

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE ROMANIAN ARMY

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Abstract: *The communication structures of the Ministry of National Defense have a considerable seniority and have played an important role both in different historical, critical periods for the country (wars, political crises) or institutional building (the forming of the Romanian army, of the modern command structures, etc.) as well as during the transition period after 1989. The first military publication, Observatorul Militar, (Military Observer), was released in 1859, being followed by a few thousands of magazines, newsletters, specialized directories, or during the war years of information and opinion journals such as Romania, organ of the General Headquarters, in the years of World War I, or Soldatul (The Soldier), Santinela (The Sentry), during the years of World War II. One after another, others followed such as: since 1916 Studioul Cinematografic al Armatei (Army Cinema Studio), originally, a photo-cinema structure, then specialized in the documentary film: history, presentation or training, and, since 1940, on public radio frequencies Ora Ostașului (Ora Armatei), (Soldier's Hour, Army's Hour), then since 1968, a television broadcast on public television station broadcasting frequencies, since 1996 the web products (the first web site of an army in Eastern Europe, the first site of a ministry within the Government of Romania). The force and the role of the structures varied from period to period Studioul cinematografic (The Cinematographic Studio) had in 1989, 217 employed people, military and civilians, today there are less than 15), according to the budgets and the importance of what they were given by the management structures. The revolution of December 1989 marked the depoliticization of the communication act and the switch to the professionalization of the specialized structures, transforming their propaganda tools into products and means of Public Relations. The years 1990-1995 have marked this process through: (a) the establishment of structures, (b), staff training (in France, Switzerland, Germany, but especially in the United States), (c) the completion of the first guides, instructions, procedures for the field, (d) the opening of the first course for specialists, (e) the initiation of a quarterly specialized magazine Panoramic militar, (Military Panorama), (f) a code of ethics for practitioners.*

Keywords: public relations, the Ministry of National Defense (MoND), communication, MoND's Press Office, the Directorate of Public Relations and Information (DPRI)

I. Introduction

The activity of relationship with the civilian press was established as early as the first decade of the last century, when at the Minister Cabinet a press office was set up which functioned in this structure until October 1945, when the Army General

Inspectorate for Education, Culture and Propaganda (IGAECPP) was established, and then, in 1948 the Army's Superior Political Directorate (DSPA), being taken over by the political structure, having since then and until 1989 tasks in the coordination of the military publishing. The professionalization

in the domain of Public Relations in the Romanian Army occurred along nearly five years between 1990 and 1995, despite the fact that the Ministry of National Defense inherited starting with January, 1990, one of the most equipped and experienced structures of communication. [1]

The first modern structure, specialized in communication of the Ministry of National Defense, The military Press and the Department of Military Radio and Television Broadcasts, was established in March 20, 1990 [2], as a distinct military unit, subordinated to the minister and in the administrative coordination of the Head of the Minister's Cabinet, taking over the inventory and part of the staff, *Press Office and of the Department of Military Radio and Television Broadcasts from the Direction of the Propaganda and Culture of the Political Council of the Army* [3] the structure that coordinated up to December 22, at the Ministry level, the political and ideological activity of all the personnel of the Army [4].

Moreover, during the communist regime, all ministries, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of Trade, Home Affairs, the Government) possessed such structures, most of them being established in the last years of the reign of King Carol II under the control of the ministers (the Prime Minister), coordinated by the Department of Press and Propaganda of Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party [5].

The press offices of the Ministry of Defense and the Interior belonged before December 1989, to the central party structures, because these ministries had their own political apparatus, separated from those of the civilian institutions, the press offices also having a special status, that of MoND being an independent structure directly subordinated to the Head of the *Directorate of Culture and Propaganda of the Superior Political Council of the Army*, later on hierarchically, to the head of *Superior Political Council of the Army* [6].

II. The first year of democracy. Social, political and institutional context

Following the depoliticization measures of the Army [7], the *Superior Political Council of the Army* was disbanded, some of its subordinate structures, military units with separate tag, continuing to operate [8], others, having military and civilian professionals placed at *disposal*, in order to appoint them on other positions after the evaluation of their activities and competences by commissions created ad hoc made up of command military personnel of the General Staff (MStM) or from the new established *Directorate for Patriotic Education and Culture of the Army (Direcție pentru educație patriotică și cultură a armatei)*, due to the pressures of a military group, CADA which advocated for depoliticization and the elimination of abuses committed at the central and local level, in MoND.

All these structural transformations took place amid a general turmoil manifested in the society, particularly in Bucharest, between different groups of power, the newly created civil society, political factions and various groups of internal and external interests. A tense period was that during the ministerial mandate of General Nicolae Militaru, recalled in activity by a decree of CFSN [9] and appointed to the command of the Ministry after removal of the ad-interim Minister, general Victor Stănculescu and of the Chief of the General Staff, General Ștefan Gușă. It is a troubled period in which, in accordance with the turmoil of the civil society, military belonging to all branches, from military units from Timișoara and from Bucharest, organized themselves into associations, the best-known being CADA which staged protests, some in the street, in front of the Victoria Palace, attracting broad categories of military, some conscripts, from the construction units, or conscripted for the national economy activities.

Along with the crystallization of the civil society, distinct voices demanded explanations from the MoND for the events that had happened between December 17 and 25 in Bucharest, Cluj, Sibiu and Timișoara, and in other places in the country, the identification of the responsible ones for the suppression of the popular demonstrations, the situation of the terrorists, as the officers from CADA asked.

It is an exciting time. A new world was taking shape, the public sphere was reconstructed, the first political formations were created [10], the result of some private initiatives [16], even the old ones emerged, renamed and re-evaluated, with new editorial policies and visions for their audiences.

The Ministry of National Defense had to answer to all these pressures and in many cases the response was inadequate [11]. By changing the defense minister by the end of March 1990 [12], at the general pressure of the officers of the General Staff and of those affiliated to the democratic associations all over the country, the bringing back of General Victor Stănculescu as the head of the ministry, a person who knew the importance of a press office and personally knew members of the Press Office of CPSA [13], have eased the founding of the first modern public relations structure in April/May 1990 and its professionalization.

III. Professionalization of RP activity in the Romanian Army

The newly founded *Secție Presă și Emisiuni Militare* (Press Department and Military Broadcasts) [14], will be dissolved in 40 days *Secția Presă a Ministerului Apărării Naționale* (MoND's Press Department) [15] and *Secția Emisiunilor Militare de Radio și Televiziune* (Department of Radio and Television Military Broadcasting) will be established, both military units with allotted numbers and directly subordinated to the minister.

In October 15, 1991, Public

Relations and Information Department (SIRP) [16] will be set up under the Department of Education, Science and Culture, with responsibilities to the internal communication, being the first Public Relations structure from Romania, named and designed as such. In a couple of months, on 15 July 1992, SIRP will be subordinated, the same as the Press Department of the MoND, to the minister of national defense [17]

On 30 October 1993 because of the increasing need for communication and public transparency of the military institution and the need for rapid changes according to the standards of a modern army, capable of meeting the challenges of the new international security environment, based on the general order of the defense minister and the order of the Staff, *SIRPA* merged with *Secția Presă a Ministerului Apărării Naționale* (the Press Department of the Ministry of Defense) turning into *Direcția de Informare și Relații Publice a Armatei* (Public Information Department of the Army) (DIRPA).

The newly created structure will operate under the name of *Direcția Relații Publice* (Public Relations Directorate DRP), (April 30, 1997-February 20, 2007) this changing again on the 20th of February 2007, in *Direcția informare și relații publice* (Directorate of information and public relations).

The central structure has worked in various subordinations: the subordination of the State Secretary and Chief of *Department for Defense Policy and International Relations* (1993-1997), then directly subordinated to the defense minister (1997-2000). Since March 1, 2001 Public Relations Directorate was subordinated to the Secretary of State and head of *Departamentul pentru Relația cu Parlamentul, Armonizare Legislativă și Relații Publice* (the Department for Relations with the Parliament, Legislative Harmonization and Public Relations) [26], to be successively subordinated to the

minister, after 2009, respectively, in 2013, to the Secretary of State and head of *Departamentul pentru relația cu Parlamentul, informare publică și creșterea calității vieții personalului* (the Department for Relations with Parliament, Public Information and Welfare.)

DIRPA's aim is to inform the public (civil and military) of Romania and the international opinion, about the main problems of public nature of Romania's military policy, the national military doctrine, evolution and activities of the military structure, the military evolutions within our strategic area and at the European level [18].

The Directorate was organized in two departments *Planificarea-coordonarea comunicării și Relații Publice, Presă și informare publică*, (Planning-coordination of communication and Public Relations, Press and public information), each with three offices (*Communication analysis and planning, Relations with the public administration, political and apolitical organizations, Assessment of communication and coordination of military mass media, i.e. the Press office Synthesis and information in the military environment and International Information*), in the subordination to the head of the Directorate being a deputy commander and two independent offices [19]. DIRPA will also be responsible for *Grupul de Presă al Armatei* (the Press Group of the Army) a structure that also comprises: The Military Publishing House, the headquarters of the military publications ((*Observatorul militar, La Datorie, Viața Militară, Spirit Militar Modern*), the Insurance Department with Technical Editorial Material (SATEPP), other subunits, and The Television and Radio Military Broadcasts [20].

Since the establishment, the new structure will develop its first *Strategy of communication and public relations*, and, a year later, in 1994, it organized an international seminar in Bucharest. The

officers that were to be appointed the specialized positions were tested and prepared. They were responsible with internal communication, in relation with the community, with the media, advising and informing the commanders. DIRPA sent specialists for training in the USA, [30] Switzerland, France and Germany, as well as to post-graduate courses lasting organized by SNSPA and will prepare in 1996 the first year of a post-graduate course for public-relations officers at the *Carol I* National Defense University in Bucharest, with a duration of six months to prepare the officers from military units.

The professionalization process involved legal actions as well; thus, on 22 May 1995, first regulation of Public Relations from a governmental structure from Romania, *Instructions on the Organization of informing activities and public relations in the Army* entered into force the [21], followed by a methodological guide [22] and, later, with details of how to manage crises [23]. It is the last year of changes, the structure will send the first RP officer to the press center of a NATO/PFP exercise, Commodore Ioan Ciubucă, who afterwards in the autumn of the same year, in Sibiu, will organize at the House of Culture of trade unions, the first press centre of a multinational NATO/PFP exercise from Romania, with over 200 accredited journalists (80 foreign ones) [24].

It is the year in which, under the leadership of Brigadier General Simion Boncu, first head of the structure, the first issue of the publication of professional guidance of the specialists in the field, *Panoramic militar* will also appear, being edited under the coordination of Lieutenant Colonel Grigore Buciu [25].

Conclusions

The revolution of December 1989 marked the depolitization of the communication act and the switch to the professionalization of the specialized

structures, transforming their instruments of propaganda in products and means of Public Relations.

The years 1990-1995 marked this process through: (a) the establishment of the structures, (b), staff training (in France, Switzerland, Germany, but mostly in the United States), (c) achievement of strategic planning tools of communication, (d) the appearance of the first guides, instructions, procedures for the domain (s) opening of the first course for specialists in the country with positions in this area, (f) initiation of a specialized quarterly magazine *Panoramic militar*, (g) assuming the components of a code of ethics for practitioners.

In 1995, the Directorate prepared for the reorganization, with three sections, to

allow the approach to new areas, on-line communication and designing the first web site and electronic publications, having two specialists, teachers in higher education, specialists in communication, participating with more than 20 people at the General Assembly for the establishment of the *Asociației Române a Profesioniștilor în Relații Publice (Romanian Association of Professionals in Public Relations)* the governing body of professional practitioners of Romania, affiliated to IPRA, that initiated research and methodological studies, some of them at Southeastern and Central European level.

References

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