

WHEN PROPAGANDA ERASES MEMORY. ABOUT POLAND IN THE ROMANIAN COMMUNIST "SCÂNTEIA", 1948-1953

Florin ANGHEL *

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Abstract: It was clear, both from the political decision in Warsaw and in Bucharest, as well as from the reading of "Scân-teia" that the relations between Romania and Poland after the Second World War, but especially after the proclamation of the People's Republic in Bucharest, were neither close nor freestanding. During Stalin's lifetime, until the beginning of 1953, nothing was stored within the bilateral relation, as had happened after the First World War when, even the first months of peace had brought with them a number of joint actions and calls for a strategic alliance, including the establishment of a common border. On the contrary, after 1948 this memory was repudiated, and the protagonists were criticized. "Scân-teia" did not, obviously, resume any of the episodes of the bilateral relationship between Romania and Poland from the interwar period and did not refer to any of its peak moments, even if the elapsed time was not a long one at all; for example, the Polish refuge in Romania in the fall of 1939 and its extension during the war years had happened just a few years before the abdication of King Mihai, on December 30, 1947 and Romania's entry into totalitarianism.

The image of Poland in Stalinist Romania was flawless from a dogmatic-ideological point of view: almost certainly a more perfect template was hard to find in the editorial spaces of the other official newspapers of the communist parties in the states occupied by the USSR. Being a narrative completely accepted by Moscow and the Soviet occupiers, the image of Stalinist Poland became in turn an indigestible text for the general public. Moving further, continuing with templates without any relevance to the bilateral relations, until the early 1990s, after the collapse of the communist regimes, Romania and Poland went separately with their minor regional interests and options, other than those imposed by the USSR, throughout the Cold War. This was a completely different situation, of course, from the golden story of the "alliance of hearts" from the interwar period.

Keywords: Romania; Poland; Stalin; communism; "Scân-teia"

* "Ovidius" University of Constanța, Romania. fl_angel@yahoo.com

As one moves towards the East - stated Adam Burakowski, a specialist in the final stages of the European communist regimes – one notices the obvious expansion of the senses: there are no fanatics anymore. "Those from Western Europe, assured Burakowski, are fanatics. They had a 30-year war, Hitlerism came from there, communism, in fact, was not a Russian invention at all. Westerners are more fanatical. In our area, people are more realistic, given the fact that the borders are changing. Imagine a man who was born in Uzhhorod in the Ruthenian Carpathians, in 1900: he was a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then of Czechoslovakia, then of Hungary, and he was also in the Democratic Republic of Ruthenia for a few days, then in the USSR and then independent Ukraine. In this area, people know that it (all) passes"¹.

How is Stalinism seen from one side to the other?²

Does it have different colors, are the Soviet dogmas translated in a relatively nuanced way into other Eastern European languages?³ What could be different within European Stalinism after the establishment of the popular democracies, then the proclamation, one by one, of the communist republics, a fact which was historically concluded by the abdication of King Mihai I in Bucharest, on December 30, 1947, and by the *coup d'état* in Prague, in February 1948?

¹ Magda Grădinaru, „Interviu: istoricul polonez Adam Burakowski: După 1989, societatea românească a pierdut cel mai mult. A câștigat nomenclatura”, *News.ro*, 20.11.2016, in <https://www.news.ro/politic-intern/interviu-istoricul-polonez-adam-burakowski-dupa-1989-societatea-romaneasca-a-pierdut-cel-mai-mult-a-castigat-nomenclatura-1922400020002016111216055745> (Accessed 4.04.2020).

² There is an abundant literature, in various kinds of interpretations, relating to the Stalinist period. Among others, the following answered the question: Andrzej Paczkowski, *Poland: the enemy nation*, in Stéphane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartoszek, Jean Louis Margolin, "The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression" (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 363-394; Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2014), Anne Applebaum, *Cortina de fier. Represiunea sovietică în Europa de Est, 1945-1956* (București: Editura Litera, 2015); Thierry Wolton, *O istorie mondială a comunismului. Încercare de investigație istorică*, vol. I *Cu pumnul de fier. Călăii* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2019), 406-574. On Stalin and his era: Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and His Era* (London: Tauris Parke, 2007); Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: curtea țarului roșu* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2014). An integrative look into the Eastern half of Europe, from the point of view of Kremlin's perspectives in Cosmin Popa, *Între tentația imperiului și alianța strategică. URSS și Europa Centrală și de Est (1941-1953)* (Cluj Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2012).

³ Paweł Sarna, "W trosce o nieprzedstawienie-wizerunek Józefa Stalina na łamach czasopism społeczno-kulturalnych okresu stalinizmu w Polsce", *Res. Rhetorica*, Katowice 6, no. 2 (2019): 33-47.

We have tried to establish the image by which Stalinist Poland, after 1948 and until March 5, 1953, was highlighted in the official newspaper of the Romanian (communist) Workers' Party (PMR), "Scântea".

The two states occupied by the Red Army, without independent policies, without an internal or external reaction capacity, and with two completely different institutional and military stories in the Second World War, after 1944-1945 were standardized and trampled by Stalin's will and actions. Both states, Romania and Poland, which during the interwar period were essential elements of the "cordon sanitaire"⁴ system, of French inspiration, aimed at defending Europe from the imperial, ideological and military valences of the USSR, became, after the Second World War, mere institutional instruments of Moscow.

1. The general framework of the picture. The colors of Stalinism in Poland and Romania and the lack of memory of the past.

"Scântea", the main official newspaper of the PMR, did not write much about Poland after the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic, on December 30, 1947, and until Stalin's death, on March 5, 1953. All the texts were either simple translations from the Russian language of certain official communiqués first printed in the USSR, or entire speeches of party members from Warsaw and, very rarely, dogmatic reports on a given theme. Most of the time, the journalistic approaches dealt with the reconstruction sites of the Polish capital or, less often, industrial activities from marginal fields, until 1948: mining, metallurgy, car manufacturing plants, real estate construction sites. The official newspaper of the PMR was the main source of information in Romania in the 1948-1953 period, and also after that, being printed in 700,000 copies, with 4 or 6 pages in black and white, under modest typographical conditions, rather rudimentary compared to what readers were used to in the interwar period and even during the war, until 1944.

The same ideological editorial content was, obviously, found to be mirrored: a long-lived Polish publication from Katowice, "Odra", printed in December 1949, on the 70th anniversary of Stalin's life, texts which were almost identical to those that a Romanian could read in the publications he bought from the kiosks in Bucharest. For example, the poems dedicated to the Kremlin leader: in Poland they had the same titles - "Song for Stalin" (Michał Isakowski), "Stalin" (Nairi Zarin), "Stalin" (Włodzimierz Sosiura), "When Stalin Speaks" (Johannes R. Becher)⁵.

⁴ Florin Anghel, *Construirea sistemului "cordon sanitaire". Relații româno-polone, 1919-1926* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2008); Henryk Walczak, *Sojusz z Rumunią w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1918-1931* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytet Szczeciński, 2008).

⁵ Paweł Sarna, 38-40.

Today, in the case of "Scân-teia", there is a direction of analysis of the content of everyday events, the so-called mundane events, which nevertheless build the concentrationary universe of communism⁶, and also approaches, that are equally important, which start from the public letters addressed by various people, usually "working citizens", to the editorial office in order to clarify certain situations, to condemn others or to legitimize, in general, the leaders⁷. This fully respected what Françoise Thom wrote that "no one transformed better than Stalin the moral immanence of ideology into an apparently circumscribed terror"⁸.

Stalinist Poland was not a favorite subject for the Bucharest press between 1948-1953: in no way similar to how Bulgaria was, during the years 1947 and 1948⁹, or the neighboring Yugoslavia or, of course, the USSR. The themes brought from Poland were schematic, few and contained templates without color. The key words often built the text and very little was left in order to create the image of the other. One would think, and would never know how much of it was an impression, and how much reality, that the reports about Poland in "Scân-teia" had a very high chance of having been written from the modest Bucharest office of the foreign policy editor. Moreover, everything was built by the ideologues from Bucharest in the very rigid context of the eternal and unchanging conflict between the USSR (at the helm of an "anti-imperialist camp") and the "revanchist", "imperialist", "aggressor" states, most of them not being named, with the exception of the United States.

In a mirroring manner, the same language was found in the official press from Warsaw, perhaps only more correctly written from the point of view of the spelling of the geographical designations or proper names¹⁰.

Although one would have expected changes in the discourse, even if only propagandistic, regarding the image of a country that was also going through profound Stalinist transformations, in the case of "Scân-teia" this did not happen until 1953. The change in the decision-making structure of the PMR, in 1952, by removing Ana Pauker, Teohari Georgescu and Vasile Luca from its leadership, had no effect in the case of the monotonous and mediocre evolution of the relations between Romania and Poland. Neither the

⁶ Mioara Anton, "Cotidianul comunist în anchetele ziarului „Scân-teia”. Lipsuri mărunte și fapte diverse”, *Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană*, 2017: 130-147.

⁷ Mioara Anton, Laurențiu Constantiniu editors, *Guvernați și guvernanți. Scrisori către putere. 1945-1965* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2013).

⁸ Françoise Thom, *Limba de lemn* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2005), 135.

⁹ Florin Anghel, "The Correct Price of Bulgarian Communism: Romania as an External Propaganda Instrument (1947)", *Historical Yearbook XIV* (2017): 57-73.

¹⁰ Patryk Barbiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland. Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), pp. 97-156; Michał Kozłowski, "Czerwony nacjonalizm? Przyczynek do genealogii polskiego stalinizmu", *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, Warszawa, 8 (2019).

restructuring of the Cominform, nor of the relations within the communist world, after the repudiation of Yugoslavia, in 1948, changed anything in the evolution of the relations between Bucharest and Warsaw, and even less so in the reflection of this relation in the ideological discourse. Practically, Romania and Poland did not have an expressive, intense collaboration throughout the entire communist period, and even less so between 1948 and 1953, the fundamental reason being the lack of an independent foreign policy during Stalin's lifetime¹¹.

How uniform even the insignificant everyday aspects of life could be in the first years after the establishment of communism in the Eastern half of Europe is proven by the ideological project of "christening" or baptizing? some cities (in some cases, historical ones) with the name of Stalin and the modification of the local memory through the placement of statues, billboards, names of institutions, streets, parks and central squares. Residents of the Stalin cities were those from Katowice (Poland, between 1953 and 1956), Braşov (1950-1960), Dunaujváros (Hungary, 1951-1961), Varna (Bulgaria, 1949-1956) and Kucova (Albania, 1950-1990)¹².

Another fundamental aspect must be noted: the training of foreign policy journalists was deficient and rudimentary. Equally ludicrous was the documentation regarding the minimal aspects of Stalinist internal politics in Poland. The most important figures of Polish Stalinism from Warsaw always appeared, especially in the early period, in 1947 and 1948, misspelled¹³ or often translated from Russian, and not matching the characters of the Romanian language. The leaders from Warsaw were anonymous to the Romanian public, just as those from Bucharest meant nothing to the ordinary Pole during the Stalinist period. Only on May 16, 1947, the interview of a leader from Warsaw,

¹¹ Adam Burakowski, "Poland and Romania: The Loyal Republic and the Maverick", *Cold War International History Project*, Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/poland-and-romania-the-loyal-republic-and-the-maverick> (Accessed 7.10.2024); Florin Anghel, "Strategic Second Hand Partnership: The Communist Propaganda and the Beginning of Romanian-Polish Relations (1945-1946)", *Historical Yearbook* XV (2018): pp. 73-89. Cezar Stanciu, *Frăția socialistă: politica RPR față de țările „lagărului socialist”: 1948-1964* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2009), 43-46.

¹² Teresa Semik, "“Byłem mieszkańcem miasta Stalina”: ddy Katowice nazwano Stalingród", *Dziennik Zachodni*, Katowice, 30.08.2017, <https://dziennikzachodni.pl/bylem-mieszkancem-miasta-stalina-gdy-katowice-nazwano-stalingrod-projekt-ipn-ar/12433878> (Accessed 16.06.2020).

¹³ For example, an article signed on April 20, 1947 by the Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka was presented as Vladislav Gomolka. Such spellings were not accepted for public figures in Poland before 1939-1940. Vladislav Gomolka, "Polonia și Teritoriile Recâştigate", *Scânteia*, XVI, no. 803, 20 April 1947: 4.

i.e., Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, granted to a Romanian publication, evidently "Scân-teia", was printed¹⁴.

The frustration of the communist team from Bucharest with the external status of the new people's republic was visible: in addition to the layer of isolation determined by the partisanship with Nazi Germany against the USSR (between June 22, 1941 and August 23, 1944) and the mediocrity of the role played in international relations at the end of the war and at the conclusion of peace (Romania was treated as a defeated state), there was also the lack of any prospects of admission to the newly established United Nations Organization, where communist Poland was a founding member. During the negotiation of the text of the bilateral Treaty of January 26, 1949, the communists from Warsaw insisted on the proper maintenance of all the references and articles included in the framework treaties signed by the occupied states with the USSR, including by Romania (on February 4, 1948). Angry, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Pauker, raged in front of her colleagues from the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PMR, on January 20, 1949, that the Poles were asking too much when they wanted to invoke the "spirit of the United Nations Charter" in the text of the treaty in a distinct article. "We asked for this to be included in Article 2 of the treaty, mentioned Ana Pauker. We believe that now more than ever we must not highlight this, because it would mean bowing to the imperialist countries".¹⁵

Along with the signing of the bilateral treaties of friendship with Bulgaria, Hungary (January 1948) and the USSR (February 4, 1948), with identical texts, the first official bilateral document was negotiated between Warsaw and Bucharest at the convention level. That was the Cultural Collaboration Convention, a mediocre level of reporting on the bilateral relations, which were still suffering after the obvious disinterest of the Polish communist leaders and after the steep dispute from 1945-1947 regarding the existence, or not, of some debts from the World War period.

The text of the Cultural Convention of February 28, 1948, signed in Warsaw, was extensive and full of honorable commitments, which were very difficult to put into practice for reasons related to the rigor of the communist censorship and the lack of the basic freedoms of expression in the artistic and

¹⁴ "Primul Ministru al Poloniei vorbește „Scân-teii”", *Scân-teia*, 16 May 1947: 1. Cyrankiewicz does not speak at all about the Romanian-Polish alliance from the interwar period, limiting himself to stating that "We would like to have as close relations as possible with Romania and I believe that after we overcome the obstacles and difficulties resulting from the war and related to the restoration work, these ties will fully develop".

¹⁵ Camelia Moraru, Laura Neagu, Constantin Moraru, Constantin Neagu, Claudiu Dincă, Ioana Zamfir editors, *Stenogramele ședințelor Biroului Politic și ale Secretariatului Comitetului Central al PMR*, vol. II (1949) (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2003), 27.

cultural space, in general¹⁶. None of the articles of the Cultural Convention was imperative and the text left enough understanding and power of interpretation to each of the parties in order to explain the possible lack of achievements. In the absence of anything better, and pending bilateral financial regulations, the Cultural Convention was precisely a good, necessary step to stop the irreparable degradation of the bilateral relations, and also to perform small, but impactful public gestures, aimed at leveling the major disagreements and to numb the fears of the public opinion and of the political and administrative decision-makers.

In fact, if we were to believe Eduard Mezincescu, who wrote the text of the Convention on behalf of the Romanian side - and half a century later shared his experience in an interview for the national radio station - the decision regarding the lowering to a minimum of the bilateral relations between Romania and Poland had nothing to do with any factor from Bucharest. Mezincescu stated that Moscow - maybe even Stalin himself - decided the signing of a cultural Convention instead of a bilateral treaty: I - says the former director of the Political Division of the Romanian diplomatic apparatus in 1948, in an account from 1994 - as the political factor, was a little surprised that we did not sign a treaty in Warsaw and I was told (by Ana Pauker): It is not yet necessary to draw up an alliance treaty with Poland"¹⁷. Anne Applebaum explained in her monography dedicated to the Iron Curtain the sources of the Soviet decisions in relation to the internal policies of the occupied states and regarding the relations between these satellites. "The Soviet generals and the NKVD officers who came to Eastern Europe," Applebaum said in an interview about her book, "believed that they would push the frontiers of the socialist revolution and that it was only a matter of time before they moved from Eastern Europe to Western Europe"¹⁸.

Why did Romania and Poland fail to restore the memory of the interwar alliance during the communist period?

A close relationship between Bucharest and Warsaw, be it a symbolic one, as long as the Red Army troops had occupied both states, was not desired by Stalin and the decision-makers from the Kremlin, even by virtue of a perfect geopolitical logic: such a connection would

¹⁶ On a general overview of the artistic and cultural phenomenon in Stalinist Romania: Cristian Vasile, *Literatura și artele în România comunistă, 1948-1953* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2010).

¹⁷ Victor Brădățeanu, "Ultima vizită a lui Tito la București înainte de a deveni „călău”, December 17-19, 1947”, *Rador*, December 15, 2015, in www.rador.ro/2015/12/15/ultima-vizita-a-lui-tito-la-bucuresti-inainte-de-a-deveni-calau-17-19-decembrie-1947 (Accessed 6.10.2024).

¹⁸ Vladimir Dubinsky, "How Communism Took Over Eastern Europe After World War II", *The Atlantic*, 22 October 2012, in <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/10/how-communism-took-over-eastern-europe-after-world-war-ii/263938/> (Accessed 8.04.2024).

quickly and inevitably transform in one against Moscow. As it happened immediately after the First World War and as it was established institutionally by the defensive alliance convention of March 3, 1921.

2. On Stalinism in Poland, according to the words of Stalinism in Romania

Although a brief reading of "Scân-teia" after the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic leaves no doubt about the dogma and key words of the totalitarian ideology, there is evidence that the leaders of the Romanian Workers' Party were still not satisfied with the way the body of the newspaper looked, nor were they sure whether some incriminating "bourgeois" nuance remained. However, nothing reflects more faithfully the color of the Stalinist regime, and the transformation of language and thought, than the reading, even in passing, of this daily newspaper.

During one of the interminable meetings of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the PMR, on January 26, 1951, in the presence of the editor-in-chief of the publication, Sorin Toma, the content of "Scân-teia" was also analyzed. The most dissatisfied was Ana Pauker, who complained that *"our newspaper still retains much of the character - how should I say so as not to offend in vain - a Western character, a character of the communist Western press, I mean, a character of 'hate'". The problems dealt with are treated it seems, if not optimistically, rather in a screaming manner*¹⁹. The Stalinist leader of Romania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, was in complete agreement, and even more than that: "We tend to shout once from all the trumpets and then we remain silent for a while. (...) With our screams about the class enemy, we often cover our lack of skill, the ineffectiveness of our organs that throw everything at the class enemy. I don't see how "Scân-teia" could do anything other than what it does today, how it could eliminate the deficiencies without specialized staff within the branches. How can you write something if you don't know how to do it?"²⁰.

Well said, but little was done. Because, until 1953, and also after that, the quality of writing was not related to skill, but rather to ideology, instructions and staff control.

For example, in the case of the Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka, while in the first half of 1948 the official communist newspaper in Bucharest presented him as a reliable member of staff, a historical figure for historical times, it was enough for the summer vacation to pass, along with Stalin's decision to dismiss him, so that the same "Scân-teia" would move on to

¹⁹ Camelia Moraru, Laura Neagu, Constantin Moraru, Constantin Neagu, Claudiu Dincă editors, *Stenogramele ședințelor Biroului Politic și ale Secretariatului Comitetului Central al PMR*, vol. III (1950-1951) (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2004), 481.

²⁰ Ibid., 493-494.

his condemnation, such as those successive ones, from 17 and 18 September, 1948²¹.

Atanasie Joja, one of the few academics enrolled in the Communist Party of Romania before 1944, who had just been put in the capacity of ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Romanian People's Republic in Warsaw, at the beginning of June 1949, is the conclusive proof of the quality of the public discourse regarding the analysis of the bilateral relationship. No nuance, no personal idea, other than the slogans exposed in the party's press. Obviously, Atanasie Joja, who had taught at the University of Bucharest before the war, knew more about the history of the Romanian-Polish relations, which were more than six centuries old, but he did not care to speak more than at the level of a sample from a wall newspaper, transmitted by the party's ideologues. This happened all the more so since his brother, architect Constantin Joja, with legionary sympathies, was already a political prisoner and had been appointed, from a camp on the Danube-Black Sea Canal route, to coordinate the restoration works of the imposing Casino building in Constanța²², which had been damaged in the Second World War by the Soviet bombings.

On June 10, 1949, "Scânteia" picked up an interview given by Atanasie Joja to the Polish national press agency PPA on the occasion of taking over his diplomatic post. A convinced Stalinist, he transmitted propaganda: "The Polish Republic and the Romanian People's Republic are linked by an unshakable friendship, due to their common economic and social structure, their common ideology and political program, as well as their common struggle for the construction of socialism. We stand side by side in the common camp of people's democratic countries and enjoy the support and friendship of the invincible Soviet Union, which liberated us, helped us in our economic reconstruction and is now helping us to build socialism"²³. Convincing for the background of the new relations between the two Stalinist regimes is the fact that even this interview could not be printed on the front page of the official newspaper of the communist party, rather it was sent, reverently, to the body of the newspaper.

²¹ "Pentru învingerea complectă a devierii de dreapta și naționaliste", *Scânteia*, September 17, 1948: 3-4; "Rezoluția Plenarei Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Polonez", *Scânteia*, September 18, 1948: 6.

²² Andreea Pavel, "Pe urmele părinților. Fiul arhitectului Cristodulo și fiica deținutului politic Voicilă s-au întâlnit în Cazinou, fostul șantier comunist în care tații lor au îngropat scrisori și poezii", *Info Sud Est*, Constanța, in <https://info-sud-est.ro/pe-urmele-parintilor-fiul-arhitectului-cristodulo-si-fiica-detinutului-politic-voicila-s-au-intalnit-in-cazinou-fostul-santier-in-care-tatii-lor-au-ingropat-scrisori-si-poezii/> (Accessed 17.06.2020).

²³ "Republica Polonă și RPR sunt legate printr-o prietenie de nesdrucinat", *Scânteia*, 10 June 1949: 3.

A few months later, on September 23, 1949, the Polish Embassy in Bucharest obtained the approval for the organization of a public demonstration dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the "invasion of the country by the Hitlerites". Obviously, the aggression of the Red Army on September 17, 1939 and the occupation of the eastern half of the country were evaded. The participants could watch a documentary exhibition entitled "Poland on the road to building socialism" and two documentary films, in the purest possible Stalinist realism: "The Construction of Warsaw" and "The Metallurgical Industry". The representative of the embassy, *chargé d'affaires* Tadeusz Findziński, conveyed to the audience, and "Scân-teia" of September 24, 1949 picked it up, that "the Polish people wanted to live in friendship with the peoples of the Soviet Union, but the reactionary government made from the hatred of the Soviet Union the basis of its entire foreign policy. This led to the throwing of Poland into the hands of the Hitlerites and to the destruction of Polish villages and cities. (...) The victory of the Soviet Union restored freedom and independence to Poland and made possible the establishment of people's democracy"²⁴.

The speech of the head of the diplomatic mission in Bucharest, a *chargé d'affaires*²⁵ who always filled in for ambassador Piotr Szymański in the mission in Romania (1947-1951), marked a decade since the collapse of the borders of the Polish state, in which the USSR also made a contribution equal to that of Germany, after September 17, 1939, but also since the aid granted by Romania, in the fall of 1939, to tens of thousands of refugees, civilians and soldiers²⁶. The "resistance" blamed by Tadeusz Findziński was the one that, for better or for worse, had managed until the last moment one of the most successful regional strategic alliances on the European continent in the two interwar decades and had ensured for Poland a path to development and modernization.

The action at the Embassy headquarters, on Alexandru Street, was followed, three weeks later, by a kind of grand opening, however, in the spirit of the new rules and dogmas, of an artistic achievement typical of the era. It dealt with a film, "The Last Stage"²⁷, directed by Wanda Jakubowska, a survivor of the Auschwitz camp, a film with significant communist ideological potential. Broadcast starting from mid-October 1949 at second-rate cinemas in Bucharest ("Marna", "Dacia", "Tomis", "Flacăra", "Moșilor", "Florida") with only one

²⁴ "Conferința de presă dela Ambasada Republicii Polone", *Scân-teia*, 24 September 1949: 3.

²⁵ Tadeusz Findziński (1911-1987) was a diplomat of the Polish People's Republic, ambassador to the Netherlands (1951-1957) and to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1960-1963). He collaborated after 1956 with Władysław Gomułka.

²⁶ *Polscy uchodźcy w Rumunii, 1939- 1947. Dokumenty z Narodowych Archiwów Rumunii*, foreword by Florin Anghel (Warszawa, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2013), 2 vols.

²⁷ *Ostalni etap*, released in Poland at the end of 1947. Marek Haltof, *Screening Auschwitz: Wanda Jakubowska's The Last Stage and the Politics of Commemoration* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 75-100.

exception, from that point on the newly appointed Nicolae Bălcescu Boulevard ("Aro"), the film benefited from a favorable chronicle, in the spirit of the message conveyed, which was promptly printed in *"Scântea"*, on October 16, 1949. "This film - wrote Sorin Mladoveanu, this time on the second page of the body of the party's daily newspaper - makes you seethe with righteous anger not only against German fascism, but also against American and English imperialists, who exonerate Nazi criminals and executioners like those at Auschwitz, who are vigorously encouraging the revival of Hitlerism under the guise of the Bonn "government" and "parliament" and are striving - in league with the German capitalists - to transform Western Germany into a base of a new world war"²⁸.

Polish cinematographic films were broadcast before, all of them of recent production, with the classic motifs of the class struggle and the war against Nazi Germany. One cannot help but notice how often Polish documentary and artistic films were being brought to Bucharest and how eagerly they were broadcast, for lack of anything better, in order to be, of course, also promoted propagandistically in the party's press. Only one month after the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic, the Romanian Association for the Development of Polish-Romanian Friendship Relations (ARPOL) launched a "gala of Polish films" at the "Luxor" cinema. To add more weight, no less than three ministers of the Romanian government, Octav Livezeanu (Informations), N. Profiri (Communications) and Teodor Iordăchescu (Public Works) came to the viewing of the artistic film "Warsaw Suite" and the documentary "Silesia", on February 2, 1948²⁹. A few days later, at the "Ritz" cinema, the Embassy of Poland played other films, documentaries, such as "Student City", "Floods" and "Working in the salt mines", alongside the same artistic film "Warsaw Suite", this time in the presence of Prime Minister Petru Groza and Ion Niculi, member of the Provisional Presidium of the Romanian People's Republic³⁰.

At the beginning of January 1950, through Sovromfilm and the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with the Foreign Countries, a so-called "Polish Film Festival" was broadcast at the biggest cinema in Bucharest, "Patria", including titles long forgotten after 1953: "Unconquered City", "Border Street", "Last Stage", "Warsaw Premiere", "Treasure", "First Flight", "Lonely House". Then, after January 20, 1950, the "festival" was also shown in the cinemas of Cluj, Oradea, Rădăuți and Iași³¹.

²⁸ Sorin Mladoveanu, "Cronica filmului. O armă în lupta pentru pace: filmul polonez „Ultima etapă” (Auschwitz)", *Scântea*, October 16, 1949: 2.

²⁹ "Gala cinematografică de filme Poloneze", *Scântea*, 5 February 1948: 2.

³⁰ "Gala cinematografică organizată de Ambasada Republicii Polone", *Scântea*, 15 February 1948: 3.

³¹ "Festivalul filmului Republicii Polone", *Scântea*, 12 January 1950: 1.

It was over three years later that handpicked spectators from Warsaw were also able to watch a Romanian cinematographic production in line with the ideological requirements. Produced in 1952, directed by Victor Iliu and Marietta Sadova, based on Mihail Sadoveanu's novel, the film "Mitrea Cocor", a masterpiece of Romanian cultural Stalinism, was presented in the official salon of the Romania's Embassy in Warsaw, on December 27, 1952, in the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Stanisław Skrzyszewski, and with Ambassador Nicolae Dinulescu as host³².

For months in a row, after the flagrant deterioration of the relations of the communist world with Tito's Yugoslavia, the official newspaper of the Romanian Workers' Party, "Scân-teia", reported exclusively small pieces of news, devoid of interest for the majority of the public opinion, regarding Poland, its representatives and its relationship with Romania. The visit of the Katowice Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Grzegorz Fitelberg and Witold Rowicki, with concerts from the Russian and Polish classics and Soviet music, in April 1950, at the Athenaeum³³, the opening of an exhibition of Polish posters in the hall of the Ministry of Arts, on Wilson street no. 4, on May 26, 1950³⁴ or a conference of the literary critic Hieronim Michalski, at the headquarters of the Writers' Union, on May 15, 1950, about the "Problems of Polish literature"³⁵ was about all that could bring to light the relations between Romania and Poland in the full Stalinist era.

The inexpressiveness of these bilateral relations and the low level of the bilateral collaboration can be easily read even in the dogmatic texts of two ceremonial speeches, delivered on July 22, 1950, on the occasion of the celebration of Poland's new national day, and promptly printed in "Scân-teia".

The two speakers, PMR activist Constantin Pârvulescu³⁶ and *chargé d'affaires* Tadeusz Findziński, did not say a single word - not a single one - about the relations between Romania and Poland, nor did they recall, they had no way to do so, any moment in the history of the bilateral ties. "Our people, claimed Pârvulescu, who have also known the imperialist yoke and who also owe their liberation to the invincible Soviet Army, take part wholeheartedly in the great celebration of the Polish people, friends and brothers. (...) The treaty of friendship, collaboration and mutual assistance concluded between the Republic

³² "Prezentarea filmului „Mitrea Cocor” la Varşovia”, *Scân-teia*, 3 January 1953: 3.

³³ "O mare orchestră simfonică poloneză în vizită în ţara noastră”, *Scân-teia*, 5 April 1950: 3.

³⁴ "Deschiderea expoziţiei „Afişul Polonez”, *Scân-teia*, 27 May, 1950: 5.

³⁵ "Conferinţa criticului literar polonez Heronim Michalski”, *Scân-teia*, 17 May 1950: 2.

³⁶ At that time, Constantin Pârvulescu was in charge of the party's staff/members office. Lavinia Betea, "Constantin Pârvulescu, veteranul mişcării comuniste din România, fusese exclus de două ori din partid”, *Jurnalul.ro*, April 25, 2009, in <https://jurnalul.antena3.ro/scinteia/special/constantin-parvulescu-veteranul-miscarii-comuniste-din-romania-fusese-exclus-de-doua-ori-din-partid-505449.html> (Accessed 9.04.2020).

of Poland and the RPR expresses the will of the two peoples to fight, together with the other countries of people's democracy, on the great front of peace and socialism, with the Soviet Union and the genius of I.V. Stalin at the forefront"³⁷.

The Polish diplomat, in turn, uttered exactly the same phrases, increasing the feeling of total standardization, according to the Soviet model: the texts of the speeches seem to be literally written by the same hand and by the same person. "The historic liberation of Poland by the heroic Soviet Army made it possible for the people to take power into their own hands," stated Tadeusz Findziński at the same ceremony on July 22, 1950. Taking stock of their successes on the sixth anniversary of the establishment of people's power in Poland, the Polish people will never forget that their liberation, the opportunity to achieve such successes and to step on the path of building a happy life are primarily due to the brotherly and selfless help received from the Soviet Union and our great teacher I.V. Stalin"³⁸.

A uniform dogmatic pattern can also be found in the official speeches read two years later, in a ceremony recorded by "Scântea" on July 21, 1952, also on the occasion of the anniversary of the "liberation" of Poland by the USSR. In a formula that clearly signaled Romania's international isolation (in the presence of only diplomats from the USSR, The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Hungary, People's Republic of China, Bulgaria, Albania, the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia), the Deputy Minister of the Armed Forces, General Leontin Sălăjan, claimed that "Between the Polish people and the Romanian people there is a tradition of an old friendship which, however, acquired a new, rich content only after the liberation of the two countries. Our peoples fight closely united, shoulder to shoulder, for the triumph of the ideas of peace and socialism, under the all-conquering banner of Marxism-Leninism, under the banner of the great Stalin"³⁹. The answer of the Polish ambassador, Wojciech Wrzosek, freshly sent to the mission in Bucharest, does not differ either in content or in the essential dogmatic elements, being practically an identical text to that of the Romanian official: "By creating through efforts and hard work the new life of the Polish people - under the leadership of the Polish Unity Workers Party and within the framework of the new Constitution - we are aware that we are strengthening our steadfast friendship with the great Soviet Union, with the Romanian People's Republic and with all the countries of people's democracy"⁴⁰.

Another unsigned editorial, printed in "Scântea" on July 22, 1950, six years after the USSR had established a provisional communist government in Lublin, in 1944, was a rarity in the effort to convey some color to the bilateral

³⁷ "Adunarea festivă cu prilejul aniversării eliberării Poloniei", *Scântea*, 22 July 1950: 5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "8 ani dela eliberarea Poloniei. Adunarea festivă din Capitală", *Scântea*, 22 July 1952: 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

relationship. The respective text praised the "liberation" by the Soviet troops, as was usual, but also, and that was a rare thing, it dealt with the bilateral historical memory (in a perfect Stalinist purism) and strongly sprinkled ideological criticisms about the Romanian-Polish alliance of the interwar period. "The liberation by the Soviet Army - "Scân-teia" wrote on July 22, 1950 on its front page – from under the yoke of fascist imperialism, also meant the conquest of its national independence and sovereignty for Poland. The shameful fate of being the pillar of the anti-Soviet "sanitary cordon", which imperialism had inflicted on Poland - as well as on our country - has been liquidated. (...) The Romanian people are connected by strong ties to the Polish people. The old "alliances" between Poland and Romania were alliances of the bourgeois-landlord cliques in these countries. The one in the present is an alliance of two peoples who are fighting a common struggle for the defense of peace, for the abolition of the exploitation of man by man, who jointly defend their road to socialism and their right to freedom and independence. The Polish Republic and the Romanian People's Republic both owe their freedom and their happy development to the Soviet Union"⁴¹.

One could read the same thing, or rather the same text, two years later, in the editorial printed on the front page of "Scân-teia", on July 22, 1952: "The relations of friendship and collaboration between the Romanian and Polish peoples have a secure basis: the friendship of two free peoples, united in their common struggle for peace and socialism, a friendship cemented by the common love and gratitude we bear to our liberator and our great friend and ally, the Soviet Union, and to the beloved father of our peoples, Comrade Stalin."⁴²

On the other hand, the dissonance in perceiving images of the same photograph of the moment and place is striking. For example, in the summer of 1956 while both being in front of the place where the Jewish *ghetto* in Warsaw was located until 1944, Colombian Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the reporter of "Scân-teia" newspaper, Ioan Grigorescu, saw and wrote in a different manner. Traveler Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote in his diary that "in Warsaw there are very few automobiles", "the general aspect is one of great poverty. It is more striking than in Eastern Germany and in Hungary" and that ordinary Poles "are poor to an extreme which is impossible to describe, but one can see that they are facing poverty with a revolt which, in Eastern Germany, is not so obvious"⁴³. Nothing heroic, only destruction and, indeed, a dignified attitude of the crowd, obliged to a grey, controlled daily life, without ideals. The correspondent of "Scân-teia" in the capital of Poland between 1956 and 1958,

⁴¹ "Polonia prietenă- factor activ în frontul păcii și socialismului", *Scân-teia*, 22 July 1950: 1.

⁴² "Ziua eliberării și renașterii Poloniei", *Scân-teia*, 22 July 1952: 1.

⁴³ Gabriel Garcia Márquez, *Călătorind prin Europa de Est* (București: Editura RAO, 2016): 68-70.

Ioan Grigorescu, saw in a different way the city destroyed and in the middle of the reconstruction process. "In 1945, wrote Grigorescu, in the "center" of the remains of Warsaw, there was a tramcar surrounded by ruins. This tramcar was the first pharmacy in Warsaw after the war. There was no bread, but medicinal herbs were being sold at the tramcar. People came out from under the ruins like inhabitants of the prehistoric caves, and one of their first concerns was to clear the brick of rubble and to raise new walls"⁴⁴.

"The ghetto, narrated further Colombian Marquez, is now a deserted and empty square, smooth as a butcher's table. That was the center of the city on the day of liberation. Not only did the city no longer exist; not even Poles existed"⁴⁵. The reporter from "Scântea", on the other hand, wrote that: "A real new industry has appeared, that of manufacturing construction materials from the ruins. The entire Muranów district, with massive blocks of 6-7 floors, which appeared on the site of the former Warsaw ghetto that was destroyed to the ground and washed by the blood of a hundred thousand people, seems raised on some hills, and under it lie the walls of the city that had existed before"⁴⁶.

Another editor, I. Manea, whom, we suspect, did not leave his office in order to write the text, whipped up in "Scântea" of December 23, 1950 something about Nowa Huta, the workers' town built by the communist regime near Krakow: "From Nowa Huta huge quantities of metal will go towards all the machine tool factories in Poland. The production here will be equal to the amount of molten metal of all metallurgical plants in Poland. The Land of Socialism has brought to the Polish people the liberation from Hitler's tyranny. Also, from the great Land of Socialism today the wonderful machines with which Nowa Huta will be fit up, the foundation of Polish heavy industry, the guarantee of the independence of the new Poland, will be arriving"⁴⁷.

In the last weeks of Stalin's life, at the beginning of 1953, more than at any time after 1948, there was an increase in the number of articles related to the reconstruction of Poland, and of Warsaw in particular, which at this point were being printed on the front page of "Scântea", thus becoming relevant for

⁴⁴ Ioan Grigorescu, *Pasărea Fenix. Doi ani în Polonia populară* (București: Editura Tineretului, 1961), 43.

⁴⁵ Gabriel Garcia Márquez, 71.

⁴⁶ Ioan Grigorescu, 43.

⁴⁷ I. Manea, "„Nowa Huta”. O cetate a fierului și oțelului în Polonia populară”, *Scântea*, December 23, 1950: 3. Nowa Huta, as an experiment of the communist regime: Katherine A. Lebow, "Public Works, Private Lives: youth Brigades in Nowa Huta in the 1950s", *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 2 (2001): pp. 199-219; Katarzyna Zechenter, "The Repositioning of Postsocialist Narratives of Nowa Huta and Dunaújváros", *Revue des études slaves* LXXXVI, no. 1-2 (2015): pp. 141-156; Marek Keja, "Nowa Huta: The Story of the Ideal Socialist-Realist City", *Culture.pl*, February 26, 2016, in <https://culture.pl/en/article/nowa-huta-the-story-of-the-ideal-socialist-realist-city> (Accessed 10.10. 2024).

the editorial content. "How profound are the changes that have taken place in these eight years!" could be read on January 18, 1953 in an editorial dedicated to the entry of the Soviet troops into the Polish capital in 1945. Here are the new neighborhoods and settlements, which form compact urban units, endowed with the most modern comfort, meant to make the lives of the working people happier. Each neighborhood has its own economic, social and cultural institutions: shops, schools, nurseries, centers of culture, libraries, medical centers, green belts"⁴⁸. In the spirit of the reconstruction of Warsaw was also the last report in "Scântea" printed before Stalin's death, regarding the automobile factory in Żerań, on the eastern bank of the Vistula, the pride of the Polish economy until the collapse of the communist regime. It was here that the Soviet model GAZ-M20 Pobeda became "Warszawa" and filled the roads of the country and of several other communist states. "The first big construction of the Żerań district, the text of February 12, 1953 mentioned, was the automobile factory, one of the prides of the working people of People's Democratic Poland. This plant, which produces the "Warsaw" cars, is a creation of the 6-year plan"⁴⁹.

The cultural exchanges, heavily soaked with propaganda and in which the merits of Stalin and of the USSR were relentlessly inserted, remained of extremely mediocre level, but they were ideologically mediatized by the official newspaper of the Romanian Workers' Party. The unaided eye of the reader can see that the editors of the newspaper, no matter how hard they may have tried, had no way of building events from happenings of modest relevance. These cultural exchanges represented to a great extent the basis of the entire scaffolding of the relations between Romania and Poland in the 1948-1953 period, during Stalin's lifetime. Information such as a concert performed in Warsaw by the cellist Radu Aldulescu and the soprano Ana Tălmăceanu, from the Bucharest Opera House, in August 1952⁵⁰ or the concert of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Witold Rowicki, in Cluj, in the performance hall of the "Janos Herbak" enterprise ("Clujana" shoe factory, founded in 1911), in November 1952⁵¹ are relevant for the course of the bilateral relations, in a system of international relations controlled by Moscow, decided by the USSR and in which Stalin's suspicions were more important than any argument.

The mutual translations from literature, in this first Stalinist five-year period, greeted spectacularly in the press, are downright ridiculous due to the lack of any quality other than that of revealing an ideological direction, and more precisely the insistence related to the Soviet aid, the benefits of the system

⁴⁸ "Renașterea Varșoviei", *Scântea*, 18 January 1953: 4.

⁴⁹ "Crește noua Varșovie industrială", *Scântea*, 12 February 1953: 1.

⁵⁰ "Succesele artiștilor RPR în străinătate", *Scântea*, 31 August 1952: 3.

⁵¹ "Concertul orchestrei Filarmonice din Varșovia la Cluj", *Scântea*, 28 November 1952: 5.

in the USSR and Stalin's permanent vigil for great things. If he could, at the end of February 1953, the "leader of the peoples" from the Kremlin would have read in "Scânteia" a summary of the Romanian authors translated and printed in Poland after 1948: Mihail Sadoveanu (with "Mitrea Cocor"), Zaharia Stancu ("Descuț/Barefoot"), Eusebiu Camilar ("Negura/The mist") and Petru Dumitriu ("Drum fără pulbere/Road without dust"),⁵² the last one a legitimization of the concentration camps located along the Danube-Black Sea canal construction site, which was started in 1949. In exchange, in Warsaw, the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with the Foreign Countries organized on February 25, 1953 an ideological meeting dedicated to Nicolae Bălcescu, with speaker Zygmunt Młynarski, and a viewing of the artistic movie "Răsună valea/The valley resounds"⁵³, made in 1950 by director Paul Călinescu.

On the five-year anniversary of the signing, on January 26, 1949, of a Treaty of Friendship between Romania and Poland, a template diplomatic text that the USSR sent to all the communist states in Europe in order to be translated and applied within the system of international relations, an editorial of "Scânteia" from January 26, 1949 was entitled "Romanian-Polish friendship and fraternal alliance"⁵⁴. "Before the Second World War, one could read in the text, the international reaction had reserved for Romania and Poland the vile role of pillars of the accursed "cordon sanitaire", with the help of which the imperialists hoped to prevent the flame of the Great October Socialist Revolution from lighting the way for the working class, they hoped to isolate and to suppress the first socialist state in the world, the Soviet Union"⁵⁵. Further, in the course of history, according to the litany of the official newspaper of the PMR, a "miracle" happened, related to the "liberation" brought by the USSR: "Thanks to the liberation from under the fascist yoke by the glorious Soviet Army, following the conquest of power by the working class, between Romania and Poland relations of friendship and fraternal collaboration were able to develop, based on the noble ideology of the proletarian internationalism, relations characteristic of the entire democratic camp, led by the USSR"⁵⁶.

Then, in the end, Stalin had not even had time to rest in the crypt in the Kremlin, where he had been deposited after his death on March 5, 1953, when

⁵² "Rodnica colaborare culturală româno-polonă", *Scânteia*, 27 February 1953: 3.

⁵³ "Reuniune consacrată comemorării lui N. Bălcescu la Varșovia", *Scânteia*, February 27, 1953: 4.

⁵⁴ "Prietenia și alianța frățească româno-polonă", *Scânteia*, 25 January 1949: 5

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. On the Romanian-Polish Treaty of January 26, 1949, see Cezar Stanciu, pp. 77-78. See Andrzej Dubicki, "Współpraca polsko-rumuńska w ramach RWPG do roku 1962 (do XVI sesji RWPG)", *Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i bałkanistyczne* XXV (2017): pp. 88-95, DOI 10.4467/2543733XSSB.17.007.7253 (Accessed 7.10. 2024).

the two leaderships, from Bucharest and Warsaw, out of inertia adjusted one of their multiple minor bilateral issues which had become major press topics for lack of anything better. On March 10, 1953, in Warsaw, the two states concluded an Agreement on the exchange of goods and payments for the year 1953, whereby Poland agreed to send laminated products, zinc, charred coal, machine tools and chemical products, and Romania, in turn, to send oil, grain, oil equipment, timber and chemical products⁵⁷.

It was clear, both from the political decision in Warsaw and in Bucharest, as well as from the reading of "Scân-teia" that the relations between Romania and Poland after the Second World War, but especially after the proclamation of the People's Republic in Bucharest, were neither close nor freestanding. During Stalin's lifetime, until the beginning of 1953, nothing was stored within the bilateral relation, as had happened after the First World War when, even the first months of peace had brought with them a number of joint actions and calls for a strategic alliance, including the establishment of a common border. On the contrary, after 1948 this memory was repudiated, and the protagonists were criticized. "Scân-teia" did not, obviously, resume any of the episodes of the bilateral relationship between Romania and Poland from the interwar period and did not refer to any of its peak moments, even if the elapsed time was not a long one at all; for example, the Polish refuge in Romania in the fall of 1939 and its extension during the war years had happened just a few years before the abdication of King Mihai, on December 30, 1947 and Romania's entry into totalitarianism.

The image of Poland in Stalinist Romania was flawless from a dogmatic-ideological point of view: almost certainly a more perfect template was hard to find in the editorial spaces of the other official newspapers of the communist parties in the states occupied by the USSR. Being a narrative completely accepted by Moscow and the Soviet occupiers, the image of Stalinist Poland became in turn an indigestible text for the general public. Moving further, continuing with templates without any relevance to the bilateral relations, until the early 1990s, after the collapse of the communist regimes, Romania and Poland went separately with their minor regional interests and options, other than those imposed by the USSR, throughout the Cold War. This was a completely different situation, of course, from the golden story of the "alliance of hearts" from the interwar period.

⁵⁷ "Semnarea Acordului privind schimbul de mărfuri și plăți pe anul 1953 între R.P. Polonă și R.P.R"., *Scân-teia*, 13 March 1953: 1.