

Snapshots of Romanian Archival Ideas in the Second Half of 20th Century. Part 1: Preliminaries

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ABSTRACT

As preliminary for the archival ideas in the second half of 20st century in Romania, this paper outlines the legal and practical trends in managing historical Archives in Romania. The paper covers the framework of managing records in creating institutions, the organisation of the State Archives, the acquisition policy and the main ideas about arrangement and describing archives.

Descrizioni sintetiche di idee archivistiche romene nella seconda metà del XX secolo. Parte 1: Preliminari

SINTESI

Come preliminare per le idee archivistiche nella seconda metà del XX secolo in Romania, questo articolo delinea le tendenze legali e pratiche nella gestione degli archivi storici di Romania. L'articolo copre la struttura della gestione documentale nelle istituzioni creatrici, l'organizzazione degli Archivi di Stato, le politiche di acquisizione e le principali idee sull'ordinamento e la descrizione archivistica.

Kratek pregled romunskih arhivskih idej v drugi polovici 20. stoletja. 1. del: uvodno razmišljanje

IZVLEČEK

Kot uvodno razmišljanje o arhivskih idejah v drugi polovici 20. stoletja v Romuniji, obravnava prispevek pravne in praktične tendence pri upravljanju zgodovinskih arhivov v Romuniji. Prispevek obravnava okvir za upravljanje z zapisi pri ustvarjalcih, organizacijo državnega arhiva, politiko pridobivanja in glavne zamisli o urejanju in popisovanju arhivskega gradiva.

Aspecte ale ideilor arhivistice din Romania în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Partea 1: Preliminarii

REZUMAT

Ca preliminarii la ideile arhivistice din Romania celei de-a doua jumătăți a secolului trecut, acest material schițează tendințele juridice și practice în administrarea arhivelor istorice din Romania. Articolul tratează cadrul general al administrării arhivelor curente, organizarea Arhivelor Satului, politica de preluări și principalele idei despre ordonare și inventariere.

1. Historical framework

The inter-war Romania resulted at the end of the First World War, by unification of many historical provinces, with different historical, cultural and administrative traditions. From archival point of view, it was then a co-existence of pure Austrian tradition (in Bukovina), Austro-Hungarian tradition (in Transylvania), a Russian Tsarist administration (in Bessarabia) and, finally, the tradition of the Romanian Kingdom.

The attempt of smoothing the different administrative and legal practices was produced between 1920 and 1930. The prevalent model was, of course, the one belonging to the Old Romania Kingdom, but local resistance generated also a series of adaptations of initial intentions.

From legal point of view, the unification regulation was adopted in 1925 - The State Archives Act (SAA). This was the framework for archival activities in Romania, until the Communism regulation in 1951. Altogether with different amendments and some related regulations, the law defined the main stream of Romanian archival thinking in the inter-war and first years of post-war Romania.

2. Management of current and semi-current records

SAA from 1925 does not address at all the management of records held by creating organisations. Their activity in this field is regulated at most by some line instructions¹. For instance, one can cite *The general Instructions for editing records and the registries from the chancelleries of local mayors' offices*², that ordered for a regulated registration system and a certain classification scheme, with several levels of hierarchy. There were no provisions at all about disposition and retention.

Besides these kind of regulations, there was no articulated policy at State level to secure records against unauthorized destructions. On the contrary, several acts formally favored the trade and destruction of public records. In several occasions, the public records held in the custody of creating agencies were allowed to be sold in public tender as waste, and the money had to be delivered to various NGOs. In 1935, the Ministry of Justice found an original source of enrichment of its budget: selling its records as waste! In 1938, an order stated that all the local mayor's offices should be gathered to the county prefecture ad from here - to the paper mills.

The government hardly received the reaction of the State Archives. In 1932, an amendment to the SAA obliged all the State civil, military and church institutions had, every year, to submit to the State Archives an inventory listing all the files created in the previous year. In 1936, it was decreed that the semi-active records of different public institutions are the ownership of the State Archives and a procedure for disposition was endorsed. The measures had a limited impact.

Another attempt to improve the bureaucratic system occurred in 1943, when the *General instructions for rationalising and simplifying the office works* were issued. The registration system was reinforced, a new classification scheme was developed and a system for disposition was in place. State Archives were mentioned as the only institution that can approve a legal destruction of records.

3. Historical archives

3.1 Organisation of the State Archives

In the inter-war period, the administration of historical archives was the responsibility of State Archives. It has a general directorate, in Bucharest and four regional directorates, corresponding to the four major regions of the country.

Despite some statements that the centralisation principle for archives was abandoned³, a subtle feature of centralisation can be noticed⁴. Local administrations did not preserved their archives in their localities, or even in their county, but collected in regional centres. In this regard, the regional centralisation of archives was aimed⁵. Sometimes, this approach was defined as regional "concentration" of archives⁶.

Such a policy was rejected from the very beginning by local authorities having long tradition in

1. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Arhivistica*, București 1970, p. 87.

2. București 1933.

3. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Arhivistica*, p. 82.

4. Ioan DRĂGAN, *Arhivele Statului Cluj (1920-1995)*, p. 9, note 6 in *Din istoria arhivelor ardelene. 75 de ani de la înființarea arhivelor Statului Cluj*, Cluj Napoca 1995.

5. Art. 5 in SAA 1925

6. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Instrucțiuni arhivistice*, București 1948, p. 14.

preserving old archives. In Braşov, for instance, the archivist of the town filed against this “concentration”, arguing that professional staff, own regulations and the freedom of access for researchers are good reasons for the local preservation of archives. Eventually, the archives remained in the town⁷. In the same regard, in 1932, debating in Parliament some amendments to SAA, Nicolae Iorga, a personality of Romanian historiography, argued against concentration of archives, asking that each local authority to keep its own archives⁸. Due to such developments, the regional centralisation trend was abandoned; instead, more regional archives were founded, revealing a new trend, of decentralisation.

3.2 Functions of the State Archives

According to SAA in 1925, the State archives was an institution dedicated exclusively for keeping and preserving the historical memory (“cultural history”). The interactions with creating agencies had solely the role of picking the potential valuable records of historical relevance and not that of helping them to manage properly their information assets. This model reveals was alike with most European continental ones⁹. Gradually, facing the risks of losing archives held by creating agencies, the State Archives started to get involved in the management of records, mainly in disposition phase.

Several opinions were expressed about the social functions of the State Archives at time. Paul Gore wrote, in 1924, that the Archives has as a function the insurance of individual and collective rights and then services to science¹⁰. Broadly, he considered that archival science had two goals: 1). elaborating the principles for the best, simplest and logic possible management of archives, in order to insure the integrity of archival material and the ease of use, for the interest of science and individuals; 2). Disseminate the content of archives for national and international science¹¹. In his article, he quoted the Russian N. Calacev, claiming that the main duty for archivists is to describe and control the documents, and the French Langois (“the true duty of archivists is not editing historical books, nor editing the documents, but compiling a true, scientific records and inventories”).

In the same regard, the Hungarian-origin archivist Veress Andras emphasized that “the archivist job is to serve the patrons”, and “the modern goal of Archives must be to offer the public access to the whole arranged and catalogued archival material and, with some restrictions, even to the one not arranged¹².”

3.3 Archival processing

3.3.1 Professional standards

The activities of archival processing were generally not the subject of professional standards, during the first years after the WW I. Even more afterwards, the State Archives did not issued standards or working guidelines, every archivist having the complete freedom of action, according to his/her skills and knowledge, to process the records. The overall trend seemed to be less regarding archival work as a job in itself, but to serve the historical science or to prepare the documents for historical research. Such an approach came even from those who graduated the School for archival Science and Paleography, founded in 1924¹³. Therefore, the “technical” articles in the professional journal of the Archives are more individual initiatives than institutional policies.

This situation was subject to change since the general director of the State Archives was appointed Aurelian Sacerdoţeanu (1938-1953). In 1939, he issued a series of normative orders-first in the history of the Romanian State archives, as far as we know-, developed and reissued in 1949. Withal, he addresses the issue of professional ethics, denouncing the fact that “the user was subject to

7. Elisabeta MARIN, *Fritz Schuster-arhivarul oraşului Braşov, 1916-1927*, “Revista Arhivelor”, 2004, n. 1/2, p. 244-245.

8. Monica VLAICU, *Arhivele Statului Sibiu, In 120 de ani de arhivă publică în Transilvania*, Sibiu 1996, p. 34.

9. An author claims that the SAA in 1925 would have been influenced by similar acts in France and Italy (M.R. MOCANU, *Arhivele Naţionale şi societatea românească*, Bucureşti 1997, p. 11).

10. P. GORE, *Arhivele Basarabiei*, “Revista Arhivelor”, 1924, n. 1, p. 9.

11. *Ibidem*.

12. A. VARESS, *Un nou sistem de catalogare a arhivalelor*, “Revista Arhivelor”, 1924, n. 1, p. 178.

13. D.ex., C. I ANDREESCU, *Ştiinţa şi tehnica în istorie*, “Hrisovul”, 1944, nr. 4, p. 5-59.

the archivist will, who, frequently, besides he was not aware of his own holdings, was also dominated by the subjective and non-scientific sense of non-communication, hidden under the formula of 'professional confidentiality' (...) When the archivist was reserving for himself an important archival material, his sense of communication could completely disappear¹⁴.

Sacerdoțeanu's efforts to standardize the activity were declined sometimes by other directors of regional archives. It should be quoted, in this regard, the lines written by Teodor Bălan, the Director of the Regional Archives Cernăuți: "about the intended rearrangement of archives, because we were asked for opinions, we believe in this moment we should abandon any thought of re-arrange. The duty of the State Archives is to capture and preserve the archival material. It does not matter the title of the documents; the main fact is that documents should be well preserved and easy retrievable. It is better to preserve the archival material as we have it, instead of dismantle the whole archive, arranging records according to a new system. It is not good to standardize our archives, based on one model. Each director should have the freedom to arrange records based on the system fitted for his archives, mandating him to do it in a practical and convenient mode for researchers"¹⁵.

3.3.2. Acquisition policy

In 1924, the State Archives elaborated a new system for selection the records of historical value¹⁶. When State Archives requested, the creators (state institutions) had to compile a full list with archival materials older than 30 years, with a description of their content. Based on this list, the State Archives were marking the records appraised as having historical importance, and accessioned them. The flaws of compilations (both as existent and as content description) reduced dramatically the quality of appraisal.

According to SAA In 1925, the State Archives got the task of preserving the accessions civil, church and military State institutions or of local authorities, as following:

- Historical documents
- Records about the civil status of the royal family
- Memorial and foundation records
- Records and documents older than 30 years that were not necessary anymore to the current activities of any civil, church and military authorities
- Scraped seals and stamps
- Scraped heraldries
- Official publication
- Collection of Romanian coins and medals, manuscripts, maps and engraving prints, and other old objects related to the history of Romanians (sic!)
- Deposits from individuals, who will preserve their ownership right, but it will grant the right of public use to the State Archives¹⁷.

Some remarks around these legal provisions:

1. State Archives was an institution intended as direct connected to the cultural, historical memory of the country.
2. The rule of thirty years for accession historical relevant records was in force. Earlier than this period, the State Archives had no function. This led to the freedom of action for creating agencies to sell their archives as waste paper and State Archives were going to face the risk of not having any historical records to transfer after 30 years. In this context there are understandable some attitudes of breaking the law limitations like, for instance, P. Gore's, who claimed that disposition of records should not be allowed unless the archivists were involved¹⁸. Facing these challenges, State Archives preferred many times either to get involved in the process of appraisal and disposition in current or semi-current archives held by their

14. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Instrucțiuni*, p. 5.

15. *Inventarul Arhivelor Statului*, București 1939, p. 333-334.

16. *Arhivele Statului. 125 de ani de activitate*, București 1957, p. 108.

17. SAA, art. 2-3.

18. P. GORE, loc. cit, p. 12 sqq.

- creators, or to transfer raw material from creators and re-appraise it in its own repository¹⁹.
3. The State Archives collected not only archives, but also any kind of historical evidences, like seals, stamps, manuscripts etc. This obviously broadened the mandate of the institution and it is a direct result of the mindset of considering archives as a supporting institution for writing history.
 4. State Archives were targeting the State owned institutions only. The relationships with private archival holder were based on respect of the ownership rights and, on the other side, in cases of deposits, on respecting the rights of public use of the State Archives.
 5. Despite the provisions of law about all the civil, church and military institutions, in fact:
 - a. Military or Foreign Affairs archives were not transferred-they had their own historical archives
 - b. Church archives of ethnical and confessional minorities had the right to preserve their existing organization, under the right of surveillance and inspection from the State Archives²⁰.

Detailed instructions about the enforcement of laws were supposed to be issued shortly-in fact, never happened²¹.

According to the law creators had to compile inventories of the files created in the following year after the creation of records. A copy of them had to be sent to the State Archives and, 30 years later, these copies were supposed to be the transfer list of historical records. This provision of law seemed to remained a wishful thinking and, in 1942, the rule was changed. Transfer lists, in three copies, should have been compiled only for historical records that were supposed to be transfer.

It is worth reminding that, from 1932 to 1937, State archives had the right of legal depot, enforcing the provision of collecting official publication²². In this time, a respectable institutional library was developed.

Although not specifically mentioned into the law, State Archives had the practice of loans to administration. If a creator had the need for records that were previously transferred to State Archives, they could ask for temporary restitution.

For instance, in Bucharest, in 1939, it was reported that, after the foundation of the Ministry for Agriculture and Estates, a significant number of documents have been transferred from the State Archives for the current legal affairs. This material is about to be recovered and archival fonds will be completed²³.

3.3.3. Professional terminology

Professional articles edited in the Inter-war period reveals a full freedom in using archival terminology. A perfect example is offered by a fundamental concept, but extremely dizzy at time: archival fonds.

This term was not really integrated in the professional vocabulary of Romanian archival science. The word was used a synonym for "archives", but was not conceptualized in any way. For instance, in 1924, S. Reli wrote about "an important collection of the fonds in Bukovina"²⁴, while P. Gore mentioned the archives that contains files from different creator²⁵. In 1939, C. Sassu wrote about "collection of fonds" that form an archive²⁶, while in 1941 the same S. Reli mentioned again, "significant fonds and collections". An archive was seen as the whole of documents generated by an organisation, no matter if inside there were one or many archival fonds, with different provenances and with no real

19. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Darea de seama despre Arhivele Statului pe 1946*, București 1947 (extras), p. 4, 1 etc.

20. SAA, art. 8.

21. *125 de ani...*, p. 37.

22. *Inventarul...*, p. 296.

23. *Inventarul...*, p. 11-12 sau Sacerdoțeanu, *Dare de seamă*, 1946, p. 23. Many of these documents never returned...

24. S. RELI, *Arhivele Bucovinei*, "Revista arhivelor", 1924, n. 2, p. 308.

25. P. GORE, loc. cit. p. 16-18.

26. *Inventarul...*, p. 401.

references between them, except for a common holder. The credit for officially defining and attempting to enforce the concept of archival fonds belongs to A. Sacerdoțeanu, în 1949²⁷. He also coined the term “aggregated archives” for many fonds hold by the same organization.

In fact, Sacerdoțeanu had many other attempts for theoretical clarifications. In a study from 1944²⁸, he develop a theory about the difference between *regist* (summary) and *rezumat* (abstract) in describing documents and the various methodological approach. In 1947, he is reviewing various finding aids in archives²⁹. Besides, he wrote a whole set of paleography, diplomatics etc.

Another example of confusing term is “description” of documents or archives. A different authors it meant different things, from describing content (Gore) to describing the physical appearance of a document (Sacerdoțeanu). Also, “archival unit” meant for Sacerdoțeanu any archival entity that was an item in a finding aid (for instance, one fonds!), and not only the “file level” units.

As an intellectual source of professional knowledge, it has to be remarked the German, French and Italian influence. Particularly for A. Sacerdoțeanu, he quote many times from French, German, Italian and Dutch sources). A constant reference-and presumably a strong influence-is the Italian archivist Eugenio Casanova.

3.3.4. Arrangement. Methods and principles

The arrangement of documents-not defined as well and named in different ways: systematization, classification, ordering, arrangement etc.-had the same freedom of approach as the other aspects mentioned already.

On the one hand, there is the category of archivists who support and exercise the arrangement of archival material based on provenance. P. Gore, in 1924, quoted Delaborde: “Library is one thing, archives is something else, and this is why archives cannot be dismantled arbitrarily”³⁰. C. Sassu, in 1939 mentioned the principle of provenance and tried to impose in processing the archives in Brașov³¹. The archives in Chișinău and Iași are quite special among other archives in Romania in 1939, byh aviong the records arranged based on creators (so, on fonds). This was also the opinion of the General Director of the State Archives, A. Sacerdoțeanu, clear-cut on this aspect: “We should not forget that in archival science the intangibility of fonds is a standard. So, the fonds is the one and only criterion for grouping and arrangement”³².

Another group of archivists did not necessarily share these positions. Reading the *Inventory of the State Archives* in 1939, it is visible that in arrangement of archives was prevalent the will of archivist, by: 1. a topical grouping of material, rather a principle of pertinence; 2. look for the most practical and convenient solution. The archivists in Cluj, for instance, in their action of recovering Transylvanian archives, made rather a museum activity than an archival one. They collect the archival material and then arrange it independent of institutional provenance, on geographical criteria of reference. The Archives in Bucharest has a great variety of criteria for arrangement: origin of accessions, historical ages, documentary form, language of documents etc. Here it can be seen a pragmatic approach, which is a direct answer to the precise needs of archivists.

But the most verbal reaction against the “principled” arrangement of archives (suggested by A. Sacerdoțeanu) belongs to Teodor Bălan, already cited above, who claimed that the archivist “should arrange the material in a pragmatic way and convenient for researchers(...) It does not matter what

27. “Fonds = all records created by an institution, an organisation or even by an individual, during their activity or life, or those that comes from them. These records are considered as a whole, no matter their nature (volumes, sheets), language or records system”.

28. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Regest și rezumat*, “Hrisovul”, 1944, n. 4, p. 100-111.

29. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Inventare arhivistice*, “Revista Arhivelor”, 1947, n. 2, p. 217-238.

30. P. GORE, op. cit., p. 12.

31. *Inventarul...*, p. 401. The way implementation of this principle was understood is questionable, since he identifies “fonds” inside one fonds.

32. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Regest...*, p. 109.

title the document has, it is important to be well preserved and easy to find”³³. A “functionalist” position can also be met in Veress Andras’ papers, influenced also by the experience gathered as museum custodian. He argued that all the archival material should be arranged (topical and) chronological, in one series, citing the example of Vienna State Archives. He admitted however that an already arranged archive the initial order should be preserved³⁴.

Our conclusion is that these different perspectives are the result of different approaches belonging to the archivists at time. On the one hand, dependent of each one’s professional experience and background, they laid either principle of provenance or the principle of pertinence. Respect of provenance (interesting enough, no information about *respects de fonds*, that is the source of the principle in Romania is not French!) seemed to come on a theoretical branch; it might be an explanation why its professional relevance was not elaborated, at least publicly, in Romania of those times. Pertinence, without being named as such, was obviously the result of a sort of “household” approach. It was a quick, maybe improvised answer to the issue of arranging the archives, under difficult conditions of severe lack of resources (staff, storage areas etc.). It looked, put it differently, the simplest way to have a ‘logical’ order for the archival material. It is, however, the ‘logic’ of the archivists and not the one of creators.

In 1939 and then in 1948, A. Sacerdoțeanu, as General Director, issued archival instructions, addressing also the arrangement topic. He denounces the practice of grouping documents on language or form criteria, disrespecting provenance; in fact, he mentions principles of provenance and pertinence, giving first line to the former. It is to remark that by provenance he did not understand the creating agency itself, but rather a group of creators with the same function (not one court, but the whole legal system of courts, for instance). On the other hand, he stated that archives must be arranged based on creators, and, at the next level, based on the internal organizational scheme. He supported, additionally, the need to respect the integrity of fonds, arguing that topic arrangement in Romanian Archives is incidentally, not the rule. About the chronological order, very used in practice, he wrote: “Chronological order will not be respected but for the limits of the smallest archival unit”. In this respect, he introduced the concepts of “historical date” (date of creation) and “archival date” (date of registration). He also indicated some rules for chronologically arranging the documents.

3.3.5. Description/inventorying the archival material

Archivists in the interwar period do not excel in theoretical approaches nor in the field of inventorying/description of the informational content, with few exceptions and-again-the remarkable exception of A. Sacerdoțeanu. The activity was called either inventorying or description. P. Gore wrote that the description of archival material is directly connected with the goal, if the document resulted is targeted to the public or to the staff of the Archives; in both cases, the description has to be concise and exact, at file level, accompanied by person and geographical name indexes³⁵. Veress Andras, one of the few archivists who expressed in writing technical opinions about this activity, recommended for inventorying a complex system of description record at document level, co-related with an ingenious colour code and indexing system. The subjectivism of his method was obviously even for his contemporaries³⁶ and it was rooted in his experience as archivist at the archives of Transylvanian Museum.

A. Sacerdoțeanu pleaded for the compilation of many finding aids for archival description and control, in order to facilitate as broad as possible access to the documents. In his executive orders, all the other activity of archival processing are, in fact, subordinated to compilation of the finding aid. He encouraged the creation of large and objective descriptions, arguing that “we [archivists] do not work for what we know now or our contemporaries, but for the future, and this is why we had to assume that a moment will come when the interest [of researchers] will cover any topic”. He recommended that “secret fonds” (i.e. records with restrictions) not to be publicly highlighted in finding aids. He also called for an accelerated action for inventorying of the fonds having no finding aid, stating that “the archivist ought not to postpone endless the fulfillment of his tasks, such delays damaging his prestige and the interest of the community [of users]”

33. *Inventarul...*, p. 333-334.

34. A. VERESS, *Catalogare...*, p. 178.

35. vezi P. GORE, op. Cit., p. 12.

36. A. SACERDOȚEANU, *Inventare...*, p. 238.

Following Casanova, he encouraged the preservation of the records according to the original finding aids (compiled by the creators) and, if the case, to arrange the records based on those finding aids³⁷. If the finding aids does not exist, Sacerdoțeanu recommended compilation of the following tools:

- *Archives Guide*, an alphabetical presentation of all fonds hold by an Archive
- *Archive historical manual*, a presentation of the archival history of one fonds
- *General inventory of Archives*, where all the fonds held by the State Archives were presented briefly
- *Archival inventory*, a list of all records existent in a fonds and, eventually, a brief presentation of their content. This “brief” presentation had the following elements: dates, place of issue, abstract (issuer, recipient, topic), brief “external” description (forms, medium, language, validation form) and the reference code. One interesting remark was that inventory had to chronologically list the records/aggregation of records, and not to reflect the physical arrangement of records in the repository (reference codes order). Also, an inventory should mandatory be accompanied by indexes.
- *Archival index*, a chronological list of all the records in an Archive.
- *Archival catalog*, the most complete archival tools, as seen by Sacerdoțeanu. It was also considered the most “intellectual”, because it should comprise the full description of relationships and context of a record.

4. Closing remarks

After the WW I, the State Archives in Romania stepped towards modernity. Facing severe staff and budget issues and also a lack of prestige in Romanian institutional framework, the management of the institution attempted to fulfil the social function of preserving the state memory. Due to different interests, it seems that precisely the contemporary records were the most endangered and there is the exact position where the institution could hardly perform. On the other hand, after 1924, the Archives could slowly be staffed with qualified workers, due to the foundation of the School for Archival Science and Paleography. With such a background, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, who became the General Director of the State Archives in 1938, attempted a modern raising in theoretical and methodological area for the work in archives. Many of his formulation would have been landmarks in the following decades.

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37. *Inventarul...*, p. 237-238.

SUMMARY

As preliminary for the archival ideas in the second half of 20st century in Romania, this paper outlines the legal and practical trends in managing historical Archives in Romania. The paper covers the framework of managing records in creating institutions, emphasising the few initiatives for a regulation of the field. It is to be noticed the prevalence of registration system and the evolution towards implementing rules for disposition. The paper continues with the management of historical archives that was, mainly, undertaken by the State Archives. It is presented the organisation of the State Archives, the acquisition policy and the main ideas about arrangement and describing archives. It is revealed the evolution towards standardisation of archival practice, by issuing guidelines and executive orders. In this framework, a main role was played by Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu. Next parts of the papers will follow the evolutions in the field after the politic dramatic change at the end of WW2.

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