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# Political Violence in the late 1940s' Romania Regime Power and Peasant Protests\*

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This article is part of a larger research project that comparatively explores the relationship between the nature of political regimes and the forms of state violence used against collective protests during 1933-1999 in Romania. The general argument is that the type of power of a political regime influences the level and type of violence it uses in situations of open conflict with segments of the society (in this case, participants in collective actions of protest). More specifically, in the case of non-democratic regimes, (predominantly physical) violence used by the state against its contenders is higher in the early stages of regime consolidation. Once the regime is consolidated, its inherent institutionalization facilitates the use of other, more diluted forms of violence (e.g. psychological violence). The nature of regimes can thus be more thoroughly understood if researched in connection to their uses of power.

The present article examines the reactions of the communist institutions and agents of government against peasant protests in the early stages of the collectivization process. I focus on a single case study, namely peasant riots in Arad county (July-August 1949). The findings guide reflection on the features of the power and the associated forms of political violence that were displayed by the communist regime in its early phase of development (identified in the literature as a feature of the 1947-1964 period). I thus place the analyzed case study in the wider context of the socialist transformation of agriculture and the general process of the communist's regime consolidation and institutionalization<sup>1</sup>. I am to expand on existing (mostly historical) literature on this topic by focusing the analysis around concepts that have undeservedly been ignored thus far and which are briefly discussed below.

According to Michael Mann, there are two types of power political elites use: *despotic power* and *infrastructural power*. Mann defines the former as "the range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups", and the latter as "the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm"<sup>2</sup>. Combining these two dimensions of power, Mann proposes a typology: *feudal states* (low on both despotic and infrastructural power), *imperial states* (high on despotic, but low on infrastructural power), *bureaucratic states* (low

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<sup>1</sup> These initial stages after power takeover are defined by Kenneth Jowitt as "system-building" and characterized by "a desperate bid to gain authority", in *Revolutionary Breakthrough and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Michael MANN, "The Autonomous Power of the State", *Archives européennes de sociologie*, vol. 25, 1984, pp. 185-213.

on despotic, but high on infrastructural power), and *authoritarian* states (high on both dimensions). This typology does not, however, look at the different phases of development of the same regime, which produces variations in the type of power that is used at different points in time. Charles Tilly's typology can fill this gap, by hypothesizing the relationship between regime capacity and the use of collective violence on its territory. Tilly argues that in low-capacity undemocratic regimes, there is a high level of collective violence; in high-capacity undemocratic regimes, on the other hand, there is a medium level of collective violence (because the regime forbids most or all protests and there is "extensive involvement of state security forces in any public politics")<sup>1</sup>. This classification looks primarily at how the existing political opportunities facilitate or deter collective protest. This article slightly shifts the angle of analysis and looks at what determines the establishment and development of these structural features: the type of power that elites rely on.

Although in non-democratic regimes that have high infrastructural powers the actions of agents of government are still carried out without negotiations with civil society, the regime can rely on the institutional "infrastructure" it needs to implement decisions. In this way, it can be argued that once a non-democratic regime increases its infrastructural powers, it tends to decrease the use of physical violence against its contending "subjects". This process is facilitated because wider institutional reach into the territory endows the elites with more levers for exercising power (whereas in the initial period of consolidation, the state does not fully control its institutions, it has a limited reach over its territory, thereby finding the use of physical violence the most effective means of control). By extension, in the absence of institutionalized mechanisms that can be used to prevent or control collective protests, a less consolidated non-democratic regime will rely on the use of non-institutionalized and more physical violence to contain protest. Mann argues that despotic states

"have rarely been able to hold on to such power for long [as] despotic achievements have usually been precarious in historic states because they have lacked effective logistical infrastructures for penetrating and co-ordinating social life"<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, "a despotic state without strong infrastructural supports will only claim territoriality"<sup>3</sup>. Based on this, I argue that during the consolidation stages of the regime (from the late 1940s until the early 1960s), the Romanian communist elites exercised high despotic powers, but had low infrastructural capacities, which favored the use of a high level of physical violence against participants in peasant riots as the only means to secure control.

The consolidation of the communist regime in Romania was in many key aspects based on the institutionalization of the role and functions of coercive state institutions (Secret Police, Militia etc.) as the "basis of state power"<sup>4</sup>. This process increased the regime's infrastructural power (as defined by Mann). The characteristic nature of this power can be analyzed and explained through a careful analysis of one of the key

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<sup>1</sup> Charles TILLY, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Michael MANN, "The Autonomous Power...cit.", pp. 185-213.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 111.

dimensions that characterize any modern state – the monopoly of the use of violence (legitimate or illegitimate)<sup>1</sup>. The meanings, motivations, justifications and methods for using violence show considerable variation across historical periods, geographical regions etc.<sup>2</sup>. As one of its sub-categories, political violence varies according to the historical and social context in which it develops and the nature of the relationship between power configuration and the characteristics of protest groups. Invariably, however, political violence arises in situations of conflict between state and society. It "involves the use of *physical* force and causes injury to the opponent in order to achieve political objectives"<sup>3</sup>. In this article, I expand the definition to objectives that are not necessarily political, but which are perceived or framed by the elites as a threat to their authority (i.e. protests that have at their origins dissatisfaction with socio-economic decisions that are implemented, but which do not directly contend the political order). To an understanding of political violence as only involving physical connotations, I add Johan Galtung's structural dimension of *psychological* violence, which he defines as the "violence that works on the soul", which includes "lies, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats [...] that serve to decrease mental potentialities"<sup>4</sup>. Although not analyzed at length in this article, this dimension of violence is useful for understanding the development of the communist regime in Romania during its later, institutionalized stages.

Along these lines, the state can be defined as a

"field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by 1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and 2) the actual practices of its multiple parts"<sup>5</sup>.

Joel S. Migdal argues that states "are shaped by two elements: image and practice"<sup>6</sup>. These elements can be "overlapping and reinforcing or contradicting and mutually destructive"<sup>7</sup>. The first element – image –

"implies perception [...] the perception of the state by those inside and outside its acclaimed territory as the chief and appropriate rule maker within its territorial boundaries [...] the perception assumes a single entity that is fairly autonomous, unified and centralized"<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by Max WEBER, in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Free Press, New York, 1964, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> A brief, yet comprehensive overview is captured by Peter IMBUSCH, "The Concept of Violence", in Wilhelm HEITMEYER, John HAGAN (eds.), *International Handbook of Violence Research*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003, pp. 13-39.

<sup>3</sup> Donatella DELLA PORTA, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State. A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Johan GALTUNG, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1969, pp. 167-191.

<sup>5</sup> Joel S. MIGDAL, *State in Society. Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

The second one – practice – represents “the routine performances of state actors and agencies” which “may reinforce the image of the state or weaken it”<sup>1</sup>. These two elements cast a “dual view” of the state in Migdal’s understanding:

“The corporate, unified dimension of the state – its wholeness – exposed in its image, and one that dismantles this wholeness in favor of examining the reinforcing and contradictory practices and alliances of its disparate parts”<sup>2</sup>.

Migdal’s definition of these two elements of a state’s power complements Mann’s typology and is useful for the purposes of this article. It helps separate between the powerful despotic image the communist elites were aiming to project starting with the late 1940s and the practice that shaped a weaker and contrasting reality, due to internal inconsistencies, limited infrastructural reach and “loosely connected parts or fragments, frequently with ill-defined boundaries between them”<sup>3</sup>. Exploring the institutional “realm of action” as a “critical component of the center” which “implements the values of the center throughout society” is essential to explaining how authority is exercised in a state<sup>4</sup>. The analysis thus framed helps to look into possible answers to questions regarding the role of institutions in shifting the balance between the types of power elites use at different times in the development of a political regime, as well as into the social changes they determine in the process.

I analyze the “regulatory function”<sup>5</sup> of violence by looking at the decisions of party elites and the actions of the state security institutions (with a focus on their local agents). Peter Imbusch separates between direct violence (used by agents), institutional violence (employed by institutions) and structural violence (enacted through structures)<sup>6</sup>. This distinction is useful because it helps explain the relationship between the predominant form of power of the communist regime in its early stages of development (highly despotic, but low on infrastructural reach) and the forms of violence it engaged in (a mixture of brutal physical violence and “softer” surveillance techniques, with the balance tipping in favor of the former).

Informed by this conceptual framework, the article explores the mechanisms of political violence employed by institutions and agents of government against participants in peasant riots in the summer of 1949 in Romania. The reactions to what were perceived to be “subversive activities” of the peasants illustrate the repressive function of one of the institutions directly involved in the communist state-building process: the Secret Police. The actions that were taken against the protesters serve to illustrate the type of power the regime used in the early phases of its development and the purposes for which it used it.

I rely on existing secondary literature<sup>7</sup>, published documents and documents identified in the archives held by the Council for Studying the Secret Police Archives

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Peter IMBUSCH, “The Concept of Violence”, cit., p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Anale Sighet 2: Instaurarea comunismului – între rezistență și represiune*, ed. Romulus Rusan, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 1995; *Anale Sighet 7: Anii 1949-1953 – Mecanismele terorii*, ed. Romulus Rusan, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 1999; *Anale Sighet 8: Anii*

(hereinafter ACNSAS)<sup>1</sup>. The article outlines the initial stages in the process of collectivization (until 1956), analyzes the mechanisms of state violence against some of the participants in the riots, and points to the specific measures of reorganization of the Secret Police as a result of peasant riots.

## THE INITIAL STAGES OF THE COLLECTIVISATION PROCESS: POLITICAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS (1949-1956)

The socialist transformation of agriculture was formally launched at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee (CC) of the Romanian Workers' Party (PMR) during 3-5 March 1949. Under the false pretext of liberation from the "exploitation of kulaks", the regime officially began the process of suppression of individual ownership of land. Its justification was that

"kulaks consume only a small part of their products, while the rest goes to speculation on the market [while] in the context of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a process of change in the formation of the internal market occurs, [...] in the sense of the abolition of the anarchy which characterizes the capitalist market and its replacement with a new organization"<sup>2</sup>.

The role of the reorganization of agriculture in shaping the new social order is thus confirmed. The Romanian communists took on to replicate the Soviet model. Marking its scale, the Romanian leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, set forth the key axes of the process: the establishment of national and local institutional structures (collective agricultural households – GAC, state agricultural households – GAS, and stations of cars and field engines – SMT) the application of persuasion strategies by local party activists and the use of propaganda directed against the kulaks (the "class enemy"). Due to the extent of territory where collectivization had to be implemented and the regime's uncertainties of how to go about it, the first envisaged stage was to pilot the establishment of collective agricultural households (GAC) only in certain areas, to test for possible problems. These first households were to be established "only with the free consent of the peasants"<sup>3</sup>, taking into account certain criteria, and their multiplication was going to happen

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1954-1960 – *Fluxurile și refluxurile stalinismului*, ed. Romulus Rusan, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 2000; Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 2004; IDEM (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Dimensiunea politică*, vol. I and II, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 2000, 2005 etc.

<sup>1</sup> The translation in English of the documents belongs to the author of this article (including the translation of documents quoted in secondary literature).

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party*, presented by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej at the plenary reunion of 3-5 March 1949 (fragment), in Octavian ROSKE, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Dimensiunea politică, 1949-1953*, vol. I, cit., pp. 57-58.

<sup>3</sup> Octavian ROSKE, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, "Studiu introductiv", in IDEM (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Dimensiunea politică, 1949-1953*, vol. I, cit., p. 18.

"as the growth of socialist industry was to occur, which would then be able to endow socialist agriculture with improved agricultural machinery, as the agriculturalists were going to become capable of running such a collective farm and as the awareness of the working peasants concerning the superiority of and necessity for collective farms would increase"<sup>1</sup>.

The seeming initial caution of the Communist Party was equal to the extent of the huge proportions of the commitment it was undertaking:

"Solving the peasant problem is one of the most difficult tasks of the proletarian dictatorship [...] the main task of our work in the countryside is the restriction of capitalist exploitation and the preparation of the conditions for the socialist organization of agriculture"<sup>2</sup>.

This cautious attitude was in contradiction with the communist authorities' issuing two legal acts of key importance to the process of collectivization. The death penalty was introduced by *Law no. 16/1949*, thereby punishing actions considered to be "crimes", including "treason [...] and bringing harm to state power" (Article 1b), "setting on fire or destruction in any manner of industrial or agricultural products, or forests" (Article 2c), "acts of terror committed by individuals or groups, by any means, and the spread of germs or poisonous substances"; in the same manner "the formation of groups, for terrorist or sabotage purposes" were punished (Article 3)<sup>3</sup>. *Decree no. 83/1949* – amending *Law no. 187/1945* – provided for "the transferal to the state of bourgeois estates", together with associated movable goods. Penalties for those who "prevent or attempt to thwart expropriation [...]" were 5 to 15 years of forced labor and confiscation of property<sup>4</sup>. Another important legislative item was *Decree no. 183/1949*, which stipulated very harsh sanctions such as "correctional prison from 1 to 12 years and a fine from 10 000 to 100 000 lei" for economic misdemeanors<sup>5</sup>. Other penalties were also very harsh, including sanctions of "5 to 15 years of forced labor and a fine of 50 000-200 000 lei" for "[...] hiding, destroying or distorting goods or merchandise [...]"<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party, presented by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej at the plenary reunion of 3-5 March 1949 (fragment), in Octavian ROSKE, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Dimensiunea politică, 1949-1953*, vol. I, cit., pp. 65-66.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution of Plenary Reunion of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' regarding the tasks of the party concerning the forging of the alliance between the working class and the peasant workers and with a view to the socialist transformation of agriculture, 3-5 March 1949, in Dorin DOBRINCU, Constantin IORDACHI (eds.), *Țărănimia și puterea. Procesul de colectivizare a agriculturii în România (1949-1962)*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Law no. 16/1949 for the sanctioning of crimes that threaten state security and the development of national economy*, published in the *Official Bulletin* no. 12/15 January 1949, in Octavian ROSKE, Florin ABRAHAM, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Cadrul legislativ, 1949-1962*, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 2007, pp. 83-84.

<sup>4</sup> *Decree no. 83/2 March 1949* for with additional provisions to *Law no. 187/1945*, in *Ibidem*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>5</sup> *Decree no. 183/1949* for the punishment of economic crimes, in the *Official Bulletin*, no. 25 of 30 April 1949, in *Ibidem*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>6</sup> *Decree no. 183/30 April 1949* regarding economic crimes, Art. 4, par. d), in *Ibidem*, p. 90.

The initial "caution" of the elites was to disappear a year later, when it was decided that the voluntary adhesion of the peasants was no longer a guiding principle in forming the collective agricultural households. Thus, in 1950, the agricultural policy changed its initial direction. The new strategy's objective was to "boost" peasant entries in the collective agricultural structures. The "incentives" that could lead to such actions from the farmers who were losing their land were often coercive. Council of Ministers' *Decision no. 1154/26 October 1950* established the legal parameters of the communist regime's arbitrary power to deploy citizens from "crowded centers" (such as Bucharest and an area of 20 km around it, Braşov, Ploieşti, Cluj, Oradea, Timişoara etc.) and to "establish mandatory residence in any location"<sup>1</sup>. Through *Decision no. 344/15 March 1951*, the authorities were entitled to decide on

"the displacement and relocation from any location [...] of people who [...] harm the building of socialism in the Romanian People's Republic [...], such as those who commit acts of sabotage, oppose the enforcement of laws and measures of state bodies, spread news that discredit the regime of popular democracy and other deeds of a similar kind"<sup>2</sup>.

The reality shaped by peasant resistance, the abuses of the agents of government and the arising problems of implementation was very different from ideological motivations and political planning. This resulted in a less intensive collectivization campaign in 1951. The minutes of the Central Committee of the Romanian Worker's Party of March 5, 1951 transmitted to the local party agents that there would be "penalties ranging up to exclusion from the party and criminal trials for anyone who forced peasants to join collective farms"<sup>3</sup>. The Central Committee *Decision of September 18, 1951* recorded that "in addition to [...] undeniable success in the socialist construction in the villages, there were also serious distortions and deviations from the party line"<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, it was stated that:

"During the year 1950, some former county committees [...] running after quantitative success, bureaucratically planned and forced the growth rhythm of collective farms, going as far as organizing competitions. In their search for large numbers, the local party agents grossly defied the indications of the plenary of the Central Committee of the party, which showed that at the foundation of collective farms to be established must stand the principle of free consent of the peasant workers, as a result of continuous political work of the Party and mass organizations. In some cases, local party activists used coercion methods

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<sup>1</sup> *Decision no. 1154/26 October 1950* of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Romania, in *Ibidem*, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Decision no. 344/ 15 March 1951* of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Romania, in *Ibidem*, p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> In Robert LEVI, "Primul val al colectivizării: politici centrale și implementare regională, 1949-1953", in Dorin DOBRINCU, Constantin IORDACHI (eds.), *Țărănimea și puterea...cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> *Decision of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party of 18 September 1951 regarding work related to the establishment of collective agricultural households*, in Octavian ROSKE, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Dimensiunea politică, 1949-1953*, vol. I, cit., p. 247.



in the process of forming collective farms, which were not in agreement with our party's line of action [...] Only the peasants' deep conviction about the great advantages of collective farm can serve as a basis for the creation of truly lasting households"<sup>1</sup>.

Going beyond the ideological form of discourse, one can observe that far from being unacquainted with the "coercive methods" they challenged rhetorically, the communist authorities acknowledged their inability to actually fully – or even partially – control the realities on the ground (including local agents of government themselves). This points to a low level of infrastructural power the regime had in those years. Aware the danger of extensive use of coercive means at a time when the power of the regime was not consolidated, the Central Committee decided to replace them by using a strategy of persuasion, coupled with intense propaganda measures, deciding that "any method of coercion, of economic or administrative pressure to determine the peasant workers into entering collective farms will be combated with determination"<sup>2</sup>.

*Decree no. 131/June 18, 1952* allowed a renewed legal offensive against peasants, introducing the notion of "forced requisitioning" of agricultural products undelivered on time and in the amount required by the quotas, establishing that

"non-compliance with the obligation of collective farms and citizens to deliver [...] agricultural products subject to collection, brings [...] a liability that consists in mandatory compliance by way of judicial order through the payment of a civil fine [...]"<sup>3</sup>.

Coercive provisions were increased in the more elaborate *Decision no. 1554/22 August 1952* by the legal sanctioning of deportation to labor colonies. The Decision indicated "the more active resistance of hostile elements" and incriminated several categories: those who "spread alarmist, biased, hostile rumors"; "verbally abuse the Romanian Workers' Party [...]"; "instigate racial and chauvinist manifestations"; "instigators to insubordination or failure to comply with orders"; "reactionary elements or former exploiters"; "active cadres of the former fascist parties and bourgeois-landlord groups"<sup>4</sup>. It is important to note that these criteria will be found in most of the charges brought against those who resisted the collectivization process. Many court motivations of sentences would appeal to the Criminal Code (Article 209) and invoke "conspiracy against the social order".

*Decree no. 6/1950* of the Council of Ministers of the Romanian People's Republic<sup>5</sup> should be correlated with *Decision no. 1554/1952*, because the former legalized the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> *Decree no. 131/18 June 1952* published in the *Official Bulletin*, no. 30/ 18 June 1952, in Octavian ROSKE, Florin ABRAHAM, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Cadrul legislativ, 1949-1962*, cit., p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> *Decision no. 1554* of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Romania, 22 August 1952 regarding the establishment of work colonies, obligatory residence and work battalions, in *Ibidem*, p. 297-298.

<sup>5</sup> *Decree no. 6/1950 for the establishment of work units*, issued by the Chair of the Grand National Assembly of the People's Republic of Romania on 13 January 1950, *Ibidem*, pp. 118-119.

existence of "work units", while the second established the creation of "labour colonies, forced settlement and labor battalions". The concrete consequences of this type of approach of the relationship between state and society – which proves the incapacity of the communist regime to control all the levers of the process that it launched – can be quantified under the large number of arrests and imprisonment resulting from repressive practices that led to prison overcrowding. By consequence, the number of peasants who could work the land was diminished, and increased agricultural production remained an unfulfilled goal:

"We concluded that for a number of reasons the process unfolded frantically, thousands of people were arrested who should not have been arrested and especially working peasants, who are the majority, more than the kulaks [...] Văcărești prison is full, prisoners sleep in the yard, they do not have enough space, something awful is happening there, something unimaginable"<sup>1</sup>.

In the case of the collectivization process, external factors were as important as domestic ones in the decisions taken by the communist authorities in Romania. On the one hand stands the internal economic conditioning, and on the other hand the political changes occurring in the USSR after Stalin's death. Both ought to be considered. In the summer of 1953, Dej stated that

"there was a misconception on our side [...] we should have established such a scale in developing the country's economy on branches and within those branches, that would suit a long-term process, not we have designed it, on a short term basis"<sup>2</sup>.

Dej also stated that "there must be an end to the mistakes [meaning] to introduce a serious policy of curbing rather than of elimination"<sup>3</sup>. The constant parameter remained the fact that agricultural production needed to increase significantly. Once again, one can notice considerable quenching of anti-kulak rhetoric, previous abuses being assigned to "deviant" party elements. On the background of de-stalinization in the communist camp, collectivization remained a major concern for the Romanian Communist leaders:

"The main tasks of the party in the second five-year plan regarding the socialist transformation of agriculture are [...] increasing the political and organizational work with a view to creating, at a faster pace, new agricultural and household collective association, respecting nevertheless the free consent of peasant workers; strengthening and developing existing collective farms and agricultural associations"<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe GHEORGHIU-DEJ, *Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party of 19 November 1952*, in Octavian ROSKE, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Dimensiunea politică, 1949-1953*, vol. I, cit., p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> IDEM, *Minutes of the plenary reunion of the Central Committee*, in Octavian ROSKE, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Dimensiunea politică, 1953-1956*, vol. II, cit., p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes of the plenary reunion of the Central Committee*, 5 August 1953, in *Ibidem*, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> *Activity Report of the Central Committee*, presented by Ghe. Gheorghiu-Dej at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party (fragment), in *Ibidem*, p. 323.

The new indicators established in the Plenary meeting in December 1956 introduced the abolition of "mandatory quotas for wheat-rye, corn, sunflower and other grains (barley, oats, beans, peas), potatoes, hay and milk" from the 1st January 1957<sup>1</sup>. The poor harvest of 1956 was an additional reason for the "relaxation" of the pace of collectivization, with the objective to "strengthen [...] the alliance between the working class and the working peasantry" through "the practice of such prices [which] would lead to incentives for agricultural producers [...] to increase global production and the production of goods"<sup>2</sup>. This measure had the ideological objective of consolidating the power of the regime in a period when its weaknesses had been exacerbated by contingent events. There was also an economic objective: increased agricultural production.

The collectivization process was again accelerated beginning 1957, while the number of peasants who were arrested and sentenced many years in prison for acts considered as crimes increased again as compared with 1956<sup>3</sup>. There were peasant riots after 1957, for example in the county of Vrancea (Vadu Roșca), Olt (Vâlcele), Dâmbovița (Dobra), Argeș (Mozăceni Deal), but they were limited in scale and outcomes.

Following this review of the first stages of collectivization, the next section looks into short and long-term measures taken against the peasants who participated in the riots and their families; it also examines some of the measures taken to consolidate and expand the functions of the Secret Police as a direct consequence of the riots.

## THE PEASANTS AND THE REGIME: THE RIOTS IN ARAD (JULY-AUGUST 1949)

In the summer of 1949 collective peasant protests occurred in several locations in the counties of Arad, Bihor, Botoșani and Suceava. According to existing research, such protests took place in 7 cities in Arad and in 18 localities in Bihor county. A year later, in the summer of 1950, there were repeated riots in Vlașca County (in Ciuperceni, Tudor Vladimirescu, Silișteea, Baci, Sârbenii de Jos, Sârbenii de Sus, Corbii Mari, Ghimpați – Udeni etc.). This section explores the peasant riots in Arad in the summer of 1949 and the communist authorities' reactions of them by illustrating the range of the violent mechanisms used to repress opposition.

### *Short-Term Measures: Killings and Arrests*

The alleged "counterrevolutionary actions" of this type were mostly reduced by the communist propaganda to the status of "hostile activities of the kulaks". Those identified as the leaders of the rebellions received the stigma of reactionary elements

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<sup>1</sup> Draft of Action Plan, 25 December 1956, in *Ibidem*, pp. 386-387.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> According to numbers in Secret Police files, in 1956, 705 peasants were arrested and convicted, and for the following three years, their number grew to 1308, 1829 and 1499, quoted in Octavian ROSKE, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, "Colectivizarea agriculturii: Represiunea totală, 1957-1962", *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, vol. IV, no. 21, 1998, p. 215.

that instigated the poor or middle peasants to protest actions and disobedience against party directives, thus becoming a threat to state security. In the case of the protests in the Apateu, Somoșceș, Berechiu and Sepreuş villages in Arad (July-August 1949) – where the riots broke out simultaneously – repression manifested itself through the violent intervention of Militia troops, platoons of guards and Secret Police battalions. This deployment of armed forces was clearly disproportionate, as the peasants were mainly using agricultural tools as “weapons”. Their resistance was ended abruptly after a few dozens of hours after the breakout of the protests.

The responsibility for organizing peasant riots in the northern counties (including Arad) in the summer of 1949 was placed on “reactionary elements” and “kulaks” almost without exception, although many peasants who participated could not be classified as such:

“To prevent the State Plan in the agricultural sector regarding the completion of grain collections, reactionary forces tried to organize a series of events that in some regions culminated in rebellions [...] this action did not occur by chance, and did not have a local character, but has been prepared, organized and led by certain reactionary elements who tried to expand it”<sup>1</sup>.

Identifying the “instigators and the leaders of the kulak actions” was the first step towards the “liquidation of counterrevolutionary actions”<sup>2</sup>. The actions of those held responsible for the outbreak and development of the protests were deemed as “conspiracy against social order and the security of the people”<sup>3</sup>. For ideological reasons, the communists sought to blame “subversive organizations” for plotting to undermine state security through the riots:

“The counterrevolutionary actions of the kulaks in the counties of Bihor and Arad were not spontaneous, but organized activities, prepared for a long time by the elements belonging to subversive organizations”<sup>4</sup>.

There was disproportionate use of violence aimed to “stifle the rebellion and prevent its expansion in surrounding regions, [and] the provision of threshing and

<sup>1</sup> Account concerning the operations carried out to establish order in the regions where rebellions occurred from Arad-Bihor-Sălaj counties, no. 31.721/ 6 August 1949, Ministry for Internal Affairs, Troops Commandament, 1st Unit, in ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 15, “Counterrevolutionary kulak actions 1948-1949”, The Division of Security Police, File nr. 5628. Sp, booklet no. 1, ff. 158-165.

<sup>2</sup> Informative study on the counterrevolutionary kulak actions from Bihor-Arad counties, 12 August 1949, reproduced in Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, cit., p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, Dosar 560, vol. 1, RPR – Ministry of Internal Affairs – Operative Archives – *Subversive organizations and groups, Apateu commune – Arad county*, Record of proceedings from 17 Octombrie 1949, issued by the General Unit of the People’s Security, f. 314.

<sup>4</sup> *Synthesis on peasant rebellions in Bihor – Arad*, 12 August 1949, Informative study on counterrevolutionary kulak actions from Bihor – Arad, in Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, cit., pp. 104-118.

harvest collections in normal conditions”<sup>1</sup>. During peasant riots, the degree of peasant violence was relatively low compared to that used by the agents of government. Often spontaneous, these protests were characterized by a type of “unspecialized”<sup>2</sup> violence that needs to be related to the economic, social and cultural context of Romania in those years (lack of peasant literacy, means of communications across localities and regions etc.). With a view to “restoring order” in the villages where peasant riots occurred, police bodies resorted to on-spot executions of some of those that were identified as the “instigating heads of rebellion”. The purpose was to discourage the peasants and contain the protest from developing further. Documents attest to the killing of 4 peasants in Sepreuş, 2 in Somoşcheş, 3 in Apateu and 1 in Berechiu<sup>3</sup>. Executions were followed by the operations of identification of all those who had taken part in the “rebellions” with the mission to “restore order and peace in all regions, eliminating the possibility of expansion of acts of rebellion and turmoil [...], persuade the population on a clear political line, causing it to follow orders concerning the proceedings regarding collection”<sup>4</sup>. Secret Police documents attest the arrest of 57 peasants in Sepreuş, 49 in Somoşcheş, 19 in Berechiu and 22 in Apateu<sup>5</sup>. The families of those who were executed, counting a total of a few dozen members, were relocated. The remaining “enemies of the people” who were suspected of having taken part in the protests were arrested or placed under surveillance. Secret Police documents recorded 78 “instigators” of the riot in Sepreuş (Arad), considered by the repressive forces as “organizers” and “leaders of agitators, gross rebels”<sup>6</sup>. According to the same documents, 22 individuals were arrested in Apateu, 18 in Berechiu, 10 in Moşiori and 4 in Somoşcheş<sup>7</sup>. Approximately thirty peasants were deported

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<sup>1</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 15, RPR – Ministry of Internal Affairs, “Counterrevolutionary kulak actions 1948-1949”, Unit of the Security Police, File no. 5628.Sp, Booklet no. 1, *Account on establishing order in the regions with peasant unrest in the Arad-Bihor-Sălaj counties* no. 31.721/6 August 1949, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Troops Commandament, Section I, ff. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Donatella DELLA PORTA, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> According to telegram no. 11/20853-8 of 4 August 1949, sent by the Regional Unit of the Security in Timișoara to the General Unit of the People’s Security Bucharest, in Teodor STANCA, “Răscoalele țărănești din 1949 din județul Arad, reflectate în documentele organelor de represivitate”, *Analele Sighet, Anii 1949-1953: Mecanismele Terorii*, vol. 7, ed. Romulus Rusan, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 1999, pp. 679-670.

<sup>4</sup> *Account on establishing order in the regions with peasant unrest in the Arad-Bihor-Sălaj counties*, no. 31.721/6 August 1949, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Troops Commandament, Section I, in ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 15, RPR – Ministry of Internal Affairs – “Counterrevolutionary kulak actions 1948-1949”, Unit of Security Police, File no. 5628.Sp, Booklet no. 1, ff. 160-165.

<sup>5</sup> According to telegram no. 11/20853-8 of 4 August 1949, in Teodor STANCA, “Răscoalele țărănești din 1949 din județul Arad...cit.”.

<sup>6</sup> Nominal tables of individuals instigating to rebellion identified and detained from Sepreuş commune, Arad, 3 August 1949, in Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, cit., pp. 76-79.

<sup>7</sup> Nominal tables of individuals instigating to rebellion identified and detained from Sepreuş commune, Arad, 3 August 1949, in *Ibidem*, pp. 79-82.

following the investigations of the Secret Police and the Militia, as a consequence of their participation in the riots in Arad county<sup>1</sup>.

The situation in Arad county is presented in the Secret Police records as follows:

"In four villages there were aggressive protests. In other 5 communes there was also large-scale unrest, without aggression having occurred [...] all 9 communes that experienced protests are occupied by the army. A total of 112 instigators were arrested, among which 10, while trying to escape the escort, were suppressed. The families of the 10 [people mentioned above], 33 people in total, were evacuated"<sup>2</sup>.

As follows, the repressive mechanisms were also used against the families of those who participated in the riots: evacuation or dislocation actually meant deportation. For example, a report signed by representatives of the Militia and the Secret Police drafted in August 1951 shows that six families from Sepreuş village were deported<sup>3</sup>. The situation is similar for Somoşcheş and Apateu villages, where a number of three, respectively four families were deported<sup>4</sup>. Two years after the riots, the communist authorities find that "dislocations that were made [...] during the peasant unrest that took place had the effect of improving the state of mind in [these] communes, while producing panic among the hostile elements and fear among the wealthier citizens"<sup>5</sup>.

To serve ideological purposes and to legitimize the repressive action of the Militia and Secret Police against peasants, the spontaneous nature of the protests was contested by the officials of the communist regime. Recognizing the riots had indeed been indeed spontaneous would have posed a serious legitimacy problem. Scapegoats were identified, whose actions were justified by their social or political membership:

"The events in Arad and Bihor show that in counter-revolutionary actions, the kulaks essentially rely on legionary elements [...] remnants of traditional parties, elements released from the army, on some of the village priests, especially the Catholics and some leaders of the Baptist denomination"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Tabel with deported peasants following the rebellions in Arad, document in Dan CĂTĂNUŞ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, cit., pp. 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> National Historical Archives, Central Committee Fund – Organizational Section, file 71/1949, ff. 1-10, quoted in Nicoleta IONESCU-GURĂ, *Dimensiunea represiunii din România în regimul comunist: dislocări de persoane și fixări de domiciliu obligatoriu*, Corint, Bucureşti, 2010, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Account of the situation in regions of Bihor, Arad, Baia Mare, Suceava and Sibiu, 10 August 1951, in *Ibidem*, p. 318.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 323.

<sup>6</sup> *Synthesis concerning peasant rebellion in Bihor – Arad*, 12 August 1949, *Informative study on counterrevolutionary kulak actions in Bihor – Arad counties*, in Dan CĂTĂNUŞ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, cit., pp. 104-118.

The investigation files drafted by the Secret Police justified the involvement of the middle and poor peasants as a result of the kulak's use of "propaganda methods, showing them that it is better to ask to be given their share of the goods following thrashing operations in nature, and not money"<sup>1</sup>. Peasants riots in Arad were therefore dismissed as

"terrorist actions [that] had a well-defined purpose, in the sense of inciting the population to rebel against the given laws and orders, being led by kulaks, who did not kindly look to their lost positions through the measures that had been taken in connection with the gradual quota"<sup>2</sup>.

A number of 44 persons were accused of being either "leaders of the rebellion", to have taken "an active part in events", to have called out "anti-democratic slogans", to have "stormed into public institutions", of "inciting the population to rebellion". The Secret Police agents claimed that the rebellion of Apateu was "led by agitators recruited by the kulaks"<sup>3</sup>. The documents also mention a number of 55 people who were investigated – "poor and middle peasants" – that were "trained either directly by the kulaks, or their committed agents". They "[took] part in the protests, without committing terrorist acts"<sup>4</sup>. Following investigations carried out over a period of two months, a number of Secret Police documents mention 27 people who

"initiated, organized, participated and instigated to rebellion, [who] were armed and committed armed attacks against public authorities' offices and their representatives, which they devastated, burned down, also instigating the inhabitants of Apateu commune to rebel"<sup>5</sup>.

The Secret Police's official version concerning the 1949 riots in Arad county asserted the idea that "the event did not occur by chance and did not have a local character, but was prepared, organized and led by reactionary elements who tried to expand it"<sup>6</sup>. The instructions received by the Secret Police forces deployed to "restore order" were very clear:

"Those who indulge in crimes, acts of terrorism (damages, cutting telephone wires etc.) or robbery will be executed; if aggressors employ force or fire against troops and authorities and do not subject to legal summons, use of fire is permitted, aiming at liquidating the leaders"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 560, vol. 1, RPR – Ministry of Internal Affairs – Operative Archives – Subversive organizations and groups, Apateu –Arad, Recording of proceedings from 29 August 1949, General Unit of the People's Security, f. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 1-23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 19-23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, ff. 16-18.

<sup>6</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 15, RPR – Ministry of Internal Affairs, "Counterrevolutionary kulak actions 1948-1949", Unit of Security Police, File no. 5628.Sp, Booklet no. 1, *Account concerning operations of establishing order in the regions of peasant unrest from Arad-Bihor-Sălaj* no. 31.721/6 August 1949, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Troops Commandament, Section I, ff. 158-165.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 161.

### *Long-term Measures: Forced Dislocations and Deportations*

Secret Police documents state that some of those arrested were released after completion of the investigations, but many others were sent to prison or in forced labor units or being house arrested in Dobrogea (generally in the region of Constanța county). The following overview of stages of intervention is telling:

"The repressive actions, thus organized and carried out, led to [...] the suppression of the rebellion and the punishment of the instigators [...] in the Oradea region of 16 kulaks were executed, in the Arad region 12 kulaks, all heads of rebellion; in both regions, 300 people were taken to Medgidia, Constanța county; in Oradea region there are still 170 persons who are arrested, that have still not been investigated; [...] the introduction of law and order in the region"<sup>1</sup>.

Although decisions which established the labor units, colonies, battalions, and forced residence were taken formally in 1950 and 1952 (as previously discussed), the quotation above confirms that the dislocations ("evacuations" in the communist jargon) existed prior to the issuance of these decisions.

As a mechanism of political violence involving physical assault on individuals, dislocation and forced resettlement (deportation in more blunt terms) in other regions of Romania was recurrently practiced in the early stages of communist power: "People in the county of Arad who were relocated were taken to Cermei and housed on the school premises [...] on August 3, 1949, they were shipped in freight trains bound for Medgidia, Constanța county"<sup>2</sup>. According to a report concerning the elements relocated throughout 1949, 439 families in the following regions were relocated in 1949: Oradea – 336, Baia Mare – 8, Arad – 18, Cluj – 13, Suceava – 16, Bacău – 5, Câmpulung – 24 and Mureș – 10<sup>3</sup>. These persons "were forcibly relocated in Constanța region, being afterwards engaged in unskilled work"<sup>4</sup>.

The effect was close to that expected by the authorities:

"The forced removals carried out in 1949 after the rebellions that occurred had the effect of improving the general attitude in communes, while at the same time producing panic among hostile elements and fear among the wealthier citizens, which resulted in the change of the strategy used beforehand, that of making outright propaganda. The trend among the middle peasantry was to join collective farms without, however, being convinced that they are making the right choice and working hard"<sup>5</sup>.

For a certain period of time, the deportations lacked a legal basis, as acknowledged by the elites themselves:

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<sup>1</sup> Account concerning operations of establishing order in the regions of peasant unrest from Arad-Bihor-Sălaj no. 31.721/6 August 1949, ff. 162-163.

<sup>2</sup> National Historical Archives, Central Committee Fund – Organizational Section, file 71/1949, f. 43, quoted in Nicoleta IONESCU-GURĂ, *Dimensiunea represiunii din România în regimul comunist...cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> ACNSAS, file 172, ff. 368-369, *Ibidem*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>4</sup> ACNSAS, file 11653, ff. 1-10, *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Account, 10 August 1951, ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 11653, f. 252, in Nicoleta IONESCU-GURĂ, *Dimensiunea represiunii din România în regimul comunist...cit.*, p. 83.



"Such dislocations do not appear to have been made using legal orders, but they were made following orders of superior command [...] Dislocation were not all made based on established guilt, some of them were made on the basis of the material status and following the proposals of former interim committees and commanders of militia stations"<sup>1</sup>.

Apart from the attempt to shift the blame to lower levels, this quotation also illustrates the infrastructural problems the regime faced in its early years in power.

Together with their deportation, the peasants' were also dispossessed of their movable and immovable property. Council of Ministers *Decision no. 308/1953* provided the legal framework for these assets to remain in state ownership<sup>2</sup>. According to *Decision 6100/27 July 1955* on the lifting of domiciliary restrictions of relocated elements, commissions were organized in 1955 to check the relocated elements, reaching a total of 8850 displaced families from Arad, Timișoara and Craiova regions, the majority in 1951, who were relocated in the "special villages" in the Bucharest, Constanța and Galați regions:

"Of the 8850 families displaced, we propose lifting residence restrictions on a number of 3692 families, while 5055 families are to continue on the same restrictions. Of the total of 3692 families for whom proposals to lift residence restrictions have been made, for 513 families we have proposed lifting residence restrictions with the right to return to the original place of settlement"<sup>3</sup>.

The lifting of residence restrictions was carried out for the following categories:

"Poor and middle peasants, mistakenly deployed in the kulak category as well as former servants of the kulaks deployed with them; those who escaped from the USSR, but who are not former exploiters and are not known for hostile activity; [...] families in which the one who caused the entire family's displacement has died; old and sick who are unable to provide for themselves and who have relatives in other parts of the country that can support them; those relocated as suspicious elements and against whom there is no compromising material"<sup>4</sup>.

Interestingly, however, that among those proposed to remain with "residence restrictions" by these committees were "[...] elements that participated in the kulak rebellions, who instigated and had leadership role in these riots"<sup>5</sup>. Although the report specifies that the references pertain to those displaced during 1951, it is evident from this quotation that among those displaced were also those who participated (or their families) to the riots in the summer of 1949 in the counties in the northern part of the

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<sup>1</sup> Account, 24 March 1951, ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 172, ff. 21-22, in *Ibidem*, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Art. 12, in *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry for Internal Affairs, Special Commission for the Verification of Dislocated Elements in the New Communes, Report no. 00703883/27.07.1955, in ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 55, vol. 24, RPR – Ministry of Internal Affairs – Operative Archives – Operative Correspondence Fund of the Security, ff. 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 2.

country (Arad and Bihor). Secret Police files do not contain clear references to the reasons for which those persons had received the sanction of dislocation and house arrest<sup>1</sup>.

### *Organizational Measures as Riot Outcome*

Peasant riots of 1949 revealed many infrastructural weaknesses in the communist institutional structure. Poor quality of the informative work being considered by the authorities as one of the leading causes that allowed for the shaping of the peasants' collective actions. One of the immediate consequences of peasant rebellions in Arad and Bihor in the summer of 1949 was increased focus on gathering information and monitoring civilians, in order "to know kulak elements with all their activities, past and present, and the methods employed by them"<sup>2</sup>. Thus, "regional Secret Police departments established with regional Secret Police and county offices chiefs the need to reorganize the surveillance network security in rural areas"<sup>3</sup>.

The strategies and action plans were clearly designed to prevent the occurrence of similar situations. Some clear directions can be identified through which these agents of government aimed to strengthen their operational mechanisms. The main objective was to increase the control over the peasantry. "Informative actions" had to be strengthened, in order to gain insight into the "frame of mind" of the peasants and to uncover "class enemy plots", as well as the way in which the local Party, Secret Police and Militia representatives performed their tasks. The structural inefficiencies are highlighted in the reports of the Ministry of Interior's High Command Troops, which were drafted in the wake of the peasant rebellion's suppression:

"The work of persuasion was not organized enough, while the elements responsible for carrying out this task had not been sufficiently prepared; seeing the existing information, preventive measures were not taken in time"<sup>4</sup>.

"Security linemen" were appointed in every commune, emphasizing the deficiencies to be corrected:

"Persuasion work was not sufficiently organized, and those who performed this task were not sufficiently prepared; seeing the existing information, preventive measures were not taken in time; [...] work was initially unassertive and has decisive actions to suppress were not taken"<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Report no. 1, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Commission for the verification of dislocated persons with fixed residence in the new communes, ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, File 55, vol. 22, RPR – Operative Archives – Operative Correspondence Fund of the Security, f. 2.

<sup>2</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 4022, vol. I, f. 100, in Nicoleta IONESCU-GURĂ, *Dimensiunea represiunii din România în regimul comunist...cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 4022, vol. I, f. 100, in *Ibidem*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Account concerning operations of establishing order in the regions of peasant unrest from Arad-Bihor-Sălaj* no. 31.721/6 August 1949, Ministry for Internal Affairs, Troops Commandment, Section I, in ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 15, "Counterrevolutionary kulak actions 1948-1949", Unit of Security Police, file nr. 5628.Sp, Booklet no. 1, f. 164.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

As follows, there would be increased surveillance carried out by bodies whose monitoring capacity had proven to be relatively inefficient.

In the attempt to prevent riots similar to those from 1949, prior to the organization of the harvesting campaign in 1950, communist authorities intensified the surveillance operations in the villages. They decreed the strengthening of

“informative operations in the rural environment, with the purpose of always knowing the exact frame of mind of the peasants [...]; the identification of the class enemy’s conspiracies and their methods of counteraction; the way in which competent bodies responsible for these operations fulfill their duty”<sup>1</sup>.

Drastic measures were to be taken against

“hostile elements who instigate villagers not to do the necessary agricultural work in the places assigned by the local authorities; incite peasants to not give in the fixed rates; instigate or attack the storage places, convoys and warehouses where grain is stored; instigate or attack party and state authorities in charge of these operations; launch alarmist reports in order to prevent the campaign”<sup>2</sup>.

An order of the Directorate General of the Secret Police addressed to all Regional Units in the country (issued in July 1950) asked for complete reports on the cropping campaigns, structured according to certain parameters. Reports were to contain references to

“aggressive mass actions following agitation caused by the enemy or lack of tact of state bodies (attacks, arson etc.), non-aggressive mass actions, events that include groups of people who manifest their dissatisfaction with the cropping and collection process, noisy mass actions, tacit disobedience to give in cropped wheat, or [other] quotas, including mass protests [...], isolated, individual actions, arson, sabotage, spreading manifestos, [...] the number of complaints submitted by peasants in each county”<sup>3</sup>.

Equally important is, from the same perspective, the Order regarding the actions to be taken by the Secret Police representatives in order to resolve in a timely manner the grievances expressed by the peasantry, with the purpose of preventing protest events:

“The malfunctions or other various causes that determine changes in the frame of mind of the peasantry will be solved on the spot, where appropriate, through the referral to the competent bodies to take the necessary measures”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Security White Book*, vol. II, 1994, pp. 232-233; ASRI, Fund “D”, file no. 8974, vol. 2, ff. 84-85, *Address of Security Unit in Bucharest regarding its tasks in reorganizing the collection and threshing campaign in the summer of 1950, 1 July 1950*, in Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, cit., p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 7, vol. 4, RPR, State Security Council, *Order of the General Unit of the People’s Security no. 233/335784 of 6 July 1950 to all regional units in the country*, f. 110.

<sup>4</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 8, vol. 1, RPR – State Security Council, *File regarding syntheses and orders D.S.C. 1949-1950, Order of the Ministry for Internal Affairs*, Unit of Bucharest Security office no. 14/3934/20 January 1950, f. 23.

These examples describe much of the ideological jargon found in the Secret Police documents. The attempts to identify the levers of exerting power are obvious. The despotic aim found in the content of normative acts dictated by the central elites proved somewhat more difficult to implement on a local level. In this sense, the documents found in archives of the former Secret Police lead to the conclusion that the operations that were part of collectivization process had in many ways a deficient organization: mistakes in setting quotas were very common, plough-lands were not separated from the non-arable ones, the individual or collective resistance and boycotting of the peasants were quite extensive, there was a lack of adequate storage space for crops, a lack of security of the warehouse where they were stored, a poor organization of the local activists of the Communist Party, a lack of effective coordination between the Secret Police and the Militia, an arbitrary setting of quotas of grain that were due on land area, not on harvest output etc. The coordinated, homogenous and efficient implementation policies dictated from the center largely depended on the concrete conditions that existed in Romania's counties. Moreover, there were tensions not only between high-ranking officials at the center, but also between them and local party authorities. The situations in the localities where party activists tried to implement central directives could not be controlled at any time from the center.

The structure and content of reports submitted by various Secret Police regional units to the General Headquarters clearly emphasize the subordinate relationship that existed between them, but can also be interpreted as a weakness in the chain of command. The relationship of interdependence was clear: to carry out its directives, the center depended on the local agents of government (party, Secret Police, militia). An example in this sense can be found in a note issued by the General Headquarters which emphasized that "the measures [...] taken (the tardy gathering of evidence) rather encourage than suppress [the kulaks'] actions"<sup>1</sup>. Transferring the blame for committing illegal acts on the local level, the "weak political work among the poor peasantry"<sup>2</sup> was incriminated, as well as the inefficient management of the collectivization process by the local authorities:

"Party organizations have undertaken poor political work in villages so that poor and middle peasantry could be influenced by the class enemy [...] showed a lack of vigilance, allowing opportunistic and hostile elements to creep into their leadership"<sup>3</sup>.

By way of conclusion, the central authority was faced in the first decade of its accession to power with major institutional challenges. The regime had to penetrate (to use the term of Michael Mann) existing structures and shape them according to the new guiding ideology. However, while building its infrastructure, it had to rely

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<sup>1</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Fund, file 8, vol. 1, RPR – State Security Council, *File regarding syntheses and orders D.S.C. 1949-1950, Note from the General Unit of the Security to the Bucharest Unit no. 145/104.665* – Confidential, Top Secret, ff. 606-607.

<sup>2</sup> *Informative account of the counterrevolutionary kulak actions in Bihor-Arad*, 12 August 1949, in Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Octavian ROSKE (coord.), *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Represiunea (1949-1953)*, cit., p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 104-118.

predominantly on the despotic powers which bred a high level of violence against the population in its territory. Peasant resistance, although never framed directly as a contestation of political power, was perceived by the elites as a threat to its authority and legitimacy. Weak in the infrastructural reach that would secure the regime, violence was used as a replacement for assuring obedience from the population and permanence in power. In the process of consolidating power, elites relied on and strengthened what was to become the main pillar of communist power: the institutions with repressive functions. This article has briefly illustrated this process by addressing the organizational measures that were taken by the elites in strengthening the reach of the Secret Police in Romania's villages in the late 1940s.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study of peasant riots in the summer of 1949 in Arad county described the mechanisms used by various communist agents of government to repress protest and punish those found responsible for "terrorist actions": executions, investigations and surveillance, psychological pressures, death threats, beatings, evictions, dispossession of movable and immovable property, the prohibition on return to the native village, the inability to communicate with family members who were in other locations, interruption of children's education, arrests, false accusations, forced labor, famine.

The analysis of primary sources (documents preserved in the archives of the former Secret Police) reflects the rhetorical legitimization of the use of these mechanisms: the restoration of social order. It also serves to identify the weaknesses of a despotic regime that had not yet developed its infrastructural powers and was therefore faced with the gaps in local implementation of its decisions and policies: numerous technical problems, poor training of local communist cadres and Secret Police representatives, as well as peasant resistance and boycotting of measures were significant obstacles that the communist elites sought to minimize by relying on political violence as a means of governing. While the ideological and legislative components of the regime were relatively well defined during the initial stages of regime development, these could not replace the pragmatic functions of the system. To make up for the infrastructural weaknesses of the regime that were an obstacle to exerting full societal control, the elites strengthened the repressive component and used political violence as a leading mechanism of control.

The structural weaknesses of the communist state – some of which are outlined in this article – explain the use of a high level of violence as a political resource of control. The stages of collectivization outline in the first section of this article illustrate the constant oscillation between "restriction" and "violence" as types of state coercion<sup>1</sup>. While the former aims to "establish parameters within which individuals (victims as well as bystanders) modify their behavior in an attempt to avoid sanctions in the present and future [...]"<sup>2</sup>, the latter is intended to "eliminate a part of society deemed unacceptable while compelling acquiescence or guided change within others"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Christian DAVENPORT, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, Cambridge University Press, New York & Cambridge, 2007, pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

Both strategies increase significantly the costs of protest, because the resources and opportunities that are available to individuals are drastically reduced and the risks of failing actions are among the most severe.

Although in most cases peasants opposed the mandatory quota system that was set arbitrarily and without regard to objective conditions, the communist authorities perceived the peasants' opposition as protests against the political establishment. As follows, to the violence of peasants during the riots (involving the destruction of Communist Party buildings, the interruption of telephone lines or physical attack on some of the local representative of the parties), the communists responded with disproportionate violence, engaging militia troops and border guards who possessed superior armed resources. The elites were threatened as they were aware of the legitimacy gap that existed. This came across glaringly with the opposition of poor peasants, regarded as the main "beneficiaries" of the process of collectivization. This explains the constant propagandistic attempts to divert the blame for the "hostile manifestations" and "actions of sabotage and incitement to disorder" on the ideologically convenient "class enemy": the kulaks. This justification legitimated repressive interventions against the protests.

The "accusations" that were brought against those who had been identified as "enemies", "agitators" or "instigators" were often unclear and unsubstantiated. Most times, however, as evidenced by Secret Police reports or informative notes, the "plots" against the social order were reduced to the free public expression of dissatisfaction or grievances about the injustices that took place during the process of collectivization. The repressive tactics identified in this article show the existence of a management system that incorporated *violence* as the main mechanism of government. Instruments used to neutralize the resistance of those who opposed regime practices were perceived as a threat to an already shaky legitimacy, as well as the social networks that previously existed. The findings of this article also point to a dynamics of the repressive phenomenon that cannot be fully controlled by the authorities that initiate it. As such, the combination of decision making at the national level, and the implementation conducted by local agents of government that implement orders is conducive to unanticipated results that challenge the rhetorical defense of regime cohesiveness and intended territorial reach. Punitive actions are often disproportionately high compared to the force of the estimated "danger". It can thus be argued that the regime's violence acquires "irrational tendencies" in moments of perceived threat, as was the case with peasant riots<sup>1</sup>. Thus, in an attempt to redefine the power relations between state and society, the communist elite used *violence* as a key governing tool, leading to countless abuses. One illustration of the cumulative effect of these abuses discussed in this article was the decimation of the workforce in agriculture as a result of a large number of imprisonments and forced labour sentences. The extensive campaign of arrests of various targets in the class enemies marked its institutional incapacity to support the coercive ideological momentum of its leaders or field agents (i.e. prisons were insufficient for the number of prisoners they received).

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<sup>1</sup> In the sense defined by Kenneth JOWITT, in *Revolutionary Breakthrough and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, pp. 97-99.

Thus outlined, the characteristics of the political violence used by the regime elites during the early stages of regime development has a crucial role in understanding the communist phenomenon and its impact on the socio-political order in Romania. Political violence was manifested through various techniques during the communization process and it was the basis that allowed the regime to survive and strengthen its infrastructural power. Political violence – marked by predominantly physical uses during the analyzed period and gaining more psychological connotations later on – had the overarching goal of preventing mobilization of critical voices against the regime by institutionalizing a state of fear and distrust that would prove near-fatal to the articulation of cohesive opposition for nearly five decades. The effects of these policies gradually increased the isolation of individuals from the public space and the shaping of a political culture dominated by suspicion.

This article has shown that various measures were taken as a result of peasant rebellions to consolidate the institutional capacities of the communist regime. Although one can easily notice the inability of farmers to organize sustained and repeated protests at regional level, their actions being confined to the local level (village or commune), Secret Police documents reveal, however, that the power of groups of peasants who opposed the agricultural policies of the Communist Party lay not in their strength or organization, but in the numbers of protests that took place during 1949-1962 (be that open collective or individual protest or forms of boycotting quota impositions or forced enrollment in collective farms). The consolidation of repressive institutions of government grew into a constant feature of regime development. Increased infrastructural power allowed the regime to lower its level of political violence applied through physical methods (widespread imprisonment and forced labour) – which dominated the late 1940s until the early 1960s – and increase the psychological use of political violence (through the penetration of society by Secret Police networks of surveillance and collaboration).

The institutions exerting political violence represented the basis of the communist regime's infrastructural power. The years 1951 and 1953 can provide a good illustration in this respect. A series of directives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (General Directorate of the Secret Police) were issued, which were intended to more effectively organize "work and management of information in the villages", "operational records of hostile elements in the Romanian People's Republic", the organization of "informative investigative work of the Ministry of Secret Police organs" or to "improve work with agents"<sup>1</sup>. These directives – as do many others in the coming years – show continuous concern of the communist elite for training cadres and consolidating the repressive mechanisms of the Secret Police, those that could ensure the consolidation of the infrastructural state power.

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<sup>1</sup> These documents can be accessed at [www.cnsas.ro/ist\\_sec.html](http://www.cnsas.ro/ist_sec.html).