Abstract

In the political-diplomatic context of the preparations for the Belgrade Follow-up Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, inspired by the former, the initiative by the Romanian writer Paul Goma to start a human rights movement in Romania, at the beginning of 1977, was seen as an open declaration of war by the communist regime. All those who joined the Goma Movement were subject to repression. The writer would be in danger of losing his life because of the attempts to assassinate him by the secret police. A sudden death was preferable to a public trial, which would have seriously damaged the image of the regime in Bucharest, especially since in 1977 provisions dealing with political crimes had been removed from the Criminal Code. Released from prison under pressure from the West, the dissident writer, banned in Romania, continued to be one of the leading critical voices against the Ceaușescu regime while in exile. When he was forced to leave the country in November 1977, the writer was warned by the Securitate general Nicolae Pleșită that the long arm of the secret police would reach him...
no matter where he was. In the 1980s, at the behest of the party leaders, the secret police were still working out ways to silence him. Just as he survived the first assassination attempt (in the Rahova prison in Bucharest, April 1977), Paul Goma would survive two more attempts, in 1981 and 1982, planned by the Securitate, under direct orders from Ceaușescu, the first attempt being carried out by the international terrorist Carlos the Jackal, the second one by the Securitate officer Matei Haiducu, based in Paris.

Keywords

attempt, Soviet Bloc, dissidence, opposition, Securitate

The domestic and foreign context of Paul Goma’s opposition

1971, when Ostinato, a novel escaped from Romania, was published by Suhrkamp (Sandri, 1971), was a year of ideological refreeze in Romania. Nicolae Ceaușescu launched his new programme on the model of the Asian Cultural Revolution, known as the July Theses. At that point the writer had suffered repression for 15 years: detention for political reasons, house arrest, failure to complete university studies for the second time on ideological grounds, being denied the “right to sign” his works. In 1968, in Moscow, Russian opponents Larisa Bogoraz, Konstantin Babiiți, Vadim Delaunay, Tatiana Baeva, Vladimir Dremliuiga, Victor Fainberg, Natalia Gorbanevskaja, Pavel Litvinov had already proclaimed to the whole world: „For our freedom and yours”, against the official policy of the Soviet Union. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops (less Romanian ones) had the opposite effect: by acclaiming Ceaușescu for his refusal to take part in the invasion of a „friendly country”, Romanians indirectly manifested their resentment towards Moscow. Ceaușescu’s master-stroke won him popular support for a short time: while European dissidents also fed on such events, in Romania the way in which the regime had been „supportive” of the Prague Spring re legitimised national communism. Shortly afterwards, Paul Goma realised that the hope of publishing his novels in the language in which they had
been written was illusory, as long as they did not follow the censors’ directions. His noncompliance became all the more apparent after Nicolae Ceaușescu reworked the *July Theses* in the *Exposition at the working session of party activists on ideology and political and cultural-educational activity* [Expunere la consfătuirea de lucru a activului de partid din domeniul ideologiei și al activității politice și cultural-educative].

On the agenda: the duties of the communist (writer, composer or artist and in all areas of culture) who, through his work, was required to follow and revive the party’s ideological line with a view to raising the socialist awareness of the masses. The writer, in particular, should be committed to the ideological war: „for the sake of the freedom of creation we cannot shut our eyes, we shall never admit the writing of all kinds of literature”, Ceaușescu pointed out, and literary criticism „must be communist criticism, literary journals and magazines must be entirely communist”, and reject „retrograde aesthetic ideas” (Deaconu, 2015/2016).

The state’s position in the ideological war would also be strengthened by Act No 23 of December 17th, 1971 on the defense of state secrets in the Socialist Republic of Romania. Previously, the ban on publishing manuscripts abroad, before their publication in Romania, was provided by a Decision of the Council of Ministers (*dCM* 957/1966). Written in a well-known style that maintained a semblance of legality, the act banned „the smuggling, dissemination or publication abroad of any type of works or writings, which could be harmful to the interests of the Romanian state” (Official Gazette, 1971). The totalitarian regime had no difficulty deciding that a novel could be a „state secret” and that its author was a traitor to his own country, a charge which would be laid against Paul Goma, who wished his books to be first published in the language in which they had been written. After three years of rejections disguised as postponements, it was obvious that the books would not be published, so long as the author refused to mangle them ideologically. Until 1977, the most difficult year in the oppositional writer’s life, he published in the West the novels *Ostinato*, *The Door*, *Gherla*, and numerous articles and interviews in periodicals. The most relevant essay is *Censorship – Self-censorship – Paraliterature*, with the subtitle *The Short Way from Truth to Lies*, translated into

You wish to say (or write) what you have to say (or write) and what seems true to you. But then a clenched fist hits you in the face, which shuts you up and silences you: you keep silent, because you obey censorship orders. You would like to say (or write) what you would have to say (or write) and what seems to be true to you. And a clenched fist threatens you – you know it, it has silenced you in the past, has threatened you before: you keep silent, because you censor yourself. Once, a long time ago, you wished to say (or write) something, but a clenched fist had shut you up, had threatened you. And now you have grown tired. You think you would like to say something... – actually, you have nothing more to say... Something about the truth... but who knows the truth anyway...? [...] This is how, after the steps-backward of 1968 and 1971, a para-literature emerged in Romania: books written-published with approval from the police; a nice, pleasant literature, which says nothing and upsets no one (except perhaps «some minor clerks»), but which could have huge print-runs: censors have no objection to a writer publishing his work, meeting with his readers, being filmed, interviewed, recognised as a great-writer, (re)paid, as long as he does not tell the truth (Goma, 2010, pp. 40-43).

In the same year the novel The Door was launched at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and as shown by documents in the Securitate archives, the Bucharest regime was extremely bothered by the writer who continued to express himself freely in the Western media whenever he had or sought the opportunity. On 3rd October (Goma had turned 37 years old one day earlier) Goma gave an interview to the Romanian-born German writer Dieter Schlesak, broadcast by „Deutsche Welle“. The Securitate officer who reported on the event held that „he [the writer] made disparaging comments about the political climate in Romania, the freedom of creation, as well as some persons who hold important

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1 Reverse translation into Romanian by Michael Astner, of the German text recovered from the archive of „Die Zeit“. 

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positions in our country” (ANCSSA, DUI 2217, vol. 2, f. 174), those who were not named being Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, that the writer’s activity „is marked by permanent political opposition”, and that the reason for it would be „his wish to stand out as an exponent of «social revolt», explicitly directed against our socialist regime”. To this end he would have resorted „to all sorts of clandestine means and, breaking the laws of our state and with the help of persons abroad”, smuggled out of the country the manuscripts of Ostinato and The Door, published in German and French between 1971 and 1972, their publication being surrounded by „publicity unfavourable to our country” (ANCSSA, DUI 2217, vol. 2, f. 174).

Between 18th June 1972 and 15th June 1973, Goma received a tourist passport for the FRG, Austria and France, being pressured by the authorities, who hoped that by giving him a visa to leave the country he would not return. The secret police closely monitored his activity through their informers and residents in the West, as well as by the analysis of his articles and interviews in foreign periodicals and his appearances on the programs of Radio Free Europe (RFE). Thus, Goma wrote „three more novels with a hostile content” and during the same period talked to two West German journalists: „this time, Goma accused the Romanian state for his failure to publish his books in the country”. The officer who wrote the internal note for his superiors saw Goma as having a „provocative character”, which was also proved by „the way in which he handled the open letter addressed to the party leaders in February 1972, letter which he later published in the Paris newspaper «Le Monde», on 30th April of the same year, in an attempt to put pressure on the Romanian authorities” (ANCSSA, DUI 2217, vol. 2, ff. 340–345). The Minister of the Interior demanded that he be deprived of his Romanian citizenship, a measure which, as it will turn out, would not have made the writer end his opposition to the communist regime, and which consequently would never be enforced.

2 The Archive of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (ANCSSA); Information surveillance file (DUI).
3 For an in-depth analysis, see Bălănescu, 2022.
In 1977, the solitary and socially-minded Goma formally „imitated” the dissidents in Prague, where some of the authors and supporters of the anticommunist manifesto were communists or communist sympathisers, who wished to reform the system through their political pragmatism. A CIA analysis shows that the Husák regime was very surprised „that 241 people initially signed the document”, what is more, they may have been „astounded and concerned that almost three times as many would add their signatures in the face of the intense media criticism and police harassment” (Dissidence in Eastern Europe4, 1978). The analogy between the Romanian case and the Czech holds true in a rather narrow sense, because in 1977 there were so few dissenting voices in Romania, that the situation was more similar to that in East Germany, where dissidence was represented by individual cases. The singer and poet Karl Wolf Biermann is a case in point. As in Romania, Biermann’s sympathisers would be imprisoned, „persuaded” by specific methods to recant or emigrate. STASI, and the Securitate used the same methods for neutralising opponents, acquired from the big brother from the East. In 1968 Reiner Kunze left the Socialist Unity Party, in protest at the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Two years later he published in West Germany (without requesting permission from the authorities, like Goma) a children’s book Der Löwe Leopold: Fast Märchen, fast Geschichte (Leopold the Lion: Almost Story, Almost History), which was viewed as a „hostile” act. It was followed in 1976 by the critical prose book Die wunderbaren Jahre (The Wonderful Years), smuggled and published in the FRG. Like Goma, Kunze was expelled from the East German Writers’ Union. He was denied the right to sign his works, a sanction imposed on Goma as soon as the Securitate found out that Ostinato would come out in Germany. As a painful coincidence, on 13th April 1977, the day when the Romanian writer, while under arrest, was excluded from the Romanian Writers’ Union, the Kunzes settled in the FRG, after they had willingly renounced the GDR citizenship. At this point, the profile of Paul Goma and his

4 The document titled Dissidence in Eastern Europe (A Research Paper) is over 20 pages long and it is an analysis by the Central Intelligence Agency, National Foreign Assessment Center, September 1978, available at: https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80T00634A000900110001-5.pdf.
family is a bit different, in that he went to France, where he spent the rest of his life as a political refugee. The profile of the Romanian dissident also diverges from that of Kunze because his individual gesture became a collective one in February 1977, attracting over 430 signers (identified by the Securitate, actually more).

If the political police in the countries of the Soviet bloc used the same methods as the KGB to keep writers within the confines of controlled creation, with differences dictated by the „national character“, the grievances of the population in the respective countries were also similar, being voiced by opossitional and dissident movements, which served as a litmus test thereof, again with small national differences. In Central-Eastern Europe, 1977 saw public discontent caused by violations of civil rights and liberties, the most publicised issue being the restrictions on foreign travel and emigration. In the GDR there were thousands of applications for permission to travel. Economic problems were the main reason for these applications, although the East Germans did not experience such serious difficulties as the Poles (Dissidence in Eastern Europe, 1978). The detail is of particular relevance for the Romanian space, where there were attempts to minimise and incriminate the Goma Movement as the „Goma passport movement“, the constitutional right to free movement being thus trivialised, all the more so since that was the common denominator of oppositional/ dissident movements in Europe at the time. The letter addressed to the CSCE in Belgrade on 8th February 1977 by the first eight signers of the text which would embody the Human Rights Movement in Romania made reference to a number of human rights, freedom of movement being mentioned only towards the end:

[...] the rights guaranteed by domestic laws and the international conventions ratified by the governments of totalitarian states are not respected; the citizens’ rights provisions in the SRR Constitution (art. 17); the right to work (art. 18); to education (art. 21); to association (art. 27); the freedom of speech, press, assembly, meetings and demonstrations (art. 28); the freedom of conscience (art. 30); the inviolability of the person (art. 31); residence (art. 32); the secrecy of correspondence and telephone conversations (art. 33). Equally disregarded is the right...
to free movement of persons, ideas, information, while the right to citizenship is perverted into an obligation which does not serve the cause of progress... (Bâlănescu, 2022, p. 608).

Paul Goma lived, wrote and acted from the deep conviction that a writer’s mission is to always tell the truth, based on the assumption that a creator’s life and work must not be treated separately. He turned this conviction into a rule of ethical conduct⁵.

The first attempt to assassinate Paul Goma: April 1977

The Securitate was not reinventing any methods for intimidating, punishing and neutralising/liquidating opponents. The method used by the secret services, specifically those of the countries in the Soviet bloc, of eliminating „enemies” by poisoning, is documented and actually turns out to be a sad recurrence of the practices of the Soviet secret services. The attempts to assassinate the writer generally mentioned in specialist literature are two plans of the Securitate (1981, 1982) which were to be carried out abroad. In trying to punish and intimidate the dissident writer, the Securitate also used the poisoning method in the attempt to eliminate the writer’s son, only two years and four months old, in March 1978. The child was going to ingest pills carried in the purse by a Securitate agent, who paid a visit to the Gomas, on the pretext that she was a refugee. Everything went

⁵ With reference to Ostinato, Monica Lovinescu wrote in 1973: „I noticed that, whenever an Eastern literature, locked up in a non-universal language, drew to itself the attention of the West, it was for reasons to do with the writer’s ethics, more than with the aesthetics of the work. Hungarian literature was massively translated after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Polish literature, after the events in Poznan, Czech and Slovak books after the Prague Spring. This was not because editors, critics, intellectuals in those countries would be systematically anticommunist - quite the reverse - but because the Eastern writer who regained his status as a writer by an act of rebellion, became credible, legitimized his work by the life-and-death situation he experienced. In certain historical contexts, such as that of Eastern Europe in the last quarter-century, ethical non-conformism is the threshold which must be crossed in order to re-enter the aesthetic”. „Paul Goma and the Duty of Memory”, Ethos, no. 1, 1973, pp. 118–129; and in Monica Lovinescu, Shortwaves, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990, pp. 517–519.
as planned, despite the insistence of Paul and Ana-Maria Goma that the intruder should not leave her purse within reach of the child. The agent left unobserved and the parents noticed some worrying signs in time, so that the child could be saved by French doctors (Goma, 2019).

Paul Goma started to feel sick shortly after being arrested on 1st April 1977 on the charge of „treason by disclosing secrets” („transmitting to foreign organisations data and documents which due to their classified nature pose a threat to state security”) (ANCSSA, Criminal Investigation Fund, file 313, vols. 1, f. 9), of establishing and constituting a subversive group whose purpose was the commission of acts of treason. The suspicion of poisoning was indirectly confirmed in 1982, when the Securitate sent to Paris an officer charged with eliminating the writer by aconitine poisoning. Despite the observation in the medical records, completed by the prison doctor on 3rd April 1977 (the third day after his arrest), that the prisoner was in good health (ANCSSA, Criminal Investigation Fund, file 313, vol. 11, ff. 5–6), starting on the 27th April, the medical records suddenly indicated issues of great concern: attack of angor pectoris followed by radiating pain, functional impotence, painful ischemic heart disease and medication to match. The reason why he received medical care so late was explained by Goma himself, and his suspicions were recently confirmed by documents in the Securitate archive.

On 28th April 1977, an internal note of the Ministry of the Interior described the prisoner’s situation as follows: on 22nd April 1977 RFE broadcast one of Goma’s letters, which the Paris-based French Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania had received on the same day, and which allegedly was dated a month earlier (21st March 1977). It is especially relevant, for the purpose of historical reconstruction, that an unpublished draft of the letter, „which contains the main ideas in the said letter”, was discovered and seized during the house search conducted on the day of the writer’s arrest, 1st April 1977. The letter had been entrusted to the Belgian diplomat Etienne Dussart (who smuggled out of Romania a number of Goma’s manuscripts) „with the proviso that it should be made public abroad if he were arrested […] and it was made public at a time deemed opportune by the reactionary groups abroad” (ANCSSA, Criminal Investigation Fund, file 313, vol. 13, f. 40). Although the letter was
broadcast on 22nd April, and some sources said that the writer was under arrest, the news was confirmed beyond doubt and it became credible to FRE only a week or so later, when the writer Dumitru Țepeneag submitted for publication and sent out to radio stations for broadcasting the Testament which Goma had handed over to him and which the author had drafted as early as 1976, in case he was arrested and assassinated.

Faced with an unpredictable situation, the Securitate had then to try to save him from the death it had planned, for a reason unrelated to the humaneness of the communist regime: if Goma had died while in prison, the image of the communist regime, whose leader posed as an opponent of Moscow, would have suffered a serious blow. Another coincidence complicated the already sensitive political and diplomatic context surrounding the Belgrade CSCE: Ceaușescu was just renegotiating with the United States for the granting of the Most Favoured Nation status to Romania. The Goma movement played a major role in disrupting the relations of the Bucharest regime with the Western world and, in particular, with the United States.

The order for immediately saving Goma from death by poisoning, planned to occur after the administration of a carefully calculated dose of aconitine, came from the highest level of the party leadership. The operation was codenamed Assignment X. On 27th April 1977 „X” had a blood pressure of 230/120, and on 2nd May 1977 the guard on duty noted in his report the intervention of the writer’s cell mate, who knocked on the door to inform him that around 10.35, prisoner Goma Paul in cell 5 suffered a heart attack which he did not report. Seeing that, prisoner Stan Ioan who is his cell mate called me to say that prisoner Goma’s condition had not improved. [...] Shortly afterwards, prisoner Stan Ioan asked me for a match and told me that his cell mate was indeed suffering from a heart condition and it would not be entirely unlikely that he turned his face to the wall during one of these seizures and that we found him cold in his bed (ANCSSA, Criminal Investigation Fund, file 313, vol. 11, f. 7).

Paul Goma asked the sergeant for a Distonocalm pill, which was given him by the latter together with the shift supervisor. The
following day, 3rd May, col. Vasile Gheorghe (the head of criminal investigations in the Rahova–Bucharest prison), included in the said report an order which betrayed his concern: “Mr. Radu, the prisoner is to be seen by a doctor and receive medical treatment every day or whenever necessary. Special measures will be taken for guarding the prisoner.” (ANCSSA, Criminal Investigation Fund, file 313, vol. 11, f. 7). Goma’s testament called into question and denounced the methods used against prisoners of conscience under the communist regime.

TESTAMENT

April 1976/ 21st March 1977

Paul Goma’s last statement before his arrest

I, the undersigned Paul Goma, residing in Bucharest, declare the following:

1. I have not participated and I do not intend to participate in any kind of conspiracy aimed at the forceful overthrow of the existing political regime in Romania;

2. I have not committed and shall not commit acts of treason against my country;

3. I have not committed and shall not commit acts against Romania as a national and spiritual unity;

[...] 5. If after the arrest, irrespective of the manner thereof and of whether I am subsequently released, the repressive bodies or private individuals will state, verbally or in writing, that I cooperated with the investigation, made confessions, admitted to being guilty – let it be known that these “confessions” are false and I declare them null and void;

[...] 7. If I should die in prison (beginning at the time of my imprisonment) or if I or any member of my family should be the victim of an “accident” – fatal or not – let it be known: the authors are members of the repressive apparatus;

[...] 10. This statement is to be made public by my witness, whose signature is placed next to mine, within 48 hours of my arrest.

Paul Goma

(Goma, 2010, pp. 147–148)
He was hastily released on 6th May 1977, although his criminal file also contained the charge sheet, which set forth the charges brought against him. „What have you done to him, you murderers, when you arrested him, he looked like a man and now he is a wreck, what have you done to him?”, cried Ana-Maria Goma when he came out of prison (Goma, 2015, p. 412). The attempt on the writer’s life in the Year of Human Rights indicated two facts which hold true for surviving opponents/ dissidents throughout the socialist camp, even though there are also exceptions: 1. the only effective way of staying alive as an opponent/ dissident in the 1970s and 1980s was for the persons involved to make themselves known to the Western public opinion, and for their families and friends to try to communicate to the world “outside” what was happening to them; 2. the most powerful weapon against the communist regime was non-silence (a term used by Goma in his novel Gherla: not to keep them silent – to keep them not silent…), the refusal to give in to abuse and crime.

The victim gained the upper hand by upsetting the plans of the terrible repressive body, which failed to both assassinate him and to convict him for treason in a show-trial, in which Goma was to be held up as a bad example. In order to save appearances, on 6th May 1977, the day of his release, the prosecution claimed that the „threat” had been exposed in time by the competent authorities, so that no there were no „serious consequences for state security”. He was discharged based on this legend, although the suspension of prosecution was signed as late as 16th June 1979, the writer being a political refugee in Paris since November 1977. The picture of appearances was completed one day after the writer’s release by Decree no. 115/7 May 1977 on amnesty and pardon (published on 8th May 1977 in Official Gazette no. 38) signed by the head of state. A desperate gesture of captatio benevolentiae on Ceaușescu’s part, mainly intended for foreign diplomatic officials. The Securitate agents not only hatched plans to compromise and eliminate opponents, but also plotted acts of blackmailing diplomatic allies, by invoking the help that Romania, allegedly independent from Moscow, had offered the Americans, all this while RFE, funded and organised by the US Congress, broadcast programs critical of the Bucharest regime and its leaders.
Between 1981 and 1982, Paul Goma was the target of two assassination attempts for which the Securitate enlisted the services of international terrorists. These were captured by Goma in the novel *The Dog’s Soldier*, written while the events were still „fresh”, and published in 1983 by Hachette (*Chassée-croisé*, trans. Alain Paruit).

**The second assassination attempt: the parcel bomb (1981)**

After conducting my own investigation over the last few years I have come to a conclusion which might baffle some experts in the Goma case: being stripped of Romanian citizenship would not have been the most terrible thing that could have happened to him, but was always a plan B. The measure appears more drastic nowadays than in the late 1970s, when people in the socialist camp were trying to escape to the free world, but it would have deprived the agents of repression of the satisfaction of being able to convict the opponent of „treason” at a convenient time. A noncitizen or a stateless person cannot be held legally accountable. Moreover, Bucharest would have sent a message damaging to its own image.

The Belgrade CSCE (4th October 1977–8th March 1978) did not avoid the East-West ideological tensions. The Soviet diplomatic corps and the satellites of Moscow were made uncomfortable by the human rights issue. In those circumstances, Paul Goma, the RFE journalist Șerban Orescu and the former National Peasants’ Party politician Nicolae Penescu participated in the Madrid CSCE in November 1980. The three organised a press conference in which they spoke out against the Bucharest regime. In retaliation, each of them received a parcel bomb, on 3rd and 4th February 1981, Paul Goma and Nicolae Penescu in Paris, and Șerban Orescu in Köln. The Securitate recruited Ilici Ramirez Sanchez, a.k.a. Carlos the Jackal, to carry out the operation. Three weeks later, on 21st February, a bomb attack aimed at the Romanian RFE broadcast service in Munich hit instead the Czech section.

In his numerous encounters with the Securitate, Goma had developed a special instinct, which taught him to be circumspect. He wondered why someone in Madrid would send him a parcel containing Khrushchev’s memoirs in Spanish. He opened the parcel,
just enough so that the bomb didn’t go off, then he called the police. His foresight saved him from being severely or lethally wounded, which however the police expert who defused the bomb, the leader of the bomb squad of the Paris Police Headquarters, could not avoid (being injured on the forehead and one hand). The criminal investigations conducted after 1990 in Germany and France showed that the suspicions of the direct victims and RFE journalists were confirmed: the secret police of the Ceausescu regime was involved in the acts of the terrorist Carlos the Jackal, both in delivering the parcel bombs, and in the bomb attack on the RFE headquarters in Munich. The operations were well documented by Liviu Tofan, a former RFE journalist, based on over 130 files on Carlos and his terrorist group, which covered their activity over a period of around 30 years (Tofan, 2013).

L’Affaire Tănase: the third attempt to assassinate Paul Goma (1982)

In this case, the Securitate turned to one of its own officers, Matei Pavel Haiducu, an „intelligence officer, undercover agent“, in the Foreign Intelligence Directorate, who was tasked with a double assassination attempt. „Hirsch“, „Hajdu“, „Mironescu“, „The Traveller“, „Vișan“, „Anatole“, „Anastasian“, „Horia“, „Emil“, „Locride“, „mister Z“, Mathieu Forestier (Tofan, 2012) had been in France since 1975 to carry out industrial espionage. In 1982 he was given a mission different from the type of operations he had previously been involved in: political assassination. For personal reasons, he chose to defect to the French, turning himself over to DST (Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire). On the „order of the supreme commander, Nicolae Ceaușescu“ (Teianu, 2013), he was to eliminate the two Romanian writers in Paris, Paul Goma and Virgil Tănase, who criticised him in publications and novels. With regard to Goma, the order stated that „the Romanian services must under no circumstances be involved. The method chosen to eliminate Paul Goma had to be such that he would appear to have died of natural causes“, according to the statements made by Haiducu (Teianu, 2013). They chose the old technique of poisoning with aconitine, hidden in a small pill, which dissolved
almost instantly, tasteless and odourless, which would have caused a heart attack within 48 hours, leaving no chemical traces in the body. A lethal dose was to be slipped in Goma’s glass during a cocktail party. The purpose: a slow death, but quicker and more certain than the one planned in April 1977 in the Rahova prison (when it had to appear the result of a condition developed in time). The assassination was staged carefully with the help of the French authorities, so that the officer could fool his mandators in Bucharest. Virgil Tănase was to be „killed in any way, in any way could have meant ringing the doorbell and shooting when the door opened, organising a street fight, in any way whatsoever!” (Teianu, 2013).

„The word is my only weapon”, would say Goma who, despite the attempts by the Securitate to compromise, neutralise or eliminate him, never stopped speaking out against the regime in Romania and Nicolae Ceaușescu, in a French TV show. The two writers in question „damaged his image […] like an unsightly wart on the commander’s nose”, in the words of Haiducu (Teianu, 2013).

In an interview in „Le Quotidien de Paris”, on 6th September 1982, Goma was disappointed at the outcome of foiling the plans of the Securitate, implying that their expectations that Nicolae Ceaușescu would be shown to the whole world for what he really was: a dictator who held on to power by practising state-sponsored terrorism, had not been fulfilled: „We were used, then abandoned, they played with our lives” (Tofan, 2012, p. 25). Political-diplomatic considerations always prevail over individual and often even community interests. The socialist president of France, François Mitterrand, who had come to power less than a year before, included communist ministers in his cabinet, which is why he was isolated in the western bloc. By postponing his planned visit to Romania, he was trying to reassure the American allies, who regarded him with some suspicion. Beyond the undercover operations of the intelligence services, Haiducu had a personal stake: he was trying to remove his family from Romania. On the one hand, he had to continue for a while to play his part convincingly before general Nicolae Pleșiță, who had put him in charge of the attempts, on the other hand, the French criminal police was not to reveal what lay behind the „affair” (Tănase was reported „missing”, so that the information sounded
credible in Bucharest; they could not speak of the poisoning of Goma, because he had to die a „natural” death). The media was not to find out things that would have jeopardised the success of the operation.

Paul Goma, who had participated in so many anticommunist demonstrations in Paris, together with opponents from other countries of the Soviet bloc (Natalia Gorbanevskaja, Alexandre Smolar, Krzysztof Pomian ș.a.), with Western writers and intellectuals recognised for their civic-mindedness (Jacques le Goff, André Glucksmann, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie etc.) saw himself as being used by those who had granted him political asylum in the name of the respect for human rights. The conclusion of the novel The Dog’s Soldier is extremely relevant in this respect:

«On 26th November, in 1982, Le Monde ran an interview with François Mitterrand. To the question: To close off our discussion of the countries of East Central Europe: How are the relations with Romania now, after the famous Tănase affair?, The president answers:

I have nothing to add to what I have already said. The Romanian and the French peoples have strong historical ties. I am committed to preserving them.

I have nothing to add to what I have already said...

Neither do I».

Paris, 1982 (Bălănescu, 2022, p. 479)

Conclusion
By publishing his novel Ostinato in the FRG in 1971, Goma was the first Romanian writer under the Ceaușescu regime to be in synch with Western literature. „The synchronism of Romanian literature under the communist regime seems to be rather dependent on formulas accepted by the censors, within the confines of political control, rather than on the open outlets of literary modernity in the free world. According to the «modernist» theory of aesthetic autonomy, a novel like Ostinato was attuned to the South(-)Eastern European literature created by brave writers in the countries aligned to Moscow and was highly acclaimed by the cultural world of the democratic West.” (Bălănescu, 2022, p. 177) In 1977 the oppositional writer was the only Romanian who by his public actions joined the dissident movement in
the communist bloc, and managed to put Romania back on the „dignity map”, as Monica Lovinescu would state, the best-known Romanian voice on RFE. Goma’s breaking with the „tradition” of silence and conformism, especially common among writers and intellectuals under the Ceaușescu regime, drew positive reactions and support from Romanian exiles, who found that there is also a Romanian writer in tune with his fellow-writers in the other countries within the Soviet sphere of influence. Virgil Ierunca had expressed his enthusiasm as early as 1971, when Ostinato came out: „I had been waiting for him for twenty years, even longer” (Ierunca, 1993, p. 272). „Such books which bear witness to the real face of the underdeveloped dictatorships in Eastern Europe” had reached the free world coming from the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, not from Romania though, not until Goma, in 1971: „Paul Goma was the first to make a decisive step forward in showing to the world that writers who rise up to the times we live in also come from Romania. Like Boris Pasternak, like Solzhenitsyn, like Tibor Déry” (ib.). In an interview on RFE in February 1977 by Monica Lovinescu, Eugen Ionesco stated that Goma „is an excellent writer, a great writer, obviously he is not as big as Solzhenitsin, but neither is Romania as big as the Soviet Union, morally however he is just as valuable and perhaps even more so” because „there is a Romanian inertia, there is a kind of Romanian fatalism, a kind of metaphysical indifference” (ANCSSA, DVI 2217, vol. 4, ff. 242–254; ib., vol. 5, ff. 165–168).

Selected Bibliography

Archives


**Volumes**


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