contract for producing the new car models in Romania, even during the official visit of Corneliu Mănescu in Italy.

The price accepted by the Romanian authorities and “Renault” company for the entire business was of approximately 35 million French francs (42,525,000 lei Western currency) and it was including the importing, by Romania, of some complete collections of subsets and spare parts for setting “Renault 8” (from 1968) and “Renault 12” (from 1969) models, the import of 8,000 cars from France (offering, for example, “Renault 10” and Renault 16”), and the export of chemical and industrial products of 18 million dollars value – this export covering 40% of the complete subset import value, and car parts, along with the value of the vehicles that were delivered by France in Romania, in the period 1966–1976⁴.

The Romanian authorities accepted to pay 20% of the licence value, after they had received it from “Renault”, and 80% from the sum for the licence was paid in installments, until 1976. Meanwhile, the complete collections of subsets, along with the vehicles sent to Romania, were paid in a percent of 10%, the moment they were received, the rest in four years (that credit having an interest of 5.75%). On addressing the equipment and the outfit delivered by “Renault”, the Romanian party agreed on paying 20% of their value, when they would be checked and signed for in the country, and 80% would be paid as a credit, in 8 years, with an interest of 6% a year⁵.

According to the contract signed on the 6th of September 1966, the French party delivered to Colibași plant, in 1968, a line for manufacturing the gear boxes, used for “Renault Estafette” vans. The Romanian authorities set it in work in the same year, for delivering 75,000 gears and spare parts for “Estafette” (especially front-rear axles), in the period 1969–1972 – the total value of the products supplied by Romania being of approximately 35.5 million francs⁶. In the same time, the authorities from Bucharest observed that the price the French were purchasing the gear boxes for “Estafette”, made at Colibași, was lower than the expected one.

Consequently, Nicolae Ceaușescu and Ilie Verdeț mentioned that aspect during their official visit in France (the 15th–17th of June 1970). The two Romanian politicians insisted, during the discussions with Georges Pompidou, and respectively the Prime-Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas, for reducing the French customs taxes

³ Rodica Chelaru, *Culpe care nu se uită. Convorbiri cu Cornel Burtică*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche Publishing, 2001, pp. 73–74.

⁴ Valentin Vasile, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Central Historical National Archives (further cited as: A.N.I.C.), *collection of C.C. within R.C.P. – Chancellery*, file no. 218/1968, f. 58. “Renault Estafette” was renamed “Dacia D6” in Romania. This car was using a 1289 cm³ engine (54 CP) fitted on “Dacia 1300” model too, and it was dedicated to goods transportation.

for the Romanian products made within the French-Romanian cooperation agreements and gave as example the possible reduction of the taxes for the gear boxes made at Colibași for “Estafette” cars. The French president affirmed that the problem the Romanian guests were noticing had to be analysed and solved by the French company that was involved in the project⁷.

After an evaluation of the economic efficiency obtained by Colibași plant, Nicolae Ceaușescu tried to develop the Romanian automobile industry and, during the year of 1973, the authorities from Bucharest proposed to “Renault” company the setting in Romania of a mixt production and commercialisation company, for some car models that consumed less fuel⁸.

A year later, the representatives of the French company carried out negotiations with the Romanian party, for the shared production of “Renault 5” model, which had three variants of motorisation: 900, 1100 and 1297 cm³. It was expected to be done in a proportion of 70% in Romania, the rest of the subsets and parts being imported from France. Because the project was considered very expensive by the authorities from Bucharest, the negotiations between the two parts failed⁹.

In parallel, it was attempted a collaboration with “Volkswagenwerk AG”, without a favourable result, and during the meeting between Nicolae Ceaușescu and Kurt Biedenkopf, the general secretary of the Christian-Democrat Union (Bucharest, the 27th of June 1974), the president of Romania expressing his regret for the fact that “*the «Volkswagen» collaboration in a mixt Romanian-German company has not been yet materialised (A/N)*”¹⁰. Basically, it was the second failed attempt of the government from Bucharest to conclude a collaboration contract with the west-German company.

Later, Romania started to export “Dacia 1300” automobiles in D.R.G. and, in November 1979, it was reached the level of 35,000 items made at Colibași plant, for the east-German market. The Eastern Berlin authorities were importing, at that time, different cars from USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Sweden and Italy¹¹.

⁷ Paul Grecu, *Vizita președintelui României în Franța (15–17 iunie 1970)*, in Nicolae Ecobescu (coord.), *România: Supraviețuire și afirmare prin diplomație în anii Războiului Rece. Comunicări, articole, studii*, vol. 3, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing, 2014, pp. 461–462. Unfortunately, the title of this study contains an error: Nicolae Ceaușescu was not a president of Romania in June 1970, but a president of the State Council of The Social Republic of Romania.

⁸ A.N.I.C., *collection of C.C. within R.C.P. – Chancellery*, file no. 194/1973 (vol. I), f. 137.

⁹ Valentin Vasile, *op. cit.*, p. 264. According to the documents drafted by “Renault” company representatives, Romania had to pay, for a collection of “Renault 5 subsets, a price that was over the one previously established for a “Renault 12” vehicle.

¹⁰ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, *Daily Report*. Eastern Europe, FBIS-EEU-74-128 on 1974-07-02. Romania (Further Details) [Page H7].

¹¹ Idem, *Daily Report*. Eastern Europe, FBIS-EEU-79-228 on 1979-11-26. Reportage on activities of foreign congress delegates, Romania, (SED Delegation at Car Plant) [Page H14].

In 1976, the maximum capacity of production from Colibași was of 58,000 automobiles a year, and during his visit in France (the 15th–17th of December 1976), Manea Mănescu invited all the “Renault” company engineers to participate at “Dacia” car production development, while the specialists from “Thomson-CSF” French company were encouraged to take part in the project of equipment endowment of the second Romanian television channel¹².

On addressing the reliability issues, registered at the Romanian cars, and denounced by the customers, they were present in all the car models, made in Romania. For example, as regarding “Dacia” and “Aro”, there was registered malfunctioning in the electric systems and the engine sealing components, the gears, fuel pumps and other pieces. Moreover, the clients were complaining about the suspicious noise coming from the engines and gears, the exfoliating paint, the different coachwork elements that were oxidising, and the storage batteries that were discharging too fast¹³.

Regarding the initial qualities of the automobiles delivered by the plant from Colibași, nowadays, it is known the fact that the assembling of “Dacia 1300” cars (the standard model, with an engine of 1108 cm³ and 46 HP) had the following evolution, from the quantitative point of view: 2,030 (in 1968), 12,375 (1969), 12,122 (1970) and 11,019 cars (1971). Moreover, until 1972, and including, there were also sold approximately 6,400 automobiles of the same type in Romania (probably imported directly from France), and there were set up few dozens of “Dacia 1100 S” cars, which had a more powerful engine (1360cm³ and 65 HP) and two pairs of headlights. The same model was distributed to some sectors of the Internal Affairs Minister, and some sports clubs.

In the period August – December 1969, at Colibași, there were set up 203 “Dacia 1300” cars, and none of them was exported. In the next year, there were sold, abroad, the first four cars “Renault 12” model (from 4,128 made in Romania, in 1970) and 5,405 “M-416” off-road vehicles. Until mid of 1972, on “Dacia 1300” model, there were fitted up engines imported from France (Type 810–02) and Solex EISA single-body carburettors. Then, they were fitted up with engines produced in Romania (Type 810–99) and carburettors made at the “Carfil”, plant from Brașov (under the licence of “Weber” Italian company).

The political meetings had an important role in the dialogue between the authorities from Bucharest and “Renault” company leadership. Nicolae Ceaușescu and Ion Gheorghe Maurer understood from the beginning that the success in that business could not be obtained without the major support of the political authorities

¹² Idem, *Daily Report*. Eastern Europe, FBIS-EEU-76-245 on 1976-12-20. Romania (Manescu, Barre and Paris talks, sign documents) [Page H2]; Idem, *Daily Report*. Western Europe, FBIS-WEU-76-246 on 1976-12-21. France (Manescu discusses contracts with French Companies) [Page K1]; Idem, *Daily Report*. Eastern Europe, FBIS-EEU-78-114 on 1978-06-13. Romania (Long-term agreement with Renault signed) [Page H9].

¹³ Valentin Vasile, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

from Paris. Thus, after the concluding of the collaboration contract for the manufacturing, in Romania, of "Renault 12" model, the Romanian authorities prepared for the visit in Romania, of the secretary of state for the external commerce of France, Charles de Chambrun. At the end of it, the French guest was welcomed by Nicolae Ceaușescu and Ion Gheorghe Maurer, and the shorthand record of the reunion is going to be presented entirely, further on.

ANNEX

September 26 1966, Bucharest.

Shorthand record of the discussions on the occasion Nicolae Ceaușescu and Ion Gheorghe Maurer received the visit of the secretary of state for external trade from France, Charles de Chambrun.

THE SHORTHAND RECORD

of the discussions on the occasion Nicolae Ceaușescu and Ion Gheorghe Maurer received the visit of the secretary of state for external trade from France, Charles de Chambrun, on the 26th of September 1966

The discussions were also attended by comrades: Gheorghe Cioară, member of C.C. within R.C.P. (Romanian Communist Party), the minister of external trade and Andrei Păcuraru, member of C.C. within R.C.P., chief of Affairs Department of C.C. within R.C.P. Jean Louis Pons, the ambassador of France at Bucharest was present.

The discussions started at 9.00 a.m. and lasted for 30 minutes.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I am very impressed that you have been available to receive my visit this morning, before my depart.

I need to tell you that this short visit of mine in Romania interested me a lot, and impressed me equally.

Cmrd. Nicolae Ceaușescu: Allow me to express our satisfaction for the visit of mister minister in our country, and for the results this visit has generated.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I took the liberty to address, on my government behalf, an invitation to mister minister Cioară, for visiting France. During the discussions that we had here, I have analysed a series of issues, which I think could be usefully approached in Paris. I wish to put forward a bill of programme in the future 15 days. Nonetheless, you can rest assured that my government wants to extend the relations with Romania, in all the fields: technical, economic and cultural.

Cmrd. Nicolae Ceaușescu: We consider that the relations between our countries, so far, have been auspicious: I am referring to the economic, cultural, scientific and political relations. And these certainly represent circumstances for the future development. The wish is present on the Romanian side too, and, being a common desire of Romania and France, I am confident that there is nothing to impede the further development.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I have been profoundly impressed by the sincerity expressed in my discussions with mister minister Cioară, in which he explained to me both

the strengths and the weaknesses in your programmes. This is something that will make his stay in France extremely useful.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: It is true, and, in this manner, there will be found a means of collaboration, adequate to the necessities.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: As far as we are concerned, we will do our best, because the increase of these exchanges is extraordinary, the Romanian exports increased considerably in France.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: We need to provide you with the means for payments.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Maybe we have a small advantage compared to you: with the help of electronics, we can easily see the development of the commercial exchanges; I told mister minister Cioară that the numbers doubled.

Cmr. Nicolae Ceaușescu: This is indeed an advantage, but it also needs to help us in the collaboration between us; we also want to be able to calculate the amount of the imports and exports in France.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: We can provide you with these numbers easily.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: You also have the advantage of the electrotechnical industry that is developing rapidly.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I thought that, during the visit project that I am going to present to mister minister Cioară, I should include the visiting of an electronic calculation centre.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: Electronics is one of our weaknesses and we are thinking we should take measures to change it.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: There ought to be chosen certain fields where the applications prove to be more useful.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: This situation is met in almost all the fields; there is no need for too much extension.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I have been thinking about how mister minister Cioară will have the possibility to visit an electronic research centre, where we carry out experiments, with really good results.

Cmr. Nicolae Ceaușescu: This is a field where we are left behind, but we intend to advance faster, to catch up.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I think the future research is not greatly influenced by this delay; it is more important to understand which are the unexploited sectors.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: Indeed, this aspect weighs a lot.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Mister president Maurer speaks French excellently. I am glad to see many Romanians who speak French.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: The Romanians were educated in the French culture. For me, the French language is the second mother tongue.

Cmr. Nicolae Ceaușescu: Have you managed to visit anything in Romania?

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Yesterday I visited Brașov. On Saturday I visited the petrochemical complex from Brazi, where I could see your achievement so far, and where I was informed on the future perspectives.

My visit in Romania gave me the possibility to create a general impression on your country. Few of my family members had told me how beautiful the Carpathian region is. I am now convinced of it.

Cmr. I.Gh. Maurer: Unfortunately, you missed luck when hunting.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I reckon the first battue was too long and the game was agitated.

Cmrd. I.Gh. Maurer: When you return, you will be more successful. I do not think there are many regions as rich in game as ours.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I think there are a lot of wild boars; I saw many wild boar trails.

One of my biggest desires was to go to the Danube Delta.

Cmrd. I.Gh. Maurer: You need to come towards the end of November, that time is a good hunting season.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Although the situation was not favourable at hunting, yet, the experience was extremely pleasant; the region is stunning.

Cmrd. I.Gh. Maurer: Actually, it is one of the places that are abundant in game. When you come back, we shall give it a try once more.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I think my unsuccess is due to the first battue; it was too long.

I heard a bear passing before my shooting spot, but because the leaves did not fall, it hid easily.

Cmrd. I.Gh. Maurer: As a matter of fact, the ideal season for bear hunting is towards the end of October. The forest is defoliated then and it is more difficult for the bear to hide.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: The imperatives of commerce do not allow us to choose the most convenient moment for hunting.

Cmrd. Nicolae Ceaușescu: This sometimes happens when you hunt.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: It is nonetheless the charm of the chase.

Cmrd. Nicolae Ceaușescu: To go and hunt nothing!

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I was impressed by the trophy from “Cerbul Carpatin”.

Cmrd. I.Gh. Maurer: Mr. Ceaușescu has many such trophies in his panoply.

Cmrd. Nicolae Ceaușescu: This is a game appropriate for the younger hunters, for stags one needs to climb higher.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Which is the procedure for hunting stags, to stay on watch?

Cmrd. I.Gh. Maurer: You stay on watch and wait for them to come.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: A sport that has gained a lot of interest, in France, is crossbow shooting; it presents the advantage that one can shoot without making any noise. It is difficult to organise a hunting in which the game to be chased by horse riders, because the roads are getting busier and busier. I do not think there are more than 5–6 teams in France that practice it.

Horse-riding is also a sport that has become widespread in France. After the war, almost 10–15 years, this sport enjoyed a smaller attention, but now, it has started to regain the interest of the people for it. In my department, I have organised few competitions to attract more tourists.

Cmrd. Nicolae Ceaușescu: Yet, one can hunt well in Romania. But it is also room for a better organisation.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Nevertheless, I think that the first battue was too long.

Mr. Jean Louis Pons: There were two successive mountain sides and the animals crossed the line of the beaters easily. There were trails, a proof that shows that there is good game.

Cmrd. I.Gh. Maurer: In two days of hunting, we shot 40 wild boars and a bear.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: I noticed that there are a lot of mushrooms in the places where we hunted. I told mister minister Cioară which are the main markets for selling the mushrooms, especially considering that their import is free. Do not think that it is an

insignificant aspect: there is a variety of mushroom, which I saw in your region, that is preferred on the Marseille market. Last year, in my department, there were obtained 1,5 million dollars from selling mushrooms.

Cmrđ. I.Gh. Maurer: Generally, the berries are extremely popular.

Dl. Charles de Chambrun: As a saying goes that the big rivers are made of the smaller streams, the same way, this source of income should not be neglected.

Cmrđ. Nicolae Ceaușescu: But we cannot pay “Renault” with mushrooms!

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Yet, 1,5 million dollars is not a neglectable amount of money.

Cmrđ. Nicolae Ceaușescu: Just fancy comrade Cioară, to sell in France 1,5 million-dollar worth mushrooms in France.

Cmrđ. Gheorghe Cioară: Mister minister has got me into trouble.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: Maybe it would not be a bad idea to send a specialist, who would be able to identify the varieties of demanded mushrooms.

I started to organise mushroom picking in my department, because, essentially, it is a rural department and I had to find complementary activities. Besides the forest-grown mushrooms, we also harvest a vegetal moss, from which there is made a fixating agent for perfumes. It allowed us the opening of a perfume factory.

I think we should look for using all the possibilities. A complementary activity, for which people work 10–15 days a year, is an excellent option.

Cmrđ. I.Gh. Maurer: And if we won few millions of dollars from harvesting the berries, it would be very good.

Mr. Charles de Chambrun: One of my collaborators, who was still-hunting, noticed a mushroom that is very rare, and which the French adore. It is called “leg-of-lamb”, because it has the shape of a sheep leg.

Yet, do not worry, I not would wait mister minister Cioară in France to talk only about the issue on the mushrooms! (laughter)

Central Historical National Archives, *collection of C.C. within R.C.P. – External Affairs Department*, file no. 120/1966, ff. 2–8.