



ORIGINAL PAPER

The Romanian Press During the Transition from the Communist to the Post-Communist Period. Case Study: Art, Culture and Economy

Păușan-Barna Leonard-Denis¹⁾

Abstract

The transition from communism to post-communism in Romania constituted a profound transformation that extended beyond political change, affecting institutional structures, economic systems, and cultural practices. Within this context, the press emerges as a key medium for analyzing recent history, given its dual role in both reflecting and shaping social realities. Under the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian media operated under strict state supervision, functioning as an instrument of ideological control. Censorship and propaganda mechanisms ensured the dissemination of a uniform and carefully constructed image of society. Economic discourse highlighted planned achievements, cultural production adhered to socialist principles, and artistic expression was subordinated to political objectives. This resulted in a highly standardized and controlled media language. The events of 1989 marked a decisive turning point, initiating a rapid restructuring of the media landscape. The collapse of the communist regime opened the way for freedom of expression, ideological plurality, and the emergence of market-driven journalism. However, this transition also brought challenges related to adapting to democratic norms and competitive pressures. As a consequence, media representations of economy, culture, and art became increasingly diverse and at times, fragmented. A comparative perspective reveals both significant transformations and elements of continuity between the two periods. While the communist press fulfilled a prescriptive and mobilizing function, post-communist media gradually evolved into a platform for debate, critique, and the redefinition of collective identity. By focusing on the fields of economy, culture and art, this study highlights the discursive shifts that accompanied Romania's broader societal transformation.

Keywords: *Romanian; Journalism; Communism; Social; Language.*

¹⁾ PhD, West University of Timișoara, Doctoral School of Humanities, History specialization, Phone: 0770547413, E-mail: leonardpausan@yahoo.com

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The transition from the communist to the post-communist regime in Romania represented not only a change in political system but also a structural transformation that affected all levels of society, from institutional organization and economic mechanisms to mentalities, cultural practices and forms of public expression. In this context, the press occupies a privileged position in the analysis of recent history, as it both reflects the realities of a given era and actively contributes to their construction and shaping. During the regime led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian press functioned as an integral part of the state's ideological apparatus, being subject to extensive control exercised through mechanisms of censorship and official propaganda. Publications of the time promoted a standardized image of society, in which the economy was presented through the lens of planned achievements, culture was subordinated to socialist values, and art became an instrument for legitimizing political power. Media discourse was characterized by uniformity, formalized language and the enforced promotion of dominant themes imposed by the party. The year 1989 generated a major rupture in the structure of the media system. With the collapse of the communist regime, the press entered a rapid process of redefinition, facing multiple challenges: freedom of expression, ideological pluralism, the transformations of the market economy, and the emergence of new competitive mechanisms. This transitional period was marked both by the enthusiasm of newly gained freedom and by the difficulties of adapting to a democratic and capitalist framework. Consequently, discourse on economy, culture, and art diversified, became fragmented, and began to reflect multiple, often contradictory perspectives. A comparative analysis of the press in the two periods makes it possible to capture the mechanisms through which transformations in language and thematic focus occurred. While during the communist period the press had a predominantly normative and mobilizing role, in the post-communist stage it began to function as a space for debate, critique, and the redefinition of collective identity. At the same time, certain continuities can be identified, either at the level of journalistic practices or in the persistence of inherited interpretative frameworks.

This study proposes an approach centered on a case study focusing on art, culture, and the economy, fields that allow for a deeper understanding of the ideological dynamics of the analyzed period. By investigating how these themes were addressed in both communist and post-communist press up to the 2000s, the research aims to highlight both the discursive rupture produced by the change of regime and the gradual adaptations that shaped the new Romanian media landscape.

I) The Representation of the Economy in the Press During the Transition from Communism to Post-Communism

During the communist regime, the Romanian press represented one of the main instruments through which the state exercised control over society and the flow of information. Mass media did not function as a space for public debate or pluralism of opinions; rather, it was integrated into the ideological mechanism of the party, having the role of transmitting and legitimizing political directives. Under the regime led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, the press became an essential tool for consolidating the image of the regime and for promoting the official discourse regarding the development of socialist society. References to the press prior to 1989 generally concern publications with large circulation and national distribution, such as „Scînteia” or „România Liberă”, alongside national radio and television stations. These mass media outlets are, justifiably, analyzed in the scholarly literature as fundamental instruments of communist propaganda, integrated into

a media system strictly controlled by political authorities. With regard to the economy, the communist press emphasized the successes of centralized planning, presenting production indicators, the development of large industrial platforms, and the increase in living standards as direct results of state-promoted policies. This type of discourse aimed to reinforce the image of an economy in continuous development, even though the everyday realities experienced by the population often reflected significant difficulties, especially in the final decades of the regime. In the cultural and artistic sphere, the press promoted a model of creation aligned with the principles of socialist realism, in which artists and intellectuals were portrayed as active participants in the construction of socialist society. Cultural events, literary works, and artistic productions were interpreted through the lens of collective values and the educational role that culture was expected to fulfill within society (Bocancea, 2014:19).

Romania's economy during the communist period underwent successive transformations, yet these changes essentially followed a logic of doctrinal continuity. Stalinist-inspired economic policy, based on the primacy of accelerated industrialization, with an emphasis on the development of heavy industry and the consolidation of centralized planning, was reaffirmed in the party's programmatic documents, from the April 1964 Declaration to the last Congress of the Romanian Communist Party in April 1989, and this orientation was further consolidated and intensified during the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu. At the IXth. Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, held in July 1965, a moment officially remembered in historiography as the beginning of the so-called "Golden Age," the new general secretary emphasized, in his report, the central role of socialist industrialization: „Guided by Marxist-Leninist teachings and taking into account the realities of our country, the party has placed at the center of its policy the socialist industrialization of the country—the foundation of the progress of the entire economy, the multifaceted development of socialist society, and a decisive factor in ensuring national independence and sovereignty”. The official discourse also stressed the need to perfect the economic structure through the prioritized development of sectors such as machinery manufacturing, metallurgy, the chemical industry, and electricity production, as these sectors were intended to account for approximately 75% of total industrial output, reflecting a clear choice for a strongly industrialized economy oriented toward large production platforms and the consolidation of the state's economic autonomy (Rotman, 2020:371).

The communist press emphasized the idea of economic progress, constructing an official narrative focused on development, modernization and industrial success. Numerous articles published in periodicals of the time aimed to reinforce the image of a continuously expanding economy, while minimizing or ignoring the real difficulties faced by the population. Food shortages, energy restrictions and the decline in living standards, particularly during the 1980s, were either omitted or reinterpreted in a mobilizing key, as expressions of necessary sacrifices for consolidating economic independence. An example in this sense is the statement: „During the years of people's power, by firmly promoting the line of socialist industrialization, the Romanian Workers' Party directed the country's development toward combining the process of overall economic growth with the diversification of production, in order to continuously expand the energy, metal, and, in general, raw materials base, and to create a strong processing industry...”. This fragment reflects the standardized language of the official discourse, characterized by laudatory formulas, generalizations, and the absence of any reference to the social costs of this economic policy. In reality, accelerated industrialization and the disproportionate focus

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on heavy industry generated significant structural imbalances. Massive investments in priority sectors were often made at the expense of consumer goods and infrastructure intended to meet the population's daily needs. Thus, the image of a diversified economy undergoing harmonious development contrasts sharply with the economic reality of the last decade of communism, marked by shortages, rationing, and declining living standards. Therefore, the analysis of these articles highlights not only their informational content but especially their ideological function: to legitimize the regime's economic policies and to construct a favorable public perception, despite everyday evidence to the contrary (Expoziția realizărilor economiei naționale a R.P. Romîne, 1964:4).

A counterexample to the legitimizing discourse of the communist press can be identified in an issue of the periodical „Cotidianul” from 1994. In an article dedicated to the reevaluation of economic policies from the period prior to 1989, it is emphasized that the communist regime constantly cultivated the perception of a high-performing economy, comparable to or even surpassing Western economies. Such a discursive strategy is interpreted as part of the propagandistic mechanism through which the authorities sought to consolidate public confidence in the socialist economic model, despite evidence indicating stagnation and structural imbalances. The same article offers an explicit critique of the economic interventionism characteristic of totalitarian regimes, stating that „all dictatorial regimes, in all historical periods, sought to destroy the market”. Invoking the Soviet model and the influence exerted by leaders such as Lenin and Stalin, the text argues that governments established in Romania after 1945, under the leadership of Petru Groza, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and later Nicolae Ceaușescu, eliminated market mechanisms and suppressed private initiative, replacing them with a rigid system of centralized planning. During the transition period, the press became a space for critical reevaluation of the recent past, with most publications recognizing the virtues of the market economy and the framework it provided for efficiency, competitiveness and adaptability. Nevertheless, debates regarding the optimal post-communist societal model were not without controversy. Divergences of opinion concerned the pace of reforms, the extent of privatization and the role of the state in the economy, reflecting the complexity of the transformation process and the inherent difficulties in redefining the economic and social structure after decades of centralized planning (Tașnadi, 1994:6).

Nicolae Ceaușescu consistently emphasized, in his speeches and interviews, the supposed economic prosperity of Romania under his regime. In an interview granted to the Egyptian newspaper Al-Messa, the communist leader highlighted Romania's economic difficulties during the pre-Soviet period, mentioning the low production and modest agriculture that characterized the country before the implementation of collectivization and centralized planning. Comparing Romania with other states in the communist bloc, Ceaușescu argued that the success of socialism in the country required the application of a „special algorithm,” adapted to the national specificities, intended to make the socialist system functional in the Romanian context. This type of discourse reflects both the propagandistic strategy of the regime and the way in which the leader sought to legitimize state interventions and centralized economic policies, presenting domestic sacrifices and constraints as necessary for achieving collective prosperity. In reality, however, the so-called „miracles” of industrialization and collectivization were accompanied by economic imbalances, material shortages, and strict control over everyday life, factors often omitted or downplayed in the official discourse (Șerb, 2020:72).

At the same time, numerous publications consistently reproduced and disseminated Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches, emphasizing the supposed progress of the national economy. Newspapers presented achievements in the energy sector and successes in agriculture as markers of a rapidly developing Romania, thereby constructing an idealized image of the country and reinforcing the regime's official narrative. In this way, the press not only reflected the leader's discourse but amplified it, transforming it into an instrument of ideological legitimization and of mobilizing public opinion in favor of communist policies (Șerb, 2020:38).

In the daily newspaper „Clopotul” from 1985, Nicolae Ceaușescu stated that Romania's economy had achieved significant progress. In an article published during that period, the communist leader declared: „If Romania, following the path of socialist construction, had not acted to develop a modern industry based on the most advanced technology, we would have remained, as before, a poorly developed country, dependent on industrialized nations”. The newspaper interpreted this statement as an argument for transforming Romania from a predominantly agrarian country with underdeveloped industry and agriculture into an industrial-agrarian nation, characterized by a modern industry and a socialist agriculture in full expansion. According to the article, „the country's industrial production increased more than 103 times compared to 1945, and total agricultural production more than sevenfold”. Such statements reflect how the communist press manipulated statistics to create the impression of uniform and spectacular economic progress, while ignoring regional disparities and the everyday problems faced by the population. A frequently used mechanism in communist mass media was the repeated use of laudatory models applied alternately to several cities. For example, in the mentioned article, the industry of Botoșani was highlighted as an emblem of industrial development, even though in other newspapers, the same discourse could be attributed to different localities. In reality, Botoșani experienced growth rates above the national average and its annual industrial production exceeded 10 billion lei, with leading sectors such as electrotechnics, electronics, and chemistry considered symbols of local industrial modernization and creative labor. This example illustrates both the propagandistic manner in which the communist press glorified economic progress and the real discrepancies between official discourse and the concrete developments in industry and agriculture. Furthermore, it highlights the strategy of media uniformity, intended to convey the idea of generalized progress applicable to all regions of the country, regardless of local particularities (*Economia românească sub semnul accentuării acțiunii factorilor intensivi ai dezvoltării*, 1985:1).

The transition from the „great economic progress” promoted in Nicolae Ceaușescu's discourse and reflected in the communist press to the post-communist period was far more complex than the propaganda of the time suggested. This change is clearly illustrated in an article published in a post-1989 newspaper, which highlighted that Romania was undergoing a distinct phase in the country's economic life. The December 1989 Revolution generated significant transformations in the structure and functioning of the economy, as well as in the direct experience of citizens. According to the article, „The path is open for us towards a market economy, towards privatization, towards a prosperous life we have awaited for decades,” suggesting that, although the population aspired to a free and competitive economy, achieving this was not possible under the communist regime. The article emphasizes that, in the post-communist period, economic units in Romania gradually gained decision-making autonomy. Employee collectives were allowed to plan their activities, determine which products to manufacture, in what

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quantities and to which markets to sell them. In this way, economic units were encouraged to develop high-quality, competitive products with lower costs and increased profitability, adapting to the requirements and standards imposed by the market economy. This example reflects both the contrast between the illusion of economic progress propagated by the communist press and the complex reality of the post-1989 transition, highlighting how economic autonomy and freedom of decision-making became essential principles for adapting to the new conditions of a competitive and liberalized economy (Dorim să facem din I.M.C. o întreprindere model, 1990:3).

In another public statement, presented by Angelo Miculescu, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Food Industry, it was emphasized that the progress of Romanian agriculture was made possible due to policies implemented during the communist period, particularly under the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu. According to the speech, Romania achieved increasingly better economic and production results each year, which was said to contribute to a continuous improvement in the population's standard of living. The article also highlights the technical aspects of agricultural development: the increase in the production of vegetables, potatoes, and fruits, the rational organization of production units, the operation of specialized farms, and the use of seeds with superior biological potential. However, this presentation reflects how the official discourse, reproduced by the press, constructed the image of a high-performing and efficient agriculture, while minimizing the real difficulties faced by farmers and the population, such as food shortages or the pressures imposed by collectivization. Thus, the communist media discourse served not only to inform but also to provide ideological legitimization, presenting state policies as an unquestionable and uniform success, while the real complexity and imbalances of agriculture remained largely hidden from the public (*Expunerea la proiectele legii retribuirii muncii în unitățile agricole cooperatiste și legii privind organizarea producției de legume și cartofi, precum și valorificarea legumelor, cartofilor și fructelor*, 1976:5).

The aspects presented in the communist press can, evidently, be challenged by analyses from the post-communist media. After 1989, Romanian publications emphasized that the transition from the centralized, planned economy characteristic of the communist regime to a market economy was marked by major difficulties, highlighting the structural imbalances inherited from the Ceaușescu period. Post-communist articles show that, in reality, the structure of the Romanian economy before 1989 was not as solid as presented by newspapers and official speeches; accelerated industrialization, an excessive focus on heavy industry, and centralized planning had generated imbalances between economic sectors and regions. In this context, it becomes clear how the communist regime used the press as an instrument of public opinion control, constructing the impression of a prosperous and flourishing economy intended to legitimize Ceaușescu's policies and mobilize the population in support of industrial and agricultural projects. In contrast, the post-communist press highlights the real difficulties faced by Romania during the transition period, emphasizing that the post-communist era was marked by significant economic challenges, largely generated by the communist legacy and the need to restructure the national economy. Thus, the comparison between the propagandistic discourse of the communist press and the critical analysis of the post-communist media provides a clear perspective on the differences between the idealized image of the economy presented before 1989 and the economic realities confronted by the population after the fall of the regime (Achim, 1992:5).

A representative example of the propagandistic discourse promoted by the communist press can be found in an article published in the newspaper „Zori Noi” in 1989, titled „Increasing Economic Power through the Power of the Communist Deed”. The piece presents a speech by Nicolae Ceaușescu, in which the communist leader aimed to convey to citizens the necessity of a general mobilization to achieve the economic objectives set by the party. The speech emphasized the population’s commitment to work „responsibly” to fulfill the territorial socio-economic development plan and to accomplish the tasks and objectives to be established by the party’s 14th Congress. The language used in this article reflects the typical characteristics of communist propagandistic discourse: appeals to collective mobilization, glorification of labor, and emphasis on the achievement of economic plans established by the party. Such texts aimed to reinforce the legitimacy of the regime and to convey the image of a society united around the socialist project, in which economic success was presented as the direct result of collective effort and party leadership. In reality, 1989 represented one of the most difficult periods for the Romanian economy, marked by food shortages, energy restrictions, and a decline in living standards. In this context, the laudatory speeches published in the press can be interpreted as part of a strategy to maintain ideological control over the population by presenting an idealized image of the economy and of the policies promoted by the communist leadership (Creșterea puterii economice prin puterea faptei comuniste, 1989:3).

In contrast to the laudatory discourse promoted by the communist press, publications that appeared after 1989 often adopted a critical perspective on the economic policies of the communist regime. This can be seen in an article published in the daily newspaper „Lucaefărul” in 1991, which stated that „The communist state destroyed the economy”. Such a statement reflects the radical shift in discourse that took place in the Romanian press after the fall of the communist regime, when journalists and analysts began critically reassessing the economic policies of the previous period. Whereas the 1989 „Zori Noi” newspaper presented economic development as the direct result of the „communist deed” and collective mobilization around party-established objectives, the post-communist press portrayed the Romanian economy in a much more nuanced and often critical way. Articles published after 1989 highlighted that accelerated industrialization, centralized planning, and strict state control over the economy had generated major structural imbalances, which became particularly evident during the transition period. Thus, the comparison between the two articles highlights the discursive rupture between the communist and post-communist press. While the pre-1989 press glorified the regime’s economic achievements and presented socialist planning as the foundation of national progress, the post-1989 media began to critically analyze these policies, emphasizing the negative consequences of the centralized economic system and the need to restructure the Romanian economy within a market-oriented framework (Dragomir, 1991:11).

A similar discourse can be identified in the pages of „Revista Economică” from 1974, where one article highlighted Nicolae Ceaușescu’s role in the development of socialist society theory. According to the article, the communist leader had supposedly enriched Marxist-Leninist theory by introducing the concept of a „multilaterally developed socialist society”. This formulation was presented as the expression of a higher stage of social development, characterized by an efficient and prosperous economy, a harmonious distribution of productive forces across the entire country, and a constant concern for improving the leadership, organization, and planning of the economy and society. The article also emphasized the idea of a continuous increase in the material and

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spiritual standard of living of the population, as well as the development of the education system and culture. In this vision, socialist society was presented as a space of generalized progress, in which education and culture were meant to contribute to the formation of the „new man,” characterized by adherence to materialist-dialectical ideology, socialist ethical and equity principles, and a high socialist consciousness. Beyond its theoretical dimension, such discourse reflects the propagandistic mechanisms through which the communist press legitimized the regime’s political project. The concept of a „multilaterally developed socialist society” thus became an ideological instrument through which the economic and social achievements of the regime were presented, contributing to the construction of an idealized image of Romanian society and consolidating the political authority of the communist leadership (Deschizător de orizonturi comuniste, 1976:3).

In contrast to the image of a prosperous and continuously developing economy constantly promoted by the communist press, publications appearing after 1989 reflect a much more critical perspective on the economic legacy of the previous regime. Thus, in the post-communist press of 1992, references frequently appeared to the need to pull the Romanian state out of a deep economic crisis, considered by many authors to be a direct consequence of the economic policies applied during the communist period. Whereas before 1989 the official discourse emphasized the idea of a flourishing and efficient economy, in the press of the 1990s the image of an economy marked by structural imbalances, the rigidity of the centralized planning system, and the necessity for profound economic reforms became increasingly clear. In this context, the post-communist press highlighted that the process of economic restructuring and adaptation to the principles of a market economy represented a difficult but necessary stage for overcoming the problems inherited from the communist regime. Thus, the contrast between the optimistic discourse of the communist press and the critical analysis presented in post-1989 publications highlights the profound transformation of the Romanian media landscape, as well as the shift in how the country’s economic realities were interpreted and presented to the public (Statul, economia și guvernarea, 1992:4).

II) The Reflection of Art and Culture in the Press During the Transition from Communism to Post-Communism

The concept of freedom in artistic creation was often invoked in modern cultural discourse; however, in reality, artistic production was almost always influenced by the social, political, and cultural context in which it was created. Artists did not operate completely independently but were, to some extent, dependent on social structures, patronage systems, or the dominant ideologies of their time. In this sense, artistic creation often reflects the values, mentalities, and expectations of the society in which it develops. Under the communist regime, this relationship between art and society was formalized and controlled through official ideology. Communist ideology did not merely impose themes or subjects deemed appropriate for artistic creation; it also developed an aesthetic program intended to make artistic production accessible to the masses. This program focused on promoting socialist realism, an artistic style aimed at presenting reality in an optimistic and mobilizing manner, emphasizing the collective values of socialist society. In this context, art was seen as an educational and ideological tool, designed to contribute to the formation of a new social consciousness. Artistic creation was expected to reflect the ideals of socialist society and participate in the cultural and moral transformation of

the population, often being presented as an alternative to the values and aesthetics associated with bourgeois culture (Zamfir, 2011: 6-8).

Between 1965 and 1974, a relative relaxation could be observed in several areas of social life, a phenomenon particularly noticeable in the cultural sphere. During these years, the education system underwent a process of modernization and a certain openness, manifested through a reduction of the emphasis on Marxist dogmatism and an increased focus on exact and technical disciplines. This orientation reflected, on one hand, the authorities' attempt to support the economic and technological development of the state, and on the other hand, the need to mitigate the ideological rigidity that had characterized the previous period. In the field of social sciences, a revival of certain disciplines can be noted, which had previously been marginalized or even removed from the academic sphere due to ideological pressures. Sociology, for example, was gradually reintroduced into research agendas and university programs after having been considered for a long time incompatible with the official doctrine. Similarly, history experienced a significant resurgence, benefiting from a relative diversification of the topics addressed, although the interpretation of the past remained largely subordinated to the political interests of the regime. A comparable process can be observed in literature, the arts, and music, where cultural production experienced some development. However, this evolution should not be interpreted as a genuine manifestation of cultural freedom. Artistic activity continued to be strongly influenced by communist ideology, and creations were often oriented toward promoting official values and consolidating the image of the regime. In this sense, cultural development during this period was largely constrained by the ideological control exerted by the state, which transformed art and culture into instruments of propaganda and political legitimation (Georgescu, 1992: 276-277).

Artistic means of expression were frequently used to promote the ideology of the communist regime. Through literature, history, and the visual arts, the image of the "new man," the ideal model promoted by official propaganda, was constructed. Cultural creations were expected to reflect and glorify the achievements attributed to the regime, such as accelerated industrialization or the collectivization of agriculture. In this context, the worker became the central figure of artistic representations, depicted as a hero of socialist society and a symbol of economic and social progress. This idealized portrayal aimed to consolidate the legitimacy of the regime and convey the message that societal development depended on the collective effort of the working class. In reality, through these cultural representations, the regime sought to influence public perception and convince the population that the socialist system represented the optimal solution for improving the standard of living. Thus, art and culture were transformed into instruments of propaganda, intended to ideologically support the political project of the communist state (Boia, 1998: 89).

A striking example of how the communist press promoted the regime's ideology and the personality cult can be identified in an article entitled „Prestigious Contribution to the Dynamization of Scientific Activity, to the Flourishing of Culture and Art,” published in the periodical „Amfiteatru”. The article uses highly laudatory language to describe the achievements attributed to the communist regime, stating that „wonderful are the accomplishments of our people, wonderful are their achievements in all fields of activity”, while economic and social transformations are illustrated through symbolic images such as the emergence of new cities or the exploitation of the country's natural resources. Such discourse reflects the propagandistic pattern of the communist press, in which economic and cultural progress was presented in an idealized manner intended to

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consolidate the regime's legitimacy. The same article also highlights the figure of Elena Ceaușescu, portrayed as an important scientist and political leader, illustrating the consolidation of the personality cult around the ruling family. She is described as having a significant contribution to directing scientific research, particularly in the fields of exact sciences and technological development. At the same time, the official discourse emphasized the importance of research in the humanities and the promotion of national culture, suggesting a continuous concern for the spiritual and cultural development of society. Another central element of the article is the role assigned to artists within socialist society. In a speech delivered at the conclusion of the Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture in 1987, Elena Ceaușescu stated that literature, music, visual arts, theater, and cinematography had the mission of contributing to the formation of a socialist consciousness and the education of the „new man”. In this vision, artistic creation was not seen as an autonomous expression of cultural freedom but as an educational and ideological instrument designed to promote communist values and reflect the struggle and labor of the people in building socialism. Therefore, the analyzed article illustrates how the communist press transformed the cultural sphere into a space for political legitimization. Art, literature, and scientific research were integrated into a broader propagandistic discourse aimed at glorifying the regime and consolidating the personality cult of political leaders (Berlogea, 1998: 1-3).

In contrast to the propagandistic discourse of the communist press, post-communist publications emphasize that, in communist doctrine, culture actually occupied a secondary place. According to this perspective, the foundation of the regime was economic, followed by social relations, and only then political life, while culture, although theoretically included in development plans, remained marginalized. Modern Romanian history textbooks reflect this hierarchy, highlighting that although the ideology and mentalities imposed by the regime influenced the cultural sphere, it did not succeed in gaining real autonomy or primary importance in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the post-communist press acknowledges that, in a broader sense, culture played an essential role in the modernization of Romanian society. The profound transformations of the twentieth century, often described as the “transfiguration” of Romania, were largely cultural phenomena. Through culture, more than through material achievements, Romania managed to gain recognition and appreciation internationally, thereby contributing to the consolidation of national identity and prestige (Boia, 1992:6).

In Nicolae Ceaușescu's conception, culture was presented as a benefit for all citizens, regardless of language, social class, or professional affiliation, but also as a right that people could exercise freely. The cultural act and civilization were seen as emanating directly from the people, emphasizing that they should be produced through the voluntary and conscious effort of each individual, in a context favorable to the affirmation of everyone. The article „Ctitor de cultură de artă, de frumos” highlights the increase in the number of creators of beauty: poets, prose writers, playwrights and artists in various cultural fields, as evidence of this cultural „emulation”. Poetry and art are described as „valuable goods of the country”, meant to draw the masses toward socialist culture while providing satisfaction to society through works that are „imperishable for the people and by the people”. From a critical perspective, however, this discourse reveals the way in which the communist regime transformed culture into an ideological instrument. Creative freedom was limited, and artistic activity was conditioned by the propagandistic goals of the state, being valued more as a tool to educate and mobilize the population than as an authentic expression of the individual or cultural diversity. Thus, what was presented as a

„cultural right for all” in reality served to legitimize the official ideology and consolidate the personality cult of the leader (Dezideriu, 1984: 8).

The communist regime promoted the idea that „everyone is both a producer and a consumer of culture”, presenting culture as a universal right accessible to all citizens. According to this official discourse, each individual would have contributed to the development of art and culture simply by participating in social life and assuming collective responsibilities. In reality, however, this conception did not reflect the way culture actually develops. Authentic artistic creation cannot be achieved by just anyone; historically, it has belonged to spiritual and intellectual elites who possessed the training, talent, and experience necessary to produce truly valuable works. The post-communist press, exemplified by an article in the daily „Timpul” from 1995, emphasizes that presenting all people as creators of culture is misleading. The author of the article argued that genuine art has always been intended for a spiritual elite and that collective tradition cannot be equated with authentic creation. Furthermore, it is noted that no one can automatically be considered part of the cultural elite simply by social status or membership in the general populace; recognition of cultural value requires training, talent, and real involvement in the creative process. Therefore, the claim that every individual is a producer of culture conceals the reality that not all citizens can contribute equally to artistic and cultural development. This idealized notion, propagated by the communist regime, served more to justify a false image of collective participation in the cultural sphere than to support genuine autonomy of artistic creation. Thus, the reality of culture under communism was far more complex and cannot be reduced to the simple general involvement of all citizens, as the official propaganda claimed (Raichici, 1995: 5).

The statement that art must „gain in efficiency, in the power of influence, in terms of forming a new consciousness” directly reflects the role assigned to artistic creation under the communist regime. Art was not conceived as an autonomous domain, oriented toward free individual expression, but as an active means of shaping collective consciousness, integrated into a broader ideological project. In this sense, artistic production was evaluated not primarily according to aesthetic criteria, but according to its ability to influence and direct public mentalities toward the values promoted by the regime. Through literature, the visual arts, theater, or cinema, the authorities sought to construct and consolidate a specific type of social consciousness aligned with communist ideals. The themes, characters, and messages of artistic works were selected and guided to promote behavioral models consistent with official ideology: the devoted worker, the united collective, and individual sacrifice for the common good. In this way, art became a tool for deeply influencing perceptions and values, contributing to the internalization of norms imposed by the regime. This process can be interpreted as a systematic attempt to reshape mentalities through culture and art. It was not only about transmitting explicit messages but also about creating a symbolic framework in which certain values became dominant and seemingly natural. The public was constantly exposed to idealized representations of social reality, where conflicts, shortages, or contradictions were eliminated or reinterpreted. Thus, art contributed to forming a selective perception of reality favorable to the regime. Consequently, the role of art during the communist period went beyond the aesthetic sphere, becoming an integral part of a broader mechanism of social influence. By emphasizing „efficiency” and the „power of influence”, artistic creation was transformed into a means of guiding collective thought, aiming to form a consciousness compliant with the ideological demands of the state (Gavril, 1978:21).

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Although the official discourse during Nicolae Ceaușescu's period claimed that art and culture occupied a privileged place in society, the post-communist reality revealed a much more complex situation. In the context of the general economic difficulties after December 1989, Romanian culture faced a profound crisis, largely due to a lack of financial resources and reduced institutional support. Post-communist press highlighted that the indifference of authorities and the contradictory attitudes of the new government contributed to the deterioration of material conditions in the cultural sector. Under these circumstances, cultural institutions, artists, and creators had to operate in an unstable environment marked by uncertainty and difficulties in adapting to new economic realities. Thus, although freedom of expression was theoretically guaranteed, it was undermined by the lack of concrete means of support, calling into question the effectiveness and viability of cultural production. Consequently, the post-communist period did not only signify liberation from ideological constraints but also the emergence of new challenges, in which culture had to redefine its role and survive in a difficult economic context. This situation highlights the contrast between the idealized image of culture during the communist period and the complex realities of the transition, where cultural freedom was not always accompanied by stability and material support (Platforma-Program a Convenției Democratice din România, 1992: 8).

Conclusions

The analysis of Romanian press during the communist and post-communist periods highlights a profound transformation of public discourse, driven by the political, economic, and social changes that occurred after 1989. Under the regime led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, the press functioned as a central instrument for transmitting and consolidating official ideology, promoting an idealized image of economic and cultural realities. The economy was portrayed as continuously developing, marked by progress and efficiency, while the population's real difficulties were systematically omitted or reinterpreted. Similarly, the fields of art and culture were integrated into a controlled discourse, in which artistic creation was oriented toward shaping a collective consciousness aligned with the regime's values. The notion of general participation in cultural activity and the promotion of the „new man” reflected a homogenizing vision, where freedom of expression was limited by ideological requirements. Thus, both the economy and culture were presented in a manner that served to legitimize political power and consolidate the image of a functional and prosperous system. In the cultural sphere, the press and official discourse turned art and artistic creation into instruments of propaganda, aimed at shaping a collective consciousness aligned with communist values. Freedom of creation was restricted, and artistic achievements were evaluated based on their capacity to influence the public and promote the regime's ideology. Culture was presented as a „right of all citizens”, but in reality, it was heavily subordinated to the political and educational goals of the state.

After 1989, the post-communist press brought a significant shift in perspective, adopting a critical stance toward the legacy of the communist regime. Economically, it highlighted structural imbalances and the difficulties of transitioning to a market economy, emphasizing that the image of prosperity under the previous regime had largely been artificially constructed. In the cultural sphere, public discourse exposed the limitations imposed on artistic creation during communism, as well as the new challenges generated by resource scarcity and economic instability in the 1990s. Consequently, comparing the press across the two periods reveals not only a change in discourse but also

a transformation in how reality is interpreted and presented. Whereas before 1989 the press served to support and justify the regime, afterward it became a space for debate and critical reevaluation. This evolution reflects the shift from an ideologically controlled system to one characterized by pluralism and diversity of opinions, even if marked by the specific difficulties of the transition period.

Appendices



Portrait of Elena Ceausescu by Lazăr Iacob. (Source: Contemporanul 1981)

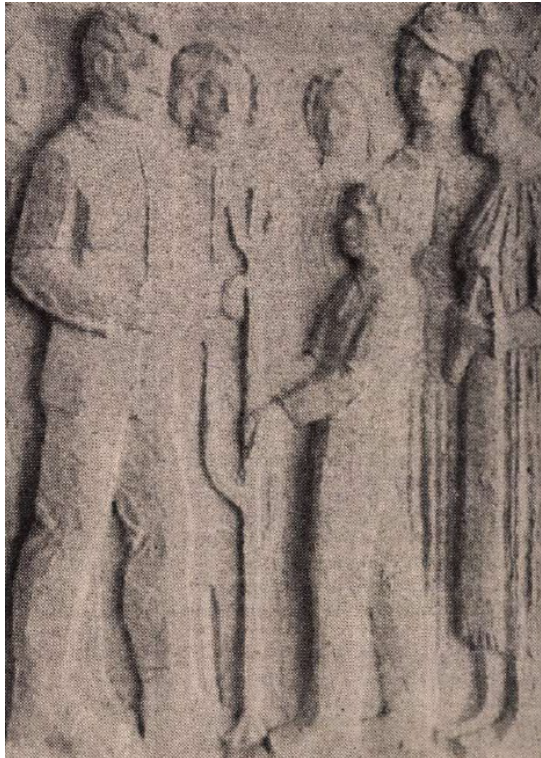
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Portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu by Zamfir Dumitrescu (Source: România Literară 1984)



Bust of Nicolae Ceaușescu by Paul Vasilescu (Source: România Literară 1984)



„Continuity” by Nicolae Pascu (Source: România Literară 1984)

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