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Suffering into patrimony: dealing with communist repression in postcommunist Romania

Abstract: Analyses of communist repression in post-communist Romania focused on anti-communism and its totemic figures. Laws, institutions and people promote this perspective, transforming the suffering of the formerly politically persecuted into a patrimony meant to be preserved and passed on. On the official level, the anticommunist paradigm gained momentum in December 2006 when the communist regime was condemned as ‘criminal and illegitimate’. However, a majority of the population have not embraced the official approach to communism as the fallen regime still acts as a ‘milieu de memoire’ (as defined by Pierre Nora). My article deals with the main institutions and laws which aimed at promoting and transmitting the memory of repression in post-communist Romania. Analyzing the memory politics as regards the communist repression might provide fresh insight into the ongoing process of building a cultural memory through selection, reconstruction and adjusting figures, deeds, and memorial items.

Keywords: cultural memory; communism; repression; anticommunism; post-communism; political prisoners

Słowa kluczowe: pamięć kulturowa; komunizm; represje; antykomunizm; postkomunizm; więźniowie polityczni

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The communist repression

In Romania, between 1945 and 1964, hundreds of thousands of people were imprisoned, tens of thousands deported, and many others persecuted in one way or another. The statistics, coming from the communist authorities, do not fully reflect the extent of this phenomenon. Thus, in terms of population displacements, the Securitate (the notorious Romanian Political Police) statistic for 1949–1961 mentioned 3,000 landlords, 43,891 people from the border with Yugoslavia; 9,000 and another 4,052 persons deported¹. The number of political prisoners accounted for by the Securitate would have been 91,333 people in 1950–1968. The year with the most assumed arrests was 1952 (with 24,826 people) and the fewest occurring between 1963–1966, around 300 per year². However, the early years of the repression are not accounted for, which significantly increases the number of political prisoners in Romania.

The gaps in the documents, intentional or not, do not allow to know the exact number of those persecuted. The British historian, Dennis Deletant, estimated the number of political prisoners at approximately 180,000³. The report of the Tismăneanu Commission for the study of the communist crimes suggests 600,000⁴. Jean-François Soulet, a French historian, proposes another percentage, namely 1.2%⁵.

¹ ASRI, Documentary fund, file no. 7778, vol. XXXVI, f. 39, quoted by Cristina Roman, *Represiune și regim concentraționar în România comunistă (1945–1967)* [Repression and concentrationary regim in communist Romania], [in:] *Dicționarul penitenciarelor din România comunistă (1945–1967)* [The Dictionnary of the Prisons in Communist Romania], ed. A. Muraru, Iași 2008, p. 28.

² F. Banu, *Serviciile secrete românești în timpul regimului comunist (1948–1989)* [Romanian secret services during communism], [in:] *Panorama comunismului în România*, ed. L. Corobca, Polirom, 2020, p. 241.

³ D. Deletant, *Romania under communist rule*, Bucharest 1998, p. 105.

⁴ *Raportul final al comisiei prezidențiale pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România* [Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania], Bucharest, 2006, (hereafter, *Final Report*), p. 214. Pdf. version, on-line at this address (among many others): https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf [accessed: 12.03.2023].

⁵ J.-F. Soulet, *Istoria comparată a statelor comuniste din 1945 până astăzi* [The Comparative History of the Communist States from 1945 to the Present Day], Iași 1998, p. 50.

The accurate number of people who died in the investigation chambers, prisons, and labour camps is not known, either. Dorin Dobrințu, a Romanian historian, relying on official documents, has advanced the figure of 1,406 individuals who died in prison or were executed between 1945 and 1958⁶.

The number of imprisoned women was estimated at 3,500, based on the criminal records collected by the Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER). Other estimates indicate 4,500. A dictionary based on memoirs, memories, and other documents, entitled *The Golden Book of Romanian Resistance against Communism*, published by a former political detainee, Cicerone Ionițoiu, in Paris after the fall of communism (publisher and year of publication not mentioned), advanced a number of 10,000 politically persecuted women.

It should be noted that many people were arrested without evidence of their presence in the investigation cells, penitentiaries, labour camps, etc. This type of imprisonment is known as the so-called administrative detentions with victims but no trace. Most of the time, the people thus arrested spent some time in prison or labour camps and then were released, without being registered in the administrative documents. Lavinia Stan, a Romanian scholar, wrote that there would be thousands of this kind of arrests, many of which occurred with the nationalization of property in June 1948⁷.

All the political detainees and deportees were set free in 1964. From that moment on, there were no political prisoners recorded by the communist administration. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, people who opposed communism were placed in psychiatric hospitals, were imprisoned for economic reasons, or transferred from one place to another (as happened after the miners' revolt in 1977 or after Brasov uprising from November 1987). The total number of these unacknowledged persecuted people remains unknown, making it difficult to account for all the victims of communist repression⁸.

⁶ *Listele morții* [The lists of deceased], ed. D. Dobrințu, Iași 2008, p. 66.

⁷ L. Stan, *România*, [in:] *Prezentul trecutului recent. Lustrare și decunimizare în postcomunism* [The Present of the Recent Past. Lustration and Decommunization in Postcommunism], ed. L. Stan, Bucharest 2010, p. 246.

⁸ The Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania estimated a number of 2 million people repressed in the 44 years of the communist rule.

Memorial Policies

The communist regime created political prisoners. After the fall of communism, the new political order recognized their sufferings and losses, and compensated them. Thus, on March 30, 1990, Consiliul Provizoriu de Uniune Națională (the Provisional Council for the National Union-CPUN) adopted Decree-Law no. 118 regarding the “granting of rights to persons persecuted for political reasons by the dictatorship starting from March 6, 1945”. According to the law (amended several times to include people who no longer had Romanian citizenship or to increase the ceiling of allowances), a person persecuted for political reasons is considered a person who “served a custodial sentence based on a final court decision or was deprived of liberty on the basis of a preventive arrest warrant for political crimes”; the imprisonment was “on the basis of administrative measures or for investigations by the repression bodies”; “was admitted to psychiatric hospitals”; “lived in mandatory residence”; “was displaced to another locality”; “was deported abroad after August 23, 1944”; “was taken prisoner by the Soviets after 23 August 1944 and was held in captivity after the armistice” (12 September 1944)⁹.

This restorative/compensatory law aimed at former political detainees and persons who had received compulsory residence (DO) in Bărăgan, as well as Romanian citizens of German origin (or their descendants), or representatives of other ethnicities deported to the Soviet Union in 1945. Thus, in 1990, the law would have granted compensatory rights to 120,000 former political detainees¹⁰, over 40,000 deportees to Bărăgan, and several tens of thousands of Germans or their descendants.

The law provided the following: “the period of detention, deportation, persecution in any form during the communist period constitutes seniority”¹¹. Each persecuted person receives 200 lei per month¹² for each year of repression endured, free assistance and medications in state medical facilities, adequate housing space

⁹ Decret-lege nr. 118 din 30 martie 1990, published by *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 50 from 9 April 1990.

¹⁰ L. Jinga, *Rehabilitation of victims and compensations*, [in:] *Democratic Transition Guide. The Romanian Experience*, CEVRO, National Endowment for Democracy 2017, p. 34.

¹¹ Decret-lege nr. 118 din 30 martie 1990, published by *Monitorul Oficial* no. 50 from 9 April 1990.

¹² In February 2015, a new law upgraded the amount of the allowance from 200 to 400 lei.

granted by local authorities. In order to prove political persecution, each person had to provide documents issued by the authorities or by other legal entities, to county and municipal commissions made up of 6 members, of which 2 were from the administrative departments and 4 from the Association of Former Political Detainees of Romania (Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici din România, hereafter-AFDPR) in the year beginning with the day when the law became effective¹³.

The law recognized every person who suffered from communist repression as politically persecuted, allowing all those who “opposed the regime to demand reparations”¹⁴. If this law was encompassing, the subsequent ones excluded those accused of ‘crimes against humanity’ and their descendants from any reward or recognition. It looks like the neo-communists in power in 1990 were open to reward and celebrate all people who suffered from political persecutions during communism. On the other hand, the democrats and their political off-spring were not so eager to recognize the anticommunist opposition of the extreme-right, the legionnaire movement, which, since the very beginning of its creation in 1919, vowed to fight communism.

This was the case with Law 214 of 1999 which granted the status of ‘Fighters in the anti-communist resistance’ to all the imprisoned or deported, but excluded the legionnaires. The Law was proposed by MPs of the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR), a coalition made up of historical parties led mostly by former political prisoners. It was a restorative law meant to promote anticommunism and its totemic figures. This regulation, amended by Law 568/2001, stipulated that persons recognized as ‘Fighters in the anti-communist resistance’ should benefit from: “restitution, under the law, in kind or, if this is not possible, by equivalent of the confiscated assets”; “assignment, under the law, of the names of the persons provided for in art. 1 to streets, parks, squares and other such public places; priority awarding of orders and medals provided by the legislation in force”¹⁵. The status of ‘a fighter in the anti-communist resistance’ was granted by a committee made up of representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Administration, and the AFDPR.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ L. Turcescu, L. Stan, *Collaboration and resistance: Some definitional difficulties*, [in:] *Justice, Memory, and Redress in Romania: New Insights*, eds L. Stan, L. Turcescu, Cambridge 2017, p. 42.

¹⁵ Ordonanța de urgență nr. 214 din 29 decembrie 1999, în *Monitorul Oficial*, nr. 650, 30 decembrie 1999: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/20487> [accessed: 16.11.2020].

The subsequent additions to the law also included individuals expelled from high schools and universities for political reasons¹⁶.

After Romania's accession to the EU in 2007, new memorial laws aiming at the recognition of the sufferings of the formerly persecuted people or at their rehabilitation were adopted by the Parliament. In 2009, Law no. 221 cancelled all the sentences passed by the communist criminal courts, but also the administrative decisions of individuals convicted on political grounds, deportees and all opponents of the communist regime in Romania. According to this law, the formerly persecuted were rehabilitated and could request compensation from the Romanian state in the course of the next 3 years, depending on the losses suffered (moral and material). As with the 1999 law, individuals convicted of crimes against humanity and those who promoted racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, were excluded.

During the first year after the law came into force, the number of people who requested financial compensation was reduced. As of September 2010, only 174 people had received final decisions from the various courts that also determined their financial compensation, ranging from 300 to 1 million Euros. Due to the large amounts decided by the courts, in 2010 the government capped by law the amount of these allowances at 10,000 Euros for former political detainees and deportees, at 5,000 for their 1st degree descendants, and 2,500 for 2nd degree descendants. However, the law did not include the miners who revolted in 1977, or the women and children who suffered from the decrees banning abortion¹⁷.

According to the AFDPR, in 2014, 3,000 former political detainees, 20,000 former deportees, 30,000 spouses, and other descendants of former political prisoners could apply for compensation from the Romanian state. However, the declaration of the law as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) in November 2010 prevented them from demanding their rights, the effects of the law remaining limited to this day¹⁸.

In 2011, Law no. 198, established 23 August as the 'National Day of Commemoration of the Victims of Nazism and Communism', and Law 127 from 2017, which established the commemoration of the 'National Day of Communist Prisons' Martyrs' on May 14, do not contribute to active commemoration of the repression due to the way in which these commemorative days are promoted and celebrated. For more than 40 years, 23 August was the national day of communist Romania, high-

¹⁶ L. Jinga, *Rehabilitation of victims and compensations*, p. 32.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 33–34.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

lighted by the famous parades in which almost every Romanian participated at least once in their life, a re-memorial of this day from the perspective of the 'victims of communism' required an effort to explain, debate and promote the memory of the oppressed. On the other hand, commemoration of martyrs of communist prisons on May 14 was promoted by neo-legionary groups which treat it instrumentally, thus bringing moral damage to those who suffered in prisons by equating suffering with legionnaires.

3. Vectors of Memory

The laws adopted to rehabilitate and compensate people who suffered from communist repression did not contribute to the dissemination of the memory of political persecutions in Romania. This daunting task was performed by a few people, institutions, and memorial artefacts. They became both guardians and vectors of memory of the political violence experienced by the Romanian society during the 44 years of communist dictatorship.

After the fall of communism in December 1989, the memory of repression flooded into public space. It was promoted by The Association of Former Political Detainees of Romania, founded in January 1990. In its struggle to promote and pass on the memory of the communist repression, the AFDPR was joined by other institutions such as Association "15 November 1987" from Braşov, founded on 2 January 1990, the Memoria Cultural Foundation, created by the former political detainee and writer, Banu Rădulescu in November 1990, Association "Memorial of Revolution of 16–22 December 1989" Timișoara (founded on April 24, 1990), the Civic Academy Foundation established by Ana Blandiana in 1994.

All these institutions promoted an anticommunist perspective on communism, supported in the subsequent years by a documentary "The Memorial of Sorrow" by the Sighet Memorial as well as by historical political parties like the National Peasant Party, the Christian-Democrats (PNȚc.-d.), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Social-Democrat Party of Romania (PSDR), etc., refounded and lead by former political detainees.

a. The Association of Former Political Detainees of Romania – the AFDPR

Legally established on January 13, 1990, the AFDPR, whose first president Constantin Ticu-Dumitrescu, member of the PNȚc.-d., stood out as the main guardian

of the memory of communist repression, but also as a vector for its dissemination. The AFDPR established local branches throughout the country that met at a National Congress every year. The AFDPR was a member of the International Union of Former Political Detainees and Persecuted of the Communist System whose first president was Constantin Ticu-Dumitrescu.

The AFDPR used to publish a monthly magazine, *Rezistența*, featuring numerous interviews with former political prisoners, monuments erected in places of detention and participated through its members in numerous other projects, such as documentaries, radio-TV shows, press interviews, etc. At the same time, the AFDPR members were encouraged to publish their memories of imprisonment and/or deportation. The AFDPR was a part of the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) within which it campaigned for a trial over communism, for the promotion of laws and actions in support of former political prisoners.

Furthermore, after the CDR won the elections in 1996, Constantin Ticu-Dumitrescu elaborated and promoted several laws concerning the debunking of the Security's officers and collaborators, lustration of the former establishment and the Securitate officers, abolition of convictions and administrative measures of political nature¹⁹. Only one of his proposals, the law on 'access to one's own file and the debunking of the Securitate as a political police', known as the Ticu-Dumitrescu Law, was adopted by the Romanian Parliament after fierce debates in 1999.

The law provided that: "Any Romanian citizen, or foreign citizen, who had Romanian citizenship after 1945, has the right of access to their own file compiled by the Securitate, as the political police. This right is exercised upon request and consists in a study of the file, the release of copies of the documents and the documents proving the contents of the file. At the same time, the person, the subject of a file, has the right, upon request, to find out the identity of the Securitate agents and collaborators, who provided information for his/her file"²⁰.

Since the very beginning, the AFDPR not only took care of its members but was interested in inviting young people to join the association as friends of ex-prisoners "to get to know us better, to learn the truth from those who have survived the ordeal"²¹. Furthermore, the Association welcomed as members the off-spring

¹⁹ Law 221 from 2009 established financial compensations for the suffering of former persecuted people.

²⁰ "Lege privind accesul la propriul dosar și deconspirarea securității ca poliție politică", pp. 1–2. <https://senat.ro/legis/PDF/1997/97L239FC.pdf> [accessed: 15.11.2020].

²¹ Appeal in the journal *Rezistența*, no. 5, March 1992, p. 16.

of the formerly persecuted individuals, which, by now represents the majority of its members.

b. The Civic Academy Foundation and The Sighet Memorial

If the AFDPR was very active and visible in 1990 through public events, publications, civic activities, and legislation, since 1994 the Civic Academy Foundation and its Memorial to the Victims of Communism and Anti-Communist Resistance, known as the Sighet Memorial has been the most visible memory vector of the repression. This is attributed to the fame of its founders, Ana Blandiana and Romulus Rusan, well-known writers, civically and politically involved immediately after Ceaușescu's fall.

As early as in January 1993, Ana Blandiana asked the Council of Europe to support the creation of a Memorial to the 'victims of communism' in Sighetul Marmatiei, a town near the border with Ukraine, the hot spot of the interwar elite imprisonment in the 1950s. In order to create the Memorial, in 1994, Ana Blandiana and her husband, Romulus Rusan, set up the Civic Academy Foundation. The objectives of the foundation included "preserving the history of political persecutions under the totalitarian regime by recording and storing the testimonies of the survivors and transforming the Sighet penitentiary into a Memorial consisting of a museum and an international study centre..."²². Furthermore, as Ana Blandiana repeatedly pointed out: "The Memorial to the Victims of Communism and Resistance was created from the desire to revive the collective memory, as an antidote to brainwashing, which is at the heart of the many of the anomalies of life and society. We need to know what and why we experienced, to understand what we are living today and what we no longer have to live tomorrow"²³.

In order to achieve these goals, the founders were assisted by international NGOs (Konrad Adenauer Foundation), former political prisoners, former dissidents and their off-spring, as well as the Romanian state, especially after the CDR came to power in 1996. Thus, in April 1995, the Civic Academy Foundation received from the Romanian state the Sighet penitentiary, which was transformed into a museum,

²² <https://www.facebook.com/MemoriaRo/posts/520942757926949> [accessed: 17.11.2020].

²³ Ana Blandiana, interview in *Formula AS* magazine: <http://arhiva.formula-as.ro/2004/635/spectator-38/ana-blandiana-5390> [accessed: 20.11.2020].

officially opened in June 1997. Each year, one more room was added to the museum, reaching 60 rooms in 2019.

The Sighet Penitentiary was built in 1897 and was a common law prison until 1944. It briefly served as a transit centre for the deportation of Jews from Hungarian-occupied Northern Transylvania to the Nazi extermination camps in Poland and Germany. It was turned into a prison for political detainees in August 1948 when members of the ‘Vişovan group’, a group of pupils, students and young peasants from Maramureş, were imprisoned here. Beginning with 1950, former ministers, academics, intellectuals, as well as Greek-Catholic prelates were imprisoned in Sighet. Between 1948 and 1955, 54 political prisoners died here. After 1955, prisoners with short sentences or not sentenced at all were released while the others were transferred to other prisons. Sighet once again became a common law penitentiary, but was abandoned after the 1977 earthquake, which significantly damaged several prison buildings.

The Sighet Memorial, introduced as a historical site, adds a museum dimension to the communist past as seen from the present perspective of its founders. It is not a place where the products remembering the recent past meet²⁴, but rather a ‘marker of memory’²⁵ for Romanians, a vector for transmitting the creators’ vision of communism.

The museum displays a Manichean vision of communism, dividing the world between ‘The Good’ (the anti-communist fighters) and ‘The Bad’ (the communist torturers)²⁶. This approach is visually marked by the numerous maps, the exhibited objects, but also by the interpretations in the leaflets in the museum rooms and by quotes displayed on the walls.

The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and the Resistance operates not only the Sighet museum but also the International Center for Studies on Communism, founded in 1993, with an oral history department that was headed by Romulus Rusan. “The Department of Oral History proposed to preserve recent memory by conducting interviews with former political prisoners and those who significantly experienced the communist regime. The oral history archive contains over 6,000 hours of recordings. ... In addition to the oral history surveys carried out by the col-

²⁴ G. Kavanagh, *Dream spaces. Memory and the Museum*, London–New York 2000, p. 148.

²⁵ Romulus Rusan, dialogue with Ioana Anghelescu in *Revista 22*, no. 788, p. 15–22 April 2005 [accessed: 4.03.2023].

²⁶ This is a typical communist approach which divided the world between The Good and the Bad. The anticommunists adopted the same approach after the fall of communism. K. Verdery, *Socialismul, ce a fost și ce urmează* [Socialism, What was it and what comes next], Iași 2003, p. 171.

laborators of the Department of Oral History, the archival fund has been enriched by acquisitions and donations”²⁷.

c. The Memorial of Sorrow

A few years prior to the opening of the Sighet museum, the memory of repression was introduced to the audience through a TV documentary ‘Memorialul Durerii’/ The Memorial of Sorrow. The idea behind the documentary originated abroad and was supported by a former political detainee, at that moment, a member of the first elected post-communist Parliament.

In April 1991, a team from the Swiss Television arrived in Romania with the aim of making a documentary about the communist political persecutions, at the invitation of the Romanian Parliament²⁸. Radu Ciuceanu, then the president of the culture committee in the Parliament and a former political prisoner, not only facilitated their activities but asked TVR to send a team to join them in order to film and later broadcast a similar documentary in Romania. Lucia Hossu Longin, an experienced TV producer, was entrusted with the mission of accompanying the foreign guests who filmed in Pitesti, Jilava, Gherla, Aiud penitentiaries, but also at the Poarta Albă forced labour camp, and in the village of Nucșoara, the centre of the anti-communist resistance movement. In May 1991, ‘Dentro Il Gulag Romeno’, the documentary made by the Swiss, was broadcast on one of Swiss channels.

The material filmed by the Romanian team was used to launch the series, Memorialul Durerii; its first episode was broadcast by the Romanian Public Television (TVR) on August 14, 1991, and was dedicated to the trial of Ion Antonescu, the state’s leader during WWII, later accused of crimes against humanity. He was presented by the filmmaker as a Romanian patriot, a victim of the communists.

Ion Antonescu was at that moment enjoying a public return to grace. In 1991, he was rehabilitated in a session of the Parliament, his statues were built in various towns, his deeds and speeches were propagated in newspapers, historical magazines, books, documentaries, etc. Furthermore, Antonescu was declared a great patriot, an anti-communist and the first victim of the communist repression²⁹.

²⁷ <https://www.memorialsighet.ro/departamentul-de-istorie-orala/> [accessed: 5.03.2023].

²⁸ L. Hossu-Longin, *Memorialul durerii. Întuneric și lumină* [The Memorial of Sorrow. Dark and Light], Bucharest 2013, p. 7.

²⁹ Ion Antonescu was declared a war criminal in 2005 after being found guilty of several

The second episode, titled, 'Victims and Torturers', provides the key to reading the documentary. The 120 episodes depict the communist period in black and white, with the 'Good Ones' being the anti-communist fighters, and the 'Bad Ones' – their torturers.

The documentary is mainly based on testimonies of the survivors, filming in the places of repression, interviews with historians and other intellectuals, archival documents, footage from the TVR archive. Each episode is structured by the filmmaker's comments, suggesting the interpretation of the story spun in the documentary. Although it is difficult to quantify the audiences, the huge number of letters sent to TVR on the occasion of the broadcast of the episode dedicated to an anti-communist fighter and former political detainee, Elisabeta Rizea, provided insight into the overwhelming interest shown by the viewers towards this approach to the communist past.

Initially broadcast at 9:30 p.m., the Memorial of Sorrow was an epiphany for most Romanians who found out that, at the beginning of the communist dictatorship, many of their fellow citizens were persecuted for political, religious or sexual reasons. The documentary was broadcast constantly, although after a year it was scheduled late at night. In 2001, its 100 episodes were broadcast at midnight. From that moment on, the public television broadcast sometimes new episodes, sometimes older ones, depending on the events and needs for celebration or commemoration. This was the case on October 5, 2003 when Elisabeta Rizea, famous after the documentary, died, which led to the rescheduling of her interview³⁰.

Through its duration, its visual effects and its manner of introducing and discussing the topic of the communist persecutions, the "Memorial of Sorrow" was one of the most persuasive ways of disseminating the memory of the repression. Accompanied by a Manichean vision, it proposes an interpretation of communism as 'imposed violence' from the outside, ignoring all other aspects of communism,

pogroms against Jews during WWII. In 2005, Law no. 217, completing the Government ordinance no. 31 from 2002, banned the organizations and fascist symbols, as well as all manifestations of xenophobia and the promotion of people who perpetrated crimes against humanity.

³⁰ In 2007, the first volume with interviews was published by Humanitas editing house. Lucia Hossu Longin, *Memorialul Durerii. O istorie care nu se învață la școală* [The Memorial of Sorrow. A History which is not taught in school], Bucharest, Editura Humanitas. It was followed by another volume in 2012, Lucia Hossu Longin, *Memorialul Durerii. Întuneric și lumină* [The Memorial of Sorrow. Dark and Light], Editura Humanitas, both accompanied by 4 DVD with a selection of the episodes.

including periods of adherence to the system. The evaluation of the communist legacy is done almost exclusively under the sign of moral condemnation³¹.

4. The Official Condemnation of Communism in Post-communist Romania

Judicial condemnation of the communist crimes and abuses in Romania, required by former political detainees and deportees, was not possible as long as the former communists were in power or associated with power. An impetus in condemning the communist crimes came from the European institutions, especially after the accession of several Central European countries to the European Union (EU) in 2004. Hence, on January 25, 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe put to voting Resolution 1481 condemning the crimes and abuses of the communist regimes in Europe while advising its member countries to review their past: “Furthermore, it invites all communist and post-communist parties of the member states, which have not already reconsidered the history of communism and their own past, to distance themselves firmly from the crimes committed by totalitarian communist regimes and to condemn them unequivocally”³².

The resolution of the Council of Europe, but also the internal power struggles led Traian Băsescu, the then president of Romania, to initiate the establishment on April 5, 2006 of a Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, led by Vladimir Tismăneanu, an eminent scholar of communism, whose mandate was to write a report on the crimes and abuses of communism.

Comprising more than 600 pages, the Report – elaborated by the Commission after six months – presents the beginnings of the Romanian Communist Party, the repression, the propaganda system, the institutions and people of the repression, the indoctrination of the population, the regime’s home and foreign policy. In the conclusions, the Report suggests the measures that should be taken “not to forget, to condemn, so as not to repeat this regime”: “the establishment of a commemorative day in memory of the victims of the repression and communist terror. The urgency of building a Monument to the Victims of Communism in the centre of the capital.

³¹ A. Capelle-Pogacean, *Roumanie: l’utopie unitaire en question*, Critique internationale 2000, no. 6, p. 112.

³² Point 13 of 1481 Resolution concerning “Necesitatea unei condamnări internaționale a crimelor regimurilor comuniste totalitare”. <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-FR.asp?fileid=17403&lang=FR> [accessed: 6.03.2023].

The introduction of sections related to the horrors of communism in museums in the country... the establishment of a Museum of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania... the creation of a documentation centre for public information... the organization of an international conference to condemn the crimes of communism in Sighet... the continuation of the broadcasts from TVR from the cycle 'Memorialul Durerii'... the organization of a permanent exhibition within the Palace of the Parliament... the organization of a series of conferences in the major academic centers, the publication and translation of the Report, ... a manual on the communist regime in which the repression occupies an important place... the formation of a small group of researchers to draw up an Encyclopaedia of Romanian Communism... the declaration of the crimes and abuses of the communist regime as crimes against humanity... legally imprescriptible... the adoption of the lustration law, ...communist injustices remedied by laws... public recognition of the tragedy of former political prisoners,... declassifying the Archives of the communist regime and handing them over to the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) or the National Archives... returning the archives of religious cults, ...establishing a system of 12 presidential scholarships awarded annually to researchers based on a competition", etc.³³

Drawing inspiration from the model provided by the Elie Wiesel Commission that studied the Holocaust in Romania, the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania assumes a moral duty towards the 'victims of communism'. Based largely on the documents, testimonies and studies published by the Civic Academy Foundation/Sighet Memorial, the Report formalizes the perspective of former politically persecuted people on communism, as well as the vision of Vladimir Tismăneanu who believes that the communist regime in Romania never experienced a phase of de-Stalinization.

Based on the Report's conclusions and recommendations, the president of Romania declared on December 18, 2006, in front of the assembled plenary session of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the communist regime as 'illegitimate and criminal'. This initiative to officially condemn Romanian communism aimed, on the one hand, at a symbolic reparation offered to the persecuted during the communist regime, and it had political goals, to legitimize President Traian Băsescu, who was

³³ *The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania*, pp. 637–645. http://old.presidency.ro/static/rapoarte/Raport_final_CPADCR.pdf [accessed: 7.03.2023].

counting on attracting a part of the so-called democratic or humanist elite³⁴. At the same time, Romania was trying to make a good impression at the international level by implementing the recommendations of the European institutions.

The president's condemnation of communism put a stop to all debates on a possible 'communism trial'. By blaming the entire system, those responsible for crimes and abuses were thus exempted from individual accountability before the law. At the same time, any discussion about the role of various institutions in the repression and their involvement in the implementation of totalitarian measures, such as the judicial but also the administrative system, which still retained totalitarian practices in approaching the relationship with the citizens, was abandoned.

On the other hand, it must be said that the 'trial of communism' was not possible due to the lack of people and institutions that could have judged this regime. Political prisoners were prevented in the 90s from standing up in a moral court, being constantly harassed and branded as 'fascists, extremists, legionnaires'³⁵. The post-communist elites, formed during the communist period, were compromised by their various forms of collaboration with the regime. The long duration of communism was once again leaving its mark on its legacy. As the writer and former political detainee, Adrian Marino, noticed, the ambiguity that characterized communism marked the spirits, an ambiguity which might become a national specialty: "I have always lived in an ambiguity, perhaps this is the characteristic of being Romanian: ambiguity"³⁶.

Final remarks

33 years after the fall of communism, the active promotion of the memory of repression still weighs heavy on the shoulders of its survivors and their descendants. As happened in the '90s, the only help offered to them by the Romanian state was pecuniary. On July 15, 2020, a law supplementing Decree-Law no. 118/1990 was voted by the Parliament. It aims at the descendants of former political prisoners who were entitled to receive 500 lei monthly as compensation for the suffering endured

³⁴ V. Pasti, *România în tranziție. Căderea în viitor* [Romania in transition. The fall into future], Bucharest 1995, p. 174.

³⁵ G. Stoica, *AFDPR-siglă a frontului antitotalitar european* [AFDPR-a brand of the European antitotalitarian front], *Cotidianul*, 26 March 1992.

³⁶ Adrian Marino, quoted by Dan Petrescu, *Deconstrucții populare* [Popular De-constructions], Iași 2002, pp. 123–124.

by their parents and by themselves. Once again, the offspring of the former extreme right political detainees were excluded from compensations by the law.

However, it must be said that, after the official condemnation of communism in December 2006, the Romanian state took some measures to promote the memory of repression from an anti-communist perspective. To this end, a textbook on the history of communism for high schools was published and introduced into the school curriculum. Although balanced in terms of information and case studies, the *Foreword* written by the anti-communist historian, Marius Oprea, gives a much too ideological tone to the textbook by exacerbating anti-communism and repression and by intentionally omitting a period (second half of the 1960s – the early 1970s) of relative welfare and liberalization, which, in most cases, corresponds to the youth of the grandparents of the students to whom the textbook is addressed: “In communist Romania, since the beginning until the fall of the regime, ordinary people were subjected to continuous aggression, excessive control, including the private life, hard to imagine today by those who did not live back then. Ordinary people led their lives between the workplace and the walls of the house, and happiness meant a piece of meat bought after hours of standing in a line”³⁷.

However, despite this approach endorsed by the state, the opinion polls recorded favourable attitudes of people towards the communist regime. Thus, in 2010, 38% of the young people who completed a survey, considered communism as a much better period than the one they were living in³⁸. In another survey from 2014 regarding Romanians’ perception of communism, most respondents (69.5%) rated living conditions back then as better than current ones and corruption as much lower under communism than in 2014³⁹. A research from November 2019 shows that more than half of the participants to the opinion poll believe that communism was a better time⁴⁰.

³⁷ M. Oprea, *Prefață (Foreword)*, [in:] *O istorie a comunismului din România. Manual pentru liceu* [A History of Communism in Romania. Textbook for High School], eds M. Stamatescu, R. Grosescu, D. Dobrinu, A. Muraru, L. Pleșa, S. Andreescu, Iași 2008.

³⁸ G. Bădescu, M. Comșa, A. Gheorghiuță, C. Stănuș, C.D. Tufiș, *Implicarea civică și politică a tinerilor* [Civic and Political Involvement of the Youth], Constanța, p. 65.

³⁹ A. Boghiceanu, *Infografie sondaj: Peste jumătate din români încă mai suspină după communism*, *Adevărul*, 18 septembrie 2017, http://adevarul.ro/news/politica/sondaj-jumatate-romani-inca-mai-suspina-comunism-1_5419ba120d133766a835cd90/index.html [accessed: 3.03.2023].

⁴⁰ C. Lescu, *Percepții despre comunism după 30 de ani*, pe site-ul Radio Romania International. https://www.rri.ro//ro_ro/perceptii_despre_comunism_dupa_30_de_ani-2609009 [accessed: 11.03.2023].

This favourable image is due to an official public memory corseted in an outdated festivity that fails to convey to people (young and not so young) a clear image and a coherent discourse on communism, as well as to the ‘communicative memory’, transmitted to grandchildren by grandparents who were young in the 1960s and the 1970s, years of relative liberalization and prosperity. People who experienced the communism of that era show a “restorative nostalgia”⁴¹, they display a desire to go back in time, to reconstruct and relive that era, their golden age. This nostalgia also incorporates a critique of the present, which is much more fluid, less certain and subject to change than the past which seems grounded and easily sublimated.

This perception of communism, specific to the grandparents of today’s young people, combined with the inadequacy of the educational methods that prevail in Romanian schools, with the concern for school performances quantified by grades and qualifications, coupled with the lack of real interest on the part of public actors in regular and effective promotion of the memory of communism, partly explain the positive evaluation of communism by the new generations. Other explanations relate to the contemporary world, which has other topics of interest, oriented towards the technological future and artificial intelligence, a different perception of time and even space, of success, but also of the promotion of other values and tastes, of a life lived on the snapshot (*immédiateté*, as the French say).

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⁴¹ S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001, pp. 41–43.

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