

The Cult of Personality in the Romanian Communist Party

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The one month research at OSA focused on some details of my research of the cult of personality in Romania in the 1950s-1960s (part of a book project). While I previously covered the vast existing literature in Romania, especially the stenographs of the Political Bureau meetings, the Romanian Workers' Party (later Romanian Communist Party) Central Committee Secretary meetings, the stenographs of the RWP Central Committee Plenum from 1961 (on the topic of the cult of personality), the stenographs of the Dej-Stalin meetings, as well as *The Spark* newspaper collection (1944-1965), speeches and articles by Dej, Pauker and Ceaușescu, the Securitate (political police) file of Ana Pauker, as well as the visual archives of the former Communist Party Museum (now hosted by the Romanian Peasant Museum) and the existing literature on the biographies of the three socialist leaders (for the period before 1965, the death of Gheorghiu-Dej), the records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute offered a new perspective on the focused events, a perspective that I was not able to identify previously in the existing literature.

The Socialist regimes were characterized by an intense struggle for powers within the Communist Party. After the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, one of the most used political weapons was the accusation of promoting the cult of personality. Those who contested the position of the leader of the party but also those in power used the concept to contest their adversaries. In Romania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej was the main leader who took advantage of this concept, every time he felt threatened to lose his political power. By the usage of the cult of personality, he managed to maintain his power and even to increase his role. In the 1957, 1958 and 1961 Plena of the Romanian Workers' Party, Dej contested his opponents and eliminated them (Constantinescu, Chișinevschi, Doncea) and he reiterated his attacks against his eliminated opponents (Pauker, Luca, Pătrășcanu).

One of the effects of the critique of the cult of personality is the double edge: by playing with guilt, after a short period, the accusers became accused on the same accusations. For example, Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi, who accused Dej in 1956 of the cult of personality, were removed from party hierarchies for being directly responsible for the creation of the cult of personality of Ana Pauker. An abstract concept that criticizes the lack of democracy and dictatorial deviations was used to increase the power of the leaders already in power. The concept of the cult of personality is based on the Marxist theory of the people and not the personalities as the fundamental driving force in creating history. According to the official theory, personalities can only put into practice what the people desires, by answering to the social, economic and political demands of the historical moment. Theoretically, communist personalities cannot become heroes or the history; they cannot change the course of events but they should serve the social demands of their time, by following an unconscious and necessary historical flow. The cult of personality that stays (at the conceptual level) in the way of communist development, was embraced by most communist leaders and also by second and third hierarchical level communist members. In the case of Romania, one can easily follow the conflict between the theory of the cult of personality and its practice, in very concrete terms.

During my archival investigation at OSA, I was interested on how the criticism of the cult of personality in relation to the structures of the Romanian Communist Party was reflected in the documents of the times, with a focus on the period 1950-1960. I have identified various sources on Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and on Ana Pauker as well as files of various communist leaders of the Romanian Communist Party (or Workers' Party) in the OSA catalogue, in two sections: Romanian Unit and Soviet Red.

In the Soviet Red Archives, I was able to find relevant information on Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and how he was perceived by the international media for the 1960-1965 period, and how his position in the Sino-Soviet Split was perceived as a pro-Western move:

HU OSA 300-80 Soviet Red Archives, HU OSA 300-80-8 Non-USSR Biographical Files, Box 14

From the Romanian Unit, I focused mainly on the Communist Party personalities files of Ana Pauker, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej but also Maurer, Pârvulescu, Răutu, Ceaușescu and the members of the Politbureau for the period 1957-1963:

HU OSA 300-60 Romanian Unit, Archival boxes #93, #94, #95

The files of Propaganda Speeches of VIP's (Gheorghiu-Dej, Groza, Maurer, Mănescu, Moghioroș, Niculescu-Mizil, Pauker, Pârvulescu, Ralea, Răutu etc.) are also highly relevant for my research:

Archival boxes HU OSA 300-60-1:510
HU OSA 300-60-1:511
HU OSA 300-60-1:512
HU OSA 300-60-1:514

For documents on Ana Pauker and her purge from the Party, I also consulted the box HU OSA 300-60-1:725 (State Apparatus: Government: Pauker, A., 1951 - 1976).

For Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, I consulted also the box HU OSA 300-60-1:724 (State Apparatus: Government: Gheorghiu-Dej, 1951-1970).

This part of archival investigation was crucial in understanding how the discursive instrumentalisation of the cult of personality in Romania and Eastern Europe functioned, especially through its interpretation and usage in the inner struggles at the top of the Communist Party, by following the documents of the time and also the main departure.

I also looked at the boxes on the cultural life, especially theatre and Soviet influence in Romania, to find how the communist personalities were reflected in this specific field that had a crucial role for the propaganda machine. I looked over the following boxes:

HU OSA 300-60-1:141
HU OSA 300-60-1:142
HU OSA 300-60-1:143
HU OSA 300-60-1:144

Because many documents focus on the origin of Gheorghiu-Dej's legendary story as a communist leader, the Rail Workers' Strike from 1933 and its international impact and the role of Gheorghiu-Dej in its organisation, I also tried to find any documents on this event in the

HU OSA 381 Electronic Archives of the Communist International (Comintern)

especially the CDs on the Romanian Section (483, 484, 485, 488) but my search was not successful, also because of my lack of Russian language knowledge.