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GEORGIANA ȚĂRANU* (CONSTANTA, ROMANIA)

Nicolae Iorga as everybody's political ally in post-communist Romania

Abstract: This chapter discusses how the memory of an influential figure of modern Romania's history like Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), a foremost historian-politician and nationalist intellectual, became instrumental in the three decades following the end of communism by politicians. As he is considered the father of Romanian nationalism and a symbol of the nationalist struggle on the eve of WWI, Iorga's memory in contemporary Romania allows us to examine nationalism in politics. In the research, a qualitative approach was adopted to the subject by dealing with discourses and initiatives produced by politicians as agents of memory in post-communist Romania. By looking at the various strategies of remembrance used after 1989 by these memory entrepreneurs, the research investigates the politicians who honoured Iorga, the purpose of their engagement in such politics of memory, and what this says about how post-communist politics, nationalism and memory mingled.

Keywords: Nicolae Iorga; politics; instrumentalization of memory; post-communism; strategies of remembrance

Słowa kluczowe: Nicolae Iorga; polityka; instrumentalizacja pamięci; postkomunizm; strategie pamięci

* ORCID: 0000-0002-7366-5869; PhD., Ovidius University of Constanța; e-mail: georgianataranu87@gmail.com.

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Introduction

The question of who and how we chose to remember from our past is a very important one since both history and memory can bring groups together or set them apart. Scholars have by now agreed that memory is political (Nicole Maurantonio)¹ since it places “a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present” (Barry Schwartz)². What adds to this instrumentality is the fact that memory comes as a plurality of things to be remembered or forgotten, so we always deal in fact with “competing and layered pasts” calling our attention (Lavinia Stan)³. The past has been used by different types of political regimes to serve various purposes, but they all have one thing in common: more attention to history is given whenever the governing elites feel vulnerable in terms of legitimacy. History is thus one of the first disciplines to be deployed by agents of memory for political ends as it provides a large gallery of inspiring events and great personalities. This chapter discusses how the memory of such an influential figure of modern Romania's history, that of Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), a foremost historian-politician and nationalist intellectual, became instrumental in the three decades following the end of communism. As he is considered the father of Romanian nationalism and one of the symbols of the nationalist struggle on the eve of WWI, the question of Iorga's memory in contemporary Romania allows to examine nationalism in politics.

In the research, a qualitative approach was applied to the subject by dealing with discourses and initiatives launched by politicians as agents of memory in post-communist Romania. By looking at the various strategies of remembrance used after 1989 by these memory entrepreneurs, the research investigates the politicians honouring Iorga, the purpose of their engagement in such politics of memory, and what this tells us about how post-communist politics, nationalism and memory mingled. I have dealt elsewhere with how right-wing historians-politicians, in one case, and members of Parliament, in another case, associated themselves with Iorga's name in

¹ N. Maurantonio, *The Politics of Memory*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*, eds K. Kenski, K. Hall Jamieson, New York 2014 (DOI: 10.1093/oxford-hb/9780199793471.013.026.).

² B. Schwartz, *The social context of commemoration: A study in collective memory*, *Social Forces* 61, 1982, 2, pp. 374–402.

³ L. Stan, *The Problem of 'Competing Pasts' in Transitional Justice*, *Annals of the "Ovidius" University of Constanța – Political Science Series* 10 (2021), pp. 7–23.

the post-communist times⁴. On both occasions I argued that the politics of memory towards Iorga in the 1990s did not differ significantly from the national-communist narrative of the late communist decades. In the case of the members of Parliament (MPs), their parliamentary speeches of the 1990s invoked Iorga as *argumentum ab auctoritate*. Their appeal to Iorga's authority, be it historically, politically, or culturally motivated, was frequently a part of their xenophobic, anti-Semitic, extreme nationalist narratives. The present contribution broadens the perspective with other types of politicians, outside Parliament, as well as beyond the 1990s and up to the present, as part of a greater research interest I have in the instrumentalization of Iorga's legacy in post-communist Romania.

The present research is divided into three sections followed by conclusions. In section one, I provide a basic context for the reader to understand who Iorga was and why he still matters so much that he has been remembered by different political regimes since his murder in 1940. In section two, I discuss a selection of various references to Iorga by members of parliament from different political parties and in different political contexts. The aim here is to see how the historian's profile emerged as very versatile, depending on the actors (the authorities or the opposition), their strategies and the agenda behind them. In section three, I look to how the politics of memory of Iorga moved after 2004 outside Parliament to Vălenii de Munte, probably the most important place of memory in Iorga's symbolic geography. By focusing on two specific cases of top politicians, Ion Iliescu and Adrian Năstase, I try to identify the ways and purposes political leaders associate themselves with Iorga's legacy.

1. Why Iorga matters in post-communist Romania

Very few Romanian historians or scholars avoid using the superlative when referring to Nicolae Iorga. Just as Mihai Eminescu is considered the embodiment of a national poet, Iorga is seen as the epitome of a national historian⁵. His life and work contain

⁴ G. Țăranu, *A Romanian Political Story: The Nationalism of Nicolae Iorga Revisited (1899–1914)*, Annals of “Ovidius” University of Constanța – Political Science Series 10, 2021, pp. 129–156; Eadem, *Politics of the Past: The Instrumentalization of Nicolae Iorga's Memory in the Romanian Parliament (1990–2000)*, Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques 75, 2022, pp. 19–32.

⁵ For Eminescu's case see “*Mihai Eminescu, poet național român*”. *Istoria și anatomia unui mit cultural*, ed. I. Bot, Cluj–Napoca 2001.

all the data suitable for mythmaking. His scholarly work includes thousands of titles ranging from articles to brochures and major historical syntheses, and deal with virtually anything related to the Romanian past, South-Eastern Europe, Byzantium, from history to literature and mentalities, from ancient to modern times⁶. Iorga was an active historian, university professor, journalist, member of parliament, a short-lived prime minister and cabinet member, and founder of institutions⁷. His tireless academic curiosity, his cultural productivity and presence in so many different areas of knowledge inclined his contemporaries to refer to Iorga as a Renaissance man (George Călinescu), while in the following decades he was described as a true “phenomenon of nature” (Iorgu Iordan), “a Titan” (Ștefan Ștefănescu)⁸. Even Lucian Boia, one of the most unprejudiced and influential historians of contemporary Romania, , exponent of the demythologizing turn in the post-communist historiography, was of an opinion that “Iorga belonged in the Guinness Book of Records”. Since “It is probable that no human being has written so much since the invention of writing [...]. It is not just the quantity but the variety that is amazing”⁹. Hyperboles aside, Iorga’s accomplishments did gain him European reputation which made Peter Burke, a leading cultural historian, include him in his 2020 list of 500 Western polymaths, defined as “monsters of erudition” of the last six centuries, as one of the only two Romanian entries¹⁰.

For posterity, his profile met the requirements to become a mythical figure, seen as both a Saviour and a Victim of his country just as Ioana Bot argued was the case with Mihai Eminescu¹¹. He was the founder of the first Romanian nationalist party, predicating an anti-Semitic and anti-modernist platform which idealized the peas-

⁶ B. Theodorescu, *Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940): biobibliografie*, București 1976.

⁷ Iorga’s biographical literature is rather scarce. There are only two biographies (a communist-era and partial one – Idem, *N. Iorga*, București 1968), and a second one by an American historian: N.M. Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga: a biography* (Iași 1996) and a handful of biographical essays: B.V. Cavallotti, *Nicola Iorga* (Napoli 1977); D. Zamfirescu, *N. Iorga. Etape către o monografie* (București 1981); V. Râpeanu, *Nicolae Iorga* (București 1994). The rest is vast literature of a dozen of monographs and thousands of articles dedicated to Iorga’s many interests and activities.

⁸ Studii. Revistă de istorie (25 de ani de la moartea lui Nicolae Iorga) 18, 1965, 5, pp. 1214, 1314.

⁹ L. Boia, *Romania. Bordeland of Europe*, transl. J.Ch. Brown, London 2004, p. 251.

¹⁰ P. Burke, *The Polymath*, New Haven–London 2020.

¹¹ I. Bot, *Istoria și anatomia unui mit cultural*, [in:] *Mihai Eminescu, poet național român*, p. 53.

ants and the countryside as bearers of the true Romanian spirit¹². His fame grew rapidly after he launched cultural initiatives that explicitly challenged Romania's alliance with Austria-Hungary, and promoted a radical solution to the "national question", meaning political unification of the so-called Old Kingdom with the neighbouring Transylvanian Romanians living under the imperial rule¹³. During WWI, his mobilizing spirit made him an inspiring figure of the national resistance, hence the position of a Saviour. After Greater Romania emerged, Iorga became the main epistemic legitimist of the national project¹⁴. He provided national history with readings of the past which underlined ideas of historical continuity, cultural superiority, and political unity. That is the main reason why he is mostly remembered by those preoccupied with the national identity and invoked as a moral authority against possible "detractors." Iorga was an active politician, whose conservative and authoritarian sympathies made him a supporter, reluctant at times, of the royal dictatorship of Carol II in 1938¹⁵. His assassination in 1940 by the Romanian Fascist Iron Guard added an aura of martyrdom to an already unusual biography, hence the position of a victim. Iorga entered the national pantheon and was commemorated ever since, with two short pauses (November 1940 – January 1941 and 1948–1960/65)¹⁶. The first pause came right after his death, when the Iron Guard was still in alliance with General Ion Antonescu, Romania's wartime dictator. Silence over Iorga's murder was imposed by censorship for the next two months. After Antonescu ousted his Fascist partner from power, his military dictatorship engaged in several practices of remembering Iorga¹⁷. A longer pause came in 1948 and lasted for little more than a decade, when most East European countries had to follow the Soviet model, fa-

¹² Z. Ornea, *Sămănătorismul*, second revised edition, București 1971; I. Stanomir, *Reacțiune și conservatorism: eseu asupra imaginarului politic eminescian*, București 2000; Ph. Vanhaelemeersch, *A Generation "Without Beliefs" and the Idea of Experience in Romania (1927–1934)*, New York 2006; K. Hitchens, *România: 1866–1947*, București 2013.

¹³ On this subject, see J.P. Niessen, *Romanian Nationalism: An Ideology of Integration and Mobilization*, [in:] *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. P.F. Sugar, Washington 1995, p. 283; C. Bodea, Ș. Vergatti, *Nicolae Iorga în arhivele vieneze și ale Sîgurănței regale (1903–1914)*, București 2012.

¹⁴ M. Turda, *Historical Writing in the Balkans*, [in:] *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 4: 1800–1945, eds St. Macintyre, J. Maiguashca, A. Pók, Oxford 2011, p. 352.

¹⁵ P. Țurlea, *Nicolae Iorga între dictatura regală și dictatura legionară*, București 2001.

¹⁶ G. Țăranu, *A Romanian Political Story: The Nationalism of Nicolae Iorga Revisited (1899–1914)*, Annals of the "Ovidius" University of Constanta. Political Science Series 10, 2021, pp. 145–147.

¹⁷ V. Râpeanu, *Nicolae Iorga (1940–1947)*, vol. I, pp. 109–111.

your internationalism, and condemn their nationalist past. The Stalinist orthodoxy put in place by all countries under the Soviet control initially purged the academic elites and banned the *ancien régime* and anti-Soviet titles and authors, Iorga included. The politics of memory which allowed Iorga's comeback to the fore occurred at the height of Nicolae Ceaușescu's nationalist communist rule. This change was due to the Romanian regime's distancing from Moscow and its quest for legitimacy both at home and abroad, starting from the mid-1960s.¹⁸ For the next two decades, Iorga's exceptionality and universality were underlined as a key asset of a larger propaganda effort to glorify Romanian culture and its great personalities, and hence national identity, unity, and sovereignty within the communist world, especially in relation to the Soviet Union. On the domestic front, a teacher cult emerged, which allowed historians, many of them former students of Iorga, to gain a privileged position as "specialists of the state socialism's national agenda"¹⁹. In turn, historians offered symbolic legitimacy to the political establishment in a moment of transition and restructuring of its foreign and internal affairs. Bogdan C. Iacob argued that "the teacher cult acquired near-Messianic proportions thus simultaneously functioning as preparation/complement for and refuge from the exposure and practice of Nicolae Ceaușescu's cult"²⁰.

Katherine Verdery's insightful study has shown how in the 1980s, in opposition to re-editing Mihai Eminescu's works, the national poet, Iorga, archaeologist Vasile Pârvan and literary critic George Călinescu, to name but a few, could lead to accusations of acts against national identity: "Anyone claiming to defend the true values of Romanian culture might accuse enemies of the cardinal sin against the Nation: ties to Stalinist dogmatism, with its assault on national culture"²¹. Iorga's name continued to be a symbol of Romanian values and national identity to be "defended" from external enemies even after the political change of December 1989. While there was continuity in terms of the national pantheon, sans the Ceaușescu couple and some communist figures, things changed in the debate around national identity. The

¹⁸ V. Georgescu, *Politică și istorie: cazul comuniștilor români. 1944–1977*, ed. R. Popa, București 1991 [1977].

¹⁹ B.C. Iacob, *Nicolae Iorga as New Man. Functions of a Teacher Cult*, Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană 13, 2014, pp. 178–192; F. Zavatti, *Writing History in a Propaganda Institute: Political Power and Network Dynamics in Communist Romania*, Stockholm 2016 (Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations), pp. 199–204.

²⁰ B.C. Iacob, *Nicolae Iorga as New Man*, p. 192.

²¹ K. Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1991, p. 150.

1980s accusation of “Stalinist dogmatism” was replaced by a new adversary of the nation: Western imperialism, globalization, the European Union etc. In Iorga’s case, while the communist constraints on his editing and political activity disappeared, his legacy could now receive double praise. Thus, after 1989, Iorga was commemorated not only as a victim of fascism, but also of communist censorship, of which in fact he was only during the first part of the latter’s regime, until 1960.

2. Iorga as an authoritative ally in Parliament

Iorga’s name was treated by many political leaders as their symbolic *ally* in different political struggles. This can be considered the first and most easily traceable avatar of Iorga in the post-1989 political discourse. This understanding comes from an analysis of the ways in which politicians in post-communist Romania, representing different political parties and holding public offices at various levels, approached Iorga’s memory to support their own agendas. The historian was already in the national pantheon during the late communist years, and as nationalism resurged in the region in the early 1990s, praising historical episodes and figures of one’s country represented a successful political platform quickly embraced by all those eager to ride the populist wave²².

Two were the most important political arenas for parties and politicians to capitalize on Iorga’s memory. The first was the Romanian Parliament, while the second was a summer school held yearly in Vălenii de Munte, a small town in the Carpathians, close to the then Austro-Hungarian border, across Transylvania, in the footsteps of a nationalist project started by Iorga in 1908 for promoting political unity for all Romanians under the imperial rule²³.

First, let us take a look at the debates inside the institution with the most democratic legitimacy in any liberal political regime, the parliament. Iorga’s name was used to excuse, accuse, or legitimize all sorts of political agendas. The most active MPs on this topic were also fellow historians, who in the next section are presented as agents of memory in holding academic remembrance of their famous predecessor. From left to the far right, deputies and senators turned to Iorga in times of crisis, in their quest for political authority. Those taking the floor to praise Iorga came in the first post-communist decade mostly from the main ruling party, the National Salva-

²² T. Gallagher, *Democrație și naționalism în România: 1989–1998*, București 1999, pp. 141–142.

²³ P. Țurlea, *Nicolae Iorga la Vălenii de Munte*, București 2008.

tion Front (FSN, then Democratic Front of National Salvation/FDSN; after 1993 it became PDSR – the Party of Social Democracy of Romania, then from 2001 onwards PSD, the Social Democratic Party), the largest left-wing post-communist political party and a direct successor to the former Communist Party, but also from its right-wing ultranationalist satellites, the Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR) and the Greater Romania Party (PRM).

a. The commemoration strategy: a tool for the collective victimhood narrative

From early on, less than a year after the bloody revolution of December 1989, Iorga's name became associated with those in power. In November 1990, the Parliament held a special session to pay homage to Iorga and Virgil Madgearu, another Interwar political leader. Both were assassinated by the same death squad of the Iron Guard, on the same day²⁴. However, the interventions of the MPs engaging with Iorga's memory differed from those remembering Madgearu in both the style and content. The former were more elevated in both the form and content. The President of the Senate (the upper House of the Romanian parliament), Alexandru Bîrlădeanu, a former eminent communist official and member of the governing FSN, opened the session by referring to Iorga's murder as a "martyrdom which continued to hurt"²⁵. In line with this pious course, a member of the National Peasant-Christian Democratic Party (PNT-CD), the FSN's main rival, referred to the meaning of Iorga's death in a similar way: "the stabbed heart of the Romanian people"²⁶. The most suggestive speech came from the governing FSN, through the voice of Gheorghe Dumitrașcu, a historian and conspicuous nationalist senator. Dumitrașcu took the floor supposedly to honour Iorga. In fact, he seized an opportunity to launch typical ultranationalist professions: fear over the loss of national identity, feelings of national superiority (here, Iorga and Eminescu, the national poet, were invoked as truly remarkable indigenous creators since they were supposedly self-educated), indication of plots by external enemies etc. The Latin origin of the Romanian people, which Iorga had promoted, was in peril of being "erased" by foreign forces eager to "melt us into an amorphous continental or world mass". This supposed danger of losing the dearest national trait, the Latin descent, was equated to a virtual "attack against Iorga", who

²⁴ Parlamentul României, *Sesiune omagială Nicolae Iorga – Virgil Madgearu, 27 noiembrie 1990*, București: Imprimeria Coresi, 1991.

²⁵ Alexandru Bîrlădeanu, *Ibidem*, p. 5.

²⁶ Ioan Alexandru, *Ibidem*, p. 39.

had championed the Latin roots of his people²⁷. Dumitrașcu's strategy was to project "feelings of collective victimhood in face of a perceived external danger", namely the West²⁸. Dumitrașcu's intervention probably came as a response to concerns and firm condemnations expressed in different capitals over the miners' raids of June 1990. Ion Iliescu, the then head of the FSN and president of the country, had called the miners to defend the endangered democracy from a "fascist coup attempt". This resulted in a bloody "mineriad", a violent attack against peaceful anti-government protesters which left Iliescu's regime in diplomatic isolation and the country with a severely damaged image abroad²⁹. Therefore, the need of legitimacy for the newly constituted and yet already challenged political establishment was great. This official event organized by a state institutions did not set counter-commemorative type of memory open to a plurality of re-appropriations of Iorga, but set a course for a commemorative type of memory which worshiped its subject and continues to do so to this day. By placing so much emphasis on his assassination, this trend continued the communist strategy of emphasising Iorga's death at the hands of the Fascist Iron Guard in order to demonize its arch-enemy and consolidate its position on the oppositional axis of "good" versus "evil". Only this time, in the post-communist setting, every politician or party allying themselves with Iorga's image could freely define another enemy to oppose.

b. Rehabilitation instead of memorialisation: Iorga in the company of Antonescu

Between 1996–2000, legislative and presidential elections brought the first peaceful alternation in power under the form of the centre-right Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR). The two extreme right-wing parties, the PUNR and the PRM, in the government as coalition partners in 1992 along with FDSN/PDSR, were now in opposition. Against this backdrop, politicians from both groups turned to nationalism and history with new zeal. They resorted more and more to examples of great personalities capable of steering a sense of national pride and national identity. Most of the ultranationalist and extremist politicians of the 1990s rallied around the

²⁷ Gheorghe Dumitrașcu, *Ibidem*, p. 13.

²⁸ G. Țăranu, *Politics of the Past*, p. 25.

²⁹ D. Deletant, *Romania's Commitment to the Rule of Law?*, [in:] *Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five: Linking Past, Present, and Future*, eds L. Stan, D. Vancea, Lanham–Boulder–New York–London 2015, pp. 223–224.

controversial figure of Ion Antonescu, whose reputation of either a national hero or a war criminal proved to be a profound cleavage between politicians and historians alike. Antonescu had been Hitler's ally and Romania's wartime dictator at the time of the country's participation in the Holocaust. While in the West Antonescu was seen as a war criminal responsible for exterminating Bessarabia and northern Bukovina Jews and deporting other Jews and the Roma to Transnistria, where many of them perished, in late communist and post-communist Romania these historical facts were no longer acknowledged. On the contrary, in the late years of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, there was a strong trend among historians who embraced the national-communist line to rehabilitate Antonescu, a trend which continued vigorously two decades after the December Revolution³⁰. This issue gave the post-1989 extremist politicians in search of a platform the possibility to intensify the collective victimhood narrative and add anti-Semitic notes: Romania had one true national hero who was vilified by both Soviets and the Jewish-led West. For such minds, Antonescu actually saved Jews by refusing to hand them over to the Germans, but never responsible for the crimes committed by Romanian authorities under his rule. Such was the case of one of the most vocal nationalist politicians acting also as an agent of memory of Nicolae Iorga in the Parliament, Petre Țurlea³¹. He was a deputy from the FSN/FDSN who then moved to the PUNR, an ultranationalist anti-Hungarian party based in Transylvania. In a parliamentary speech of 1999, Țurlea took the floor to honour the memory of the two greatest personalities in 20th century Romania. The two were, in his view, Iorga and Ion Antonescu³². While he was a productive

³⁰ R. Ioanid, *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Romania*, [in:] *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, ed. R.L. Braham, Boulder/New York: Columbia University Press/The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/City University of New York and Social Science Monographs, 1994, pp. 159–181; M. Shafir, *Between Denial and 'Comparative Trivialization': Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe*, [in:] *The Treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary and Romania During the Post-Communist Era*, ed. R.L. Braham, Boulder/New York: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/The City University of New York and Social Science Monographs/Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 43–136.

³¹ I discussed Țurlea's role in the politics of memory of the Romanian Parliament in the first post-communist decade in G. Țăranu, *Politics of the Past*, pp. 26–27.

³² P. Țurlea, *Un gând de recunoștință față de două mari personalități ale secolului XX: Nicolae Iorga și Ion Antonescu*, Stenograma sedinței Camerei Deputaților, 28 decembrie 1999, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno2015.stenograma?ids=4888&idm=1,1&idl=1> [accessed: 14.05.2022].

scholar and editor of Iorga, as a politician he proved to be more keen to rehabilitate the dictator than to sincerely honour the historian. To place Iorga in such company was, for somebody with Țurlea's expertise, somehow cynical since Antonescu had been in charge when Iorga was murdered by the general's Fascist partner in power, the Iron Guard, who had been given a free hand to pursue acts of revenge. Țurlea made yearly pleas for the rehabilitation of Antonescu, whose reputation he was very eager to whitewash. Țurlea was one of the many hard-core nationalists (and historians-politicians) who combined anti-Semitic views with anti-Hungarian ones, deflecting the responsibility for the crimes perpetrated against Jews on the Nazi authorities and their Fascist Hungarian allies after the loss of northern Transylvania to Hungary³³. A couple of months later, in May 2000, Țurlea once again used the same method for the same purpose: he asked the Parliament for a moment of silence in the honour of three Romanian personalities³⁴. This time, he extended the national pantheon with one of the most symbolic historical figures, Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul). Michael the Brave was a medieval prince who in 1600 succeeded to rule simultaneously, for a short period, over all the three historical provinces which would later form most of modern day Romania: Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania. This political achievement was seen as a forerunner of the unity which would follow in 1859 and 1918. The three individuals were considered heroes due to their assassination "because of their fight for the ideal of all Romanians, the creation of their own unitary state". The winner of this association was, of course, Antonescu, whose wartime crimes were thus deliberately ignored. In this context, Țurlea's parliamentary interventions seemed to be not so much about praising Iorga, but about placing Antonescu in respectable company and thus advancing his own political and nationalist agenda.

³³ M. Shafir, *Between Denial and 'Comparative Trivialization'*, p. 77. See, for example, his other parliamentary interventions: P. Țurlea, *Clarificări în privința atitudinii 'fostei familii regale'*, Ședința Camerei Deputaților, 16 iunie 1998, <https://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=1482&idm=1,08&idl=1>, and *Protest față de noua etapă a epurării etnice în județul Covasna*, Ședința Camerei Deputaților, 29 iunie 1999, <https://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.sumar?ids=4909&idl=2> [accessed: 14.05.2022].

³⁴ Idem, *Evocarea evenimentelor și personalităților istorice legate de idealul unității tuturor românilor*, Stenograma ședinței Camerei Deputaților, 23 mai 2000, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=4941&idm=1,02&idl=> [accessed: 14.05.2022].

c. An incomparable comparison: Iorga and Corneliu Vadim Tudor

In a similar fashion, Nicolae Leonăchescu, a fellow MP from another far-right party, the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Greater Romania (PRM), used the 128th anniversary of Iorga's to deliver a xenophobic speech where Romania was again portrayed as a victim of external forces. In his irrational logic he said that "Globalism, Americanism, Europeanism, National Socialism, Internationalism, Sovietism are different names of the same danger: the loss of national identity"³⁵. Basically, the entire globe was an enemy of the country in Leonăchescu's inflated rhetoric which summarized the same collective victimhood narrative. Likewise, the true motivation behind the act of remembrance was politics. Just as the campaign was launched to rehabilitate Antonescu, Iorga's name was again invoked to make a case about somebody else, namely the PRM's chairman, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. One of the most vociferous and influential extremist politicians of post-1989 Romania, Tudor had been stripped of his parliamentary immunity few months earlier and was to face prosecution for libel³⁶. In his seemingly memorial speech, Leonăchescu used the reference to Iorga's supposed mock trial and assassination by the Legionnaires' death squad to advise his fellow representatives against the judicial "persecution" of the country's most valuable people. Although Tudor was not explicitly named, the audience got the hint, in line with Leonăchescu's earlier interventions³⁷. The two cases and personalities were hard to set side by side for so many reasons, but what mattered in this context was to provide Tudor with a favourable comparison and hence a high status. This was another strategy of remembrance motivated by a personal political agenda. In fact, Tudor gained so much popularity in those years that soon, in 2000, he advanced to the runoff in the presidential election, while the PRM recorded the peak of its success in the general elections of the same year and became the largest opposition party in the Romanian Parliament.

³⁵ N. Leonăchescu, *Evocarea personalității savantului Nicolae Iorga, la 128 de ani de la nașterea acestuia*, Ședința Camerei Deputaților, 15 iunie 1999, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno2015.stenograma?ids=4910&idm=1,16&idl=1> [accessed: 15.05.2022].

³⁶ G. Mocanu, *Vadim i-a calomniat pe Zoe Petre si Petre Roman și în instanță*, Ziua, 3 iunie 1999, <http://www.ziua.ro/prt.php?id=25997&data=1999-06-03> [accessed: 15.05.2022].

³⁷ See, for example, Leonăchescu's intervention on the same topic of March, Ședința Camerei Deputaților, 23 martie 1999, <https://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno2015.stenograma?ids=3021&idl=1> [accessed: 15.05.2022].

d. Iorga and a case for a reform of history teaching

Not only the opposition parties used Iorga as a symbolic ally. In 1999, it was also a top government official who appealed to the historian's authority in the context of a major public and political scandal over a post-communist series of alternative history textbooks, the so-called Mitu controversy³⁸. Andrei Marga, Minister of Education and member of the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNȚCD), was called in Parliament to respond to a series of furious accusations from the opposition that called the history textbook for the twelfth grade "an attack at our national history", which deserved to be "burned in a public square"³⁹. Briefly said, the government was accused of being anti-national, ruled from behind the scenes by Americans, Hungarians or other evil forces interested in tearing the country apart⁴⁰. The minister took the floor to defend his education reform. In his search for authoritative arguments and popular support, he invited the MPs to consult pre- and Interwar history textbooks written by Al. Xenopol, Iorga or Ioan Lupaș as examples of enlightened works of their times⁴¹. What was surprising in Marga's reference to Iorga was its exceptionality among the majority of those citing Iorga. While Marga appealed to Iorga just as every other politician, to imbue his argument with authority in the face of his political rivals, yet it was one of the rare occasions in which the historian's name and work were used by a politician to support a modernist agenda. If most (or all) political agents of memory involved in remembering Iorga employed his work to support the ethno-national Vulgate, this time a member of the government was using it to defend a democratic and European-oriented agenda.

³⁸ The Mitu controversy has taken its name from Sorin Mitu, the main editor of the most disputed history textbook: *Istoria Românilor. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a*, eds S. Mitu, O. Pecican, L. Copoeru, V. Țărău, L. Țărău, București 1999; R. Pârâianu, *National Prejudices, Mass Media and History Textbooks: The Mitu Controversy*, [in:] *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*, eds B. Trencsényi, D. Petrescu, C. Petrescu, C. Iordachi, Z. Kántor, Budapest-Iași 2001, pp. 93–117.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 105–108.

⁴¹ Andrei Marga, [in:] Ședința Camerei Deputaților, 15 noiembrie 1999, <https://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=4641&idm=6&idl=1> [accessed: 15.05.2022].

e. Denouncing Fascist credentials

The anti-communist and hugely reformist platform on which the CDR ran the elections lost any credibility by 1999⁴². As a consequence, the 2000 general elections saw the PDSR/PSD's return to power. Likewise, Ion Iliescu was once again elected president after he defeated ultranationalist Corneliu Vadim Tudor in the second round of the race. Despite the general dissatisfaction with the CDR's governance, the years of costly economic reforms and political instability that delayed Western integration, Romanians voted for the more moderate Iliescu instead of the extremist Tudor. The PDSR's presidential candidate seemed a much more predictable solution to get the country closer to the European and Euro-Atlantic destiny than Tudor's vigilante, anti-Western agenda⁴³. Indeed, once re-elected president Iliescu embarked on the path leading to NATO membership, which was soon to be conditioned upon efforts to coming to terms with the past. More specifically, US officials expressly pointed to the need of the authorities to admit the country's participation to the Holocaust, condemn anti-Semitism and put a stop to the campaign to rehabilitate Antonescu or Fascist symbols and figures⁴⁴. Therefore, in the following years Iliescu and his party, also in power, engaged in more measures meant to confront and reckon with the crimes perpetuated by Romanian authorities during the Holocaust. In 2002, the government enacted Emergency Ordinance no. 31 which outlawed fascist, racist and xenophobic organizations, symbols, statues, or commemorative plaques, and banned the naming of streets or foundations after personalities condemned for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The nationalist backlash did not take long to manifest itself in the Parliament in the ranks of the right-wing extremists. In this context, Iorga's name was brought up in the Parliament by another flamboyant ultranationalist politician, Gheorghe Buzatu, a senator, and

⁴² D. Pavel, L. Huiu, "Nu putem reuși decât împreună". O istorie analitică a Convenției Democratice, 1989–2000, Iași 2003, p. 483.

⁴³ M. Mureșan, *The 2000 Romanian Presidential Elections – between Populism and Europeanism*, *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai – Historia* 66, Special Issue, 2021, 201 (doi:10.24193/subbhst.2021.spiss.12).

⁴⁴ M. Shafir, *Holocaust Representation in Transitional Romania: An Updated Motivational Typology. Holocaust Memory and Antisemitism in Central and Eastern Europe. Comparative Issues*, *Caietele Institutului Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România "Elie Wiesel"* 3, 2007, pp. 181–182.

deputy chairman of the chauvinistic and anti-Semitic PRM⁴⁵. Buzatu also denied the Holocaust and was probably Ion Antonescu's most influential apologist as he was both a historian and a university professor. In his parliamentary attack against the newly enacted legislation, he condemned the ordinance for allowing loose framing of major Romanian Interwar personalities as Fascists. Buzatu used Iorga's name as an example meant to indicate the supposed foolishness of the law: "The apotheosis of this ordinance", he added, "will come when Nicolae Iorga, our foremost historian and one of the world's greatest, will be placed – as in the 1940s–1960s, about which we have developed amnesia – in the ranks of fascists and nationalists louts [...]"⁴⁶. In other words, the law was so absurd that scholars could use it to point to Iorga some of his puzzling stances in favour of the Legionaries or Antonescu. In fact, Buzatu ridiculed the historical truth to give weight to his political argument and delegitimize alternative visions of the past. As a historian, he deliberately downgraded Iorga's complicated relationship with the Fascist Iron Guard. Buzatu thus made use of the floor to advance his own version of Iorga's political biography. No wonder that for years, the relationship with fascism in general represented "a grey area" in scholarly work on Iorga⁴⁷.

3. Vălenii de Munte: Iorga's place of memory, a new political arena

Appeals to nationalism seemed to have diminished between 2000 and 2004 as the PSD needed an image makeover to contrast the second-largest party in the Parliament, the PRM. Thus the former recast itself as "a pragmatic, competent, and moderate party, intent on promoting the country's NATO and EU integration efforts"⁴⁸. In 2003, an International Commission was set up by President Iliescu and chaired by Elie Wiesel, a Nobel Prize winner and Vice-Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, to

⁴⁵ G. Buzatu, *Declarație politică*, Ședința Senatului, 7 mai 2002, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=5282&idm=2,07&idl=> [accessed: 15.05.2022].

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ G. Țăranu, *A Grey Area in Nicolae Iorga's Intellectual Biography: Fascist Italy. Some Explanations*, [in:] *The Image of the Other. Memory and Representation of the Neighbourhood and the World*, eds F. Anghel, C.-A. Leonte, A. Pavel, Târgoviște 2018, pp. 109–125.

⁴⁸ G. Pop-Eleches, *Romania Twenty Years after 1989: The Bizarre Echoes of a Contested Revolution*, [in:] *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, eds M. Bernhard, J. Kubik, Oxford–New York 2014, p. 92.

work on a report on the history of the Holocaust in Romania. Iliescu endorsed the conclusions along with the recommendations⁴⁹. As these radical decisions signalled a certain degree of the country's willingness to break from its troubled transition, in late March 2004 Romania finally joined NATO. As Iliescu's last presidential term was coming to an end, with the Constitution limiting the terms in office to two, he started to associate himself more and more with Iorga's memory. In fact, over the following years, not only Iliescu, but the PSD's top leadership, now in opposition, started to associate themselves with Iorga's legacy. But why did Vălenii de Munte become a new political arena for such politics of memory?

In the early 20th century, Iorga had established a sort of a cultural and nationalist citadel in the town of Vălenii de Munte, in Prahova county, which outlived its founder. Since 1908, Iorga had started to organize annual summer schools as part of his nationalist propaganda meant to educate young people and Romanian elites from the neighbouring empires about their common national identity and the need for a political destiny in a single unified state. As the historian-politician's reputation had grown steadily, especially as a result of his writings, lectures and mobilizing spirit on the eve and during the war, Vălenii had become a true symbol for all those believing in the project of Greater Romania. During Iorga's lifetime, Vălenii had been visited constantly by eminent foreign guests, especially by Romania's most important statesmen and members of the royal family, the King and Queen included⁵⁰. In moments of crisis, when Iorga's cultural authority or political support had been needed, key decision-makers would come to the summer school to reach a win-win negotiation: the historian had been pleased to have had distinguished guests as confirmation of his status, while the visitors had gained legitimacy, approval or, at least, neutrality. The communists suspended the summer school in 1946, the Ceaușescu regime resumed it between 1965 and 1978, when it was shut down again⁵¹.

a. Hijacking Iorga's site of memory by Iliescu and the PSD

After the end of communism, the summer school was quickly re-launched in 1990. In a similar fashion as in the Interwar period, it soon became a favourite destination, especially for the politicians wishing to portray themselves as "defenders of the na-

⁴⁹ International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report*, president of the commission: Elie Wiesel, eds T. Friling, R. Ioanid, M. E. Ionescu, Iași 2004.

⁵⁰ P. Țurlea, *Nicolae Iorga la Vălenii de Munte*, passim.

⁵¹ Ibidem, pp. 524–529.

tion”. High-profile officials such as former presidents of the Republic, acting prime ministers or ministers of key departments like Defence, Foreign Affairs, Education, Culture, the board of the Romanian Academy, historians, scholars of humanities and many more, took part in the summer events organized in Văleni. It became once again the “Mecca of Romanian identity”⁵². For the purpose of the present discussion, I will only deal with the most high-profile politicians attending the summer school in Văleni, making an attempt to answer questions as to when and why they engaged in the politics of memory of Iorga. A foundation *lieu de memoire* arrived in 2004. In April, while he was still acting President, Iliescu was declared an honorary citizen of the town of Vălenii de Munte⁵³. Apart from the fact that the mayor of the town was a member of the PSD (and an ex-communist mayor, too), there had been no obvious connection between Iliescu and Iorga’s legacy up to that point. How could Iliescu’s sudden interest in acts of remembrance of Iorga be explained? Why did it intensify only from 2004 onwards? The answer I advance is that Iliescu’s aims were twofold: history and politics.

b. Iorga, Iliescu’s ally against Bănescu

First, by the end of 2004, Iliescu was preparing to leave the president’s office, but continued his active political career in the Upper House between 2004–2008. It was in this context that he started to participate in events dedicated to Iorga’s memory. The fact that he went to the summer school on an almost yearly basis in the years to come might suggest his preoccupation with his own legacy more than with Iorga’s. How will he be remembered? After all, he was, as Tom Gallagher argued, “the architect of the political system – the creator of its rules, the definer of its goals – which functions today and whose demise does not appear to be imminent”⁵⁴. Vălenii de Munte was a stronghold of the PSD as all the mayors since 1992 until today were among its members. In spite of this one-party dominance in the town, Iorga’s site of memory had been a bastion of the ultranationalists associated with the two extreme

⁵² The term appears in P. Țurlea, *Nicolae Iorga*, p. 100.

⁵³ Consiliul Local al Orașului Vălenii de Munte, *Hotărâre privind conferirea titlului de cetățean de onoare al orașului Vălenii de Munte nr. 35 (30 aprilie 2004)*, https://www.valenii-demunte.com.ro/continut/cetateni/Hot_iliescu.pdf [accessed: 15.07.2023].

⁵⁴ T. Gallagher, *Incredible Voyage: Romania’s Communist Heirs Adapt and Survive After 1989*, [in:] *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History*, eds V. Tismăneanu, B.C. Iacob, Budapest–New York 2012, p. 522.

right-wing parties, the PUNR and the PRM⁵⁵. All the historians-politicians acting as agents of memory for Iorga discussed above (Buzatu, Țurlea etc.) were members of the two parties and, with fewer exceptions over the years, their anti-Hungarian, anti-Semitic and anti-Western attitudes prevailed⁵⁶. So from that point of view, appropriating the summer school with its nationalist neo-communist spirit was not unfamiliar to Iliescu and his closest allies. Thus, a political pilgrimage to Văleni became an easy and safe win-win situation for Iliescu: he could claim intellectual and nationalist credentials within nationalist circles (the Romanian Academy's mainstream historians included), while both local (social-democrat) and central authorities (at least when the PSD was in government) were receiving political support and national media coverage of the event.

Secondly, the timing had to do with the arrival of his political successor and rival, the new president, Traian Băsescu, candidate of a centre-right anti-corruption alliance, "Dreptate și Adevăr" (D.A., "Justice and Truth"), preferred by Romanian voters to Iliescu's protégé, Adrian Năstase. The D.A. alliance also formed the new government and engaged in anti-communist and anti-corruption efforts which challenged all the other political forces, but especially the PSD. Thus, Iliescu and the party's leadership close to him, resorted once again to nationalism as "the common denominator of Romanian politics, a minimum threshold for politicians and parties unable to communicate effectively and differently with their electoral base". As far as the summer school in Vălenii de Munte was concerned, this meant, in practice, political hijacking of the cultural event. At the time of different political crises, launching attacks from Văleni became a strategy launched by Iliescu to gain media attention and political authority. He made use of it in 2006, at a time when the new government urged the intelligence services to hand over the archives of the Securitate, the communist secret police, and was planning to implement lustration. Iliescu organized an extraordinary press conference during his stay in Văleni, in August 2006, although

⁵⁵ See in this respect one of the parliamentary interventions by Constantin Găucan, a generous patron of memory initiatives towards Iorga, based in Văleni, and a senator on behalf of the PRM which shows how the PSD did not support the summer school before 2004: Găucan, Ședința Senatului, 8 decembrie 2003, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=5598&idm=1,1&idl=1> [accessed: 15.05.2022]; also in: Ședința Senatului, 2 februarie 2004, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=5605&idm=12,06&idl=1> [accessed: 15.05.2022].

⁵⁶ Ten years later, the tone and the attitudes still prevail: *Împreună, la noi acasă: cursurile de vară ale Universității "Nicolae Iorga": ediția 2014, Vălenii de Munte*, ed. C. Manolache, Ploiești 2015, passim.

the town is just a one-hour drive from Bucharest. He called the operation a “diversion” and a “witch hunt”, while opponents argued he was afraid he was an immediate target of both lustration and the access to secret files⁵⁷. Iliescu employed the same legitimizing strategy in another hot political summer, preceding the presidential elections of November 2009. This time, in August 2009, Iliescu’s press briefing from Văleni contained a bellicose vocabulary: “the country’s main problem was how to get rid” of Băsescu, who was “a true national danger” so much so that “anyone is preferable in his place”⁵⁸. The elections eventually saw the incumbent Băsescu win by a slim margin against harsh criticism and after a failed attempt by the opposition to suspend him⁵⁹. The summer school of 2013, when the country was governed by a large anti-Băsescu coalition of parties, the Social-Liberal Union (USL), whose pillars were the two main political forces, the PSD and the PNL, alongside the Conservative Party (PC) and the National Unity for the Progress of Romania (UNPR), mirrored this unexpected front. In their quest for legitimacy, all the leaders of the country’s top institutions gathered in Văleni as if it were the capital city or as if they were Iorga’s virtual “alumni”: former President Iliescu, acting Prime Minister Victor Ponta, Crin Antonescu, acting President of the Senate, Daniel Barbu, Minister of Culture, President of the County Council, the Mayor and so on⁶⁰. The political unity around Iorga’s nationalist legacy of such agents of memory was quite remarkable and suggestive of the degree to which the biography of a great personality can provide cultural credentials to decision makers.

c. Năstase and the pragmatic road ahead

The absence of any major politic leader from the summer school held in 2014, the reflected the dissolution of the USL in February that year⁶¹. However, the social-

⁵⁷ C. Manea, *Iliescu nu vede cu ochi buni desecretizarea dosarelor oamenilor politici*, Curentul, 13 august 2006, <https://www.curentul.info/politic/iliescu-nu-vede-cu-ochi-buni-desecretizarea-dosarelor-oamenilor-politici/> [accessed: 16.05.2022].

⁵⁸ *Iliescu: Oricine este de preferat în locul lui Băsescu la președinția României*, Mediafax, 18 august 2009, <https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/iliescu-oricine-este-de-preferat-in-locul-lui-basescu-la-presedintele-romaniei-4776535> [accessed: 16.05.2022].

⁵⁹ G. Pop-Eleches, *Romania Twenty Years*, p. 94.

⁶⁰ *Orașul Vălenii de Munte devine, pentru o săptămână, capitala culturii românești*, Gazeta de Prahova, 14 August 2013, <https://gazetaph.ro/oraul-vlenii-de-munte-devine-pentru-o-sptman-capitala-culturii-romaneti/> [accessed: 16.05.2022].

⁶¹ *Cursurile Școlii de vară ale Universității “Nicolae Iorga”*, Artline.ro, 17–22 August 2014,

democrats' grip on Iorga's place of memory is there to stay. In August 2015, a book launch of the memoirs of Iliescu, aged 85, was scheduled but did not take place. Possibly, this cancellation marks the end of his decade-long yearly presence in Văleni. But there is a direct lineage in the PSD's politics of memory of Iorga in the person of former Prime Minister, Adrian Năstase, who seems to follow his mentor's footsteps⁶². Năstase is Romania's only post-communist prime minister who served a jail term for bribery. While he benefited from a conditional release, in March 2013, he spent the rest of his sentence, three more years, outside of prison⁶³. As soon as his conditional release ended in mid-2017, he started to take part in the summer events held in Văleni. Năstase was in search of fresh legitimacy and a new platform, which he sought in academic and cultural circles under the PSD's political influence. In August 2017, without hesitation, he came to Văleni not only as an invitee, but also to launch a cartographic volume, together with Mihai Gribincea, the Republic of Moldova's ambassador to Romania. The event figured at the top of the agenda on the opening day of the courses, right after the greetings⁶⁴. Furthermore, in 2018, when Romania marked its Great Union Centenary, with Iorga as a one of the key figures of the events of that period, Năstase took a step forward. He held a lecture during the summer school dedicated to another Interwar eminent politician, the diplomat Nicolae Titulescu. Just as the previous year, the former prime minister's lecture was placed by the organizers high on the agenda (the second in line), even before President of the Romanian Academy, historian Ioan-Aurel Pop, whose presentation addressed the very topic of the centenary, the 1st of December 1918 developments⁶⁵.

<https://www.artline.ro/Cursurile-Scolii-de-vara-ale-Universitatii-Nicolae-Iorga-17-22-august-2014-Valenii-de-Munte-33700-1-n.html> [accessed: 16.05.2022].

⁶² I. Popescu, *Insemnările unui jurnalist bătrân. Când vom vedea și tineri printre cursanții Universității Populare de Vară "N. Iorga" din Văleni?*, Cuvântul Liber, 25 August 2015, <https://www.cuvantul-liber.ro/320319/insemnarile-unui-jurnalist-batran-cand-vom-vedea-si-tineri-printre-cursantii-universitatii-populare-de-vara-n-iorga-din-valeni/> [accessed: 16.05.2022].

⁶³ *Analiză: Năstase, liber după două condamnări și 500 de zile petrecute în penitenciar. Ce presupune eliberarea condiționată*, Mediafax, 21 August 2014, <https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/analiza-nastase-liber-dupa-doua-condamnari-si-500-de-zile-petrecute-in-penitenciar-ce-presupune-eliberarea-conditionata-13132911> [accessed: 16.05.2022].

⁶⁴ *13–18 August 2017, Universitatea Populară "Nicolae Iorga": Vălenii de Munte. Programul complet*, Gazeta de Prahova, 7 august 2017, <https://gazetaph.ro/13-18-august-2017-universitatea-populara-nicolae-iorga-valenii-de-munte-programul-complet/> [accessed: 16.05.2022].

⁶⁵ *Programul complet al cursurilor Universității Populare 12–17 August 2018, Ploieștiul*

The audience showed once more how top government officials (President of the Senate, ministers of National Defence, Foreign Affairs, Culture and National Identity, to name only the most important) granted great importance to this political pilgrimage. In August 2022, Năstase was again the first lecturer during the opening of the summer school. Curiously, he addressed the same topic as four years back, namely Nicolae Titulescu's diplomatic activity⁶⁶. In this context, Năstase's stiff yet bold association with Iorga's memory immediately after his conditional release is only rivalled by that of Ion Iliescu after his presidential term. Neither of them even tried to pretend interest in honouring Iorga's legacy *per se*; instead, both leaders were very pragmatic as they focused more on the present, not the past and how to capitalize on their participation in Văleni⁶⁷. As of 2022, Năstase obtained judicial rehabilitation, which allows him to run again for public office. It would be interesting to see to what use he would put his nationalist and cultural credentials obtained through his association with Iorga's memory.

Conclusion

There were, of course, many other references to Iorga by politicians of various positions, but they were marginal and did not have any impact. However, for the purpose of the present research, a rigorous selection of cases had to be made since Iorga can easily be on the lips of virtually anybody. Overall, the ensuing profile which best summarized how Iorga's name appeared in the most important acts of remembrance by politicians acting as memory custodians in the three post-communist decades was, as the spoiler title indicates, that of everybody's ally. In other words, from left to right, and further on to right-wing extremism, key decision makers from the most important political parties and state institutions – the Parliament, the government

Cultural.Ro, 17 August 2018 (<https://ploiestiuicultural.ro/universitatea-populara-nicolae-iorga-valenii-de-munte-12-17-august-2018/> [accessed: 16.05.2022]).

⁶⁶ D. Dimache, *Program: Cursurile de Vară ale Universității Populare "Nicolae Iorga" Vălenii de Munte 2022*, *Gazeta de Prahova*, 12 August 2022, <https://gazetaph.ro/program-cursurile-de-vara-ale-universitatii-populare-nicolae-iorga-valenii-de-munte-2022/> [accessed: 17.09.2022].

⁶⁷ For Iliescu see his press briefings which were exclusively dedicated to his political opponents at supra notes 57–58; for Năstase see his blog post related to his participation of August 2022 in Văleni with no reference to Iorga: A. Năstase, *Cursurile de vară "Nicolae Iorga" de la Vălenii de Munte*, 15 August 2022, <https://adriannastase.ro/2022/08/15/cursurile-de-vara-nicolae-iorga-de-la-valenii-de-munte/> [accessed: 17.09.2022].

and the presidency of the Republic – associated themselves with Iorga's nationalist legacy and authority. Their appeal to his authority, formulated in historical, political, or cultural terms, was half piety and half pretence since each politician made use of only those specific arguments meant to support their own political agenda. Extreme nationalist narratives, the rehabilitation of Antonescu, education reforms, anti-lustration stances, were only some of the cases where references to Iorga abounded but had the nature of a wild card: one could never really know what qualities of Iorga's work or biography another actor could "play". The same went for those politicians en route to Iorga's *lieu de memoire* in Vălenii de Munte; their political pilgrimage *per se* was a legitimizing strategy, no matter the agenda.

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