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THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN ROMANIA 1989–1992

Abstract
This article examines a few historiographical issues in Romania's political transformation process which were significant for the transition from the communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu to the political pluralism of the early 1990s. The article presents a selection of the main perspectives on the topic by representative authors while discussing several important concepts (national communism, national Stalinism, protochronism). Starting from here, the author remarks on the growing contestation, especially by some political scientists, of the concept of national communism as applied to the period of Ceaușescu's rule. A further topic is the legacy of the communist regime, which was still visible after December 1989. Finally there comes an examination of the causes of the difficulties Romania faced in its transition from communism to a liberal democracy.

Keywords: Romania, post-communism, political transformation, historical writing, Romanian Revolution of 1989, Ion Iliescu, Iliescu regime, Romanian Presidency, political parties, National Salvation Front, Nicolae Ceaușescu

This article examines a few historiographical issues in the political transformation process which were significant for the transition from the communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu to the political pluralism of the early 1990s. The topic is very broad, and I could not possibly go over all the works of hundreds of scholars and political analysts (Romanian and foreign) who have expressed themselves on the subject. Therefore I have resorted to a selection of the main perspectives on the topic by representative authors. In the article I discuss several concepts (*national communism*, *national Stalinism*, *protochronism*), and from that starting point I note the growing contestation, especially by some political scientists, of the concept of national communism applied to the period of N. Ceaușescu's rule. Another topic is the legacy of the communist regime, which was still visible after December 1989, and here I examine the causes of the difficulties Romania faced in its transition from communism to a liberal democracy.

Nicolae Ceaușescu and national Stalinism

Nicolae Ceaușescu, the secretary general of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) between 1965 and 1989, and his personal dictatorship in the 1980s (Gilberg 1991), generated the academic interest of researchers and historians not only in Romania, United States, United Kingdom, France, but also in Germany (Kunze 2000) and Poland (Burakowski 2008). An important section of the secondary literature on Romania's political transformations between 1988 and 1992 acknowledges the nature of the Romanian communist regime of the late 1980s in order to understand the transition from dictatorship to democracy, from the personal autocratic regime of N. Ceaușescu to political pluralism. Several of these studies also focused on the complex relationship between N. Ceaușescu and Ion Iliescu. The latter (b. 1930), a former member of the communist nomenklatura, promoted after 1965 by Ceaușescu himself, became the first post-communist president of Romania (for three terms, 1990–1996, 2000–2004). After 1990, the attitude of Romanian researchers towards Ion Iliescu also influenced to some extent their academic perception of the 1989 revolution and the political transformations of the early 1990s.

Vladimir Tismaneanu (b. 1951) had the advantage that, in addition to his training as a sociologist and political philosopher in communist Romania in the 1970s, he benefited from assimilating contact with the social sciences in American academia. He was one of the Romanian

Nicolae Ceaușescu during a joint meeting of party and state authorities on 29 March 1977. National Archives of Romania, The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania, Online communism photo collection, ref. no. /cota 44/77, photo #LA426

American political scientists who wrote the most numerous books and analyses on the political transformations of the 1980s and 1990s in Romania and East Central Europe (Tismaneanu 1993). In those decades, in addition to his affiliations with academic institutions such as the Foreign Policy Research Institute of the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Maryland at College Park, Maryland, Tismaneanu was also a political commentator for the Romanian Desk of Radio Free Europe. He published several studies that prepared the ground for his major syntheses of 1998 and 2003, dedicated to the political myths of (post)communism (Tismaneanu 1998) and the history of communism in Romania (Tismaneanu 2003). Tismaneanu introduced the phrase *Stalinism for all seasons* in the case of Romanian communism, and proposed a revision of the concept of *national communism*. He has suggested that the period between 1974 and 1989 could be termed the "golden age" of national Stalinism in Romania. In 2003, with the publication of his synthesis of the history of communism. Tismaneanu actually established the concept of national Stalinism. Even before, the University of Maryland professor made a distinction between national Stalinism and national communism with particular reference to the 1980s Romanian political system, that is the last decade of the Ceaușescu regime. Both the 2003 book and Tismaneanu's subsequent studies have provided further arguments for the validity of the term *national Stalinism* and have

better defined the concept (Tismaneanu 2012, pp. 462–479). He suggested that the Ceaușescu regime, which was becoming hostile to any form of liberalisation or Gorbachev-type reforms, clearly falls outside the framework of "national communism." Therefore, to call it national communist could be somewhat outdated. In this logic, the persistence of Ceaușescu's national Stalinism until December 1989 explains at least in part the difficulties of the political transition to democracy in Romania in the 1990s. Beyond these conceptual clarifications, it should also be emphasised that important sections of his 2003 book on the history of Romanian communism, in a revised and synthesised version, at the end of 2006 became chapters of the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (*Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România*, also known as *Comisia Tismaneanu*, hereinafter: CPADCR), a commission that Vladimir Tismăneanu also chaired. This was a historical commission, called by some scholars a truth commission specific to transitional justice, which produced a report proclaiming the communist regime illegitimate and criminal (Vasile 2023, pp. 481–486).

The Presidential Commission and its activity

The name of the Commission was inspired by the German parliamentary inquiry commission of 1992 (Grossbölting 2023, p. 103). The Commission's report detailed the organisation and functioning of the party-state, the role of ideology, the failed de-Stalinisation of 1955–1958 and 1965–1971, the emergence of national Stalinism in the 1960s, and Ceaușescu's dynastic communism. The CPADCR recommended lustration. Another recommendation asked for the publication of a history textbook on communist repression. In August 2008, a textbook for high schools appeared, written by IICCR researchers and two members of the Tismaneanu Commission. On 18 December 2006, President Băsescu endorsed the Report in front of Parliament and declaimed the Romanian communist regime as "illegitimate and criminal." The speech became an official state document, but the President retained only a handful of the Report's policy recommendations. He did not introduce lustration or the ban on communist symbols. The speech broke the judicial deadlock in some property restitution cases in Maramureș county (northern Romania). (Vasile 2023, pp. 481–486) It also unblocked rehabilitation for the

Transylvanian Hungarians who showed solidarity with the Hungarian revolution of 1956, showing that the Securitate had sentenced 57 of them to prison in 1958 (ten of them were executed). Before the Report, many judges considered the 57 not victims of communism, but pro-Hungarian militants seeking Romania's disintegration. In 2010 the Court of Appeal of Cluj accepted the presidential speech as evidence for annulling the condemnation of one of the Hungarian Transylvanians (Vasile 2023, pp. 481–486).

President Traian Băsescu's support for the Commission did not mean that he genuinely adopted the spirit of the final report or the academic and moral work of the CPADCR. Moreover, in 2019, the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*, hereinafter CNSAS – an institution of transitional justice about which I will give more information later on) asked the Bucharest-based courts to officially ascertain whether the former president collaborated with the Securitate. In the file submitted by CNSAS to the court to advance this investigation, there are two handwritten informant notes signed by Băsescu himself with the code name "Petrov." The Petrov affair the former president was confronted with, including the trial following the CNSAS's approach, also says a lot about both the Romanian post-communist political elite and the issue of covering up the past (Vasile 2022, p. 357).

Protochronism in communism and post-communism

Among those who rejected or nuanced some of Tismaneanu's perspectives was Lavinia Betea, professor of social and political psychology at the "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Western Romania) and a researcher specializing in the history of communism (focusing on oral history interviews with former members of the communist nomenklatura). Between 2012 and 2015, Betea – along with a team of young researchers – devoted a three-volume work to the political biography of Nicolae Ceaușescu. In 2021, the above-mentioned trilogy was reissued in a single volume: *Ceaușescu și epoca sa* (*Ceaușescu and his era*), a rewritten and revised version listing only Lavinia Betea as author (Betea 2021). Sometimes Betea relies too much on the allegations of controversial and biased authors such as Larry L. Watts (Betea 2021, p. 377 and ff.), while ignoring the writings

of reputed historians and political scientists (the abovementioned Vladimir Tismaneanu, for example). Betea brought up again the concept of *protochronism* and its ideological influence, which is also important for the post-communist period. According to American scholar Katherine Verdery, during the 1970s and 1980s increasing numbers of Romanian writers and literary critics were drawn into an argument over an idea called "protochronism" (*first in time*) (Verdery 1991, pp. 167–214). Among them were writers such as the nationalist poet and journalist Corneliu Vadim Tudor and literary critic Mihai Ungheanu. The idea of protochronism encouraged such intellectuals to look for developments in Romanian culture and history that had anticipated events in the better-publicised cultures of Western Europe. Protochronism was a sort of cultural (ultra)nationalism that had the overt support of Ceaușescu regime officials mainly between 1974 and 1989. Before being himself a protochronist (or a supporter of this cultural political current), Ceaușescu was an unclaimed protochronist in his own way and this occurrence is also visible while reading Betea's work. In her opinion, in the 1970s and 1980s, alongside Soviet-type socialist realism, the indigenous protochronism was also attached to the official communist ideology (Betea 2021, p. 451).

The Romanian revolution of 1989, with its orientation towards the West, Europeanism, and cosmopolitanism, seemed to contribute to the irreversible decline of protochronism, but since 1992 some

Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu dance *Hora Uniiri* (a 19th c. song to the traditional dance tune praising Romanian unity) during celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Romanian independence on 9 May 1977. National Archives of Romania, The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania, Online communism photo collection, ref. no. / cota 73/1977, photo #LA455

of the representatives of the aforementioned cultural nationalism have returned to governmental positions with the coming to power of the so-called *Red Quadrangle* or *Red Quadrilateral* (*Patrulaterul Roşu*, in Romanian) governmental coalition (Roper 2000, p. 80). For example, the abovementioned literary critic Mihai Ungheanu became undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Culture. From 1992 to 1996, the Party of Social Democracy of Romania (PDSR, former Democratic Front of National Salvation/FDSN and National Salvation Front/FSN led by Ion Iliescu) ruled in coalition with neo-communist and ultranationalist parties. The Romanian independent newspapers labeled the coalition as the *Red Quadrangle* due to an apparent preponderance of far-left, neo-communist parties, but in fact this parliamentary majority grouped together radical left-wing and far-right parties: Iliescu's FDSN, the radical left-wing Socialist Party of Labor (PSM), led by Ilie Verdeț, the 1980s prime-minister of former communist dictator N. Ceaușescu, as well as the nationalist Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR) and the Greater Romania Party (PRM) of the anti-Semitic and xenophobic politician Corneliu Vadim Tudor (two extreme-right wing parties). In the early 1990s, members of the PUNR were accused of anti-Hungarian attitudes and of links with former *Securitate* and army officers (responsible for the interethnic clashes in March 1990 in Targu Mureş). In addition, Corneliu Vadim Tudor's pro-Ceaușescu orientation in the 1980s was notorious; as a nationalist communist writer and journalist, Tudor had contributed to the cult of the dictator's personality (Gabanyi 2000).

Nicolae Ceaușescu during a national conference of the Romanian Communist Party, 7–9 December 1977. National Archives of Romania, The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania, Online communism photo collection, ref. no. /cota 2/77, photo #E586

Studying 1989 Revolution

Given this apparent return to the communist past, as well as the uncertainties regarding the bloody events of December 1989, many political commentators, journalists, and even historians have questioned the existence of a Revolution in the so-called *Annus Mirabilis* and have argued that one can speak of an *Iliescu regime*

as an extension of communism or as a neo-communist regime. Without offering conclusive evidence, Alex Mihai Stoenescu, a highly controversial historian, even linked Ion Iliescu to an alleged Soviet plot against Ceaușescu (Stoenescu 2008, p. 53).

In 2004, in reaction to all these criticisms but also through his desire to remain in the history of Romania and in the historical memory as a positive character, at the end of his last term as President of Romania, Ion Iliescu prompted the Adrian Năstase government to adopt a law establishing an Institute for the Study of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989 (*Institutul Revoluției Române din Decembrie 1989*, in Romanian, hereinafter IRRD) (Legea nr. 556 2004). The controversial issue was not the establishment of such an institute *per se*, but the fact that IRRD was dominated by Ion Iliescu's supporters. The Institute was endowed with periodical publications and its researchers have printed several papers on the 1989 revolution. However, the media have criticised these works for their partisan, pro-Iliescu bias.

The Romanian historical writing about the 1989 revolution and the transition to democracy has experienced a professionalisation thanks also to researchers from abroad and the works authored by them. Some of these books were translated into Romanian shortly after their printing in English. As early as 1996, Peter Siani-Davies, a professor at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, wrote an article in which he asked the question whether one can talk about a real Romanian Revolution or a *coup d'etat*. In addition, Siani-Davies was trying to offer a theoretical perspective on the events of December 1989 (Siani-Davies 1996, pp. 453–465). In 2005 Siani-Davies revisited the topic extensively in a monograph devoted to the Romanian revolutionary process (Siani-Davies 2006). In his book he tried to answer the question: How did Ion Iliescu and the National Salvation Front come to power? In addition, based on Jaroslav Krejči's 1994 definition of revolution (Krejči and Krejčová 1994), Siani-Davies established the duration of the revolution, from 15 December 1989, to 9 February 1990. According to the British historian, on the latter day a proto-parliament convened, the Provisional Council of National Unity, gathering together representatives from most of the political groups then extant in Romania. This represented a formal recognition of the wider anti-Ceaușescu coalition that laid the ground for a revolutionary settlement which broadly conformed to Western norms of democratic organisation (Siani-Davies 2005, p. 12).

In 2006 a Romanian version of Siani-Davies' book was published (Siani-Davies 2006) and immediately there came a reply from

a Romanian scholar and diarist. In 2007 historian Apostol Stan published a valuable book of memoirs, titled *Revoluția română văzută din stradă, decembrie 1989 – iunie 1990* (*The Romanian Revolution seen from the streets, December 1989 – June 1990*) (Stan 2007). Apostol Stan, a participant in the Bucharest revolution, implicitly rejected Siani-Davies' temporal delimitation. Stan took into account the revolution itself and the turmoil in the months that followed, generated by the struggle for power. For Stan, the Revolution is not limited to the period 16–22 December 1989 [as quoted above, Siani-Davies proposed period from 15 December 1989 to 9 February 1990 – editor's note], but it was a process that spans approximately six months: from December 1989 to June 1990, that is a revolutionary process full of convulsions that highlight the limits of the Romanian revolution. Stan's point of view corresponds with that of Polish historian Adam Burakowski, who stated in 2013 that the revolutionary change of the system ended in June 1990 after the first elections (20 May) and the violence committed by the miners brought by Iliescu to Bucharest (13–15 June) (Burakowski 2013, p. 346). For Stan, at the end of the process, the political and social landscape looked bleak: a democracy not only imperfect but endangered in its fundamental feature – the freedom of expression (which was strangled by the attack on several newspapers and political parties' editorial offices on 14–15 June 1990). From the beginning of 1990, Apostol Stan realised that the National Salvation Front led by Ion Iliescu was becoming "a group of crypto-communists and former members of the *nomenklatura*" (Stan 2007, p. 192) and that "it was necessary to abandon the indifferent attitude towards such rulers" (Stan 2007, p. 184). From January 1990 until the Spring, alone or together with a few colleagues and friends from the Bucharest-based Romanian Academy's Institute of History, Stan traveled almost every day through the capital city center and participated in the opposition demonstrations that crystallised especially from 23 January 1990, the date on which Iliescu decided to involve FSN in the general elections (finally scheduled for 20 May 1990). This decision meant that Iliescu would benefit from the logistics of the state apparatus, although a short while ago he had promised not to use FSN as a political party. As a professional historian, Stan saw a parallel between what was happening in 1990 (counterdemonstrations by the government, violent repression of student rallies or rallies of historical parties, disinformation, etc.) and the events of 1945–1946. In these post-war years, as well as 1990, manipulated crowds and a servile press called for the opposition parties to be disbanded.

Apostol Stan's notes recorded practically all the demonstrations in Bucharest (in favour of or against lustration or for other political causes), which are described through the prism of his own experiences and attitudes: inventories of the slogans shouted, the contents of posters, caricatures, jokes and songs hummed at the rallies. The subjective memoirist's daily notes are enriched by reflections on economic and sociological issues. Stan, who devoted many years to the study of agriculture in the modern Romanian history, but also witnessed the 1950s process of Soviet-type forced collectivisation, is concerned both with the emergence of the first 'free traders' in post-1989 Bucharest (Stan 2007, p. 190) and with the attitudes of the peasants to political life, to their ancestors' farmland, confiscated by the communists. He was saddened to learn that many peasants from his native locality are largely reluctant to demand their land confiscated by the communists and are indifferent or hostile towards the democratic opposition –National Peasant Party (PNȚ) and National Liberal Party (PNL) (Stan 2007, pp. 274–275). The latter were political parties existing before 1948 and reactivated after 22 December 1989. The birth, the rebirth, in reality, of a capitalist economy, also in the rural areas, would have completed the revolutionary process, in fact it would have constituted a return to the pre-1948 situation; however, the limits and obstacles are obvious, especially at the level of mentality. Stan acknowledged the importance of the Gorbachev factor in the collapse of the communist regime in Romania, but did not focus on the subject. Other historians and political scientists have documented this topic in academic books dedicated to the 1989 revolution and post-communist transformations.

The role of the external factors in Ceaușescu's downfall was crucial. As Dragoș Petrescu pointed out, it was only in the conditions of the deep economic crisis of the late 1980s and of the radical change of policy at the Kremlin after Mikhail Gorbachev's take-over that the Ceaușescu regime entered a terminal crisis (Petrescu 2010, p. 18). Especially after 1986, many Romanians began to look to the USSR in the hope of persuading the Ceaușescu regime to improve their living standards. Therefore, for Petrescu, independence from Moscow, which was the cornerstone of the Romanian Communist Party's leadership legitimacy in the post-1968 period, ceased to appeal to a majority of Romanians (Petrescu 2010, p. 18). Petrescu noticed that preeminently after 1987, Ion Iliescu was often associated with Gorbachev, even at Radio Free Europe's Romanian Desk programs.

The Iliescu Regime

Apostol Stan's book concludes with an evocation of the June 1990 *mineriad* (Mineriada, in Romanian), during which he was almost beaten by the miners who came to Bucharest from the Valea Jiului coal industrial basin to punish the demonstrators who opposed the FSN and the Iliescu regime. For all these anti-democratic lapses, Apostol Stan remains convinced that a revolutionary process began in December 1989. Despite the dominance of the Iliescu regime, Stan strongly echoes the hope that political and social change will not fall in oblivion. Therefore, Stan fights to save both historical memory, and contemporary documents or archives.

As Lavinia Stan suggested in 2013, Ion Iliescu had no interest in declassifying the archives of recent history (Stan 2013, p. 58–83). Iliescu feared that archival transparency would jeopardise his own political career and negatively affect his party (FSN, later FDSN and PSD) in the elections. In 2011 political scientist Alexandru Gussi noticed that, in early 1990, the political group around Iliescu assumed in relation to the recent past a stance based on a sort of politics of fear, or politics of oblivion. Iliescu's fear was generated by an unusable (or compromising) past (Gussi 2011, p. 60). When capturing the disillusionment of many Eastern Europeans, including Romanians, with the events of 1989, several historians have spoken of the *Unfinished Revolution* (Mark 2010, pp. xxi–xxvviii). Indebted to communist-era anti-monarchical reflexes, Iliescu perceived King Michael I as a rival and did not hurry to repeal the measure to revoke his Romanian citizenship that had been adopted abusively in 1948 by the communists. Moreover, King Michael, the former monarch of Romania (1940–1947) living in Switzerland, even after the 1989 anti-communist Revolution, remained under the surveillance by the post-communist intelligence services of the Iliescu regime (Diac 2017). In the 1960s and early 1970s, Iliescu was a member of the communist nomenklatura. He even functioned as Head of the *Agitprop* and minister of the communist Youth under Ceaușescu. Immediately after 1990 Iliescu was often accused of instrumentalizing C. Vadim Tudor and his extremist political party (Tismaneanu 1998, 176). In the early years of post-communism, extremist parties praised Orthodox Christianity, Romanianness, and historical exaggerations related to medieval Romanian unity. It was just one of the legacies of the old regime that is still visible in post-communism: Ceaușescu

empowering his own cult of personality presented himself and wanted to be portrayed as a descendant of medieval Romanian rulers and voivodes (Marin 2014, 427–436). Social Democratic president Iliescu avoided a true break with these extremists, inviting several nationalist parties (including CV Tudor's) to become members of the government coalition after 1992 (Tismaneanu 1998, 41). Many historians suggested that, despite the process of political modernisation it went through, the Social Democratic Party from the post-communist period, led by Iliescu or by his successors, is in a way the inheritor of many practices and mentalities from before 1989 (Stan and Tismaneanu 2015, p. 26).

In 2006 Florin Abraham, a historian perceived as close to the Social Democratic Party, nuanced this picture in a monograph on the political system in post-communist Romania (Abraham 2006). Beyond the reflexes stemming from his communist mentality, Ion Iliescu (president of the Social Democratic Party) was nevertheless a politician with a large dose of pragmatism. Since the 1990s, Iliescu has realised that joining the European Union and NATO is also in the interest of his political group and even himself. Therefore, at the end of 2000, when he returned to the Presidency of Romania for his third (and last) term, Iliescu considered reconciliation with the Royal House of Romania led by Michael I.

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In conclusion, some remarks on the evolution of the scholarly perception of Romania's political transformations after 1989 and about the 1989 revolution. In the last decade, several researchers have reconsidered their narrative on political evolution in post-communist Romania mainly due to geopolitical developments and the emergence of the so-called phenomenon of illiberal democracy in neighboring Hungary. In July 2014, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán gave his famous "illiberal democracy" speech at the Summer University in Băile Tuşnad, Romania. In the past, in the 1990s and 2000s, the political analysts were very severe about the slow progress made by the Romanian rulers regarding early 1990s democratisation, the organisation of elections, the separation of powers, the rule of law, etc. Unlike Hungary, in Romania there was a change of power, and the written or audio-visual media were not censored as it was under Viktor Orban's government. In addition, several political dignitaries continued to be investigated for corruption. Especially after 2015, when illiberal tendencies emerged in Hungary and other Central

European countries (states of the 1990s Visegrád Group, perceived until then as more advanced in assimilating democratic norms), the Romanian case of transition to democracy started to be re-evaluated. For this very reason, some political scientists have become very reluctant to take up and use the concept of national Stalinism as applied to the Ceaușescu regime of the late 1980s.

They argued that, if Romania had had a Stalinist-type regime until 22 December 1989, the transition to liberal democracy would have been much more complicated, and Romania should have been the one to set the tone in terms of tendencies towards authoritarianism, autocracy and illiberal democracy, not Orban's Hungary. Even Dragoș Petrescu, one of the historians who used the concept of national Stalinism in the late 1990s (Petrescu 1997), following in the footsteps of Vladimir Tismaneanu, considered it inappropriate in the new geopolitical and regional context. This critical observation deserves to be taken into account and discussed, especially since Dragos Petrescu also tried to offer an explanatory model of the December 1989 revolution (Petrescu 2010). Among the most recent academic efforts on the historical reconstruction of the 1989 revolution, it is worth mentioning those of Bogdan C. Iacob (*1989. A Global History of Eastern Europe* 2019) and Andrei Ursu (*Căderea* 2022). On one side, Iacob has joined a team of historians and political scientists who have tried to rethink the 1989 transition in Eastern Europe and Romania in a global context, without the triumphalist Western perspective of the end of the Cold War. On the other side, Ursu drew attention to the negative, repressive role played by the *Securitate* (the communist political police) and secret services in the December 1989 revolution and post-communist period. A. Ursu researched mainly the CNSAS archive in an attempt to document two important topics: the 1985 murder by the Securitate of his father, the engineer Gheorghe Ursu, and the aforementioned subject of the December 1989 revolution. Although it is an institution of transitional justice that emerged after 1992, CNSAS is still worth mentioning especially in the context of A. Ursu's research. The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) was established following the promulgation of Law no. 187 adopted on 7 December 1999, on access to one's own file and the unmasking of the Securitate as political police (Stan 2013, p. 72). CNSAS is an autonomous administrative authority and legal entity, under the control of the Romanian Parliament. In 2008 the 1999 Law was changed due to a decision of the Constitutional Court which found several articles unconstitutional. Also, at the intervention of

some ecclesiastical institutions, the provisions on the categories of public persons subject to verification by the CNSAS were amended to exempt prelates and clergy from the verification process. The parliamentary majority accepted the proposed changes. The leadership of many religious denominations did not subsequently make use of the possibility to request background checks on their prelates and priests themselves and did not take punitive measures against those found to have cooperated with the secret police. Some CNSAS employees (such as Mădălin Hodor) have constantly collaborated with important historians and political scientists or civic personalities such as Andrei Ursu (*Trăgători* 2019).

In 2019, the aforementioned Institute of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989 (IRRD), an entity closely associated with Ion Iliescu, was abolished by a normative act of the government. In 2021, however, the Constitutional Court annulled this decision, and the institution was reestablished without the personalities associated to Iliescu in its composition. But a new academic council was set up and the research direction of IRRD 1989 was taken over by Andrei Ursu, the son of engineer Gheorghe Ursu (the aforementioned victim of the *Securitate* during the last decade of communist rule). The institutional reinvention of IRRD was accompanied by a vast program of bringing to public attention the ignored or less studied and scholarly researched documents. Ursu and his team of researchers at IRRD were in fact proposing a historiographical revolution, a radical change of perspective announced in 2018–2019 by texts published in the *Noua Revistă de Drepturile Omului – The New Journal of Human Rights*, and in other volumes. This (historiographical) reopening of the Romanian Revolution file is largely based on the analysis of the documents of 2014 File drafted by the Military Prosecution and on a series of questions triggered by a documentary gap: the actions of the *Securitate* between 22 and 30 December 1989, which for a long time remained unknown and concealed. Neither the CNSAS nor any other research institution has been at the time legally vested with the right to take possession of documents emanating from the former political police forces in the process of being disbanded (or of material pertaining to its last days of existence). Nor was the post-December 1989 investigation by the Prosecutor's Office much better. There are indications that the criminal investigations were biased and seemingly sidestepped the main issue, being that of the fire opened immediately after Nicolae Ceaușescu's escape from the building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on 22 December 1989. Strangely,

the indictments bypassed the *Securitate* officers, even though there were reports that the former secret police had been involved in the repression of the revolutionaries (*Căderea* 2022). However, important documents have come to the attention of the researchers, such as the Security Plan entitled "Resistance Struggle on the territory temporarily occupied by the enemy" and the deposition of the *Securitate* General Iulian Vlad (head of the political police) from early 1990 (*Căderea* 2022). The Ceaușescu regime planned to put up resistance in the face of a possible attempt to remove the communist government, with the *Securitate* forces given the privileged role of leading this "resistance struggle." There are indications that the plan was put into practice, even though the enemy was, in fact, the Romanian people themselves, specifically the hundreds of thousands of revolutionaries in the streets associated with the army that was breaking away from the Ceaușescu regime.

The questions raised by Ursu and his team are worth further investigation, obviously alongside other themes: the involvement of the army and communist Militia (Police) in the repression of revolutionaries, at least until the morning of 22 December 1989, or the survival and reinvention of the communist *nomenklatura* in early 1990s.

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