

# Silvia Constantinescu

(b. October 3, 1940, Darabani, District of Constanta, Romania.)

Journalist, Founder and Publisher of "Curierul Romanesc" newspaper.

Librarian, Professor of Romanian language and literature.

Exile, living in Sweden.

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## **Communist Fellow-travellers in the West:**

*"Yourself... and some other exile Romanians, you were alluding to the inability of Western intellectuals in accepting/understanding the horrors of Communism, furthermore you were also alluding to the dominant position of the Left-wingers in the West. Such was the case in Sweden. This attitude made light work for the Romanian embassies and for the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest to denigrate those amongst the exiles who were politically active. The same was the case in Stockholm when it came to the campaign of denigration against the "Curierul Romanesc" newspaper. This was carried out as much through Romanian Communist channels as through their Swedish counterparts, which were extremely enthusiastic in the vein."*

[Silvia Constantinescu - interview granted to Stefan Racovita and published in the Romanian exile paper in Switzerland "Caminul Romanesc", 3 (63), September 1997.]

## **Exile's Advantage:**

*"One must not forget that we, as exiles, we had every occasion to compare and to see first hand how democracy operates. By contrast, Romanians of Romania had very little opportunity in their contacts with the West, which are still restricted and consequently could not enjoy the same exposure."*

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[Silvia Constantinescu - interview granted to Stefan Racovita and published in the Romanian exile paper in Switzerland "Caminul Romanesc", 3 (63), September 1997.]

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### **Ignorance of the Exile's Difficulties:**

*"Very few are those in Romania who are familiar with the difficulties confronting the Romanian exile in general and their publications in particular, and I dare say those who know them, especially those who were the source of such difficulties, would rather that one forgot about all this. I believe that it would be useful for the people in Romania to find out more about the difficulties faced by the exile in all its entirety, not just about how well they lived. And in this latter respect, the exile publications have still a role to fulfil."*

[Silvia Constantinescu - interview granted to Stefan Racovita and published in the Romanian exile paper in Switzerland "Caminul Romanesc", 3 (63), September 1997.]

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### **New versus Old Identity:**

*"Such double (Romanian and Swedish, t. n.) even belonging, if one bears in mind that two of the "Curierul Romanesc"'s correspondents are in the United States and one is in Italy, makes us very comfortable indeed. When we left Romania, we took with us whatever it was best from the Romanian culture and traditions, which in turn we passed on to our children. To this we grafted on the Swedish culture and traditions, which is the country that received us so generously. Such addition had enriched our perception and allowed us to detect in a more nuanced way all that happens around us."*

[Silvia Constantinescu - interview granted to Stefan Racovita and published in the Romanian exile paper in Switzerland "Caminul Romanesc", 3 (63), September 1997.]

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### **Poison-Pen Letter:**

*"To Silvia Constantinescu – the Kisling of the Romanian nation: We who are the vigilant trustees of the purity of the Romanian nation in its struggle to crush the Communist regime in Bucharest, we put you on notice for the last time: History and the Almighty God are witness to the fact that we never forgave those who had become subservient to the Jewish Masonry and annihilate them like any good Romanian farmer would kill a vermin on the verge of the furrow. Therefore beware you, red whore, if you still hold any more some godly values, if you still care for your four children and still hope to see them safely home, or maybe if you cared yourself not to fall victim to some "regrettable" road accident, or be assaulted by some drug addict, of a kind that there are so many in Goteborg..."*

*"...keep your wits about yourself, we warn you for a last time, should you even not leave you lair, we will still find you..." signed: "A defender of the Nation".*

[Poison-pen letter, sent by Securitate operatives masquerading as exiles, intended to intimidate Silvia Constantinescu and stop her publication activities in the West, quoted by Silvia Constantinescu in her interview granted to Stefan Racovita and published in the Romanian exile paper in Switzerland "Caminul Romanesc", 3 (63), September 1997.]

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### **Biography:**

Silvia Constantinescu was born in a professional family in County Constanta, by the Black Sea. Her father was a lawyer in a small provincial town. Silvia became a graduate in Philology and Library Studies of the University of Bucharest. In Romania she pursued an activity as an editor at the "Reclama Comerciala" advertising publishing house, a methodologist for theatre matters at the Comities of Culture of the Deva and Gorj districts, an editor of "MODA" and "Flacara" magazines, and finally, before her emigration to Sweden in 1977, a head editor at

the publishing house "ETICART" in Bucharest. Silvia Constantinescu with her architect husband, Octavian Ciupitu, have founded and edited, since 1980, the Romanian language newspaper "Curierul Romanesc", which is published in Stockholm. As the four children grew up, they gradually became all involved in the production and editing of this family venture. Silvia speaks Romanian and Swedish, and understands six further languages: English, French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese, having taken a further Swedish University degree. Apart from her very busy traditional family life (she is married and has four children) and the work-intensive activity of running since 1980 "Curierul Romanesc, Silvia had also run, together with her husband, an Art Gallery, was active as a correspondent for the BBC and Radio Free Europe, had published an Anthology of her interviews with various Romanian exiles, and produced a multi-lingual CD-ROM on the Life and Legacy of Alfred Nobel. She is a member of the Swedish "Publicistklubben", the Foreign Press Association and the American-Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Looking back at her life-long achievements, one may well ask what is so special about her to merit a mention. Sure enough, her four children have done all brilliant studies with a good kick-start in life, with no little help from their mother. Silvia herself, following her graduation in Romania, pursued long and arduous studies in obtaining further degrees in Library Studies at Boras University and in Oriental Languages and Philology at Goteborg University respectively. Once she obtained these Swedish academic degrees, Silvia Constantinescu held various responsible positions of a kind that were not open to many educated middle-class professionals in the West.

At a first glance this may sound a little trivial, but at a closer scrutiny this is far from being the case. For Silvia's whole life was one of perpetual struggles against social, cultural, and political handicaps, which would have caused many ordinary women in the West to give up any attempt for betterment: not so for Silvia, who is made of a rather different mettle!

From the outset Silvia came from an under-privileged background, with her parents divorced when she was only five years old and her mother leaving soon Romania for Sweden. Her two maternal aunts in Romania tried to look after her to the age of twelve, after which she was sent as a boarder to, and later as an assisted of, a government children's house (orphanage) in Constanta. The Swedish Red Cross made endless representations to the Romanian Government to allow Silvia to join her mother in Sweden, but permission was constantly refused by the Communist officials on the excuse that "the state was capable of looking after the child". It is only after 1990 that the full horror of such "care" of Romanian children came to light for the world to see.

To add to Silvia's punishment, not only she was not allowed to rejoin her mother in the West, but at the same time she was also denied her place at the University as a scholar, that as a result of her father being a professional and her mother a "defector".

In fact, for nearly all of her 37 years which she lived in Romania, Silvia was punished for her parents' past. This was the sorry period of communist positive discrimination for University entry at the time, when only children of peasants and workers, or Communist "aparatchicks", could enter higher education as scholars.

But nothing could stop Silvia's drive: she did night-shift work in order to be able to keep herself alive and study to qualify as a Librarian. Once she got her University degree in Librarianship, she further took a correspondence course in Philology, and she took on an editorial job, but the Romanian law made it harder for journalists of her social background to keep their position without joining the ranks of the Communist party. This she refused and narrowly escaped being fired. The last straw was the further stringent regulations meted against journalists which made Silvia's position untenable. At this point, Silvia with her husband Octavian and their four children asked for a passport to leave Romania and settle in Sweden. But even here life was not a bed of roses, as the young mother of four had to retake all her studies to get Swedish qualifications, which added a further eight years

to the previous six spent in higher education in Romania. As she was going to find out the hard way in Sweden too, political bias, influenced by Swedish Left-wing sympathisers who were resentful of anti-Communist exiles like Silvia, meant that not all jobs which she applied for were opened to her. The long shadow of Ceausescu's Secret Services also added to the strain, through an unending row of intimidating letters that were addressed to her through the post. Clearly the Securitate operatives abroad were aiming at stopping "Curierul Romanesc" being published in Sweden (q.v. poison-pen letters).

After Ceausescu's fall, Silvia took the initiative of setting up a seminar on the functioning system of the Parliament's Ombudsman after the Swedish model, and she initiated, organised and found the necessary funds from the Swedish Institute for the visit to Sweden of an official Romanian delegation. To this end, Silvia and Octavian also run the seminars as a team, completely free of charge, and they sponsored some of the events with their own funds. Clearly the proper functioning in Romania of the office of an Ombudsman would have greatly benefited a country in its transition to Democracy. But the occasion was perceived for the most part of the fourteen official delegates from Romania merely as an opportunity of having yet another junketing abroad, rather than learning the basic principles of human rights or the need of access by the individual to Government data files, such as the Securitate files - this is still a vexed issue in Romania, even 14 years after Ceausescu was put down.

Has she got any regrets? No, she would take on the struggle all over again, but for now she would leave some of the tasks to the younger generation.

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