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KRITERION: THE INSTITUTIONALIZED ETHNIC IDENTITY

There is a fashionable motto: “unity in diversity”. On the level of a sheer linguistic abstraction, the “signifier” stands for the integrity of an entity, but also for its specificity, meaning at the same time cohesion and variety. Our study makes an attempt to present the institutional application of the concept of «unity» and that of the «division», promoted and performed by communist institutions, and focuses on a specific case of minority culture in Romania, showing the complex interplay between professional roles and ethnic identity, where the actors, in order to reach their objectives, adopt tricky strategies and various masks. Being a cultural study, it intends also to analyze phenomena of the cultural life of the communist period, attempting to bring together discourse analysis and institutional practice.

Our fieldwork explores a twenty-year period activity of the Romanian publishing house for minorities *Kriterion* (1970-1990). In our use, the term *minority* has the meaning of *ethnicity* and refers to those citizens of Romania who are different from the ethnic Romanian majority by virtue of their language, culture, history, sometimes religion; and who may be also located in a neighboring independent state¹. The sources of our research comprise various written materials: catalogues, brochures, official texts concerning institutional culture, documents from archives, reactions of the public sector (polemics, pamphlets, interviews, articles), memoirs of the main participants and oral history.

Historical premise. Ceausescu’s Romania was conceived in the official discourse as a state on the move, a continuous progress of the “multilateral de-

1 A difference between „ethnic” and „national” minorities could further nuance the concept, the second term corresponding to the Hungarian designation (*nemzeti kisebbség*); but we use here the simplified English term.

veloped socialist society towards communism”: the final objective, the *unity*, had been announced as a salvation for a nation who has “nothing but suffered” during its eventful historical past. Of course, the basic idea came from the East and was a forced remedy to a short-lived kingdom, which passed out by the end of the Second World War. Romania, a product of the fall of two strong empires, the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian, had little time to consolidate its borders and fulfil the romanization of its population: the German and Soviet powers chopped early pieces off the young country. So, the part-time re-composition of the territory has not given full satisfaction to the new government, strongly controlled by the Soviet empire, even if Stalin’s death allowed a relief. Yet it became clear that, despite the official label (the Constitution), Romania was far from being a “nation state” and the ethnic elements – especially the Hungarian and the German one – had to be handled carefully. The new formula of the socialist state allowed a skillful overlapping of the ethnic problem: it was integrated in a higher, socialist concept, where everybody was equal in rights and could live in harmony with the others. Yet the unease of the “Other” remained constant and new strategies were put up to “resolve” the “ethnic question”.

No doubt, the greatest tactician regarding this issue was the young leader of the Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Arriving to power in the sixties, he liberalized the country, allowing a relative cultural freedom. He pretended that in Romania, a „strong and united” state, different cultures coexisted, even more so, they should practice the principle of „shared values”: cultural identity was not an impediment for the larger communist identity, on the contrary, it could strengthen this latter. To show his positive intentions, he allowed the creation of a publishing house for the ethnic minorities living in the country. But this was only the spectacular, the „overt” level of his intention: the „covert” idea supposed a concentration of power in Bucharest and the meaning of „unity by sharing” underwent a progressive transformation into „melting by dividing”. This process was a slow mechanism and had its decisive steps. The same phenomenon emerged on the other side: the publishing house and its leader had „open actions” and a „hidden intention”. This symbolic dichotomy is mirrored in the personal and institutional discourse, the „masks” of the main actors.

In the summer of 1968, during the meeting between Ceaușescu and a hundred of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals from Romania, the necessity to create a minority publishing house arose, as an „internal and organic social necessity”². Therefore, on the 14th of December 1969 the Minister of Culture installed Géza Domokos, an ethnic Hungarian editor of „recommendable origin” to be the director of the new institution.

2 Quotations from an interview with Domokos, on the 20 January 1988 in A Kriterion műhelyében, Budapest, Kossuth, 1988.

Identity and roles. With 5 years of study at the Literary High School “Maxim Gorki” in Moscow, as a member of the Communist Party, and with a professional experience at a Hungarian language newspaper, Domokos seemed to be the ideal person for such a mission. Yet his very first action rises suspicion: the choice of the name of the publishing house. It starts with “K”, a letter that exists in Romanian only in foreign words, meanwhile being common in Hungarian. The Governmental Decree registers the name with a “C”, but Domokos, with a strange obsession and sparing no costs, asks for its rectification. To avoid any suspicion, he argues that the term, of Greek origin, means “measure”: it is only his professional role that makes him act and not his ethnic identity; cultural exactitude and not Hungarian specificity. And he phones the head of the cultural department of *Scânteia* (Spark)³, proposing an article about the new publishing house. Entitled *A New Cultural Workshop – the KRITERI-ON*, it comes out a few days later on the very first page of the newspaper. Thus, the Romanian reader – the majority – gets quickly familiar with this “unusual” written form and both the publisher (for having published a brand new article on communist party politics and the author (for having eluded administration) were happy. The rectification was also very rapidly done in the *Official Gazette*. This “rescue” action was more than a proof of the director’s tenacity. It shows also a technique how to evade social control, without hurting the national sensibility of the majority, while at the same time remaining faithful to one’s own ethnic identity. The risk was high: being the director, Domokos had to bring together the roles coming from his social status with the professional and extra-professional requirements.

On the political level, Domokos had to represent the Communist Party. His Muscovite past, doubled by his present position, guaranteed him a quick political accession: member of the Council of Hungarian Workers⁴, he became substitute member (a special status) of the Central Committee and, for a while, vice president of the Pen Club. The head of a cultural institution had to perform, according to the Party, a highly ideological professional role: to shape the minority intelligentsia, making them reliable members of the socialist society. But Domokos had also to carry his personal heritage, that of belonging to the Hungarian community from Transylvania, with a strong cultural identity. Therefore, being the director of a „minority institution” meant also a key strategic position to preserve and strengthen ethnic identity through cultural activity. The Hungarian intelligentsia of the country, enriched with the Second War experience, had a more suspicious approach to the „liberalization” proposed by the First Secretary. For many of them, Domokos occupied the position of a potentially „traitor” and they expected proves of his loyalty, signs of a „noble” mission of cultural preservation. This

3 The official press organ of the Romanian Communist Party.

4 The Council of Hungarian Workers was a „democratic” institution, representing the Hungarian minority in the communist political life.

uncomfortable position was even more complicated, because in the interwar period, the leader of the Hungarian intelligentsia in Romania had also been a publisher: so, it was a model to fit in, a professional role to play, a habitus to adopt.

In order to understand the complexity of this “jockey-position”, let us look at two aspects of the issue: the confessions of Domokos and the public opinion about his person. In his later writings and interviews, Domokos confessed that he had been afraid of becoming director, because he wanted to be a professional writer. Then, he recognized the “huge possibilities of serving his community” in the collective effort to “preserve national identity”⁵. His personal ethnic identity seems to be decisive for the acceptance of the professional role and thus, he gives up his former artistic ambitions to become a writer. But how was he perceived by the “invisibles” who followed closely and with suspicion his activity? We rely on the secret notes, published in the White Book of the Securitate, a careful and soft post-communist selection from the thick and, no doubt, dangerously revealing archives. Here we quote one of them:

***Domokos Geza.** In the circle of his relations, he makes tendentious assertions regarding the politics of our party, which he stigmatizes as „nationalist, dangerous and doomed to fail”. In his activity, he appears as the „defender of the cause of Hungarians in Romania” and pretends having taken his „retreat” in the publishing house *Kriterion* in order to make, „without too much ado”, a greater contribution to „serving the Hungarian cause”. He entertains relationships with accredited Hungarian diplomats in Bucharest, in front of who he stated that he will continue his activity of „defending the Hungarian cause in Romania”⁶.*

This “description” has been made on the occasion of nominations for chair of the Union of Writers, where Domokos acted as a vice president for a period.

A second interesting note, composed seven years later, constitutes an annex „top secret” on the members of the Pen Club, „co-authors of the letter with unfitting content, or those who agreed this initiative”. The „unfitting” document was addressed to the First Secretary of the Party, in order to urge some radical changes. Domokos emerges as „known for nationalist-irredentist conceptions and having relationship with Hungarian diplomats and journalists, to whom he expresses his hostile convictions“. His crime consists of delivering „information with decrying content“, as well as of being visited at home by foreign diplomats⁷.

5 In fact, the term fluctuates and we translated here the Hungarian one („nemzeti” or „nemzetiségi identitás”) instead of the English „ethnic identity”. I paraphrase here my interview with Domokos, realized in January 2004.

6 Note no.245, July 1981, published (in Romanian) in *Cartea Albă a Securității*.

7 *Ibid.*, note no. 406, 12 October 1988

Both of these papers underline his slander of the party, contacts with foreigners, defense of the “Hungarian cause” and, thus, nationalism. His status -Party member and director of a publishing house – does not fit his performance and he has deceived the Party expectations: instead of being an ideologist, he acts as a potential secret agent of foreign countries.

These texts came to light after the fall of the dictatorship. During communism, the mask of the ideological discourse ensured safety for the person. Domokos, the main author of the institutional annual reports⁸, defined “officially” its professional role

as shaping of the socialist conscience of the readers, deepening of the unity and the fraternal cooperation between the Romanian people and the cohabiting minorities on the grounds of the national policy of the party, a policy of full equality, of mutual respect between every son of the homeland, regardless of nationality⁹.

In other words, Domokos uses the rhetoric of the Communist Party, the only safe defensive weapon in a totalitarian milieu. The multiplicity of ethnic identities is legitimized by the “democratic fraternity” of the Romanian majority. But at the beginning of the eighties, the “democratic and fraternal” consensus between Romanian majority and the Others alters and even the overt discourse becomes more and more oppressive, conforming with the “homogenization of the nation”, as we shall see further. Let us present briefly the professional activity of the institution itself, in order to see how the shift took place.

Institution. *Kriterion* involved 44 collaborators. Inside the huge *Scânteia*-house in Bucharest, it had three editorial offices: the Hungarian (6 members), the German (4 members) and the Serbian (1 member, who also supervised the rest of the Slavic languages). A separate office in Hungarian was operating in Transylvania, at Cluj, under the leadership of Gyula Dávid (4 members). Later (after 1981) it was completed with an “editorial committee” comprising three reliable members of the Communist Party, performing a censorship role.

The *institutional agenda* of the *Kriterion* was very complex. Initially, the house published in five languages: Hungarian, German, Ukrainian, Serbian and Yiddish. In 1978, they also started publishing in Slovak and in Russian, and two years later in Tartar and in Turkish¹⁰. An important section was reserved to the books of minority authors, translated into Romanian, a collec-

8 They were written by the end of year and justified the publishing policy before the CP. After 1984, they become more frequent (semestrial, trimestrial) and the clichés more dense.

9 Modelarea conștiinței socialiste ale cititorilor, aprofundarea unității și conlucrării frățești între poporul român și naționalitățile conlocuitoare pe baza politicii naționale a partidului, politica a egalității depline, a respectului reciproc între toți fii patriei, fără deosebire de naționalitate (AR, year of 1979)

10 After 1990, the new director kept at the beginning this principle and he published books in Armenian, Albanian and Romani languages, but they changed soon the whole editorial politics.

tion entitled *Biblioteca Kriterion*. A few statistics show how rich the production of the house was. For two decades, 1987 books appeared in Hungarian, a total of 22 987 273 copies, 623 in German (1 866 258 copies), 206 in Serbian (103 838), 154 in Ukrainian (66 807) and 53 in Yiddish (19 050). The Slovaks were represented by 27 books (27 510), the Turks and Tartars had 7 (12 745) and the Russians only 3 (4100). The collection in Romanian totalled 151 titles with 1 112 981 copies.

Beside the multiplicity of languages and literatures, *Kriterion* promoted also social sciences, history, philosophy, ethnology, linguistics, art history, cultural history, science history, music, most of them integrated in collections. As for literature: classics and moderns, both from abroad and from the country were published, together with a huge number of translations from the Romanian into the rest of the languages or from Hungarian into German and vice versa. The literary production particularly targeted here was domestic, especially from the Transylvanian area, where the two largest communities had been living. From educational lecture to classical Hungarian, German and world literature, from young Hungarian and German poets or writers living in Romania to Romanian writers or poets, the house was a place of intense cultural exchanges. Anthologies were published in Slovak, Ukrainian, Turkish, and Yiddish.

The institution had some benefit from the books: moral and economic. A Flood-book appeared about the natural calamity that affected Romania in 1970; it received a unanimous recognition of the Romanian press because of its “socialist solidarity”. The two famous best sellers, *Gone with the Wind* and *The Citadel*, were available only on the black market in Hungary and were very expensive. If the cultural exchange between socialist countries had been alive during the first decade, the export to Hungary, Germany, Yugoslavia and even to some occidental countries faded away by the middle of the eighties¹¹.

Cultural policy. The *Kriterion* was not the only institution in Romania which published in the languages of the minorities, but by the end of the eighties it had remained desperately alone. In fact, two antonymous periods are to be noticed in the Romanian institutional activity. The first started with a central decision on the new cultural politics: many of the newly created houses were to open a section for the most significant minorities in the country, Hungarians and Germans¹². Their specialization, for instance, *Albatros* for teenagers, or *Ion Creanga* for children, aimed to attract the spiritual resources of the various literatures and also to open a prosperous field to competition. But this creative beginning was running out towards the end of 1979 and a new central conception concerning editorial politics prevailed.

11 The exported copies were commanded by Európa, Akadémiai, Gondolat, the biggest houses in Budapest but also by Aufbau and Reclam in the German Democratic Republic and the Forum of Novi Sad (YU)

12 In Timisoara, the publishing house Făclia had also a Serbian department.

The year 1981 meant the beginning of the “cultural revolution” in Romania. The state control of society increased, the number of titles and circulation diminished considerably. Using the slogan of “world-wide oil crisis”, the paper grew very expensive and publishing was decreased. The Central Committee established a new system for determining the number of copies and authorization depended on those institutions that supervised the houses and the nature of the publications. Just an example¹³: if from a book like *Studies in Cultural History*, the distributors asked for 34 500 copies, the house could take up 20 000, but the authorized number was 1600; if for a *Transylvanian Cook Book* the distributors asked for 120 000 copies and the house could produce 50 000, the central authorization was only for 5000.

An important Party conference was held in 1983, when it was decided that the “homogenization of the nation” was to be put into practice. This program targeted a rapid assimilation of the ethnic minorities and its results were noticeable in the discourse of the central organ, *Scînteia*. A host of nationalistic books had been promoted, with the purpose of strengthening the national identity of the majority. Books about Transylvania appeared with biased presentations of the minorities and tones of anti-Semitism became also loud¹⁴. Schools or classes where the education in the languages of minorities took place were suppressed or “united” (where the majority language prevailed) and even the constitutional designation “cohabiting minorities” was replaced by “Romanians of Hungarian, German, Serbian etc origins” or “Hungarian, German, etc language Romanians”. The native-language teaching institutions of the small minorities, such as Turks, Tartars, and Bulgarians had been abolished already in 1956, while one secondary school was left to the Ukrainians, Slovaks and Serbians; by now ethnic identity was endangered.

Parallel to these external factors, an internal crisis emerged among the minorities as well. At the beginning of the eighties, a huge emigration wave of Germans and Jews began¹⁵. More and more Hungarians also chose to emigrate, mainly to Austria and Sweden. Of course, an important number of the young Hungarian generation, amounting to a hundred writers and scientific researchers left the country, creating a considerable gap in the spiritual activity of the community (in this regard, the Germans were in the worst situation, they lost almost everybody). Their names were completely erased from dictionaries, newspapers and were forbidden by the censorship. This led to the regression of the spiritual potential of the publishing house.

13 Taken from Géza Domokos, Igevár (Castle of Words), Pallas-Polis, Miercurea Ciuc, Cluj, 2000

14 Two important names : Ion Lăncrănjă, *Cuvânt despre Transilvania* (1982) and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, *Saturnalii* (1984) give voice to the protestations of the director of *Kriterion* and Moses Rosen, the chief rabbin of Bucarest.

15 A bilateral accord was concluded between Romania and FR of Germany, resp. Romania and Israel. The „mother-countries” payed a pretty sum for each „returning member” of the nation.

Institutional clashes. If we spoke till now mainly about the professional role and ethnic identity of Domokos, and his “rescue” mission, we have also to analyze the struggle between the institutional apparatus of the Party and *Kriterion*. On the one hand, the main representatives were the national press, the censorship and the officially invisible, yet countless denouncers (whose identity is still coming to light making painful sensations). On the other hand, the team of the publishing house.

The existence of the *Kriterion* has known two periods of censorship. The first, with an old-fashioned, intelligent official censorship director, who often gave rectification to previously refused books, after a tough interview with the leader of *Kriterion*. Then, the official *State Bureau of Censorship* was abolished at the beginning of the eighties. This fake operation was directed to please the West, because in reality, the censors moved partly to the *Centre for the Book* (Centrul de Carte), a kind of coordinating institution, partly to the *Council for Culture and Socialist Education* (Consiliul Culturii și Educației Socialiste). Two further institutions could exercise censorship: the *Central Committee of the Communist Party* (CC al PCR) and the „Second Cabinet“ (Elena Ceaușescu).

Censors were recruited sometimes from outside, especially from people with Hungarian knowledge. According to the new structures, the organs responsible for the circulation were: for political books – the propaganda section of the CC; for scientific, technical, literary works, but also for dictionaries, encyclopedias and artistic publications – the *Centre for the Book* and the *Council for Culture and Education* (CCE); for second and third edition or for books exceeding established maximum for circulation, the Council of Ministers, upon proposal from the CCE.

The proposals were refused most often with the same remarks: “too bulky”, “lack of actuality”, or “there is no Romanian reference in the book”. In 1987 alone, 36 *Kriterion* books were cancelled, despite the fact that their authors were prominent representatives of the minority culture in Romania, having already published other books with the same institution. The collection *Forrás* (Spring), dedicated to launching young authors, was suspended, almost every book dealing with history, cultural history, or art history in Transylvania was banned¹⁶.

State funding was minimal, the number of copies diminished and the choice of books was poor. Yet the number of titles of the translated Romanian classical and modern literature increased, as did that of patriotic anthologies (“Ode to the Republic”), of collective report volumes (“Builders of the Future”), of thematic volumes of “essays” (“Socialist Patriotism”) or of celebratory vol-

16 The second volume of the „Literature of the Transylvanian Saxons”, the „Ukrainian Folk Tales from the Maramureș” fell victim to the censors; so did “The History of Theatre in Oradea”.

umes (“We Celebrate the President of Romania”, “Words of Respect”). Those publications tried to create a new political profile for the institution, banishing creative work.

While the editorial situation grew worse in the eighties, paradoxically, the *Kriterion* managed to enlarge its activity. Slowly but surely, the main idea of “strengthening ethnic identity” produced an extension of languages. The basis for support has been always the public, measurable in the percentage of the non-Romanian population. And even a part of the Romanian intelligentsia sympathized with the house, mainly because contemporary writers had immediately the possibility of a German translation, which meant also an international opening in world literature. It was therefore the Party and its above-mentioned organs (press, censorship) that needed guarantees of loyalty.

Habitus and roles. As a Hungarian intellectual, Domokos lived with the conscience of the so-called “transylvanism”, an ideological movement created in the twenties by Károly Kós, a polymath leader (architect, writer and publisher) of the Hungarian minority. He urged for political loyalty towards the new ruler of Transylvania, the Romanian state, without giving up the Hungarian cultural identity. His manifesto became an important book of consolation for the loss of the mother country, and a tendency of idealization of the medieval Principality of Transylvania was on the move¹⁷. This habitus was adopted by Domokos and parallel to the ideological terror of the eighties, it worked as a counterpart to the oppression.

Therefore, Domokos assigned five roles to his institution: 1. to preserve the language and culture of the minorities in Romania; 2. to “encourage every gifted writer, scientifically researcher, artist”; 3. to “be a pontiff, a bridge-builder between past, present and future”; 4. to “always open windows toward world culture and modern thinking”; 5. to “cultivate creative restlessness”, the virtue of “tireless quest”. We will comment on the third role, because it concerns the interplay of ethnic identity and professional mission, rooted in a cultural heritage.

It has to be said that publishing in Transylvania has a glorious tradition, from the prosperous time of the Principality of Transylvania¹⁸. In 1924, Károly Kós launched his publishing house under the aegis of Transylvanian printers from the past¹⁹. Following this heritage, Domokos assumed the role of a „pontifex”, a bridge-builder and he borrowed from Kós a metaphor: „with stone and wood you build a house, with words you build a castle”, which became later the title of his memoirs, *Castle of Words*. He was a bridge-builder, no

17 Kós, a brilliant organizer of the literary life, published his *Crying word* (*Kiáltó szó*) in 1921.

18 The Principality of Transylvania came into being in 1541 and lasted under such name till 1690. Famous printers were Johannes Honterus (XVI century) or Miklós Tótfalusi Kis (XVII century).

19 Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh (Transylvanian Fine Guild, between 1924-1944), the most fine and valuable publishing house in Hungarian language in Romania by that time.

doubt: of a bridge permitting the communication between cultures through translation (he translated also Romanian authors into Hungarian), linking historical tradition to the present, educating generations of writers, poets, researchers in various fields. But he was also a castle-builder, whose main endeavor consisted of the preservation and strengthening of national identity.

Enlargement and identity. It took place by degrees: Slovak, Turkish, Tartar and Russian (Lippovan) authors were published. Such a decision could not have been taken, of course, without the assent of the higher powers; it needed caution. A few Slovak-language writers used to publish in Czechoslovakia; therefore, first a review came out where, together with the already recognized authors, young or as yet unpublished writers could appear. After a few issues, *Kriterion* published them in a book-anthology, *Variations* (Variácie). The same strategy was deployed with the Turks and the Tartars, their books being printed in their mother tongues in *Colours* (Renkler), later to be published every year.

The intellectuals from various minorities were able not only to cultivate their mother tongues, but also to become members of a privileged institution, the Romanian Pen-Club, enjoying both symbolic and economic advantages. Their slow promotion guaranteed not only a safety from the Central Committee, but it averted the suspicion of the community itself: the Tartars especially were very silent, because, during the Stalin era, lots of refugees from Crimea had found shelter in Dobrudja and the suspicious eye of the Romanian authorities watched them closely²⁰. Sometimes, the institution was not powerful enough to implement its will: for instance, in the eighties in the town of Tulcea, the secretary of the department committee did not allow the presentation of a book in Russian, denying the existence of such minority in Romania²¹. Domokos intervened using his party status – being substitute member of the Central Committee – and the presentation took place.

Sometimes the institution could not take high diplomatic risks. In Romania, there is a little community of Catholic Bulgarians²². An ethnic Bulgarian teacher collected a huge folklore material, ready to be published by *Kriterion*. But unfortunately, Bulgarian Catholics have been using the Latin alphabet since the eighteenth century. The „fraternal Bulgaria”, ignoring officially the Catholic minority living outside of the country, could have interpreted it as an insult coming from Romania – since they wrote in Cyrillic – and this might have triggered diplomatic tensions. Domokos attempted negotiations in Sofia,

20 In Romania, there are two Tartar communities: the Nogai and the Crimea Tartars. They live in Dobrudja and according to the census of 2002, their number is around 24 000.

21 The Lippovans – Old rite Russians – are the descendants of the Raskolniks, dissenters who were opposing against the reforms in the Orthodox Church in Russia and who fled in Moldavia and Dobrudja around 1720.

22 The Catholic Bulgarians came to the Banat at the beginning of the 18th century. The biggest community lives in Dudestii Vechi (around 3500), from a total of 8000 (according to the census in 2002).

hoping also to export the book, but ideological and practical (Sofia asked for a transliteration into Cyrillic) reasons brought down the initiative.

Mask and identity. As for the official discourse present in the annual reports, we learn that the Serbian, Ukrainian and Yiddish literature have in common “the strong rooting in the socialist reality, the presence of revolutionary traditions, the patriotic accents, the constant increasing of the artistic level”²³. Together, the minorities shall gain with the majority “ever greater successes”, in the “creative vigor of our entire society”, opening of new horizons to the socialist construction. The extension of the minority languages has its ingenious motivation, considered a generous gesture coming from the Party: “here is a new proof of the national, Marxist-Leninist politics of the CP which offers equal chances for every creator of beauty without difference of nationality, supports in a generous way the expression of the specific cultural heritage”²⁴. In the same time, the major achievement cannot be denied:

“from an almost exclusively literary we became a complex publishing house, embracing domains like history, philosophy, ethnography and folklore, cultural history and popularization of science, art fields previously missing from the editorial programs in the languages of the cohabiting minorities”²⁵.

This feedback on 15 years of activity is a self-defense: if *Kriterion* publishes minority writers who “contribute to enriching and diversifying the common cultural heritage” knowing that Romanian everyday life has to turn towards the future, it is also necessary to “give value to everything which was progressive, constructive in the culture of the past, is part of the spiritual heritage, common to the whole country plants in the readers the same love towards the homeland, strengthens their feeling of faith in, and engagement with, the land where they and their ancestors were born”²⁶. In clear terms, the historical past of the minorities strengthens their attachment to the land, where they continue to live – a very ambiguous argumentation, but ideologically strong. Domokos used later the “salad bowl” metaphor to qualify his institution: in a salad, the radish, the onion and the lettuce are individually different, but together give the taste of the dish. So, one great collective identity – the ethnic minority identity – is composed by several collective and individual identities – Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians, Turks, etc.

23 „puternica lor ancrare în realitatea socialistă, prezența tradițiilor revolutionare, accentele patriotice, creșterea constantă a nivelului artistic” (p.14)

24 „iată o nouă dovadă a politicii naționale marxist-leniniste a PCR, care oferă șanse egale pentru toți creatori de frumos, fără deosebire de naționalitate, sprijină în mod generos valorificarea moștenirii culturale specifice (p.26, 1980)”.

25 dintr-o editură aproape exclusiv beletristică a devenit o editură complexă, îmbrățișind domenii ca istoria, filosofia, etnografia și folclorul, istoria culturii și popularizarea științelor, arta care până atunci au lipsit din programele editoriale în limbile naționalităților conlocuitoare.

26 „valorificarea a tot ce a fost progresist, constructiv în cultura trecutului, face parte din patrimoniul spiritual, comun al țării, sădește în cititori același simțămînt de dragoste față de patrie, întărește sentimentul lor de credință și devotament față de pămîntul pe care s-au născut ei și strămoșii lor”

The allies: the public. Professional work at *Kriterion* was aimed at the public. The *annual catalogues* were arranged according to the different minority languages and, furthermore, in the case of Hungarian or German publications, by themes. In 1980, a big catalogue gave an overview of ten years of publishing. Brochures informing the readers and destined to libraries and bookstores were also printed, but they ceased to come out in 1974 because of financial reasons. Instead of that, for each New Year, a *Kriterion* pocket-calendar was released, with the traditional wishes in every language provided by this institution. The New Year wishes were released immediately after the official creation of the house, in January 1970, and maybe they are today the last rescued proof of the glorious editorial past²⁷.

The contact with the readers was essential. Three regular operations were performed: meetings between the team and the readers, meetings between authors published by the house and readers as well as book exhibitions in several libraries and bookstores. Prestigious university centers, exhibition halls, city libraries and well-known bookstores scattered in the whole country organized such events. Since the cultural politics of the state favored till 1980 the fame of the book, enthusiastic meetings took place with important financial success, great sales. But the new state directives put an end to this stimulating and flourishing period, limiting the space of the meetings to the “cultural houses”, worker-clubs and schools in cities or villages, and only with the prior authorization of the Socialist Educational Council.

The control: the Party. There was a shift from the “enemies of the party” to the “enemies of the nation”: losing ground, the communist ideology began digging out the nationalistic rhetoric, starting with the flood of historical texts about Transylvania, until December 1989, when the discourse of the attacking enemy (Hungary) was (at the beginning) convincing. We mentioned the homogenization tendency and have now to speak about the concentrated attack directed towards the main Hungarian institutions. The initiative to put out of order “separatist institutions” was also a consequence of the new directives at the beginning of 1980. In that summer, the first *Kriterion Camp* was held in a very Hungarian milieu, the Szeklerland²⁸. Accused that a literary event was turned into a political forum, the camp was forbidden the next year. Further, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Hét* was fired, because in his journal, the replica of the seal of Michael the Brave was turned downwards²⁹ and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Utunk* was sent to forced retirement. Therefore, a decisive attack against the *Kriterion* was not unexpected.

27 *Kriterion* still exists, but they publish only a few books in Hungarian – with one or two rare exceptions in German or in a smaller language – but they continue to print the calendar.

28 The Szeklerland, in the center of Romania, has two departments (Harghita and Covasna) where more than 80 percent of the population is ethnic Hungarian.

29 Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul), ruler of Valachia, and according to the official version, that of Transylvania. Upside down, the seal was similar to a huge spider, accaparing his victims.

In 1984, a “commando” entered the two editing headquarters of the publishing house, led by the propaganda secretary of the party leadership. The aim of the investigation consisted in a “comparative study” of the proportion between, on the one hand literature, dictionaries, natural sciences, and on the other hand linguistics, history, ethnology. The hypothesis was that the unique goal of the house was limited to demonstrating the “Hungarian cultural supremacy”. The team asked why *Kriterion* avoided the problems of the “man of the present” or the theme of “socialist fraternity”, why was the institutional agenda so turned to the “past”: to history, ethnography and language and why the editors allowed such-and-such conclusion, statement or argument in such-and-such books, neglecting the role appropriate for that institution, that of a party activist, who should correct the authors, showing them the “right way”.

For weeks, the institution changed into a huge statistical office, where every editor calculated and developed firm argumentation during the interrogations, which lasted several hours daily. Statistics confirmed: the institution was working on the basis of a balanced program. And the commando retreated without doing any harm to the members of *Kriterion*, failing thus its goal; the institution did not have to exert „public self-criticism”, which would have made its suppression or transformation possible.

The investigation is very covertly rendered in the annual reports: “the experience of the first half of this year has shown, we think, to every worker of our publishing house, that the growing plan requirements impose to each of us new multiple tasks and a greater demand concerning our work discipline”³⁰. Much more eloquent are the testimonies, published after 1990. For instance, the nationalist journal *Totusi iubirea*³¹ incriminated Domokos as being always a ferocious nationalist and irredentist. Ceaușescu’s wife, so the paper said, was informed that the *Kriterion* nourished the idea of separatism and Hungarian nationalism; therefore, she ordered a “complex investigation” to gather evidence justifying the suppression of such an “irredentist” institution. The commission found enough proof and was ready to make them public, asking for penalty, but the head of the state, more careful, asked for “time and deliberation”, because of the delicacy of the affair related to the politics towards the Hungarian community in Romania. The wife got angry and accused her husband of pacifism, urging him to replace at least the director. Yet nothing happened. We have also the explanation of Domokos, who explains the attitude of the head of the state. His pacifism was due to some higher values and strategic interests. In the “leading circles”, writes Domokos, an important principle ruled: “one shall not be made martyr”, if there is a possibility to be

30 „experiența primei jumătăți a acestui an a demonstrat, credem tuturor lucrătorilor din editura noastră, ca exigențele de plan crescînde impun fiecăruia dintre noi sarcini multiple și exigență mărită în ceea ce privește disciplina de muncă” (p.21)

31 Edited by Adrian Paunescu, nov.1991, no. 62 (45)

set back on the right way. Furthermore, Domokos sees in that withdrawal the “invisible force of the community”; the real presence of the community could prevent a social sanction and so did it many a time during the communist dictatorship. If the argumentation of Domokos seems solid, there is another aspect of the story, almost anecdotal³². The decision was taken to change Domokos and the Editor-in-Chief of the German section, Hedi Hauser, would have succeeded to him. But an unexpected event occurred: the daughter of the newly chosen director defected to West Germany. So, because politically it was impossible to have a director with relatives abroad, the former leader was not changed, just admonished.

Masks of survival. The main weapon for the *Kriterion* was a well-formed team, familiar with the official discourse. If several colleagues left the country, those who remained managed to face the difficulties skillfully. The most convincing arguments consist of the official documents, presented to the Council of Education twice a year: the *annual reports*. They were written by the head of the institution, with contributions from the editorial staff and represent a perfect manipulation of the ideological discourse, aiming at the elimination of every possible suspicion. The reader’s impression will be that in this publishing house the only activity had been to help the party to fulfill the construction of a new system, called the “multilateral developed socialist society” and a new type of actor, the New Man.

The annual reports deal mainly with a single question: to prove the loyalty of the minority institution towards the Romanian Communist Party (and its leader) and the Romanian state (and the Romanian people). Since the institution represented both individuals (authors) and collectivities (ethnic minorities), every cultural allusion and product had to be ideologically justified. If literary criticism and literary history were necessary, it could be so only because the Party had stressed it: “the literary history and criticism, to which the party documents assign a special role to direct literature”³³. Literary biographies were backed up by the Marxist dialectic perspective: “to investigate not only the surface aspects of the subject, avoiding the complex problems, but to deploy a truly scientific analysis, to contribute to revealing the contradictions of the act of creativity, and thus, to a deeper understanding of the work”³⁴. It was not easy to publish works of history and of cultural history; therefore, the *fraternity* between Romania’s peoples was stressed: “the historical, cultural and scientific study of the past, of the specific spiritual heritage of the

32 Several Hungarian intellectuals knew it, for ex. Gyula Dávid, the redactor from Cluj or Sándor Szilágyi N., one of the best collaborators of Domokos. Both of them mentioned it to me in the interview.

33 „critica si istoria literara cărora documentele de partid le atribuie un rol deosebit în orientarea literaturii” in the A.R. of 1978, p.10.

34 „să investigheze nu numai laturile de suprafață ale subiectului, ocolind problemele complexe, ci să fie într-adevăr analize științifice, să contribuie la dezvăluirea contradicțiilor creației si prin aceasta la înțelegerea mai profundă a operei” (ibid., p.12)

cohabiting minorities emerges in all the volumes of this kind, in close interdependence with the research into, and the highlighting of, the moments of common life shared by the cohabiting minorities with the Romanian people, the common struggle for social and national justice”³⁵, and further, the importance of *patriotic education*: “through these publications, self-knowledge, an indispensable element in the patriotic, socialist education is harmoniously combined with a respect for the progressive values of the minorities, as an integral part of the cultural and scientific heritage of socialist Romania”³⁶. Terms like “progress”, “patriotic education”, “science” were among the most frequent key-concepts of the party documents, invading every written document with educational content and, as such, were extremely useful for the discourse of the *Kriterion*.

The annual reports offer also a short description of and commentary on the published works, trying to point out the ideological content, even if it was absent. For instance, the best phrase used to qualify a poetical universe is the “everyday realism” or the “actuality”. The poet’s objective is to achieve “a real and multilateral spiritual and artistic community of the Romanian people and the cohabiting minorities”³⁷. Following the same logic, the Ukrainian writer Vasili Klim “attempts to build up human characters by bringing together individuals to everyday life, which is history in the wider sense of the word”³⁸. We can see that the phrasing sometimes is very confusing, using concept-clichés, conveyed through a communist vocabulary. Thus, «work meetings» are essential for deepening «the contacts of the publishing house with the literary and scientific working scene”³⁹.

If we look at the tenth anniversary of the *Kriterion*, we can see in the mirror of the annual reports how the major achievements are closely and cleverly related to the Party’s *achievements*. A celebration always has to be linked to national and political anniversaries, ethnic identity will be approved if it shows a deep respect to the majority. Therefore, the ten years anniversary of *Kriterion* foreshadows the thirty-fifth anniversary of the “freedom of our country” and, at the same time, for the twelfth congress of the CP. The activity of the *Kriterion* has been “well planned, carefully controlled, periodically verified in the light of the party documents, of the ideological, scientific and aesthetic re-

35 Studierea trecutului istoric, cultural si stiintific, a mostenirii spirituale specifice a naționalităților conlocuitoare apare în toate volumele de acest gen în strînsă interdependență cu cercetarea si punerea în valoare a momentelor de conviețuire a naționalităților conlocuitoare cu poporul român, de lupta comună pentru dreptatea socială si națională, p.13.

36 prin editarea lor se imbină armonios autocunoasterea, element indispensabil în educație patriotică, socialistă, si stima față de valorile progresiste ale naționalităților ca parte integrantă a patrimoniului cultural si stiintific al României socialiste.

37 „unei comunități sufletești si artistice reale si multilaterale între poporul român si naționalitățile conlocuitoare” (p.21)

38 „urmăreste constituirea unor individualități umane prin conlucrarea caracterelor cu viața cotidiană, adică istoria, în largul sens al cuvîntului”.

39 legăturile editurii cu țantierul literar si stiintific (p.25)

quirements we are following”⁴⁰, it takes place in the spirit of a “comradeship and collaboration, deepening the sense of responsibility due to the role of the party organization, in order to answer the current social demands”⁴¹.

The constant argument of the discourse is the insistence on the *excellent relationship* between majority and minorities. The published works “are targeted at the man of our days, contribute to the modeling of his moral profile, an objective answer to the past, the rediscovery of authentic spiritual values, in close relationship to the Romanian people”⁴². The main role of the institution is “the modeling of the socialist conscience of the readers, the deepening of the unity and the fraternal collaboration between the Romanian people and the cohabiting minorities on the grounds of the national policy of the party, a policy of full equality, of mutual respect between every son of the homeland, regardless of nationality”⁴³. *Kriterion* assimilated very attentively every “democratic” passage of the Party documents and of the country leader’s discourse, so that ideologically it became irreproachable.

Later, the annual reports grew more dense, the names of the editorial staff were not mentioned, only the collective responsibility. The importance of the ideological roles is more emphatically stressed: “a stronger orientation towards works more directly linked to the tasks of revolutionary, patriotic education”; “spreading the Communist Party concepts among our readers, concerning history, philosophy, history of culture; “continuous development of the spirit of self-sacrifice, order, zeal and discipline for the application of the ideological and moral principles”; “modeling the new man”; “transposition in life of the social imperative”; “broadening of the theoretical horizon”; “formation of a progressive concept about the world and life”. The more the economical situation declines, the more the theory is stressed. The book becomes a “basic instrument in cultural propaganda and the augmentation of the political-ideological level”⁴⁴. Starting with 1985, the name of Ceaușescu was included in the beginning of every document.

Even disagreement was sometimes formulated using the party rhetoric, therefore safe: „what can be noticed is a certain tendency to narrow the profile of our books, the variety and thematic richness... we feel compelled to stress that the tendency to reduce the number of progressive and valuable works of our cultural heritage, with valid messages for today’s reader, tends to condemn to

40 „bine planificată, controlată cu atenție, verificat periodic în lumina documentelor de partid, a comandamentelor ideologice, științifice și estetice după care ne ghidăm” (1979)

41 conlucrare tovarășească, aprofundarea simțului răspunderii datorită rolului organizației de partid, a răspunde comenzii sociale actuale.

42 se adresează omului zilei noastre, contribuie la modelarea profilului lui moral, răspuns obiectiv la trecut, redescoperirea valorilor spirituale autentice, în strânsă legătură cu cele ale poporului român.

43 „Modelarea conștiinței socialiste ale cititorilor, aprofundarea unității și conlucrării frățești între poporul român și naționalitățile conlocuitoare pe baza politicii naționale a partidului, politică a egalității depline, a respectului reciproc între toți fii patriei, fără deosebire de naționalitate”

44 These are taken from the acts of the CP congress.

passivity a series of prestigious researchers from the field of historiography, folklore, ethnography and linguistics”⁴⁵. It was becoming clear that the party expectations had not been met with the previous activity of *Kriterion* and that the institution was being forced to withdraw back to the field of the literature only, its original area.

Epilogue. A former editor of the Domokos team took the helm. At the beginning of the nineties, some effort was made to maintain the “minority profile” and books in Albanian, Armenian and Roma language appeared (one of each). For the period of 1990-1994, 242 books came out: 148 in Hungarian, 30 in German, 14 in Serbian, 6-6 in Ukrainian and Slovak, 4 in Tartar and Turkish, 1 in Yiddish and also 12 bibliophile volumes. In one prosperous year during communism, the *Kriterion* published more than 200 volumes. Today *Kriterion* has shrunk to a small institution.

Conclusion. We can say that the professional role of the minority publishing house in Ceaușescu’s Romania was deeply interwoven with political meaning. The overt expectation from the dominant side, represented by the state and its leading institutions – the Party, the Head of State, and the Committee for Culture – consisted of the shaping of minority intelligentsia in order to create a united, strong communist state. The mask had been one of “sharing values”. The covert intention, instead, aimed at a melting process of the ethnic minorities in order to create a united, Romanian national state. More and more clear in the eighties, this hidden intention was, at the very end of the regime, expressed through the specter of the “national enemy “ and tried to play out as a last trump in Ceaușescu’s game. On the other side, *Kriterion* played also a double game. Behind its overt roles – popularize Romanian national culture, party culture and give voice to the cultural production of ethnic minorities – the covert intention was to consolidate and build up minority intelligentsia, sometimes from its ashes, capable to work in its mother tongue. The meaning of “sharing values” was therefore different, destined essentially to the ethnic communities, urging them to create in their own tongue and assume ethnic identity against the Romanian homogenization tendency. In order to fulfill this, the main weapon of the *Kriterion*, besides solidarity, consisted of the perfect mastering of the ideological discourse. This discourse proved always the loyalty towards the Party and the Romanian state, conveying the required ideological Marxist-Leninist and communist content, the ideas of patriotism, fraternity and excellence both of the Party and the relationship between minority and majority. And the head of the defendant institution, Géza Domokos, managed to maintain the necessary ideological simulation

45 „se observă o anumită îngustare a profilului cărților noastre, varietatea, bogăția arilor temat-ice... sntem obligati să semnalăm ca tendința de a se reduce numărul unor lucrări legate de mostenirea culturală, progresistă, valoroase, cu mesaj valabil si pentru cititorul de azi, tindă să condamne la pasivitate o serie de cercetători de prestigiu din domeniul istoriografiei, folclorului, etnografiei, lingvisticii”

by accumulating the maximal professional roles (vice-president of Pen-club, substitute member of the Central Committee, member of the Council of Hungarian Workers), giving up his literary ambitions for the «cause» and continuing the missionary role of the Transylvanians, a Hungarian cultural heritage in Romania. As a natural development of the *Kriterion*'s political meaning, after the fall of the regime, Domokos was to become the first president of the UDMR (Hungarian Party of Romania)⁴⁶.

Despite of an authoritarian power exerted by the communist state of Ceaușescu, having in view the homogenization of the nation, *Kriterion* managed not only to strengthen the ethnic identity of the Hungarian minority, but also to maintain other identities (Serbian, German, Jewish, Ukrainian), to re-appropriate some (Slovaks) or to give birth to overshadowed cultural identities (in the case of Turks, Lippovans, Tartars), preparing the ground for the emergence of others (Roma, Albanian and Armenian). It happened through the promotion of the creative values of each group living on the territory of Romania. Moreover, it took place without hurting the national feeling of the majority of the country or the ideology of the leading communist party, by a tacit acceptance of the majority. The *Kriterion* case shows how ethnic identities can be assumed and strengthened by an institution in a hostile milieu, when the leader's personal identity and cultural habitus determines the professional roles.

***Glossary of political semantics for smart readers
(Cambridge Dictionary of American English)***

unite	to bring (different groups or things) together to become one, or to join together to become one
melt	to change (something) or cause something to change from solid to liquid, esp. by making it warmer
share	to divide or use (something) with others
divide	to separate into parts or groups, or to cause (something) to separate in such a way

46 At present, one of his former gifted „clients”, the poet Béla Markó who published his very first volume at *Kriterion*, is bearing this charge. He became vice prime minister of Romania.

majority	more than half of a total number or amount; the larger part of something
minority	a group of people who share some characteristic by birth that makes their group smaller than some other groups in a society and may cause others to treat them unfairly
ethnic minority	a national or racial group living in a country or area which contains a larger group of people of a different race or nationality
identity	who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which make them different from others
role	the position or purpose that someone or something has in a situation, organization, society or relationship
institution	an organization that exists to serve a public purpose such as education or support for people who need help

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