

The Romanian Anti-communist Dissidents Mirrored by Radio Free Europe

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My research took issue with the Romanian anti-communist dissent as viewed by Radio Free Europe, before and after the fall of state socialism. The main objective of the investigation was to appraise the subversive role attributed to some intellectuals under communist rule and during the transition to democracy. The intellectual dissent under the Romanian communist regime was a rather accidental phenomenon, summarized by the few names of Doina Cornea, Paul Goma, or Gabriel Andreescu. However, if the intellectuals who actually spoke out against communist ideology were not numerous, history was revised after 1989 and a whole array of previously unrecorded dissidents emerged in the public realm.

I planned my inquiry at OSA as an extension to my previous analysis of the cultural field and intellectual world during the last period of communism, part of my PhD dissertation focused on the social, political and career paths of the members of the most well-known group of intellectuals after '89, a group distinguished by its post-communist anticommunism (The Intellectuals and the Reshuffled Public Space after 1989 in Romania. The Case of the Group for Social Dialogue¹) – many intellectuals or dissidents mentioned on the RFE being members of this group. My analysis of Romanian dissent in the 1970s and 1980s was based on data (documents, memoirs and testimonies) related to intellectual careers, to the function of traditional cultural institutions, the role of other institutions acting in the cultural field, and the content of their publications.

Among foreign institutions which provided some protection to Romanian dissidents by telling their story and making their work public, the role of RFE is maybe the most noticeable, along with that of some members of Romanian exile hosted by this media institution or frequented by its collaborators (Mihnea Berindei, and to a lesser extent, Sorin Alexandrescu).

¹ *Les Intellectuels et la recomposition de l'espace public roumain après 1989. Le cas du Groupe pour le Dialogue Social*, PhD thesis in sociology under the direction of Gisèle Sapiro, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, december 2018, available online <http://www.theses.fr/2018PSLEH211>

At the beginning of the '60s, the Romanian Unit was broadcasting for 5 hours per day, increasing in the '70s and '80s to 12 hours per day during the week, and 17 hours on the weekends².

Some literary critics chose the exile³ after obtaining research fellowships in Western Europe (Sorin Alexandrescu, Emil Hurezeanu, Adrian Niculescu) and they were among RFE's collaborators or they will mobilize an audience and resources to make literary dissent known.

Since the mid-1970s, intellectuals and members of Romanian exile (Gelu Ionescu, Alexandru Papilian defected in the 80s as the previously mentioned Adrian Niculescu and Emil Hurezeanu) contributed to producing Romanian cultural "resistance" and worked both for the international recognition of this type of "resistance", better known as "resistance through culture" (assessments about the intrinsic dissenting character of their works), as well as for the recognition of the Romanian intellectual "opposition" to the communist regime.

RFE was for many members of the Romanian exile a platform used as a legitimizing institution for Romanian intellectuals who were noted and commented by this media outlet – vested with both political and cultural authority – and therefore were recognised as actual or potential dissidents. For a number of such intellectuals, this recognition was either the premise of their defection and upcoming exile, or an opportunity to increase their prestige at home. Under these two extreme attitudes could be summarise the patterns of behaviour of the Romanian intellectual dissent. The reactions of the Romanian communist authorities in the face of criticism during the 1980s are closely linked to the degree of access the critics had to foreign platforms of recognition. Those who were not known, or those who were not part of the intellectual world, and more particularly the literary world, have gone unnoticed by the militant media and circles, unless they could rely on other networks of relationships (the case of the imprisonment of Gheorghe Ursu is thus exemplary).

During my stay at OSA I have consulted and studied the following files:

² Liviu Tofan, *Ne-au tinut in viata. Radio Europa Libera 1970-1990* [They kept us alive. Radio Free Europe 1970-1990], Bucharest, Omnium, 2021, p. 15.

³ Two other intellectuals took position against the regime, joined the protest of Paul Goma (letter of solidarity sent to the petitioners of "Charter 77") and eventually defected (Ion Vianu and Ion Negoitescu were not in a similar situation when they signed the letter).

- HU OSA 300-60-3 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Romanian Unit: Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement (and the following boxes: 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 18, 20, 21)
- HU OSA 300-5-190 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Analytic Research Department: Records of Vlad Socor (and the following boxes: 1, 4, 5, 6, 12, 23, 25, 26)
- HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Media and Opinion Research Department: East Europe Area and Opinion Research (and the following boxes: 5, 6, 7);
- HU OSA 205-4-70 Records of the Open Media Research Institute: Information Services Department: Romanian Subject Files (and the following boxes: 16, 73).

In the folders that I found in the boxes mentioned above, I consulted various materials such as: extracts from RFE broadcasts, reports issued by the Research Department regarding the minutiae of the dissidents' political careers, and the details of militants' activities (who were not engaged in the political scene). These reports comment the position of the dissidents as it transpires from their texts. Upon further inspection, I have also come across other materials used for some of the radio scripts, but also some notes written by collaborators about Romanian dissidents. Moreover, I have analysed press articles (the majority in French, but also in English, and sometimes in Italian and German). Some of these were ignored in the post-1989 Romanian media, as well as by most researches on Romanian communism published after the fall of the regime.

In order to provide an ample perspective of the dissidents' lives, it is important to mention that as a consequence of studying these materials, I have learned that some of them had families abroad. Furthermore, my inquiry sheds light on a number of previously unknown connections between some dissidents and intellectuals during communism, as well as on little known data about their literary careers and other messages sent to RFE.

The study of the archives of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute that I had the opportunity to conduct for a few weeks at OSA was able to nuance and enrich my approach. Here are some findings.

Radu Filipescu is among those genuine cases of political dissidents, whose actions are not related to his profession – he distributed call-to-action flyers calling for protest rally –, he will be rarely

mentioned by RFE alongside with the intellectuals, and it seems that (according to the files I have consulted) he will be mentioned in a broadcast more than one year after his imprisonment and after prominent intellectual organisations were mobilized (Amnesty International and the League for the Defense of Human Rights)⁴. He is thus an exception among Romanian dissidents and not quite known through or not protected by RFE. At the same time, Gabriel Liiceanu was becoming a cultural attraction by publishing his book of memoirs about the “school” of the philosopher Noica. And Andrei Plesu was travelling that year in Germany with a fellowship from Humboldt Foundation and then in Paris when he will meet for the first time Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca. **Gabriel Liiceanu**, a well known author, travelling abroad, primarily in Germany but also in Paris, is mentioned alongside with dissidents on the assumption that he is under surveillance and unable to communicate because of his supposed enrolment for a dissertation in philosophy under the supervision of a professor at Sorbonne University. Monica Lovinescu would usually point, as was the case with **Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu**, that an intellectual worth being mentioned was not necessarily a dissident⁵.

I will mention also the case of a dissident, **Dorin Tudoran**, who caught my attention: reading the presentation of his case we might think that in Romania before ‘89 intellectuals usually travelled abroad without difficulties. However, from what I learned during my inquiry for my dissertation, many researchers or even writers weren’t able to attend conferences or honour invitations in order to pursue their studies.

Another author, **Aurel Dragos Munteanu**, enrolled into the CRP in 1968 (an interesting detail: he studied in the USA, where he obtained a fellowship in 1970); in September 1988 he will resign from the party saying that he could not agree with the party leader⁶’s speech about the contradiction between religion and the communist identity. However, this idea was well known as the foundation of the communist doctrine. Some other reasons for which he renounced his membership are censorship and the policy of dismantling the Romanian villages.

⁴ One year after he is released, in 1987, he is among the initiators of a trade union called “Libertatea [Liberty]”, again I saw only one mention of this activity in programs released by members of the Romanian exile.

⁵ HU OSA 300-5-190: 25.

⁶ Ceausescu is not mention by his name, but named “conducatorul”.

I must also mention the case of another genuine dissident, **Doina Cornea**, who has been dismissed from the University of Cluj, and who will be the most active opponent to the regime⁷. The scope of her criticism covered measures that affected the population at large, not only intellectuals. When communist activists from the first period of the communist party will take stand against Ceausescu, as other intellectuals will do (writers and essayists), she will send her message of solidarity despite explicitly not sharing their vision (as they were current or former communists)⁸.

I have selected for this report a few quotes from statements or comments about the communist period and cultural world that I find significant for the topic at hand:

Gabriel Andreescu is a physicist and researcher, one of the rare dissidents not interested in leaving Romania, whose dissent will be known initially through a member of exile, human rights activist living in France. Gabriel Andreescu is stressing on occasions that he had not been a communist party member. Gabriel Andreescu says in the spring of '89 to a French journalist (in a program on the French public television), I quote: "individual initiative is a rare bird who is flying to foreign heaven skies" and also, I quote: "social initiatives are hardly present. Instead, there is here a cultural and intellectual life, sometimes very interesting. There are also some forms of intellectual resistance – an interior resistance or one of small groups."⁹ I noticed the flamboyant words used to characterize this intellectual: "a genius young man", a "renaissance spirit"¹⁰.

Dan Petrescu is a marginal writer, criticizing the regime starting with 1987. I found a presentation (by Monica Lovinescu) revealing demonstrations of his status as a writer. His criticism of the regime (he was not a member of the CRP) leads to the recognition of a "dissident group", the "group of Iasi" – in fact it is questionable if we can speak of dissent or of a "group" to refer to young intellectuals from Iasi. In January 1988, he had already maintained – as the title given to his interview shows, "Ceausescu is not the only guilty one" – the absence of a civil society or that of

⁷ Some media reports from the UK show that she and communists from the first generation are considered the most serious dissidents.

⁸ HU OSA 300-5-190: 6.

⁹ HU OSA 300-60-3: 5.

¹⁰ HU OSA 300-60-3: 4.

the interaction between intellectuals and workers. He and Doina Cornea were the only intellectuals declaring their solidarity with the workers' protest in Brasov in November 1987¹¹.

One of the better known and widely promoted poets, **Mircea Dinescu**, a young author and editor for the most important literary journal, member of the communist party, and who became a dissident during 1988 after his positive appreciation (during his journey in Soviet Union) of Glasnost and Perestroika and therefore the most prominent dissident among intellectuals (many intellectuals have shown their solidarity with him during the last year of communism) will criticize, in late 1989¹², the writers called the “serious proponents of the party” or the “privileged” ones distinguishing between this old generation and the “passive resistance” of the younger one (or not old enough). It should be observed that he speaks about dissent referring to the protests of former activists during the first period of the communist party.

In a commentary about literature under the communist regime, published in Romania after '89 and broadcast on the RFE, a literary critic (Eugen Negrici¹³) will speak of the advantages gained by or given to poetry in authoritarian times which ensured the undeniable success of poetry.

That made me think about the case of another very successful and well published author, the poetess **Ana Blandiana**. As one of the RFE's collaborators will show¹⁴, from a highly promoted author she was led to the status of a dissident, even if she will declare not being interested in politics at all, not even when she complained that one of her books was not published or when she lost her chronicle in the most prestigious literary journal.

After 1989, “resistance through culture” became in hindsight the mark name of a rediscovered Romanian intellectual dissent. This way, a large number of intellectuals emphasized the intrinsic dissenting character of their works, downplaying the position of prestige and even cultural authority they enjoyed under state socialism. To explain away their success as widely published and renowned writers, essayists and philosophers they mentioned the incompetence or the

¹¹ HU OSA 300-5-190: 26.

¹² His text, dated November 11, will be broadcast December 13.

¹³ HU OSA 300-5-190: 25.

¹⁴ *Journal de Genève*, Septembre 1989.

negligence of the official literary agents and publishers in charge of censorship. Some intellectuals acknowledged explicitly, after 1989, the limited scope of their subversive strategies.

In the RFE archives I found two papers (one has already been published in the most important literary journal, the other is a text sent to RFE) where literary critics (Eugen Negrici and Dumitru Micu) were saying just that: that those manuscripts that had been denied publishing could have been published before '89 because they were in fact not dangerous to the regime or critical of it. And they also maintained that in Romania a drawer literature didn't exist¹⁵ and that there was no samizdat either.

Nevertheless, in the RFE archives I found a folder entitled "Romanian samizdat 1985-1988" which contains some papers published abroad if not broadcast at the RFE¹⁶ after having been denied publishing in Romania, or even papers actually published in literary journals.

Other quotes are revealing the atmosphere of the early '90s:

An intellectual speaking in 1990 on behalf of the Group for Social Dialogue said to a foreign journalist that those in power "are trying to obscure their communist past". He was referring to the representatives of the political leadership installed after December '89 whose membership in the CRP was well known, but forgetting that he was himself a member of the CRP (and failing to mention this at all after the fall of communism).

A Yugoslav journalist put together comments made by various public figures, from Yugoslavia and Romania, such as Andrei Plesu, essayist and art historian also an intellectual broadcast on the RFE as a dissident, the first post-communist minister of Culture who stated that the societal conflicts occurring after the fall of communism stem from the weak dissent in Romania – if not its absence. An extract in a Romanian journal, that I found in the RFE archives, represents his declaration as a response to a question raised by a Romanian student union during the spring of 1990 regarding his membership in the CRP: he admits that he enrolled into the CRP in 1968, his membership being withdrawn in 1986 and he also thanks the Student Union for its vigilance.

¹⁵ As I could hear myself directly from some intellectuals (a philosopher born in the 30s, Sorin Vieru, and Doina Cornea).

¹⁶As the protestation with limited reach of the historian Andrei Pippidi (the grandson of the politician and historian, Nicolae Iorga).

RFE was highly instrumental in shaping the political identities of many prominent Romanian intellectuals and in producing (re)presentations of what is anti-communist dissent both before and immediately after the demise of communism. Radio Free Europe was not a mere manufacturer of documents, but a maker of intellectual history. Members of Romanian exile contributed significantly to the creation of literary dissent despite the rare dissenting writers.