The Romanian Borders under the Pressure of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict

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Bordering Tito
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Even though it was supposed to be a united and coherent front for many years, the newly established communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe experienced the first signs of internal disagreement as early as the spring of 1948[1]. The growing personal and ideological dissensions between the two most prominent communist leaders, Iosip Broz Tito and Joseph Stalin[2], brought important political changes to the entire bloc of "people's democracies". The conflict put the communist regime from Romania in an apparently difficult

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[1] See Leonid Gibianskii, "The Beginning of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Cominform", in Salvatore Veca (ed.), *The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milano, 1994, pp. 465-482/p. 465.

[2] As our focus in this article will be on the impact that this conflict had on the Romanian border control institutions, and especially on those segments charged with the Yugoslav border, as well as on the general political atmosphere in Romania toward this country, the events and the story behind the Stalin-Tito split will be left aside. Nevertheless, being the source of all these changes and a major pointer for the volatile character of the border atmosphere within a totalitarian regime, most of the times affected by a dictator's views, we have to indicate some references on this topic. As a major subject for cold war studies, the split between Tito and Stalin has been tackled by almost every general study on the relations between the capitalist and communist blocs, most notably by those studies, which dealt with the first decade of communist rule in Eastern Europe. There is also a significant amount of literature exclusively dedicated to this topic, which is implicitly more qualified to express the real levers behind this conflict and behind all its consequences, out of which we are interested in the Romanian ones. For an inside view see Milovan Djilas, *Tito: the Story from Inside*, Harcourt, New York, 1980,translated by Vasilije Kojić and Richard Hayes. A good perspective, though a more general one is that of Ivo Banac in the first chapter, entitled"Sources", of his book *With Stalin against Tito. Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1988, pp. 3-44. We also have to mention here two articles that focus on the causes of the split: Geoffrey Swain, "The Cominform: Tito's International?", *The Historical Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2, September 1992, pp. 641-663 and Jeronim Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, Spring 2007, pp. 32-63. All of these analyses emphasize Tito's desire to play a more important role within the communist bloc, which made him take bold initiatives without Moscow's approval that not only upset Stalin as an overall leader, but also represented a threat for the strategic directions the Soviets had in relation to the West. See Geoffrey Swain, "The Cominform…cit.", p. 641.

position. As the other communist regimes in the area, the Romanian one was now forced to relate to Yugoslavia as if to an enemy, in spite of the good relations that the two countries had enjoyed until then.

That was historically a good relationship, going a long way back, and not only since the communists had come to power[3]. However, at that time, in 1948, the communist regime was young, strictly dependent on Moscow, and aggressively seeking internal consolidation. Relying on the communist habit of meeting out punishment to traitors, as well as on the fact that Stalin wanted to provide Tito with a lesson, the assessment of the Romanian communist regime laid out above represents one of the arguments explored in this article, especially in its first part, which is centred on the policy changes in relation to Yugoslavia. It means that, especially with regard to the border control regime, the period analysed here was further influenced by the peculiar pressure Russia put on Romania, which was a former "close friend" of Yugoslavia's. Also, it was influenced by the desire of the Romanian communists to closely follow Moscow's indications, all of these being *sine qua non* conditions for the regime's consolidation, an evolution of events they were seeking anyway.

As if the general conditions set for Romanians under communist rule to travel outside their country weren't already harsh, the border regime created through the set of measures adopted after the Tito-Stalin split was one of the most emphatic examples of the "Westphalian model of border management", though not quite on the same principles that the latter was built on. As defined in a recent work by Ruben Zaiotti[4], by this latter term, which today is related to the common interpretation of border as a "marked and sometimes fortified line in the landscape", we understand a historical trajectory of managing territorial sovereignty[5] by various political units[6]. The most important feature of this culture, apart from its nationalistic approach to the management of borders, is that the states must possess stable, clearly identifiable and controllable borders. This culture is opposed to that of the fluid medieval borders or the contemporary cultures of border control imagined at a regional level and named

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[3] Leaving aside historical facts, among them the absence of any armed conflict, which might be the most obvious one, we can quote here a *geopolitical proverb* that circulates among Romanians and says that "Romania has only two good neighbours: Serbia/Yugoslavia and the Black Sea".

[4] Ruben Zaiotti, *Cultures of Border Control. Schengen, and the Evolution of European Frontiers*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2011, p. 14.

[5] Maybe the most well known definition of territoriality, which we consider valid here, comes from the classical work of Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York & Melbourne, 1986, p. 19, who sees it as "an attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control aver a geographic area".

[6] For the larger framework of the "Westphalian culture of border control" see Ruben Zaiotti, *Cultures of Border Control…*cit., pp. 45-47.

by Zaiotti Schengen and Brussels[7]. Westphalia, the name of this nationalistic culture of border management, comes from the place where the treaty with the same name was signed in 1648, which is commonly held to mark the demise of the medieval political space. Zaiotti traces to it the roots of this border control culture. That is why this culture is intimately related to the modern state system, being spread around the world overwhelmingly, especially since late 19th century, reaching its peak after World War II, and not surprisingly in the Cold War era.

The Paradox of Communist View on Borders

We went through these general assertions on border control cultures because we consider them important for the right placement of our subject within a historical and theoretical background. The same author mentioned above, however, starts from the idea that the spread of communism in Europe was a challenge to the Westphalian model, mainly because of its communist anti-nationalistic approach to borders, and concludes that, in its functional characteristics, this post-war evolution actually reinforced the model that it was challenging[8]. This was the case especially with the Iron Curtain (a string of several borders), which therefore, from this functional perspective, became an extreme example of Westphalian model, even though it wasn't an ethnic-national border at all[9]. Starting in 1948, this was also the case with the Romanian-Yugoslav border, which became a special part of the Iron Curtain because it was also subject to the rivalries occurring within the communist bloc.

To complete our general assessment of the atmosphere in which the Soviet pressure on Romania occurred, we have to also say that, by its nature, the communist regime, through its ideology and practice, was leaning toward an autarchic and isolated society, which included as an almost compulsory condition the closing of borders and a strict control of every border related activity. In fact, this ideological inclination toward isolationism and its immediate cause, the constant suspicion toward any external or supposedly externally linked activity formed the basis of communist border management and its development[10]. That is why, in

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[7] *Ibidem*, pp. 91, 117.
[8] *Ibidem*, pp. 55-57.
[9] See the German case of separation.
[10] On the ideological roots of the communist system of border control management see the first two chapters ("1. The Paradox of Socialist Isolation: Ideology and Territory in the Construction of Soviet Border Controls", and "2. States, Regimes, and Border Controls: The Link between Communism and Isolation") of Andrea Chandler's book, *Institutions of Isolation: Border Controls in the Soviet Union and its Successor States, 1917-1993*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1998, pp. 3-29.

Romania's case[11], which was different from that of the other communist countries neighbouring Yugoslavia only in its details, the regime's pressure on society as a consequence of Tito's "betrayal" of the Soviet bloc was motivated significantly by the need for internal repression[12]. A significant part of this repression resulted from military preparations, which were mostly defensive, and deeply affected people's lives. Under these circumstances, Romanian communists, acting under Moscow's direct supervision, planned to prevent potential weaknesses if faced with a very seriously supposed invasion by Western "imperialists" through Yugoslavia[13].

To quote an internal report of the Romanian border guard, "the border with Yugoslavia is not only the line of demarcation between two states it also represents the boundary between two political beliefs and social arrangements"[14]. This being said, the objective of the regime was extreme. As stated by a former border guard superior officer, the expected result, which came as a response to pressure from Moscow generated by the Stalin-Tito split, was the complete shut down of the Romanian border with Yugoslavia[15]. Starting from the radical change in political orientation and discourse toward Tito, and from its implementation within border control institutions, in the following pages we will attempt to evaluate not only the organizational outcomes and their consequences in the field within these institutional bodies, but also the repressive results of this political turn of events.

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[11] For an extended discussion on the so called "besieged city" mentality of communism in power, applied to the Romanian case, see Dan Drăghia, "Apărarea regimului sau apărarea frontierelor? Trupele de grăniceri (1944-1960)", in *Structuri de partid şi de stat în timpul regimului comunist*, *Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului în România*, vol. III, Editura Polirom, Bucureşti, 2008, pp. 158-160.

[12] Victor Frunză, *Istoria comunismului în România*, Editura Victor Frunză, Bucureşti, 1999, p. 341.

[13] An interesting discussion on the Soviet intentions toward Yugoslavia, applied to the Hungarian case, which we think is also true in the Romanian case, can be found in László Ritter, *War on Tito's Yugoslavia? The Hungarian Army in Early Cold War Soviet Strategy*, pp. 1-33, part of the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP), www.php.isn.ethz.ch, by permission of the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich and the National Security Archive at the George Washington University on behalf of the PHP network, last accessed at http://php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/coll_tito/documents/introduction_ritter.pdf, on 3th June 2014. The author stresses the fact that the Hungarian army "was *not* preparing for an invasion of Yugoslavia", but only "to repel an enemy attack on Hungary first by defensive and then by counter-attack operations in case of a potential world war" (*Ibidem*, p. 3). This assessment, which we consider valid overall, goes very well with the general USSR policy of defensive consolidation and of avoiding direct conflict, which was preferred in the first years after the war within the communist bloc.

[14] Arhiva Consiliului Naţional pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii (ACNSAS), Fond *Documentar*, Dosar (D) 13.117/3, fila (f) 57.

[15] Sever Neagoe, *Personalităţi din evoluţia grănicerilor în secolul XX*, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 155.

Tito – from Hero to Spy

As was the case with the other East-European countries, Romania's change of attitude toward Tito was sudden and radical. In December 1947[16], Tito was welcomed to Bucharest by Romanian communist leaders with massive honours, being considered one of the greatest friends of Romania. Thousands of people gathered to hail him as such. The newspapers described his visit minutely, in eulogistic terms[17], calling him "the legendary hero"[18], and a special brochure detailing the events of his visit in Bucharest was published[19]. The climax was the signing of a mutual treaty of friendship between the two countries.

Though some sources[20] indicate reticence on the part of Romanian communists, led by their newly minted leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej[21], only a half year later Romania wholeheartedly joined the June 28 Cominform[22] resolution against Yugoslavia[23]. This resolution condemned Tito as anti-Marxist,

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[16] Tito didn't officially inform Stalin in advance about his visit to Romania, a situation in which the communists from Bucharest could be considered accomplices. See Geoffrey Swain, *Tito. A Biography*, I.B. Tauris, London &New York, 2011, p. 92.

[17] See the official newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), *Scânteia*, III/XVI/1003-1004, Friday 19th and Saturday 20th December 1947.

[18] *Ibidem*, III/XVI/898, Monday, 1 December 1947, cover page. Not much later, when the split between Tito and Stalin occasioned mutual attacks within the Romanian communist leadership, all these exaggerations made to please the "Yugoslav special guest" were used in the internal fight for power and became vulnerable spots mostly for those in charge of the propaganda apparatus at the time of the visit. See Ioan Scurtu, "PMR şi criza iugoslavă",*Dosarele istoriei*, vol. III, no. 3(19), 1998, p. 37.

[19] See *Mareşalul Tito în România*, Bucureşti, 1948. Earlier that year a Yugoslav propaganda brochure, written by B. Polevoi, was also translated and published: *Mareşalul Iosip Broz Tito: mare luptător pentru pace şi democraţie*, Bucureşti, 1947.

[20] See Leonid Gibianskii*, "*The Beginning of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict…cit.", pp. 479-481. See also Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *O istorie trăită*, Editura Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, 1997, pp. 22-23.

[21] Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901-1965) – former railroad technician, the communist leader of Romania from 1948 until his death in 1965. More on his regime in Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania.Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State 1948-1965*, C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd,London, 1999.

[22] Cominform was The Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, established in September 1947 to replace the old Comintern, which was dissolved in 1943. It was essentially the international organization through which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union controlled the other communist parties in the world.

[23] On the resolution preparations see Silvio Pons, "The Twilight of the Cominform", in Salvatore Veca (ed.), *The Cominform*...cit., pp. 483-504. For a discussion about Gheorghiu Dej's attitude in this critical period from the beginning of the conflict see

basically using the classical communist sentence of not following Moscow's line. The official text also included references to Tito's nationalistic orientation, categorizing Yugoslavia as a potential "colony" of the West[24], which automatically meant an "imperialistic danger" came from its direction. It is by no means insignificant that this meeting to condemn Yugoslavia was held in Bucharest. The Romanian capital was also soon to be hosting the Cominform propaganda headquarters, most notably its official newspaper, *For Lasting Peace, for People's Democracy!,* which had previously been located in Belgrade[25].

Almost immediately after the Cominform meeting, on July 2nd, the Romanian communist political bureau unsurprisingly decided to release an internal document requesting all the party departments to treat the Cominform resolution against Tito as the new official attitude toward Yugoslavia[26]. From then on, all references to the Yugoslav communist leadership, were made by using the standardized phrase "the Tito-Rankovici[27] gang of traitors and spies", and a fierce internal propaganda was disseminated portraying the Yugoslav leader in this way[28]. In 1949, the above-mentioned treaty of friendship was unilaterally broken by Romania. However, the most obvious and best known expression of Romania's role within the Soviet led communist bloc campaign against Tito[29] was the fact that Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was designated to read

Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development. The Case of Romania, 1944-1965*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 127-130.

[24] *Clica fascistă a lui Tito, duşman de moarte al păcii, democraţiei şi socialismului*, Editura pentru Literatură Politică, Bucureşti, 1953, p. 5.

[25] Florin Constantiniu, *Schisma roşie. România şi declanşarea conflictului sovieto-iugoslav, 1948-1950,* Editura Compania, Bucureşti, 2007, pp. 37-39.

[26] *Ibidem*, pp. 99-103.

[27] Alexander Rankovici (1909-1983) – influential Yugoslav communist leader of Serbian origins, Minister of the Interior and the chief of Tito's secret police until his purge, in 1966. See http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/86-3-147.shtml, last accessed on June 25th 2014.

[28] See Victor Frunză, *Istoria comunismului…*cit., p. 396 and Paul Sfetcu, *13 ani în anticamera lui Dej*, Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, Bucureşti, 2000, p. 133. For exemplification, see also I. Lautu, *Abandonarea teoriei marxist-leniniste asupra claselor şi a luptei de clasă de către conducerea Partidului Comunist din Iugoslavia*, Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român (PMR), Bucureşti, 1948; Horia Liman, *Tito. Mareşalul ienicerilor*, Editura de Stat, Bucureşti, 1950, which has an eloquent series of anti-Tito cartoons; Aurel Duma, *Clica lui Tito, unealtă sângeroasă a imperialiştilor americani şi englezi*,Editura PMR, Bucureşti, 1951, which tries to link Yugoslavia with the "western imperialists"; *Poporul iugoslav luptă împotriva regimului fascist al lui Tito*, Editura Direcţiei Generale Politice MAI, Bucureşti, 1952; and *Clica fascistă a lui Tito…*cit.,which is a collection of anti-Tito speeches by some Romanian and international communist leaders.

[29] For the Stalinist anti-Tito campaigns, see Adam Ulam, *Titoism and the Cominform*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952and Lilly Marcou, *Le Kominform: le*

the report against Yugoslavia (entitled "The Yugoslav Communist Party in the hands of assassins and spies")[30] at the last Cominform meeting, which was held in November 1949 in Budapest.

Nevertheless, these public manifestations, which made Romania one of the most vocal mouthpieces for Tito's expulsion from the "communist family"[31], were only the surface manifestations of the pressure applied by Moscow to act against Yugoslavia. In the context of this completely new political environment, what was maybe more significant were the unseen implications of it. Most importantly, the Soviet presence in Romania, which was already significant, grew in intensity and was oriented toward palpable anti-Yugoslav measures. The Soviets became more involved in the communist administration, more so as the negative Yugoslav experience was still fresh in their minds. Thus, it was no surprise that a person like Mark Borisovici Mitin[32], who was one of Stalin's leading doctrinaires and the editor in chief of the Cominform newspaper in Bucharest, became Moscow's most influential advisor in Romania, especially in relation to Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader whom he supported[33].

Because of the Romanian domestic context, with the communists completely dependent on Moscow's presence and engaged in a still undecided fight for power within their own ranks[34], Stalin's directives were not only followed without fail, but rapidly became a source of internal competition between the communist leaders in terms of how closely they were followed. At the Politburo meeting of July 2nd, some voices already started accusing Dej of being a "personal friend" of Tito[35]. At a time when Stalin removed

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[30] *comunisme de guerre froide*, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, 1977.

[30] The entire text of the report, which opens the volume, can be found in *Clica fascistă a lui Tito*…cit., pp. 5-28. In his memoires, Gheorghiu-Dej's former chief of staff pleads that the Romanian leader was forced by Stalin to read the report, the main ideas within it being personally transmited to him by the Soviet dictator. See Paul Sfetcu, *13 ani în anticamera lui Dej*, cit., p. 308. Signed by the same Gheorghiu-Dej, we can also cite here an article published in number 9/36, 1 May 1949 [International Labour Day, especially marked within the article] of the Cominformnewspaper *For Lasting Peace, for People's Democracy!*,entitled "The Gang of Tito – Deadly Enemy of the Socialism". See Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, *Articole şi cuvântări*, Editura PMR, Bucure□ti, 1951, pp. 287-293.

[31] Florin Constantiniu, *Schisma roşie*…cit., pp. 51-52.

[32] Mark Borisovici Mitin (1901-1987) – philosopher, former director of the *Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin* Institute. During his service in Bucharest he was also a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). See *Who's Who in the USSR 1965-66*, Scarecrow Press, New York, 1966, p. 560.

[33] Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 122.

[34] *Idem, Irepetabilul trecut*, 2nd ed., Editura Curtea Veche,Bucureşti, 2008, pp. 194-199.

[35] See Paul Sfetcu, *13 ani în anticamera lui Dej*, cit., pp. 308-309; Ioan Scurtu, "PMR…cit.", p. 35.

from power many communist leaders in Eastern Europe, some of them under Tito related accusations[36], it is no doubt that this situation contributed to Dej's determination to do anything that was needed to stay in power[37]. Also, he was under great pressure to display an aggressive attitude toward Tito's Yugoslavia at that moment, just like all the other Romanian communist leaders, regardless of their internal positioning. Thus, it was no coincidence that collaboration with Tito was one of the most common accusations across the spectrum of the political "show trials" in 1950s Romania[38].

At the same time, anti-Tito fever went way beyond the high level political struggle, penetrating well within the party membership and across the whole of society, not only through the above mentioned massive propaganda campaign, but also as a result of the daily atmosphere and the activity of the secret police. Even though this was not specified in the Romanian Penal Code, the accusation of "Titoism" became, by daily practice, a distinct and quite widespread category of prison sentences[39]. Being associated with treason and espionage, it usually came with convictions meant to set an example[40], like those issued in the "Titoist trials" in 1950.

An "Anti-Tito Culture of Border Control"

The changes within the border guard system and activitycame as quickly as those in Romania's political attitude toward Tito, although it took time for it to be extended and eventually implemented.For the Romanian communist leaders, the fear of even accidentally failing to do Moscow's bidding became so high that even in small administrative matters they refrained from doing anything without Soviet approval. For example, in September 1948, when

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[36] For example, in Hungary, Interior Minister Lászlo Rajk (1909-1949), was arrested, convicted and executed, the main charges against him being his nationalistic orientation and espionage for Tito, which automatically meant treason. The same thing happened to Koçi Xoxe (1917-1949), Defense and Interior Minister of Albania, and with Traicio Kostov (1897-1949), Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria. See Robert Lee Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1956.

[37] Florin Constantiniu, *Schisma roşie*…cit., pp. 44-47.

[38] More on this subject in George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948-1954*, Praeger Publishing, New York, 1987, pp. 93-110.

[39] They were sentenced under the Law No. 16/13.01.1949, which provided special judgements for "crimes that endanger national security and the growth of the national economy". See Mircea Chiriţoiu, *Între David şi Goliath. România şi Iugoslavia în balanţa Războiului Rece*, Casa Editorială Demiurg, Iaşi, 2005, p. 131.

[40] There were several cases in which people received even death penalties, for "enemy propaganda against the regime" because they made positive comments about Tito's Yugoslavia. See *Idem*, "România lui Gheorghiu-Dej combate 'pericolul titoist'", *Dosarele istoriei*, vol. III, no. 3(19), 1998, pp. 43-44.

Yugoslav officials had to come across the border for a simple inauguration of a certain jointly built waterworks project, Gheorghiu-Dej himself demanded that his subordinates ask for Soviet advice first[41]. As we will see later on, in this highly politicized atmosphere in society brought about by the split between Tito and Stalin, the biggest pressure fell on border related institutions and activities. The changes within this area, especially regarding the border area with Yugoslavia, were so radical that they must be addressed separately in order to comprehend their breadth, which wasn't limited only to border control, but also encompassed pre-emptive measures.

Even though it was an overall change in the political orientation of the country, the actual pressure exercised on Romania by the Soviets was mostly concentrated on border control institutions, mainly on the Border Guard High Command (in Romanian – CTG)[42], but also on the intelligence agencies and on the army, thus putting extra pressure on Romanian society as a whole.A systematic overhaul of border control and border defence followed, targeting both the organizational structure and the personnel of the institutions mandated with these activities. In the first stage, the communist authorities, drawing deeply on the propaganda against Tito, reformed the old organisational structure and changed personnel inherited from pre-communist times. In the second stage they focused on fortifying the southwest border in the eventuality of a possible war against Yugoslavia.

The reorganization of this entire system followed a pyramid model, with its top tier developing a new ideological and conceptual perspective and its bottom tiers regulating the activities of small units, as well as the deployment of wartime devices (land mines, barbed wire, and trenches) or discretionary measures against regular people. In this way, the communist regime turned the Romanian-Yugoslav border into a virtual war zone.

An "anti-Tito culture of border control" formed instantly throughout the institutions of the border guard.On the 1st of July 1948, the official newspaper of the Romania army, which was compulsory reading in all militarized units, opened with the 28th June Cominform resolution against Yugoslavia. Two days later, the same newspaper published on its front page an interpretation of the resolution signed by Leonte Răutu[43], the chief ideologue of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP)[44]. The border guard system being mostly a militarized structure, we can say that these two articles represented a sign of the internal

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[41] Florin Constantiniu, *Schisma roşie*…cit., p. 169.
[42] Comandamentul Trupelor de Grăniceri.
[43] Leonte Răutu (1910-1993) – former head of the Romania department at Radio Moscow during World War II, later head of the propaganda apparatus in communist Romania. For a detailed portrait see Cristian Vasile, Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Perfectul acrobat. Leonte Răutu, măştile răului*, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2008.
[44] *Glasul Armatei*, year IV, no. 616/618, 1948, pp. 1-2.

changes to come. Following the general reorientation of the regime against Tito, the first change reshaped the political framework under which the institutions commissioned with border control acted.

The large majority of border related activities were an attribution of the CTG, although not exclusively, and this is the institution we will be focusing on here. With the official insertion of political officers into the army, roughly a year before, this was already a heavily politicised body, so the regime had only to disseminate internally its new approach toward Yugoslavia[45]. The change was quick and radical, because political education was already in effect as an integral part of the professional training of CTG personnel[46]. In July 1948, the classes for all types of personnel had as their main themes "Tito's treason" and the propaganda against him. As with the entire reorganization of the border guard system, the task was closely supervised by the Soviets through their advisers attached to the CTG. The most important of them was Major General Mihail Boico[47], who acted staring in February 1948 as a political lieutenant of the CTG commander, in charge of Political Direction. In December 1950 he was appointed full commander, being replaced in November 1952 with a party member, Major General Florian Dănălache[48], only recently integrated into the army with a military rank, specifically for this job[49].

Under their command, what we called the "anti-Tito culture of border control" became a management policy in itself for the CTG, which designed its entire activity in line with the "rejection of the *Titoistic* danger". Commander Boico in particular unleashed a severe internal personnel purge on discretionary grounds, going from simple reasons of class origin to almost deadly charges of sabotage and espionage for Tito, which was the case with several high ranking officers[50]. As stated in the opening of a statement made by the unit in charge of defending the Yugoslav border:

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[45]   Sever Neagoe, *Personalități din evoluția grănicerilor*…cit., p. 154.

[46]   For exemplification, there is a Work Plan of the Political Directorate of the CTG for the last four months of 1949 which describes in detail, on 8 pages, the activities to be carried out at each and every level of the institution. See Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (ANIC), Fond *Direcția Generală Politică a Ministerului de Interne* (DGPMI), D 26, ff. 40-48.

[47]   Mihail Boico (1912-1972) – born Romanian, he joined the RCP in the 1930s; it was said about him that he was Moscow's agent, being also an officer of the Romanian secret police, the *Securitate*. See Doina Jela, *Lexiconul negru. Unelte ale represiunii comuniste*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2011, p. 51.

[48]   Florian Dănălache (1915-1984) – former propagandist of the RCP, later Ministry of Transport. See Florica Dobre (ed.), *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R. 1945-1989. Dicționar,* Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2004, p. 200.

[49]   See Sever Neagoe, *Personalități din evoluția grănicerilor*…cit.,pp. 151, 162-163, 172.

[50]   See *Ibidem*, p. 166. See also Mircea Chirițoiu, *Între David și Goliath*…cit., p. 132.

> "[Yugoslavia] is an aggressive State, ruled by the *Tito-Rankovici gang of spies and assassins* [emphasis added], working for the American-English imperialists. This sector of the border is used for inserting spies and diversionists into our country, with the purpose of obstructing the peaceful work of our people"[51].

On the legislative side, all of the bilateral agreements on border matters with Yugoslavia were officially repealed or ignored in practice, as any mutual dialogue ceased or was reduced strictly to the unavoidable day to day problems of the border area. Of these agreements, the most harmful for the border guard's activity was the repeal of the Protocol on the Demarcation of the Common Border, dating from 1923, and that regarded small border traffic of people and goods[52]. As such, the CTG was an institution "at war", even though not officially, and no changes were spared in order to help it in its goal of closing the border. In the end, however, the military preparations made by the communist bloc in view of a possible intervention in Yugoslavia, which we think was heavily conditioned by the international situation and designed rather defensively, turned out to be used as a tool of domestic repression.

One of the most important aspects proving this assertion is the tight connection established between the CTG and the political police structures, mainly the General Directorate of People's Security (DGSP), the *Securitate* as it is commonly known. By June 1947, the CTG had already been moved from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Along with this change in the chain of command, border guard officers were also stripped of their natural attributes of investigating unlawful acts on the border, a task that was assigned to the *Securitate* investigators[53]. Such peculiar communist tendency of relaying on the police for the control of border traffic[54] was reinforced by the conflict with Tito. This turned the CTG into a simple military institution, on guard and ready to respond with violence to any attempts at violating border legislation, as it was left without many of its former attributions making it an organisation for general border management. For example, the Department for the Control of Foreigners and Passports was moved from the CTG to the General Police Directorate. The Department of Border Crossing Points had the

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[51]   ACNSAS, Fond *Documentar,* D 13.117/3, f. 57.
[52]   See ANIC, Fond *Consiliul de Stat – Decrete*, D 6/1949, ff. 233-235; *Ibidem*, D 1/1950, ff. 24-7, 30-2.
[53]   *Îndreptarul organului de cercetare penală al grănicerilor*, Bucureşti, 1969, p. 3.
[54]   In an internal document dated 1956 from the Interior Ministry it was clearly stated that "watching and defending the Popular Republic of Romania's state frontier is one of the main duties of State Security". See Arhiva Ministerului Internelor şi Reformei Administrative (AMIRA), Fond *Direcţia Management şi Resurse Umane* (DMRU), D 10/1956, f. 3.

same fate for a short eight months, until the communist authorities realized that the police didn't have personnel qualified for this activity[55].

When the conflict with Tito broke out, the intelligence activity carried out by the *Securitate* within the CTG was concentrated at the Yugoslav border[56], along with placing under the same command the troops belonging to both institutions. This marriage of convenience of the CTG and the *Securitate* reached its high point in 1952. That is when CTG troops formally merged with DGSP troops under the jurisdiction of a special Minister, that of State Security, the name of the institution being changed into that of Border Guard and Operative Troops Directorate[57].

More than a Simple Part of the Iron Curtain

This later development was directly related to the structural changes brought to the institution by the Stalin-Tito split. With the only concern of the regime in the matter of border control and defence being the Yugoslav border, the rest of the CTG sub-units deployed on other borders started to be used for operations against the partisans in the mountains[58], hence the "Operative" denomination. This was the climax of a radical structural reorganization triggered by the political tensions with Yugoslavia. The core elements of this reorganization were applied in 1949. The overall result was that the total amount of people at the CTG's disposal increased from around 20.000 people at the beginning of 1948 to nearly 50.000 in 1951. Of them, only 22.000 people were involved in day to day border defence, the rest being kept on reserve alert for possible tensions at the borders, i.e. the Yugoslav one[59].

The structural reorganization had two steps. First, in March 1949, the Yugoslav border, which previously was part of a larger border defence sector together with most of the Bulgarian border, was assigned solely to the 4th Brigade stationed in Timişoara. Then, in October, this brigade was turned into the 1st Division, stationed in Lugoj, the only large military unit of the CTG, with the other ones being simple brigades. The creation of this division, which had two large regiments, later four, best expressed the political tensions with Yugoslavia. It was by far the largest unit in size, with all its needs in this regard

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[55] Victor Aelenei, *Retrospectivă istorică a grănicerilor români şi a Poliţiei de Frontieră Române*, Editura Pro Transilvania, Bucureşti, 2001, pp. 186-187.

[56] Sever Neagoe, *Personalităţi din evoluţia grănicerilor…*cit., p. 154.

[57] For more information on the relation between the two bodies see Dan Drăghia, "Apărarea regimului sau apărarea frontierelor?...cit.", pp. 169-174.

[58] Sever Neagoe, *Personalităţi din evoluţia grănicerilor…*cit., pp. 172-173.

[59] ANIC, DGPMI, Rola (R) Nr. 1326, Cadrele(c) 858-860.

promptly satisfied, also having most of the available reserve troops at its disposal. At the same time, it was the best-equipped unit[60], in no way inferior to an active combat division[61]. The most striking example from this latter perspective is the engineering works executed within the 1st Division sector, which turned the border area into a virtual battleground. Starting in 1948, a barrier of permanent fortifications arranged in a very extensive system was built, including trenches, barbed wire fences and mine fields. For example, in 1951 alone, 318 km of barbed wire and 60.080 square meters of land mines were laid, with estimates from 1952 mentioning a possible total of 930.000 mines[62].

These organizational changes that doubled the personnel and endowed the CTG with combat tools proper were accompanied by and facilitated a more profound change within the border guard's range of activities. The increased number of soldiers in particular helped with the introduction of the Soviet model of border service, an evolution that also increased the density of border guards. The Soviet model meant a change of border watch layout toward a more centralized structure, as well as more extensive surveillance. Before this change, the basic unit for border watch was the so-called picket unit, which was a subdivision of a platoon. Three or more platoons formed a company, and the companies were subordinated directly to a full-fledged unit, the battalion, which had all the services the regime needed for control, especially political officers. With the new organization, the basic unit was the platoon, and later the border company. This was a structure that shortened the chain of command, meaning that the new basic unit was directly subordinated to the border battalions. It also enabled the regime to increase the density of soldiers on the border to almost 20 per km, meaning one border guard every 50 meters. Moreover, the border service expanded its daily routine in space and time.

From a maximum depth of 1 km into Romanian territory before, the border sector[63] grew to almost 4 km, on multiple watch lines, with four patrols in a 24 hour interval[64]. These were measures taken in particular for the Yugoslav border, which also had its border strip[65]

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[60] See Sever Neagoe, *Personalități din evoluția grănicerilor…*cit., pp. 155-156.
[61] See ACNSAS, Fond *Documentar*, D 13.117/3, ff. 34-36. The documents are from a report of the 1st Division on border service activities in the last three months of the year 1952. The forty pages of the report are revealing for the entire internal attitude toward Yugoslavia in those years.
[62] ANIC, DGPMI, R 1326, cc. 870-871.
[63] The border sector was the territory of the country where the border guard had jurisdiction and patrolled. See *Lexicon militar*, Editura Militară, București, 1980, p. 607.
[64] Sever Neagoe, *Personalități din evoluția grănicerilor…*cit., p. 168.
[65] The border strip was the small segment of land immediately before the border line between the countries ["the border before the border"], especially designed to thwart any possible attempts of unauthorized border access, where only the border guards were allowed. See *Lexicon militar*, cit., p. 10.

widened to 100 m, while the other Romanian borders had a border strip of only 50 m[66].

But, beyond the radical changes within the organizational frame of the CTG, even more intrusive for the activity of the border guards was the general political pressure on the border service, facilitated by the new structural scheme. By July 1948, Romanian border guards had been instructed to take a hostile attitude toward their Yugoslav counterparts and to act as zealous enemies of Tito in every aspect of their activity, even when not on duty with the border service, with the "party's eyes" watching their behaviour closely. The direct consequence of this was a permanent tension in the border service, with numerous incidents occurring on an almost daily basis. For example, in 1951 alone, only the Romanian border authorities recorded 223 cases of hostile action from the Yugoslav side, 6 of which were air space violations, 33 violations of the border, 15 cases of violation of territorial waters, 54 shootings over the border line, 94 cases of challenges and insults being yelled, and 21 cases of throwing handouts over to the Romanian side[67].

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that incidents like that of October 1951, when out of 38 soldiers asked if they wanted to stand watch at the border, only 3 said yes[68], occurred frequently. As stated in documents, the spread of insubordination within the border guards was a consequence of the fact that they had heard about the relative liberalization in Yugoslavia, combined with the growing internal pressure. As a result, people became more daring and hostile toward the Romanian communist regime. In 1952, a note from the political directorate of the CTG about the Yugoslav border sector stated that some soldiers had turned the picture of Interior Minister Teohari Georgescu[69] into a shooting target. Also, at an observation point were discovered labels with "Long live Tito and the U.S.A.!" or "We won't bear the

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[66]   ANIC, DGPMI, R 1326, c. 887.
[67]   *Ibidem.*, c. 881.
[68]   The context of the incident was larger, including also a refusal by 8 soldiers to sign a letter of congratulations to the party leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, on grounds of poor material conditions. Obviously, the incident report stated that the real reason was unsatisfactory political education. See ANIC, DGPMI, R 1326, cc. 265-266. The same document shows that, in 1951, 69 soldiers deserted from their units throughout the country. See *Ibidem*, c. 865.
[69]   Teohari Georgescu (1908-1976) – Romanian Interior Minister from March 1945 until May 1952, when he became a victim of the struggle for power at the top of the RCP leadership, being prosecuted and sentenced for "rightist deviationism" along with some other prominent leaders such Ana Pauker (1863-1960) and Vasile Luca (1868-1963). See Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: the Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001.

communist yoke anymore!"[70]. Thus, it was no surprise that the desertions to Yugoslavia among Romanian border guards increased significantly, to the point that, for example, out of five officers of a platoon who were also junior party members, three fled over the border[71]. Statistically speaking, in 1948, out of 27 defections nationwide, 18 were to Yugoslavia, and in 1949, out of 51, 43 were over the same border, with only 5 soldiers getting caught[72].

Finally, but maybe most importantly, there were the repressive results of the pressure brought upon the Romanian communist authorities by the conflict between Tito and Stalin. From this perspective, related to border control management but not only, the most vulnerable persons were the ethnic Serbs, who suddenly became suspects by their nationality alone. This is shown by a table dated 1949 from the above mentioned Department for the Control of Foreigners and Passports of the General Police Directorate of the Police, which identifies the Serbs who were state employees in Romania, even if they were simple teachers or beer factory workers [sic][73].

However, the worst to suffer were those ethnic Serbs in particular who were identified as a potential danger for the security of the border with Yugoslavia[74]. They formed a great part of this ethnic minority, since they lived in the Banat region, mostly near the border or a few kilometres away from it. As a result, they became subject to several forcible mass removals[75], motivated by the suspicion of the authorities toward them, and made possible by the discretionary legal regime of the border area. The largest scale such deportation was carried out in June 1951, when 43.899 people, most of them Serbs, on the basis of some nominal tables, were taken and relocated about 400 km away, in the Bărăgan plain, with the direct participation of border guard troops[76].

All these were possible under a prerequisite of the communist model of border management, namely Law No. 53 "for the institution of some safety measures in the border area"[77], adopted as early as December 1947 by the regime. This document toughened the regime of the border area and expanded its legal framework, enabling the authorities to justify all sorts of discretionary

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[70] In 1951, there were a total of 274 cases of "reactionary manifestations" among the CTG personnel. See ANIC, DGPMI, R 1326, c. 865.

[71] *Ibidem*, c. 881.

[72] ANIC, DGPMI, D 23, ff. 14-15. In 1950 there were 36 such cases nationwide, and in 1951 only 21. See *Ibidem*, ff. 1326, 865.

[73] *Ibidem*, Fond *C.C. al P.C.R. – Secția Administrativ-Politică*, D 15/1949, ff. 1-2.

[74] *Ibidem*, Fond *C.C. al P.C.R. – Secția Agitație și Propagandă*, D 19/1948, D 100/1949.

[75] For more information on the issue of Serb deportation see Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, "Dislocarea unor categorii de persoane din zona de frontieră cu Iugoslavia în Câmpia Bărăganului (1951-1956)", I-II, *Revista istorică*, vol. XXI, no. 1-2/3-4, 2010, pp. 31-55/357-382.

[76] *Ibidem*, pp. 42-55. See also ANIC, DGPMI, R 1326, c. 879.

[77] *Monitorul Oficial* (Partea I A), no. 51, 2nd March 1948, pp. 1890-1891.

measures and actions. As we saw above, such actions went from mass deportations to small-scale domestic incidents around the border area, like the accidental shooting of peasants who, while working their lands, walked onto the border strip by mistake (at the time, along the land border with Yugoslavia, up to 1000 m within Romanian territory were removed from the farming circuit). Also, along the Danube, a natural border, no one could come closer than 25 meters to the river without special permission from the border guard[78].

A significant increase in acts of repression at the frontier, such as killings or people being put in detention, was the result of this bolstering of border defences, but not only[79]. This was a consequence of the sudden change of direction that illegal attempts to cross the border gained after the start of the conflict with Yugoslavia. If until the summer of 1948 the main flow was toward Hungary, after the international developments related to this conflict most of this flow changed its course toward Yugoslavia. The explanation is simple, and concerns the lack of any dialogue between the Romanian and Yugoslav authorities, meaning that any successful attempt to cross into Yugoslavia was very probably equivalent to a definitive escape to the "free world"[80]. It seems that the desire of the Romanians to escape the 'communist heaven' was more powerful than their fear of being shot at the border or imprisoned for 3 to 10 years[81], at least in the first years after the split with Tito.

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[78] ANIC, DGPMI, R 1326, c. 887.

[79] On the subject of illegal border crossing attempt tragedies in the communist period see Johan Steiner, Doina Magheți, *Mormintele tac. Relatări de la cea mai sângeroasă graniță a Europei*, Editura Polirom, Iași 2009.

[80] Before the conflict broke out, all the Romanians who were caught on Yugoslav territory after they crossed the border illegally were returned to the Romanian authorities. The negotiations were entrusted to the so-called "border mandatory officers", who had the authority to negotiate all the problems which occurred in the bilateral relation at the border. See *Îndreptarul împuternicitului de frontieră*, București, 1974, pp. 19-27. As regards Yugoslavia, because of the conflict, this institution was mutually established only in 1953, after Stalin's death. See Victor Aelenei, *Retrospectivă istorică*…cit., p. 189.

[81] By law, in July 1948, the sentence for illegal border crossing was increased to up to ten years imprisonment and a fine of up to 40.000 lei. Showing the special character that this crime gained after the split between Belgrade and Moscow, the same sentence was also stipulated for those who worked inthe border management institutions in case of any successful attempts at crossing, with charges of complicity and even neglect of duties. See *Romania Liberă*, 17th of July 1948, p. 1 and Victor Papadopol, G.V. Protopopescu, Ilie Stoenescu, *Codul Penal al Republicii Populare Române adnotat*, Editura de Stat, București, 1948, p. 351.

Considering that many of the relevant archives are still classified[82], it is hard, if not impossible to have a complete overview of what happened at the Romanian border with Yugoslavia from 1948 until the middle of the 1950s. Nevertheless, the documents we had access to, mostly coming from the control bodies of the RCP and from the former secret police, the *Securitate*, show the evolution that we indicated above. For example, if in 1948 at the Yugoslav border there were only 98 attempts of border crossing involving 191 people, 60/115 being caught (at the Hungarian border there were 287 attempts involving 601 people, 173/361 being caught), in 1949 there were 199 attempts involving 314 people, 148/220 being caught (at the Hungarian border there were 123 attempts involving 328 people, 85/238 being caught). In terms of the people shot, if in 1948 there were 13 cases at the Yugoslav border (59 at the Hungarian one), a year later the number of shootings increased significantly, reaching 58 (at the border with Hungary there were 3)[83].

All these figures were registered before the fundamental reorganization of the border guard took place in the autumn of 1949 and in 1950. In the few CTG statistics that we found, in the last three months of 1951 only 29 people tried to cross the border with Yugoslavia illegally outside the usual border control points, of which 21 were caught. A year later, in 1952, out of 21 people who tried the same methods of escaping the country, 16 were unsuccessful[84]. Helped by all the structural changes detailed above and by these "results" in repressing border crossing attempts, the Romanian communist regime was very close to its political goal of completely closing the border with Yugoslavia in the last years before Stalin's death. From 1 January 1953 until 25th of April 1954, in the sector covered by the 4th Regiment, 1st Division, which dealt with a third of the Yugoslav border, only 48 attempts were made to illegally cross the border, involving 61 people[85].

Conclusion – No Stalin, No Conflict

Starting with 1953, right after Stalin's death, many of those sentenced on "Titoistic" charges were scheduled to be released through amnesty, which

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[82] As a militarized institution, the archives of the former CTG are in the custody of what is today the Military Archives of Romania and of the National Inspectorate of the Romanian Border Police, both inaccessible. Because of the sensitivity of the subject, especially in terms of the last two decades of the communist regime in Romania, when the illegal crossing of borders gained significant momentum and has a particular cultural memory, that of the so called "*frontierişti*", the archives still remain closed. See Brânduşa Armanca, *Istoria recentă în mass-media. Frontieriştii*, Editura Marineasa, Timişoara 2008, p. 9-23.

[83] ANIC, DGPMI, D 23, ff. 12-13.

[84] ACNSAS, Fond*Documentar*, D 13.117/3, f. 52.

[85] *Ibidem*, D 13.117/7, f. 32.

happened gradually in the following years. In 1956, the minefields from the border with Yugoslavia were removed as relations with Tito's regime rapidly improved. Even though the general conditions for those who wished to leave the country crossing the Yugoslav border remained harsh, including obstacles against crossing the border illegally, at least the additional pressure of a closed border with the "imperialistic enemy" was over[86]. All of these facts prove that the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict had an immediate and significant impact in Romania. However, this involved not only a general change of policy and attitude toward the south westerly neighbour, there were also consequences to this change of attitude. This affected state institutions greatly, beyond the ideological attitude toward Yugoslavia, especially the Border Guard Command, and, more dramatically, it affected people's lives in a very profound way.

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[86] Of interest here is a case of accidentally walking onto the border strip, which was no longer very sensitive for the regime, to the point that it sparked legal debates and was presented in the official magazine of the Ministry of Justice in 1955. See *Legalitatea populară*, no. 8, 1955, pp. 864-868.