

## **The Witch's Brew of Censorship:**

### **Coordination and Control within the Censorship System (Romania, 1949–1965)**

#### ***Abstract***

*The empirical puzzle motivating this research was that in spite of the fact that censorship policies cannot be comprehensively operationalized through clearly defined operational rules, the related institutions of totalitarian regimes seemed to function quite effectively. The question proposed to be answered by this paper is the following: what were the mechanisms within the censorship system that could ensure an effective operation despite the shortcomings at the level of policy-formulation? Diverse archive materials concerning the first phase of Communist censorship from Romania (1949–1965) revealed a sophisticated system of coordination and control mechanisms within the censorship machine, techniques that were meant to overcome this inherent “weakness” of the censorship policy. The paper represents the first attempt to accomplish my PhD research project, which aims to analyze the strategies employed by censors facing a relatively uncertain institutional environment. For this, however, one has to “map” the institution first, a task realized by the present paper.*

#### **Introduction**

This paper is focused on the internal mechanisms of the totalitarian censorship systems, more exactly, the analysis of the means and techniques of coordination and control exercised on the censors' activity. The empirical puzzle that guided me to this topic is that, in spite of the fact that censorship policies cannot be comprehensively “operationalized”, censorship of different regimes (e.g. Fascist and Communist) proved to be quite efficient. Put it differently, it is reasonable to expect that a policy will be efficient if the ends and the means are clearly defined and execution is unequivocally regulated through clear operational rules, however, this does not seem to be the case of censorship policies. So, how is it possible that putting into practice they could exert such a devastating effect on the social and cultural life? Translated into a research question: What were the internal mechanisms that could ensure the effective operation of censorship despite the shortcomings at the level of policy-formulation?

The answer that offers itself is that “well socialized” and devoted censors simply knew what to filter out, in other words, a Communist censor, for instance, could categorically spot the “manifestations of the class enemy” in the controlled materials. Well, not even near. According to some statistics of the Romanian censorship institution regarding the activity of its employees from the provinces, between June 1954 and February 1955, there were 750

“good interventions” but also 265 “mistakes”, made up of “missed” and “unjustified interventions”.<sup>1</sup>

If not the censor’s commitment or “sixth sense”, then what assured the system’s efficiency? Unfortunately, the literature on censorship suffers from a very serious shortcoming when it comes to answering this question, because very little attention is paid to the internal mechanisms and organizational features of the institution of censorship. There are several attempts to investigate censorship practices from the censor’s perspective, however, their value is limited in what it concerns our puzzle. They either lack an analytical framework, representing only descriptive accounts based on censors’ narratives (Schöpflin 1983: 102–112, Richmond and Solodin 1997) or rely too much on censors’ own accounts that are biased because of post-hoc rationalizations (Boyer 2003). Other studies are limited mostly to the presentation of bare technical issues regarding organizational elements (Ermolaev 1997), or, contrarily, use such broad historical comparative frameworks that leave no place for detailed analysis (Darnton 1994).

This situation guided me to have a look into the “witch’s brew” of censorship, to search for means of coordination and control employed within the system. To clarify these core concepts, I use the term “censorship” in its narrower (traditional, legalistic) sense, that is, “[...] an authoritarian control over what reaches the public sphere by someone other than the sender and the intended receiver of a message, [it] operates on the basis of official regulation (if not legislation), institutionalization, and administration of the control procedures (Müller 2004: 12).<sup>2</sup> “Means of coordination” refers to all tools employed in order to provide information to censors concerning the norms of censorship, put it simply, instructions regarding what to cut out; whereas the concept of “means of control” stances for all tools that were meant to check for compliance and induce censors to conform to the requirements.

The case I study in this paper is the Romanian Communist censorship. It has to be mentioned that, despite the fact that a big amount and valuable research has been made on this case in the past few years, the major points of criticism concerning generally the literature on censorship, apply for these writings too (Costea, Király and Radosav 1995; Diac 2006; Ficeac

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<sup>1</sup> *Central Historical National Archives*, Bucharest, Fond of Press and Printing Committee, Dossier no. 10/1955 p. 86–109.

<sup>2</sup> A distinction can be made between the interventionist, institutionalized (“regulatory”) censorship and the “constitutive” or “structural” censorship, which are forms of discourse regulation that can be detected in any kind of social control (Müller 2004). In its broader sense the term captures both of these aspects: “[...] the term [censorship] encompasses all socially structured proscriptions or prescriptions which inhibit or prohibit dissemination of ideas, information, images, and other messages through a society’s channels of communication whether these obstructions are secured by political, economic, religious, or other systems of authority. It includes both overt and covert proscriptions and prescriptions.” (Jansen 1991: 221)

1999; Györffy 2008; Lázok 2008; Malița 2006; Marino 2000; Mocanu 2001, 2003; Petcu 2005, Popescu 2004, Vianu 1998). There is a single article handling the topic of the everyday work of the censors, nevertheless, it is not connected to the functioning of the system as a whole (Zainea 2005.)

The focus of the research is narrowed down from two perspectives. First, I study a limited time period, the censorship between 1949 and 1965, where the endpoints represent, on the one hand, the buildup of the core institution charged with censorship, which is the *General Directorate of Press and Printing* (GDPP), and, on the other hand, the change in the leadership of the country. In 1965 begins the “Ceaușescu-era”, which might had not have a direct influence on the internal mechanisms of censorship machine, nevertheless, for the time being, it seems a handy way to narrow down the studied period.

The other narrowing dimension is that I study the means of coordination and control employed in the case of censors working in the provinces. This focus, however, does not overrule general conclusions concerning the functioning of the whole system, primarily because the basic means of coordination and control were used in similar ways for the whole operative staff of the GDPP. Nevertheless, I picked this group for the following reasons: first, it represents a specific challenge for the conceivers and operators of the censorship system. This is because these people had to bring into effect on local level all tasks that were accomplished by specialized departments in Bucharest, furthermore, they were set geographically far, hence, coordination and control through immediate and direct discussions could have not been employed as a rule. Second, there was a unit in the GDPP vested with the specific task of guiding and controlling delegates, a fact that facilitated to a great degree archive research on this topic.

The empirical sources used for this paper consists of archive materials recently collected in the Romanian national archives from Bucharest, Tîrgu Mureș and Cluj Napoca.<sup>3</sup> These represent a wide variety of documents, like legal norms, internal orders, circular letters, reports, minutes of meetings, lectures and discussions, statistical tables, and so forth. Unfortunately, in spite of the legal norms in force, some dossiers in the Central Archives from Bucharest are still not accessible, nevertheless, the consulted materials proved to be rich enough in data needed for writing this paper. As a note regarding the work with these

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<sup>3</sup> *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale*, București, Fond Comitetul pentru Presă și Tipărituri (Central Historical National Archives, Bucharest, Fond of Press and Printing Committee; abbreviated ANIC F. PPT), *Arhivele Naționale Direcția Județeană Mureș*, Fond No. 403 (Mureș County Branch of National Archives, abbreviated ANDJM F. 403), *Arhivele Naționale Direcția Județeană Cluj*, Fond No. 13 (Cluj County Branch of National Archives, abbreviated ANDJC F.13).

documents, I would like to mention that besides the amount and variety of them the researcher is also challenged by the archiving system, more exactly, the lack of a system.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the structure, the paper consists of two parts. The first chapter discusses the GDPP's general setup, namely, the targets of censorship, some organizational aspects, and the basic guidelines of censorship provided for censors. The second chapter zooms on the most important means and techniques of coordination and control in the following order: 1) first step of control, that is *recruitment*; 2) two means of coordination, the *Circulars* and the *Notes*; 3) second round of means of control represented by *reports and feedbacks*, and *control and instructions on the fields*, 4) combining coordination control in the framework of *symposia*; 5) and finally, the most obvious forms of control, the *rewards and sanction* applied to censors. Handling the issue of rewards and sanctions at the end of the chapter bears with special importance, because this line of development allows for estimating of how requirements formulated through other means of coordination and control were enforced by these kinds of positive and negative inducements. Some remarks regarding the structure and the examples used in the paper: jumping back and forth between means of coordination and control might not seem to be the best strategy for catching the readers' attention; nevertheless, I employed this structure to avoid too much cross references among sections. Furthermore, I would like to underline that I selected not the funniest but the most typical examples for sustaining my arguments.

Finally, I have to mention that this paper represents the first attempt to accomplish a broader project, my PhD thesis. This aims at analyzing the strategies employed by censors in a rather "uncertain" institutional environment, which is due to the under-defined nature of censorship policy. For this, however, I have to know and understand first their everyday work, the "rules of the game" within the institution, and last but not least, to estimate somehow the level of uncertainty faced by censors.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the year indicated on the dossier frequently does not coincide with the year indicated on the document included in the concerned dossier (the document might be either older or younger). In this sense, the footnotes in this paper containing the references are incomplete.

## **Chapter 1. The setup of the censorship machine: targets, main organizational aspects and basic censorship norms**

Histories of the Romanian Communist censorship customarily begin with August 1944, when Romania changed sides and joined the Allies, and as a consequence, Soviet-type censorship was almost immediately installed. The story continues with the Paris Peace Treaty of February 1947 that obliged Romania to outlaw the “Fascist” and “all other bodies engaged in anti-Soviet propaganda”, a requirement that was met by setting up the Directorate of Press and Printing within the Ministry of Arts and Information. The process culminates in May 1949 with the “upgrading” of this directorate to the status of General Directorate (GDPP) directly responsible to the Council of Ministers. This institutional setup lasted until 1977, when officially, but not practically censorship was abolished. It has to be mentioned that by 1949, the year when my analysis starts, the ground was already prepared for exhaustive censorship, meaning that everything related to printing was already nationalized as well as the core cultural institutions, “inimical” newspapers were banned and new journals introduced, the editors were changed, the libraries were purged, and the enumeration could go on.<sup>5</sup>

*The main targets of the censorship* machine were laid down in 1949; nevertheless, more and more new objects got into its focus during the early 1950’s.<sup>6</sup> The Order No. 267/1954 issued by the Council of Ministers summed up the previous legal norms concerning GDPP, and this remains the basic point of reference for the functioning of the censorship for the following decades.<sup>7</sup>

According to this Order, the role of GDPP is to exercise state control, on the one hand, “for defending state secrets”, and, on the other hand, “on the political content of every printed matter and other materials with propaganda and agitation character”. For this, its specific tasks were laid down in 18 points. In what follows I summarize these tasks and make brief remarks concerning the actual practice:

- *Control over the content of all kinds of printed matter.* This task has to be interpreted quite literally, namely, “every printed matter”, the control ranging from periodicals, books, maps, and internal working materials edited by central and local state

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed history of the installation of Communist censorship in Romania see, for instance, Diac 2006, Ficeac 1999, Petcu 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Decree No. 214/1949, Decree No. 218/1949, Decree No. 612/1949, Order (of the Council of Ministers) No. 461/1951, Order (CM) No. 462/1951, Order (CM) No. 340/1952, Order (CM) No. 343/1952. In: ANIC F. CPT, D. 10/1949.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

organs, to the phonebooks, forms, calendars, book-markers and wrapping paper of commercial products.

- *Control of printing houses and every means of replication.* This task refers to the fact that nothing could be printed or multiplied without the stamp of the GDPP and everything had to be printed exactly in the approved format.

- *Control over the news-agency (Agerpres).*

- *Control over the content of radio productions.* This implies even the factory and school emissions.

- *Control over the TV productions.*

- *Control of museums ad exhibitions.*

- *Control of cinemas (movies and filmstrips).*

- *Control of all forms of visual-agitation.* This task was performed by a special Committee formed by the delegates of the GDPP, the members of the local Party activists from the Propaganda and Agitation Section and members of the local government. The task was to control the portraits of the party leaders, placards, sculptures, special installations of official ceremonies, etc, in public places, like streets, train stations, schools, factories, and so forth.<sup>8</sup>

- *Control of theatrical performances.*

- *Control over the classification, usage, circulation, and distribution of all printed matter, and propaganda and agitation materials.* The “classification” refers to the fact that books and periodicals were categorized as “forbidden”, “secret” (technological issues, “that occasionally contain inimical material”), “documentary” and “free to circulate”. Access to books and periodicals – in libraries and other institutions – was determined on the ranking of the concerned printed matter. For instance, those labeled as “secret” and “documentary” could be used only by ministries and central institutions. This task also implies that PPD commanded over the recall of all “inadequate” materials.<sup>9</sup>

“Control over distribution” has to be interpreted also in the broadest possible terms, meaning not just to follow the related activity of publishing houses and editorials, but also the libraries, newspaper stands, second hand bookshops, flea markets and paper recyclers.<sup>10</sup>

- *Authorizes the import and export of all materials under its sphere of control.*

- *Informs the authorities about the offences from its domain of control.*

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<sup>8</sup> D. 10/1949 p. 90, 121–124, representing circular letters sent to the censors.

<sup>9</sup> D. 14/1949 p. 40, D. 11/1955 p. 16–17, representing Order (CM) No. 343/1952 and a circular letter.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

- *Organizes schools and courses for the professional training of the PPD employees.*

Besides this widespread activity, there were some *issues lying behind the sphere of GDPP control*, that is, the internal working materials of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs and specifically those classified as “secret” and “top secret”. Furthermore, the Ministry of Defense had its own related censorship institution, the Military Censorship Office.<sup>11</sup> When facing materials related somehow to the military (e.g. bridges or roads of strategic significance, military sport clubs, military parades, etc.), the GDPP employees had to ask for the approval of the MCO before turning back the “cleansed” manuscript to the editors.

Related to the “division of labor” in the domain of censorship, one has to mention the role played by the Communist Party too. The basic conception was that the activity of the two institutions mutually complement each other, thus, the Party plays the “guiding” role, whereas the GDPP has the “control” function. Nevertheless, the collaboration was not unproblematic, and sometimes the relationship between the two institutions became rather tensed both on central and local levels. This is because certain specialized sections of the Party exercised both pre- and post-circulation censorship as an auxiliary activity of the “guidance”,<sup>12</sup> and at the same time, they never missed a chance to remind the GDPP about its “limited duties”.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, although the paramount leading role of the Party could not be questioned, the GDPP employees felt many times as if their professional skills would be discredited or their authority undermined (in front of editorial boards), and were constantly troubled whether or not the Party appreciates or takes their work seriously.<sup>14</sup>

Having set the tasks of the GDPP, let me turn to the presentation of some broad *organizational aspects* of this institution. Parallel to the widening of the GDPP’s scope of

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<sup>11</sup> Order (CM) No. 267/1954, D. 10/1949.

<sup>12</sup> The main unit through which “guidance” and the censorship functions of the Party were performed is the *Agitation and Propaganda Section* with specialized sub-units to press, literature, arts, music, etc. The “guidance” in practice meant that on regular meeting editors were told exactly what topics to elaborate on in periodicals (e.g. harvest, technological innovation, current activities of the Party) or to the directors of theaters and other cultural institutions it was specified what to play. Specifically in the domain of censorship, the Agitprop Section was involved in different ways. As a basic task, it exercised post-circulation censorship on every printed matter and materials related to agitation and propaganda. Nevertheless, it was involved in pre-circulation censorship too, specifically in visual-agitation matters (those specified among the duties of the PPD) and periodicals. Even after the PPD apparatus was set up, the Press Committee of the Agitprop continued to control the manuscripts of the leading articles (editorials). See in this sense ANDJC F. 13, D. 180/1951, D79/1955.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party from the 19–20<sup>th</sup> of August, 1953*. ANIC, F. CPT, D. 12/1953 p. 14–26.

<sup>14</sup> This topic is developed in the second part of the paper.

duties, starting from the set up of the institution, one can witness the growth in the number of PPD employees and the mushrooming of specialized departments. The personnel transferred in 1949 from the Ministry of Arts and Information involved about 100 persons (including the administrative staff), while in the following two years this number was doubled.<sup>15</sup> In 1953, only the operative staff counted more than 300 persons, this remaining a rough average over the studied period.<sup>16</sup> These people were distributed to different departments and sections. Whereas in 1949 there were only 6 departments, in 1962 censorship worked already with 12 specialized departments (Science and Technology, Literature, Libraries–Museums–Second hand bookshops, Radio–TV, Arts, Central Press, Instruction and Control, etc.).<sup>17</sup> From the very first moment the organization included regional/local branches, which were meant to represent the central institution on local level. Except for controlling books and authorizing the publication of new newspapers, censors from the provinces had to accomplish all tasks of the GDPP on local level. Finally, the whole institution was organized in a strictly centralized hierarchy, where delegates were responsible to the Directorate for Instruction and Control.

To remind, the basic task of this 300 people was to defend the state secrets and to control the political content of printed matters and other materials with propaganda and agitation character. But what does this mean in practice? What to filter out throughout the control?

According to the *Instructions Concerning the Activity of the Censorship Bureaus from the Province* issued in 1950, which are ***the basic norms of censorship***, news, articles and pictures with the following content had to be erased from every printed matter:<sup>18</sup>

- “[...] manifestations of the class enemy directed against the regime [...]
- [...] meant to instigate against the State organs, [...] the USSR, the Soviet leaders [...], and defame people’s democracies [...]
- [...] that would contribute to the weakening and undermining of the alliance between the working class and the working peasantry, and to the repression of class struggle, or would propagate racial hate against the nationalities living together [...]
- [...] which aim to notice the public about the manifestation of the class enemy from the country and abroad, activities or manifestations that would provoke the activity of the internal class enemy, or would nourish tendecious rumors [...]
- [...] which would advocate or popularize imperialist scientific and artistic manifestations, the anti-Marxist-Leninist enemies of the proletarian internationalism targeted to deny the class struggle [...]
- [...] that advocate maleficent religious principles of the class enemy and imperialists, principles that would harm the legal norms in force [...]
- [...] that would jeopardize the security of the state by providing military secrets to the class enemy or imperialists about the national defense strategies by furnishing to imperialist

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<sup>15</sup> D. 9/1949 p. 2–11, 42–44; D 12/1951 p. 73–81.

<sup>16</sup> D. 14/1960 p. 1–10; D13/1966 p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> D10/1949 p. 6–8, D. 12/1962 p. 63–65.

<sup>18</sup> D.17/1952 p. 1–7.

agents information related to economy, administrative organization, technical details of factories, industrial installations, hospitals [...]  
[...] that would induce panic: about epidemics, combustions, floods, droughts, calamities of big proportions, railway accidents, etc., crimes, thefts [...]  
[...] news reproduced from imperialist sources [...].”

Clear enough? It stands out that except for the last three paragraphs the others are formulated in rather broad and vague terms. Who is the “class enemy”? How does its “manifestation” materialize? One might suppose that whereas facts of disclosing “state secrets” or the “panic-monger” news could be more or less easily identified even by an amateur, filtering out other kinds of forbidden issues is also a routine task for the well-trained eyes of the “specialists”, the censors, who categorically crossed the mistaken word, paragraph or the entire article. But as it was presented in the introduction, it seems that censors were far from conforming to the Party-line; they either missed to erase something or overstepped the “line” with unnecessary interventions.

It has to be mentioned that these guidelines applied not just for the press, but for all other domains under the GDPP control, which, as it was presented before, is very large. Now, how to make 300 people to employ these vaguely formulated guidelines? It seems that this challenge was partially foreseen by the designers of the institution, and put much effort in trying to eliminate their ad hoc application. The specific means and techniques that were meant to coordinate the censorship activity are described and analyzed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 2. Coordination and control of the censors’ activity**

The focus of this chapter is narrowed down to the coordination and control of the censors working in the provinces. As it was already mentioned, these people, called also “delegates” (*delegat*) were subordinated to the *Instruction and Control Directorate* (ICD), a sub-unit of GDPP that was set up already in 1949.<sup>19</sup> As the name shows, its function was to “instruct” and “control” censors, however, not all of them but the delegates. This is the only central directorate the delegates were in direct contact, that is, all commands were sent by ICD (including those issued on higher GDPP levels and/or concerning the whole operative staff) and all reports, questions were addressed to ICD. People of ICD were called

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<sup>19</sup> *Direcția Instructaj Control*. Its name was modified several times, initially being called *Service for Press and Printed Matters in the Country* (*Serviciul Presei și Tipăriturilor pe Țară*), the functions, however, never changed.

“instructors” (*instructor*), and each of them was responsible for several “collectives” (*colectivă*), that is, the group of delegates working in a locality. The size of collectives varied according to the amount of tasks existing in the place (the number of newspapers, theatres, typographies, public address systems, etc.), 1 to 8 people. It worth to mention, that in the heydays of ICD, the range of instructors/delegates was 1 to 4.<sup>20</sup> The instructors wrote reports concerning the delegates’ activity and on their own activity, these were discussed on meetings, and further reports of the ICD’s activity were submitted to higher fora, for instance, the Directorate of GDPP.

Based on this short introduction, one can conclude, that the general framework of control mechanisms is represented, not surprisingly, by hierarchical organization. In what follows I discuss in five subchapters the more specific techniques which were meant to coordinate and control censors’ activity. I start with the basic step, which is selecting appropriate people for this work. After issues of recruitment, I turn to analyze means of coordination, Circulars and Notes, which represent the more “operationalized” forms of the basic censorship norms presented in the first chapter. In the third subchapter I return to means of control, reports of the delegates and the instructors’ feedbacks to these reports, and control and instruction on the fields. Next, I discuss a peculiar form that combines elements of guidance and control, namely, symposia organized by ICD for delegates. In the last subchapter are presented the most obvious forms of control, premia and sanctions applied for censors. There is a special focus on estimating how requirements formulated through the other means of coordination and control were enforced by these positive and negative inducements.

## **2.1. First means of control: recruitment**

To establish and maintain authority over the bureaucratic organization of the Party and other state organs – which on a bigger perspective was meant to guarantee control over the whole society –, the recruitment of reliable personnel was considered a basic organizational strategy of Communist regimes. Summarizing the GDPP’s activity on this sense, a report written by ICD in 1957 states the following:

“[...] taking into account the specificities of the work and the GDPP’s scope of duties, we aimed at the recruitment of young cadres with satisfactory professional background, showing an adequate political-ideological level, with healthy origins, people who understand and are capable to put into practice the political line of our Party.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In 1955, there were 22 instructors. D. 12/1955 p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> D. 10/1953 p. 12–15.

How recruitment shows itself in practice? In what follows I present the main sources and channels of recruitment, some statistical data concerning the profile of the delegates, and finally, the problems related to this issue, as it was assessed by GDPP.

There were two main sources of recruitment, the Party cadres and students. The regional or local Party Committees were asked to propose reliable persons, check their “files” and send a characterization to the Central Committee of the RWP. After this approval, the GDPP instructors examined the candidate’s proficiency. Through this channel, most of the time party activists were transferred to the local GDPP as full- or part-time employees.<sup>22</sup> The procedure for recruiting students was easier in the sense that, according to the established practice, freshly graduated students were assigned by the ministries of education and workforces to work at specified institutions. Taking full advantage of this possibility, GDPP requested students specifying the number and their specialization.<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the number of the delegates, it can be noticed that it was pumped up in a remarkably short period of time. At the beginning of 1950 there were 12 censors working in 10 cities, whereas in 1951, the GDPP delegates counted already 79 people working in 58 localities, and this is the figure of the proximate average<sup>24</sup> over the whole studied period.<sup>25</sup>

These people were indeed young, but generally older than censors from the center. In 1951, half of the delegates was under 35 (in the Capital three-quarters), and at the end of 1965, about 62 percents of the delegates was still younger than 40 years (80 percents in the Capital).<sup>26</sup> Concerning their studies, it can be observed that censors from Bucharest were better educated, however, this gap diminished over the 15 years. In 1953, half of the delegates held high-school diploma or a higher degree, whereas in Bucharest this range was 71 percent. To the end of 1965, this category increased to 83 percent among the delegates, whereas in Bucharest it was already 97 percent, but still about 10 percent of the delegates finished only elementary-school.<sup>27</sup> The university graduates were specialized in humanities, like philology, history, pedagogy, philosophy, journalism, law, economics, etc.<sup>28</sup> Although in what concerns age and education delegates lagged behind when compared to the staff from

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, in 1950, a minimum of 20 people were transferred from the local Party administrations. D. 3/1950 p. 45–46.

<sup>23</sup> D. 11/1956 p. 8, 13–17, 92–93.

<sup>24</sup> The number of the delegates fluctuated between the minimum of 65 (in 1953, 1955) and the maximum of 113 (in 1960) persons.

<sup>25</sup> D. 1/1950 p. 87–90; D. 1/1950 p. 196; D. 14/1951 p. 4–6, D. 14/1960 p. 1–10; D.13/1966 p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> D. 14/1951 p. 37–39; D. 10/1952 p. 1–3; D.13/1966 p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> D. 14/1960 p. 8, 10, D.13/1966 p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> It worth to be mentioned, that just a small number of censors had its basic degree from party-schools. D. 13/1966 p. 169–173.

the center, they seemed to “compensate” on the dimension of origins. About half of them sprang from workers’ families, and this category counted much less in Bucharest, however, the “unhealthy” category of intellectual background was kept extremely low in both of these groups (about 3 percents).<sup>29</sup> Finally, although not a criteria of recruitment, one might notice that there is a difference between the province and center regarding the gender of the censors. Whereas in Bucharest the range is fifty-fifty, the delegates are overwhelmingly males (always above 80 percents).<sup>30</sup>

As a final remark regarding the profile of the recruited delegates, one has to notice that a relatively big proportion was just part-time employee of the GDPP, for instance, in 1955, this range amounted to 64 percent. Most of these people held offices at the local Party organization or the local government (*Sfat Popular*), but some were teachers and even newspaper editors.<sup>31</sup>

Let us turn now to the problems faced by GDPP in the domain of recruitment. The first problem concerns the strategy. Relatively soon, already in 1954, the GDPP realized that “the orientation in the recruitment was wrong”<sup>32</sup> and the professional competence might be more important than “healthy origins”. The ICD pinpointed that the most adequate source for recruitment is the university and transfers from the Party should be kept on reduced sizes, furthermore, based on the similar consideration, the ICD proposed to check first the professional competence and only afterwards the “cadre-files”.<sup>33</sup> In spite of these attempts to change the recruitment strategy, the practice remained the same over the studied period, thus, delegates were recruited preponderantly through the Party channels.

The other core problem is the constant fluctuation and change of the GDPP personnel, which implies that recruitment is a permanent task. For instance, in 1953, half of the whole staff changed, later, the peak in the case of the delegates being represented by 20 percent in 1957.<sup>34</sup> The principal motives of this fluctuation are the followings: first, purges based on cadre-files initiated in big waves by the Party; second, those part-time employees of the GDPP who were Party office-holders were transferred by the Party to jobs that did not left time for “extra” activities; third, some GDPP employees were simply overtaken (with or without the consent of the GDPP) by other central institutions. Finally, there is a tiny proportion of those who were fired or transferred to other jobs because they did not

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<sup>29</sup> D. 14/1960 p. 1–10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> D. 10/1952 p. 19; D. 9/1952 p. 7–9.

<sup>32</sup> D. 12/1955 p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> D. 10/1953 p. 61; D. 32/1961 p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> D. 13/1951

correspond to the GDPP work, so, they were professionally inadequate.<sup>35</sup> On the top of these, according to the reports written by ICD and higher GDPP fora, the regional and local branches of the Party were not really helpful in replacing the PPD personnel, rather they stalled for time even with proposals, than forgot to send the characterization to the CC of RWP, etc.<sup>36</sup>

For all these, the GDPP proposed in 1961 the followings: first examine the professional aptitudes of the candidate, next – but strictly before employment – to check thoroughly the cadre-files, and finally, asks the CC of the RWP to place an order to its regional and local branches to support the recruitment and stability of the GDPP employees.<sup>37</sup>

Now that we have the more or less successfully recruited delegates, let us see what kind of guidelines did they received, how were they instructed and their work organized, and of course, how were they controlled.

## **2.2. Means of coordination: Circulars and Notes**

The first common denominator of Circulars (*Circulare*) and Notes (*Note*) is that they were documents addressed to all censors. Furthermore, taking into consideration their content too, one can deduce that these were the basic tools that were meant to guarantee the coordination and coherence among the work of individual censors. The difference between the Circulars and Notes is that whereas the first contained a list of issues that was forbidden or allowed to appear in printed matters, the second consisted of compilations of censored materials aiming to provide models to be imitated by censors in similar cases. It has to be remarked, that these different methods of coordination corresponded to the two basic types of materials that had to be erased: state secrets and other clearly definable issues, and the “political-ideological deviations”. In the following I briefly present the Circulars and the Notes by paying special attention to the problems related to their usage.

### ***Circulars***

As it was already mentioned, the Circulars contained “the state secrets and working dispositions”, more exactly, a list of information that was forbidden or allowed to be published, and a second attachment comprising instructions related to everyday work of

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<sup>35</sup> “Elements” with “unhealthy origins”, with suspect relatives, those excluded from the party, those having “cosmopolite ideas”, or in “relationship with inimical elements”,etc. were removed. D. 14/1951 p. 21–22.

<sup>36</sup> Dosar 23/1952 p. 2–3.

<sup>37</sup> D. 32/1961 p. 2–6.

censors.<sup>38</sup> All in one, this represents the basis of the guidance given to the censors, the written and more or less clearly defined expression of the Party-line regarding censorship. The specific data for the secrets-list were issued by different ministries and centralized by the GDPP, then sent periodically through ICD to local censors.<sup>39</sup> It has to be mentioned that these circulars did not represent the updated versions of the previous ones, in the sense that the latest contains all forbidden issues; rather each added new items to the previous collections or revoked some of the earlier dispositions. As a consequence, the circulars had to be handled as one corpus and the size of this material was continuously growing: between 1951 and 1963, the delegates got at least 159 circulars (each of 1 to 13 pages), which amounted at the end of this period to 378 pages. A minimum number of 76 pages were added in 1965, counting a total of 454 pages.<sup>40</sup>

One might suppose that filtering out information that would disclose state secrets was one of the easiest tasks of censorship, but this conception is false. And this is because the circular displayed the following main features:

- The forbidden items originated from the most diverse domains ranging from machines and products from the domain of agriculture, telecommunication, light and heavy industry, to sports, crosswords, names of authors, etc.
- In several domains not just the forbidden issues were enlisted, but those that were allowed to appear too. Those that appeared under the “allowed” heading referred to items previously forbidden, or simply because the ministry decided that a specific thing should not be classified as secret like its counterparts. In other words, one oil-dwell was secret, the other was not, certain poultry farms were secret, but the others were not; and there was no further information or explanation provided to censors that would allow them to make sense of these categories.
- The prohibition or allowance with small exceptions did not refer to general categories, but to specific items (e.g. a specific machine fabricated in a specific factory).
- Issues that could appear had the following qualifiers: “only with data that mentioned in the central press”, with or without a photograph, “without editorial comments”, “setting on a modest place on the page and with a moderate title”, “oriented towards and

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<sup>38</sup> D. 14/1949 p. 1–165; D. 16/1951 p. 7–9, 12–68, 71, 74–76, 88–98, 117–118, 140–195; D. 13/1953 p. 1–54, 59, 135–263; D. 14/1953 1–39, 41–144; D. 11/1955 p. 2–11, 13–25; D. 32/1965 1–76; representing circulars.

<sup>39</sup> There was no strict periodicity; sometimes the new circular arrived in two weeks, in other cases after two months. Occasionally, urgent instructions were given through phone calls.

<sup>40</sup> D. 14/1949 p. 1–5; D. 32/1965, representing the records of handing the circulars to a new censor and individual circulars.

having the tenor of the central press”, with the approval of the GDPP Bucharest, of the local Party organs or the military censorship.

- The time period for classifying a piece of information as secret: “...until contrary dispositions or appearance in the central press and official materials of *Agerpres*.”

- Except for the distinction between the forbidden and allowed issues, as a general rule, the lists were not systematized at all. Thus, the items from different domains followed each other more or less randomly. A further exception was “the attachment of the attachment”, for instance, specific lists containing the new names of public places and institutions or the approved theatre plays.<sup>41</sup>

- The most striking feature, according to my view, and which also caused much confusion to the censors, is that many times censorship norms seemed to work not on behalf of, but against propaganda. For instance, whereas propaganda was focused on the “great achievements of the socialist sector in agriculture” or “the miraculous industrial and technical developments”, censors were asked to cut references to an enormous number of new machines employed in these works (even those constructed in Romania), but the same applies to the openings of new factories or mines, and technical products in public usage, like buses, public telephones, etc. A telling example in this sense is that all kinds of references to the organization of workers’ guards were strictly forbidden, an issue that was in sharp contradiction with the actual manifestation of the propaganda, in this case, the guards belonging to different factories were put to march up and down the streets as a part of different public festivities.

The delegates were expected to learn these dispositions by hard, the reason being that top secret documents cannot be taken out from the office when they go for control. Given the size of the material, the lack of any system and instructions that seemed to contradict all common senses, this was hardly possible. Moreover, the censors committed mistakes even with the dispositions in their hands for the same reasons, and due to the items not specifically mentioned under the “forbidden” and “allowed” headings, but which, according to the instructors, “with much more sense of responsibility” could be deduced from other “categories”. The delegates asked repeatedly to systematize or make a complete update of the circulars, but it never happen over the studied period.

Now let us turn to the second attachment of Circulars, which contained instructions related to the everyday work of the censors. The focus was on the technical details of the

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<sup>41</sup> This is because these lists were compiled by different departments from the PPD.

control performed by the delegates, rules that did not really change over time, nevertheless, for some reasons, the ICD felt that it had to be occasionally retraced. For instance, a basic task in controlling printed matter is that everything had to be checked twice: 1) the censor receives the galley-proof and stamps with “0” the parts that have to be cut (state secrets) and marks the words or sentences that have to be changed (political-ideological matters), then applies the “B” stamp (meaning “good for printing”), 2) the first piece coming out of the printer is read again to check whether or not the editors made the required changes, then applies the “BD” stamp (meaning “good for distribution”).

Besides technical issues, through the circulars the ICD occasionally requested special reports about the situation of libraries, second-hand bookshops, markets from the provinces, etc. And finally, there was attached a lists of recommended readings (books and articles of Soviet authors, official Party documents), reminders to the censors to read the central press, and specified topics for individual or group study.

### *Notes*

As it was previously mentioned, the *Notes* were collections of best interventions on texts with “improper” political-ideological content sent to delegates. Unlike state secrets, these issues could not be thoroughly defined, and given the vagueness of the guidelines in this sense, the best method to ensure coherence seemed to provide good examples about “intercepting the offences of the class enemy”. It has to be emphasized that this idea did not belong to the instructors or some higher PPD fora, but it was demanded by delegates, who simply could not apply the existing guidelines and faced harsh criticism for missed interventions. Finally, this technique was introduced in 1958, and became one of the favorite tools of instruction.<sup>42</sup>

The interventions compiled into the *Notes* were chosen from the works of the delegates and censors working in Bucharest, furthermore, besides examples coming from the press, other domains were included too (e.g. book, TV, radio censorship). One piece of example usually contained a short summary of the examined text, quotation of the incriminated sentence, paragraph or verse, the motives for considering it mistaken and its solution, namely, deleting or the changed version. Unfortunately, I have not enough data to estimate the size of this material for the studied period, nevertheless, it seems that in the 1970's, the notes amounted to 600–700 pages a year.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> D. 9/1959 p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> ANDJM, F. 403, D. 17A/1971, 17B/1971, 17C/1971.

Here is an example overtaken from the work of the Literature Directorate:

“Note  
The Door – N. Velea, E.S.P.L.A<sup>44</sup>

The volume comprises seven short stories with topics related to the life of our villages. The thematic of these stories is inappropriate and outdated. They set forth insignificant aspects from the early periods of collectivizing the agriculture as well as from the agrarian reform and the years of drought. There is not a single story mirroring the essential aspects from life in our villages nowadays.

The story “Crocks” handles the conflict and processes between an individually farming peasant and the G.A.C.<sup>45</sup> from the village. This story is even faultier when taking into account that there is another story presenting the conflict of a peasant with a big landowner.

In both of these stories the conflicts start with the cattle’s entering on the fields of the collective farm and the landowner, respectively.

The volume got “Good for print” with observation included in the texts.

The story “Crocks” was eliminated from the volume. ”<sup>46</sup>

### **2.3. Means of control 2: reports and feedbacks, control and instructions on the fields**

Having analyzed the basic tools of coordination, this section aims at describing the other side of the coin, which is the ways censors were controlled in their work. The most evident means in this sense are the regular activity reports required by superiors and controls on the field executed by ICD instructors.

A rather surprising element of control, however, is that delegates received an answer, a feedback to their reports. Shooting a glance at these answers, its twofold purpose is evident: on the one hand, the message is that “you are closely watched”, in other words, it is meant to stimulate the censor for a more thorough work; on the other hand, these feedbacks provide further guidance by pinpointing and correcting mistakes. So, the control and guidance function is intertwined. This phenomenon is present in the instructors’ fieldwork as well, which was aimed at instructing and controlling delegates in their workplace. However, the reports written by the instructors reflect that the focus was primarily on control.

In the following, I briefly present these controlling techniques. Before, however, it worth to be mentioned, that contrarily to the stereotypes regarding the style and language of “the Communist report”, these reports, and especially the feedbacks, are far from contain just stock-phrases, rather there is a big amount of useful information, frequently written in a very personal tenor.

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<sup>44</sup> The publishing house.

<sup>45</sup> Collective farm.

<sup>46</sup> ANIC, F. CPT, D. 4/1958 p. 21.

### ***Reports and feedbacks***

Delegates had to submit two types of regular reports: monthly and trimestrial activity reports.<sup>47</sup> Each had to be prepared after a well specified model by including information that fostered the deepest control possible. The monthly report was a detailed overview of all press-interventions containing the following data: quotation from the paper and the related reference material, arguments for the need of censoring, solution (deletion or modification), the modified text, the name of the censor who intervened, and cuts from the publication with the place of intervention. The interventions were grouped in two categories: “political-ideological” and “interventions according to the dispositions”, the latter being the “state secrets”, or put it better, all kinds of issues mentioned in the Circulars.

I would like to draw attention on two aspects of these reports. First, based on the required data it is clear that they were asked to keep a record of each censor’s work separately, thus, to make possible a thorough control over the performance of each delegate. Second, the motivation attached to interventions meant to filter out ad hoc interpretations, the possibility that censors act “out of instinct”. By asking to explain their interventions, censors were put to reiterate, learn, and apply – one may say – consciously the Party-line on the most diverse issues. And this is a clear attempt of coordinating the censors’ set of minds.

The trimestrial report was more comprehensive, covering all domains of activity, and also much more “analytical”. First, the interventions in the texts were rated as: “good”, “unjustified” and “missed interventions”, following the structure indicated in the case of monthly reports (citation, motivation, name of the censor, etc.). The “good” interventions were that the censors were most proud of or it was indicated as such by their instructors from Bucharest. The other two categories were compiled based on the post-circulation control, thus, the feedbacks coming from the ICD instructors and the local Party organs, but also those noticed by delegates themselves. The report also contained a description of the everyday work of the collective (division of tasks, schedules, meetings, study-groups, etc.) followed by the “self-criticism” section that was focused on the whole collective but also to each censor separately, opinion about the general profile of the periodicals, relationships with the editorials and local Party organs, and finally, the critique of an the proposals to the ICD. Both

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<sup>47</sup> ANIC, F. CPT, D. 13/1953; D. 60/1963 p. 1–6, 9–10, 13–15, 19–20, 24–26, 28–30, 32 – 35, 37 – 40, 42 – 45, 47 – 50, 53 – 57, 59 – 62, 65 – 74, 77 – 97, 100 – 119, 123 – 136, 140 – 154, 157 – 165, 169 – 174, 177 – 179, 182–184, 187 – 190, 193 – 197, 201 – 215, 217 – 231, 235 – 253, 257 – 270, 274 – 283, representing reports sent by delegates to ICD.

types of report were written by the collective's chief (*șef-collectivă*) and signed by the other delegates too.

The delegates to more or less degree accommodated to these requirements, if not, they were immediately warned by the ICD. Each report sent by the delegates was answered in about a month.<sup>48</sup> The instructors read the (mostly hand-written) reports and the published materials (thus, the post-circulation censorship of printed matters represented the control of the delegates too), counted and rated the interventions, and even if they agreed with the actual intervention, they mentioned if the motivation was wrong. The final version of the feedback contained personalized remarks about the delegates' work, and criticism was occasionally very harsh. It is worth to mention, that when noticing the missed interventions, instructors explained what should have been the reason for intervention, and this way they provided further guidelines. Besides evaluating their activity, the letters contained lists of reference materials for individual study, tips for controlling, and other issues mentioned in the circulars.

Finally, let us see some examples from these feedbacks for

... missed interventions regarding state secrets:

"[...] in the article *Intense Production Activity in GAS*<sup>49</sup> *Lechința* written by Halasz Edmund ("Avântul" no. 653/13.VII.1963), it is mentioned, contrarily to the dispositions, the wheat production in GAS for this year: over 2000 kg/hectare. And this happens after just two days You got the phone notice regarding this issue!

In the material *Technical Propaganda Closely Linked to Production* (no. 656/3.VII.1963.) appear references to the trucks "Carpați" and the buses T.V. 2R. (The appearance of this last reference is hardly explicable, especially when taking into account that at the end of the last year You have been harshly criticized and sanctioned for infringing, among others, the dispositions that forbid the propagation of this bus.) Further references to the truck "Carpați" can be found in the material *Beloved by the Collective* (nr. 661/7.IX.1963).

"[...] These mistakes are due to – least of all – the gross superficiality in lecturing the materials got for visa. We say "least of all", because the situation You created lets us to believe that You don't read at all the newspapers and the materials that have to be controlled."<sup>50</sup>

... missed interventions regarding "inadequate political views":

"[...] In the material *We Like the Russian Language* (radio emission on 21.II. 1963), it is said that school-children learn "the language of the Soviet people, who helped us to liberate ourselves from capitalists and to build up our lives." The same is repeated in two letters sent by students. You should realize that those underlined are mistaken. The Soviet Union supported us to liberate our country under the fascist yoke; however, the liberation from

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<sup>48</sup> D. 16/1951 p. p. 69–70, 72–73, 77–81, 82–87, 99–116, 119–144, 148–166, 168–178, 180–181, 186–195; D. 60/1963 p. 7–8, 11–12, 16–17, 21–22, 27, 31, 36, 41, 46, 51–52, 58, 63–64, 75–76, 98–99, 120–122, 137–139, 155–156, 166–168, 175–176, 180–181, 185–186, 191–192, 198–199, 215–216, 232–234, 254–256, 271–273, 284–287, representing the feedbacks issued by ICD to the reports of the delegates.

<sup>49</sup> GAS (Gospodăria Agricolă de Stat) – collective farm.

<sup>50</sup> D. 60/1963 p. 191–192.

exploitation is an internal problem, brought to fruition by working people under the guidance of the Party.”<sup>51</sup>

### ***Control and instruction on the fields***

With more or less regularity, the delegates were visited by ICD instructors (according to the original plans, once in every two months; but this did not coincide with the actual practice, the visits were much irregular).<sup>52</sup> One visit lasted from 1 to 5 days. The aim was twofold: explaining and discussing the instructions and to control their activity. So, on the one hand, the task was to make exercises on printed matters, controlling in parallel the local periodicals, to test the censors’ knowledge concerning dispositions (Circulars), to discuss about actual political matters and verify whether the delegates are reading the central press and the other recommended materials. On the other hand, the instructors inspected the typographies, paper recyclers, museums, etc. to see whether the received reports matched the real situation. Furthermore, the instructors discussed with the editors and collected information about the delegates from the local Party organs.

When returning to Bucharest, the instructors wrote a detailed report, that contained information ranging from observations concerning the delegates’ work (up to “falls asleep during the proofreading”)<sup>53</sup> to comments regarding personal life and attitudes (“serious deflections from the proletarian ethics”/adultery/, “conceited”, “man of poise”, etc.). Later all important observations were discussed on ICD meetings.<sup>54</sup>

These fieldworks represented also the occasions when the ICD sought to solve the problems of recruitment, and tried to tackle the tensed relationship between the delegates, the local Party organs and the editorials, respectively. The major problems identified by the delegates and instructors oscillated around the “lack of authority” of the censors, which were mirrored, on the one hand, in the fact that editors almost constantly fight them and/or did not implement the imposed or suggested changes, and, on the other hand, the Party activists had generally a disdainful attitude towards them, did not invite censors to their meetings or tried to force their hand against the GDPP’s dispositions. At the beginning, the ICD even scored the localities “where delegates have authority”, and that was, 7 cities in 1952.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> D. 60/1963 p. 175–176.

<sup>52</sup> D. 12/1955 p. 39–47, 53–61, 77–82, 98–111; D. 36/1959 p. 1–149, 150–174, 178–272, 265–266, 276–349; D. 31/1965, representing plans of control on the field and reports concerning these controls.

<sup>53</sup> When controlling for the second time the newspaper, due to the typographical process, it was usually late in the night.

<sup>54</sup> D.12/1955 p. 39–47.

<sup>55</sup> See D. 23/1952 p. 37.

#### 2.4. Combining guidance and control: the symposia

Unlike the previously presented personalized techniques employed to coordinate and control the censors work, the symposia were instances that implied a form guidance and control applied for and in the presence of all delegates. One may briefly characterize the symposia as follows: first, it provided “theoretical” and practical instructions to the delegates and represented an opportunity for a larger-scale change of information in order to assure coherent application of the censorship norms. Second, the symposium was an occasion for making a show of power and knowledge of the PPD leaders in front of delegates, which was aimed at stimulating censors for harder work by the means of honorable mentions and – even more importantly in my understanding–, by public embarrassment.

Starting from 1952, almost on a yearly basis the ICD organized a three days long Symposium of „guiding and educative character”<sup>56</sup> for the GDPP delegates.<sup>57</sup> The attendance was mandatory, and the presentations and discussions were generally organized in plenary sessions, but sometimes in seminar groups too. A symposium usually contained the following blocks: lectures, activity reports of certain collectives, activity report of ICD, discussions, and finally, announcements of notices coming from the military censorship or the accounting and administrative offices of the PPD. I present here some aspects of the lectures, the ICD reports and the discussions.

Let us start with the *lectures*. They were held by a member of the board of directors, leaders of different PPD directorates or a “guest lecturer” from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to their topic, the lectures either presented the international situation and Romania’s stance on different issues, or they were focused on the “imperialist attacks on the ideological front”. These issues were, of course, interlinked and both types of lectures were meant to “strengthen the revolutionary vigilance” of the delegates. Lectures from the first category provided ready made explanation for the main international political events, filtered, of course, through the Manichaeian “evil imperialist” – “good Communist” prism, in other words, they were pure and concentrated propaganda-texts.<sup>58</sup> The main message was that “this

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<sup>56</sup> D. 12/1955 p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> D. 10/1953 p. 37–49; D. 9/1955 p. 1–96; D. 10/1955 p. 1–151; D. 13/1956 p. 1–71; D. 13/1957 p. 1–57, D. 14/1958 p. 1–131; D. 9/1959 p. 1–83; D. 21/1960 p.1–152; D. 18/1962 p. 1–172, representing the minutes of symposia and other types of documents (plans, programs, attendance sheets, etc.).

<sup>58</sup> For instance, see the explanation given for the usage of atomic energy within the context of international disarmament. The atomic energy: handled by USA = bad, aimed at destroying the mankind; handled by SU = good, promotes world-peace and it is aimed at technological development for the “prosperity and happiness of the people”. Romania and “all sister-countries loving peace” fully support the activities of the SU. See D. 10/1950 p. 43–47.

is the reality” and the “truth”, consequently, all contradicting interpretations have to be erased.

The lectures that handle “the fight on ideological front”, aimed to explain through “theoretical” argumentation and many examples what kind of ideas have to be filtered out from printed matters. For this, censors were introduced on the “battleground” of the Communism and socialist-realism against the huge crowd of “maleficent -isms”: “imperialism”, “nationalism”, “chauvinism”, “isolationism”, “cosmopolitanism”, “revisionism” (in the Communist parlance meaning the revision of some Marxist dogmas), “dogmatism”, “hermeticism”, “symbolism”, “estheticism”, “formalism”, “naturalism”, “intimism”, “pessimism”, “objectivism”, “negativism”, “apoliticism”, “obscurantism”, “mysticism”, etc. The focus was on analyzing literary works; nevertheless, these terms were expected to be applied to a much wider sphere. It has to be emphasized that these labels (most of them borrowed from the “social-realist theory of esthetics”), were just vaguely defined and in many cases their interpretation completely overlapped.<sup>59</sup>

Let us see an example for explaining “objectivism”:

“[...] objectivism, [means] presenting certain things from the Capitalist lager that does not use for our propaganda. A work of this sort, which cannot be detected from its title, *The Mechanization and Ensilage of Forages*, actually contained a sever mistake. The work sinned [sic!] with the fact that presented in parallel the American technique with the techniques from the Soviet Union and our country. When presenting the machines used for ensilage in the Soviet Union, it made references to older machines that are not in usage anymore. Those who are not familiar with agricultural problems cannot realize that this was actually the propaganda of Western technology.”<sup>60</sup>

...and one that appears under the heading of “[p]olitical-ideological mistakes resulted from hermeticism, intimism, symbolism, pessimism”:

“In the newspaper *Steaua* no. 2 from 1958 the poems signed by A. E. Baconsky should have not appeared. The poems emanate a desolated, depressing atmosphere: the writer is sad; he does not understand what is going on around him. In the majority of the poems the “snow” symbolizes uniformity, the monotony of the poet’s life.”<sup>61</sup>

The examples were taken either from the work of the delegates or from the work of other PPD departments and the names of the censors involved or the locality were always

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<sup>59</sup> It might be due for my untrained ears, but some of these labels are quite undistinguishable, like “estheticism”, “symbolism” and “hermeticism”. Nevertheless, based on the comments made by delegates, I have serious doubts that they could clearly differentiate the “-ism”s in general.

Sometimes even the lecturers became confused, see in this sense the following example: “Concerning the question of Comrade Z. [my abbreviation], namely, what makes a material hermetical, I have to tell that if we don’t understand it we may not give B.I. [good for print]”. D 13/1957 p. 47.

<sup>60</sup> D. 14/1958 p. 17–18.

<sup>61</sup> Selected verses from a poem were read out. D 14/1958 p. 127.

specified. All in one, the technique employed for guiding censors' work is the very same as in the case of Notes: due to the fact that the domain of political-ideological mistakes cannot be strictly defined, not even when trying to subsume them under "scientifically definable tendencies", superiors selected and presented a huge number of examples hoping that censors will learn from them and apply in similar cases. The difference, however, is that on symposia the missed interventions were mentioned too accompanied by ironical remarks.

Finally, let me present one of the most disturbing issue faced by censors, which at the same time represented a huge challenge for instructors in explaining to them. This is rooted in the core Communist principle propagated for every domain of life, namely, "criticism and self-criticism are the motors of improvement and development". But, how to distinguish between "helpful criticism" and "criticism made from a bourgeois stance"; which articles tackling the shortcomings of the "socialist reality" are welcomed and which have to be classified as "negativist", "objectivist", and so forth? Or as a delegated asked it directly, "[...] actually what are the limits in criticizing collective farms?"<sup>62</sup>

Answers to these questions were less than satisfactory for applying it in practice. According to the instructors, "healthy criticism" had to be: "constructive", "principal", "mobilizing" and related to an "isolated case that allows for no generalizing thoughts" For instance, it has to be understood that there is just one corrupt party activist and, of course, not a single superior knew of his/her foul plays; there are just discrete cases of drunken workers playing cards in the factory, there are just isolated cases when peasants did not want to join collective farms, due to the fact that, quite incidentally and inexplicably, their individual farming was more prosperous than the collective farm. Furthermore, criticism had to "mirror justly reality", "should have not exaggerated", and finally, it had to appear at "opportune times". Thus, certain problems were just invented by authors, like increasing rates of divorce and alcoholism; other problems were amplified up to having "alarming character", for instance, shortage of certain vaccines, diseases related to malnutrition, or splinters of robber and glass in the bread.

Given the vagueness of these instructions, it is no wonder, that censors could not calibrate in the expected manner every article. Moreover, some feedbacks coming from instructors were rather confusing, just see the following example:

"[...] Comrade T. Gh. committed another unjustified intervention in the article *Attention, it is Falling*. The fact that a worker spent some days on the horns of a dilemma, he had a fight with his family and he left his brigade, which – according to the author – happened to other people too, should not have make You to intervene. The simple assertion that "it

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<sup>62</sup> Dosar 13/1956 p. 48.

happened to others too” does not guides us to the conclusion that this characterizes the life of foresters in general.”<sup>63</sup>

Let us turn now to the second block of symposia, the *activity reports of the ICD*. The main points of the previously held lectures were recapitulated; however, this time attached to a thorough analysis of the delegates’ interventions in general for the last couple of month, then examining the collectives one by one. The praiseworthy interventions were mentioned, nevertheless, the attention was focused on the weaknesses, unjustified and missed interventions being classified as “due to the low political, ideological and cultural level of the censor”, “lack of vigilance”, “negligence”, and “insufficient knowledge of the instructions”. Much emphasis was put on unjustified interventions, which were considered “[...] the most sinful forms of the lack of responsibility”.<sup>64</sup> The problem with these mistakes, according to the instructors, is that they either “harm the propaganda by hindering the popularization of some great achievements” or “lead to the distortion of the Party-line by letting the impression that our demands actually coincide the Party’s stance”.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, “[u]justified interventions lead to the deterioration of the collaboration with editorial offices, and undermine the prestige of the institution [GDPP].”<sup>66</sup>

Besides identifying the mistakes and their immediate causes, the instructors sketched other general “unhealthy tendencies” too. For instance, they remarked that the amount of unjustified interventions shows the tendency that censors “due to fear of sanctions or taking responsibility for their decisions”, decide to cut off every “suspicious” data, specifically figures. Other problematic tendency identified by ICD instructors is that delegates relied too much on the ICD’s help, specifically, there were too many phone calls asking for help in solving individual cases; furthermore, censors let themselves convinced by editors or even intervened on the behalf of the editors; delegates did not double-check official materials overtaken from the central press or sent by the news agency, and so forth.

At the end of the day, a “black sheep” could hear his/her name several times, during the lecture, the activity report of his/her collective, the ICD’s activity report, both in general comments and the analysis of the collective’s work he/she belonged. The ironical comments addressed personally to the culpable delegates in front of other 80–100 persons abounded, starting with something like “Comrade, do you consider that this kind of mistake can be explained?”, “I wonder how do You define revolutionary vigilance, Comrade!”, “What is the

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<sup>63</sup> D. 16/1951 p. 188–189.

<sup>64</sup> D. 9/1959 p. 93.

<sup>65</sup> D. 9/1959 p. 82.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

political knowledge of a lector committing this mistake?” up to detailed examination of how the censor became an accomplice of the class enemy.<sup>67</sup>

The third element I want to discuss regarding symposia is the block of *questions and answers*. I will keep it short, because it is not strictly related to the guidance and control issue tackled by this paper; nevertheless, it provides interesting information concerning the functioning, everyday problems, and development of censorship. First of all, delegates tried to give an explanation to their mistakes and asked how to handle specific issues not mentioned in the Circulars. Second, they were talking about their problems, primarily about the relationships with the editors. So, the “authority” problem comes into the forefront again. They specified that besides the fact that editors were not willing at all to conform to the requirements, and there were disputes on interventions, the situation got even more tensed because certain materials sent to Bucharest for extra control were answered too late, or because of the fact that certain information erased according to the dispositions appeared next day in the central press. “As a consequence”, one delegate said, “our authority in the eyes of the editors is constantly declining”.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, “[...] although the entrance problem to theatres and cinemas was solved, we are still looked at like some intruders.” As a solution many delegates proposed to intervene from the center and “impose authority”.<sup>69</sup>

The third important element of these discussions is the exchange of information and the proposals made to ICD. Although the repeated request to systematize the Circulars was never met, the Notes are definitely the result of the delegates’ pressure in this sense. Furthermore, the most active delegates constantly pinpointed domains where censorship did not work at all or did not work properly. For instance, amateur theatre groups playing on the stages of Culture Homes, lottery-tickets sold on the markets by particulars (printed matter!); the fact that delegates had no executive power regarding the books sold on flea-markets, etc. Attention was drawn also to the “unhealthy manifestation of certain authors”, that is, being refused to be published in one locality they tried their luck with another one, until they got published. All these feedbacks were important elements of the gradual expansion and development of censorship, because in most of the cases the ICD took steps to eliminate these shortcomings. For instance, from the end of the 1950’s, collectives working with literary papers exchanged their lists of refused writings.

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<sup>67</sup> See these examples D. 10/1955 p. 108, 9/1959 p. 69–74.

<sup>68</sup> D. 14/1955, p. 55.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

## 2.5. Rewards and Sanctions

Compliance with the norms of censorship was enforced with positive and negative inducements, thus, premia and sanctions applied to the operative staff of the censorship machine.<sup>70</sup> The recommendations for reward or punishment were based on the reports of the controlling fora (the ICD and the “collective’s chief” in the case of the delegates). It is important to emphasize that to make use of these measures was not optional but a mandatory task of the leaders and controllers of different departments.<sup>71</sup> Without much exaggeration, one may safely state that a certain proportion of the personnel must have been awarded or punished time to time.

The common denominator of these forms of inducements was that they implied both symbolic and material measures. The symbolic ones had no direct financial implications, the rewards being represented by mentioning someone’s name on the lists of “laureates” or “being evidenced” in bigger-scale reports (for instance, the ICD reports presented on symposia or the annual activity report of the PPD), whereas the sanctions implied “written admonishments” or in the worse case “written admonishments with warning”.

Nevertheless, on the longer term, appearing frequently among the laureates or on the blacklist might have had material consequences too. This is the case when censors were up- or downgraded on the status-hierarchy, which implied increase or decrease in salary.<sup>72</sup> It has to be mentioned, that this measure was not based solely on the accumulation of credits, but sometimes only one “exceptionally good intervention” or “extremely big mistake” sufficed for being displaced. Moreover, “in order to mobilize” or “for stimulating the collective”, whole local staffs were upgraded out of the blue.

Another version of material reward is the “exceptional premium” (bonus) accorded for those who excelled with something in their work. Depending on the merits, the size of the premia could amount to half of the monthly salary. Just like in the case of upgrading, however, censors without any special merit received bonuses with the same reason explicitly stated in the notice: stimulation and mobilization. Moreover, the difference between the value of bonuses as rewards and bonuses for stimulation is almost negligible, about 15 percents.

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<sup>70</sup> D. 14/1951 p. 41–42, 70–79; D. 9/1952 p. 23–24, 28–31, D. 10/1953 p. 22, 51, 85; D. 11/1955 p. 1, 12; D. 32/1961 p. 10, 11, 12, 30, 31, 32, 42, 50–68, 74, 99–102, 107–111, 113 – 114, 116, 127, 132–146, 151, 155, 160, 166–167, 171–175, 182–186, 189, 191–195, 204–206; D. 12/1962 p. 4, 11–12, 21–22, 30, 39, 62, 145, 185, 194, 215 – 217, 236, 237, 249–250, 253, 263–264, which represent documents containing the proposals and approvals of premia and sanctions, individual cases and tables of up- and downgrading, and notices sent to the concerned censors.

<sup>71</sup> D. 14/1958 p. 16, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Unlike upgrading, downgrading was applied to a limited time period, namely, 1 to 3 months.

Unfortunately, at this point of time I have not enough data collected about the actual application of rewards and sanctions for a comprehensive analysis. However, based on the studied materials, I can safely state that, on the one hand, this rewards/sanctions system was applied from the earliest years of the PPD. On the other hand, there can be observed an increase in relying on these measures as a means of control over the censors' activity, in the sense that more and more people were affected.

However, data from 1961 allow us to make a more complete view about these measures. From different types of documents one can deduce that, in 1961, at least 40 percent of the delegates (33 persons) were upgraded and there were 49 cases of rewards. Besides, 4 censors were downgraded and there were 20 cases of sanctions of written admonishment.<sup>73</sup>

Now let us see what types of interventions were qualified as “exceptionally good”, worthy for an exceptional reward. First, the content of all rewarded interventions is related to expressly political matters, thus, news concerning internal and external affairs (especially the Soviet Union), the activity of or references to Party officials, etc. Second, the interventions on materials that were already checked, consequently, the censors were tempted to handle them in a more flimsy way, for instance, texts at the “good for distribution” phase, reprints, materials got from the news agency or overtaken from the central press, etc. Third, instead of rewording interventions that implied some kind of more “sophisticated” analysis, all these censored materials are about missing letters that change the meaning of the word, the absence or the existence of the prefix “anti-” that obviously changes the meaning of the word, but bears with special importance when considering the strictly polarized worldview of the Communist propaganda (anti- capitalism, Hitlerism, cosmopolitanism, etc.) and “improper” succession of titles or paragraphs.

See the following typical examples:

...in a subtitle: “The Soviet People Follows with a Special Interest the Workings of the Hysterical Congress.” [Instead of “...Historical Congress.”]<sup>74</sup>

...one piece of international news provided by Agerpress: “[...] The Government of the Soviet Union invited the former allies from the Hitlerist war for talks about the urgent signing of the peace treaty with the existing two German states.” [Instead of “...anti-Hitlerist war...”]<sup>75</sup>

...improper succession of titles or paragraphs: “Yuri Gagarin Arrived to Finland” and “One More Failure”; “The Soviet–Yugoslav Joint Communication” and “An Agreement that Yokes Greece”; in the article entitled *On the Collective Farm from Jimbolia the Swine-*

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<sup>73</sup> Based on the available data, it is possible but rather difficult to appreciate the rate of the delegates affected by these measures, because some delegates were several times rewarded or sanctioned in a year.

<sup>74</sup> In the Romanian language, the difference between the two words is a single character. D. 32/1961 p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> D. 32/1961 p. 42, 50, 74.

*rearing is in Continuous Development* one paragraph ends with data concerning the declining mortality rate of the squealers, followed by a paragraph that starts with “Comrade Gheorghie Gheorghiu Dej [at that time the president of the state] – in his speech...”<sup>76</sup>

Turning to the sanctions, one might remark the followings. First, censors were sanctioned, on the one hand, for “indiscipline”, which includes repeatedly missing the deadlines for sending the reports, failing to make some of the controls, but also for being late regularly from the office. On the other hand, as it is expected, they were punished for missed interventions, both of political-ideological nature and the state secrets. However, censors were never sanctioned for unnecessary interventions, a fact that is rather surprising when taking into account the emphasis put on these kinds of mistakes in controlling their work.

Second, concerning the content of missed interventions it can be stated the same as in the case of rewarded interventions. To remind, they are directly related to political events and Party headers, and appear in the form of missed letters, the usage of the prefix “anti-”, and “suspicious” succession of different ideas. Again, there is nothing related to more provoking aspects of censoring.

Third, regarding the harshness of the punishment, it can be observed that there were two aggravating conditions. First, the fault implied material loss (e.g. it was already multiplied) or it concerned printed matter that was already put into circulation and had to be withdrawn, and second, the fault was noticed not by the PPD, but somebody from the Party organs. The latter cases always ended with downgrading, preceded by special examinations, extra visit of the instructors, some sort of written “plea agreement” of the culpable censor, and so forth.

The following story incorporates different aspects of the sanctioning measures discussed in this section. The Agitprop Section of the regional RWP from Târgu Mureș noticed that on the poster advertising the Czechoslovak movie *The Lie* and distributed in villages, under the title it was a quotation from the report of Gh. Gheorghiu Dej presented on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the RWP related to certain tasks in the domain of agriculture. The mistake was considered “very grave”, and after the examination, the censor was punished with downgrading for one month.<sup>77</sup>

As a final aspect of employing this system of negative and positive inducements, one may remark, that many times cases of rewarding and sanctioning were interconnected. This is the situation when an “exceptionally good” intervention embodies a correction of the mistake made by a colleague, for instance, stopping a material at the distribution phase, which was

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<sup>76</sup> D. 32/1961 p. 107–108.

<sup>77</sup> D. 32/1961 p. 111, 113–114.

read and approved for printing by someone else. But there were larger scale purges too. For example, in a piece of news transmitted by *Agerpres* three delegates from different cities noticed a “grave political mistake” and for this intervention each was reworded,<sup>78</sup> and concomitantly other fourteen people were sanctioned for not noticing the same problem.<sup>79</sup>

Now let us sum the main features of the rewards/sanctions system and try to estimate its stimulating effects. First, based on the available data it is clear that it was a regular means of control employed from the earliest times and the amount of affected censors increased. Consequently, it seems that reliance on this means of control grew over time.

Second, one may assess the asymmetry on the behalf of positive inducements, thus motivating censors with extra incomes. One possible problem, however, is that there is not much difference regarding the value of bonuses given to “deserving” censors and the “lazy” ones who had to be “mobilized” somehow. Due to this “error in the system”, positive inducements in the form of bonuses might have been a less important and effective tool in the hands of supervisors. Nevertheless, it is possible that upgrading, meaning a lasting higher income, indeed had a motivating force.

Third, on the one hand, there are no cases of rewards or sanctions concerning more challenging interventions, and on the other hand, there are no sanctions at all for unjustified interventions. This latter aspect is fairly surprising taken into account the importance attached to filter out texts with ambivalent interpretation possibilities and other tricky forms of the “manifestations of the class enemy” or minuscule slippages on the margins of the Party-line, and the endless lectures about the problem of unjustified interventions. Although paying attention to successions of titles and paragraphs implies some form of hunting “interpretable elements”, one may safely consider this a routine task of censors.

To conclude, certain features of the rewards/sanctions system indicate contradictory motivating power. But in general, I consider that compliance with censorship norms, in other words, the requirements imposed to the censors, were relatively weakly supported by different forms of positive and negative inducements. My hunch is that instead of rewarding and punishing on the bases of “professional performance”, bonuses for “exceptional interventions” and sanctions for missed interventions were based on the avoided problems or scandals with the Party.

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<sup>78</sup> See this case mentioned among the reworded interventions (Hitlerist instead of anti-Hitlerist).

<sup>79</sup> D. 32/1961 p. 42, 50, 52–68, 74.

## **Summary and conclusions**

The puzzle that motivated me to take a look inside the witch's brew of censorship is that in spite of the fact that censorship policies cannot be comprehensively "operationalized", in other words, it is almost impossible to translate them into well defined and sufficiently narrow rules that can be readily applied to different kinds of writings and other domains targeted by censorship, the related institutions of totalitarian regimes seemed to function quite effectively. The diverse archive materials concerning the first phase of Communist censorship from Romania (1949–1965) revealed a sophisticated system of coordination and control mechanism within the censorship machine, techniques that were meant to overcome this inherent "weakness" of the censorship policy.

The first part of the paper provided an overview of the censorship system presented from the "outsider's perspective", whereas the second part brought forward in a fine grained resolution the internal mechanisms. The description of the general setup of the institution charged with "defending state secrets", and controlling "the political content of every printed matter and other materials with propaganda and agitation character" (GDPP) revealed that its sphere of control was extensive and extremely diversified, and according to these tasks, the GDPP worked with specialized units. The data show that within the first five years the institution was completely build up and the 300 hundred people constituting the GDPP's operative staff (out of them about 80 employees in the provinces) were working on full blast. The overview of the basic guidelines provided to censors brings out that these instructions were indeed very vaguely formulated, for instance, it had to be deleted from printed matters "the manifestations of the class enemy directed against the regime".

The second part examined those attempts that, on the one hand, were directed to "operationalize" these under-defined guidelines and this way to coordinate the thinking and work of censors, and on the other hand, the control of the censors' activity. It seems that the need for these mechanisms was foreseen by the designers of the institution, because almost all techniques were introduced in the earliest days of the GDPP.

Not surprisingly, the general framework of control mechanisms is realized through the strictly hierarchical organization. The other smaller-scale techniques, however, render quite novel and interesting insights on coordination and control within the system. I reckoned among "coordination techniques", all attempts that were meant to specify and clarify censorship norms, put it differently, explaining censors what to cut out. The means employed in this sense were the Circulars and Notes, the lectures held on symposia, and some parts of the feedbacks given to the delegates' report. Instructing censors to handle issues considered

“state secrets” was not a big challenge; these were simply enlisted and sent to censors. In the domain of “political and ideological mistakes”, however, it was much harder to ensure coherence. The main technique in this field was to provide as much examples of “good interventions” as it is possible and urge censors to imitate them, to apply the explained criteria in similar cases.

The means of control were diverse too, starting from recruitment I included here the reports submitted by censors and the feedbacks given to them, control and instruction on the field, symposia, and finally, the rewards and sanctions system. The analysis pinpointed the following interesting features of control-techniques: first, each delegate’s work was closely monitored; second, each missed and, more interestingly, unjustified intervention was immediately and harshly criticized; third, the mindset of the delegates was controlled too, since every intervention had to be explained; fourth, occasionally the means of public embarrassment was employed as well. The final point of analysis consisted of examining the positive and negative inducements applied to censors in order to conform to censorship norms. Based on the available data, however, it was assessed that the ways rewards and sanctions were applied just weakly motivate adaptation to main requirements of the censors’ work. Most importantly, it seems that the more challenging tasks of the censors, for instance filtering out hidden political-ideological mistakes were neither rewarded nor sanctioned, furthermore, there were no sanctions at all for unjustified interventions.

All in one, I consider that these coordination and control techniques employed within the GDPP partially explain the effectiveness of the Romanian Communist censorship. Only partially, because, as it was mentioned in the first chapter, next to the specialized institution there were other filters in function too, first of all the Agitprop Section, then one has to take into account the editorial offices, and last but not least, self-censorship. Based on hundreds of interventions reviewed for this paper, I can tell that censorship on these levels had to be quite powerful, because I saw no “extraordinary” cases on the desk of censors, and the examples used for this paper are also telling in this sense.

In the course of answering the main questions put forward for this paper, the analysis revealed several “side-problems” in the functioning of GDPP, for example, the big sized fluctuation among the GDPP personnel, the rather tensed relationship between GDPP and the Party, the disastrously edited Circulars, the fact that actually censors could never conform completely to the requirements, and others. Examining the roots and impacts of some of these phenomena might be important for a thorough understanding of the functioning of censorship system. However, my primary goal remains to analyze the strategies employed by censors in

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this environment, the framework of their everyday work described in this paper. How did they cope with the uncertainty in pinpointing “political-ideological mistakes”? How much did the examples help? Did the rewords and sanctions have any stimulating effect on their work? These and many other questions are going to be answered by further archive research, and most importantly, interviews with censors themselves.

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