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**PANAIT ISTRATI. THE DISSIDENT AS A MEDIATOR  
BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST**

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***Abstract:***

*The proposed text tries to read Panait Istrati's book - The Confessions of a Loser (To the other flame or After 16 months in the USSR) - through the modern historical, political and ideological paradigms of the 20th century, as well as the role of the intellectual as a mediator in the constant East-West dialogue.*

*It shows the function of the intellectuals in both Western and Eastern societies, their utopian visions, clashes, delusions and disappointments, their support for Bolshevism and Stalinism in totalitarian Russia in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century. All this is examined through the optics of our present day and the historical context.*

**Keywords:** Bolshevism, Stalinism, terror, ideology, Leninism, socialism, dissident

*Whoever knows everything that is now happening in Russia, he has no wound in his soul, but his entire soul is a wound, this man is skinned. 'Never mind, it will heal, you will forget: say you who are ignorant, and we say: we do not want it to heal, we do not want to forget. We are damned if we forget!*

*Dmitry Merezhkovski, from Russia and the Bolshevism. The Kingdom of Antichrist (1921)*

***1. The literature as an ideological spectacle***

In the pluralistic 21st century, Panait Istrati's story of the USSR fits in the area of the Sovietology whose object of study resides in the causes of intellectual blindness in the thirties and the forties of the twentieth century, also continuing after the World War II. **Through its analytical tools, science analysed the gigantic manipulation of the Soviet propaganda that invented the mental construct 'The Great Soviet Land' with all its mythology and iconography.**

The ideological performance, played by this story, only (re)confirms the thesis that revolutions in art are constituted both by the artist's ability to destroy the set public order and

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the unveiling of what should remain hidden. The tension arising between norms, conformism and stereotypes, leads to the outbreak of a scandal, followed by a public rejection and condemnation, but opens up new perspectives for the perception of these ideas by future unencumbered generations. (Vineron, 2012: 19)

It all began in 1929 when Ridder Publishing House in Paris published the bold trilogy *Vers l'autre flamme* in the *Temoignages (Testimonies)* collection with the subtitle - *Confession pour les vaincus. Apres 16 mois dans l'USSR (To the other flame. Confession for the defeated. After 16 months in the USSR)*, a rebellion of the anti-Stalinists dissident Panait Istrati, Viktor Serge and Boris Suvarin, but signed on behalf of Istrati. The image of the USSR is reflected through three aspects: the one of Istrati - the Romanian who for a long time lived and worked in France, of the Russian exiled of Jewish origin, researcher, translator and writer Viktor Serge (Victor Lvovich Kibalchik) and of the Trotskyist Boris Suvarin (Boris Konstantinovich Livshits). Suvarin is a French political activist, writer and historian who has taken up his pseudonym from the character of a Russian revolutionary in Emile Zola's novel *Germinal*. The scandal caused by the ideas voiced in the book resonates throughout the 20th century, as well as through the next one. Its profile is not only non-conformist, anti-Bolshevist and anti-Stalinist, but also a reflection of a particular layer in the left-wing intellectual community, which examines the Bolshevik doctrine in its perspective. In the paradigm of intellectual history, the book shows a radical change in the status of the intellectual after the Russian Revolution in 1917, who becomes a kind of state-linked – “organic” - intellectual, with an extinct critical spirit, placing oneself at the service of party politics. (Dosse, 2007: 103) The next aspect is how the Bolshevism with its radical anti-popular and anti-democratic leanings was accepted by the peripheral European societies in the Balkans, whose representative and spokesman was Istrati.

Istrati's narrative problematized who were the defeated and how the class rejected its own people, why theorists went with the theory, and the new political figures went with their revolutions. The autobiographical discourse outlines the social affiliation of the author - a marginal writer who chooses the path of social and trade union struggles. The text outlines the major movements of the twentieth century - workers' riots, trade unionism and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The era itself is settled, the Western European mass echoes with its poor South-eastern suburbs, blown up by the ideas of Georges Sorel.

Istrati begins the rhetoric of relativism under the term ‘defeated’, those who are ostracized, rejected by the class, able to see. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical paradigm ‘Terrorism and Terror’, as well as Aaron's ‘Democracy and Totalitarianism’ interpret the theme of betrayal:

*... fighters are inclined not to distinguish between opponents and criminals or traitors. [...] over the last 20 years of the history of France, the label - "traitor" - was liberally used [...] and changes in this definition reflected the volatility of events and relativity of historical assessments.* (Aron, 1993: 163)

The Romanian writer is the first who shakes off his Sovietophilic illusions, calling the Soviet Union – “a construction of the socialism” – “malfunctioning under the leadership of incapable communists.” (Istrati, 2014: 66) Today Sovietologists such as Paul Hollander and Robert Conquest reach the same conclusions, proving his prophetic intuitions. Stereotyped by the biggest leftist writers of East and West as a “traitor”, today his anti-totalitarian interpreters definitely distance him from the intellectuals of his time, worshipers of Russophile ideas, defined by Conquest as – “traitors to the human mind.” (Conquest, 2014: 3) Almost 80 years

later, the American professor Alan Charles Kors (figuratively speaking - a later follower of Istrati, who changed his leftist positions from the 60-ies of the 20th century to anti-communist ones and became one of the major denounciators of the communist crimes) continues Istrati's dialogue – "... socialism and communism claim to have a Marxist approach, and Marxists are certainly right for one thing: ultimately, we have to judge human systems not as theories and ideal abstractions, but as acting history and practice." (Kors, 2003: 116)

### *1.1 The intellectuals and the Bolshevik's utopia*

Istrati's self-delusion was typical for the twentieth century leftist utopianism - the extravagant modern zeal, clichéd by the evils of capitalist democracy, progress and flourishing liberalism. Intellectuals from the West and East felt called to be mediators, multiplying the leading ideas of their time, sometimes without delving deeper into their essence or realising the consequences. It would be difficult to determine Istrati as an orthodox Marxist. This shows the assessment of his friend Viktor Serge: "... he had no concept of Marxism [...] His fiery feelings replaced his doctrine [...] something like humanitarian archaism away from theory. He knew only one thing about the Soviet regime: that it was an enemy of capitalism." (Istrati, 2014: 24)

The Romanian intellectual was far from being an exception among those who confronted the Russian phenomenon. According to several of Russian philosophers, Russia is the Christian East, which suffered a strong pro-Western influence in the seventieth and nineteenth centuries. The Russian social development, consisting of collapses, crashes and failures, and even the change of its civilizational history, was also specific. Therefore Istrati was unable to penetrate into the complicated concept of Russian communism, since Berdyaev warned us:

*Russian communism is difficult to understand due to its dual nature. On the one hand, it is a global and international phenomenon, and on the other - Russian and national. It is essential for the people of the West to understand the national roots of Russian Communism, its determination by the Russian history. Knowledge of Marxism in this case does not help.* (Berdyaev, 1994: 5)

Istrati belongs to the so-called old socialist movement, but he is captivated by the idea of socialism (as he writes in his biography) after the Zimmerwald Conference (1915), which adopted the manifesto against war, chauvinism, annexation and the war reparations, but rejects Lenin's appeals for a global civil war, and especially after the even more leftist Kintal Conference (1916), which combined the Marxist forces after the Second International.

The Romanian writer declared his readiness to join the revolution of October 1917, but immediately changed his mind by declaring that he was watching it from Switzerland, instantly changing the angle, without realising that this gesture could cost him dearly. He had not understood the transformations performed in the USSR - as ascertained by the politologists, the Bolshevik policy was nothing more, but the Old Russian Empire under a new Communist mask.

Istrati did not possess the theoretical preparation to comprehend the gigantic Bolshevik experiment. As later Norman Davis writes, "The October revolution or coup, introducing the Bolshevik dictatorship creates upheavals reaching the very depths of the social, economic and cultural foundations of the empire. " (Davis, 2005: 915) This explains the fact that his first article – "Tolstoyism or Bolshevism"- in the French newspaper "*La Feuille*" engaged him in

the debate between Tolstoyism and Bolshevism. A rebel by nature, Istrati was attracted by Tolstoy's destructive instinct towards state institutions and his wild hatred towards the industrial West, mixed with sermons on nonviolence. Tolstoy predicted that if Marxism be established in Russia – “a transfer of despotism” (Johnson, 1994: 177) would be performed.

Psychologically, Istrati's publicistic writing illustrates an immense guilt that he had been misled, manipulated and used, because he was caught in the grip of his own illusions: “We believed in everything said and heard ... in the Marines returning from war ... in the progressive French intellectual elite. I had just read ‘Fire’ by Henri Barbusse, this ‘magical book’ for me at the time, I was carrying the words of Romain Rolland in my soul.” (Istrati, 2014: 67)

Bolshevik governments were constantly spreading false truths, pretending to be - “impartial seekers of the truth” - and Istrati could not know that even Lenin's declaration from 10.26.1917 for the Russian press, advocating on behalf of the workers, soldiers and peasants, was a lie. But the greatest betrayal was committed by the intellectuals - which in Istrati's mind was - “the courage of revolutionary-minded writers from Europe who will save the world.” (Istrati, 2014: 67)

They all took part in the Soviet adventure. It was the pro-Soviet oriented Rolland who gave the signal with the call published in the communist official paper “*L'Humanité*” (1932). Together with Henri Barbusse they initiated a large-scale campaign for winning ideological comrades among the intellectual elites in Europe and America, accomplished at the Amsterdam Congress, and for organising an intellectual front. Thus André Gide, André Breton, Bernard Shaw, Heinrich Mann, Paul Eluard, René Char, Kregel and even Albert Einstein were attracted, and overseas - Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Herbert George Wells. Later on a whole cohort of American intellectuals became left-oriented - Ernest Hemingway, Dashiell Hammett and Lillian Hellman to John Dos Passos and Norman Mailer, dutifully listed by Paul Johnson in his book *Intellectuals* (1994). Many of them identified the Soviets as - “*our international homeland*” - causing Johnson's sinister conclusion:

*One of the main lessons of this tragic century, which saw millions of human beings being sacrificed for the schemes aimed to improve the fate of humanity as a whole, can be formulated with the following sentence - beware of intellectuals! [...] Taken as a whole they often are ultra-conformists with respect to those whose approval they seek and appreciate. That's what makes them en masse so dangerous, because it allows them to create opinions and impose rules that are irrational and often have disastrous consequences. And above all we should never forget something that intellectuals often miss: people are more important than concepts. The worst of all despotisms is the heartless tyranny of ideas.* (Johnson, 1994: 446-447)

When in 1929 Istrati's book against USSR is published in Paris, it outlines the path of a modern, utopian, and according to the intellectuals, geographical adventure - the Bolshevik Russia. With religious ecstasy they will experience it, describe it, and it will slip away, because it is not the space of the place, not a geography, but rather a cartography of desire. For intellectuals, Soviet Russia is the new Promised Land, Stalin is the new Christ, and they all feel as if they are Moses. The reasons must be sought in the deep crisis engulfing capitalist society after the World War I and the fatigue of ideas, which raises the clash between Western ideas and Soviet reality, as well as the raging storm of collectivism and international solidarity.

A striking example is Herbert Wells - in 1920 he visited the USSR and his old friend Maksim Gorki, who introduced him to Lenin. In his book - *Russia in the Shadows* - Wells presented the Russian reality, arising from a complete social collapse, the Bolshevik society as a perfect and modern civilizational architecture. The English fictionist sees the role of the Bolsheviks not as a reason for the collapse of Russia, but as saviours from the social apocalypse that would have engulfed the Western civilisation as well, so he wrote - "While the rest of Russia was apathetic like the peasantry, or surrendered to violence in the country, the Communists were ready to act". (Wells, 1921: 76)

Even the 'iron Stalinist activist' Louis Aragon (in the words of A. Sanchez) after returning from the USSR (1931) published his poem "The Red Front", carrying the aggressively destructive power of the red 30s, but during the 70s he will talk about this work with hatred and remorse. Reading excerpts from Marx's *Capital* (1927-28) Brecht identified himself with the Communist Party. In the thirties, as Stalin's political pilgrim, he visited Moscow, then *The Event*, his first Marxist work was published, and he gained popularity among the German audience for the adaptation of Maxim Gorky's *Mother*, played through all communist clubs, and for his rough propaganda screenplays. In the USSR, together with Feuchtwanger and Willi Bredel, Brecht will edit the *Das Wort* journal (The Word), but Russia was a place where he was afraid to stay for more than a few days. In 1954 the Soviet government awarded him the Stalin Peace Prize.

His friend Walter Benjamin also headed to the Mecca of communism, as well as George Bernard Shaw who wrote his guide to the revolutions and their rationalism entitled *The Rationalisation of Russia* where the artist is paradigmatically embodied in the understanding of Brecht for the new type of intellectual - severe, cruel, and callous. In tune with the arrogant time spirit Shaw raised the idea that the Bolsheviks and Lenin are reasonable people - business-oriented and rational human beings with well thought-out program - and accused Churchill of demonising them.

The Soviet Union from 1954, through the prism of Jean-Paul Sartre, will be a new Arcadia, where freedom reigns, and its subjects will not travel, not because of limitations, but because of the lack of desire to go beyond the boundaries of their lovely country. According to the French existentialist, freedom of speech ruled in the USSR. Years later, Sartre said that he had written an article with a whole bunch of flattering words about the Soviet Union, without believing in them, and explained this with courtesy, not to vilify the hosts. The paradox is that the French philosopher admitted that he was quite unaware of the Soviet Union, as well as of his own ideas. (Sartre, 1976: 220)

### *1.2 The citizen position against the political commitment*

In this context, the civil behaviour of Istrati and Gide, projected in their books, articulate a syndrome which is customary for the twentieth century, namely - "the ambivalence, internal bifurcation" - and in particular the - "intrinsic turmoil of commitment" in terms of - "strong commitment, followed by a critical retreat." (Dosse, 2007: 86) The scandal unleashed by Gide's book *Back from Russia* (1935) is the only which can be read as symmetric to the "Istrati Case". At the heart of both scandals stands the "Viktor Serge Affair" with the denouncing of the Stalinist dictatorship, stripping off its specious mask and revealing the true faces of many Russian party functionaries. The persistent conformist Nikos Kazantzakis, travelling around Russia together with Istrati, did not assume the risk to write a book as his co-author, which saved him from a party lynch. Instead, in two chapters of his book *Report to*

*El Greco - Russia and Caucasus*, the Greek writer revealed his impressions of Lenin, calling Moscow “the New Jerusalem of the new god, the Worker, in the heart of Russia [...] in the world’s that day heart, Moscow”- he wrote highly laudatory texts about the USSR. (Kazantzakis, 1984: 357) Later, as a true Levantine, he will start to praise another totalitarian dictatorship - the one of Generalissimo Franco in Spain. As stated by Dosse, that was the reason for the intellectuals were seen as individuals **of falsehood, lie and empty claims**, but most repulsive was the desire to suppress sensitivity under the coolness of the intellect. (Dosse, 2007: 87)

From a contemporary point of view, Istrati’s greatest contribution is not the writing of an angry book against Russia (so did others), but highlighting one of the biggest affairs in Stalin's Russia - that of Viktor Serge. He was the first to include the book “*Soviets*” in his trilogy, and his work was continued by Gide, as a Chairman of the First International Congress of Writers in defence of Culture in June 1935 (Istrati died on April 16 that year in the Filaret sanatorium in Bucharest). The discussion about the Russian dissident proposed by Gide was rejected by Ilya Ehrenburg, the conductor of the Soviet regime in Paris, who was engaged in recruiting French intellectuals for the Stalinist idea.

However the discussion was held in the afternoon hours in a small remote hall because - “there are things that are better discussed within the family.” (Sanchez, 2006: 52)

The Italian delegate Gaetano Salvemini read a document with a clear and unequivocal position on this case, but he was disapproved by the Soviet participants. Madeleine Paz, head of the French Communist movement, presented a full and detailed report on the “Serge Case”. This circumstance persuaded the fluctuating Gide to leave to Soviet Russia and later, thanks to his energetic intervention via a letter to the ambassador of the USSR and the pressure put on Rolland (who was going to meet Stalin), Serge was released from exile in Siberia and immigrated to Belgium. It was from there that Serge asked his friend in a letter to reflect the actual state of things seen in the USSR, which helped Gide to be prepared in advance to meet the Stalinist reality. The dissident gone all the way through the hell of Stalinism, bitterly observes: “We made a front against fascism. But how to stop it, if we have just as much concentration camps behind ourselves? Our duty is not simple, I see it now, and no one can simplify it.” (Serge, 1936: 71-75)

## ***2. The downfall of the ideological viewpoint of the USSR***

The two leading leftist intellectuals, Istrati from the East, and Gide from the West, broke once and for all with the Stalinist monstrous manipulation and they suffered the attacks of both Western and Soviet communists for having proclaimed the truth. Davies’ perception that the most decisive “anti-communists” were the former communist was confirmed. If we symmetrise the two books of Gide and Istrati we will notice that the first one is melancholic, and the other one is angry. So that decodes Istrati’s findings – “*People from the Balkans, I myself being one of them, are different from those in Russia or France.*” (Istrati, 2014: 69) The French writer spent only two months in Russia, but Istrati spent 16. Russia did ‘upset’ Gide even more, for besides his illusions, he lost his companion and friend Eugene Dabit, who died of scarlet fever. The book begins with the following dedication: “To Eugene Dabit. A reflection of what I have experienced and pondered along with him’, thus Gide giving us a sign that Dabit would have supported the work, but also depicting him as a symbolic reader.” (Sanchez, 2006: 21-22) While the Balkanian Panait Istrati temperamentally claims - “The entire Soviet Russia has become an enormous prison.” (Istrati, 2014: 181)

In his brilliant study – “The Sorrow of Truth. Andre Gide returns from Russia” the Mexican Alberto Ruy Sanchez insightfully wrote about Gide - “He showed the moral persistency of a writer who was a witness of his time and who dared to stand against the big falsifications, clearly visible in his environment.” (Sanchez, 2006: 22)

Moscow on the morning of October 20, 1927 through the eyes of the Balkanian Istrati was a hectic metropolis, getting ready to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the October revolution, or the ritualised lie, as seen from the contemporary perspective. The writer coming from the poor South, stared into the social detail: “The greatest country in the world and the poorest – “but still” - a colossal effort aimed for the bolshevisation in a certain way of the guests invited and defined by the hosts as ‘independent persons’”. (Istrati, 2014: 82)

A person from the Levant East, bearing inside himself the Balkan mixing of ethnicities, wanderer and adventurer with a fast boiling “Cephalonian blood” (in the words of Kazantzakis) and the spirit of a mutineer, Istrati derided the great grotesque carnival, played before his eyes. The image of a black man wanting to become a citizen of the Soviet Union was turned into a semiotic sign:

*... they put his face on posters and banners, in all newspapers and showcases, and taught him to utter some crap, finally they placed him on - "bloody" - throne of the Romanov family imperial line, they put on his head the royal crown and photographed him as if he was a monkey from the circus. (Istrati, 2014: 82)*

In this case, Istrati’s worlds meet the psychosomatic worlds of Dostoevsky, brilliantly analysed by Nabokov, or Bulgakov’s avant-garde visions in *The Master and Margarita*. Istrati captures the rough features of Russia, the belittling of the human nature - the abominable grotesque - all that defines him as a writer of the East, rather than of the West. Knowing the misery and poverty of the Braila suburbs, he asked himself - “... how much did that opulent parade of the Russian workers and peasants cost. [...] But of the thousands of participants, would there be a dozen people ready to ask this inconvenient question. Most of them were silent.” (Istrati, 2014: 84)

For the refined Gide, Moscow was bringing much sorrow that passed into melancholy - “I doubt that in some other countries nowadays, including Hitler’s Germany, the human mind can be more suppressed, more terrorised, more enslaved.” (Sanchez, 2006: 32) At the very beginning the free-spirited Frenchman Gide faced the police state, the enslaved population, and the trampled freedoms. And nevertheless he was

*part of this utopian universe itself: if it were not so, confronting the truth about the USSR would not be considered a tragedy. There were others like Bertrand Russell, who went to Russia before Gide and upon their return they made harsher criticism, but without anything tragic in their stories and analyses, simply because they were not believers, morally obligated to deny their previous beliefs. (Sanchez, 2006: 37)*

Both Istrati and Gide were included in the festive masquerade of the advertising socialism. In his book, the Romanian writer continued to describe the parade follies, for example a model of the Earth globe tied with real iron chains and a boy with an enormous hammer in his hands, hitting to break them. Those actions exhausted and annoyed Istrati. Writer Roger Martin du Gard tells about Gide being a delegate in Moscow – “dragged him to rallies, they prompted

him to manifest at the head of folk processions, chair congresses, sing revolutionary hymns, speak in front of thousands of others.” (Sanchez, 2006: 60)

The Stalinist advertising campaign was accompanied by an unprecedented corruption. Both writers are powerfully funded. Istrati admitted - “The state publishing houses signed contracts with me for most of my books and I regularly received big sums as royalties and copyrights. In the meanwhile, my novel *Kyra Kyralina* was successfully videotaped in Ukraine and I got pretty good money for it.” (Istrati, 2014: 87)

In his study, Sanchez comprehensively reveals the entire mechanism of subordinating the Stalinist regime supporters among the circles of foreign intellectuals - “Writers who were inspired to do the ritual pilgrimage in the country of utopia received such amounts in the form of copyright that were true wealth.” (Sanchez, 2006: 63) In his diaries Gide claimed that he was - “horrified by the extreme welfare that Russia offered him.” (Sanchez, 2006: 63) He was greatly surprised when he learned from the Russian press that more than 400,000 copies of his books were sold in a few months and the adulatory articles about USSR were also very highly paid.

Media images of Istrati and Gide were built by the journalistic field in the East and West and starting to approach and construct the doctrine of betrayal. According to Serge, the book published by Istrati caused a real sensation in the West and made Stalinist press go hysterical. Istrati chooses “*Nouvelle Revue Francaise*” to be his tribune in order to reveal the public face of the Stalinist terror. The Communist press fought back. In the West, in “*Le Monde*” Henri Barbusse depicted him as a - “renegade” - and managed to change the attitudes of the leftist French intellectuals who recognised him as a - “fascist”, - “antisemite”, - “member of the Iron Guard in Bucharest” (Istrati, 2014: 10) “*Komsomolskaya Pravda*” directly accuses him of betrayal and hypocrisy, calling him - “a person without a face”. (Istrati, 2014: 15) A comment on Istrati’s publication in “*Nouvel Review Francaise*” described him as someone - “spoiled by the bourgeois editors and publishers, generously paid by them.” (Istrati, 2014: 15) The hatred reached its apogee when the commentator compared him with the Russian diplomat and dissident Gregory Zinovievich Besedovski. (He gave up the high office and requested political asylum in France. In his books - *From the Memoirs of a Soviet Diplomat. Activities of the Comintern and the State Political Directorate (GPU)* and - *On the Road to Thermidor* Besedovski reveals the secret strategies and plans of the GPU, and on their part the Soviet leaders announce his memories to be a coarse forgery.) The Romanian writer was clearly aware of the consequences - “If I present all the details in my book, my cunning enemies will subtract excerpts out of the context, in order to spit on the USSR in their writings.” (Kazantzakis, 2014: 130)

Even before his book was published, Istrati had already been presented in the text of Morris Laporte, who in the capacity of head of the French Communist movement visited the USSR, but after his return wrote a critical book and gave up his ideas. The image of Istrati is frightening because of its confused identity:

*During the celebrations dedicated to the tenth anniversary, one man stood up and raised his voice in front of the Kremlin walls against all meanness of the authorities in this country, and he did it not as a principle, but driven by fear, selfishness and by his instinct for self-preservation, and that was the ‘Jewish writer Panait Istrati’.* (Kazantzakis, 2014: 127)



This probably was a discreet hint at him being a companion of Serge and Suvarin who were Jewi, showing the whirling antisemitism in Russia and France. Istrati also transferred his political criticism into the intellectual field of the Russian communist society. His article "About a Congress" analysed the congress of writers in May 1927 in Moscow, highlighting its airtightness, dryness and lack of public evaluation. This text met the approval of editor Pierre Navi because of the truth more "useful for our comrades from the French Communist Party than hundreds of other insincere writings." (Kazantzakis, 2014: 127) It was disapproved by the official organ of the French Communist Party "*L'Humanité*" and was published by the "*Clarté*" journal. On the other hand, "*L'Humanité*" continued to entangle journalistic mythology about the name of Istrati, reproducing the version that the writer was captured and beaten by the GPU.

The ruling propaganda machine, both in the East and West fabricated lies and manipulations, and the press was its herald. Istrati continued to write his epistles to the Russian special services and anti-Soviet articles described as – "hysterical" in Ehrenburg's book - *People. Years. Life. Book 3-4* (1967), and his contemporary Bulgarian translator Ognyan Stamboliev described them as - "dissident". The radical actions of the intellectual caused his former patrons to stand against him. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* stereotyped him into the ideological paradigm as an enemy - "wolf in sheep's clothing", - "anti-Semite" and - "fascist". (Istrati, 2014: 10)

The response in the Bulgarian periodicals is no different from that in the French and Soviet ones. The leftish journal "*Zarya*" (*Dawn*) (1938, №5099) featured Vassilios Christou's article - "Panait Istrati and his Crusade." Subject to commentary were Istrati's political articles in - "*Cruciada romanizmului*" (*Romanianism Crusade*) newspaper edition of a group of seizures from the Iron Guard. In this article, his compatriot shared that he did not notice any change in Istrati's outlooks during his pre-death conversations. Istrati prepared a volume entitled - *My and Our Crusade*. Because of the bad attitude towards him, it was three years after his death when the famous Romanian journalist Titu Liviu Balcescu (who lived 30 years in South America) collected the articles he considered to be the - "last pathetic confession of a troubled conscience" and offered them to the - "*Mi cruzada a la nuestra*" (*My and Our Crusade*) publishing house.

In another printed edition, the "*Obzor*" newspaper (1929, №19), under the heading "Cultural News" we read - "Panait Istrati reviled." The material refers to Boris Volin's article in "*Pravda*". According to Russian journalists, Istrati's disappointments were a - "zoological roar of a deranged, salable petit bourgeois." Here is a different assessment - in "*Narodno Delo*" (1930, №1) Dr. K.Sokolov published the article - "Panait Istrati. Criticism of his Book on Russia." According to the analyst, the book caused - "a staggering impression, given the fact that it was not a work of The White Guard and counter-revolutionaries, but of the defenders of the working people." He states that Istrati's faith - "in today's Russian authorities has been completely killed" for becoming an eyewitness of - "violence, lawlessness, filth, lying, meanness." (Sokolov, 1930: 67)

### ***3. The Dissidence – a bridge between the East and the West***

The work of Istrati - *To the Other Flame. 16 months in the USSR* - reveals his findings about the polymorphic intellectual environment - great creative figures, swinging between anarchism, syndicalism, Bolshevism and Trotskyism or, like Gide - "satellites" of

communism, frank and candid dissidents. They all were projected on the background of an overly alarming political and ideological panorama, which transformed them into cultural mediators and chroniclers of the time. Symptomatic is the fact that in the same year when Istrati visited the USSR the emblematic pamphlet of Julien Benda - "La Trahison des clercs" (betrayal of the people of the spirit) was issued, transferring God's sacredness to the intellectuals, treating them as martyrs of truth.

Repressions of Stalinism were shown by Istrati through the figure of the extravagant socialist Krastyo Rakovski, a member of the Socialist International, leader in the Russian Revolution, Prime Minister of Ukraine, diplomat in Geneva, London and Paris, a faithful companion of Plekhanov, Trotsky and Lenin, comrade of - all great leaders of the European Left - Fr. Engels, Zasulich, Jules Guesde, R. Luxemburg, Wilhelm and Karl Liebknecht. He was depicted by Panait Istrati a tragic victim of the Stalinist terror (killed in 1941), and in a later study of the Romanian historian Stelian Tanase, Rakovski was presented as

*a part of the radical intelligentsia from the beginning of the century who feels at home in Parisian cafes, on the trains between Berlin and Vienna, in the editor's offices in London or hotels in Brussels, Prague and Copenhagen. A world that these same intellectuals hate and love in equal measure. They dream to destroy it, but also crave to be recognized by it. Starting with Russia, they are prepared to take over Europe.* (Tanase, 2015: 12)

In his study, the Romanian historian presents Istrati as one of the circle around the Romania of the Workers journal, funded by Rakovski together with Gheorghe Cristescu Plapumaru, Alecu Constantinescu, I.C.Frimu, Mihail Gheorghiu Bujor, Alexandru Nicolau and Stefan Gheorghiu. He quoted an excerpt from Istrati's book and commented that its release in Paris caused a huge scandal. (Tanase, 2015: 19)

In the contemporary historical paradigm of Romanian publicists, Istrati is heavily influenced by the ideas of Rakovski, while Rakovski is - "a prisoner of his own obsessions, complexes and ideas." (Tanase, 2015: 21) Istrati constructed the image of the Bolshevik leader through the image of the French government - a sophisticated Russian diplomat with elegance, taste and protocol inherent in the literary and political elite in the Parisian society. (Tanase, 2015: 153) Rakovski was a typical example of how the artists of the revolution fell out of what their dreams was - "The Madness of these ideas, manifested nowadays in the entire mournful glow, after the miseries that Bolshevism brought during the last century!" - summarises the publicist. (Tanase, 2015: 21)

In a possible historical scenario of Eastern European dissidence, which has unwritten one still, Istrati will occupy a leading position, because in the early years of totalitarianism, he was raising his voice in defence of the common man from the European East - "I feel sorry for these good and honest people, faithful to the idea, completely innocent, who have been the victims of the evil in this country." (Istrati, 2014: 138) Much later the poet and a Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky puts his narrative in the context of the same subject. On the way to his exile in Archangelsk he met an illiterate Russian peasant who stole a sack of grain from a state farm to save his family from starvation, but the peasant was too old to wait for his release. The wrath of the intellectual is against the East and the West: "And not even one intelligent person - neither in Russia nor from the West - will rise to his defence. Never! Because no one will ever know about him[...] Neither the BBC nor - "The Voice of America"! "(Volkov, 2000: 85)

The great Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, like Istrati, argued that one of the reasons dissidents were hated in the West was the Soviet propaganda, to which was added - “the children's disease which is the leftism of the intellectual world and the sympathy for the ideas of socialism.” He again raises questions about the abomination cast on dissidents, the hypocrisy of the Western elite, admiring their courage, and deeply hating them at the same time, because they are - “a threat to the illusions of some and barricaded conscience of others.” (Bukovski, 1997: 8-10)

#### 4. Conclusion

In his historical-political paradigm Tony Judt points out that the early texts of Serge and Suvarin expose the Soviet myth, fitting into the - “Big Story of the 20th Century.” The historian believes that if we have to point out the symbolic moment of the transformation and - “the axis on which the post-war self-perception of Europe has spun” (Judt, 2010: 616), we would find them in Paris on 28.12.1973 the first Western publication of – *The Gulag Archipelago* by A. Solzhenitsin. (Judt, 2010: 483) Judt’s text helps us to make sense of the deep connection and continuity of the dissident ideas throughout the 20th century. In a new way this explains the fact why this exact publication helped for the official vindication of Istrati in France after 40 years with the assistance of Joseph Kessel and Eugene Ionesco.

During the 21st century, we need to rearrange (albeit with effort) the historic puzzle of the West and East, assigning a proper place to the - “cult of the victims” as well as trying to reconcile the antinomy - “the history of victory” and - “history of victims.”

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