THE ETHNIC GREEK MINORITY NEWSPAPER IN ALBANIA
"ΛΟΓΟΤΕΧΝΙΚΟ ΛΑΪΚΟ ΒΗΜΑ"("LITERARY POPULAR TRIBUNE") (1988-1991)

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ABSTRACT

The dictatorial regime in Albania had an undisputable influence on the press of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania. The policy of this regime, when it came to the press of the minority in question, was generally undecided, hesitant, sometimes limiting, and sometimes flexible. A clear evidence of this policy is the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” (“Literary Popular Tribune”) that had been published for the first time in September 1988 under the subtitle “Edition of the Democratic Front of Gjirokastër District about Greek Minority”. The newspaper was published until May 1991.

The purpose of this article is the representation of the historical background and some characteristics of the artistic literature published in the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”. More specifically, the historical period to which we refer is between 1988 - 1991. We will mainly focus on the general characteristics of the newspaper “Literary Popular Tribune”, on the editorial team objectives, on the circulation frequency, on the staff and its ideology. Furthermore, this article aims to present the features, the shape, the content, and the importance of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” focusing on some of its literary sections.

Keywords: historical background, features, form, content, importance, literary sections

INTRODUCTION

In 1988, in Albania it became necessary the publication of a second newspaper in the Greek language, which would help the creative activity of the writers in the territory of the Ethnic Greek Minority. So far, the editorial of the newspaper “Λαϊκό Βήμα” (“Popular Tribune”) used to publish the single page “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” almost every week, under the attendance of the gifted writer and poet Niko Kacalidha.

In this circumstances, with the initiative of Thanas Vaso from Dhivër village of Saranda, driven also by the desire shown from several other writers, it was proposed to the leadership of the Albanian Communist Party, the edition of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” which would enable the writers of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania to submit their creative works to the broad public and boost the literature of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania in the Greek language.

¹ The first newspaper of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania was “Llaiko Vima”, which was published permanently during 1945-1991. After 1991 this newspaper continued to be published until nowadays, but with some interruptions in time.
In June 1988, after the meeting at the offices of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, also attended by members from the Ethnic Greek Minority, journalists of “Λαϊκό Βήμα”, and journalists of the central press of Tirana, there was communicated the decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on the edition of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”. For the time, this action was "... a sign of the liberalization trend that began to appear in the Communist Party's policy as a result of new developments in the so-called socialist camp." ii From the importance given to this meeting, it became clear that besides the communication of the decision on the edition of a new newspaper, there was intended the emphasis of “the interest” shown by the ruling Party regarding the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania, at a time that warned the collapse of the communist regime.

The newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”, a publication done by the newspaper’s editorial “Λαϊκό Βήμα”, circulated as an eight-page monthly newspaper. To some extent, “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” replaced the Literary Page that was previously published in the newspaper “Λαϊκό Βήμα”. This is also confirmed by the editorial of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”, that had written the following about the publication of this newspaper:

“...the newborn “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”, next to the 43 year-old “Λαϊκό Βήμα”, is ranked through the honor variety of our popular press, having in conscience its sublime mission. “Λαϊκό Βήμα” has contributed in a peculiar way on the new edition of “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”. The new newspaper we are publishing today, has grown within the pages of “Λαϊκό Βήμα”, which ... simultaneously with...the journalistic material, has left space in its pages even about literature and art. We started with separated literary texts, which were published from time to time, and continued with our literary page and literary sheet. Today we have the literary newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”...” iii

The new literary newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” was welcomed not only by the newspaper “Λαϊκό Βήμα”, but also by the editorial of the Albanian newspaper “Drita”, Edition of the Union of Writers and Artists of Albania, that wrote the following regarding its publication: “...Our colleagues and brothers of the Greek minority have in their hands this beautiful work and enjoy it, conscious that a new step of the written word, which has noble targets, also serves to the further ennoblement process of the human spirit, culture and native language.” iv

In general, the people of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania welcomed the edition of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” with enthusiasm and joy, especially several writers of that time like: Pano Çuka v, member of the Leading Committee of the Union of Writers and...
Artists of Albania, Niko Kacalidha, chairman of the Union Branch of Writers and Artists in Saranda district, Dritëro Agolli, chairman of the Union of Writers and Artists of Albania, who expressed about the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” specifically: “... “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” is a new voice in our media, a voice harmonized with the beauty of speech and thought of our society. “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” will shine brightly within the constellation of our journalism. This newspaper will refer to literature and will bring to light the literature that will be written and will be created in the Greek language by our minority brothers, by our writers and creative colleagues, as well as by the teachers and the students.”

The “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” newspaper commenced its life in a very creative surrounding, and in the appropriate spring socialist climate that ‘brought the Party’. It was introduced to the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania as a “precious gift” offered from the governing Party. This is also mentioned in the editorial of its first edition: “....to the Greek Minority, as all over our socialist Homeland, the art and the culture are not privilege of a certain group of “chosen people”, but are property and spiritual nourishment of all the people...of Dropoli, Vurkari and Pogont... who love knowledge and art. Browsing the new newspaper, you see unfolding the history and the traditions, the knowledge and its spiritual world. They feel... historic messages and the strong pulse of the Party era, observe... transformed into art, the identity of their country. This is the structure of literary and artistic creativity... welcomed through the pages... of the newspaper, along with other selected creations of Albanian, Greek and world literature.”

In such atmosphere, the new authors of the Greek minority entered the creative field and struggled with high and noble ambitions, close to the old authors. All of them were equipped with the necessary tools for a combative art with the socialist spirit, with healthy content and advanced orginal form, and with the highest human ideals that fulfilled the entire people requests.

The newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” has really boosted the literature of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania. On the pages regarding the popular creativity there were published: poems, stories, novelettes, novels’ extracts, etc. There were also published studies on the popular creativity regarding the rich folklore, songs, dances, lamentations, etc. This cultural heritage shined as precious diamond in the necklace of the spiritual world of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania. Moreover, in the newspaper were promoted dozen works of creative poets, authors, prose writers, painters, sculptors, musicians, folklorists, etc., amongst the Greek minority.

The first poem published on the literary newspaper, precisely on the editorial of the first edition, was the poem titled “Mirë se erdhe!” (“Welcome!”) of the author Stavro Llajo. It is a poem that welcomed and congratulated the literary newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”. Its last two stanzas are the following:

Εδώ που η ποίηση παντού ευδοκιμεί κι η τέχνη του λόγου συλλάπαρε για νέες ακτές,

Here that poetry thrives everywhere and the art of speech sails for new shores,
καλές προκοπές!
Και δοσ’ του και δοσ’ του να πάρει…
Τ’ αστέρι το στίχο, ο ήλιος την ποίηση
ολούθε να ιδεί η οικουμένη
αγνή βεβαιότητα:
Μικρή μειονότητα
με βήμα μεγάλο διαβαίνει…

Σταύρος Λάγιος

Stavro Llajo

Analytically, in this newspaper were published: series of poems, stories, reportages, portraits, paintings (sketches, posters, and cartoons), studies of literature and other arts, traditions’ studies, translation and artistic photos. The most important literary section of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” was titled “Literary and Artistic Creations”, where were presented the following subtitled sections: “Monthly Literature and Art” or “Poetry”, “Albanian Literature”, “Greek Literature”, “Balkan Poetry”, “World Literature”, “Talking with the creators”, “From the writer’s notepad”, “Description”, “Sketches”, “Reportages”, “Chronicles”, “Criticisms”, “New books”, “Critical thought”, “Discussion on literature and arts”, “Studies”, etc. There were other frequent sections, like: “Painter’s section”, “Friendship Charter”, “From the cartoonist’s sight”, “Our artistic picture”, “Cultural news”, “Our traditions”, “Archeology”, “Cinematography - Theatre” or “Cinematography”, “Humor”, “Waggery”.


Among the most important sections of this newspaper were the ones that published literary creativity from the world literature. These were the sections "Balkan Poetry" concerning poetry from Turkish literature, we may mention the poetry of Aydin Hatipoglu: “Spring of homeland” (“Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα”, Χρόνος 2ος, Αριθ. 5, Γενάρης 1989, p. 8), translated into Albanian language by Mihal Naçi; from Bulgarian literature we may mention the poems


Besides various creations in the poetic and prosaic speech, there were promoted in the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” the pictures of considerable paintings and sculptures. Simultaneously with the literary sections of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” were presented the visual arts throughout the permanent sections: “Painter’s section”, “Sketches”, “Friendship Charter”, “From the cartoonist’s sight”, “Our artistic picture”, etc.

The publication of the newspaper “Λογοτεχνικό Λαϊκό Βήμα” was interrupted in May 1991, after the collapse of the so-called socialist system.
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