

The German press from Romania during the Communist period

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Summary – PhD Thesis

Keywords: German minority, Communism, written press, censorship, the newspaper *Neuer Weg*

The present paper is an analysis of the most important German newspaper in Romania during the Communist period, namely the national newspaper *Neuer Weg*. Throughout the present analysis we wanted to find out whether in spite of the communist indications and limitations, the newspaper *Neuer Weg* has supported the Romanian citizens of German origin and to which extent the contents of this newspaper helped to affirm and maintain the identity of its readers, namely the German minority. We sought to find out what was the importance given by *Neuer Weg* to themes relevant for the German minority. We analyzed how traditions, concerns and problems of the German minority in Romania were represented, if they were represented.

Through this analysis we want to describe the Romanian publishing system from the communist period in general and, in particular, to outline the German publishing system from Romania during the same period, through a representative example, namely through the newspaper *Neuer Weg*, the only national German newspaper in Romania, during the 40 years of communism in this country. One can only fully understand the situation and concerns of the German minority from Romania, after analyzing the system in which they lived and the information to which they had access.

To start such a comprehensive analysis, it was necessary to create a framework, a context, and the most important issues underlying this theme will be presented in detail in the Chapters of this paper. These include: the social, economic, political and cultural life of Romanian citizens of German origin, the media situation in general, and in particular the German media of those times. Another important step for the purpose of this study is the analysis and presentation of the studies which have already been conducted on the subject, their limits and expansion possibilities, followed by theoretical aspects regarding the research method - the content analysis, in general, and the media content analysis in particular. These steps are followed by the presentation of our own content analysis of newspaper *Neuer Weg*, the chosen analysis material, the evaluation of the selected materials, detailing and discussing the results and presenting the findings.

The first chapter is short, introductory and makes reference to the theoretical and practical objectives of this paper.

The second and third chapters are closely related to each other. The second chapter presents various German minorities from Romania and their origins, from the Saxons of Transylvania, to the Bukovina Germans.

The third chapter presents the situation of the German minority after the Second World War in four phases: The first one is contradictory and harsh, due to all the measures taken regarding the German minorities: deportation, expropriation or restrictions for the use of their mother tongue. The second period can be regarded as a moderate one, as the measures have been more indirect, such as including the members of the German minorities in the Communist Party and in the legal status of minorities. The third phase has been intolerant and repressive, because of the actions of the Ceausescu Regime, such as tracking, forced assimilation and cynical emigration regulations. During the last phase, towards the end of the Communist Regime, the consequences of all the actions unfold in an extreme nationalism and loss of basic human rights.

In this period, the German minority has been hit very hard. Between the years 1945 and 1948, the German minority has been subjected to discrimination. Most German schools were closed, the Germans from Romania were excluded from the legal status of minorities and many members of this minority were arrested. Under communism, all rights were based on nationalist goals aimed at creating a homogeneous nation, by eliminating the differences of nationality and assimilating all minorities to the Romanian culture.

In 1945 the deportations took place, while the Germans have lost all civil rights and were excluded from the legal status of minorities. Consequently, these people found themselves in an outlaw state, they no longer existed legally, had no political or civil rights. Then the total expropriation of all major German owners was imposed, followed by the nationalization of industry, finance, banking, and education by nationalizing all schools in the country. Thus, the German minority was prepared, in the communist sense, to build socialism.

Regarding the communist party, we have created two subchapters. One refers to the reasons why the communist party has developed a promotion campaign in order to attract the German minority. The second subchapter includes a short analysis of the main characteristics of the Communist party and a comparison between this one and other communist parties from other countries from the former communist block.

We highlighted the policy of the 70s and paid special attention to the merging effect of the 80s, when nationalism became a state ideology and the homogenization, ie the Romanization of the minorities became one of the main objectives of the state. The chapter ends with a suggestive graphic regarding the number of Germans living in Romania over the

years. Looking at the figures from the chart, we can observe that after the war and the deportation in the Soviet Union, the numbers have decreased, then we see a stagnation period for about twenty years and after the migration agreement between Ceausescu and the German chancellor, another decrease has been registered. After the communism has fallen, almost three quarters of the Germans have fled, left the country, the numbers have fallen drastically. These numbers are saddening, but understandable, if we look at the historical facts.

This chapter has created the necessary context for our study and for this reason only the effects of the communism on the German minority has been taken into account, and not on the whole Romanian society of those times.

Chapter four has a central theme, namely the media in communist Romania and is therefore a step closer to our main objective, namely conducting a media content analysis. Here we have three subchapters regarding the Romanian television, radio and newspapers and another three subchapters regarding the German television, radio and newspapers from Romania. Of course there is also a subchapter regarding censorship, the censorship institutions and mechanisms, but also regarding the most important press agency from Romania, the agency *Agerpres*.

We have also discussed and interpreted the provisions of the Press Law (1974). Then we have presented the situation of the press after 1977 and during the 80s, highlighting the particularities of every period. We referred also to the number and content of the radio and Tv programs.

Regarding the description of the German publications from Romania, we have created a list of all German publications which have appeared several years before and also during the communist period in Romania, especially in Banat and in Sibiu. We have paid special attention to the newspaper *Neuer Weg*. As an introduction to the next chapter, we have described the profile, the general themes and the political themes of this newspaper.

One cannot talk about the communist media without mentioning the control and censorship organisms. The official national press agency during the communism has been *Agerpres*, the former press agency *Rador*. *Agerpres* has been founded through a decision of the Great National Assembly on the 20th of May 1949. The role of this agency has been to inform the public opinion from the country and from abroad about the inner and foreign affairs of the communist government. The institution named *Direcția Generală a Presei și Tipăriturilor* was in charge of controlling the political news, and later on it was given also a decision power regarding the employees of the press agency. Through the decision No. 53 from the 30th of May 1975 given by the National Council, this institution has been replaced by

another institution called *Comitetul pentru Presă și Tipărituri*, which has been subordinated to the government and to the party. Two years later, the censorship has been aborted through a decree and the agency *Agerpres* had to practice self-censorship.

In Romania the sole political party has been omnipresent, keeping everything under control. It has limited the quantity of paper given to the publications, limiting also the size of the newspapers and magazines from Romania. The radio and Tv frequencies have been limited and, at the same time, the activity sphere of the journalists and of the editors. Not only the content, but also the format have been kept under control by the party and its censors.

The period 1965-1971 has been the high peak of *liberalisation* during communism. The relations to countries from Western Europe have been renewed, Romanian intellectuals have been allowed to travel more, a series of literary works have been translated and great writers, such as Maiorescu or Blaga, have been taken again into consideration, but only in critical debates on themes they have written on in their works.

When Ceaușescu became president in the year 1974, the restrictive press law has been promulgated and its provisions have been in force until the end of 1989. The media have simply been unilateral means of communication of the Communist party and have not represented the interests of their public. The newspapers looked like deserts of lead, with a small font, all the speeches of the president have been copied or translated, word for word, and published in the newspapers. The news were written in a standardized language only about successes in different areas, whereas sensational or negative events were excluded, were completely missing. During the last years of the Ceaușescu regime, nationalism and a weird personality cult have spread all over the country and the forms of expression have been standardized. Certain addressing and expressing formulas have become official and mandatory.

The most important national newspapers from communist Romania have been: the German daily newspaper *Neuer Weg*, as a press organ of the *German Anti-Fascist Committee*; The daily newspaper *Scînteia*, later named *Adevărul*, as an organ of the *Central Committee* of the Romanian Communist Party; The daily newspaper *România Liberă*, as an organ of *National Council for Democracy and Socialist Unity*; the daily newspaper *Scînteia Tineretului*, later named *Tineretul liber*, as an organ of *The Communist Association of the Young People*; the Hungarian daily newspaper *Előre*, later named *Romaniai Magyar Szó*.

The fifth chapter makes reference to the studies that have already been conducted, having the German newspaper *Neuer Weg* as a central theme. There have been conducted four

studies with this central theme, and we presented them in this chapter, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. This approach serves as the basis for our detailed study.

Until now only four studies were conducted on *Neuer Weg*. However none of them carried out an extensive analysis of this paper, but each focused on one aspect. Thus, one study focused on news about the deportation of the German minority for the reconstruction work in the Soviet Union, another study on the newspaper features during the 80s. A third study analysed the newspaper only a few months before and several months after the fall of communism, while one study examined the form and content of the paper only after 1989. Consequently, we have observed that an analysis period of 40 years is missing. Only after a systematic review of the newspaper throughout the communist period, an overview of the paper can be shaped and extensive conclusions can be drawn. Therein lies the originality and contribution of the present thesis.

In the sixth chapter we have presented theoretical aspects regarding the content analysis, as a sociological method, theories given by the most important scientific researchers and theoreticians. Very important for our approach have been the indications regarding media content analysis, especially analysis of journalistic material published over extended periods of time, as ours. These indications have been elaborated by Prof. Michael Meyen from Ludwig-Maximilians Universität from Munich, a classic of this field, in his latest book, indications which we have followed.

Chapter seven presents our own study having the German newspaper *Neuer Weg* as a central theme. Through this analysis we intended to find out whether in spite of the communist limitations, the newspaper was able to represent the interests of the German community of Romania, if and to what extent, the pages of this newspaper, printed for the the German minority of Romania, supported and promoted their identity.

On the one hand, we have wanted to see whether the newspaper has written about the Germans from abroad, about the ones from the FRG and from the GDR, and on the other hand, about the Germans from Romania. The tense relation between the typical German elements and the socialist ones are in the centre of our interest and one of the most important research questions is: Has the newspaper been written in the German or in the socialist context?

As mentioned before, we intended to find out the importance the newspaper has given to the relevant contents for the German minority. We assumed that the following topics were relevant to the German minority: the GDR and the FRG events and events in Romania involving the German minority.

In order to establish whether in the newspaper *Neuer Weg* have been published themes regarding Germany, we have conducted a qualitative content analysis. We have proceeded systematically while choosing the analysis material, therefore we have created a list with the most important events from GDR and FRG. The events took place during the communist era in Romania, during the existence of the newspaper *Neuer Weg*. Among all these events we have chosen the most important 35 from all areas, such as: victories in sports, the split of Germany, five anniversaries of the construction of the Berlin wall, political decisions, Germany's relations to other countries e.t.c.

We have evaluated the ways in which those events have been published and searched for the reasons why some of the events have not even been mentioned. Therefore we have created three categories:

- Events that have been published;
- Events that have not been published;
- Events from Romania.

The evaluation of analysis material has been done by taking into consideration the information given to us by persons working for this newspaper during the communist era. We have conducted three interviews with three persons which have worked and are still working for this newspaper: Mrs. Gertrud Montferato, secretary of the NW/ADZ, Mrs. Rohtraut Wittstock, chief editor of the NW/ADZ and Mister Werner Kremm, editor of the NW/ADZ. We have taken into consideration also two speeches of two very important personalities from the field, one speech of Mister Walther Konschitzky, former editor for the newspaper *Neuer Weg*, and the second speech given by Mister Hannes Schuster, former editor for the newspaper *Karpatenrundschau*. We have used in our evaluation, excerpts from these speeches, which have never been published before and which, due to the generosity of the authors, will be published in the present thesis for the first time entirely, in the appendix.

Our analysis has shown that reporting about some events, negative aspects, problems or rumors has been avoided. In general, the articles about the FRG have been very short, without details and any kind of drama has been avoided.

On the basis of the content analysis we could determine the journalistic style of the newspaper. The different publishing styles have been used, regarding the events which have taken place on the territory of Germany: intentional omissions, negative evaluations about the FRG and lies.

From the 35 selected events, 14 have been published in NW. In most of the cases intentional omissions have been used regarding events which we today know that they have

an incontestable historical meaning, which didn't correspond to the communist visions of those times. Six events, almost half of them, have been published in a very short manner, omitting all details not corresponding to the communist vision:

- the promulgation of the first constitution;
- the visit of the Chancellor Adenauer in Moscow;
- the visit of the American president Kennedy in Berlin;
- Willy Brandt as leader of the German Socialist Party;
- the first Great Coalition in Germany;
- the visit of the Chancellor Willy Brandt in Warsaw.

An example in this regard is the following: on the 26th of June 1963, the president of the USA J. F. Kennedy has visited West Berlin and in his speech has said the sentence, which became famous all over the world: „Ich bin ein Berliner“ (I am a Berliner). Although the next day the section of the NW with news from abroad has been pretty large, this highly important event has been briefly published: it was about the visit of the American president and about the officialites he met, but nothing about his speech through which he expressed the American support for West Germany, approximately a year after the Berlin Wall has been built. This speech, which high peak has been the sentence mentioned above, has been a symbol of moral support for the inhabitants of West Berlin, frightened of an eventual occupation by the forces from GDR. The readers of *Neuer Weg* have not been informed about this kind of support.

The second journalistic style has been creating a negative image for the GFR, in three articles:

- Unemployment in the GFR;
- Germany – Football World Champion 1954;
- The Godesberg Program.

An example in this regard: the Godesberg program has been 1959 - 1989 the program of the Socialist Party in Germany. Through this program the Socialist Party recognized and supported the formation of the federal army and NATO defence. It accepted and supported the market economy and private ownership of means of production and initiated collaboration with churches. *Neuer Weg* has placed this program into a negative light and especially underlined its negative consequences, like the danger of arming West Germany and especially arming the federal army with nuclear weapons.

The third journalistic style has been publishing through a lie:

- The construction of the Berlin Wall

The newspaper *Neuer Weg* published on the 15th of August 1961 an article about the construction of the Berlin Wall, as a consolidation measure of the GDR for peace and safety. The paper describes the situation of that day as being relaxed, without any incidents or reactions from the civil society. The greatest untruth was the description of the traffic situation, ie the newspaper reports that a dense string of cars was heading from West, because most people wanted to live, after the delimitation of the two areas, in the East.

The events which have been simply removed from the media agenda, which haven't been published, have been:

- Democratic initiatives of the RDG;
- Events which might damage the image of the Communist Party;
- Sensational events or scandals, such as the attacks at the Olympic Games in Munich 1972 or the Hitler diaries.

The content analysis of the events from the country revealed that besides cultural aspects, other concerns of the German minority in Romania were not covered by the newspaper. Often the newspapers reported names, German names, of workers which have exceeded their workload, information about German dance groups, who had shows in various cities, about students studying for exams and assisting each other, but most articles thematized cultural events, such as theatre evenings, German translation of classical literature or contemporary books, or supplies of German libraries. Very popular were the attacks on capitalism and its methods and glorifying the socialist system by means of examples that illustrated the welfare of the socialist countries and the problems of the capitalist ones.

The cultural supplement, *Kulturbeilage*, which appeared every week, together with the newspaper, included a variety of themes and texts about the cultural life of Romanian citizens of German origin in Romania. The supplement for young pioneers, *Raketenpost*, did not include specific German elements, but was simply for the entertainment of the young readers. The resort *Lokales* has reported the most about the traditions of the German minority in Romania.

The publication of cultural themes, important to the German minority, was a practice that has enjoyed continuity over the years, even after Ceausescu came to power, when some issues of this paper were sometimes published without separate sections, every article included visits, activities and speeches of the President and his wife. Such an example is the NW issue from the 13th of October 1987, where there were no distinct sections in the four pages long paper.

After the detailed analysis of the paper we have noticed that there have been published articles about themes of interest for the German minority. In approximately one third of the analyzed issues, events which took place in Germany were included, even if, most of the time, details have been left aside. There is not a single issue not mentioning the Germans from Romania. We have selected 35 important events from the RDG and the GDR and the newspaper has reported on 14 of them.

Another objective of the present research has been to establish whether this newspaper has been like any other Romanian paper or if it has been different from all the other newspaper from Romania. In order to start a comparison, we have chosen the most important Romanian newspapers from that period, *Scânteia* and *România Liberă*, and we have intended to establish whether the themes mentioned above can be found also in these newspapers and, mostly, which were the differences between these three newspapers.

Regarding the form, we have noticed the following: the number of pages has been approximately the same: the newspaper *Neuer Weg* had 4, 6, 8 and sometimes even 10 pages. Usually it had 4 pages, and when it was published together with the supplements, it was larger. After Ceaușescu came to power, the number of pages has been often high, because his speeches have been published word-by-word, and were translated into German. The newspaper *Scânteia* had 4 or 6 pages, most of the time 6. The newspaper *România Liberă* had 4, 8 or 10 pages, usually 8.

Regarding the price of the newspapers, it was almost the same, except the year 1949 when *Neuer Weg* was 8 Lei and the other two newspapers just 4 Lei. After the monetary reform from 1952, the prices of the three national newspapers have been the following:

- in the year 1953 one issue was 20 Bani;
- in the year 1966 one issue was 25 Bani (*NW*), respectively 30 Bani (*Scânteia* and *România Liberă*);
- in the year 1970 one issue was 30 Bani;
- and in the year 1983 one issue was 50 Bani.

The international news have been published in *Neuer Weg* in the section *Aussenpolitik*, in *Scânteia* in the section *De peste hotare* and later in *Viața internațională* and in *România Liberă* in the section *Actualitatea internațională*, the difference has been that in this last newspaper the articles are more elaborated and the themes included more details than in the other two papers.

The German newspaper has written about 14 events from the 35 which have been selected. The two Romanian newspapers have written about the following six events: the

revolution from the GFR (1953), the construction of the Berlin wall (1961), the visit of president Kennedy in Berlin (1963), the Kissinger coalition (1966), the visit of Willy Brandt in Poland (1970) and about the attacks at the Olympic Games in Munich (1972). The publishing style has been the same, through omissions, negations, exaggerations. The differences regarding the content are greater. The newspaper has indeed published more about the events which happened in Germany, than other newspapers. The German paper has painted a beautiful image of the lives of the members of the German minority in Romania: according to the paper, they have worked with pleasure during the day and in the evening they have taken part at cultural German events. Without reading the first part of the thesis, a simple newspaper reader, not knowing the realities of those times, would get the impression that living in Romania has been a feast for the Germans.

The persons who have worked and are still working for the *Neuer Weg* and which have answered our questions, have been: Mrs. Gertrud Montferato, Mrs. Rohtraut Wittstock and Mister Werner Kremm. Except for the questions regarding their personal career, there have been also questions about four larger themes: the work of the editors, the work of the journalists, the censorship - eventually the ways of avoiding the censorship and specific German aspects approached by the paper.

The discussions have been extremely useful for our research, because we have found out about certain aspects, which could not have come from other sources. Regarding the editors, we have found out the following: in order to become an editor for the NW, the most important condition has been to know the German language very well and eventually to have studied the German language at the faculty. Most of the employees have been indeed members of the German minority, because these knew the language very well. During the 50s for the paper have worked mainly German speaking Jews and over the years also some Romanians have contributed to the paper. All the editors have been party members, but they weren't employees of the Central Committee, but of the paper.

The journalists working for the NW have not been students of the communist academy *Academia Stefan Gheorghiu*, but have studied the German language at other state faculties. Because in that era, there was no faculty of journalism, many of them have been trained directly by the other employees of the paper.

Regarding the censorship, we have found out the following: The editors were responsible for all the content of the paper. There were also two censors alternatively reading the paper and controlling its content, these were not employees of the paper, but of the censorship institution. Mrs. Montferato admitted that no one has dared to write about

forbidden themes or in a forbidden manner and she has described the every day work as being a hard work of translation of tens of pages every day. Although persons who have worked for this newspaper or have studied aspects related to this paper have stated many times that this paper has been free in a certain way, we have learned that the censorship could not be avoided. Not a single respondent could give us an example of an article or theme written in a certain way so that it avoided the censorship.

The next great theme of discussion has been about the typical German elements approached by the paper. We have found out what was typical German about the paper, and that is the articles about the traditions, especially those from Banat. The chief editor went a bit far when she stated that this newspaper was an example for how a newspaper had to be in those times. The findings of our study disagree with this statement, which, according to the previous chapters of our thesis, seems a bit exaggerated. It is true that the themes from the NW have been more pleasant and we have found out that also Romanians knowing the German language preferred to read this newspaper rather than the Romanian ones. Despite all of these, NW has not been free of constraints and has not been specific German.

The last essential question for the present study has been if NW has been simply a Romanian newspaper written in German or if there were considerable differences between this and the other Romanian newspapers of that era. We have found out that the major difference was the themes, which were more pleasant to read, but especially the cultural supplement or the supplement for the young readers or the movie reviews, which no other paper had.

Although it was not free of constraints, the people working for the paper have supported their readers through the paper and have contributed to the fulfilling of the following objectives:

NW has been involved in preparing and applying the Decree no. 81 regarding the retrocedation of the lost land and goods.

Later on, the newspaper has contributed to the fact that the state took into consideration the years during which the Germans have worked in the Soviet Union after the war. Thousands of letters from the readers have been handed.

The newspaper has contributed to the founding of the German theatre in Timișoara (1953), to the founding of the German department at the state theatre from Sibiu (1956) and has assured the continuity of the German traditions, such as Kerwei/Kirchweih.

The content analysis and the interviews have led to the conclusion that the interests and the problems of the German minorities have not been approached by the paper. It has

reported about traditions or linguistic aspects, but other social, economic or political problems have not even been mentioned. If we look at the historical facts and then read the articles from the newspaper, we see two parallel worlds, one harsh with existential problems, and the other one with celebrations, books and traditions.

The newspaper *Neuer Weg* was not a communication tool of the German minority, but a simple Romanian newspaper written in German, which has written more about the traditions of the Germans. The question we have addressed at the beginning gets a negative answer: the paper has been written rather in a socialist context, than in a German one. Although the paper has not managed to give a realistic image of those times, it has probably managed to maintain the identity of its readers over the years, during the communist era.