

# **Serbian/Yugoslav-Romanian Relations and Interactions in the 20th Century**

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## Toward a Fluid Identity Profile: The Serbs in Romania after WWII

**Abstract:** Based on sources from Romanian archives and relevant literature, this paper analyzes the position of the Serbian national minority in Romania after World War II. The focus is on the consequences of the cooperation of the Serb minority with the Yugoslav authorities, both during the war and in the first years after. During the conflict between Yugoslavia and the Cominform, the Serb minority was exposed to violence and even deportation, which left significant consequences on their perception of their own identity, which are still evident today.

**Keywords:** National Referendums in Novi Sad and Alba-Iulia, Romanian-Yugoslav Convention on Primary Schools Education, Pro-Yugoslav Heresy of Serbs in Romania and its Consequences

### 1918: The losing battle of figures and referendums

In the population assessments in Banat, beyond the demographic statistics on the ground, it is easy to intuit maximalist identity projections, which make their place in moments of reconfiguration of the geographic-political space. There were two such turning points for the Banat Serbs in the last century: 1918 and 1945. The Belgrade Armistice, concluded by the Antante with the socialist government of the „Red” Count Károlyi Mihály, stipulated that Serbia would take over the administration of Banat<sup>1</sup> until the final decision was taken by the Peace Conference. The region was faced with the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrej Mitrović, *Razgraničenje Jugoslavije sa Mađarskom i Rumunijom: 1919–1920: prilog proučavanja jugoslovenske politike na Konferenciji mira u Parizu* (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1975); Јован М. Пејин, *Прејлед прошлости Срба у Банаћу* (Београд: Вецес, 2003); Drago Njegovan, Miodrag Milin, „Banat, Basica și Barania în 1918. Unirea cu Serbia”, *Istoria Banatului. Studii privind particularitățile unei regiune transfrontaliere*, coord. Victor Neumann, 2nd edition, (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2016), 543–558.

overlapping and coexistence of two or even three types of authority. For several months, until the spring of 1919, despite the self-proclaimed Civil and Military Councils of the dominant nationalities (in Timișoara) and the great Referendums of Novi Sad and Alba Iulia, put into operation after the famous *14-point Project* of the American President Wilson, an acute vacuum of authority was felt in the territory. In November 1918, Banat was formally administered from Budapest (through the county authorities, the Social-Democratic Banat Council and Otto Roth's Banat Republic of October 31); from Novi Sad<sup>2</sup> (through the Serbian National Assembly, which decided on November 25 to reunite the Serbs of Banat, Bačka and Baranja with the Kingdom of Serbia - and Uprava/ its leadership from Novi Sad); and from Belgrade (through the Serbian Military Command headed by General Đorđe Đorđević and the Carashovian lawyer Martin Filipon, invested as grand župan of the reunited Counties of Timiș and Caraș). It should also be noted that in Novi Sad, the Banat Serbs actively and enthusiastically participated in the developments surrounding the takeover of the area - bounded by Orșova, Moldova Veche, Bela Crkva, Vršac, Timișoara, and Aradul Nou - by Belgrade's troops. The Novi Sad assembly was attended by 757 delegates, representing 211 municipalities, of which the Banat of Timișoara had 72 delegates from 36 municipalities.<sup>3</sup>

Such a fraught coexistence soon led to heightened tensions. Romanians were abusively prevented from going to the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia on December 1. Commander Petar Bojović, upon his arrival in Timișoara on December 3, was greeted by Otto Roth as a messenger of the Banat Council and the Hungarian Republic. The Serbian commander replied, trenchantly, that „everything taken over by the Serbian army is Serbian...”<sup>4</sup> The tension soon degenerated into conflict: the ban on the Banat Council, the taking of refuge in Budapest by social-democratic militants and the anti-Serb general strike in Timișoara<sup>5</sup> and in some towns in southern Hungary. This marked the beginning of a crisis of confidence in the Serbian army's mission,

<sup>2</sup> *Ослобођење Новог Сада 1918. године: сведочанства и ђолемике*, сакупио и приредио др Слободан Бјелица, (Нови Сад: Новосадски клуб, Градска библиотека, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> *Присаједињење Срема, Баната, Бачке и Барање Србији 1918: документи и ђрилози*, приредио Драго М. Његован, (Нови Сад: Музеј Војводине, 2001); Драго Његован, *Присаједињење Војводине Србији: ђрило ђолићичкој историји Срба у Војводини до 1921. године* (Нови Сад: Музеј Војводине, 2004); Драго Његован, Зоран Вељановић, *Од сна до јаве: ђрисаједињење Војводине Србији 1918. године* (Нови Сад: Музеј Војводине, 2018)

<sup>4</sup> Љубивоје Церовић, *Срби у Румунији од раног средњег века до данашњег времена* (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> On the „hot” events in Timișoara, see: Милан Петровић, *Успомене*, приредила Биљана Шимуновић Бешлин, (Нови Сад: Градска библиотека, Матица српска, 2016), 233–263. See this text in Romanian translation, in: *Banatul și unirea cea mare*, eds. Ioan David și Miodrag Milin, (Timișoara, Academia Română, 2018) under the title *Banatul politic, prin imaginea celalți* (translation: Andrei Milin), 93–109.

which was increasingly viewed, even by Romanians, as an occupying force. The demarcation line, created after the Serbs' military withdrawal in July 1919, would definitively establish the new Romanian-Serbian (Yugoslav) state border. Approximately 60,000 Serbs and Croats found themselves on the Romanian side of the border, while about 80,000 Romanians remained in the Serbian part of the Banat.

Was this outcome positive or negative? For there were difficulties everywhere in the implementation of the general commitments made by the new Eastern European nation states to respect the status of minorities. In the Serbian localities in our (Romanian) part of Banat, the existing Serbian denominational schools (41 in number) continued to function under the administration of the diocese, as did a number of communal schools (12).<sup>6</sup> But the latter were soon transformed into state schools with Romanian as the language of instruction. The school situation of the Serb minorities improved considerably later, with the entry into force of the *Romanian-Yugoslav Convention on the Organization of Minority Primary Schools in Banat* in autumn 1933.<sup>7</sup>

All schools in Serb-populated localities became, at their own request, confessional Serbian schools. In order to train teachers at these schools, specialized courses were set up at the normal schools in Timișoara and Vrșac, respectively. However, as the number of qualified teachers was insufficient, the two states were obliged to employ, by contract, the necessary number of teachers. The result was a revival of minority education, with more than 100 Yugoslav contract teachers and teachers coming to Banat. The number of pupils in these Serbian schools also increased correspondingly: from a total of about 3,000 at the beginning of the 1930s, 6,500 Serbian pupils were registered in the 1935/36 school year as a result of the application of the *Convention*. The beginning of WWII brought a further decline in the school population: 4,500 pupils in the school year 1940/41 and only 3,400 in 1945/46.<sup>8</sup>

However, the inter-war period for the Banat Serbs as a whole was one of setbacks rather than achievements. Since the establishment of Greater Romania, the Serb minority has faced a continuous erosion of its social and political position. They have tried unsuccessfully to preserve their national cultural and political values through the Church and the organization of an anemic national party. Once brutally severed from their ethnic trunk, their past, their history, became a burden far beyond their strength. The cosmopolitan spirit of the metropolis of Timișoara, still dominated by the convincing rigour of German values of material civilization, is, however, being dilu-

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<sup>6</sup> Душан Сабљић, *Српско школство у Румунији 1919–1989*. (Темишвар: Демократски савез Срба и Карашевака у Румунији, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Gligor Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941*. (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu, Institut za istoriju, 1984); Vasile Râmneanțu, *Istoricul relațiilor româno-iugoslave în perioada interbelică* (Timișoara: Mirton, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Душан Сабљић, *Op. Cit.*

ted. The demographic change, which can easily be deduced from the statistics after 1918, also involves the disruption of the traditional multi-ethnic and multi-confessional behavioral model of the Banat region. It disrupts the civilization of public life, especially the civilization of minority community life, which is increasingly under attack from the majority, which, as it grows, has become increasingly unreceptive. The demonstrations, written or spoken, in the four traditional languages, of the social-democratic workers of Timișoara, soon became a memory, obscured by the passage of time. The German and Hungarian minorities were still relatively compact and numerically important in the inter-war urban centers. Here, they formed one of the population's distinct groups, with corresponding needs and institutions established in earlier periods and now upheld with pride. The Serbs, relatively few in number, were, except in Timișoara (which was also largely abandoned by the nation's intelligentsia), primarily representatives of a rural civilization model: oral expression and a preference for occupations on the border between urban and rural (shopkeepers, traveling merchants, craftsmen: tailors, hat makers, leather artisans...). This declining world, in crisis of identity, lost its sense of social functionality. The intelligentsia, formed in a pronounced traditionalist national spirit, not fitting into the conditions of the unitary Romanian national state, would soon abandon Timișoara, Sânnicolau Mare, Ciacova or Arad, and move to Vrșac, Bela Crkva, Kikinda, Veliki Bečkerek, Novi Sad or Belgrade. A deeply felt absence of the more educated social categories was soon felt. Improvisation and compromise took the place of order, maintained by the once-established patronage and authority of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the nationalist intelligentsia. The people of the cultural periphery: teachers, country priests, the occasional freelancer or politician, the leisure class... these now came to the fore as the new exponents of the Serbian nation on the eve of war; neither peasants nor real townsfolk, people who were found, in need.<sup>9</sup>

### **1945: Under the sign of „antifascism” and proletarian revolution**

I recall the feeling of helplessness, born of the inability to protect a well-ordered world; helplessness and despair in the face of the devastating assault of those without calling or legitimacy, born of the combination of subculture and instincts that have been dislodged, of those who overnight embraced the hammer and sickle. The word „front” is the order of the day, and Timișoara's *Pravda*, the „anti-fascist” and „Slavic” organ, is quivering with the unrepentant spirit of the unresolved spirit of the clashes with the quiet order and orderly life.

As if anticipating that the worst was yet to come, the *call of the Serbian youth in Romania* in 1934 sounded apocalyptic: *There were once Serbs in Ro-*

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<sup>9</sup> *Sârbii din România în secolul XX*, ed. Miodrag Milin, (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2012), 15–18.

manian Banat, but they were hungry and devoured each other. No one was there to warn them. And the wolves swallowed them. A good people, but too easily deceived. They got excited out of nothing. Easy-minded.<sup>10</sup> „To new times and new schools! ” - sounded another mobilizing slogan from the pen of one in a cassock, called upon rather to defend the pre-established order of denominational schools.<sup>11</sup> In this incendiary atmosphere, inoculated also in the seat of the Eparchy (Vicariate) of Timișoara, the defender of the confessional schools, the protopope Slobodan Kostić (who in the time of the emergency had also been the vicar and interim bishop of the episcopal see) was forced to retire at the end of 1946. This was also the end of Serbian denominational education in Romania, which was finally finalized by the 1948 reform of the education system. The inter-Serbian conflict escalated: the Slav Anti-Fascist Front (AFS) planned to stage a congress of „progressive” forces in Timișoara on May 8, 1945, in order to „fight fascism” and „establish democracy” in Romania. As a subsidiary, it was also planned to „expose” the protopope Kostić as aporopiate of the London yugoslav government and emigration and of the monarchist zealots of General Draža Mihajlović. At the last minute, the Prime Minister Dr. Petru Groza managed, through General Vinogradov of the Inter-Allied Commission in Bucharest, to stop such an adventurous and possibly secessionist venture of the exalted Serb minorities.<sup>12</sup> The Yugoslav Legation in Bucharest was openly engaged in the elimination of the „enemies” of the communist power in Belgrade. An active presence, guiding (and controlling?) the activities of the AFS and its successor was that of the embassy press attaché. He wrote detailed reports on what was happening in Banat, including in the meetings of the diocesan School Committee, where he inflamed the obstruction of the „comrades” in cassock against the legitimate representative appointed by the Serbian Patriarchate, Father Kostić. On October 19, 1946, Petar Pantović, the president of the Yugoslav colony and representative of the monarchist Yugoslav government, from Bucharest, and his close friend Nemanja Kostić, the son of the vicar of Timișoara, were kidnapped and disappeared forever. Both had been close to the Chetnik movement during the war. The leader of the movement, General Mihajlović, had just been captured by Tito's secret police<sup>13</sup> and executed following a legal frame-up. Dark thoughts now began to haunt anyone who did not feel sufficiently anchored in the new reality. The elderly priest, devastated by this tragic blow, withdrew from public life and spent his

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<sup>10</sup> Стеван Бугарски, *Завичајна књижевност Срба из Румуније 1918–1947*. (Темишвар: Савез Срба у Румунији, 2007), 267.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 195–198.

<sup>12</sup> Миодраг Милин, Андреј Милин, *Срби из Румуније и румунско-југословенски односи: људи и грађа (1944–1949)* (Вршац: Виша школа за образовање васпитача; Темишвар: Универзитет „Банатулуи”, 2004) 78–79.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, according to American archival sources, handed over by British agents to Tito's UDBA. See the full story in the excellent monograph by Jean-Christophe Buisson, *Mihajlovići: eroul trădat de aliați (1893 – 1946)* (Bragadiru: Editura Miidecărți, 2019)

final years in undeserved obscurity.<sup>14</sup> The time had now come for the new, with an „unblemished” past and a devotion „to the cause”.

The new patriots, vetted, with Party credentials and activities, are ever vigilant. They do not have schools yet, but they zealously orient themselves, reading in the communist newspaper and calendars *Pravda* about the struggle for national liberation of peoples, new holidays and commemorations; they learn revolutionary songs and Russian (Kazakh) dances; they also compose poems, clumsy and then more and more daring, about Stalin the liberator, but also with Marshal Tito, or even the PCR, victorious against fascism and in the proletarian revolution. Just when it seemed that things had settled down again, a thunderbolt like a thunderbolt struck the new proletarian farmers, anti-fascists, brigadiers and all sorts of activists. Their idol, Tito, the living hope of the Balkan Slavs, was decreed the mortal enemy of true communism and a *servant of imperialist capitalism*.<sup>15</sup> This is how a detail of precarious social status, a precious biographical support in the rise of the new hierarchies, could at the same time become the main charge for a planetary guilt. It was no longer important just to pull oneself up from among the minions (poor, docile and honest), but it was essential to set oneself on a positive course early on; if one was not vigilant and again sluggardly to another cause, there was a great risk that overnight one would become as odious as the fascists or the imperialist huiers, the unrepentant enemies of world peace. The extreme purification solution („ideological” this time, not „racial” as with other enemies) was the short (but intense!) 30-day „wheat from chaff” short courses of activists on the fields and in the factories of the socialist homeland - a rudimentary literacy in the „good”, positive doctrine of Stalinist Marxism-Leninism. He who is not with us is against us! So Tito's antifascists of the day before yesterday, who wanted to „democratize Romania” by ridding it of the „fascist” monarchy, yesterday's brigadier, has been bustling with papers and ideological cleaning recommendations in the ever-narrowing (and therefore much coveted) corridors of the activist career. To make sure that the filtering was „faultless”, Security, the iron fist in the service of the „working class”, stepped in. Informant, border informer, Securitate collaborator - this is the best business card to overcome all kinds of obstacles and to be guaranteed to rise: yesterday's village teachers, party instructors, if necessary (because there were no others), heads of Slavic organizations, heads of district and regional RCP(Romanian Communist Party)ist propaganda structures, rectors, deans, lecturers or professors at the new workers' faculties and institutes of education and vigilant supervision.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Стеван Бугарски, *Књижевни раг њроше Слободана Костића* (Темишвар: Савез Срба у Румунији, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Miodrag Milin, „PCR și minoritățile: cazul UACDSR (SSKDUR) sau sârbii bănățeni - de la erezie la calvarul „reeducării”, *Partide politice și minorități naționale din România în secolul XX*, vol. II, coord. Vasile Ciobanu și Sorin Radu, (Sibiu: Techno Media, 2007), 219–234.

<sup>16</sup> Миодраг Милин, Андреј Милин, *Срби из Румуније и румунско-југословенски односи...*, 74–78.

The others, who did not want to, or could not, or were stopped on this route, were left on the outside, out of „distrust”, doomed to an adverse destiny, with obstacles at every step.

In this ideological war, with sporadic incursions across the border, barbed-wire networks and defense pillboxes, frequent shoot-outs and casualties, Tito's secret police did not sit idly by either. It succeeded by appealing to Tito's war-hardened „true Yugoslav patriots”, still surviving in the various organizations and power structures in Romania. This was the substratum of an insane, vulgar and degrading propaganda war, carried out ruthlessly to the point of (cultural) extermination within the Serb minority. It is also the environment from which the party/state model came to life in Romania, with the new proletarian army, the Securitate and the „people's” militia, and a tailor-made school reform. The 7-grade education was generalized everywhere, in the same propagandistic manner and proletarian haste, of going beyond the norms, at any cost. A new question naturally arises: Is what is much always good? The modest denominational schools in the villages of the Banat region were transformed into seven-year co-educational schools; agricultural technical schools were added to the existing state high schools. And in Bucharest, a Serbian language department was set up at the university, populated by lecturers and teachers from among the former Marxist activists. Before, the little schoolchildren worshipped St. Sava, the spiritual patron saint of the nation, and followed the rituals of the great Christian feasts and joys. Now, almost overnight, the educational repertoire has completely changed. The new St. Sava is Stalin the liberator, the new saint - Ana Pauker, the model of the woman-activist, at least equal, if not feared by the man. The pantheon of angels is populated by various RCP secretaries. And the demon, in the „unanimous acceptance”, enhanced by the zeal to remove any form of suspicion of total attachment to the cause, was Tito, the vampire, the executioner, the henchman, etc.

### **Heresy**

In the spring of 1945 the Banat Serbs were united under the umbrella of the Slav Anti-Fascist Front (AFS), an organization of the National Democratic Front (NDF) under the direct control of the RCP. As a result of national aspirations unfulfilled in 1918 and now revived under the benign gaze of Belgrade, a general Slavic congress was planned to be held in Timișoara on May 8, 1945. This meeting, which looked dangerous for Romania's future post-war territorial configuration, was prevented, *in extremis*, by the intervention of Prime Minister Dr. Petru Groza with Soviet officials in Bucharest.<sup>17</sup> As the Romanian-Yugoslav relations were in trouble due to the activation of a political factor in Timișoara under the sign of Slavic unity, the leaders of the AFS were summoned to the Yugoslav Mission in Bucharest; here the emissary (future ambassa-

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80.

dor) N. Grulović informed the delegates from Timișoara of the conclusions that had emerged from the discussion with the Soviet representatives in Romania (Embassy Counsellor Korš): the AFS in Timișoara was to dissolve itself as a political organization and its members were to regroup as a Slavic democratic cultural-educational association of the Slavs in Romania.<sup>18</sup> The meeting of the Initiative Committee of the planned Union of Slav Democratic Cultural Democratic Associations in Romania (SSKDUR – Savez slovenskih kulturnih demokratskih udruženja u Rumuniji) was held on July 15, 1945. The Assembly also met „to take cognizance of some tasks that the RCP has set before us... namely, the reorganization of the Slavic line”. Not unimportant is the fact that the initiator of this „reorganization” was (at least this is how it is signed) the lawyer Borislav (Bora) Popović;<sup>19</sup> we say that this is important because he was also the secretary of the defunct AFS. In this position, he had signed the invitations for the aforementioned Slavic congress in Timișoara. As president of the AFS, the invitation, dated May 3, 1945, did not mention a name, but was signed by a common official of the structure.<sup>20</sup>

Rewinding the time movie a bit, we will stop on March 26, 1945. A delegation - says the archive document - of „Yugoslavs from Romania” was visiting the Federal Foreign Ministry in Belgrade.<sup>21</sup> Minister Ivan Šubašić was accompanied by Rada Fenlački, president of AFS and inspector of minority schools, Lazar Adamov, editor of the AFS press organ *Pravda*, Milan Teodorović, director of *Pravda*, Liljana Marković, secretary of the FAF (Women's Anti-Fascist Front), Pavle Stojanov, secretary of the FAS - youth, the representative of the People's Front for Northern Banat (Yugoslav military), and the Deputy Foreign Minister, General Vladimir Velebit. The report of the above-mentioned meeting of the Initiative Committee on July 15 speaks in hermetic language of „mistakes made in the past” and „especially those on the eve of the Slavic Congress that was being prepared”. Such mistakes „weakened the common struggle front and could put the RCP in an undesirable situation”<sup>22</sup>

To put it differently, it was not the RCP, but rather the Serbs - with their organizational structure, their presence in the Banat, and their so-called „antifascist” elements - who positioned themselves as the RCP's antifascist vanguard, exceeding what was actually expected of them. A short while ago, the meeting in Belgrade with Minister Šubašić, General Velebit and the Timișoara Serbs took place. At that meeting it emerged that „the objectives of the Slavic anti-fascist bodies in Romania are identical to those of the national

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>19</sup> Here and hereafter the names have usually been transcribed in the form in which they are found in the cited documents.

<sup>20</sup> Миодраг Милин, Андреј Милин, *Срби из Румуније и румунско-југословенски односи...*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–78.

<sup>22</sup> Ljubomir Stepanov, *Uniunea Sârbilor din România* (Timișoara: Uniunea Sârbilor din România, 2006).

liberation movement in Yugoslavia; it is in fact a popular movement aimed at the seizure of power by the people and the establishment of brotherly love within the Slavic community"<sup>23</sup> The concrete objectives of the Slavic movement in Romania would be „the union with Yugoslavia of all the provinces in which the Slavic population lives and - if this were not possible - the resettlement of this population in Yugoslavia”<sup>24</sup> As the lawyer Bora Popović observed on July 15, 1945, „these mistakes, not ours, but those of some members...” tended towards chauvinism, doing a disservice to the RCP (in fact, to the Banat Serbs).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, these „members” who had exposed themselves in Belgrade would gradually disappear from the ranks of front-line figures. By over-exalting national sentiment, they disqualified themselves as minority leaders in that time of meandering and, in the end, implacable post-war transition. The same lawyer Popović, a man called upon in necessity and crisis, observed that the era of the AFS was over, describing it as „a political organization, too small to be able to defend the interests of the Slavs”. These interests, the future president of the SSKDUR noted, „can be better served within a large party - the RCP ...”. He too, suddenly freed from the deluding Panslav delusion, remarked with uncanny detachment: „The AFS was a provisional organization. Now, when fascism is disbanded as a military force it is no more necessary...”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Calvary**

In the summer of 1948 the waters of the SSKDUR were muddied again, this time for good. On June 28, the document (*Resolution*) of the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, meeting in Bucharest, was published, condemning the CP in Yugoslavia and the orientation promoted by its leader, Tito. There followed a furious campaign of rallies orchestrated by the PMR (the former RCP), in which the most vehement voice was that of Ana Pauker,<sup>27</sup> who openly called for an armed uprising of the Yugoslav peoples to overthrow the „odious” Tito, who had overnight become a tool of „Anglo-American imperialism”. Gheorghiu-Dej<sup>28</sup> and - for understandable reasons, in Timișoara itself - that of the Minister of the Interior, Teohari Georgescu, were also in the same vein, in somewhat more moderate tones.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the Minister of the Interior himself, one of the top members of the party-state pyramid, was able to come to Timișoara in person. Teohari

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<sup>23</sup> Миодраг Милин, Андреј Милин, *Срби из Румуније и румунско-југословенски односи...*, 76–77.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Arhivele Naționale ale României Timiș [National Archives of Romania Timiș] (ANRT), Fond UASCR(SSKDUR), file 1/1944–45, f. 90. Initiative Committee meeting of July 15, 1945.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Миодраг Милин, Андреј Милин, *Срби из Румуније и румунско-југословенски односи...*, 193–200.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 195–199.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–205.

Georgescu had a very special objective: to persuade and compel the heads of the Union and other representative Serbs to embrace and disseminate the incriminating ideas of the anti-Yugoslav *Resolution* among the common people. A first meeting of the dreaded minister with Union activists took place on July 2; although surprised and stunned by the unexpected turn of events, those gathered refused to sign an act incriminating Yugoslavia. Pressure was brought to bear on the executive leadership of the Union during the night of July 2-3; the Serb leaders were taken to the county headquarters of the PMR, where the Interior Minister himself, the activist at the center (Iosif? or Solomon?) Bogdan and the county secretary (Emil?) Stanciu alternated between promises and threats; finally Teohari Georgescu raised the tone: „If they are not for the *Resolution*, they are in fact against the USSR and Stalin!” Consequently, they were labeled „bandits, traitors and Yugoslav spies”. Finally, they were told that „they alone will bear the consequences”. They were released on the morning, but were forbidden to leave their home (i.e. the city of Timișoara). In the afternoon of the same day, the Union's Executive Committee met. This time, those present, with two exceptions, signed the required adhesion. The adhesion was immediately made public through the Union's newspaper *Pravda*.

The minister continued his campaign to promote the anti-Yugoslav *Resolution* in Serbian villages (Diniaș, Sânmartinu Sârbesc, Ivanda...) with generous promises of reduced quotas for those willing to join. In the days that followed, the villages were also traversed by the activist at the center, Bogdan, who also embarked on an image campaign, removing portraits of Tito everywhere, confiscating Yugoslav books and banning, under threat of sanction, the listening to Radio Belgrade.<sup>30</sup> The Serb minority remained dumbfounded, totally stunned by this unforeseen war of slogans and labeling. Yesterday they had been enthusiastic „anti-fascists”, but now other „truths” were being revealed to them: their idols appeared to be „imperialist henchmen” or even „hidden tools of fascism”. A jumble of terms and interpretations which, in the logic of the political message, also meant that no one was sure what the future might hold and that danger lurked at every step. As a matter of urgency, teams of propagandists were set up to go around the villages to explain and justify the „new line”, which they themselves were unable to understand. As in any situation of such uncertainty, the solution was... postponement. The propagandists of the SSKDUR met on July 10 in a „stock-taking” meeting, which was supposed to evaluate the effects in the territory of the communiqué of adherence to the anti-Yugoslav *Resolution*, prefabricated by the PMR and formally adopted by the leadership a week earlier. The text condemning the Yugoslav line again raised a number of objections.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Павле Стојанов, *Јуџословенска национална мањина у Румунији* (Београд: Култура, 1953), 126–129.

<sup>31</sup> Andrei Milin, Miodrag Milin, *UACDSR sau sârbii din România pe baricadele Războiului Rece* (Timișoara: Uniunea Sârbilor din România, 2009), 79–105.

Interesting are the comments of the Union propagandists gathered at the above-mentioned meeting at the center. The anti-Yugoslav *resolution* was, as we have said, adopted at the leadership level, and it was to be inoculated to the people in the countryside, many of them former volunteers in Tito's partisan units. The trip to the territory took place on July 4. *Pravda* editor Lazar Adamov had been in Foeni. The meeting of local Serbs was preceded by a conference of the PMR, at which a few local Serbs were present. Then, in the afternoon, the actual Serb gathering was held. The „Processing” was listened to „quietly”, no questions, no fuss. Just astonishment..., „How did the present state of Yugoslavia come about?” Participants - 35–40 people. In Ketvel was Laza Nedeljkov; in front of approximately 50 participants, the resolution was received in silence. Only questions like: „How did it come to this, when we followed the Yugoslavs, or did we follow their example?” No objections, „there is much more interest in cereal quotas, so people are not interested in the *Resolution*”, observed our rapporteur, a supporter of convenient solutions. Đorđe Popović went to Parța. Here too, people are surprised, „but they don't take a position, they are not agitated by this issue... more interest and agitation is about quotas”. Milan Đurić reports from Sânpetru Mare. A joint meeting of the PMR and the SSKDUR was held in this large Serbian settlement. Boško Lacić, a teacher from the village, a former Yugoslav officer and employee of the Embassy in Bucharest, spoke in Serbian to over 150 people. The atmosphere was apparently quite heated, „a lot of questions were asked!” Presumably, an enigmatic figure, the senior activist from Bucharest, was also present, the mysterious Dr. Bogdan, who would later make the „recalcitrant” Serbs bitter. Therefore, in Sânpetru Mare, a kind of „ideological duel” took place between the Yugoslav emissary Lacić, the former partisan commander, and the PMR instructor who called himself Dr. Bogdan.

### A few conclusions

„The *Resolution* was not well received, especially some of the Party delegates' statements, who did not know enough about Yugoslav realities”... Many former partisans of the Yugoslav Army criticized the decision of the Central Committee of the Slavic Organization (i.e., its adherence to the anti-Yugoslav resolution of the PMR on July 3). There was great discontent, „even among those who had been co-owners”, over the abusive increase in grain quotas (69 wagons, as against 34 the previous year). The PMR instructor delegate tried to promise that, if the Serbs complied with expectations, „the quota would be very low”. The rapporteur noted, with resignation and frankness, that „as a result of the above, the propaganda work will be very difficult”. In Soca (Dobroslav Kaplar), Saravale (Steva Malimarkov), Sânnicolau Mare (Bora Konić), Cenad (Joca Sapundžijin), Tolvad (Steva Lepojev), the atmosphere was gray: surprise and misunderstanding, „especially among for-

mer fighters". In Recaş, a town with a distinct Croatian community, Joca Pelić reported that „in private conversations, people often speak out for Tito”... presented as a Croat. Perhaps a poignant note emerges in the remarks of Joca Sapundžijin, who speaks of his Serbs as „calm, but very downcast”. It reads more as an introspective glimpse into his own state of mind as he braces for the storm ahead. Another dissident in the making, Dr. Miloš Todorov, a senior figure within the Union and a member of the Parliament, already knows what he has to do: a conference was held in Dinaş with „many participants”, not a pronouncement, in fact...; he will pronounce soon, but against *the Resolution*. A third dissident, Boža Stanojević, did what he did and did not show up as a propagandist in Recaş, where he was expected on July 4. Instead, he made his revenge in full force at the meeting of the Union leadership on July 10: „...the Serb population is deeply dissatisfied, especially with our *Resolution*...” The leadership has isolated itself from the masses... People have stopped coming to the Organization, especially in Timişoara...”, „*Pravda* Newspaper is no longer run by our organization”...,<sup>32</sup> „We should not have brought the *Judgment*, and it was not right to publish *the Judgment*, especially with signatures... until he lost confidence in us.”<sup>33</sup> President Popović pledged to spread the Party's word to the Serbs in Ciacova. In a burst of candor, he would admit that he did so in front of only 15–20 locals. The same „calmness” and „non-pronunciation”; reassurances about the normal continuation of the organization's life, which, the President hoped, would bring peace. It was not to be so; as we have seen, Boža Stanojević was already criticizing the Union leadership for alienating itself from the real life of the minority, risking to jeopardize its legitimacy as a representative body. The President tried to restore the authority undermined from within, appealing to reasoning such as „higher interests” and quotes from the incriminating Yugoslav *Resolution* aimed at „breaking democratic unity”. Then, with a substantial dose of hypocrisy, they distance themselves from „national sentimental elements which hinder understanding and work” and „which must be tactfully defeated”; because „they themselves are not convinced ... of the thesis they have to support”. The nationalist spirit that dominates them „hardly allows them to understand the *Resolution* well and in depth”; this is also due to their lack of „theoretical training”, which prevents them from „understanding what the *Resolution* says,” speculates President Popović, the well oriented lawyer. And a new display of hypocrisy and obedience all in one: he reproaches the people for precisely what he finds most disturbing: „they do not have the courage to go out to the people when they think they will find opposition and do not understand their role of guidance...” Nothing new under the sun; just

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<sup>32</sup> The conflict between the SSKDUR (still controlled by the UDBA) and the PMR (controlled by the Securitate) is already in the offing (Obs. M. Milin).

<sup>33</sup> We, i.e. the acting president of the Union, Bora Popovici, who also drafted the minutes of the July 10 meeting. (n. n. M. Milin)

a sad sequence of conduct, frequently practiced nowadays, by versatile and unscrupulous aspirants to a political career, who blame their opponents for their own infirmities of character and behavior. And finally, the whistleblower in his own emptiness: „I have come to the conclusion that the members of our Central Committee, if they continue to work in the same way, will spoil more than they do... and I deem it necessary to ask for the advice of the regional PMR.”<sup>34</sup>

Like any scoundrel, very careful to cultivate his own „good” image and to transfer any shadows or failures onto others, our president is also looking for circumstances that will absolve him from possible criticism, such as lack of „vigilance”, that things have gone wrong with the Serbs. This is not incompetence in the art of leadership, but rather an entirely accidental slip, which can in no way be imputed to the „hero” in question, who has already taken the high road...<sup>35</sup> Concealment and innocence, perfectly mimicked. So, at one point, at the meeting, „there was a heated commotion”; but this was when the person concerned was absent, „having been called on the telephone and leaving the room”. It was only on his return that he noticed the agitated attitude of Joca Nikolin, who vehemently demanded that „a new resolution be brought in, specifying that the resolution of 3 July is not the Organization's as such, but the personal one of those who signed it...”. This is because „we are considered traitors” and „we cannot judge the Yugoslav Communist Party as a cultural association”...Boža Stanojević, Joca Sapundžijin, Joca Pelić „firmly” associated themselves with these opinions, „although we have already previously opposed this point of view”, the president, who diligently ticks the minutes, diligently mentions. They insisted that „we should discuss the whole issue with the PMR again”. The only thing that remained was that „they should all go there and express their views openly”. That the objections were not just formal, the „organs” soon found out through their informers, who were all over the Union structures. The executive leadership of the Union (which, as we saw, seemed to have lost its political functions!) was urgently summoned to the PMR headquarters: the „recalcitrants” had to retract their opinions and align themselves with what the PMR had decided, through the voices of Dej and Pauker, now twinned. By the game of Fortune, the telegraphic account of this marathon meeting on the night of July 12–13 was preserved in the report of the instructor from the Center, Bogdan, to the head of the Interior, Teohari Georgescu. For a better understanding of the drama of this dramatic moment at the beginning of the hunt for „heretics” among the Serbs, here is the gist of it:

*...I was told by comrade Teohari to call you on the phone, that you have something to tell me. \* Yes, from the Serb leadership here, Miloš Todorov, Sta-*

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<sup>34</sup> Infact it had been PMR for half a year, but PCR sounded even more mobilizing.

<sup>35</sup> Although he was a scientific nullity, he became the first rector of the Pedagogical Institute (the nucleus of the future West University) in Timișoara. (n. n. M. Milin)

*nojević Boža and Sapundžijin Joca are agitating the Serb population around a motion in which they disagree with the resolution of the Information Bureau and the attitude of the PMR. Around them are grouped Serb reactionary clergymen and priests. Their motion they have tried to pass it on. We are of the opinion here that in order to keep the peace and to prevent a mass action... these three should be detained. That's all we had to say. \* Their motion has been sent to Bucharest and is with Comrade Chishinevschi. \* Couriers have been sent with this motion to all the centers of the country, with the instruction that, after it has been circulated, it should be forwarded there. That is all. \* Comrade Bogdan, please wait five minutes. Yes? \* Yes. \* ...This is Internal Affairs... \* Mr. Minister will be right back with the result, he said so: he went to Minister Teohari Georgescu's office and he'll be right back with the result. \* Good... \* Is Mr. Bogdan still there? \* Yes, he's here, next to me... \* Mr. Bogdan, we'll take further action tonight or tomorrow, after we'll judge the consequences of this measure. Understood? \* Yes. Yes. They are now in our house (i.e. in the PMR headquarters) and we are debating the issues politically, but they are to go home to the villages... \* And you will settle the matter politically. And if you don't come to any conclusion, we will take further action: but only after we have thoroughly analyzed the matter. \* We have reason to believe that going home... to disappear. We, too, are against rash measures. \* Comrade Teohari decides whether or not they should be detained. \* We thought it would be good to point out the situation tonight. We continue the political discussions for another hour or an hour and a half, we'll see what results we get and we'll announce it in the morning, possibly at night; but we can't do anything after the meeting if they disappear. \* Yes, I understand! What I told you is the point of view of Mr. Teohari. Is that all right? \* Yes, fine. Cheers...<sup>36</sup>*

And the next step, to put the wall against the wall and unleash the sarabande of misfortunes, began like this:

*The Executive Committee of the Union of Slavic Democratic Cultural Associations in Romania, in its meeting of July 18, 1948, taking cognizance of the behavior of certain elements in the leadership of the Association, unanimously, brings the following RESOLUTION: At these times, when the Association, as well as the population, should be as united as possible, together with the democratic forces in our country, there have been found people like Dr. Miloš Todorov, Joca Sapundžijin, Boža Stanojević and Bora Petrov, who have tried to break the unity of the Serbian population, to separate it from the rest of the progressive population, to throw it into the arms of reaction. In doing so, Miloš Todorov, as the initiator, a man full of self-importance and personal ambitions, together with Sapundžijin Joca, who came from America and during the war was a collaborator and friend of the fascists (sic!?), they wanted to link our entire population to the betrayal of the proletarian internationalism of Tito, Kardelj, Đilas and Ranković,*

<sup>36</sup> ANRT, Fond UACDSR (SSKDUR), file no. 7/1948, f. 142; Andrei Milin, Miodrag Milin, *UACDSR sau sârbii din România...*, 105–108.

*along the lines of bourgeois chauvinist nationalism, along the lines of breaking the anti-imperialist front; thus they went along with the bourgeoisie, along with reaction. Through this action, Miloš Todorov, Sapundžijin Joca, Stanojević Boža and Petrov Bora became agents of reaction and wanted our Association to become a tool of theirs. However, thanks to the vigilance of our members, this action was discovered and its initiators unmasked. The Executive Committee considers that this action, started by the above-mentioned people, who tried to attract other elements, is a subversive and treasonous action, which has nothing in common with the work of our Association. In view of the above, namely, that Miloš Todorov, Joca Sapundžijin and Boža Stanojević have betrayed the interests of the Serbian population and put themselves at the mercy of the reaction, in accordance with Article 28 of our Statutes, the Executive Committee decides to exclude them from the leadership and from our Association. We are convinced that in this way, by expelling all traitors from our midst, we shall strengthen our organization, better weld our ties with the Romanian people and the neighbouring nationalities, strengthen our People's Republic and contribute to the strengthening of the anti-imperialist front, which is headed by our great friend and neighbour, the Soviet Union. Executive Commitee.<sup>37</sup>*

### **The „Reeducation” of the Serbs between the tragic and the ridiculous**

Following the deplorable failure of the attempt to instrumentalize the Union as an effective weapon of Romanian communist anti-Tito propaganda, a furious campaign of harassment of Serb militants was launched by the PMR cadre section, Timiș-Torontal branch. Its reports meticulously describe the incriminated acts and the measures envisaged to restore the authority and bring the Serbs back under the control of Party propaganda. Being particularly suggestive in highlighting certain temporal states, we will try to present those facts and situations illustrative of a new political pedagogy applied to the minorities: the construction of **a duplicitous behavior**, of „rewarding” the obedient or cowardly and ruthless repression for the unyielding:

July 1948. *After the publication of the Information Bureau's resolution on the situation of the PCI, the party members of the CC Slavic Organization were given the task of enlightening the Serbian population in the county about the betrayal of some members of the PCI CC, headed by Tito. They signed a Resolution published in Pravda (Timisoara), in which they denounced the betrayal of Tito on behalf of the Serb population. This stance on their part was not sincere and, behind the Party's back, they prepared a counter-resolution, in which they stated that the first Resolution was signed by them as members of the PMR, but as slaves they are waiting until the Serbian people will have their say. Their action was unmasked and the Party sanctioned the organizers of this action with expulsion. On this occasion it became clear that the Slavic Cultural Organization, although*

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 108–124.

run by Party members, was in fact under the influence of the national-Slav influence and was following orders from abroad through the Yugoslav Embassy. The CC of the Slavic Organization was staffed with tovi devoted to our Fatherland, and among them an intensive campaign was begun to enlighten the Serbian population about the situation in Yugoslavia.<sup>38</sup>

August 1948. The events in Yugoslavia constituted a testing stone for Serbian party members. In order to strengthen them, our section took measures, first of all by contributing to the election of leaders, who were sent to the Serbian communities, and to the reorganization of the working staff of the newspaper *Pravda* and the Slavic Organization. Thus I helped in the reorganization of the CC of the Slavic Org. (Kurić Aleksandar, a former instructor at the County Propaganda Department (at the school), was sent to them as secretary...<sup>39</sup> Following investigations into the situation of the Party members of the CC of the Slavic Cultural Organization, the following were sanctioned with expulsion from the Party: dr. Miloš Todorov, Joca Sapundžijin, Bora Petrov, Boža Stanojević and Pavle Stojanov, attaché (at) the Yugoslav Embassy in Bucharest. Following the events in Yugoslavia and in the Serbian communities, we proceeded to reorganize the leadership of the Slavic Cultural Organization, promoting reliable comrades, starting with the CC, down to the last basic organization.<sup>40</sup>

August-October 1948: Bringing the SSKDUR in line with the instructions of the cadre section of the PMR.

*Work plan of the SSKDUR Executive Committee. General tasks: 1. To unmask the anti-Slavic policy of the RPR Slavic population conducted by a part of the Union leadership (Todorov Miloš, Sapundžijin Joca, Stanojević Božidar, former secretaries of the Union); 2. Unmasking the enemy policy of the CP leaders in Yugoslavia, according to the BI Resolution; 3. Training the Slavic population among the democratic forces to support the actions of the Government, emphasizing the role of the PMR; 4. Popularizing the USSR as the leading force of the democratic camp in the struggle for peace, democracy... Concrete tasks: to work in all the 61 local councils against the hostile policy of a part of the Union leadership (Todorov, Sapundžijin, Stanojević)...<sup>41</sup>*

September 1948. Nicolin Joca, the former leader of the UTM (Communist youths) Brigade „December 30“, CC member of the Slavic Cultural Org, supported the treacherous action of Dr. Miloš Todorov. He was given time to recognize the unfairness of Tito's position; however, he disagreed with Resolution.<sup>42</sup>

October 1948. On October 11, a peasant cadre school, with Serbian-language instruction, was opened in the County of Timiș, with 35 comrades,

<sup>38</sup> ANRT, Fond Comitetul județean PCR Timiș-Torontal (1948-1950), file no. 43/1948, f. 37, Activity reports, Cadre Section.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 38.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 41.

<sup>41</sup> ANRT, Fond UACDSR (SSKDUR), file no. 7/1948, f. 2-4; Andrei Milin, Miodrag Milin, *UACDSR sau sârbii din România...*, 47-49.

<sup>42</sup> ANRT, Fond Comitetul județean PCR Timiș-Torontal (1948-1950), file no. 43/1948, f. 62.

who were later to be used in outreach work in the Slavic Organization or elsewhere... The Serbian school was hastily organized and the nets sent unverified elements and without records; and later, when checking the pupils, it was found that there were elements who came to the school who were not members of the Party, because of haste and unverified work, who were sent home...<sup>43</sup> In the Dinaș commune, the native village of Dr. Miloš Todorov, there is much fret about his problem and, in particular, the fact that he is away in an unknown place(?) and shows no sign of life. We are also informed that the newspaper *Politika* [from Belgrade], sent from Kikinda, has arrived in Dinaș, in which Todorov's case was reported...<sup>44</sup>

November 1948. Thirty pupils have finished Serbian school. The comrades, after finishing the school, were put as secretaries of the Slav grassroots and cultural organizations for the ideological and organizational strengthening of our Party.

Among the methods of „re-education” of the cadre section, denunciation was very important. Here is a sample that has escaped the vigilance of the „purge” of compromising archives.

Fenlak, November 1, 1948. Report. The undersigned Plužar Mirčea, of Serbian origin, member of the PMR, promoted since 1945, accountant „7 November” in Fenlak, on the occasion of the BI Resolution on Yugoslavia, the comrades were in our commune: lecturer Briban from the County and comrade Băștianu, from the local committee of the Timișoara Trade Unions, with whom I followed all the activity of the Org. Slave for three weeks. As a result of our research, we found out that it is a chauvinist political org. At their head is the Serbian priest Unipan Veljko. The clique gathers at the home of the wealthy Miša Nikić, where, entering with comrade Briban, I found them on the pretext of drinking brandy, listening to Radio Belgrade, persons: Nikić Mihaj, expelled from the party; Mitrić Mirko, a chiabur (koulak); Nikić Georgije, a chiabur; priest Unipan Veljko, a chiabur, although they are not neighbors. As we were leaving this house, we met Sava Mitrov, a chiabur, 55 earth yugars, and Mihajlović Mija, excluded from the Party; on our way to them, and they said that they were going to Nikić Mihaj's house, to the radio, because the priest was there. About 15 days ago, the student Mitrić Miša came home from Yugoslavia... He goes from house to house, looking for news... Then I found out, through a comrade from the commune Variaș....so he, Mitrić Miša brought a memo and a report made by their clique against the po-

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 64.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 67. MAN deputy Dr. Milos Todorov was taken from his home on July 14, 1948 and transported to Bucharest. He was then taken under house arrest to Brașov; being there he was being drawn by agents of the Yugoslav Embassy. He was moved to Vaslui to a hospital for contagious diseases. He was then taken directly to the trial of the „Titoist traitors” in Bucharest in August 1950. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. (See details in: Miodrag Milin, Andrei Milin, *Sârbii din România. Documentar și studii despre remodelarea identitară* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2017), 110–119.

*litical secretary here...it is not known what lies he brought to the Security of Sânnikolau Mare.*<sup>45</sup>

The harassment of minorities reached its peak during the period of the Bărăgan deportations. The most banal facts are deformed without decency in the poisoned atmosphere of instructions from the „cadres”. The most banal reality, as the case may be, becomes a possible basis for incrimination; or, on the contrary, an occasion for vulgar and indecent adulation, when it is taken and amplified to the point of caricature by the obedient and obsequious environment of the 'reformed' leadership of the Union. Here are sporadic samples, incidentally escaped from more recent „purges” of the archives:

January-March, 1951. *SSKDUR Executive Committee Report... During this period the Trial of the Titoists was held in Timișoara.*<sup>46</sup> *Also at the same time, we sent activists on the ground, to the communes where these Titoists were from, to see the atmosphere in these communes. The activists followed this and processed about the treacherous policy of Tito-Ranković and their agents, who are on trial. The atmosphere was mostly good, because it was observed that the Serbian peasant workers condemned these Titoists; that in Dinjaș commune, even Necin Paja's wife, Necin Desanka, took a stand against him because he was condemned as a Titoist and said "Now she sees why her husband did not want to join the GAC (collective), because he is a Titoist agent and he tried to sabotage..." In Saravola commune, Janošev Spasa said: "Now I see why my cousin, Janošev Sima, who is a convicted Titoist agent, tried to lure me not to join the GAC, saying that the times would change; but I did not listen to him and joined the GAC, where I still work today... There were such attitudes in the villages of Soka, Ketcfelj and others..."<sup>47</sup> *Our organization, led and guided by the Party, led the struggle to unmask the enemy, training the population of the Serbian working peasantry to unmask the gang of fascists and murderers of the Tito-Ranković clique, the minions of Anglo-American imperialism, class enemies, stirrers of a new war,... for the strengthening of class consciousness (?), hatred of the bourgeois and national unity (?), hatred of bourgeois nationalism, love of international proletarianism (sic!), love of our homeland the RPR and our liberator the great Soviet Union, the bastion of peace and security of the peoples...<sup>48</sup>...Visual agitation: slogans, wall and citizen's gazettes, carica-**

<sup>45</sup> ANRT, Fond Comitetul județean PCR Timiș-Torontal (1948-1950), file no. 43/1948, f. 70.

<sup>46</sup> In the second half of 1949, several leaders of the Union were picked up from their homes and arrested; thus, in August 1949, the „Trial of the group of spies and traitors in the spy service of the Titoist fascist clique” began at the Military Court in Timișoara. (Liubomir Stepanov, *op. cit.*, 38-39). In fact, there were dozens of secret political trials of „Titoist” Serbs, resulting in more than 1000 political convictions. See details in: Andrei Milin, Miodrag Milin, Țvetco Mihailov, *Sârbi din România în vremea comunismului. Arhivă sonoră și manualul pătimirii* (Timișoara: 2011), 514-538 (Nominal table with identified Serb political prisoners).

<sup>47</sup> ANRT, Fond UACDSR (SSKDUR), file no. 10/1951, f. 62-63.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 66.

tures... For the designation (sic!) of caricatures we did not manage to train the older comrades, and in most cases caricatures are drawn by school children or, in isolated cases, by some who are more talented. In this way, 129 caricatures were made in communities with a Serb population, exposing the bandit Tito, the Anglo-American imperialists, such as Rudna, Srpski Semarton, Ivanda, Sempetar and others; and caricatures exposing the outlaws, the class enemies of the communities. There are no caricatures in the communes where the class struggle is not being waged, such as Čenej, lately Varjaš, Saravola, Keča and Rekaš, where the peasants are very peaceful and under the influence of the Church. As far as visual agitation is concerned, for the writing of slogans, we could not train the older people to do them; and in all our communes the teachers do them with the school children, with the guidance and help of the Party. These slogans read: "Long live the PMR!", "Long live the RPR!", "Long live the USSR, bastion of peace!" and "Down with the traitor Tito!"<sup>49</sup>

April-June 1951. Report... During this period, the active members of the Organization studied and read the books and pamphlets published in Serbian, as well as the books published in honor of the 30th anniversary of the Party, for example: 30 years of Party struggle, resolutions and decisions of the CC of the PMR, pamphlets by comrade Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, Mrs. Ana Pauker and others. In the communes, for example, in Dinjaš commune, the biography of comrade Stalin, the books of fallen heroes such as Filimon Sârbu, Ocsko Terezia and others were read. In the communes of Čenej and Parac: the biography of tov. Gh. Gheorghiu-Dež's biography, the booklet of Mrs. Ana Pauker. Conferences were also held, at which the heroic struggle of the Party during the 30 years of struggle for peace, democracy and socialism was shown. New songs and recitations were written in honor of the Party's anniversary, showing the heroic struggle of our Party, written and composed by our poets and composers...<sup>50</sup> We carried on the work of enlightening the peasantry to enter the settlements to work their land with SMT tractors, by showing the peasantry the superiority of working the land with technical means and Soviet methods... In the sowing campaign songs and recitations appropriate to the campaign were written. The peasantry was trained to write articles for the wall and street gazettes. During this period the work of sharpening the class struggle was carried out, where the butchers were unmasked: Velin Laza, Ćirić Mihailo, by Marić Sava, in a conference. In the Čanad commune, Paia Jivić, Joca Nedeljkov, Unčanski Nika, who sabotaged the sowing campaign, were exposed through conferences and caricatures. These Titoist butlers also spread Titoist rumors. At the call of the Standing Committee for the Defence of Peace in the RPR and under the leadership of our Party, our Organization has been working to enlighten and mobilize the Serbian working peasantry to sign the World Council's Appeal for the conclusion of a peace pact between the five great powers. The Serbian pe-

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 70.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 75.

ople in general welcomed this action and signed the appeal, thereby contributing to the strengthening of peace and dealing another blow to Tito-Ranković's band of spies. But there were also some isolated cases, very few, who did not want to sign. One was in the village of Soka, where the village clerk Jaić Joca influenced the peasantry not to sign, where it was noticed that none wanted to sign (from that street),<sup>51</sup> and at that time comrade Sablić was there, and it was reported that none wanted to sign. When he asked the peasants why they didn't want to sign, they replied that they wanted to, but Jaić Joca told them not to sign. This rascal was unmasked by comrade Sablić Milutin, the instructor of our organization. We had a new difficulty with the signing of the Appeal for Peace in the Nova Moldava district, in the communes of Langovet, Divič, Radimna and Sokolovac, where the peasants were influenced by the class enemy: that if they sign, they will enter the GAC (Agrucultural Collective). At the beginning of the campaign over 30% refused to sign. After the Titoist class enemies were unmasked and the work was carried on more intensively, man to man, it was possible to get 96% to sign the Appeal for Peace...<sup>52</sup> To unmask the warlike machinations of the Anglo-Americans and their Tito-Ranković minions, the caricatures made and put out in the wall and street gazettes and in the cultural homes contributed... For example, in the Čanad commune, the caricature unmasked the butcher Unčanski Nika, who did not deliver the milk quota on time and how he sold wine on the black market...<sup>53</sup> In honor of May 8 (PMR celebration), the Ensemble of our organization learned 3 new songs, one in Romanian and 2 in Serbian; new compositions made in honor of May 8: "The Party Flag" and "Collectivists Celebrate the Party". The learned songs were sung on May 1st in the Timișoara Capitol Garden. Our poets, in honor of May 8, wrote 11 recitations and poems describing the glorious struggle of our Party during 30 years...<sup>54</sup>

In the countryside, once the fear of the Cominform had subsided, people were gripped by a sense of dread at the prospect of the collectivization campaign, which stripped them of their land overnight. The amateurs who were willing to caricaturize Tito disappeared. This now thankless task was left to the schools. In villages and towns, the Slavic Organization, now under the patronage of the PMR, encouraged competitions and public performances by children on vulgar propaganda subjects: caricatures of Tito were drawn by the dozens, as were poems, rigorously typed according to the thematic repertoire of the day: Stalin and Soviet communism - earthly paradise; Ana Pauker and Gheorgiu-Dej - revolutionaries martyred in capitalist prisons and victors over the Romanian bourgeois and landowners; the Tito-Ranković clique - enemies of communism and friends of the koulaks; Moša

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<sup>51</sup> The street notice, added in ink.

<sup>52</sup> ANRT, Fond UACDSR (SSKDUR), file no. 10/1951, 77.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. See also Andrei Milin, Miodrag Milin, *UACDSR sau sârbii din România...*, 47-53.

Pijade - Jewish spy, sold out to Anglo-American imperialism. The germs of a new intelligentsia in keeping with the times were also appearing; a „revolutionary” approach was also being attempted in the guiding texts of the „Cultural Guide” [“Културни упутник”]<sup>55</sup> „True!” culture was starting from scratch, with them and the magazine „Нови живот” [„New Life”]. The same poisoned arrows against the Belgrade Establishment, but in a more refined idiom, with allegories and metaphors, appropriated at the schools of propaganda and guidance.

Life between the grotesque and the tragic. At the same time, the prisons are groaning with the large number of „Titoist traitors”, the butchers, Yugoslav and Anglo-American spies. The sieve of proletarian vigilantism is increasingly frequent. The new type of justice is being used against not only outright enemies (those who have publicly dared to show pro-Yugoslav sympathies, opinion leaders recruited by Belgrade’s secret services), but also those who are hesitant or merely passive, for the simple reason that they once joined the partisan movement or the various anti-fascist fronts (Slavs, women, youth) in the euphoria of the end of the war. Harsh purges, even among the new activists, who had been trained in Marxism or had collaborated with the Securitate. Those found with a „blemish on their record”, according to the new Regime requirements, had to be „dismissed” from the services, the army, schools... Those who had had the misfortune to be on a list, even in insignificant positions, in the basement of it, as „substitute members” of some subversive organization, disappeared overnight from their homes in black vans. Marriages broke up, people scattered to the countryside, in anonymity, as far away as possible from the city and the unforgiving hand of the Securitate. The Slavic activists and anti-fascists of yesterday found themselves overnight cellmates with the „mortal enemies”, the Legionary fascists, war criminals, collaborationists and imperialist spies.<sup>56</sup>

Nor did the villagers escape. The ones it had lost (or omitted), the Securitate brought back to the public eye the most zealous, pure activists, from district committees and rural town halls, who sealed their attachment by working diligently on the endless lists of compatriots only fit for deportation to the Bărăgan.<sup>57</sup> From some Romanian villages on the border no one was taken up; this was not the case in other villages, especially not those with Serbs, where everyone had his enemy, with good judgment. The children and grandchildren of the newly outlawed were also expelled from school as enemies of the people. The zeal of the purges sometimes reached the

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<sup>55</sup> Miodrag Milin, „Stalinist clichés among Serbs in Romania (1948–1951). Case study: „The Cultural Guide”, *Dupa 25 de ani. Evaluări și reevaluări istoriografice privind Comunismul*, coord. Cosmin Budeancă și Florentin Olteanu, (Iași: Institutul de investigare a crimelor Comunismului și memoria exilului românesc, Polirom, 2017), 119–133.

<sup>56</sup> Andrei Milin, Miodrag Milin, *UACDSR sau sârbii din România...*, 61–62.

<sup>57</sup> Miodrag Milin, Țvetco Mihailov, Andrei Milin, *Sârbii în Golgota Bărăganului: noi contribuții* (Timișoara: Mirton, Uniunea Sârbilor din România, 2016).

point of paranoia: a teacher-activist at the Serbian high school in Timișoara (A. Kurić) harassed his pupils who had been through the torments of the Bărăgan, years afterwards, even though his parents in the countryside had endured the same torments of deportation.

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The poor destiny of a minority at the crossroads of worlds and on the edge of the country; the chameleon's coat became his everyday uniform, in the increasingly illusory hope of redemption. And when, exhausted and useless, he has discarded the lying garment, in the mirror he sees something diffuse, or he no longer sees anything at all: with the garment, without the garment, he remains lost.

### Summary

The former Serbian activists and militants in Romania who had supported the Yugoslav cause refused to show solidarity to the Stalinist program; So, they drafted a counter-resolution favoring Belgrade. This was the moment when the Anti-Serbian repression was triggered. Tens of political trials followed and ended with hard prison sentences. Over 1000 former militants and almost 3000 other Serbians were deported in the fields of Baragan. After serving the sentences, they were constrained (or, those who avoided prison, blackmailed) to sign commitments of collaboration with the Security of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's regime. All of this unfolded in an atmosphere of terror, suspicion and uncertainty. In such a hostile environment, the Anti-Yugoslav cultural propaganda was born, along with the harmful school and media policies, conducted through the institutions of repression of the communist State, of the unique Party and Security. In the aftermath of Stalin's death and the first signs of normalizing bilateral relations, when the Yugoslav diplomacy had received encouraging signals from the Soviet leader Khrushchev, a series of measures were undertaken to address the injustices previously inflicted upon the Serbian population in Romania. For example, the performance of bringing back the Serbians deported to Baragan to the native Banat, at the end of 1955. If towards the end of the 1950s, the effect of violent repression was alleviated, in time things have deteriorated from the perspective of individual psychology. The corruption of character and the extension of forced surveillance among all fields of community life had negative consequences. The behavioral model instituted by communists left its mark for a long period of time upon the Serbian minorities' institutions. The fact is visible after 1989, too, when the former activists have taken the levers of the new democratic instruments.

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