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THE FIFTH POWER TRANSITION OF THE ROMANIAN SECURITATE FROM COMMUNISM TO NATO

Those who after December 22, 1989, believed they would be doing away with the Securitate were harboring illusions. The Securitate in Romania, just like all the other similar institutions in the former socialist countries, is organized in such a way that even if some of its leaders disappear, it goes on functioning without them. Its hierarchy is organized in accordance with the Indian-file principle: when one of its leaders vanishes, the whole file takes one step forward, filling the places occupied automatically. This type of organization, however, has a defect that can destroy the unity of the apparatus: if the chief at the head of the file changes course, all the others follow suit.¹

This is how a man belonging to the Securitate apparatus – a colonel from the county of Dolj – defined the transformation process that took place in the political police during the years of transition in Romania. The “recovery” of the Securitate structures by the authorities that came to power after 1989 has been mentioned and proven many times, and by many people in hundreds of press articles, which show how important areas of society were “contaminated” by the presence of officers of the former communist political police.

Today, officers of the former Securitate can be divided into three large categories. The first category is that of officers who were successful politicians or businessmen. The second category comprises those who were successful both in life and career, advancing from the rank of captain, major or colonel to the rank of general or even head of a Romanian intelligence service. The third category is made up of the few who retired from activity, preferring to live simply on a pension complemented occasionally by income from their parents' household in the country or, best of all, a lucrative activity like being administrator of an apartment

block or head of personnel charged with employee attendance and discipline in small and medium sized enterprises. In practice, this sorting into categories reflects – in this author's view – the sociological "grid" that described the composition of the Securitate apparatus before 1989. The first two categories generally comprise those who established themselves in the beginning of the 1970s, many of which came from the Securitate School in Băneasa having showed promise as students and being top university graduates. For example, Alexandru Tănăsescu, a former general in the espionage department of the Securitate and – until he was placed in reserve in 1999 – first deputy director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, who graduated magna cum laude from the faculty of history at Bucharest University and, on graduation, was appointed to the post of researcher with the Institute of Historical and Sociological Studies. He held this position until January 3 1973, when he was appointed to the General Direction of Foreign Intelligence² and assigned to many espionage missions in Western countries. The active policy of attracting intellectuals to the Securitate apparatus was devised by the former chief of the State Securitate Department [SSD], General Iulian Vlad, who in 1969, at a time when the structural reforms within the State Securitate Department had reached a climax, held the position of chief of the Cadres Education and Improvement Direction. The third category, which is atypical in the general context of the Securitate apparatus, is made up of people who came to work for the Securitate as a result of certain "combinations of circumstances/events". Members of this group perceived their own positions in terms of a compromise that would afford them a slightly better life, or were simply officers who in the past had been "renowned" for their utter incompetence. Without a shadow of a doubt, this third category now belongs to history. The first two, however, continue as practitioners of a custom attributed by legend to KGB instructors: "Some people are writing history, we are making it."

On December 22 1989, the State Securitate Department had a total of 15,312 employees, of which 10,114 were officers, 791 military foremen, 3,179 non-commissioned officers, and 1,228 civilian personnel. The central divisions of the Securitate employed 6,602 people; the territorial divisions and the Securitate of the Municipality of Bucharest employed 6,059 people; while the cadres of educational and improvement schools numbered 225 persons and the special undercover units 2,426, of which

1,892 were officers.³ The events of December 22 1989 caught many in the Securitate unawares, many were unprepared. For example, events took place so fast that, some two hours after the courtyard of the Securitate Inspectorate in Brașov had filled with people, a military foreman was still sent to a farm belonging to the Party Household near Brașov to collect a pig for the holiday dinner of the cadres. The lack of imagination shown in evaluating the events that preceded Ceaușescu's flight, borne of a sense of belonging to an immutable caste experienced by each Securitate operative, led to paralysis of the system.

Neither the general chaos that reigned on December 22 1989, nor the subsequent the manner in which the structures of the State Securitate Department were dissolved and brought under control was explained clearly in the succession of normative acts issued by the provisional power. The apparatus of the communist party found itself in the same situation. Firstly, the communiqué to the country by the National Salvation Front delivered by television by Ion Iliescu on the evening of December 22 1989 mentioned only that "the whole of state power had been taken over by the Council of the National Salvation Front [CNSF], to which is subordinated the Superior Military Council that coordinates the entire activity of the army and the units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs." Although this formulation proved sufficiently confusing to heighten the unlimited certainty and direction of the period, it was not until December 24 that the CNSF delivered a further communiqué, which said: "The units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs will be integrated into the Ministry of National Defense, which will take over the sole command of all the country's troops and means of combat."⁴ In the two days following Ceaușescu's flight, the former Securitate was denounced, but the demonization was limited only to the level of public conscience. With the dissolution of the former political police into the waters of power having already begun, there has to this day been no official condemnation of the repressive deeds it once performed.

Directly after being appointed minister of national defense, General Nicolae Militaru, a former client of counterespionage thanks to his connections with the Soviet agency of military espionage, signed a new CNSF decree together with Ion Iliescu. The new decree (No. 4 of December 26 1989) dealt with the fate of the former SSD. In Article 1 it made clear that:

The State Securitate Department, the Command of the Securitate Troops, together with the organs and divisions reporting to them, are to become part of the composition of the Ministry of National Defense. The above includes the structure, budget, personnel, armament, ammunition, technical equipment, fixed assets, and the assets and liabilities within the country and abroad.⁵

Set against the background of a manipulation of public opinion, as evidenced by television images of dismantled telephone bugging centers, the first months of 1991 saw an intense regrouping of the former Securitate structures in parallel with efforts by a number of provisional dignitaries to control these structures. Formally, the former Securitate was subordinated to the Ministry of National Defense on December 22. On December 31, immediately after Iulian Vlad and his entourage had been arrested, Ion Iliescu appointed then vice prime minister of the Provisional Government Gelu Voican Voiculescu to the post of commander of the State Security Department.⁶ On the evening of the same day, at 10 p.m., Voican Voiculescu organized an extraordinary meeting at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the highest-ranking officers of the Securitate. At this meeting, he promised the SSD officers that the new power would not wage war against them, but would only abolish the structures of the institution. On January 2 1990 General Militaru and Voican Voiculescu began coordinating the takeover of the Securitate by the Ministry of National Defense. A thorough analysis of the organizational chart of the Securitate was conducted and the future intelligence structures of Romania were outlined. These structures were formed using the personnel and logistics of the Securitate, which had not been formally abolished. It is worth remembering that with the decree signed on December 26 by Ion Iliescu and Nicolae Militaru, the State Securitate Department was transferred as a whole to the Ministry of National Defense and became a component part of the ministry. The archives of the SSD, its vast network of informers, the services intelligence officers were capable of performing, and, finally, the business interests of the Securitate – all these things were quickly understood by the new power.⁷

The fate that befell the Securitate – which disappeared by itself without its disappearance being confirmed by law – was also shared by the former communist party, and for the same reasons. The decree for the dissolution of the Romanian Communist Party, signed under pressure from the streets on January 12 1990, was abrogated after five days by a decision of the

Council of the National Salvation Front.⁸ Dissolution would have entailed the issue of succession and establishment by law of how to divide the patrimony of the Romanian Communist Party. In both cases, besides the political motivations of the new power, which hesitated to make a real split with the past, there existed another reason. We can call this the *privatization of the communist regime* in keeping with the pattern of what was also happening at the time in the USSR.⁹

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A large number of Securitate operatives were then recovered and utilized by the provisional power in the first months of 1990 and integrated into the structure of the “new” intelligence services and the governmental apparatus, into the ministries of Internal Affairs, Justice, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade.¹⁰ The intelligence services took over almost the entire personnel and logistics of entire departments in the Securitate. In Romania, according to Law No. 51 of July 29 1991 regarding national security, there are no fewer than seven (officially) operational secret services: the Romanian Intelligence Service, the Foreign Intelligence Service, and the Protection and Guard Service; these are followed by three other services developed in compliance with Article 6 of the same law within “the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice, by means of specialized internal structures”; finally, there is also a separate structure, the Special Communications Service, tasked with protecting official communications. The first of these services, established with the accord of the Provisional Government and the president of the CNSF, Ion Iliescu, at the beginning of the month of February, was the intelligence service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This service took over 260 of the total 566 officers formerly belonging to the Securitate of the Municipality of Bucharest.¹¹ The new service was officially headed by Admiral Cico Dumitrescu, but in practice was controlled from behind the scenes by Voican Voiculescu assisted by his advisers – Securitate General Nicolae Doicaru, former chief of communist counterespionage, and Colonel Viorel Tache.

The policy of assigning former Securitate operatives in parallel to governmental structures continued. In the following years, many Securitate operatives took refuge in the government and local power structures, or with Romanian representations abroad. For example, during August 1993

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and the Ministry of Tourism appointed a number of seventeen former high-ranking officers of the former Securitate to positions abroad – as military attachés or commercial advisors. A further eleven were transferred to the Central Headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Trade to take up leadership positions, thereby strengthening the ranks of Securitate officers already present in those structures. Of Peter Ciobanu, for example, a director in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, it was known that he was a former spy. Two other Securitate officers held important positions in the reform and finance system: Radu Herghelegiu was appointed coordinator at the Reform Department, while Petru Rareş became director of EXIMBANK.¹² The effect was that Romania's structures of representation continued to be dominated by the former Securitate. The position of the régime in this respect was made clear by the explicit policy adopted in 1990, when Mihai Caraman was appointed chief of the newly established External Intelligence Service. Caraman was famous for having been a Romanian spy who in the 1960s caused much harm to the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance when he succeeded in purloining a large quantity of secret documents later delivered by Ceauşescu to the Soviet Union. This appointment, combined with the regrouping of former Securitate operatives, sent a clear signal to the West as to the pro-Soviet orientation of the new power in Romania. Romania was in fact the last country to sign the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty and the only country in the Soviet Bloc to sign a treaty with the USSR (April 1991).

Coming back to the former Securitate: the remaining former operatives that had not been incorporated into the structures of the intelligence services and the central and territorial apparatus of government, or included on electoral lists, were instead allowed to enter the world of business. They came to constitute an “élite force” that was involved in all the more profitable market affairs – from the bankrupting of state companies by overvaluing supply and sales contracts, to large-scale import-export businesses and the control of privatization processes. As a consequence, the “crisis period” endured by the Securitate in December 1989 was short lived: the new power structures, as soon as they felt their position threatened by the re-establishment of historical parties in the context of political pluralism, were quick to understand the benefits to be gained from utilizing the capabilities of the former Securitate operatives. Competition from these parties was to be eliminated – in as far as possible without the violent implication of the state institutions – by controlling

and discrediting them, which the SSD cadres were both trained and willing to do.

The complicity of the new authorities with the structures of the former Securitate resulted in actions that placed the latter unconditionally in the service of power. By way of example we may look at the campaign of slander which became a permanent feature during 1990-1992 and was typical of the former "D" (disinformation) service headed by the Mihail Stan, who in the meantime had become a general and deputy director of the RIS. At times the attacks verged on the absurd, as can be seen from the following brief catalog of targets and themes of the campaign: of the well-known dissident Doina Cornea it was said that she had distributed money for political purposes and had gone around the country buying companies, that she was in fact Jewish, and that, together with Radu Câmpeanu and Ion Rațiu (whose real name was allegedly Racz Janos), had signed a treaty with the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stipulating the detailed "sale" of Romania's territory for their benefit. This story was published several times – in facsimile, in NSF official newspapers – and spread in the larger towns as apparent truth. In a similar vein, it was said of Corneliu Coposu that he had lived almost his entire life in the West, without knowing the difficulties suffered by ordinary Romanians. With this occasion the highly popular syntagma was launched: "You did not eat Soya salami". And in the official NSF daily newspaper, "Azi", Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu, the leader of the "Association of Former Political Detainees", was denounced by means of falsified photographs showing him to have participated in the assassinations perpetrated by the legionnaires in 1940 – needless to say, omitting the fact that he was only 12 years old at the time the assassinations took place.¹³

As the years went by and, as with the post-communist régime, the occult power of the former Securitate increased – through the infiltration of political parties and power structures, not to mention the coordination of the Romanian intelligence services – these methods ceased to be necessary weapons in the arsenal of the political police. Meanwhile, however, the Securitate had penetrated Parliament, was leading the Government, and executing the orders of power within the secret services: the Securitate had been privatized. All attempts to dismantle the huge hidden power the Securitate has amassed have so far ended in failure. In the first years after 1989, Securitate operatives won immunity from the abuses committed in the past – abuses which were not only far from

being punished, as the trial for the assassination of anticommunist dissident engineer Gheorghe Ursu in 1985 shows, but which were not even seriously investigated. The belated setting up of a National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (NCSSA) with a view to unveiling the activity of the former communist political police ended in failure: the new institution had nothing to work on since, under various pretexts and with the tacit agreement of President Iliescu, the secret services refused to respect the law and hand over the archives of the Securitate to the NCSSA. This protecting of the past was only part of the reward the then power gave to the former Securitate for helping what is today the Social-Democrat party, successors by direct filiation of the former communist party, in regaining and consolidating power. Under the cover of a genuine conspiracy of silence, the authors and instigators of a long series of criminal abuses inflicted on the Romanian people during communism were kept within the structures of the secret services in their new roles as *specialists*, who moved in the shadows of power and became “respectable/honorable” businessmen or equally “respectable” politicians. This leads to the inevitable question: How does the Năstase Government and President Iliescu intend to meet the requirements of NATO, which has expressed concern as to the strong influence still exerted today over Romanian society by former Securitate operatives? Do they really intend to do this? And, if they are, are they in a position to do so?

Unfortunately, no declaration by President Iliescu or Prime Minister Adrian Năstase has touched upon this subject. The Romanian authorities have preferred instead to insist upon laws for the defense of NATO secrets, thereby bypassing the essential: that those who represent a real danger to those secrets are the very same Securitate operatives who have been entrusted to guard them. As one-time NATO rivals, they once betrayed Ceaușescu, and so too might they one day betray the secrets of the Alliance.

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The former Securitate currently dominates the economy.¹⁴ When declarations in Washington refer to corruption, they move immediately to the topic of the former Securitate with which they implicitly associate the bribery and name-dropping that took root in Romania in the last ten years after flourishing prodigiously during the transition stage. The

privatization process in which the Securitate participated was a carbon copy of the way the so-called transition took place in the Soviet Union – in numerous stages. The only difference is that the process in Romania was non violent. One possible explanation for the non-violent character of this process is the loyalty of the private structures of the Securitate towards their new protectors, a loyalty that was strengthened by the fact that they were “recovered” or rescued by the new power after December 1989 at a time when the majority of the population was requesting the dissolution of the political police and their arrest.

In terms of politics or business, the former Securitate act in accordance with their own rules, which bear no relation to democracy or the contract-based market economy. Anyone who stands in their way or of whom they have need is either bought off or compromised. As the source of much corruption and illicit business, being involved in the smuggling of cigarettes, diesel, alcohol and even weapons, and known to bank-bankrupt “advisors” or organizers of financial embezzlement schemes masked as investments funds, while always enjoying sizable political and logistical support – the Securitate represent the fifth power in the Romania today. Among other examples, they were responsible for bankrupting Bancorex, the largest bank with state capital in Romania. The bank disappeared after having granted huge non-secured credits, mainly to companies in which former party activists and Securitate operatives were shareholders, but also directly to officers of the intelligence services, magistrates and policemen. According to the report by the International Monetary Fund for the year 2000, the bankruptcy cost Romania two billion USD.

This would not have been possible without political protection and control. The links between Securitate operatives and the Iliescu régime are as strong as those that existed during Ceaușescu régime, if not even stronger since they are based not just on simple military subordination but also on common interests. During the privatization of communism, the non-violent transfer of state patrimony from socialist ownership to the private sphere of funds, accounts, profitable businesses and property can be explained in terms of the close links between Securitate operatives who chose to enter the world of business, their colleagues that remained in the ranks of intelligence services, and the political protectors of both categories, who themselves are exponents of the old communist élite. These different links in the chain of power are not based on competitive relationships. Rather they work collaboratively, being based on close

personal and long-standing relationships that were not changed after the events of December 1989, but were in fact taken to a new dimension.

When the identity of a former Securitate operative from the secret services or the structures of power is compromised by a leak to the press, he is saved by “rotation of cadres”, which removes him from visibility, though not from a position of influence and power. This happened in the case of General Victor Marcu.¹⁵ General Marcu was born on June 28 1943 in the village of Ulmi in Dâmbovița County. His real family name is Butucea. He graduated in 1970 from the School of Law at the University of Bucharest and began to work at the Securitate’s Direction II for Counterintelligence, where he focused on the economic sectors before being transferred to the Direction of Foreign Intelligence on March 15 1975. Here he worked as an officer and chief of department at the military unit UM 0626, a special unit that dealt with eliminating “hostile emigration”. In practice, UM 0626 had the role of identifying and assassinating persons sentenced to death by Ceaușescu, either for deserting the Securitate or for activities against the régime that had incurred the wrath of the dictator. After 1989, he was “recovered”, and, on May 29 1992, became an RIS general and deputy to Virgil Măgureanu. He was then removed from the Interior Intelligence Service (IIS) on the grounds of his dubious business dealings with the Arab mafia. The Năstase Government, however, appointed this presumed assassin to the position of Secretary General at the Authority for Privatization and Administration of State Participations. His appointment was justified by his superior with the explanation that the credit-worthiness of clients would need to be verified and that the Authority’s intelligence would need to be protected. He was removed from this position only after September 11 2001, when his notorious and close links with Arab smugglers in Romania – which most likely supplied terrorist networks – took on a new importance. Needless to say, it is highly unlikely that these links were not known by the authorities when he was appointed to the position.

Former Securitate operatives in Romania are supported and maintained in a climate of corruption in which they move like fish in water and through which they feed the political class that holds the reins of power with immense amounts of money. In practice they form a bridge between the political and business spheres and are situated on the fringes of the law where they can exploit many opportunities to make quick profits. Any measure taken against the Securitate-mafia groups fails for this very reason: so as not to “cut” the substantial income that guarantees the

welfare of the Social-Democrat dignitaries. The number of villas, luxury cars, and the size of bank accounts is in direct proportion to the closeness of these links, which are sometimes based on personal affinities – as in the case of Premier Adrian Năstase, who is advised even today by the godfather of one of his sons, Colonel Ristea Priboi, despite being well aware of the request of the North Atlantic Alliance and Romania's European partners to diminish the power of the former Securitate.

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A simple listing of the cases in which the former Securitate – who had changed their logo of two crossed machine guns to the three roses of the Social Democrats – were appointed to key positions following the 2000 elections is highly enlightening. Between 1996 and 2000 they even created a paramilitary structure within the framework of the current governing party, which at the time was in opposition. More precisely, they created a *Department for the Guard, Protection, and Propaganda of the Party of Social Democracy of Romania*, utilizing the compromise and disinformation methods of the Securitate to the full. After the success of the elections, many of these officers were reactivated within the intelligence services.

There is a fundamental contradiction between official declarations regarding the strong desire to become a member of NATO, on the one hand, and the reactivation of former Securitate operatives, on the other. There are many examples that illustrate this point, one of the most notable being that of the aforementioned Securitate officer Ristea Priboi. Priboi was born on May 9 1947 in the village of Brădești in Dolj County. He graduated from the Securitate School in Băneasa in 1968 and in 1971 obtained a degree as a graduate in law. One year previously, on January 1 1970, he was appointed as an officer in the External Intelligence Direction (EID). He was assigned to espionage missions in his role as a cadre of the EID in England (1974 to 1978), followed by Sweden, France, Spain, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, and Greece. In December 1989 he placed himself at the service of the newly installed power, which at the time appeared more interested in preserving the Warsaw Treaty (the dissolution of which was signed last by Romania) than in integration into NATO. His last mission, this time as an officer of the External Intelligence Service (EIS), was to Jugoslavia, where, in 1994, he

“cemented” the friendship relationship between the Iliescu régime and that of Milosovic and contributed to the organization of fuel smuggling to the former Jugoslavia in a deliberate infringement of the embargo. The smuggling was performed in 1995 by the Romanian authorities with the help of the secret services and a number of private companies controlled by former Securitate officers. After being placed in reserve, Priboi placed his expertise at the disposal of Adrian Năstase and became an advisor to the latter on “issues of national security”. Prime Minister Năstase supported him in his bid to obtain the position of chairman of the Parliamentary Commission for the Control of the EIS and only the quick reaction of the press prevented this from happening.

As a Securitate operative, Ristea Priboi had been among other things the deputy to the chief of the department within the EID concerned with “Radio Free Europe” during a period in which Romanian espionage organized not only the bomb attack on the Munich headquarters of Radio Free Europe (perpetrated by Carlos the Jackal with the coordination of the Securitate), but also various attempts to assassinate Radio Free Europe employees and the dissident writer Paul Goma. The author’s own investigations have shown that Priboi – habitué, mentor, and hunting mate of Năstase – also performed political police activities in Romania. He was involved in the actions of the Securitate against a large group of intellectuals in 1981.¹⁶ Two protesters in the revolt in Brasov in 1987 claim they were investigated by him, one even accusing him of participation in acts of torture.¹⁷ Despite this, Ristea Priboi swore, on becoming a deputy in the Romanian Parliament, that he had never collaborated with the former Securitate. Cynically, Priboi believes he did not commit perjury since there is a difference, he says, between “to collaborate” and “to be employed”. Typically, Ion Iliescu and Adrian Năstase joined forces in defending Priboi, who had rightly been accused by the press, civil society, and a section of the political opposition. Ion Iliescu, for example, urged Romanians to free themselves “from the emotional and psychological burden that lies heavily on the climate of the country”, maintaining that, “a man should not be blamed” for having worked with the Securitate. This tone differs from the tone assumed when making declarations about Romania’s integration into NATO.

Not satisfied just with Priboi, after being installed as head of government, Adrian Năstase promoted yet another former spy to the post of advisor. Constantin Silinescu was born on March 30 1948 at Potcoava in Olt County. He was a division general who was placed in reserve in 1977

after having been a deputy director with the EIS. He graduated from the Securitate School in Băneasa (1966-1974), the Law School (1972), and the Special School for Spies (1973-1974), after which he was sent on espionage missions in the West. He was first sent to Great Britain (1974-1984) together with his colleague Ristea Priboi to conduct espionage activity under the cover of the Third Secretary at the Romanian Embassy in London, before moving on to Czechoslovakia (1979-1984) – again under diplomatic cover. After this he was sent on various missions to the former USSR, Bulgaria, China, Jugoslavia, Hungary, Mongolia, and the USA throughout the period 1985-1989. After revelations in the press, and especially those made by the opposition politician Ioan Talpeş (presidential advisor on issues of national security, who had a very bad relationship with Silinescu and whose daughter had divorced Silinescu's son), the former spy lost his position as advisor to the Prime Minister on "special issues". In exchange, however, he became a director of the National Agency for Environmental Protection, a field in which he suddenly appeared to possess a wealth of expertise, even publishing a book on the subject, though he was later accused of plagiarism.

The list of Securitate operatives that were reactivated after 2000 within the structures of power continues with Marian Ureche. At the beginning of the 1980s, Ureche worked for the Securitate of the Municipality of Bucharest. By December 1989 he had become deputy commander of Direction I of the State Securitate Department, which dealt with the tracking of persons that had become inconvenient to the régime. As recently proved by the College of the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives, Ureche had inspired and participated in political police activities, including the political persecution of the philosopher Ioan Petru Culianu. In 1994, he became a shareholder in ARGIROM Holding, together with former Minister of Interior Doru Ioan Tărăcilă and the Social-Democrat deputy Iosif Armaş, who was one of the richest members of Parliament. At the time, Ureche was a professor at the National Intelligence Institute, the cadres school of the Romanian Intelligence Service. He helped establish the ARGIROM company, contributing 179,820,000 lei in share capital, which was a huge amount of money at a time when the average wage did not exceed 15,000 Lei and which could not be explained in terms of his legal income. He subsequently transferred his shares to his wife's name. After the elections of 2000, he became the head of the Independent Protection and Anticorruption Service in the Ministry of Justice, but later resigned in

December 2003 following revelations by this author about his past as a Securitate operative. Ureche's business affairs did not escape the eyes of the press, either. He was also involved in managing a number of contracts for importing oil, as well as exporting oil to Yugoslavia during the embargo. A company he controlled was credited by the State with nearly 22,000,000 USD. The money has never been repaid.¹⁸

Ureche was not the only secret service head to be compromised by his past in the political police. After the 2000 elections, President Iliescu appointed Tudor Tănase to the post of Special Communications Service General. He had been a member of General Nicolae Plesijă's team at the time the latter was in charge of the External Intelligence Direction and in touch with the terrorist Carlos the Jackal. Tănase joined the Securitate operatives that had worked as spies in the West and were members of the team of "specialists" which Iliescu and Năstase would adhere to NATO. The number of reasons for bewilderment in relation to the way the Euro-Atlantic integration of Romania is to take place is roughly equal to the number of Securitate operatives reactivated under the generous umbrella of the Social-Democrat Party, to whose ranks belong also those officials promoted to extremely important positions who in the past had declared visible hostility towards the NATO Alliance. Iliescu chose Radu Timofte to be head of the Romanian Intelligence Service, someone who had displayed violent anti-NATO sentiments during the Kosovo conflict. The same is true of the current Defense Minister, Ioan Mircea Pașcu.

An unexpected pretext for the reactivation of former Securitate operatives was created by invoking national security requirements after the attacks of September 11 2001. The reactivation of a number of notorious Securitate operatives, and their promotion to powerful positions, was accompanied by the increased sphere of possible action granted to the secret services under the pretext of an "antiterrorist strategy".¹⁹ On a positive note, the terrorist attacks did at least draw attention to the duplicitous policy of the authorities as regards the organized networks of the "Arab mafia", which had enjoyed immunity in Romania in exchange for excluding Romania from the list of countries targeted for terrorist attack. This policy was inherited from the Ceaușescu régime through the agency of the former Securitate operatives. Ceaușescu's privileged relations with the Arab world of the 1980s are known: they existed at a time when Romania was isolated from the West and even from its partners in the Eastern Bloc. Romania could not avoid becoming a favored terrain

for Islamic terrorism, all the more so as from 1980 up to the Revolution more than half a million Arab students passed through Romania. All these students had come under the magnifying glass of the Securitate, which used some as informers or as communication channels with the Arab secret services and international terrorist networks. After 1989, some chose to stay in Romania and became Romanian citizens. Most Arabs living in Romania have no affinities with fundamentalist movements, nor do they have connections with terrorist movements or illegal business. Nonetheless, until 1996 some had developed illegal businesses and connections with the explicit protection of the Romanian authorities. And it was no accident that Ossama bin Laden mentioned Romania as one of the countries from which Al Qaeda had received financing. The organization of financial support networks was the price being paid for keeping Romania off the map of the countries targeted for terrorist attack.

A few days after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, one of the top voices of authority, that of the director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, Radu Timofte, declared that Romania was not vulnerable to terrorist attack and that terrorist groups had never had support from Romania. He later changed his declaration, probably after learning of the close relationships that had existed between the former Securitate and Arab terrorism. On September 20 2001, this author published an article²⁰ in an important Romanian daily newspaper directly referring to the support granted by the Iliescu régime to the Arab mafia up until 1996. The following day, the RIS published the following communiqué:

The Service regrets to remark that from an excess that can only be harmful, the authors of some so-called sensational revelations or signatories of documentary materials and investigations and analyses, have entered, perhaps involuntarily, into a dangerous game of communicating false information that could be detrimental to national security and the foreign relations of Romania.

One day later, in an implicit recognition of the links, the author was denounced by the Romanian Presidency to the General Magistrate on the grounds of *divulging state secrets*. In the end, the prosecutors in the case decided that no crime had been committed by publishing the evidence and the author was not made the subject of any investigation. Two months after the September 11 attacks, the RIS director, Radu Timofte, finally admitted that “large amounts of money” from Romania had the

funded the foreign accounts of certain organizations: "Large amounts of money flowed from [Romania] to the bank accounts abroad of some international organizations, possibly of a terrorist nature."²¹

The raising of funds for Arab terrorism was made possible mainly during the previous mandates of Ion Iliescu. As is apparent from the numerous revelations published in the Romanian press at the time, smuggling was state policy. The power won as a result of the elections was not used to implement the party's various election promises, but was instead used to ease the running of illegal businesses, which provided government officials and other public dignities with immense amounts of money. Many of these illegal activities were carried out by genuine mafia-type networks, organized by Arab nationals, one of which, Kamel Kader, was himself to become a dignitary under the Iliescu régime. Kader was born on March 9, 1960 in Rafah in the Gaza strip as the son of Ahmed and Aisha Mohammed. When he was granted Romanian citizenship in 1993, he was the only known permanent resident at 31 Mureş Street in Timișoara. He graduated from the Timișoara Medical School, qualified as a doctor. He informed on his Arab and Romanian colleagues, including the Securitate officers Traian Sima and Radu Tinu. One of the "favors" granted to him in exchange for his reports was the obtaining of visas and passports for a certain fee for the entry into Romania of other Palestinian citizens through the agency of Colonel Orleanu, chief of the Timiș Passport Office. During his academic years, Kader openly introduced himself as leader of the Palestinian students in Romania, and from his friends he also did not hide his membership of two terrorist groups (Al Fatah and Abu Nidal) or his past as a former combatant in the West Front in Lebanon. In fact, both before and after 1989 he maintained more or less open relationships with the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian Authority. These relations became more frequent after the arrival in Bucharest on February 26, 1990 of the official Palestinian representative Fouad al Bittar. However, he also established confidential links with the RIS and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was mainly formed from the former Securitate. It is quite possible that, in the words of one former intelligence officer who knew him at the time, "not even he knew for whom he was working".²²

Kader's main preoccupation was smuggling via Romania's Western borders. Just as with another big smuggler, Zaher Iskandarani, Kader, as both Syrian intelligence officer and Securitate agent, contributed large amounts of money to the Social Democrat election campaign in 1992.

As asserted, his close relationships with the head of the Presidential campaign at the time, Viorel Hrebenciuc, resulted in a “contribution” of around one million dollars from the Palestinian community in Romania. As a reward, for three years (1992 to 1994) Kader held positions with both the Presidency and the Government, where he had the function of “advisor” in both cases as the representative of the “Palestinian minority in Romania”. In Government he would attend cabinet meetings, entering by the official entrance, armed with a gun and a cell phone – a rarity at the time – and was not subject to any controls thanks to his status as a Romanian state dignitary, who could have had direct access to governmental telex and fax machines. In 1994, he controlled fourteen companies in Timișoara and Bucharest, obtained sizable loans from the state-controlled banks thanks to his function in Government, and was the main beneficiary of export licenses for timber, calves, and baby rams – licenses he either ceded to other Arab businessmen or exploited through his own companies.

The decision to revoke Kamel Kader’s position as advisor to the Government and to the Presidency was taken as late as December 1994. As such it proved impossible to avoid a political scandal, which placed the authorities in a delicate position after it was proven that Kader had enjoyed unhindered access to confidential materials. In the meantime, several confidential documents had disappeared from the Government building, leading to their subsequent “declassification” so as to avoid any accusations that Social-Democrat dignitaries had been accomplices to espionage. This precipitated Kader’s departure for Palestine, where he became an advisor on intelligence issues to Yasser Arafat.

The list of the Arab mafia businesses, especially the smuggling of cigarettes, supported by the leadership of the Romanian Intelligence Service through General Marcu is highly impressive. Sometimes the money earned was used to buy weapons, sometimes even from Romania as in the case of the network set up in 1993 by the Lebanese national Elias Nassar. The traffickers escaped punishment, even when caught, and were free to leave the country. Nassar was released in 1994 after paying three million dollars to the Romanian Intelligence Service. Later, another big smuggler under investigation, Victor Michelle Issa, was released from custody and allowed to leave the country, though not before sending President Iliescu a letter of congratulations on the occasion of his birthday.²³

These close relationships and the toleration of the business and financial networks of the Arab mafia in Romania were the result of the strategy

continued after 1990 by the Romanian intelligence officers of the former Securitate who had had close links with Arab students in the past. The unwritten non-aggression pact between the Securitate operatives in the intelligence services and the terrorist networks – through which a lot of people became very rich – bore its ugly head on September 11, 2001 in New York and on March 11, 2004 in Madrid.

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During the entire period of transition, Romania was exposed to constant and intense pressure from structures of the former communist nomenclature and its activists, who dictated decision making related to both internal and external policies and strategies. On another front – in Parliament, Government, the Justice system, the secret services, the press – large groups of former Securitate operatives were able to exert an active influence on decision making on matters of interest to them. Over a number of years, these structures consolidated into informal power networks. They represent, in their own right, a decision making factor – a fifth power. The force and toxicity of this power has been displayed on several occasions. For example, during Bill Clinton's visit to Bucharest, Jim Steinberg, then deputy advisor for national security at the White House, declared that "the Romanian secret services are full of former Securitate officers to whom no NATO secrets can be entrusted"²⁴. As they were, so they remained. A divorce between the Securitate and its present-day political protectors, the formerly communist Social-Democrat Party, is difficult to imagine, which is why have I have tried to describe life as it is in Romania today with its Securitate operatives newly admitted to NATO. An illuminating anecdote describes this well: my former Securitate investigator (currently a banker) and a former subordinate of his (still active in the secret services) were exchanging jokes with some Americans during half-time at a football match – the result of which they already knew as it was they themselves that had arranged it; all the while they were eating sunflower seeds out of paper bags labeled "Top Secret" and wearing American "Red Bulls" caps.

NOTES

- 1 Marius Oprea, *Moștenitorii Securității*, an article in *Analele Institutului Român de Istorie Recentă*, Vol. 1, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2003, p. 13.
- 2 Alexandru Tănăsescu was born in Bucharest on March 17 1945. After being placed in reserve in December 1999 he reemerged as a close supporter of the former Party of Social Democracy of Romania, currently the ruling Social Democrat Party.
- 3 Data taken from the Organizational Chart of the State Securitate Direction, published by the author under the pseudonym B. Petriceicu in "România Liberă", issue no. 4187/2003.
- 4 Domnița Ștefănescu, *Cinci ani din istoria României. O cronologie a evenimentelor, decembrie 1989 –decembrie 1994. Mașina de Scris* Publishing House, 1995, p. 34 (hereinafter referred to as *Cinci ani...*).
- 5 *Ibidem*.
- 6 "România Liberă", issue no. 1207/1994.
- 7 See details of the process whereby the former Securitate was taken over by the new power installed in Bucharest after December 22 1989 in Marius Oprea, *Moștenitorii Securității*, pp. 13-36.
- 8 *Cinci ani...*, pp.46-47.
- 9 The participation of the Securitate in privatizations and its implications was elaborated upon by the author during a conference on "The post-revolutionary businesses of the Securitate" that took place at the New Europe College in Bucharest on January 7 2004. The main parts of the conference were published in the daily newspaper "România Liberă" on January 22 2004 under the title "*Onorabilele familii...cu epolet*".
- 10 Many officers were taken on by the Ministry of Foreign Trade, with the heads of department for Asia, the Far East, Africa, and Europe run directly by Securitate operatives in 1990. Former Securitate officers were also appointed to lead a number of foreign trade companies subordinated to the Ministry of Foreign Trade (e.g. FRUCTEXPORT, AGROEXPORT, METALIMPORTEXPORT, and TERRA). The same happened with afore-mentioned ministries themselves as revealed in various press articles at the time ("România Liberă", issue no. 130/1990, *Securitatea există! Lângă noi...*, "Evenimentul Zilei", issue no. 345-1993, *Numirea unor foști securiști în străinătate aduce României immense prejudicii*).
- 11 "România Liberă", May 26 1998.
- 12 "Evenimentul Zilei", issue no. 345/1993, *Numirea unor foști securiști în străinătate aduce României immense prejudicii*.
- 13 A study of issues from the daily newspaper "Azi" (official newspaper of the NSF) from February-May 1990 is enlightening in terms of the slander and disinformation campaigns conducted at the time.
- 14 See Note 9.

- ¹⁵ There have been many articles in the press regarding the activity of this Securitate officer; also after 1989, referring to his involvement in supporting illegal smuggling operations.
- ¹⁶ In "a Plan of measures to prevent and counteract hostile activities against our country under the cover of the 'Transcendental Meditation sect'", which was drawn up by Iulian Vlad in 1982, Ristea Priboi's name appears as main force behind the unveiling of the criminal activity of the "Transcendental Meditation sect" by the Securitate one year before (See Marius Oprea, *Banalitatea răului. O istorie a Securității în documente (1949-1989)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2002, p. 396.).
- ¹⁷ Marius Oprea and Stejarel Olaru, *The Day We Won't Forget, November 15, 1987*, Brașov, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2004, p. 100 (English version).
- ¹⁸ "România Libera", November 5 2003: *Ministerul Justiției a pierdut o...ureche*.
- ¹⁹ Because the secret services in Romania were no longer allowed to conduct "special operations" with the help of the "Arab mafia" they were authorized to set up their own business networks. Through Emergency Ordinance No. 154 of November 21 2001, the EIS was authorized to perform economic activities. A similar allowance for the RIS followed through Emergency Ordinance No. 72 of June 13, 2002, followed by an emergency ordinance for the private service activities that could be conducted by the Protection and Guard Service (Emergency Ordinance No. 103 of August 29, 2002). Even the Special Communications Service gained the right to "provide services" in private conditions through Emergency Ordinance No. 7 of January 30, 2002.
- ²⁰ The article entitled *Bratul de sprijin al lui bin Laden în România*, met with strong reactions and criticism from Social-Democrat officials.
- ²¹ Radu Timofte's contradictory statements on terrorist networks and their connections with Romania were published in detail in the press at the time.
- ²² For the links between the Arab mafia and the Romanian authorities, with direct reference to Kamel Kader, see also www.tripod.ro, *Regimul Iliescu – paradis al terorismului internațional*.
- ²³ The author keeps a duplicate of this letter in his personal archive.
- ²⁴ This statement was published in the Romanian press after the Clinton visit to Bucharest.