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**The Communist Propaganda in Romania (1965-1974). Institutional
Practices and Communication Techniques**

Abstract

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The study called *The Communist Propaganda in Romania (1965-1974). Institutional Practices and Communication Techniques* aims to analyze the manner in which the communist propaganda has been organized and functioned in the 1960s. The phrase *institutional practices* incorporates both the way that the official institution of propaganda, part of the Central Committee of the RCP has been organized, and the manner in which the propagandistic body has been organized and managed. Regarding the official institution of propaganda, we will focus, in particular, on the evolution of Propaganda and Agitation Section and its main subordinated institutions: the Party schools, the cultural houses, the libraries and the museums. Since the Propaganda and Agitation Section would not have functioned without the support given by the propagandists' group, its inclusion in the present thesis is, in our opinion, essential. Regarding the communication techniques, we have identified the functions and themes through which propaganda has been broadcasted at the societal level, the communication process incorporated within the system of propaganda and finally, that within the relation between the communist system and society. The results of the process of transmitting the propagandistic message are important in understanding the entire system of power and the societal communication.

The main premise of the study is that the Romanian communist propaganda was developed rationally and consisted in the employment of precise methods. In this regard, propaganda developed an extensive rhetoric or, in other words, it included extensive discursive practices whose main purpose was to change people's beliefs. All these discursive practices have been elaborated using various techniques, which have been broadcasted from top-down using a variety of methods. Given these facts, our opinion is that the propagandist's role has been indispensable. He became more than the voice of power in broadcasting the message; he also became a piece in the corpus of power. The importance and the symbolic valences of his actions determined the existence of a certain direction of propaganda.

We have chosen this topic being inspired by the existence of certain questions which gravitate over the 1960s. The main question is whether or not the period of the 1960s represented a genuine opening in the Romanian policy. Simply put, could it be integrated in the natural phase of the regime development or has it been a consciously prepared and organized strategy of propaganda? In order to find an answer to this question, one should have information on the nature of propaganda.

The main sources we used in this research are the archives. We checked the following Sections of the fond CC of the RCP: Propagandă și Agitație, Cancelarie, Cadre and

Organizatorică, from the National Archives of Romania, Bucharest. The analysis of the transcripts included in the meetings of the Political Bureau or that of the Secretariat of the CC made possible the understanding of the reasons which determined the changes mentioned above and the ways they have been put into practice. The debates during these sessions highlight the fact that there have existed several levels of power. This aspect created a new image of the manner in which the nomenclature perceived Nicolae Ceausescu and conversely. In order to identify the internal mechanisms of control and the feed-back of the society, I checked the Documentary and Press fonds from the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives.

A second type of sources is represented by the press and the writings of the time. They contributed to the analysis of the discourse promoted in the epoch and to the historical and rhetoric reconstruction of the period. Therefore, we have taken into consideration the speeches delivered by the political leaders of the time, the literature and the articles published in the written press ("Scânteia", "Lupta de Clasă", "Munca", "Carnetul Agitatorului", "Contemporanul", "Presa noastră. Revista Uniunii Ziaristilor din RSR", "Teatrul", "Veac Nou", "Viața Capitalei", "Viața Sindicală", "Limite"), books and lectures taught in the Party and normal schools, brochures and flyers used in factories for propagandistic purposes. We also included, in the same category of sources, the documentary fond identified within Bibliothèque Documentaire d'Histoire Contemporaine in Paris, where I identified a series of brochures, Party literature and several studies about Romania written by foreign observers (sociologists, historians, political scientists) in the 1960s and 1970s. These studies have a great importance in identifying the foreign perspective on Romania of that time. The correlation between the foreign and internal perspective gives birth to a clear image of the status of the Romanian system of propaganda and communication.

The major part of the instruments and secondary sources has been studied in the Central University Library in Bucharest, CERCEC Library (Centre d'Etude des Mondes Russe, Caucasien et Centre Européen), Paris, the Library of the Institut for Slavic Studies, Paris and BULAC (Bibliothèque Universitaire des Langues et Civilisations) in Paris.

In order to understand the importance of the institutional changes of propaganda I used several scholarly works regarding political communication and studies on the methods and techniques of the Soviet propaganda. As we deal with the Soviet model of propaganda, it is necessary to have information on this institutional and rhetoric pattern. Accordingly, in each chapter I permanently used the comparative method with regards to the USSR. It is only in

this manner that one can identify the specific aspects of the communist regime in Romania in terms of propaganda,

Regarding the time limits we have chosen, the inferior limit is 1965, the year that Nicolae Ceausescu seized the power. It is well known that the IXth Congress of the RCP in November 1965 has legitimated the new leader. The administrative changes that occurred have been continued by the decisions undertaken at the National RCP Conference in 1967, when the new leader also became the president of the Council of Ministers. Many studies approach the year 1971 and, more precisely, the moment of the July thesis, as the element which traces the line of two types of leadership in the case of Nicolae Ceausescu. However, we consider that this moment did not represent but a premise of the real change in the foreign and internal policy that occurred in 1974. It was in this very year that Nicolae Ceausescu occupied the position of the President of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Things became more and more tensioned beginning with 1974, when the XIth Congress of the RCP adopted *Codul principiilor și normelor muncii și vieții comuniștilor, ale eticii și echității socialiste*[*The Codex of the labor and communist life's principles and norms, of the socialist ethic and equity*]. The Codex consisted in 33 moral and social principles which had to be assumed by each of the individuals in order to become a genuine communist¹. The decisions of the Congress have been preceded by the law of the press in April 1974, when the journalist has been officially called “propagandist”, which demonstrated the complete subordination of the informational means to the regime leadership. Thereby, the year 1974 has been chosen as the superior limit of my study.

The main three purposes of the present study are: the reconstruction and the analysis of the institutional profile of propaganda and the actors that have animated it; the identification and analysis of the functions and character of the communist propaganda, as well as the identification of the interferences between communication and propaganda, both inside the system and between the political power and society. Beside these main purposes, in the analysis undertaken in each chapter we tried to fulfill several secondary goals. We will present these purposes, as well as the methodology used in each chapter in the lines that follow.

The first chapter of the thesis, *The internal organization of propaganda* consists in a historical analysis of the institutional structure of propaganda. It is not our aim to conduct an exhaustive analysis of the system, due to the fact that it might become the topic of another

¹ See *Codul principiilor și normelor muncii și vieții comuniștilor, ale eticii și echității socialiste*, București, Editura Politică, 1974.

study. However, this type of analysis is essential in understanding the internal mechanism of propaganda functioning. The analysis of the institutional re-organization might provide answers regarding the importance with which the regime itself perceived the propaganda system. Another aim of this chapter is represented by the analysis of what communists call “the mass culture” or, in other words, the methods of broadcasting the propagandistic message, like: houses of culture, libraries, museums.

In the second chapter, *The Actors of the propagandistic message*, we will conduct an analysis of the propagandistic body. Often defined as technicians of the public opinion, informers, commentators, analysts or propagandists, they acted differently and built a different group morphology. In the case of the communist regime, in which the system of information and propaganda becomes a system of indoctrination, the profile of the actor of propaganda becomes very special. Therefore, who were the transmitters of the political message? How were they recruited, instructed, educated? Which were their responsibilities and which was their role in the propaganda system? The identification and analysis of the propagandistic body will bring a new light on their status and the role of the propagandist within the system of power.

We consider that the reconstruction of the system of organization and broadcasting the propaganda is essential in the analysis of its functions, the methods of interaction with the society and the manner in which its effects reflected upon society. Taking this premise into account, these chapters represent the necessary basis for the thoroughgoing study of the other research questions.

The third chapter is called *The functions of the communist propaganda*. The premise of this chapter starts from the idea of Jacques Ellul, according to which the socialist propaganda has a total effect, explaining that it acted not only in the political, but also in all other fields of the society. Moreover, with the help of ideology it acted by modifying the psychology of the human being². Remarkable through its institutional organization, this system developed certain functions through which propaganda has been broadcasted at the societal level. These functions have not acted in equal proportions and have not been the same throughout time. The manner they transformed themselves or interacted between them demonstrates the importance given by the political power to certain issues. Furthermore, the identification of the functions of propaganda brings an answer regarding its impact over society.

² Jacques Ellul, *Histoire de la propagande*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1967, p.114.

The analysis and depiction of the functions of propaganda, as well as the continuous concern of the regime for the improvement of the propagandistic group and its institutional organization underlines its genuine importance in supporting the regime. This determines the identification and analysis of the propagandistic themes developed in the period, together with the transformations and differences occurred from one leadership to another. Our aim is to achieve this purpose in the fourth chapter of the thesis, *Themes of the communist propaganda*. The propagandistic themes represent another important element of the system. The existence of one theme or another, as well as the special importance provided to one or another indicates the political direction of the regime and the manner in which the leaders understood to solve a certain problem. In this chapter I focused on three propagandistic themes. The first one is nationalism. I consider it the most important theme during Nicolae Ceausescu, all the more so as it reflects the leader's political beliefs. Therefore, propaganda has been directed in the way of creating the image of a unified society, which provides the regime with support. On the other hand, this theme has been used in order to legitimate Nicolae Ceausescu's power, as well as in the way of strengthening his image abroad.

The second theme is that of the new man. I consider that it represents one of the essential propagandistic themes in all communist regimes. It is well known that the communist regime has developed a rhetoric of the social policy, based on the Manichean theory, which divided the world into good and evil and openly differentiated the good individual, the model of the new man of the bad individual, who was a non-communist and, moreover, a misfit. This very binomial, the communist-non-communist individual, has legitimized the existence of the institutional instruments which participated to the implementation of the propagandistic model of the new man, motivating the censorship and even repression in certain cases. In this regard we will conduct a linguistic analysis, identifying the symbolic terms which represented the basis for the discursive construction of one theme or another. Accordingly, we borrowed the Foucault's perspective on the discourse. According to the philosopher, in each society the manufacturing of the speech is controlled, selected, organized and then redistributed through a certain number of procedures which main role is reinforcing the power³. For the nationalism theme, we also used the quantitative method of the discursive analysis. In other words, we used the method called "designation analysis", which is in fact a part of the semantic analysis of the content, a procedure which

³ Michael Foucault, *Ordinea discursului. Un discurs despre discurs*, Eurosoy and Book, 1998, p.15.

classifies the signs on the basis of their significance⁴. This type of analysis is part of the functionalist method used in the communication analysis and it is a new method used in the historical studies. Regarding the new man topic, apart this method, we also made several biographic portraits through the identification of the symbolic linguistic elements. In order to portray these propagandists, who benefit of important positions within the system, like Iosif Ardeleanu or Ion Cumpanasu, we will use, as the main source, the autobiographies which have been identified in the Cadres' files. Our analysis has as main idea Brigitte Studer's assessment on the new man. As she uses to argue, "one does not get born Stalinist, but one might become one though *travail sur soi*"⁵. This process is developed through the technique of autobiographies, which the communist individual had to manufacture, through self-critique and reports on his activity, as well. This approach of the self has been influenced by the historical context that the individual related with. In this chapter, my purpose is to answer several questions: which was the role of the nationalist policy in the Nicolae Ceausescu regime, or was there a genuine nationalist policy? Which was the key offered by the leadership to the national problem? Which were the institutional instruments which contributed to the creation of the new man and which were the real existing models?

In the last chapter of the thesis, *The morphology of propaganda*, we focused on the analysis of the communication process within the system of power and between power and society, as well. The analysis of the communication system has been performed from Malte Griesse's network perspective. Therefore, the connection and the internal changes in the propaganda system served as the amplificatory of this communication system, the so-called *parler bolchevik*⁶. This makes necessary an incursion inside the propagnnda system as a whole and the identification of the pre-existent relations of power.

For the identification of the upright communication model, we have chosen the August 1968 moment as a key element of the communication between the political power and society. In this regard, our aim is to answer the following questions: was there a genuine form of communication between political power and society in the context of 1968-moment? If it was so, how much did it last and what made it disappear? Which were the reasons for which the political power changed its attitude towards the society? Which was the role of the journalist in the context of the above openings/closures?

⁴ According to Irving L. Janis's classifications from Harold D.Lasswell, Nathan Leites, *Language of politics. Studies in quantitative semantics*, The M.I.T.Press, 1965, p. 56.

⁵ Brigitte Studer, *L'etre perfectible. La formation du cadre stalinien par le travail sur soi*, in "Geneses 51", June, 2003, p. 92.

⁶ Malte Griesse, *Communiquer, juger et agir sous Staline. La personne prise entre les ses liens avec les proches et son rapport au système politico-idéologique*, Peter Lang, Franckort am Main, 2011, p. 27.

Has his statute and responsibilities modified in the context of change in the foreign and internal policy? In the same chapter, our aim is also to analyze the manner in which the political power and Nicolae Ceausescu himself has referred to the development of the means of communication. The propaganda system assumes the development of a certain technique for broadcasting the information. The manner in which the political power refers to one or another means of communication highlights the type of leadership and the political intentions.

An important aspect of the present study is represented by the identification of the multiple voices incorporated by the political power. Therefore, the issuer's voice was not unique at all. It has been multiplied by the propagandists. The propagandist became a symbol of power through his possibility to participate to the manufacturing and interpretation of the political message. In this regard, our analysis has shown that the symbolic image of the propagandist has been possible because of the political context or, simply put, the period of liberalization. The development of the communication function of propaganda determined the change in the manner in which the propagandistic actor has been perceived. The system allowed him to interfere as he desired in order to broadcast his ideas and the techniques which have been used for this purpose.

The liberty of the propagandists and journalists in mid-1960s has not only been a mirror of the leadership style, but also determined the re-positioning towards the society. The communication function, which propaganda developed in the first years of Nicolae Ceausescu rule has almost been lacking the persuasive element. This situation determined a weakness in its control function. The effect on the society became visible and one may quantify its importance through the letters sent to the leaders by the ordinary citizens and, in particular, to Nicolae Ceausescu. Therefore, for the period 1967-1972 we identified hundreds of letters personally addressed to Nicolae Ceausescu and then, to Ceausescu couple, through which the citizens were inviting them to attend their personal and family moments. Most of the letters asked them become wedding or baptism godfathers. The phenomenon is as interesting as the CC archive offers the positive answers of the leaders to these events. Whether or not they attended these events, whether or not they sent gifts, one may identify the presence of power in the private life of the individual. This occurred without a coercive pressure. On the contrary, the individual was the one who addressed himself to the power holders in order to become a part of his life. Therefore, we consider this aspect as a success of propaganda.

However, when the communication function of propaganda incorporated a more liberal shape, the leadership felt threatened by the pressure of the society. Consequently, Nicolae Ceausescu decided that it would be better to return to the previous type politics. This

decision of the leader has been influenced in a high degree by those people who occupied important positions within the propaganda system. The differences in their opinion outburst at the top level. Nicolae Ceausescu has been warned on the fact that the citizens understand in a wrong manner this opening to West and that it would be soon that the power will lose its control over society. If in 1968, within the Party press, one used to say: "let the youngsters walk like Belmondo, if Belmondo walks nicely"⁷, in 1971 they used to say that „Stalin woke up!". Confronted with a direct critique against the manner in which they ruled the country, the leadership could not find any solutions to managing this situation, so they preferred the old orthodox type of politics. If the society was allowed to express the discontents openly, the leadership would have risked losing its control. It is for this reason (the argument that the society must be in alert for a possible foreign intervention) that political power strengthened censorship. This determined another interesting phenomenon. The journalist became one of the main targets permanently verified by the political power. It was due to the fact that he had access to the means of mass communication and information. Consequently, the one who used to be a propagandist, a voice of the political power, transformed in a possible enemy. This determined the modification in the process of transmitting the information. The system of manufacturing the false began to take shape in the very moment of the creation of the propagandistic message. The consequence was that it returned from bottom, from the receiver, more deformed than it used to be. This so called "séances de mise au point"⁸ mechanism was similar to what has happened in the other communist countries. The mechanism of truth falsification from top to bottom has been accompanied by the process of misinformation from bottom to top. The manufacturing of false did not take place in the phase propagandist-individual anymore, put in the first stage, leadership-propagandist. Of course, an insignificant number of propaganda agents started to be the prisoners of their own discourse and, consequently, the propaganda system collapsed. It was a consequence of the system insufficiency and its impossibility to satisfy the individual's needs at least at the minimum level.

On the other hand, in the context of the development of the communication techniques, Nicolae Ceausescu asserted: "propaganda must not compete with television, but use it". On the other hand, he preferred to take advantage of the functions of the propagandist. The development of the communication techniques was equivalent to an increase of the

⁷ Ecaterina Oproiu, *Fascinația modelului*, în „Scânteia”, anul XXXVIII, nr. 7864/1968, p. 5.

⁸ This mechanism repeated itself at all the levels of the apparatus, from top to bottom, and served to broadcasting the less true information, in an hierarchical manner (Paul Lendvai, *Op.cit.*, p. 63).

possibility in which the people could express its opinion. This return to the previous model of propaganda has been also caused by the economic constraints of the late 1970s.

The comparison conducted in the present research has shown that regarding the institutional organization, the propaganda system has not been different comparing with the Soviet model. Although re-organizations of the main institution have taken place, to some extent they were identical with the Soviet model. In this regard, the most significant change occurred in 1969, when the core institution changed its name from the Propaganda and Agitation Section in the Propaganda Section. This has also taken place in the Soviet Union, in 1967. The reason consisted in the degree of specialization of the propagandists and the need to point it out.

In conclusion, the communist propaganda did not represent only a system of indoctrination, but also an educational one, as well as of control, communication and evaluation (of the self and others). When the propaganda system is being studied, one should regard it as a whole. The functions incorporated acted differently and incorporated different proportions, according to the leadership desire and the feedback received from the society. Therefore, the development of propaganda has not been a one-way process, where the power holders had the core place. On the contrary, the process depended both from the issuer and receiver. The people's reaction towards the leadership's attitude has determined the manner in which the power reacted. The presence of these functions of propaganda is a proof of the existence of its real effect on the society. Although the effect has only been partial, and it often has not been an immediate one, it could be identified in a certain degree. However, we have been interested in the crossroad points between power and society through propaganda and the mechanisms it developed over time. Accordingly, through the development of the five functions: regulative, legitimizing, mobilization, persuasive and identity, it is a fact that propaganda permanently interacted with the individual.

In the light of these observations, one may conclude that the improvement of the propaganda system in the 1960s did not represent just a strategy of control, but also a communication one. The context of taking the power, together with the international atmosphere of political relaxation represented the favorable premise of the natural relaxation of the regime. This should not be translated in terms of the absence of control, desire which was manifested by the leader. In fact, this function of propaganda has not been anymore the one which subordinated the other functions.

The complexity of the propagandistic apparatus, as well as the specialization of the actors who animated it made possible the broadcasting of propaganda in a very subtle manner.

This generated less effort in the process of generating the cult of personality, because the collective emulation of the society facilitated the development of such a phenomenon. Although the reasons of re-imposing the control function of propaganda have been multiple and also very complex, one cannot deny the emergence of a partial success through the development of the persuasive, identity, educational, instruction and not least the communication function of propaganda.