

1945. REPRESSION AGAINST ROMANIAN PRINT MEDIA-RELATED ISSUES

1945. ASPECTE PRIVIND REPRESIUNEA ÎN PRESA SCRISĂ ROMÂNEASCĂ

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Abstract

The repression against Romanian journalists started in February 1945, when a law on the political cleaning of print media journalists was enacted. This law was based on the Armistice Convention signed in Moscow on September 12, 1944 by Romania and its allies.

Print media cleaning was based on law no. 102 on press cleaning, published in the „Official Journal“ no. 34 from February 12, 1945.

This law was the theoretical tool for implementing the political cleaning of print media institutions. After August 23, 1944, this institution tried - by its representatives and within the limits imposed by the internal and external political environment, otherwise extremely tensed - to regain its democratic status, meant to objectively inform the public opinion by excluding, as far as possible, any political interference.

The political repression on print media was made possible with the help of governmental bodies controlled by the Communist Party (the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Justice through the Peoples' Court, the National Propaganda Ministry), resulting in the removal of those journalists who didn't observe the rulers' official policy, therefore being subject to severe consequences, life imprisonment included.

Key words: Armistice Convention, press cleaning, the National Propaganda Ministry, the Peoples' Court, Soviet-type dictatorship

The Romanian print media after August 23, 1944 consisted in several newspapers and periodicals. Most of these served the Democratic National Front that ensured them regular paper supplies.

Thus, print media was mostly controlled by the Communist Party, as part of authorities' general policy to entirely seize state and civil society entities. They started to annihilate all those who didn't observe the coordinates imposed by the new rule, especially after March 6, 1945, when Groza government took the power under the Communist Party reign that intended to install a totalitarian regime.

The repression against Romanian journalists started in February 1945, when a law on the political cleaning of print media journalists was enacted. This law was based on the Armistice Convention signed in Moscow on September 12, 1944 by Romania and its allies.

As far as publications were concerned, article 16 of the Armistice Convention provided that: „Printing, importing and disseminating periodicals and non-periodicals in Romania [...] will be made according to the (Soviet) Allied High Command“¹. Thus, the Allied Control Commission was in charge with information control, namely censorship. This body will support ‘democratic’ media, prejudicing the independent or traditional political parties media.

Enjoying full support from the Allied Control Commission, the Communist Party imposed its control both on print media and the relevant trade-unions. Thus, mass-media was subject to double censorship: on one hand the Allied Control Commission limited the printing paper supply; on the other hand Communist-led trade unions from the printing-press refused to print any article which seemed to be an attack against Petru Groza „democracy“.

Print media cleaning was based on **law no. 102 on press cleaning**, published in the „Official Journal“ no. 34 from February 12, 1945.

The law specifies from the very beginning the categories of media employees subject to sanctions: „journalists, editors and media contributors who, by their works or media activity prior to August 23, 1944 were found guilty of the following:

- a) they served hitlerism or fascism, therefore serving foreign interests;
- b) they were financed by the Axis Powers for propaganda in favour of their policy;
- c) they prepared the public opinion for joining the Axis and instigated to an unfair war against the United Nations;
- d) they militated for ideas opposed to democratic principles, or, influenced by anti-democratic beliefs, they instigated to terrorist acts, rebellions, ordeals and murders or took part in them“².

Such phrases („they served hitlerism or fascism, therefore serving foreign interests“, „they militated for ideas opposed to democratic principles“ or „influenced by anti-democratic beliefs“), allowed biased readings of the law and therefore its arbitrary enforcement. Thus, a growing number of editors were subject to those provisions, while outstanding representatives of the Romanian print media were removed as they didn’t agree with a far left totalitarian regime being installed in Romania.

¹ Stelian Neagoe - *Istoria politică a României între anii 1944-1947. Crestomația tranziției dintre două dictaturi (Romania’s political history during 1944-1947. Crestomancy of a transition between two dictatorial regimes)*, New Alternative Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 54.

² „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 34/ February 12, 1945, part I, p. 978.

Sanctions for the above-mentioned acts included: written remonstrance; activity suspension for 6 months to 5 years; irrevocable publishing suppression. This article provided that: „Suspension and suppression refer to the right to publish and edit any political paper“³. The law also made clear that sanctions provided in article 2 were applied differently from other sanctions provided by other laws.

The authorities' justification for enacting such a law is recorded in the report no. 3598 dated February 6, 1945, addressed by Foreign Affairs minister Constantin Vișoianu to King Michael.

The above-mentioned document voices the necessity to start cleansing among print media and broadcasting institutions: „Cleaning is essential in this field since individuals who militated against democratic principles in media and in political papers, who served foreign interests or prepared the war with the Axis Powers against the United Nations, favouring hitlerism and fascism may still lead the public opinion in the current democratic regime“⁴.

The Foreign Affairs minister also highlights the role of his institution in media cleaning: „The Foreign Affairs Ministry that, after the dissolution of the Propaganda Ministry, took over media and information regulation responsibilities and, on the other hand, according to its ordinary responsibilities, has to watch on maintaining good relationships with the United Nations, considers those persons acting against the United Nations should be removed from media as soon as possible“⁵.

Moreover, the law banning the activity of print media key figures, also famous for publishing historical, fictional, poetical works, namely Pamfil Șeicaru, Nichifor Crainic, Radu Gyr is not singular. It is worth saying that in May 1945, the new authorities, ruled by the ubiquitous Romanian Communist Party and backed by the Soviet Union, based on article 16 of the Armistice Convention, enacted **the law on the withdrawal of certain periodicals and non-periodicals, graphic and plastic copies, movies, records, medals and metallic badges**⁶, published in the „Official Journal“ no. 102 from May 4, 1945.

According to this law, 16 such lists with withdrawn publications were drafted during 1945. They also contained Romanian media figures subject to political cleaning.

Article 1 provided that a commission made up of the Romanian Committee for Armistice Enforcement, Interior Ministry, Arts Ministry, Romanian Writers Society and Romanian Academy representatives should be established within the Propaganda Ministry.

Which was the main responsibility of this commission, subordinated to the Propaganda Ministry?

³ „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 34/ February 12, 1945, part I, p. 978.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 102/ May 4, 1945, part I, p. 3701-3702.

According to article 2, „the commission will elaborate lists with all periodicals and non-periodicals published between January 1, 1917 and August 23, 1944 containing legionary, fascist, hitlerist, chauvinist, rasist notions or excerpts that could prejudice good relationships between Romania and the United Nations“⁷. These lists were to be published in the „Official Journal“.

It is worth mentioning the chronological limits established by authorities for periodicals and non-periodicals to be withdrawn, namely January 1, 1917-August 23, 1944.

This „generous“ time frame was aimed at including as many authors and works as possible on the lists meant to ban those publications seen as inconvenient for non-democratic authorities. These papers covering different scientific fields contained, according to Communist authorities and their „satellites“, „legionary, fascist, hitlerist, chauvinist, rasist notions or excerpts that could prejudice good relationships between Romania and the United Nations“, as provided in article 2 of the law under debate.

The law concisely described and analyzed herein was the theoretical tool for implementing the political cleaning of print media institutions. After August 23, 1944, this institution tried - by its representatives and within the limits imposed by the internal and external political environment, otherwise extremely tensed - to regain its democratic status, meant to objectively inform the public opinion by excluding, as far as possible, any political interference.

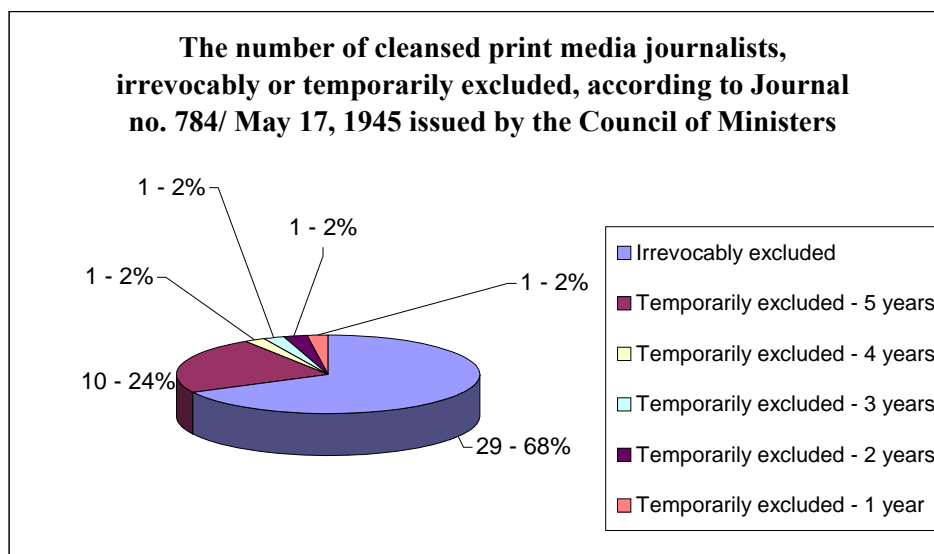
The case of publishers removed in the spring of 1945 (according to Journal no.784 from May 17, 1945, enacted by the Council of Ministers, on the removal of several professional journalists) is relevant for the above-mentioned law enforcement, given the stature of personalities covered by Romanian media political cleaning.

On October 16, 1944, the first list with banned journalists was published, as the first step in their removal from the professional journalists branch. The list included: Pamfil Șeicaru, Stelian Popescu, Dem. Teodorescu, Nichifor Crainic, Al. Hodoș, Romulus Seișanu, Mircea Grigorescu, Toma Vlădescu, Eugen Titeanu, Romulus Dianu, Emil Ciuceanu.

To make sure these journalists will not reveal by any means the real political situation and the transition to a Soviet-type dictatorship, the authorities recently installed in March 1945 brought the above-mentioned journalists before the Special Court for Judging the Culprits of National Disaster.

A key issue to be discussed is the chart-based statistics reflecting the number of cleaned print media journalists during 1945. They are classified as follows: irrevocably excluded, temporarily excluded, sanctioned with a written remonstrance and protected against cleaning.

⁷ „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 102/ May 4, 1945, part I, p. 3701.



Prior to the enactment and enforcement of Journal no. 784 from May 17, 1945 providing that several journalists were removed from the print media, the authorities, namely the Propaganda Ministry, published in the „Official Journal“ subpoenas issued by the Press Cleansing Commission, subordinated to the above-mentioned ministry.

Thus, for the first group of professional journalists excluded from the media in May 1945, the „Official Journal“ published in no. 73/ March 29, 1945, part I, 21 subpoenas addressed to those journalists who were requested to appear before the Press Cleansing Commission for investigations.

Journal no. 784 from May 17, 1945, issued by the Council of Ministers⁸, provided that 43 journalists were excluded from the media, 29 of them irrevocably and 14 temporarily, as seen in this chart, based on the period when their activity was banned.

Those mentioned in this Journal were considered to be „fascists“, one of the many general terms lacking substance among the common vocabulary used in the whole repressive legislation mainly drafted after March 6, 1945.

A few examples of journalists are relevant for the above-mentioned issue.

Thus, Stelian Popescu, blamed for „having initiated the fascist action conducted by ‘Universul’ newspaper years on end, generating the antidemocratic press campaign; he attacked the anti-fascist militants, always contesting them in the newspaper during trials and affecting the court decisions; he invariably instigated against democratic press, praised Mussolini and his regime, personally writing in favour of the Italian fascism; he channelled all anti-democratic acts, legionarism

⁸ „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 111/ May 19, 1945, part I, p. 4093-4095.

included; above all, he praised and supported Antonescu's dictatorship, he prepared and promoted the war against the United Nations⁹.

As for Pamfil Șeicaru, he was considered to be „a fascist; an apologist of neo-racism; financed by all reactionary governments, a tool of all Romanian dictators, he prepared Romania's joining the Axis and the war against the United Nations and especially the U.S.S.R.“¹⁰.

Another exponent of professional journalists excluded from the press in May 1945 was Nichifor Crainic (real name Ion Dobre) who, as a „former legionary minister of National Propaganda, a renown fascist, germanophil, prepared and supported Romania's joining the Axis and the war against the United Nations, militating in the press against anti-fascists fighters“¹¹.

In order to make sure those excluded from the press will not reveal by any means the real political situation and the transition to a Soviet-type dictatorship, the authorities recently installed in March 1945 brought them before the Peoples' Court. The judicial action filed against them will be discussed below.

First, the „Official Journal“ no. 119/ May 29, 1945, part I, published the court rulings for bringing to trial several professional journalists, i.e. some of those excluded from the press, based on Journal no. 784/ May 17, 1945 issued by the Council of Ministers: Pamfil Șeicaru, Ion Dumitrescu, Romulus Dianu, Romulus Seișanu, Ilie Popescu-Prundeni, Ilie Rădulescu, Alexandru Hodoș, Radu Demetrescu-Gyr, Pan Vizirescu, Nichifor Crainic, Stelian Popescu.

The indictment issued by the Council of Ministers on May 17, 1945, wrote these journalists, „by articles published in newspapers, booklets or conferences served the fascist or hitlerist propaganda and supported an odious regime and an evil foreign policy meant to attract Romania in a disastrous adventure and lead to its political and military crash“¹².

As you can notice, according to the well-known vocabulary used by authorities, the indictment contains a series of general terms without legal substance, specific to all repressive legislative acts and political lawsuits filed by the Communist regime in order to suppress any opposition.

In late May 1945, the lawsuit against the 14 journalists, most of them key figures of the Romanian media, was launched: Stelian Popescu - director of „Universul“ newspaper, Pamfil Șeicaru - founder of „Curentul“, Nichifor Crainic - founder of „Gândirea“ newspaper, dr. Ilie Rădulescu - director of far-right newspaper „Porunca Vremii“, Ion Dumitrescu, Romulus Dianu, Alexandru Hodoș, Radu Demetrescu-

⁹ „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 111/ May 19, 1945, part I, p. 4093.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Ioan Opreș - *Procesul ziariștilor naționaliști (22 mai-4 iunie 1945) (Nationalist journalists' trial)*; *May 22-une 4, 1945*, Albatros Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 9.

Gyr, Romulus Seișanu, Ilie Popescu-Prundeni, Aurel Cosma, Gabriel Bălănescu, Justin Ilieșiu, Nicolae Iliescu.

Four of the above-mentioned journalists, namely Stelian Popescu, Pamfil Șeicaru, Justin Ilieșiu and Nicolae Iliescu were tried in absentia.

The real target of the trial is clearly specified by one of the defendants, journalist Ilie Popescu-Prundeni: „As you can see, we, the defendants, are only 14, out of which only 7 present. Therefore, we represent the past press and we also bear on our shoulders the honour or dishonour of the past Romanian press... There's no absolute truth in the political life. There are only certain truths valid in one epoch and invalid in another“¹³.

The opinion expressed by Ilie Popescu-Prundeni shows the new authorities had no intention to admit the journalists' wording, namely those „truths valid in one epoch and invalid in another“.

As far as indictments are concerned, they are mentioned in Journal no. 784/ May 17, 1945 issued by the Council of Ministers, in terms proper to the whole staging used by authorities to designate those who didn't agree with the new political trend, i.e. totalitarian, established by the Communist Party with the full support of the Eastern big neighbour.

In the end, 'nationalist' journalists received extremely tough sentences, i.e. from life imprisonment to 12-year imprisonment, the easiest sentence for journalists belonging to this group.

Thus, 8 defendants, namely Pamfil Șeicaru, Stelian Popescu, I. Rădulescu, I. Popescu-Prundeni, Gr. Manoilescu, Gabriel Bălănescu, Pan. Vizirescu and Nichifor Crainic were sentenced to life imprisonment, civic degradation with asset seizure.

Other 4 journalists, I. Dumitrescu, Romulus Dianu, Romulus Seișanu, Alexandru Hodoș 'benefited from' a lower sentence: 20-year imprisonment, civic degradation with asset seizure.

The last 2 professional journalists judged by the Peoples' Courts in early summer of 1945, were sentenced as follows: Aurel Cosma - 12 years and a half of penal-servitude, Radu Demetrescu-Gyr - 12 years of penal servitude and 5 years of civic degradation, with assets seizure.

The political cleaning ended with asset seizure for journalists excluded from the press, following their judgment and conviction, while the 'Official Journal' published several judicial notifications issued by the Ministry of Justice.

Another relevant issue is the literary work of some of the above-mentioned journalists excluded from the press during 1945. Thus, based on article 16 of the Armistice Convention and law no. 364 regarding the withdrawal of certain periodicals and non-periodicals, graphic and plastic copies, movies, records, medals and

¹³ Dinu C. Giurescu - *Uzurpatorii. România. 6 martie 1945-7 ianuarie 1946 (Usurpers. Romania. March 6, 1945 - January 7, 1946)*, Vremea XXI Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 261.

metallic badges, published in the „Official Journal“ no. 102 from May 4, 1945, part I, the Romanian Commission for Armistice Implementation and - since August 1945 - the Propaganda Ministry, decided that several works on different themes should not be made public any more. These works were signed, among others, by some of the journalists subject to the law on press cleaning, be they temporarily or irrevocably cleaned.

It is worth mentioning that this paper only refers to those lists adopted during 1945 banning works signed by some of the journalists politically excluded, according to the law on press cleaning.

The first 4 such lists were published in the „Official Journal“ no. 66/ March 21, 1945, part I.

These lists were preceded by several regulations on the manner in which periodicals or non-periodicals ‘whose content could harm good relationships with the United Nations’ should be suppressed¹⁴.

Article 16 of the Armistice Convention provided that „publishing houses, printing-presses, bookshops, any kind of shops, news-talls, self-publishing authors and any company or institution storing or possessing any periodicals or non-periodicals [...] must immediately proceed to their withdrawal from circulation and must store them in special rooms, being directly responsible for them“¹⁵.

As withdrawal lists were published, possessors of periodicals and non-periodicals were obliged to turn them in to districtual prefectures 15 days after each list appeared in the „Official Journal“. Then, these publications were taken over by the Paper Office and sent to paper factories for processing.

The same preamble provided that „publications on this list and on the lists to come, from libraries with legal storehouses and in libraries of higher education institutions all over the country will be withdrawn form circulation and kept under direct supervision and responsibility of these institutions’ heads.

These books might be read, in the future, based on an individual special permit issued by the relevant institution head, on his own responsibility, but only in the library facility“¹⁶.

Thus, not only the population acces to print culture from libraries was severely restricted; in their turn, students were no longer able to research works needed to complete their university studies.

Lists no. 3 and 4 contain 2 journalists excluded from the press in May 1945 who had also authored several books, among which the following were withdrawn from circulation:

¹⁴ „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 66/ March 21, 1945, part I, p. 2135.

¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 2135-2136.

¹⁶ „Monitorul Oficial” (*Official Journal*) no. 66/ March 21, 1945, part I, p. 2136.

1. Stelian Popescu: *Predică în pustiu (Preaching in the desert)*, 1941, Universul Publishing House.

2. Romulus Seișanu - *Transilvania românească (Romanian Transylvania)*, 1941, Universul Publishing House.

A month later, the „Official Journal“ no. 129/ June 9, 1945, part I, published the list no.7 containing the work of only one journalist excluded from the press in May 1945, Ștefan Ionescu, namely *De la Petru cel Mare la Stalin. Istoria unei revoluții (From Peter the Great to Stalin. History of a revolution)*, published in Bucharest during 1941 - 1942, also included in the list no. 2.

In July 1945, the list no.8 containing the works of a key opposer to the authorities installed in March 6, 1945 was published.

Thus, the „Official Journal“ no. 153/ July 10, 1945, part I, includes the above-mentioned list containing 3 works by Nichifor Crainic: *Nostalgia paradisului (Paradise nostalgia)*, Cugetarea Publishing House, Bucharest, 1942; *Ortodoxie și etnocrație. Cu o anexă: Programul Statului etnocratic (Orthodoxy and ethnocracy. Enclosed: the ethnocratic state program)*, Cugetarea Publishing House, Bucharest; *Puncte cardinale în haos (Cardinal points in chaos)*, Cugetarea Publishing House, Bucharest.

The 12th list, published in the „Official Journal“ no. 199/ September 3, 1945, part I, mentions Radu-Gyr with his work *Căciulița Roșie. O poveste în pădure, cu pitici și cu o fetiță (Little Red Hood. A story in the wood, with dwarfs and a little girl)*, Cartea Românească Publishing House. The work bears the following mention: „Partial cleaning: the name Radu Gyr will be removed“¹⁷.

The last 2 lists, no. 15 and 16, adopted during 1945, were published in the „Official Journal“ no. 248/ October 30, 1945, part I.

The lists with professional journalists excluded from the press during 1945 contain the following names and titles:

- Romulus Seișanu - *Aventuroasa viață a lui Despot-Vodă (Despot-Vodă's Adventurous Life)* Ciornei National Publishing House, Bucharest, 1938.

- Mircea V. Pienescu - *Temeiuri politice pentru actualitate, Ziarul „Curentul“, 1928-1938 (Political grounds for today, „Curentul“ newspaper, 1928-1938)*, Ramuri Publishing House, Craiova, 1939.

Analyzing these titles we can also notice certain works whose subject was imperialist Russia, either led by czar Peter the Great, or by Stalin, two historical figures with absolute power, who annihilated any opposition that might endanger their authority.

Since the Soviet Union was invoked in the formal propaganda as Romania's friend, Petru Groza government wanted to withdraw certain works, i.e. „From Peter the Great to Stalin. History of a revolution“ by Ștefan Ionescu, highlighting the

¹⁷ Idem, no. 199/ September 3, 1945, part I, p. 7764.

Russian state totalitarianism throughout centuries. Its aim was to conceal this issue from younger generations and try to erase from older generations' memory those events related to Romanian-Russian relationships.

To conclude, political repression on print media was made possible with the help of governmental bodies controlled by the Communist Party (the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Justice through the Peoples' Court, the National Propaganda Ministry), resulting in the removal of those journalists who didn't observe the rulers' official policy, therefore being subject to severe consequences, life imprisonment included.