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Internal Mechanisms of the Romanian Censorship System (1949–1977)

One of the empirical puzzles regarding the functioning of censorship pops up when considering that censorship norms cannot be exhaustively operationalized; hence, they cannot be incorporated into well defined rules. As a consequence, designing and operating a censorship system implies specific organizational challenges. Given that the censorship from the Communist Romania is considered one of the most effective among its Central and Eastern European Communist counterparts, this case offers excellent possibilities for studying the design and internal mechanisms of censorship. The central question this paper aims to answer is the following: what were those organizational elements that ensured the effectiveness of the Romanian censorship system? To this end, I analyze primarily the internal control mechanisms of the censorship system (ranging from recruitment, sanctions and incentives applied to the censors, multilevel control of the published materials, to public humiliation), but I also present the “successes” and “failures” of the institution as it was seen by its operators. The empirical sources used for this study are archive materials from Romania.