

***THE REGIME'S WRITERS CONFLICTS IN MOLDAVIAN SSR BETWEEN
1944 AND 1953***

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Abstract: During the period of 1944-1953, the Union of the Soviet writers from Moldavian SSR had four chiefs (Ion Kanna, Emilian Bukov, Andrey Lupan and Piotr Ipatenko) and passed through several conflicts. These were caused by the division in “old” and “young”, the origins of the writers (from the left or the right-bank), the search of the formalist, nationalist, cosmopolitanism, “out of the time” elements, the belonging to some specific group of interests formed after 1944.

Among the first signs of the quarrels was the letter of the G. Menyuk (b. 1920) against I. Kanna (b. 1902) from the left bank of the river Nistru, sent to the Central Committee in April 1945. Menyuk cited Stalin, attacked Kanna for being mediocre writer, and not fair towards the “young” generation. Later, in September 1946, Kanna argued the necessity of the elimination of the Menyuk (and D. Vetrov) as having Bourgeois influence and ideas from the opera of Blaga.

All this conflicts continued until the end of the Stalinist age, culminating in April 1949 with the campaign against cosmopolites, which ended with the elimination of the critic V. Ruzhina and the marginalization of the poet and author of books for children D. Vetrov. At that moment, Kanna acted as the main defender of Vetrov. In 1950-1951 Party moved the conflict to the field of the “national limitation” (most evident at Kanna and I.D. Chobanu).

Keywords: Moldavian SSR, writers, formalism, cosmopolitanism, nationalist

The Moldavian sociologist, Petru Negură, considers that during the Stalinist age, in the case of the Moldavian writers, there were no heroes and no traitors.¹ He considers that it is hard to speak about the collaborationists and that existed two groups of writers, having their own interests – from the right bank (Bessarabia) and from the left bank, from former MASSR. In this approach, the Bessarabians were those who had a role in preservation of the literary language² and in the publishing of the classical writers, such as for example Eminescu prohibited until 1952. In fact, it is not possible to divide the authors from the post-war period at Chisinau, in “good” and “bad”. The archive documents of the Party’s (nr. 51) and Writers (nr. 2955) funds show a long struggle between the writers. The groups were not so clear at the beginning and suffered several changes, but mainly after 1948, the group of Andrey Lupan dominated the scene. A question, which remains valid, is for what they fought. For ideas, for functions, for privileges or they were simply manipulated by the Party?

In October 1944, the writers came back to Chisinau. The so called “writers organization”, controlled by Propaganda and Agitation Section, was ruled by Ion Kanna, a writer from the left bank, and Georgy Menyuk, his secretary, who was from the right bank. It is important to

¹ See his recent work – *Nici eroi, nici trădători*, Chișinău, Cartier, 2014.

² See also Mihai Cimpoi, *O istorie deschisă a literaturii române din Basarabia*, Chișinău, ARC, 1996, p. 159-160.

notice that some of writers were the victims of the repressive Party's policy – during the first days after 22nd of June 1941 the cases of the novelists Nikolaye Kostenko and Mikhail Kurikeru.³ Other writers became victims of the repressions in 1944-1945 after the reinstatement of the Soviet regime, under the accusation of “collaborationism” with the Romanian authorities – Vladimir Barkary, Nikolay Tsurkan and Dmitriy Zareshnyak.⁴ The last two were from the left bank. This example supports our thesis that the writers from the both banks had different options.

In December 1944 the Party's Biuro warned the writer's organization that many tasks were not completed. For example, it remained unwritten a large novel on the realities of Besarabia, from class struggle point of view. In addition, it was necessary to publish some of the classical writers. The chief of the writers at that moment, Kanna, had the intention to publish in 1945 some works of Creangă, Negruzzi, Alecsandri, and Eminescu. However, from unknown reasons, the Central Committee did not approve his plan. On the other hand, he could not write a novel on Besarabia because he was from the left bank and usually he preferred the topic of the left bank during the Tsarist domination and in the years of revolutions and civil war. Besides Kanna, the most known Moldavian Soviet writers at that moment were the poets Emilyan Bukov and David Vetrov. During the years of war in 1943-1944, they succeeded to publish books in Russian, at Moscow. Both Bukov and Vetrov, were from Bessarabia.

The first deep signs of the conflicts between the writers appeared in April 1945, after Kanna was reelected chief of the Union of soviet writers from MSSR. The young poet G. Menyuk (b. 1920 in Chisinau) wrote a letter against I. Kanna (b. 1902, Dubossary) to the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party from Moldova. In building his attack, Menyuk cited Stalin, argued that Kanna was mediocre writer, and not fair towards the “young” generation. Soon after that, Kanna wrote to S. Tsaranov, the chief of the Propaganda Section, that because of his work at the Radio and of his illness, he would like to leave the function of the head of the Union of writers. It seems that the Party's staff did not appreciate his letter. We can speculate on what was the real reason of the letter of Menyuk and that Bukov, who unified a group of writers as Vetrov, Iaker and Delyanu, inspired his letter.

At the end of October 1945 Bukov replaced Kanna. It is important to notice that at that moment an important player in the cultural affairs was the left bank linguist and writer I.D. Chobanu. He participated for some months at the meetings of the writers, but after Bukov came, his role diminished. Bukov and Menyuk were from interwar Besarabia, and they believed in the Soviet power. Despite them, the writers from the left bank never lived in Romania, and that is why it could be very difficult to call them collaborationist. Their main problem was that they spoke the Romanian (named at that time Moldavian) language worse than the right bank writers.

Soon, Kanna had the chance for revenge and he tried to use it considering that Party would help him.

³ *Dicționarul scriitorilor români din Basarabia 1812-2010*, Chișinău, Pontos, 2010, p. 172, 190.

⁴ *Archive of the Social Political Organizations from Republic of Moldova* (shortly: ASPORM), Fund 51, inv. 3, folder 79, p. 134. It was mentioned the arrest of the journalist P. Sytnik.

In September 1946, having in his back the discourse of A. Zhdanov on “Zvezda” and “Leningrad”, at a large reunion of the “art’s activists” at Chisinau, Kanna argued the necessity of the elimination of the Menyuk from the Union of writers. The main argument was that Menyuk had Bourgeois influence and ideas from the opera of the Romanian poet and Professor Lucian Blaga. Was Kanna in reality a Party’s writer following the Zhdanov’s ideas or it was something simple – he used the context for revenge on Menyuk because of the letter of this in April 1945. It is not clear, why Kanna criticized violently also Vetrov.

At the same reunion, which lasted three days, and at which assisted several Party’s officials, I. D. Chobanu, criticized the writers who grew in the towns of the interwar Bessarabia arguing that they had the influence of the ideology of these towns. It is possible that Menyuk played in that context the role of the interface of a group of poets of Bessarabian origins to which belonged Bukov, Vetrov, Delyanu (was from Iasi) and others. Even if all of them received the critics of the Party’s officials, no one was excluded. They were only simply warned, and promised to improve their writing and to leave the past influences (as the idealizing of the legendary or historical heroes).

At the same debates appeared the positive examples – the poets Bogdan Istru and Andrey Lupan. It was sad that even if they had interwar influences, they left them in the past and were examples for others. The first one, Istru, published poems before the war as Besarabian poet before 1940. On June 28, 1940 he betrayed, and passed to the Soviet side.⁵ In 1941, he retreated to with the Soviet administration. In 1943, he worked at Radio in Moscow and was in close relations with Kanna with whom he affirmed that the Moldavian Soviet writers had to be of Moldavian origin. Bukov wrote a letter to the Moldavian Central Committee about this.⁶ The second one, Lupan, was not a classical writer. He was an “illegal” man in interwar Romania – in 1935, he became member of the illegal Communist Party from Romania. He studied at the Institute of Agriculture from Chisinau. After the war, he had only one more known poem - “Sat uitat”, in which he depicted in dark colors the life of the peasants in the interwar Romania. In general, he hadn’t some evident literary activity.

The final decision of the Party in October 1946 was to replace Bukov with Lupan at the Union of writers. It is unknown the reasons why at that moment Kanna supported Lupan. The first decision was to name Kanna secretary of Lupan, but after he gave up, Istru occupied this place.

During 1946-1948 at Chisinau appeared a group of young writers, a new generation to which belonged the novelist Yakob Kutkovetsky who wrote about the war, the poet Fyodor Ponomary, the critic Ramil Portnoy and many others. Despite this new generation, during the next 10 years, one of the persons who decided the way of the Union of writers and who strictly respected the Party’s decisions was Andrey Lupan and his entourage. A journalist, I. G. Batov, attacked him violently, for the first time, in March 1948.⁷ The mistake of Batov was that he mixed two plans – the mediocrity of the Lupan’s poems with the idea of “Bourgeois influence”. Soon, at the Union of writers Lupan recognized his mistakes and maintained the position of the chief of the organization.

⁵ ASPORM, F. 51, inv. 9, f. 24.

⁶ ASPORM, F. 51, inv. 1, f. 107.

⁷ “Sovetskaya Moldavia”, 23rd of March 1948.

At this moment, I cannot appreciate which were the privileges of the dominant group of writers at that moment and if they promoted some young writers, not for their talents but for their loyalty. The letters with the young writers from that period show that the literary consultants of the Union ignored and/or rejected some of them for such reasons as “Bucharest dialect”, “idealizing of the past”, “too much love lyrics”, “distance from the real life” (the socialist victories and construction).

One of the culminant moments in writers struggle was the letter of Kanna, Chobanu and Egorov,⁸ in “Sovetskaya Moldavia”, on September 25, 1948. They accused Bukov, Lupan, Istru and others of promoting “Bourgeoise nationalism”. From unknown for us reasons, Kanna considered that his former comrade, Istru, was on the other side of the barricade. This letter has an improper interpretation at Chisinau until nowadays. Especially in the literary and historical circles it is considered that it shows the bad, the antinational part in the national literature – the writers from the left bank as Kanna and Chobanu, and those who fought for a literary Romanian language, the writers from the right bank. In this interpretation, Kanna was the regime’s writer (even if he had no functions at the Union of writers), and Lupan, who held the chair, and Bukov who since 1947 was member of the Council of Ministers from Chisinau, were some kind of “dissidents”. In fact, as we will see below, just few month later, on April 6, 1949 Bukov and Lupan, were the main critics of the cosmopolitanism.

The result of the letter of Kanna, Chobanu and Egorov was unexpected – the members of the Biuro of the CC of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party discussed it on October 4, 1948, and condemned it. On November 23-24, 1948, at Chisinau was organized a meeting of Central Committee of Communist (Bolshevik) Party from Moldova, at which participated also the Moldavian writers and the delegates of the Union of Writers from Moscow. Among the main accused for mistakes were Kanna and Chobanu. The last one tried to defend himself saying that he was not at Chisinau when the letter appeared. The muscovite writers accused Kanna for being a mediocrity and for the fact that he had no texts written in Russian.

On November 24, 1948, CC modified the structure of the Union of writers and replaced Lupan by a secretariat with three members Ipatenko, Lupan (!) and Kruchenyuk. The last one was from the left bank and soon became the chief of the literary review “Octombrie”. Despite the theory of the left and the right banks, Kruchenyuk had his own policy (not pro-left bank) and progressed rapidly – in September 1948, he was “elected” member of the Central Committee. The decisions of Party from November 24, 1948, show that there were no victims of the Kanna’s (and/or Batov) letter from September 25, 1948, such as Bukov or Lupan. The first one remained member of the Council of Ministers until 1951 and the second one remained one of the three rulers of the Union, and more than this, on June 5, 1951, the Party decided the elimination of Ipatenko and the instatement of a new secretariat with nine members had a “new” old chief – Lupan.

The next culminating moment came soon. In April 1949 at Chisinau began the campaign against cosmopolites. The accusations of the speakers were aggressive. Even one of them denounced his friend. The main pieces of the accusation were Lupan and Bukov. Lupan even evoked the Batov’s case and the fact that “Sovetskaya Moldavia” criticized him one year before. He accused several cosmopolites, but also Kanna for supporting the “diversionist”

⁸ I suppose that the real author of the letter was Batov.

Batov before and for not understanding what was going on.⁹ In that context also spoke Bukov who also criticized Kanna and the grammar of Chobanu.

It is important to notice that on April 6, Kanna defended Vetrov (whom he criticized in September 1946) and argued the corruption of the chiefs of the Union of Writers that had relations with different newspapers and Communists from the Chisinau town's committee, and with Muscovite writers and newspapers. Kanna knew about this because before, in 1948, he tried to defend his opinion at Muscovite newspapers, but the journalists rejected him. The other participants at the discussions had not heard the voice of Kanna. They fought against cosmopolitanism and against him.

The final resolution of the meeting determined the elimination of the literary critic V. Ruzhina (also eliminated some days before from the State University from Chisinau) and the marginalization of the poet and author of books for children D. Vetrov. Neither Lupan, nor Bukov defended Vetrov who was morally destroyed and had a series of health problems until he died in 1952.

In "Moldova Socialista" and "Sovetskaya Moldavia" appeared articles condemning Ruzhina and Vetrov. For an unknown reason, at Chisinau Party decided to stop this campaign. Ruzhina remained out of the system, by officially nobody spoke about cosmopolitanism. The Party redirected the conflict between the writers, in 1950-1951 to the field of the "national limitation", pursuing the Ukrainian campaign against Prokofyev and Sosyura. After the XIX-th Congress of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party at Moscow, "Moldova Socialista" published an article in which was claimed a "higher artistic level of the arts". It is interesting that among the criticized writers were also some of the former enemies – Bukov, Kanna, Delyanu, Istrum Menyuk, Kruchenyuk and Kornyanu. The opera of these suffered of "Bourgeoise-nationalistic limitation".¹⁰ The "Soviet patriot" writer and ruler of the Union of writers, Lupan, was not among them.

The conclusion of our study is that there was not a clear distinction between left bank and right-bank writers. There were some conflicts between them – for example Kanna and Chobanu with Bukov. In October 1946, Lupan used the support of Kanna to become the chief of writer's Union. Later Bukov and Lupan allied against Kanna. In my opinion the documents don't show the existence of a Kanna group, as it was in 1945-1946 the group of Bukov – Vetrov, Delyanu, Menyuk, Yaker. However, Kanna had a huge influence as actor on the cultural scene from Chisinau in 1945. In that context, Chobanu and Istru supported him.

Gradually, Kanna has lost his position and after that his influence. The last moment was at the meeting on Cosmopolitanism on April 6, 1949, when he defended his former opponent Vetrov. On the other hand, Bukov left his former supporter Vetrov. It was a mistake, because, later or sooner, Bukov also was marginalized, being mentioned besides Kanna, Menyuk, Kornyanu and others in October 1952. The winner of all this conflicts, at the end of the Stalinist age, were two. The first one, from the right bank, the former student of the Agricultural Institute from Chisinau who had a poor literary activity was Andrey Lupa. The second one, from the left bank, was the poet Petrya Kruchenyuk, who became member of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party from Moldova. It remains an open

⁹ See ASPORM, F. 2955, inv. 1, f. 66.

¹⁰ "Moldova Socialista", 22nd of October 1952.

question - in which measure this two writers had the unofficial support of the Party to succeed.