

PROPAGANDA AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY THROUGH TRANSLATION IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA. A CASE IN POINT: ROMANIAN REVIEW

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Abstract. *Some authors understand paradiplomacy, classified by Kuznetsov (2015) into eleven major domains, as the participation of non-central governments in International Relations through networking (permanent, or ad-hoc) with public or private entities to promote socioeconomic or cultural development (Cornago Prieto, 2000). Cultural diplomacy has been, and still is, an essential tool not only in its international dimension, but also as a decisive device in domestic projection (labelled by some scholars “intermestic affairs”).*

In this paper I will bring into discussion a cultural product based entirely on translations and intended as a propaganda tool during the communist era in twentieth century Romania.

Keywords: *paradiplomacy; propaganda; thème translation; Romanian Review.*

1. Introduction

The Romanian Cultural Institute (a state-funded institution, subordinate to the Ministry of Culture) was founded in 2003 and was designed to “raise the profile of Romanian culture around the world.” A merger of the Cultural and Publishing Foundations, both dating from 1992, the Institute had predecessors in the communist regime. At present, its nature and goals are complemented by such programs as the funding of the translation and publication of Romanian literary works abroad. But how was this cultural diplomacy performed during the Cold War? A case in point is Romanian Review, a cultural product consisting entirely of thème translations and intended for distribution abroad as a propaganda instrument. An ancestor of this journal appeared for the first time in 1861 as a contribution to the normalization of the Romanian language, but the collection I delved into started its trajectory in 1946, when the monarchy was replaced by a People’s Republic.

The term “paradiplomacy”, coined by Soldatos in late eighties was also referred to as “micro-diplomacy” by Duchacek or “parallel diplomacy”, “foreign policy of non-central governments” and “pluri-national diplomacy” by Aldecoa in the late nineties. These definitions often enclosed the conflictual nature of the notion (between central and non-central governments), but paradiplomacy is an essential concept also for the analysis of changes occurred in modern states during the last decades. The end of the Cold War triggered the acceleration of the integration process in Europe. The decentralization of power in Russia and the requirements of the EU fostered cross-border cooperation among regional governments in Europe and Eurasia and regional networks emerged.

In the new millennium, with the rise of Chinese economy, scholarship assumed that paradiplomacy was possible even in non-democratic countries, which contradicted a

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previous assumption (federalism was not real in countries like USSR on grounds of the inexistent power sharing). According to Kuznetsov, democratization and decentralization of the USSR in the nineties gave way to paradiplomatic action, while in the 2000s, under Putin's leadership, regions' performance in international affairs decreased and with it, the academic research in the field. Examples of the past started with Stalin's Soviet Constitution of 1936, amended in 1944 granting the Union's Republics extraordinary competencies in international relations and defence policy, making USSR seem one of the most advanced countries in paradiplomatic terms. Nevertheless, the Soviet model was based on the supremacy of the Communist Party, bureaucratic and highly centralized, hence the incompatibility between the *de jure* and *de facto* situations which shows that paradiplomatic opportunities in the Soviet Union were an illusion. However, both USSR and the countries on the communist side of the iron curtain did practise an intense cultural diplomacy during the cold war. As Lecours and Moreno (2003: 3) show, "cultural defence and promotion tend to be the most important issues of paradiplomacy because they are central to its underlying force, nationalism." This assertion is embedded in the post-modern paradigm of nationalism which regards nations as imagined communities rather than objective historical entities. Within this model identities are strongly influenced by discourse ("speaking the nation"), an idea that emerges also from Anderson's theory on nationalism (2016/1983). By analysing social change and transformed consciousness, he delineates the processes by which the nation came to be imagined, modelled, adapted and transformed. In his view (2016: 6) nation is an "imagined political community" because in each member's mind, there is a communion with the rest of members, in spite of the fact they are unknown, in spite of exploitation and inequity because a nation "is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" and translation played a relevant role in the birth of nationalism.

In Pasatoiu's terms (2016: 145) the definition of paradiplomacy would be as follows:

[the] capacity of governments to pursue a foreign policy agenda aggregating trans-sectoral and cross-organisational interests not necessarily within a given jurisdiction but having as reference scale a given territory. Para-diplomacy reflects a foreign policy agenda that is constrained by the state foreign policy and needs to be complementary to that.

This author discards those definitions based on the "parallel" nature of paradiplomacy as external to the operational reach of central authorities, or opposite to the national agenda of foreign policy, or even to statecraft in itself. He rather subscribes the current dualistic dimension of paradiplomacy (international and domestic at the same time), from which some scholars have drawn the label "intermestic affairs" blending both terms.

2. Paradiplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy or Propaganda?

Quite a significant corpus of specialised literature has been written on paradiplomacy since the 1970s, but one of the most complete descriptions is Kuzhetsov's, that classifies the domain into eleven major dimensions: constitutional; federalist; nationalist (envisaging the definition/articulation of regional or group interests by promoting goods based on cultural distinctiveness); the international relations dimension; border dimension, globalization dimension; security dimension; global economy dimension; and finally, the environmental; traditional; and separatist dimensions (struggle for statehood and international recognition).

In this paper I will consider (as some authors do) cultural diplomacy to be a kind of paradiplomatic action, not in terms of regional governments being interlocutors of

states, in order to “spread the word” of their narrative, but rather the other way-round, in terms of Eastern European states spreading their cultural propaganda in Western countries through translation (of literary and non-literary texts). They did so via embassies and target country cultural institutions or personalities, during the cold war. In its aftermath, they turned on to own institutions such as the Romanian Cultural Institute, created in 2003. Elsewhere (Iliescu, 2016) I called this mechanism indirect paradiplomatic action. I referred to those actions performed by the state through its institutions with regions or other interlocutors in countries where its diasporas had settled. Such is the case of three Romanian institutions, state-funded, subordinated to three ministries (Culture, Education and Foreign Affairs) that carry out (1) culture management activities; (2) language spreading activities; (3) political-diplomatic activities meant to support the paradiplomatic work of diasporas intended as lobbies. Vertovec (2009: 3) defined this dual activism (geographically distant but politically homeland-oriented) as “transnationalism”, and explained it in the following terms:

When referring to sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders – business, non-governmental organizations and individuals sharing the same interests (by way of criteria such as religious beliefs, common cultural and geographic origins) – we can differentiate these as “transnational” practices and groups (referring to their links functioning across nation-states). The collective attributes of such connections, their process of formation and maintenance and their wider implications are referred to broadly as “transnationalism”.

This author (2009: 78) shows that transnational practices among immigrants are highly diverse between and within groups (whether defined by country of origin, ethnicity, immigration category or any other criteria). The former UN Secretary, Kofi Annan, cited in Vertovec (idem: 158), emphasized the importance of recognizing how migrants can “maintain transnational lives” while Vertovec concludes that:

Transnationally, the politics of homeland can take a variety of forms: exile groups organizing themselves for return, groups lobbying on behalf of a homeland, external offices of political parties, migrant hometown associations, and opposition groups campaigning or planning actions to effect political change in the homeland (idem: 95).

In the case of Romanian diaspora, institutions that early acknowledged the transnational dimension of migrating minorities in the host-land influencing political decisions in the homeland are: *The Romanian Cultural Institute RCI*; *The Romanian Language Institute RLI* and *The Department of Relations with Romanians Beyond Borders DRRBB*, recently transformed into a Ministry (MRP), hence the importance given by the central government to diasporic populations as economic modifiers and moreover, as public opinion influencers and even possible voters (not only in elections but also in referenda).

The RCI was founded in 2003 aimed to “raise the profile of Romanian culture around the world”¹ as a merge of the Romanian Cultural Foundation and Romanian Cultural Publishing Foundation, both dating from 1992. It is a state-funded institution, subordinated to the Ministry of Culture. In 2007 the RCI joined the EUNIC (European Union National Institutes of Culture), thus being a second level body integrated in the

¹ The RCI enables (through its 16 branches located in capitals and main cities) foreign audiences to experience the products of Romanian culture by organising high-visibility cultural events adapted to suit the tastes of foreign audiences. It has developed close ties with Romanian minorities in neighbouring countries as well as with the Romanian diaspora. The CANTEMIR Programme, launched in 2006, aims foster links between Romanian and foreign artists.

supra-national (first level) structure of the EU². From a paradiplomatic perspective, the RCI has subscribed collaborations with institutions of the so called “third level”, that is universities and regional bodies, as well as non-profit associations (generally made up of Romanian migrants). Thus, RCI’s nature and goals are complemented by specific programmes, such as the one funding the publication of Romanian literary or art works abroad. Although its activity is mainly oriented towards foreign target societies, the branches of RCI are also collaborating with Romanian diaspora, i.e. personalities rooted and appreciated by host society in cultural or academic fields. These individual nuclei together with universities may contribute to a better integration of Romanian immigrants into the receiving society. Thus, cultural diplomacy could be seen as indirect paradiplomatic action with various results: economic exchanges, negotiation on political issues at stake, twinning of cities, European Capital status awarding, etc.

After the fall of the communism, Romania started to settle and develop international relations and to strengthen its cooperation with strategic partners. At the same time, it joined international organizations both of political and economic nature. These efforts to integrate into the international community came both from the central and regional/local levels. The first decades of the 21st century brought new legislation on local public autonomy further modified according to the Council of Europe’s rigours intended to provide real opportunities for cross-border cooperation. Thus, the cultural diplomacy performed by the central government was completed by the cultural paradiplomacy led by regional, local (even municipal) authorities.

According to Kuznetsov (2015), regions can be seen from several perspectives. On the bottom level the term “region” defines meta-entities like Eurasia or Latin America. On the second level, “region” refers to geographically, historically, economically, linguistically or culturally united areas like Eastern Europe (links that go beyond artificial imposed unions like COMECON or Warsaw Pact). On the top of the pattern is the postulation of a “region” as administrative-territorial unit of a state that can be “real” (Bavaria in Germany) or “invented” for research purposes. In Kuznetsov’s opinion, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, some new areas of scholarly interests emerged, such as “post-communist” or “post-soviet” regions. In this sense, he warns that the involvement of the Chinese coastal provinces like Guandong, Shangai or Tianjin in paradiplomacy must be analysed not “as a manifestation of transnational relations tendency in this communist country, but as a sign that the central authority in Beijing is looking for differentiation in their foreign policy”. Cornago (2000) seems to agree and points at the central government’s “zhoubian” diplomatic strategy post-Tienanmen crisis, consisting of “a tool to overcome negative international attitude”. In Cornago’s view, we are not facing a spontaneous tendency on behalf of regions in China, but a programmed manoeuvre on behalf of the central(ist) power.

² Collaboration among national institutes of culture based in cities across Europe became formal through the foundation in 1997 of CICEB (Consortium of the National Cultural Institutes of the European Countries in Belgium), a non-profit organisation under Belgian Law. In 2006 it became EUNIC (European Union National Institutes of Culture), now with 32 organisations in 26 countries. This was the first major partnership of cultural institutes aimed at promoting European culture globally and at strengthening relations with countries outside Europe through its over 80 clusters worldwide.

3.A Case in Point: *Romanian Review*

Starting from these observations, I approached a cultural product issued in Romania consisting entirely of theme translations and intended for distribution abroad as a propaganda instrument under the name of *Romanian Review*, between 1946 and 2008. An ancestor of this journal appeared for the first time in 1861 as a contribution to the normalization of the Romanian language, but changed its aims and language in 1946, when the monarchy was replaced by a People's Republic. In 1861 the Romanian language was still not completely normalized in its written form so, one of the purposes of this review (called «for sciences, letters and arts») was to help create a «unitary and literary Romanian language». However, its presence among the periodicals of the time is soon interrupted and it is not until 1924 that the review re-appears with a slightly changed purpose: «a publication of studies, information and research», whereas in 1946 its wider scope is described as: «Rumania's political, social, economic, literary artistic, scientific life». It is obvious that a clearly intended change of position within the system occurs. After claiming, at the beginning of its existence, a cultural-linguistic aim, the publication later turns into a socio-political one. *Romanian Review* is first published in English (1946) but soon a French version is issued, conceived as an identical twin of the English volume (same table of contents, same graphical form and cover design, same format and structure).

The first question arising when one starts looking into this collection founded in the 19th Century is what aim such a publication might have pursued when adopting a foreign language shape with no correspondence in the source language since, quite paradoxically, no Romanian version existed of the *Romanian Review* throughout the years (of its more than half a century existence). One possible explanation is that after 1946, the new post-war government needed some anchorage in traditional values to counter for its image of a direct beneficiary of the coup changing Romania from a monarchy into a "People's Republic". As the editorial board themselves acknowledge at the end of the table of contents in one of the volumes issued in 1946, the review "serves the cause of mutual good-will and understanding among all peoples".

Propaganda has been in terms of Preutu (2017: 449) "one of the essential aspects of the public manifestations of communist regimes, being the main vehicle for the dissemination of communist ideology". She starts from the assumption that propaganda involves not just manipulation but also education, identity moulding and development of societal values. International propaganda in the sixties and early seventies presented Romania as a country looking towards the West in terms of economic relations, a country with certain nationalist tendencies, even distancing itself from the Soviet Union (Preutu, 2017: 452). Romania's relations with the capitalist world extended to cultural relations and exchanges and the export of cultural products led to oscillations in the power's practices and in the relationship with its own society, activating a feeling of national pride. This is confirmed by such statements as Breslașu's (1962) in his article published by *Secolul 20*, a respected journal also based on translations, only of international literature into Romanian. In hyperbolic terms (quite common to this type of propagandistic essays meant to raise national pride), he states that "Romania's growing international prestige is owed to its peace, friendship and collaboration politics among the peoples of the world" and that "great personalities in universal literature sign translations from Romanian authors into languages of international circulation for huge masses of readers worldwide".

Starting from the setting up of the communist regime (1946) and until the anti-communist Revolution in 1989, *Romanian Review* acquires a profound socio-political

character (proved especially by its opening articles) and the message intended to reach its audience throughout this period is a propagandistic one, namely: the Romanian people's socio-economic status is high (as sustained by the articles forming a substantial part of each issue), and high quality cultural manifestations develop (see the literary section of the review) under the communist regime which fosters not only art production, but also its export (as proven by the existence of *Romanian Review* itself).

An important turning point can be seen in the mid-seventies, as a response to the threshold marked by the year 1971 considered by historians the border between two types of leadership, when a new stage in the history of communist Romania began, an obscurantist period during Ceaușescu's dictatorship known as "the cult of personality", reaching its climax in the decade of the 1980s. As Malița (2016: 54) shows, the secretary general presented his new "theses"³ through which measures to fortify the ideological control were introduced aimed at "firmly promoting the aesthetic principles of the party". Obviously, *Romanian Review* could not stand aside from this new wave of propaganda and tried to comply with the requirements but did so in a very ambiguous way, adopting surface changes while preserving quality in literary selection and translation. Thus, the review started increasing the number of politicised articles while reducing literary contributions and introducing speeches, photographs, quotations from and homages to comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu. If we look at the issues in themselves, we find out that in mid and late 1980s, covers start reproducing "committed art", first through abstract works, then straight through images of comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu surrounded by waving flags and happy children like in Maoist imagery. We also see how the portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu is introduced after the table of contents, reminding us of the Stalinist period. Another striking change in the late eighties was the introduction of texts not related to the content of the issue but adequate to political purposes of the moment. Although fairly extensive, these texts were not always recorded by the table of contents which makes us think of last-minute imposed contributions which editors themselves had no clue about in terms of number or length. However, Malița (2016: 57) believes that "writers stubbornly insisted in making valuable literature" in those years and the "autonomy of the aesthetic principle was not destabilized".

A striking feature of *Romanian Review* during all these decades is the fact that it does not state the names of the translators permanently working for it who translated the socio-political and historical part of the review, but only the free-lance collaborators' names who translated literary works and undersigned them. No editorial board appeared and no indication regarding the tutelage or the Publishing House was given till mid '80s. Even the name of the editor-in-chief disappeared between 1948 and 1980. However, if in the early 1980s we could find neither the name of the editor in chief nor the body that commissioned the publishing, at the end of the decade, the journal announced its chief editor, tutelary body, editorial staff and translators. Literary texts were commissioned to collaborators, (normally prestigious figures, literature professors) while the rest of the contributions were translated by the permanent team of translators working for *Romanian Review*. Thus, only literary translations specified the translator's name, which reinforces

³ the name commonly given to the speeches by Nicolae Ceaușescu in July 1971, in response to a need for ideological legitimisation, delivered before the Executive Committee of the Communist Party under the title: "Proposed measures for the improvement of the political-ideological activity of the Marxist-Leninist education of party members, of all workers". The consequences of these theses were felt much later, after the establishment in 1974 of the territorial agencies of the Council of Socialist Culture and Education.

Malița's idea of an attempt on behalf of the editors to preserve the aesthetic principle's autonomy.

Instead of conclusion

In this paper I tried to pinpoint some of the features I have drawn from a wider study carried out on a cultural propaganda product during the communist regime in Romania, namely a review issued within the country's borders, based on translations and distributed abroad between 1946 and 2008. Starting from the assumption that the boundary between paradiplomacy (as defined by Kusnetzov), cultural diplomacy and propaganda is blurry rather than clearcut, I mentioned some of the policies and institutions that mark Romanian cultural diplomacy nowadays, in accordance with Vertovec's idea of diasporas as paradiplomatic forces. The question arising from this approach was how these actions (if any) were carried out during the cold war. In search of arguments, I approached the case of *Romanian Review* which provided illustrations of a systematic propagandistic activity developed by means of cultural products' export throughout the whole communist period. An intensification of propaganda devices was noticed in the seventies, coinciding with Nicolae Ceaușescu's "theses", but perhaps on a superficial level only, since literary aesthetic values continued to characterize the contents of the review, which would corroborate Malița's idea of a deliberate ambiguity (compliance and resistance) even at the level of publisher decision-makers. However, this is just one aspect of a wider study (in progress) encompassing insights from several angles aimed at providing an accurate and complete outline of a complex, transversal and multifocal issue.

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