

EAST-EUROPEAN DISSENT AND THE ROMANIAN SPECIFIC ARCHITECTURE OF OPPOSITION

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Abstract: It follows that, in former communist countries, the conviction of the regime started somewhat from similar ideological positions with those of the power, not from opposing positions. The only chance of dissent was contesting ideological principles by small steps policy, within the ideology, forcing its limits of tolerance. Moreover, most of the dissidents were communist themselves, now more or less confident in doctrine, and their affiliation did not indulged much space for option.

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It happened that, unlike other Eastern exiles, ours was far less concerned about the translation and promotion of writers in the country. True, interest to Eastern literatures there was little in the West, maybe since the second half of the decade eight and only regarding the dissenting literature. Poles and Czechs have taken advantage of this opening, promoting "Solidarność" and Charter '77 by prompt translation of the writers of these movements. "The reason of the immediate appearance of translations in the West is interesting - historian Tony Judt points, illustrating the Polish example. This is because an entire generation of Polish intellectuals, from 1968 until the late 70s, begin to hold positions in western universities, Yale, Columbia, Berkeley, Oxford" and gives example Kolakowski and his followers, Hus and his followers like Alex Smolar, who is the founder of Bathory Foundation, "equivalent Soros Foundation in Hungary. Alex Smolar was a student in Paris in the early '70s, I did not know him, but it was one of those who translated Michnik. They all lived in the West, and were the chain by which the Pole dissidents were heard in the West".¹ Romanian exile has chosen another way. Probably lacking the same means that have enjoyed their Czech and Polish counterparts, did not support the Romanian literature abroad, but for Romanians, aiming especially political purposes. The small number of dissenters was again an impediment, but when they were there, exile has made every effort to make them visible.

Located differently in the emergency of the political command, the exile, through its leaders, focused almost exclusively on directing its message to the country, in some cases with propaganda purposes. Oriented towards the country, the militant exile exercised its influence on the inside hierarchy of literature, primarily by ethical criteria, the aesthetic platform falling on a secondary background. Simultaneously, the approach only aesthetically of the most important critics in the country converged with the ethics of exile, aligning their platform to the ethical one, so they finally meet. The two views were in fact faces of the same reality, and their joint action concerned a same common enemy: the literature subservient to the regime. However the hierarchy made in the country did not overlapped on the one made

¹ Tony Judt, *Europa iluziilor*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2000, pp. 19-33.

outside so authors with real talent and aesthetic merits, because of their alleged "collaborationism", not always real, was concealed, while the merits of the "brave" were sometimes exaggerated. But - it must be said - the differences were not as pronounced as to prevent axiological perception closer to reality. Small distortions still had a role, insidious, it is true, with considerable effects in the long term upon literature, and especially on its policies. This does not mean, of course, that the ethical attitude of Parisian critics would have an intentional dogmatic position against the cultural act. To understand the historical and political circumstances that led to their political responsiveness, beyond their natural anti-communism against the Soviet occupation regime that had taken possession of their land, in their first two years of exile they faced with political circumstances designed to discourage all their hope to be heard. France after the War was keen to erase from their consciousness collaborationism with the German occupier, much larger than the French resistance, and also, the "sins" of the Vichy government. On the other hand, for the French democrats the fascist regime was a still an open wound, still unhealed. The main currents of ideas in postwar France were as predictable as possible, anti-fascist and Marxist. In addition, the Soviets were allies. This Marxist period was extended until Solzhenitsyn's case became well-known. Until then, as Tony Judt points out, "different histories of anthropology, political science (not yet appeared in France a separate discipline of political science) were dominated by people trained after the war. People who studied at the Superior Normal School between - say - '48 and '55 ". It left all visible. In addition, the entire West seemed blind and deaf to the problems of captive countries behind the Iron Curtain. In addition to "forget ethics" - the war left behind an unbearable memory, as beneficiaries of prosperity due to the Marshall Plan of economic rehabilitation, funded by U.S., Western Europe had no mood no curiosity to know what is really happening in the new communist countries. Is there a selfishness of the developed countries of Western Europe. For example Judt had appeared shocked at the time, that "after what happened in Prague in August 1968, almost no one talked about these events. There was not, of course, total silence, but for most "Prague Spring", as Dahrendorf said, was a bourgeois spring. That does not really have anything to do with Western revolution ". In fact, the Prague Spring and the May '68 revolts in Paris, as complaints were justified, as legitimate as the seemingly antithetical. Yudt was shocked by "indifference, and cynicism about what was happening in Eastern Europe". As a reflection of a guilty conscience or not, "from 1956 to the mid-60s", French intellectual's interest would rather heading to Third World problems and the war in Algeria.

"After '68 world realizes, however, that something is moving in this area (Eastern Europe, NM, NS), but - says Judt - a whole tradition of forgetting had already established". Solzhenitsyn's arrival will change the perception. After his interviews, books translated into French, a small earthquake occurs in consciousness. In "Nouvel Observateur" is an editorial by Jean Daniel, "Oh! How I could not figure out what happened?" Not that he didn't know what happened, but "only Solzhenitsyn gave us a vocabulary to talk about all this." Until then, interest in the situation of the East was almost zero. Yudt speaks of a "Yalta of mind", that after 1945 "this part of the world becomes less interesting, included automatically in the Soviet world to simplify the analysis" and "area east of Vienna was a nebula." Politically, on the other hand, in the view of Yudt, "the second element of the postwar situation that facilitated the construction of" Europe "was the Cold War. Since 1947, for most European leaders became clear that the Soviet Union was a serious threat to Eastern Europe and that, if only for their own protection, Western European countries had to create some kind of alliance

between them first, then with the U.S."² In that conditions, Romanian intellectuals had to fight in a specific way. The fight involves, both sides, tactical movements, strategic maneuver, retreat, attack, concealment, enveloping, concessions, all to the interest of the unique cause. The evaluation criterion is efficiency.

Consciously or not - notes Mircea Iorgulescu, this action falls within the boundaries defined since the launch in July 1947 by George Kennan of the American strategic concept of *containment* (...). Restriction, limitation, impoundment of the actions of the communist officials, first of all in their cultural actions, but also in the social and political ones, was the priority of the campaign ... "³ The containment strategies, which bowed on various researchers⁴, the Cold War, applied within the culture, seem to belong to a conscious, coordinated approach, although Mircea Iorgulescu slips a margin of doubt, because we will see, cultural cold War indicates a concept for a reality orchestrated by the U.S. to a remarkable level. Otherwise, both concepts have come to the attention of prominent historians and researchers after the fall of communism, especially since the Cold War archives became available.

In a famous text of 1978, *The Power of the Powerless*, Václav Havel was announcing a bizarre presence: „A specter is haunting Eastern Europe: the specter of what in the West is called „dissent”. This specter has not appeared out of thin air. It is a natural and inevitable consequence of the present historical phase of the system it is haunting. It was born at a time when this system, for a thousand reasons, can no longer base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power, eliminating all expressions of nonconformity. What is more, the system has become so ossified politically that there is practically no way for such nonconformity to be implemented within its official structures... Our system is most frequently characterized as a dictatorship or, more precisely, as the dictatorship of a political bureaucracy over a society which has undergone economic and social leveling.” At the same time Havel expresses his doubts on the adequacy of the concept of dictatorship, because the term rather hides than clarifies the real nature of the power of the system. He prefers to call it a "post-totalitarian" system, but without involving the prefix “post” “that the system is no longer totalitarian; on the contrary, I mean that it is totalitarian in a way fundamentally different from classical dictatorships, different from totalitarianism as we usually understand it”. Then he will illustrate the idea by a brilliant allegory of a grocery store in the window of which should be exposed the slogan „ Workers of the world, unite!”, allegory which shows that a mere slogan, taken or shown only formally, can distinguish between conformity and dissent. That slogan could become one of the most powerful instruments of obedience in "post-totalitarianism", an infinitely more subtle means of coercion than torture, but ultimately just as implacable. Although the system was from a long time estranged from the social movements that claim, these origins have provided a solid base so that they become inextricable part of the structure of the modern world. The flexible, more logical structure of such ideologies would be like almost a secular religion. It provides ready answers to any question, can hardly be accepted in part, and this acceptance entails profound implications for human life. In an era of metaphysical and existential certainties in a state of crisis, when

²*Ibidem*, p.153.

³ Mircea Iorgulescu, *Tangențiale*, Editura Institutului Cultural Român, București, 2004, p. 141.

⁴ See also John Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, Oxford University Press, 1982.

people feel uprooted and alienated, losing their understanding of what is today's world, this ideology exerts, inevitably, a hypnotic charm - says Havel⁵. You see here an effort to legitimize himself as a dissident, as an insider understanding the phenomenon of dissent, with all its implications, but also to explain to the outside, for those seduced by the rhetoric of communist ideology, for those who do not know or do not recognize the ossification of the original generous ideals in an oppressor, leveling, highly conformist and punitive system.

Dissent, by its nature, is a challenge that amends the ideological system from within. The dissident criticizes from inside, the opponent from outside. But is there talk of opposition in a one-party system? It follows that, in former communist countries, the condemning of the regime started somewhat from similar ideological positions with those of the power, not from opposing positions. In addition, in the eyes of the West, the communist system did not seem so compromised as it appears in its true reality. It was not perceived as totalitarianism. It took some time and it took more consistency and sacrifice of the Eastern intellectuals to be heard and understood. Even in the years when Havel's essay appeared, or otherwise in the next, no one could even imagine the end of communism in Eastern Europe, it was not even desirable for the western countries which have reached the standard of unprecedented economic and social comfort. The only chance of dissent was contesting ideological principles by small steps policy, within the ideology, forcing its limits of tolerance. Moreover, most of the dissidents were communist themselves, now more or less confident in doctrine, and their affiliation did not indulged much space for option. The very notion of dissent speaks of a departure, a detachment from the inside. In addition, in the eyes of the Western, reconciled with the reality of communist states in Eastern Europe, the idea of an overt challenge would made the dissidents to look like some Martians, and their message would be hit by a massive misunderstanding and a compact mistrust.⁶

It is strange the report of the majority of Romanian intellectuals, after the fall of communism, towards dissent as an act of anti-communist opposition. It's actually a projection of current perceptions upon past historical realities. It's a retroactive application of current beliefs. Dissent was not proposing an alternative doctrine, did not put into question the

⁵ Vaclav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless" (1978).

⁶ In the book *Europe of Illusions* (Editura Polirom, Iași, 2000), Tony Judt speaks credibly about a certain blindness of the West in the Eastern states. Also about a sense of guilt, quoting Hans Magnus Enzensberger: "In the first years after the war ... Europeans were housed under the umbrella of collective amnesia." Judt said: "Had it not been the speed with which especially West Europeans have left behind the war, postwar rebuilding, for many European countries, not to mention any European community, would be much more difficult. But the result was that «Europe» remained highly vulnerable to memory - the past is a burden that weighs upon present, but is also a source of understanding" (p. 196). Judt also speaks about what Léon Blum called "shame-release relief" feeling of abandonment and, therefore, of forgetting. "This feeling of embarrassment of the French for abandoning Eastern allies, for betraying former established connections, turns, after the war, into a desire to forget, and French, primarily (but not only them, nm, NS), are no longer interested in Eastern Europe after 1947" (p. 34). In the case of Havel, after the echo his texts from the '80s, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, his writings, "with their high moral tone and neo-Heideggerian disgust towards the ornaments and the selfishness of «modernity», were quite unusual and comforting to look attractive, while a fleeting moment". If, under communism, the eastern countries were subject to forced marginalization, augmented both by the "shame-release relief" and by the Western amnesia, today they are "enjoying" a different kind of marginalization that have only to be accepted because "intellectuals from Eastern Europe (or Central as they like to say) can afford fewer illusions. Supporting the idea of a Europe without divisions of East-West type, in which the culture kept (or recalled) of Central Europe would deal again its deserved place, they must now realize that their issuance price itself is a renewed marginalization, both at home and abroad. In any case, for Eastern Europe there is only one option: to join Western Europe in its conditions, "and conditions are determined by the fatality that, like Americans," Western Europeans are more concerned with Russia than its former satellites and more with their own problems than the Western aspirations of their neighbors from the east" (pp.193, 195).

regime, nor claim itself, at least in Romania, from any political or social structured body. It required only compliance with existing democratic principles, but respected the status of the Communist Party. In Romania there was no dissent in fact, there were only dissidents. If intellectuals from other Communist countries did not claim and do not claim even now any doctrinaire otherness, their Romanian colleagues are even less justified. Of course, after the fall of communism for some, after exile for the others, they have evolved doctrine in one direction or another. But if we refer strictly to those times, we must address records with respect to the truth. Disputes from Romania and addressed to Romania did not question the entire system, but its methods, how they meet or fail to comply rather demagogic than democratic principles outlined in its program.

If, in Hungary, in 1956, it starts the revolution against Soviet occupation, turned from a peaceful demonstration of the students, whether in Poland, back in March 1968, is triggered the student revolt between whose leaders is included the historian and the journalist Adam Michnik, being in a leading position also in the solidarity action of the working class, culminating with the great uprising of August 1980, whose result is the establishment of the independent autocephalous union "Solidarność ", if, in Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel, Jan Patočka, Zdenek Mlynar, Pavel Kohout, succeed to gather the signatures of a number of 243 Czechoslovak citizens solidary with Charter 77, a civic initiative of dissent, if, in Russia, the "samizdat" is born, in Romania the idea of solidarity and samizdat seems to be absent. The passivity of the Romanian elite is difficult to explain, although several arguments include the rumor that, unlike its Eastern neighbors, just as Russian troops left Romania, the local Communist Party could benefit to consolidate its position, suggesting obliquely the idea that all actions of the other communist countries were of anti-Soviet nature rather than antitotalitarian. Rather weak argument, however. Or that, in Romania, the regime was harsher and nationalistic and the "ceausist" tint was more ruthless than the rest of the communist regimes. As questionable argument, if we think that all communist regimes started from the same wild and bloody Stalinism. Then the communist nationalism was not the appanage of the regime from Bucharest. This nationalism was manufactured in Eastern European countries where dissent began to make their voice heard. The moral capital of the opponents was claiming from an European platform, from a membership of a common destiny, and it is easy to imagine that their opponents, in order to discredit them, associated this international affinity with the communist internationalism or with the transnational universalism of communism. "...Therefore - Tony Yudt reminds us - the most intelligent communist "aparatici" in Belgrade, Bucharest, Kiev, Zagreb and Bratislava had to recycle rapidly turning into nationalist demagogues."⁷ A credible response to the relative passivity of Romanians, in terms of the historians, we have not yet. An explanation that would appeal to their cowardice would be equally implausible, however. It is needed more thorough and competent investigation of the past.

Another feature to note is that the leaders of dissent from other communist countries, bringing much of the suffrage of their people, were not limited to strictly domestic action, but have maintained continuous dialogue with their neighbors, supporting each other, developing even very friendly relations. Why the Romanian elite, with few exceptions, remained in place prudent and self-sufficient is difficult to explain. Unlike Romania, intellectuals in neighboring countries, as summarized Adam Michnik⁸, have tried to invent an alternative to totalitarian society through the creation and strengthening of civil society which, finally, will break that

⁷ Tony Yudt, op. cit., p. 188.

⁸ Adam Michnik, *Mărturisirile unui disident convertit*, prefață de Vladimir Tismăneanu, postfață de Józef Tischner, Editura Polirom, 2009, pp. 82-83.

gap through which the totalitarian system will drain and will dissipate. "A Polish feature - says Michnik - was that dissident movement has taken institutional form of the Workers Defense Committee, and then - after August 1980 - the NSZZ Solidarność (...). I invented something like the idea of an alternative society, which satisfies an important part of its needs, independent of the totalitarian state. " If the Russian samizdat somewhat satisfied the need for alternative, "Czechoslovakia, around Charter 77, emerged the idea of independent polis, which ought to be - according to Vaclav Havel's formula - the power of the powerless. In Hungary, Gyorgy Konrad wrote Antipolitics policy. In Poland appeared Workers Defense Committee, free trade unions, independent publications and books printed and gleaned illegally. It was when Jacek Kuron formulated his famous principle "instead of party committees to give fire, you better create some own ". And, very importantly, Michnik adds: "If the symbol of totalitarian communism was the Gulag Archipelago, we tried to create an Archipelago of Freedom and Tolerance". Where, geographically, Romania did not take part in the creation of this territory of the archipelago of freedom and tolerance, it did not get involved either in a civic way. Therefore the only collaboration between the media of opposition was between Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, collaboration which Adam Michnik calls "maybe the first meeting of the Visegrad community".

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