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THE PERPETRATORS' TESTIMONIES: THE CASE OF ALEXANDRU DRĂGHICI AND HIS ASSOCIATES

Abstract

At the Plenum session of the CC of the RCP of April 1968, Alexandru Drăghici, minister of Internal Affairs and head of Securitate between 1952-1965 was identified as the main responsible for the crimes and abuses that took place in the Gheorghiu-Dej era. With this occasion, he and his associates have produced an important corpus of documents regarding the political violence in Romania. This study analyzes those narratives with the purpose of identifying the main justifications given by Drăghici and others officers of Securitate for what they had done.

Keywords: Alexandru Drăghici, narratives of political violence, Securitate, communist repression, justifications.

On 19th of March 1965, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the ruler of Romania from 1945, dies. Shortly, the Political Bureau chose Nicolae Ceaușescu, the youngest of its members, as prime-secretary of the communist party. This choice would lead to internal fights for power within the Romanian Communist Party. Due to this conflict, whose main protagonists were Nicolae Ceaușescu and Alexandru Drăghici, minister of Internal Affairs and head of Securitate between 1952–1965, an important corpus of documents was produced by Alexandru Drăghici and his collaborators. According to Lynn Viola, those documents represented an “open window onto the world of perpetrators”.¹ Fathoming through this window in the world of the Romanian officers of Securitate, my intention is to analyze the narratives produced by them in 1968, in order to identify and examine their main justifications and motifs for what they have done.

At the same time, I will show that producing these testimonies about the communist repression also had a practical purpose, which was the comb-out of Alexandru Drăghici and his collaborators from the Securitate.

This would have also meant that Nicolae Ceaușescu would gain total control over the secret police. When he was chosen as the party's prime-secretary, he didn't meet one of the three essential conditions identified by Mary Ellen Fischer in order to be the indisputable leader of a communist regime: control over the political police.² Without it, there would have been the risk that a stronger opponent would take over his position. That would have been possible if someone else would have had control over the communist repressive apparatus.

The Securitate officers have produced in certain moments of their careers different narrations about their activity in the main repressive institution of the communist regime. Nonetheless, these documents weren't used by the Romanian historians in their papers concerning the communist repression published after 1989. The majority of the contributions regarding this subject are based on two categories of sources: the memoirs of the victims and the official versions of the institutions involved in the repression, such as the Romanian Communist Party/the Romanian Workers' Party. That is why, something important is missing from the analysis of the political violence, that being the narratives produced by the ones that were responsible for it in communist Romania. Examining them allows us to see their motivations and justifications for what they have done, and also the atmosphere from the Securitate. By looking at these documents, this article is aiming a redirection of the scientific interest from "impersonal institutions and abstract structures to the actors, the men and women who actually carried out the atrocities".³

Such a historical analysis, like all the historical reconstitution, also requires a certain amount of empathy with the subject. But taking into consideration that the main subjects of this study are officers of Securitate, who have tortured and killed innocent people, empathizing with them would seem rather humanly wrong. This is why I will try to see their actions through their eyes using the so called "cold empathy" that was introduced by Robert Gerwarth in his paper *Hitler's Hangman. The Life of Heydrich*. He defined it as:

an attempt to reconstruct Heydrich's life with critical distance but without succumbing to the danger of confusing the role of the historian with that of a state prosecutor at a war criminal's trial. Because historians ought to be primarily in the business of explanation and contextualization, not condemnation, they should try to avoid the sensationalism and judgmental tone that tended to characterize early accounts of Nazi perpetrators.⁴

The sources of this article are the testimonies produced by Alexandru Drăghici and his collaborators in the context of the fight for power within the Romanian Communist Party between the years 1965 and 1968 that are kept at the CNSAS (Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității/ The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives) and at the National Archive of Romania. The subjects of this paper initially stated their justifications orally during the party meetings. Subsequent, they had to write down the memories about their activity in the Securitate. Within these documents, they indicated “the facts that they were proud of”, but also the justifications for the crimes for which they were being criticized in 1968. At the same time, they also described some of the most barbaric violent practices from the first period of the communist regime, such as “the atrocities from Salcia”, the reeducation from Pitești. They even mentioned the work methods of the Securitate from that time frame, as well as the atmosphere in which they worked and lived for two decades. Most of the cases described by them are in a way or another connected to Alexandru Drăghici, the one considered to be the sole culprit for the crimes committed during the first period of the communist regime in Romania.

Of course, not every testimony of the Securitate officers is about the political violence. Depending on its author, some of them present information about the corruption within the Securitate, the relations between them, the networks of human trafficking (especially those about the emigration of the Jews at the beginning of the 50’s), the sexual violence against the female employees of the Securitate, and even against the wives of the political prisoners. Regardless of the information contained by these documents, the ones that are important for this article are those concerning the violence and the politically motivated repression.

Alexandru Drăghici – a short biography

Alexandru Drăghici, nicknamed Romania’s Lavrentii Beria⁵ by the Romanian historians, was born on 27th of September, 1913 in Tisău, the county of Buzău, into a family of poor peasants, as he called it in an autobiography written in February 1945.⁶ After he graduated from elementary school at 13 years old, he left his native village and moved to Buzău. Here he worked for a year as a shop boy and in 1928 he became the student of a professional school within the CFR Buzău depot. After three years, the school was closed and the students were allocated

to the CFR Grivița Workshops from Bucharest. In 1932, he received his mechanic fitter certificate.⁷

In the next year, Alexandru Drăghici became a member of the Romanian Communist Party, which was an underground organization then. This decision would influence his entire subsequent biographical direction. Only two years after joining the communist movement, he was arrested while he was participating to a Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Union in Bucharest. After he and others were investigated, the trial of the "19 antifascists", as it was called by the press that was favorable to them, took place in Craiova. Drăghici was the only Romanian from the 19 investigated members or sympathizers of the communist party.⁸ The star of the trial was Ana Pauker, member of the CPfR Secretariat (Secretariatul Partidului Comunist din România). Other communists that will make a career after 23rd of August 1944 were arrested along her side, such as Liuba Chișinevschi or Alexandru Moghioroș. For his activity within the communist movement, he was sentenced to 9 years and 6 months of prison, which he would spend in different prisons from Romania, among which was also Doftana, one of the main penitentiaries where Romanian communist were locked up in the interwar period.

In his confinement years, he would get close to Gheorghiu-Dej, and he would become his close collaborator, seconding his with fidelity and devotion in the struggle for power after the party was no longer illegal after 23rd of August 1944. At that time, Drăghici would get to be one of the leaders of the party, even if he was less known when he was arrested in 1935. After 1944, he would hold different leading positions in the communist state, such as public accuser at the People's Courthouse (Tribunalul Poporului) from Bucharest, member of the Party Control Commission, prime-secretary of the RCP Bucharest organization.⁹ The position for which he was chosen as a subject of this historical reconstitution and which put him in the situation of explaining the committed crimes is the one of minister of Internal Affairs and head of the Securitate between 1952 and 1965.

Alexandru Drăghici's encounter with the political violence

Alexandru Drăghici has known detention as a political prisoner for nine years, when he atoned his sentence in the penitentiaries of Văcărești, Jilava, Doftana, Târgu Ocna, Caransebeș and the political prisoners'

camp from Târgu Jiu. Did this interwar concentration experience have any consequence for the way in which Alexandru Drăghici acted after he became the minister of Internal Affairs and head of the Securitate? Did this experience represent a self-justification for people like Alexandru Drăghici? We can find an answer for these questions only if we look over their memories from that time.

From the analysis of the documents that I have studied, results that Alexandru Drăghici first met the political violence from the other side of the law in 1935, at the Jilava prison, when he was investigated for his activity in the communist movement. During his trial from 1936 that took place in Craiova, he claimed that he was beaten by the guards in front of the Jilava prison's commander¹⁰ In the communist period, these beatings would become something regular. The commanders of different communist penitentiaries would assist or even participate to such "disciplinary measures", as they were euphemistically called by them in their internal reports.¹¹

At the same time, Emanoil Kaufman, one of the 19 codefendant, was mentioning in his memoirs written in the 50's that "many bad things have been done", such as taking away the main rights that the prisoners had (walking on the prison yard, getting food packages, the right to speak).¹² These practices would become just a few of the constants of the detention regime from the communist period.¹³

Starting from one of Primo Levi's statement that "an oppressed can become an oppressor. And often he becomes one",¹⁴ Tzvetan Todorov mentions in his paper "The memory of evil" that those persons like Alexandru Drăghici use their past to justify their present acts. According to him, "the victims of wrongdoings" easily get to the conclusion that their past as victims "authorizes, even imposes an aggressive attitude in the present" or that "the wrong that was done to him" would "legitimate the evil" that he would "provoke" to others.¹⁵ At the same time, the French philosopher mentions that if "the former victim has become an aggressor; the new victim has nothing to do with the former aggressor".¹⁶ That being said, the violence that was seeded in them by a certain aggressor would be used against a third party, not as revenge, but as legitimation. Otherwise, during the meetings with his subordinates from the time in which he led the Securitate, Alexandru Drăghici would tell them what being a prisoner in the bourgeois prisons meant, the guardians' tactics of demoralizing the communists. That way he would encourage his subalterns to learn from their methods.¹⁷

An experience which Alexandru Drăghici talked about during the Plenum of April 1968 was the Congress of the Albanian Communist Party from 1948. In that year, he was sent by the leadership of the RCP to represent the Romanian communists at that meeting. In 1968, twenty years after that event, he would rememorize what he has seen and especially the feelings that he had at that encounter with the communist political violence. Reflecting at this episode from his past, during the Plenum of April 1968, Alexandru Drăghici said that the scenes that he witnessed disgusted him, generating inside of him a feeling of disgust for what he has seen. At the same time, he understood that the faith of an enemy of the people in a communist regime, regardless if he was a member of the communist elite, and that in the world that he was living, a person could be condemned by a simple hand raise. In such a world, which he would shortly lead among others' side, the penal investigation done by the Securitate represented simple formalities that had the sole purpose of proving what would be established in the party sessions only by a hand raise:

What has been done then in the congress left me the impression that a judging council is no longer needed, because they all raised their hand at the same time as Enver Hodja. Sure, after that there were other formalities and those people had been condemned to death. I don't know if the investigators checked it up any longer, because the hand raisings in the congress meant their condemnation. [...] This is where I wanted to come back to the damned example of the Albanians. At that moment I saw such aspects that made me nauseated.¹⁸

According to his declaration from 1968, after he returned to Romania, he shared this experience to Gheorghiu-Dej and Alexandru Moghioroș, proposing them to "intervene in these problems". He mentions about himself that he was "a naïve back then, I didn't have experience in these problems". At the same time, Dej "appeased" him by saying that "this thing can't be done".¹⁹ Starting from this event that he rememorized, we can conclude that this episode marked him, leaving deep traces on his personality. At the same time, it also shows us what his first reaction to such practices was. At the beginning, he was disgusted by them, but afterward, he accepted such experience as something completely normal in a communist country. The repulsion that he initially felt was gone as he was initiated in these rituals of political violence. "Learning by

participation”²⁰ and the support of Gheorghiu-Dej helped him to outclass this psychical discomfort that he felt. That also helped him identify and accept the system that he lived in.²¹

After he came back to Romania, Alexandru Drăghici’s career was on an ascendant path. After he filled the position of prime-secretary of the Bucharest RCP/RWP organization (1948-1950), he was sent to the Soviet Union in order to specialize and learn from their experience. When he came back to his country, he was appointed head of the Administrative Section with the mission of organizing it according to the similar structure from the mother-land.²² In December 1950, he was appointed deputy minister of Internal Affairs and director of the General Political Direction of MIA,²³ position in which he was responsible with the indoctrination of the Securitate officers. In the same year, he coordinated the deportation of the so-called “titoists” from Romania’s western border from 17th/18th of June 1951.²⁴ In May 1950, after the Ana Pauker – Vasile Luca- Teohari Georgescu group was culled, Drăghici was appointed minister of Internal Affairs, position that he held until 1965.²⁵ In this period, he also held position in the party apparatus. Among them, the most important were member of RCP/RWP (1948-1968), member of the Politic Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP (1955-1965).²⁶

The political context in which the testimonies were produced

In the moment of his death, March 1965, Gheorghiu-Dej hadn’t officially designated a successor. However, the rumors peddled in the memoirs of the former party members indicate that his apparent successor would have been Gheorghe Apostol. Although Dej saw him as a “not too bright” individual, he trusted him just because he knew he “would do absolutely everything he says”.²⁷ Apostol also held the position of prime secretary between 1953-1954, in the context following the death of Stalin. Yet, he was only the puppet of Gheorghiu-Dej, a means for him to have a better control over the party. Him being appointed as a successor is indicated even by Apostol in his unpublished memoirs that are kept today in the former archive of the Securitate. He mentions that right before Gheorghiu-Dej died, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, one of Dej close collaborators communicated the last wish of the dying leader. His last wish was that Apostol would be the next prime-secretary of the RCP. Even if what Apostol said was true, it didn’t make any difference. At 22nd of

March 1965, the Political Bureau has chosen the youngest of its members as prime-secretary. After this event, Apostol mentions that he accepted the choice of the Political Bureau, because any opposition from him “would have meant the beginning of internal fights for power in the Political Bureau, then in the Central Committee and then in the whole party”.²⁸

Regardless of Apostol’s decision, a fight for power was imminent and it would start in the following years. The protagonists of it were Nicolae Ceaușescu and Alexandru Drăghici. The beginning of this conflict is also mentioned in the surveillance documents of the Securitate. For example, an informant said in an informative note from 1965 that Ady Ladislau, former deputy of the Minister of Internal Affairs from the 50’s and his collaborators were talking about the fact that “there were dissentions between Ceaușescu N. and Al. Drăghici within the Political Bureau”.²⁹ The informative note shows that “in a not too far future, we will talk about the mistakes made by comrade Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej – meaning about the Danube-Black Sea Canal.”³⁰

After the plenum of April 1968 was over, I. Petrov, secretary III at the Embassy of the Soviet Union from Romania told to the Romanian communists that the rehabilitation of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and “the dismissal of Alexandru Drăghici from the positions that he held was to be expected”.³¹ Probably, his expectations were based on the way that Lavrentii Beria and his people were eliminated by Khrushchev after Stalin’s death. But in 1968, Romania’s political context was different and Drăghici and his collaborators didn’t have the same faith as their Soviet homologous.

At the same time, in the year that Ceaușescu was appointed as prime-secretary, according to Mary Ellen Fischer, he was “a relatively unknown figure inside and outside Romania”.³² Plus, as she observed, he “had formidable rivals for the top position”.³³ She mentions three conditions that would make a member of the communist elite eligible for the supreme position: 1. revolutionary prestige, 2. coercion or even terror, meaning control over the secret police and 3. foreign support.³⁴ Among the members of the Political Bureau, Alexandru Drăghici was the powerful adversary, because he had two of the three requirements. His revolutionary prestige was at least as big as Nicolae Ceaușescu’s, or even bigger. Plus, he had 13 years to make the Securitate apparatus loyal to him, by naming in leading positions people that were totally devoted to him. There is no doubt that he controlled the Securitate and that he could have used it in a fight over power.

The restricted space doesn't allow us to analyze the way in which this fight took place among the members of the communist elite. That is why we will limit to only present and examine the measures taken by Nicolae Ceaușescu in order to eliminate Alexandru Drăghici.³⁵

The fear that the head of a secret police inspires to the communist elite in a communist state is best illustrated in the case of Lavrentii Beria who, although after Stalin's death was one of the members of the collective leadership, was eliminated due to certain plans that were secretly organized by Stalin's other close collaborators.³⁶ Beria's elimination was an underground work, so this would also be the pattern for Alexandru Drăghici. Also, another common point of these two conflicts for power was the control over the secret police, as Mary Ellen Fischer mentions that it was an essential condition for a communist leader.

Therefore, in the next years, Nicolae Ceaușescu's primarily preoccupation was to eliminate his main contestants from the party and to win complete power, so that nobody could contest his authority. But before putting his plans into application, Ceaușescu made Alexandru Drăghici choose between his position on the state or party line. This was due to a decision adopted at the 9th Congress of the Communist Party, which stated that a party member could only hold position on party line or state line.³⁷ So, theoretically, this would exclude the accumulation of positions.

Drăghici gave up his position of minister of Internal Affairs, where he was replaced by Cornel Onescu, a close collaborator of Nicolae Ceaușescu, who owed his career to the client relation that he had with the new prime-secretary of the RCP. By keeping his positions in the party, he seemed to be consolidating his role. According to Pierre du Bois, at the 9th Congress from July, there were two members of the communist elite that held position in the main party structures. Those two were Nicolae Ceaușescu and Alexandru Drăghici, who were members of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the RCP, members of the Permanent Presidium of the CC of the RCP and secretaries of the CC of the RCP.

The French historian mentions that those positions that Drăghici held would indicate that he was the second in the party.³⁸ Also, from his position as a member of the Secretary, he still kept his control over the Securitate. Pierre du Bois identifies three stages of the fight for power between the two of them that ultimately led to the isolation and elimination of Drăghici. The first one took place in April 1966, when Drăghici received a new task as

member of the Secretariat, meaning coordinating the administrative reform, and the control over the Securitate activity was given to Vasile Patilineț. Drăghici's transfer from the Secretariat to the position of vice-president of the Government is indicated by Pierre Du Bois as the second stage. He describes this transfer as a sign that Drăghici's power was shaking. The Plenum of April 1968 is indicated as the last stage, when the almighty minister of Internal Affairs from the 50's lost all of his power and the position that he held and ended up being shortly excluded from the party.³⁹

Between these three stages that were identified by Pierre du Bois, Ceaușescu took a series of measures that had the ultimate goal of undermining Drăghici's main power resources, meaning the control over the Securitate. Therefore, in 1965 he created a secret commission that received the task of investigating the activity of the Securitate in the 50's. This task was given to Vasile Patilineț, deputy of the head of the Organizing Direction of the CC of the RCP between 1956 and 1965.⁴⁰ Also, he started his activity in November 1965 by studying Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu's penal file.⁴¹ In the next year, Grigorie Răduică, head of the Section of Work Control in the MAF/MIA and Justice of the CC of the RCP (Secția CC al PCR pentru controlul muncii în MFA/MAI și Justiție), would be appointed member of this commission. He mentions a few aspects of this commission's activity in his memoirs, which he published after 1989. He underlines that only Nicolae Ceaușescu, Vasile Patilineț and Cornel Onescu knew of its existence. According to Răduică, this commission worked in secret for two years, so that Alexandru Drăghici and others Securitate officers wouldn't find out about it. The task that they received from Ceaușescu was to document everything that was special in the archives of the communist regime.⁴² So, Ceaușescu has periodically been informed for two years by Patilineț about the activity of the commission and especially about what was hidden in the archives.

In 1967, the activity of the Minister of Internal Affairs was critiqued during the Plenum of June. But his critique was only a pretext of the reorganization of the Minister of Internal Affairs. After the Plenum, the Minister of Internal Affairs was reorganized and a Department of State Security, as a structure subordinate to MIA, was set up. This department was led by a Council of State Security, directly subordinated to the government and to the party.⁴³ Ion Stănescu, who was close with Ceaușescu, was appointed as its leader. Until that moment, he had filled the position of prime-secretary of the Oltenia regional party Committee (1964-1967).⁴⁴ In the same year, a party commission has officially been

set up. It received the task of researching certain cases, especially those in which the victims were members of the Communist Party. At its leadership was appointed the same Vasile Patilineț, and among its members were Gheorghe Stoica, Vasile Patilineț, Ion Popescu-Puturi, Nicolae Guina, and Ion Stanescu.⁴⁵ The reorganization of the Securitate would also continue in the next year. The new structure of the main repressive institution of the communist regime was finalized a few months before the Plenum of April 1968. Therefore, at 3rd of April 1968, the Securitate was out of the MIA's suborder and a new organism was created: the Council of State Security, which would be a "central organ of the state administration, separate from MIA".⁴⁶

The justifications of Alexandru Drăghici

In mid-April 1968, Vasile Patilineț, the president of the Party Commission handed to Nicolae Ceaușescu the written report. At Nicolae Ceaușescu's proposal, it was initially discussed during the Permanent Presidium of the Executive committee of the RCP that took place between 17th and 18th of April 1968.⁴⁷ After that, the report was brought into discussion again at the CC of the RCP plenum of 23rd-25th April 1968. With this occasion, were brought up the cases of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Ștefan Foriș, former communist leaders that were murdered as a result of the fights for power from the first decade of the communist regime. It was the perfect opportunity to present Alexandru Drăghici as the main responsible for the abuses committed by the Securitate.

When all of this happened, the communist elite expected that Alexandru Drăghici would make his *samokritica*, as others who had been in his position did during the communist period. According to Arch Getty, *smokritica* was an instrument used by the party in order "to eliminate the people and to weaken the power of some regional satraps".⁴⁸ Such a ritual took place before the close doors of the party meetings and this goal was the comb-out of the undesirable ones, as well as finding a scapegoat for the "mistakes" of the past.⁴⁹ Besides that, such rituals were made "to pronounce a lesson to other below not to make the same mistake and to recognize the status and rights of the party receiving the apology (the leadership) to set the rules".⁵⁰

For his position as the head of the Securitate for 13 years, Alexandru Drăghici was the perfect candidate for the scapegoat role. At the same

time, the events from those days represented for him an occasion to reflect on his own past and to think about his acts.

After the reading of the report by Gheorghe Stoica in the Permanent Presidium meeting, Ceaușescu invited the guests to speak. Drăghici was the one to take the floor so that he could answer to the accusations brought to him. With this occasion, he presented his own justifications.

From the beginning of his pleading, he mentioned that this party meeting was a reckoning.⁵¹ He was convinced that the members of the Commission were instructed on how they should speak. He thought that all of it was made just to provoke him. After an exchange of lines with Nicolae Ceaușescu, he said that he will tell since when this reckoning against him started. At the same time, he summoned the guests to answer his questions and to tell where the people from the Pătrășcanu lot had been beaten.⁵² Through his questions, he was trying to show that the acts of which he was blamed took place before he was appointed as minister of Internal Affairs. He also mentioned that, as a politician, he has the right to defend himself. He made a comparison between his situation and the one of those on the death row, highlighting that even they had this right.⁵³

Regarding the crimes that were mentioned in the Commission's report, he indicated a few explanations. He said he knew that "mistakes" had been committed in that period. He asked the guests to answer his question: "but can we really do other politics different than others when we have the Soviet army here?"⁵⁴ He also reminded them that in that period none of them was against the slogan "the class fight sharpens day by day".⁵⁵ He advised them to think about what had been said during the party meetings, meaning that "the enemy is everywhere, that the enemy can appear under many forms, anytime and anywhere", how these indications were processed within the Securitate, "where people are put in direct fight with the enemy".

Comrades, I think a very grave thing is being done, when the base report is not put in the context of that time. Let's remember that every one of us not only say, but we processed that the class fight sharpens, that the enemy is everywhere, that the enemy can appear under different forms, anytime and anywhere. Imagine if that would have been processed within the party, how they used to do it within the Securitate, where people were put in direct fight with the enemy.⁵⁶

Some of Drăghici's explanations for the facts that he was accused of were connected to the circumstances and the conditions from the past. Another explanation given by him was about the threats to the stability of communist regime. This way, he tried to go against the accusations of his party colleagues, reminding them that the most important of his actions had been vital for the survival of the communist regime. He described himself as a savior of the regime. Among his most successful actions he indicated the liquidation of "the bands from the mountains", meaning the clandestine organizations that fought against the communists. According to his statements, there were thousands of them in the mountains of Romania. That is why he thought that the results of his activity as minister of Internal Affairs and head of the Securitate were good because he managed to "liquidate the last remains of the ruling class".

In general, we needed a few years of tight work from the MIA bodies, as well as from the Militia and the Securitate troupes to liquidate these bands. There were thousands of clandestine organizations within the country territory. Within this, mistakes and exaggerations had been made. The comrade Gheorghe Stoica was talking about the peasants, but all of these things were done according to the existing laws, and even though there were certain overreactions concerning the operative power, the results were good, because the last remains of the exploiting class have been liquidated. Sure, there were misdemeanors too, others were beaten too.⁵⁷

There were a series of mistakes, as he called beating the political prisoners, which were a heritage of the period in which the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Securitate were led by his predecessor, Teohari Georgescu. Alexandru Drăghici highlighted that in those years the officers of Securitate found it normal to use the beatings in order to obtain confessions from those that were investigated. He asked those that were present if "anyone was arrested at the police without getting beaten". At the same time, he denied the accusation brought to him in the report of the commission which stated he was just a tool (un instrument) of Gheorghiu-Dej. He also stated that he wasn't a milksop (papa lapte) and that he stroked the enemy as many times as it was needed.

It has been told here about my instrument role. I wasn't much of an instrument. It is true, it was a new job, which I did not know, I had never in my life been a minister of Interior Affairs, I was making efforts to learn the specifics of the work, but I didn't comply either in the role of

instrument of milksop. [...] Mistakes were made, but because of the lack of growth of the apparatus, of the tardy conditions of our apparatus, from lack of qualification of the apparatus, which was used from the old time to work with beating.⁵⁸ [...] I have inherited an unfortunate situation: you couldn't get anything done back then, except with beatings. I ask, was it really someone arrested by the police without getting beaten? When the conditions themselves were of such nature that the enemy had to be hit, we hit the enemy.⁵⁹

By refusing to make his *samokritica*, Alexandru Drăghici defied and provoked Nicolae Ceaușescu, trying at the same time to send the message that all of the accusations against him were fabricated by him and his team. Also, Drăghici kept his defying attitude towards the general secretary after the Party Plenum from April 1968 was over. After this was done with, the former minister had to appear in front of the same party commission in order to respond to the accusations that were brought to him during the Plenum.

In a note that was probably written by Vasile Patilineț, this behavior is described. The document called "Drăghici's attitude towards the abuses that he has done", he presents his main reactions:

Defying attitude towards the commission members, refusal to answer certain questions, trying to intimidate by showing his so called merits: 'I have liquidated the legionary resistance', 'I have liquidated the counter-revolutionary groups', 'I have defeated the open opposition of the reaction', trying to minimize the gravity of his abuses and the illegal things that he has done.⁶⁰

Also, he reiterated his position from the Plenum that lies have been told during those party meetings and that "those who have taken the floor had scraps of paper prepared for them, being asked to read them".⁶¹ Not least, he told the members that if they want to talk about murders, then they should talk about Focșani and about the killing of the peasants from this locality by Nicolae Ceaușescu during the collectivization.⁶² As it was to be expected, the commission refused to engage with Drăghici in such a dialogue. Its members limited themselves to discussing only those cases that had a connection, in a way or another, to Alexandru Drăghici.

The assassination of Ibrahim Sefit aka The Turk

During the CC of the RCP Plenum of April 1968 and during the ulterior party meetings, several cases of murders committed in the 50's were discussed. Among them, the one that stands out is the assassination of Ibrahim Serafit, which was investigated with scrupulosity by the members of the party commission. The case is eloquent for highlighting such a common practice in those days, but also for the way in which Alexandru Drăghici was thinking. At the same time, it also shows us how the orders of the minister were perceived by his subordinates and why they were so kin to fulfill them. Unlike the party meetings of April and May 1968, not only was Alexandru Drăghici been interviewed about this assassination, but he has also been confronted with the former executants of his orders.

Ibrahim Sefit was a common law prisoner in the interwar period and was locked-up in the same penitentiaries where the communists were. But his relation with the communist wasn't connected only by the environment that they were in. It goes beyond that. He used to do certain services for them, which got him closer to the members of this movement.⁶³ After 23rd of August 1944, he moved to Sibiu and he took advantage of the connection that he had with some communist leaders. The documents suggest that he also held a leading position on the County Seat from Sibiu. In December 1954, Alexandru Drăghici was in this town.⁶⁴ While he was at the center of the party district committee, someone entered the room. It was "a citizen and his wife, who made a big scene about hearing that someone from the leadership came and he wanted to talk to him, to confront him". Ibrahim was a big guy, as the minister of Internal Affairs describes him, so it was easy for him to get past Drăghici's bodyguards. Apparently, the local heads of the party complaint to him by the troubles started by Ibrahim. After asking for more information, the officers of Securitate from Sibiu told Drăghici that there is nothing that they can do about Ibrahim. They informed him that every time that they would arrest him, he would be set free. According to Drăghici's statement, he ordered to Briceag to "finish with that trash over there". Afterwards, when they told him that Ibrahim "was liquidated", his answer was "very well".⁶⁵

Ghergheli Francisc, head of the Inspectorate Sibiu in 1968, has presented a story that is partially different from the one that Alexandru Drăghici has told. According to him, that year, Ibrahim Sefit came to the party main office to talk to the minister. But the minister refused to see him, so Ibrahim "made some offensive allusions about him", which only

made Alexandru Drăghici very angry. After this episode, the minister summoned the head of the Securitate Sibiu and ordered him to liquidate the Turk.⁶⁶ Gergheli Francisc also mentioned that after they received the order to liquidate him or to “get rid of that disgrace”, a team formed by five officers of Securitate Sibiu led by Nicolae Briceag actioned like this:

They hogtied Ibrahim, got him into a car at 10 o'clock at night, they took him to the forest between Șura Mare and Slimnic, got him off the car and executed him with automates and pistols. 32 shots were shot at him [...].⁶⁷

Nicolae Briceag mentioned in the declaration given in front of the same commission that while they were transporting him, one of the “guys” came up with the next idea, that it seemed a good one to him: “he would escape from under the escort on the road and he would be executed”.⁶⁸ After they committed the crime, the colonel Gheorghe Crăciun, deputy director of the Securitate Sibiu, went to the place of the assassination. Out there, he asked the executants to agree on their statements. He also says that he received the order from his direct superior, Aurel Moiş that the documents must say that Ibrahim Sefit “was shot while he was trying to run from under the escort”. At the same time “the name of the comrade Drăghici should not appear in the documents”.⁶⁹

In order to understand why Drăghici's order was interpreted as a “license to kill”, it is necessary to present a short biography of Nicolae Briceag and one of the repressive practices for that period. Nicolae Briceag was no stranger to such methods, and the way in which they “got rid” of Ibrahim Sefit was quite frequently used in the époque.

Born on 12th of November 1916 in the Negreni village, Argeș county, Nicolae Briceag was an orphan of both parents and he was raised in an orphanage from Dej. Here, he graduated 4 elementary classes and 4 theoretical profile high school classes. In 1931, he abandoned his studies and got a job as an apprentice at a tailor shop, becoming himself a tailor. He worked in this domain until 1944. In the interwar period he had contact with the communist movement, participating to the meetings of the “Red Help” (Ajutorul Rosu) organization. In 1944, while he was concentrated in the Someș County, he was arrested for communist propaganda. He was shortly liberated as a result of the intervention of the Soviet Commandment. In April 1945, he started his career of policeman as head of the Securitate Dej.⁷⁰

At the beginning of the 50's, in the Securitate region Cluj, where he used to work, more peasants had been assassinated as a result of the orders given by Colonel Mihai Patriciu. Because of the orders that they received, Nicolae Briceag and others officers of Securitate arrested more "chiaburi", who were taught to be opposed to the collectivization or who were described in the documents as opponents of this political decision and so they executed them. The method that they used was the next one: the peasants were forced to get in one of the Securitate cars, they were taken at the border of the village and executed. The motive given was that they escaped from under the escort. The executants were instructed to declare in their reports that the peasants were murdered because they tried to escape or even tried to attack the officers:

You get him in the car, you take him nearby their birth village, you hit them to the ground and you report [that] they tried to escape and that they jumped our organs when we wanted to go with him to show us where he hold his arms [...].⁷¹

The same happened in Sibiu in 1954. The case of Ibrahim Sefit shows that the act of killing had become a routine for the officers of Securitate, and murder was, as Alexander Hinton would argue, part of their job.⁷² At the same time, the routinization is indicated by different researchers as one of the conditions that facilitated the crimes that were politically motivated, alongside the authorization and the dehumanizing of the victim.⁷³

In May 1968, the officers of Securitate that assassinated Ibrahim Sefit the Turk were interrogated. Being asked by the members of the Commission why did he execute an illegal order, Nicolae Briceag told them that the regulations of the Securitate stipulated that "the order of the minister is law for the subordinates".⁷⁴ This way, he felt authorized to commit such a crime. At the same time, during his interrogation, Drăghici was surprised why the members of the commission gave such an importance to a thing that was "nothing", as he labeled the murder of Ibrahim Sefit by his people.⁷⁵

Most probably on a regular basis, nobody would have cared about it. But now, their interest was determined by the possibility of sending the minister to trial not for his "merits", that being murdering the ideological enemies, but for an act that was no different than any other killing which the party would see as necessary for its wellbeing. The fact is that the party actually saw the murders of those who were considered "enemies"

as part of his “merits”. But they chose something that was unauthorized by the party as a means to an end.

Sending Drăghici to trial was discussed during the Permanent Presidium meeting from 19th of September 1968 and it was backed up by Gheorghe Stoica. But not everyone agreed with this decision. Maurer was against the option, seeing that in this case, they have to let the prescription intervene. In his opinion, “the best solution was to let things go towards the prescription from a juristic point of view, to not take a decision, to say that he will not be sent to trial and to take political actions against the man. There are just a few months until the regulation”.⁷⁶

At the same time, he highlighted that sending Drăghici to trial would reveal “a series of bad things” from which the RCP would have nothing to gain. He also said that such a trial would only take place in a secret manner, like Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu’s trial did. And a new similar trial, after they would remove Drăghici, which would have the citizens convinced that they were doing the same thing.⁷⁷

The political perpetrators’ collective testimonies

After the Plenum of April 1968 finished, the measure that had been taken was discussed in all the party organizations. In general, a member nominated by the party leadership read the resolution, which was followed up by discussions. During these discussions, the participants would express their indignation towards the crimes that had been committed and the abuses mentioned in the document, and also their “total agreement” with the resolution and their support for Nicolae Ceaușescu. From all of these meetings, the most relevant for this study are those that took place within the Securitate. The participants, officers of Securitate, had produced then an important corpus of documents that allow us today to analyze their representations of their pasts and of what they have done. At the same time, they uncovered their own crimes or the ones of their colleagues.

Hereinafter, I will examine the meeting that took place at the main office of the Securitate between 3rd and 6th of May 1968. But the participants were not just simple officers. They were the leaders of the Securitate. The party meeting was open by General Grigorie Răduică, member of the party commission. In 1968 he was appointed as deputy president of the State Security Council.⁷⁸ He mentioned that the object of that meeting was to discuss the party documents so that “such abuses,

illegal things and crimes would never be possible in the future, as it happened in the past”.⁷⁹

Their testimonies emphasize a few leitmotifs for their actions. One which has been repeated by most of them was identifying Alexandru Drăghici as “the scapegoat” for the abuses that were incriminated by the party. Through this portrayal, the officers of Securitate were trying to diminish their own responsibility for the crimes that they had committed. This way, they would put all of their blame on Drăghici’s shoulders. At the same time, most of them admitted that they have made “some mistakes” or even abuses. For example, Colonel Gergheli Francisc, head inspector of Securitate Sibiu in 1968, declared that

We are old officers. Every one of us has done some abuses. We weren’t perfect. But when the party demands us to be sincere, we have to be sincere and reestablish the truth.⁸⁰

Constantin Ioana, head of Securitate Cluj mentioned that in the 50’s it was common to imagine and create an internal enemy. He also showed that he and the others officers felt encouraged and learned to create enemies, believing that every person could potentially be one.⁸¹ As he declared, in that period, their activity was evaluated by the number of arrests and so that is the reason that he reiterates for arresting innocent people so easily “in the basis of some information that would lack reason”.⁸² The existence of such contests among the officers of Securitate was also mentioned by others participants. For example, Victor Burlacu, head of Securitate Constanța, declared:

The perpetration of such abuses was made possible by the fact that in the given period the results of our work were appreciated by the number of arrests, and not by their quality, and also by the fact that the arrest was easily approved by a single person.⁸³

Colonel Dumitru Borsan, director of 1st Division of the Securitate also spoke of these contests. But he mentioned that at the origin of them was the fear of not being labeled as class enemies. The officer suggests that their eventual refusal to fulfill his orders would have led to their arrest. Also, this fear also represented for them a stimulant to do illegal things. This impetus was so strong, that not only were they racing each other in doing them, but also they would try and show who could treat the

class enemies in the most brutal way. Borsan concluded that this was the atmosphere within the Securitate.

If someone would have dared then to say that what you're doing isn't right, he would have been simply catalogued that he makes a covenant with the class enemy. I am reporting that there is a certain competition in committing illegal things, in kidnapping as much as possible from the street, in acting brutal towards them, in showing through this the spirit of class enemy. This is the atmosphere from the Securitate.⁸⁴

General Neagu Cosma admitted that he and his colleagues have done a few abuses. He highlighted that for him, as an officer of Securitate, it's painful to confess this. He also said: "but no matter how painful and sad it is, we have to do it with all of our strength".⁸⁵ According to Neagu Cosma, these crimes and abuses were possible because they let themselves be dragged by people with bad intentions. The confession of a murder, and not the crime itself, was seen by the general as a shameful act:

In which measure we let ourselves be trained into making illegal things and abuses, and with regret, I have to report here, that even I personally and the unit I am a part of and our whole body let itself be dragged by people, who weren't irresponsible, but had bad intentions, people who weren't supposed to be in charge of this body. We let ourselves be dragged into following such orders, which contravened the general interests of our state. We simply embarrassed ourselves. We are ashamed not only to confess, because it is very hurtful to confess that you have done such abuses, but we're almost ashamed to confess that we are a part of the Securitate.⁸⁶

Neagu Cosma also offered another motive for why those crimes have been committed. According to him, there was no party or even civil control over the Securitate organs. This lack of civil control can be interpreted starting from the concept called "the power of the bystanders". According to Ervin Staub, „active opposition by bystanders can reactivate the perpetrators' moral values and also cause them to be concerned about retaliation”.⁸⁷ But at that time, there wasn't an active opposition against the practices of the Securitate.

Two of Alexandru Drăghici's main collaborators, Colonel Gheorghe Crăciun and General Alexandru Demeter, had participated to this meeting. Alexandru Demeter was head of the Cadre Direction. The former collaborator of Drăghici was in a special situation. He was involved in the

main murder incriminated at the Plenum of the CC of April 1968. During the trial of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, he was one of the assessors who voted for his death sentence. Demeter insisted in his interventions from the party meeting that he was tricked.

I gave too much credit to the arranged evidences administrated in this trial. I will never forgive myself for the situation in which I was put. Trust me comrades that I was deceived, my good faith was deceived that I am serving a right cause.⁸⁸

Also, he indicated as possible justifications for his acts the pressure that everybody felt because of the presence of the Soviet councilors. This situation was characteristic to all the other communist countries during the times of the so called show trials.⁸⁹ During his interventions, he described a few repressive practices that were very common in that period, such as the teaspoon order, which meant that a person could have been arrested if the evidences against them could metaphorically fit on the edge of a teaspoon.

It was the counter-revolution from Hungary in 1956. It also had certain influences in our country. Some hostile elements rose their heads, we were taken care of in time. The workers, the honest people, our bodies did their jobs and took care of them. After this work, no justification can be found. After a years or so came an order from Draghici, which was delivered by Pintilie, which remained in everybody's conscience «the teaspoon order», meaning that if you have just a little bit of material on an element, he must be immediately arrested, investigated and sent to justice. Hundreds of people were sent to justice.⁹⁰

Demeter also showed how the arrested ones were convinced by the officers of Securitate through persuasive methods, euphemism for torture, to accept the role of enemies of the regime. In fact, he highlighted that they created enemies "artificially". Just like the others officers, he made a distinction between the enemies that were created artificially and the real ones, who were shot as soon as they raised their heads. He describes the ones that were unrightfully "repressed" as persons that unenlightened by the communist ideology. In this case, the term of "repressed" was just another euphemism for the political violence used by the officers of Securitate. It was part of the way in which they expressed themselves.

Who were most of them? Workers who were unhappy with certain life conditions from the enterprise, unhappy peasants who would manifest in one way or another their opinions concerning the foundation of the APCs (Cooperativă Agricolă de Producție). And what is extremely grave, is that part of our officers, some of them have done some penal investigations that they have influenced even the people that thought they have done nothing wrong against the state, to eventually think that they have done bad. I was at the prison in Galati. There were a big number of peasants. How are you doing, old man, why are you here, what have they put you in here for? «For talking». Another one asks, still «for talking». When I ask one of them, peasant too, he says: «For counter-revolutionary activity held against the state security», formula that was stereotypical to the inquirer. How's that, old man, who told you that, what is that? That's what mister officer of Securitate taught me to say because he knows better, he is literate, he says. That is what is painful, that they created enemies artificially. We presented unenlightened people as enemies.⁹¹

Gheorghe Crăciun was the director of more directions of Securitate in the 50's, such as head of the Carpatin operative group (Grupul Operativ Carpatin). The main mission of this group was the liquidation of the anticommunist resistance group led by Ioan Gavrilă Ogoranu. At the same time, at the end of the 50's and the beginning of the 60's, under Alexandru Drăghici's order, he organized the reeducation of the prisoners from the Aiud penitentiary.

During this meeting, the colonel of Securitate presented more justifications for the crimes that he and his colleagues have committed. One of those was their incapability of saying "no" to the orders of Alexandru Drăghici. He described himself as weak, incapable to say "I'm not doing that. It's not right, no". Crăciun also mentioned that he hid the crimes committed by Drăghici because he wanted to be liked by his boss. So he did whatever his boss told him, because, as an officer, he had to follow his orders. Those orders were given by the minister, his boss, a member of the Political Bureau.

If it is being told to me, like the comrades from the leadership and the comrades from here told to General Demeter, about subservience, about cowardness, about that, I agree. They suit me. I didn't know how to be a man or a party member, dignified officer and say: «I won't do that. It is not right, no.» I thought, I stupidly thought, but that's how I thought that I have in front of me an Internal Affairs minister, member of the Political Bureau

and the positions that he held. And I follow his orders and I defended him in the dirty case of which was talked today.⁹²

This was also one of the reasons that determined them to commit “such crimes”. Likewise, wishing to be liked by their superiors was one of the characteristics of the perpetrators.⁹³ The need of being liked by their bosses represented most probably a stimulant for the crimes that they had committed. Even if he use some justifications that are similar to the one used by the perpetrators of the Holocaust, they are used differently. For example, Christopher Browning mentioned that some of the policemen that refused to kill Jews during World War II declared during their trials that they couldn’t do it just because they were too weak.⁹⁴ In the case of the Romanian communism, Crăciun said that he was too weak to refuse committing the crimes.

His testimony also shows why the officers of Securitate couldn’t find the strength to go against an illegal order. Crăciun also mentioned that they couldn’t even speak in front of Drăghici. It was like they would freeze as soon as he entered the room. Even more, he was jealous if the minister would not invite him to dinner or if he wouldn’t honor him through a response to the cards that he would sent to the minister.

We knew him when he stepped among us here. The way we looked at him and the way we moved and the way we could not talk in front of him. I was wrong to see in him something that he was not. There are comrades, maybe still here, some of which are not any longer, who had very close relations with him. I was jealous that he didn’t invite me to dinner, that he didn’t honor me to a card I gave him.⁹⁵

Therefore, their accept to execute the orders that they had received without any hesitation or remorse can be seen as an attempt to gain his respect, or showing that they deserved to be honored by their boss. Also, Alexander Hinton mentions that one of the reasons Khmer Rouge cadres were willing to «destroy» their enemies was to gain face and honor”.⁹⁶ Would such an affirmation also stand in the case of the Romanian officers of Securitate?

The authority of the minister was overwhelming. That is why none of the officers was capable of standing up to him and to refuse an order to kill from him. As Zimbardo mentions, “human beings are capable of totally abandoning their humanity for a mindless ideology, to follow and

then exceed the orders of charismatic authorities to destroy everyone they label as «the Enemy»”.⁹⁷

Even if the officers talked about those “mistakes” and their “abuses” during the party meetings, Ceaușescu and his team didn’t have even for a second the intention of encouraging real debate over the crimes from the Gheorghiu-Dej era. They only wanted to remove Drăghici’s collaborators from the Securitate and to humiliate them. At a certain point, even Drăghici’s accusers thought that maybe they went too far with the allegations. They were probably afraid that the employees of the Securitate would no longer fulfill the tasks given by the party.

At a meeting with the officers from Galați that took place on 31st of May 1968, Vasile Patilinet told them that the “great trials that took place in the period when the power was taken over and of the fight over power” were not illegal. He labeled those trials as “just”, saying that none of them would be “revised”.⁹⁸ He sent the message that the hopes of the former counterrevolutionary prisoners were not realistic and that some of them didn’t understand the significance of condemning the abuses committed by the Securitate. At the meeting from Galați, Patilinet said that he didn’t consider the officers responsible for what happened in the past and that the whole activity of the Securitate could not be confused with a few people. At the same time, he also mentioned that the activity of the Securitate would continue as long as there will still be imperialism, and that the number of “abused” person was very low. There were about “30 something cases”, as he highlighted.⁹⁹

Conclusions

The analysis of the testimonies produced by the officers of Securitate in 1968 opens a window toward a world where their activity was evaluated by the number of arrests, even though they would be without reason. It didn’t matter if they were guilty or not. The justifications of the officers for the crimes that they have committed highlight two main aspects. The main justifications of Alexandru Drăghici are circumstances and conditions from the past, such as the presence of the Soviet councilors and the internal threats for the communist regime. That is why he perceives his actions not as criminal, but as good ones. The motive was that through his actions, he eliminated the last remains of the exploiting classes. That is why he

portrays himself as a savior of the regime by not taking any responsibility for the committed crimes.

The only thing that he would admit to was that mistakes have been made. But he didn't see himself as guilty. He would only blame his predecessor for the inherited situation and mostly for the fact that the employees of the Securitate were accustomed to use terror in order to obtain confessions. He was the one that introduced legality, as he sees himself. At the same time, killing a person, as was the case of Ibrahim Sefit aka the Turk, was "nothing". He wouldn't understand why this case was used by the commission, especially because he had defied him.

On the other hand, his associates and different officers of Securitate admitted in April that they have made "a few mistakes". They would relativize their crimes by using euphemisms for describing them. That way, killing a person wasn't seen as a crime, but as a mistake that made because they've let themselves be dragged by a person with bad intentions, who has betrayed their trust. At the same time, they portrayed themselves as innocent by blaming it all on Alexandru Drăghici. By analyzing their confessions, he can also tell the main characteristics of the political crimes: authorizing or encouraging them to kill, routinizing and describing the victims as enemies of the regime.

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