

THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AS GEOPOLITICAL PARLOR GAME: BRANDSTATTER’S “CHECKMATE” DOCUMENTARY AND THE LATEST WAVE IN A SEA OF REVISIONISM

By Richard Andrew Hall

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Dedicated to the memory of Ilinca Zarifopol Johnston, a radiant spirit, who called me mormoloc (tadpole) and surdulica (little deaf one), and withstood my earnestness as a first-year Romanian and graduate student to help me translate my first articles from the Romanian press about the Revolution.

Part 1: Opening Moves

--Any history is in fact two histories: the history being told and the history of the period in which it is being told. The recording of the past is always to some extent prisoner to the present in which it is recorded.

Take revisionist histories of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Such accounts generally insinuate that, at the very least, senior US officials had foreknowledge of the attacks and cynically did nothing to prevent them, or, even more diabolically, elements of the US government and political and economic elites launched the attacks against their own people in order to pursue an insatiable thirst for power and riches. True, such revisionist suspicions exist across the globe—including in the United States—but they have gained greater mass media exposure and notably sizable (if still minority) popular interest and acceptance in some countries more than others.

Revisionist theories of the September 2001 attacks appear to have found their most vocal proponents in France and Germany. The most prominent and influential of these revisionist accounts are probably those of the French author Thierry Meyssan (“The

Horrifying Fraud”) and former (West) German Cabinet minister Andreas von Bulow (“The CIA and the 11th of September, International Terror and the Role of the Secret Services”) (for summary and analysis of these accounts see, for example, “Wall Street Journal,” 29 September 2003, “New York Times,” 22 June 2002, and “The Washington Post,” 21 July 2002).* It must be pointed out that, according to public opinion surveys, the extreme contentions and accusations lobbed by Meyssan and von Bulow are rejected by overwhelming majorities of the populations in both these countries, and co-nationals from across the political spectrum have heavily criticized their revisionist theories (Reuters, 11 September 2003; “New York Times,” 22 June 2002). These theories are neither inevitable nor even representative of political, media, intellectual, or public opinion in these countries. Nevertheless, we are left with the questions of why these two European countries and why now?

The history of these countries and of their relations with the US and the historical political culture of their intellectual and media elites surely play a role. However, it is also clear that the contemporary global geopolitical condition and intellectual and political climate in France and Germany are at work. The books of Meyssan and von Bulow reflect the “zeitgeist” in which they are written: the perception and reality of the disparity of power between the United States and the rest of the world, fear and resentment of American hegemony, and suspicion of the motives driving American foreign policy. Just as the 11 September 2001 attacks are somewhat difficult to imagine happening 15 years earlier—when the bipolarity of the Cold War still prevailed—so it is difficult to imagine the depth of suspicion of US leaders and the broad toleration and acceptance of these revisionist theories in the Western Europe of 15 years ago.

A NEW WAVE OF FRANCO-GERMAN REVISIONISM GREETES THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION

Such recent Franco-German revisionism has not been confined to the events of the 21st century, however. It is also being projected back into the events of the late 20th century. A new school of Franco-German conspiracy theory about the Romanian Revolution of December 1989 has developed in the last few years. Film director Susanne Brandstatter’s “Checkmate” documentary about the overthrow of Nicolae Ceausescu—broadcast for the first time on the Franco-German channel “TV Arte” in late February 2004—is probably the best exposition of this new school. Appearing as it did, during the year that marked the 15th anniversary of the Revolution, the film prompted much publicity and discussion in Romania.

Reflecting on the biggest events of 2004 in the daily that “broke the story,” “Jurnalul National,” journalist Marina Constantinoiu recalled:

“[It all began when] I merely reprinted an article/commentary about this interesting film that had been published in the online TV supplement of the French weekly ‘Le Nouvel Observateur.’ The next day ‘the madness’ started. There followed a torrent of reactions, the telephones at the newspaper were ringing off the hook, with all kinds of people expressing their agreement or disagreement with the documentary’s claim, some even

bringing proof to support one or the other versions. ‘Jurnalul National’ prompted a true national debate, starting from a simple television documentary.’ (“Jurnalul National,” 30 December 2004).

Although undoubtedly engaging in the same kind of self-interested media hype as Constantinoiu, it is telling of the impact of the documentary that the night after the TV Arte broadcast, Hungarian Television devoted a show to discussing a film that the host described as “having even before its screening already provoked a wave of reactions across the globe” (Magyar Televizio 1, 2004). During the program, a Hungarian reporter in Bucharest relayed Romanian reaction as the film was broadcast for the first time on Romanian television.

Brandstatter’s film, the coverage it provoked in the French, Romanian, and Hungarian media, the debates it sparked, and its comparison with previous investigations of the Revolution are the subject of this paper. Although the conclusions of Brandstatter’s film reflect contemporary geopolitical relations, her methodology of investigation continues a long tradition in both foreign and Romanian studies of the December 1989 events, and the content of the film is heavily reliant upon claims and allegations that have circulated for years—many back to 1990—in Romania.

The conclusions of Brandstatter’s film are consistent with and probably reflect the broader contemporary trend of ascribing a seemingly limitless propensity and capacity for manipulation and skullduggery to the United States. At the same time, however, the content of the film is a product of enduring and perhaps intensifying trends that are characteristic of so many explorations of the Romanian Revolution and that are specific to the case itself. In other words, the film is a reflection of a longtime, deeply-embedded historical debate on the Revolution within Romania—and, to a lesser extent, abroad—as interpreted through the prism of contemporary geopolitical relations.

CONJUGATING CONSPIRACY: HE CONSPIRES, THEY CONSPIRE, YOU CONSPIRE...

Susanne Brandstatter's "Checkmate" documentary is a reformulation of the longstanding KGB-CIA "Yalta-Malta" theory of Ceausescu's overthrow. That Brandstatter's is not a solitary perspective is demonstrated by the claims of the French researcher, Catherine Durandin, during 2002-2003. Brandstatter's film caused a flurry of commentaries and analyses in the French, Hungarian, and Romanian media—somewhat funny, as journalists and intellectuals in and from Romania routinely maintain that common citizens are exhausted by and disinterested in investigations of the December 1989 events, and that "The Revolution doesn't sell." The Brandstatter-Durandin school argues that Ceausescu's overthrow was primarily the work of the CIA, with various Western security services and the Hungarians—although still communist at the time, nevertheless working in concert with the West—fulfilling a secondary role. The KGB is said to have participated, but had only a bit part. Even in Romania, some commentators who did not seriously entertain this thesis until now, appear to have been swayed by the film—a testament to its seductive presentation and power.

This is all just a little ironic—given that in late 2003 a large swath of the Romanian media and intelligentsia hastened to declare that "new revelations" by Soviet-era Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky had once and for all put to rest the controversy over "what really happened in December 1989." While on a visit to Romania in November 2003, Bukovsky stated in passing that, on the basis of his access to KGB documents in the early 1990s, he could maintain unequivocally that the KGB masterminded and stage-managed the Romanian Revolution—as it did, he claimed, the collapse of communism throughout Eastern Europe in 1989. Despite the fact that Bukovsky began making these allegations as far back as 1990—thus, before his access to the archives—for those in Romania who have long-advocated this thesis, Bukovsky's words were received as gospel and as definitively closing the book on the investigation and understanding of the December 1989 events. The so-called "Bukovsky Scandal"—for much of 2004 it had its own separate link on the webpage of "Ziua [The Day]," the daily that launched it—erupted again in the spring, summer, and fall of 2004 with a new flood of articles and exchanges, but virtually no new details to back up Bukovsky's claims.

But the Brandstatter-Durandin CIA-engineered coup theory is even more ironic when you consider the previous wave of Franco-German conspiracy theories—which cornered the market in 1990 and has had a profound and enduring imprint upon how the events of Ceausescu's overthrow have been studied and understood since. Those theories maintained the exact opposite of the Brandstatter-Durandin argument in terms of the weighting awarded to foreigners in the December 1989 coup: that Ceausescu's overthrow was primarily the work of the KGB and other East European security services—the Hungarians acting at the behest of Moscow—with the CIA and Western security services playing at best a limited, purely (dis)informational role. The first wave of Franco-German conspiracy theories might not have had such a lasting—and I would argue, destructive—impact had it not been awarded credibility and promoted by prominent Romanian intellectual and academic emigres in the West. I personally can

attest to this impact, for it was the prism provided by the latter in the English language that heavily shaped my views of the December 1989 events until conducting dissertation research in Romania in 1993-1994.

In essence, what I argue here is that one cannot understand the latest wave of Franco-German revisionism sufficiently without placing it in the context of prior historiography of the Revolution, especially revisionist historiography. Likewise, one cannot understand the Romanian historiography of the Revolution accurately without understanding the revisionist historiography of Romania's communist security service, the Securitate, and how it has infected and weaved its way into the broader Romanian historiography. Finally, one cannot understand the deleterious effects of the first wave of Franco-German conspiracy theory on scholarly understandings in English without understanding the role émigré Romanian intellectuals played in relaying and legitimizing it.

“REVISIONISM” OR...WHEN EVERYTHING TURNS OUT TO HAVE BEEN AN ILLUSION

Revisionism has been a central and prominent feature of the historiography of the December 1989 Revolution. I should clarify what I mean by “revisionism” here. My definition of “revisionism” is necessarily broad because it is outcome-based rather than process-based. Although important, the causes of revisionism are not and should not be what defines it. Revisionism is certainly not bad, illegitimate, or incorrect by definition. Some revisionism turns out to have been well-grounded and proved right, some not. But to attribute or define revisionism in terms of some intentional agenda to obfuscate the truth or disinform is not only to vastly oversimplify human behavior, it is self-serving and self-deceiving at the same time, and does not help in understanding the phenomenon. Whereas “others” start from a premise or conclusion and then decide to produce an account that advocates it, “we” research and arrive at conclusions. It is true that the former exists—and plenty of those examples will be highlighted in this series—but the sources of revisionism are a lot more complex. Many “revisionists” merely interpret events through their prism of preexisting beliefs and understandings and do not intentionally arrive at the conclusions they do. What is important, however, is that their conclusions are still “revisionist” in that they substantially “revise” the initial understanding(s) of an event.

Not all events lend themselves equally well to “revisionism.” The overthrow of Ceausescu does so precisely because of the striking uniformity of interpretations at the time of the events, a situation highlighted well by Verdery and Kligman in an article authored in November 1990 (Verdery and Kligman, 1992, pp. 118-119). To me, indicative of this were the chaotic events of 12 January 1990—three weeks after Ceausescu's overthrow on 22 December—when demonstrators with no doubt as to the existence of “terrorists,” the name given to presumed Ceausescu loyalists during the December bloodshed, chanted “Death to the terrorists!” The besieged party-state bureaucrats who succeeded Ceausescu hastened to restore the death penalty for presumed “terrorists” (no longer under the immediate pressure of the crowds, they would renege on this promise the following day). In other words, those on either side of the fundamental

post-Ceausescu political barricade agreed on the question of the existence of the “terrorists” (more on this critical issue later in this series).

Perhaps the best example of the existence and influence of revisionism upon understandings of Ceausescu’s overthrow comes from a comparison made by Vladimir Tismaneanu of the comments by the famous contemporary historian of Central and Eastern Europe, Timothy Garton Ash, immediately after the December 1989 events and ten years later.

“Reflecting on the December 1989 events in Romania, Timothy Garton Ash wrote: ‘Nobody hesitated to call what happened in Romania a revolution. After all, it really looked like one: angry crowds on the streets, tanks, government buildings in flames, the dictator put up against a wall and shot [Ash 1990, p. 20].’...However, ten years afterward, Ash would write: ‘Curiously enough the moment when people in the West finally thought there was a revolution was when they saw television pictures of Romania: crowds, tanks, shooting, blood in the streets. They said: That—we know THAT is a revolution, and of course the joke is that it was the only one that wasn’t.’ (Ash, “Conclusions,” in ed. Antohi and Tismaneanu, 1999, p. 395).” (Tismaneanu 2003, p. 230, p. 323 n. 115)

That the idea of a “coup d’etat” or a “stolen revolution” came only later—i.e. was revisionist—is also demonstrated by Veronica Szabo’s intriguing study of a Romanian collection of graffiti on the walls of the center of Bucharest where demonstrations took place: “There is however, one scenario of the revolution which is not consistent with the data examined here, and that is the ‘hijacked revolution scenario’” (Szabo, “Handwriting on the Wall,” p. 6). As Szabo notes, the significance of the data set is its thoroughness (141 graffiti entries), its unobtrusive collection process, and the fact that it “was simultaneous rather than retrospective (the collection took place during the revolution)” (p. 4).

RUMORS OF A REVOLUTIONARY DOCUMENTARY

Long before its broadcast on the Franco-German TV Arte channel on Wednesday, 25 February 2004, the “Checkmate” documentary by Austrian filmmaker Susanne Brandstatter was creating a buzz. Meeting the filmmaker by chance in Berlin in late November 2003, Gabriela Adamesteanu, the editor of Romania’s well-known cultural and political weekly, “22,” conducted an interview of Brandstatter with bated breath and eager anticipation of the upcoming premier of the film (Adamesteanu, 2004). Coming in the pages of “22,” which has frequently hosted interviews and articles through the years alleging that the December 1989 events were a Soviet-led coup d’état, Brandstatter’s thesis that the events were primarily a CIA-led coup appeared somewhat out-of-place. Nevertheless, a coup is a coup is a coup to some extent, and although Adamesteanu asked Brandstatter leading questions on the Soviet role, and Brandstatter did not deny a KGB role, the interviewer was clearly seized with excitement about the film.

Five days before the broadcast of the film, Vincent Jauvert summarized the documentary's main thesis on the Internet site of the French daily "Le Nouvel Observateur:" "Nicolae Ceausescu was not overthrown by his own people, but by the CIA" ("Le Nouvel Observateur," 20 February 2004). In his article, Jauvert gave a sneak preview of what was to come in the film: admissions by Miklos Nemeth (the communist Hungarian Prime Minister at the time of the events in 1989), former CIA officials, and French intelligence officials, and an allegation that one of the key players in the December events, Romanian Army General Victor Athanasie Stanculescu, had been a Hungarian spy. The Romanian daily "Jurnalul National" relayed Jauvert's descriptions three days later and, on the day before the film's premier, presented a lengthy interview with Brandstatter under the headline: "The CIA and KGB shook hands in Bucharest" ("Jurnalul National," 24 February 2004). Anticipation was so great that the chief editor of "Jurnalul National," Marius Tuca, devoted his one-hour television show on the Antenne 1 Television Station on 23 February to the still-unseen documentary, with Stanculescu in the studio and Brandstatter participating by phone (Bucharest Antenna 1 Television).

BACKGROUND TO BRANDSTATTER: "OLD EUROPE," "NEW EUROPE," AND HISTORY AS CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL WISHBONE

Brandstatter's thesis of the Romanian Revolution as a CIA-led coup in conjunction with other interested intelligence services did not appear out-of-the-blue. Catherine Durandin, a French academic with a more substantial background in Romanian studies, argued the thesis on French television and in "Le Monde Diplomatique" in 2002 (Verluisse, 2003). Durandin gives the KGB a larger role in the guiding of the December events than Brandstatter, but remains convinced that it was for the most part a CIA operation. In her statements in 2002 and 2003, she claimed that the CIA "currently controls Romania." How does Durandin know about the CIA's alleged guiding role in the December events? According to her: because she has had access to secret CIA documents that confirm it—documents that she appears to claim she saw in the preparation of her 2002 book entitled "The CIA at War," which is an exposition of CIA misdeeds and skullduggery through the years (Durandin, 2003).

In early 2003, Durandin took to the French airwaves, presenting her revelations on France-3 Television under the title, "Incontrovertible Proof." Durandin stated:

"the events of December [1989] in Bucharest were the consequence of a secret accord between Moscow and Washington....The CIA penetrated the highest echelons of the Romanian power structure at the very time 'the frustrated Gorbachevites [of the Communist Party]' were converted by the CIA." (The Sunday Herald, 2003)

In an intriguing article by Gabriel Ronay in the "The Sunday Herald (Glasgow)" on 30 March 2003, in the second week of the American invasion of Iraq—"French Accuse US of Masterminding Fall of the East Bloc"—Ronay noted the presence on the program of former DGSE (French external intelligence service) "secret agent" Dominique Fonveille, and Christian Harbulot, Director of France's School of Economic Warfare. Ronay

speculated that this was designed to “give weight” to Durandin’s allegations, especially in light of the fact that one of Durandin’s principal sources was General Francois Mermet, the influential Director-General of DGSE. Ronay offered that, in the wake of nasty exchanges between President Jacques Chirac and Romanian President Ion Iliescu and Prime Minister Adrian Nastase over Romania’s letter of support for US policy toward Saddam Hussein—which by this time had translated into the US-led military attack to remove Hussein from power—“the timing of it [Durandin’s documentary] and the political intent appear to be rather obvious.”

Ronay also reported on the brief furor that broke out among among some journalists and intellectuals in Romania in response to Durandin’s televised contentions. The biggest outcry was predictably from sharply pro-Western journalists and intellectuals, especially those who have long argued that the December 1989 events were a KGB coup—with the corresponding role of the Western security services minimal to non-existent—and that Romania continues to be controlled not by CIA agents, but by former or even present Russian agents. In other words, views that are 180 degrees at variance with those propounded by Durandin.

Despite Durandin’s acknowledgement that there was also KGB “intervention” in the December 1989 events, her emphasis on the CIA role was naturally what caused a stir in Romania. In his dispatch, Ronay referenced an article in the daily “Ziua” entitled “The CIA is running Romania!” (“Ziua,” 24 March 2003). The author of the article, Dan Pavel, noted appropriately that Durandin’s claims were worthy of Albiciade—the pseudonym used by the former Ceausescu court bard, until recently leader of an ultranationalist political party, and surprise runner-up in the 2000 presidential elections, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, in his weekly “Romania Mare [Greater Romania].” Pavel’s reasoning for refuting Durandin’s thesis that the CIA engineered Ceausescu’s overthrow and was still running the show was hardly complimentary: “the CIA does not have analysts or influence agents capable enough to understand the chameleon-like Romanian political class,” so how, he asks, could it possibly have manipulated Romanian events as Durandin alleges?

Those steeped enough in the literature on the Revolution (see Hall 1997, Hall 1999, and Hall 2002) know, however, that the allegations of a CIA role are only one half of the “Yalta-Malta” scenario Albiciade routinely advocates. [That the KGB plays a central and defining role in the “national communist” version of Ceausescu’s overthrow, propagated by the likes of “Albiciade,” is not solely a personal view —see Siani-Davies’ description of it in Siani-Davies, 2001]. What Pavel fails to admit is that the writings of Albiciade also contain the overwhelming majority of the cherished claims he and like-minded journalists and intellectuals marshal to demonstrate that the December 1989 events were a Soviet-engineered coup. The cold, hard reality of it all is that it is simply far easier to ridicule the clunky and simplistic anti-American cant of Albiciade, than to acknowledge and attempt to explain the embarrassing similarity of their views on the role of the KGB in December 1989 with those of former Ceausescu regime elements, especially the former Securitate. The latter has two possible outcomes: either the former Securitate is telling the truth on these issues—a possibility that cannot be dismissed out of hand—or it is

lying and Pavel and his colleagues have swallowed some of the Securitate's biggest tall-tales.

The circumstances surrounding the unveiling of Brandstatter's documentary in February 2004 thus mirror those of Durandin's television appearance roughly a year earlier. Echoing Ronay, Gheorghe Bratescu wrote in an article entitled "Budapestian Enigmas" on the on-line journal "Clipa":

"The question is a classic one, that is 'Cui prodest?' all this, more specifically in Romanian, who does the French-German documentary benefit? It is clear that this is the subtle propaganda of the French and German policy of sanctioning Romania for Romania's steadfast support of the United States [with regard to the Iraq war]. Therefore the documentary tries to 'demonize' the Romanian people, by presenting them to French and German spectators as marionettes of the American administration, who in 1989 [supposedly] were already concentrating their entire diplomatic and intelligence/espionage arsenal on making Romania the pawn of their long-term influence in Central and Eastern Europe... The appearance of the 'Checkmate' documentary, now in 2004, is not accidental. It unambiguously serves the electoral campaign for the European Parliament [June 2004], with dozens of candidates campaigning on an anti-American platform and on slowing the admission of some countries from the East of the continent into the European Union, especially Romania, considered an American 'Trojan Horse,' a theme advanced often in the French press." ("Clipa," 11 March 2004).

*It is doubtful that Usama Bin Ladin's most direct claim of credit to date for the 11 September 2001 attacks in his 29 October 2004 video will cause revisionists to reassess their views—although it further undermines the credibility of their allegations.

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THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AS GEOPOLITICAL PARLOR GAME: BRANDSTATTER’S “CHECKMATE” DOCUMENTARY AND THE LATEST WAVE IN A SEA OF REVISIONISM

By Richard Andrew Hall

Part 2: CHECKMATE: “A thrilling documentary that may destroy your confidence in the mass media...”*

With much fanfare “Checkmate” finally debuted on the Franco-German TV Arte channel on Wednesday, 25 February 2004. Brandstatter’s film is more formidable than many accounts alleging a primary foreign role in the December 1989 events. Indeed, it is impressive in some ways: Brandstatter obviously did a lot of leg-work and preparation for her documentary. She filmed and conducted research in Romania, Hungary, Germany, Austria, France, and the United States, and spoke to other relevant figures in Great Britain, Bulgaria, and Norway. Among those whose interviews appear in the film are: former President Ion Iliescu, analyst Stelian Tanase, dissident Laszlo Tokes, Army General Victor Stanculescu, dissident Doina Cornea, Securitate Colonel Gheorghe Ratiu, Army General Dan Voinea, NSC official Robert Hutchings, Congressman Christopher Smith, and former CIA officers Milton Bearden, Charles Cogan, and Robert Baer (“Jurnalul National,” 24 February 2004).

Brandstatter’s thesis in the film is that Nicolae Ceausescu was overthrown in December 1989 by the CIA, in conjunction with the intelligence services of some of its NATO allies, and of the Hungarians in the East bloc. To be sure, she says, the Soviets had their fingers in the pie, thanks to the presence of the ubiquitous Russian “tourists” (i.e. intelligence agents, more about this below), but theirs was not the decisive role. Thankfully, Brandstatter does at least acknowledge the independent role played by the courage of the long-suffering average Romanian citizen—although not sufficiently in the view of critics—and does not suggest that all was merely smoke and mirrors in December 1989 (“Jurnalul National,” 24 February 2004).

What evidence does Brandstatter marshal in support of her theory? A key sequence in the film begins with Miklos Nemeth, Hungarian Prime Minister in December 1989, who admits that Hungary supplied the Romanians with “a lot of important aid, including guns and ammunition,” and that Hungary attempted to recruit officials in key institutions of the Ceausescu regime who were “in a position to help the regime’s victims.” Brandstatter believes that General Victor Stanculescu was one of those high-ranking Romanian officials who the Hungarians allegedly recruited—although Stanculescu denies this in the film and claims that although he sympathized with regime opponents, he had no ties to them (Magyar Televizio, “Titkos Forradalom?” 29 February 2004).

Next, a Securitate colonel in 1989, Gheorghe Ratiu—in fact, head of the First Directorate, the one most identified by Romanian citizens as the “political police”—declares the Securitate was in possession of information that in (West) Germany (Zehndorf), Austria (Traiskirchen), and Hungary (Bicske), there were training

camps where guerilla warfare was being instructed by “American trainers.” The trainees were taught how to “foment unrest and a national uprising.” Then, in one of what is perhaps the film’s most unexpected moments, Nemeth appears to confirm the allegations from Ratiu’s interview: “In the south of Germany and in Austria and in other countries, the Germans and Americans were training the required people” (Magyar Televizio, “Titkos Forradalom?” 29 February 2004).

Brandstatter asks, “Was this possible in Romania at that time?” Dominique Fonveille, the former French intelligence officer who appeared in the February 2003 Durandin television expose discussed in Part 1 of this series, reveals in the Brandstatter film: “Yes, one could enter from neighboring countries, and there were also training camps in Hungary and Germany. It is certain that these people had to be infiltrated in at the given moment. You have to understand, however, that it was not possible to infiltrate hundreds of people, nor even for that matter dozens.” Charles Cogan, described as “head of the CIA’s Paris Station in 1989” is seen stating: “Either the CIA was active in these camps or was training the trainers.” In his interview, Robert Baer, a former CIA officer, elaborates, “It is likely that they [the trainers] would have told these people, here is an M-16, here is how to load it, here is how to secure it, here is how you shoot with it and here is how you kill someone with it. Here is how you activate a plastic explosive, etc.” (Magyar Televizio, “Titkos Forradalom?” 29 February 2004).

Finally, Brandstatter interviews Milton Bearden, presented as “Director of CIA’s East European [operations].” Bearden declares:

“It is said that these were CIA camps. We have to make a distinction here. Almost everything is attributed to the CIA. I don’t know what these people told you, [and] I don’t deny it in its entirety, but I would advise you to be careful...” (Magyar Televizio, “Titkos Forradalom?” 29 February 2004).

Of course, because Brandstatter’s thesis is that the Revolution was essentially “made in the USA,” sparked and manipulated by American-trained agents, it is not surprising that she promotes the ideas of her interlocutors that the bloodshed and victims of December were intentional—part of a plan to stoke popular outrage against the Ceausescu regime and then to legitimate the leadership that replaced him. Once again she invokes the words of former Securitate Colonel Gheorghe Ratiu of the First Directorate. According to Ratiu, the lesson learned by the “producers” of the December 1989 Revolution from the Brasov workers’ riots of November 1987 was that “if there aren’t any corpses, the people won’t revolt sufficiently [in order to overthrow the regime]” (Jurnalul National, 27 February 2004). Therefore, he suggests that the bloodshed, in the week that preceded the Ceausescus’ flight from power on 22 December 1989, was intended to accomplish just this end.

The French security official, Dominique Fonveille, apparently speaking mostly in reference to the post-22 December bloodshed, argues that the gunfire and chaos that dominated the next few days was deliberate, designed to create a state of insecurity that would in turn create support for the new leaders. Victims were thus necessary for the

credibility of the Revolution, in his view. Finally, Brandstatter presents an interview with the former Romanian Military Prosecutor, General Dan Voinea, who, on the 10th anniversary of the Revolution, had declared the findings of the investigation into the question of the so-called “terrorists”—the term used to describe those held responsible for 942 deaths (nearly 90% of the overall number of 1,104 people who died in the course of the Revolution) in the immediate hours and days following the flight of the Ceausescus. According to Voinea—who, it is important to point out, was himself one of the people involved in the trial of the Ceausescus that was justified officially as having been necessary to put an end to the “terrorist” violence:

“After 22 December 1989, there existed a huge diversion, in the sense that the notion of terrorists who were attacking the population were invented. After investigating the question, it was determined that these terrorists did not in reality exist.” (“Jurnalul National,” 27 February 2004).

DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN REACTIONS TO THE “CHECKMATE” DOCUMENTARY

Reviews of Brandstatter’s film were positive and it certainly fascinated its viewers. A rare note of skepticism, but also acceptance of the film’s thesis on foreign involvement, was Dominique Dhombres’ review in “Le Monde” on 26 February 2004. Yes, he wrote, the CIA, the KGB, and perhaps even the French secret services were involved, but Brandstatter still underplayed the role of Romania’s citizens “who were not [just] marionettes.” He concluded, “Brandstatter’s display is seductive, but like the execution of the Ceausescus...[her conclusions are] a little hasty.”

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, some Romanian commentators not known for their support of the Western-engineered variant of the conspiracy theory of December 1989 have argued that Brandstatter’s arguments deserve serious consideration. Using the research strategy of “qui bono”—a strategy which Brandstatter admits also drove her analysis of the December 1989 events—Cornel Nistorescu, editor of the mass daily “Evenimentul Zilei [Event of the Day],” concludes: Hungary was also interested in Ceausescu’s fall (it’s European integration would have been an unsolvable problem if Ceausescu had continued to exist across its Eastern border); also interested were France, Germany, and the United States” (“Evenimentul Zilei,” 28 February 2004).

Some of the other commentary on Brandstatter’s film is equally interesting. In a statement published by “Jurnalul National [The National Journal]” on 25 February 2004, Radu Tinu declared: “It is regrettable that the facts I presented, five years ago, have become interesting only now, when the West releases them... We Romanians did not make the Revolution, but rather danced to the music of other intelligence services. Tap-dancing for the CIA and ‘kalinka’ for the KGB.” Tinu differs with Brandstatter, however, over for whom Stanculescu was spying; according to Tinu, he was working for the English, not the Hungarians as Brandstatter insinuates. The name Radu Tinu may be familiar to Romania watchers: he was the Deputy Chief of the Timis County Securitate

that was involved in the bloody repression of demonstrators in Timisoara in December 1989.**

In a 3 March 2004 editorial entitled “The Romanian Revolution at the Intersection of CIA and KGB Streets,” the senior editor of “Jurnalul National,” Marius Tuca, accepted the rejection of some of Brandstatter’s claims—relayed by journalists at his own paper—and then summarizing the contradiction and timeless conspiratorial view at the center of many Romanian responses wrote: “...there exists one certainty in all this debate: the Revolution was founded by the Romanian people. What remains to be learned is if someone put it in train and especially WHO! (emphasis in original).”

One of the more interesting reactions to the film came from Sergiu Nicolaescu, a film director who found himself at the center of the December events and who chaired a parliamentary commission investigating those events in the early and mid-1990s. Nicolaescu alleged that the film was “a dirty trick financed by the Hungarians, because they are the only ones interested in making people believe that the Romanian Revolution was made by someone other than Romanians...[and, furthermore] the interviews were conducted in Hungarian not Romanian” (“Jurnalul National,” 28 February 2004).

HUNGARIAN INTERVENTION...IN THE [HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE] ROMANIAN REVOLUTION

Had it not been for the surprising claims of former Hungarian Prime Minister Miklos Nemeth in “Checkmate,” it is doubtful the Hungarians would have paid much attention to the film. But Nemeth’s comments suddenly converted what otherwise would have been a “foreign story” into one that “hit home,” so-to-speak. Those who think that such narcissism is the province of individuals—or as a good number of American academics seem to think, a quintessentially American condition—have probably never witnessed media coverage in other countries of an overseas catastrophe or sporting event, in which co-nationals are the be-all and end-all of coverage.

Until investigations by Hungarian Television to substantiate Nemeth’s claims in “Checkmate,” the Hungarian population had been informed primarily by translated dispatches of “Jurnalul National,” related by Hungarian correspondents in Bucharest, that were not subject to further scrutiny. The daily “Magyar Hirlap” presented on 26 February the revelations of Securitate officers Ratiu and Tinu as confirming the thesis that Ceausescu had been overthrown by foreign intelligence services—who had set up training centers, including in Hungary as Nemeth maintained. That the statements by former Securitate officials—even if in support of the argument of a former top Hungarian official—could be taken at face-value is perhaps evidence of how far we have come even in Hungary from December 1989—such statements would have been subject to far more, almost knee-jerk scrutiny in the early 1990s. The idea that the Hungarian media was just dying to deny Brandstatter’s allegations thus does not really wash.

Hungarian Television began scrutinizing the film in its “Thursday Evening” program, but the more important examination of the film was on Sunday, 29 February 2004, when

MTV (Magyar Televizio) broadcast a program entitled “Secret Revolution (Titkos Forradalom)?” According to the host, Sandor Friderikusz, “days later [after the first showing of the documentary] the film was still enthralling Hungarians and foreigners.” But it was clearly Nemeth’s claim that was driving everything—and ended up serving as the gateway to a more wideranging deconstruction of the film.

Brandstatter had been scheduled to appear on the program, Friderikusz stated, but after having promised for a week to participate, at the last minute pulled out without giving a reason. Friderikusz decided to contact those interviewed in the film to verify their statements on camera. A pattern soon began to emerge: Brandstatter had conducted long, in some cases hours-long, interviews, but had only placed short, frequently out-of-context clips in the final product. Moreover, according to her interlocutors, she had come to the interviews with her mind firmly made up about what had happened in December 1989.

The first interviewee who was sought out, was Milton Bearden, who participated by phone from his home in New Hampshire. Bearden, the former Chief of Operations for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, was not amused by Brandstatter’s documentary. His admonition to Brandstatter, that she should be careful in her pursuit of the idea that the Romanian Revolution was the work of foreign security services, was the only excerpt of what he maintained was a two and a half hour interview. [Romanian Army General Victor Stanculescu maintains that although in the film he only has a few words, the interview with Brandstatter lasted four hours (“Clipa,” 11 March 2004).]

Bearden was emphatic in declaring that “the CIA in no way directed or precipitated the revolution” and rejected Brandstatter’s contention that the Revolution was the work of foreign security services as “completely untrue.” Asked if he thought Brandstatter had forced her case, Bearden responded: “I don’t want to cause Brandstatter difficulty, but she [came] already convinced of the truth of her theory.” His admonition for her to “be careful,” appears to have been a reference to how she was approaching the topic analytically—not that this pursuit was endangering her life or well-being.

Bearden considered the allegations of a central Hungarian role ridiculous. He noted that in 1989, the Hungarian political scene was dominated by two principal issues: the reburial of Imre Nagy and the opening of its western frontier with Austria. To his credit as a journalist, Friderikusz challenged Bearden on two points: 1) perhaps other personnel within the CIA might have been involved in an operation against Romania of the variety alleged in the film of which Bearden was unaware, and 2) if there had been a CIA role, would it not be natural that Bearden should deny a CIA role? Bearden claimed it was out of the question that an operation of this type could have taken place without his knowledge, and he acknowledged the suspicion with which his denials might be received but reiterated emphatically that Brandstatter’s claims were groundless.

Next, Friderikusz interviewed Ferenc Karpati, Hungarian Defense Minister at the time of the Revolution, and Laszlo Borsics, Hungarian Chief of Staff at the time. Karpati and Borsics denied any preparation for, or provision of, arms during the Revolution, and

stated that they did not believe something such as the alleged CIA training of agents provocateurs to overthrow Ceausescu could have been launched from Hungary. Although there was some discussion in political circles of sending in Hungary's anti-terrorist brigades and armed volunteers, Karpati opined, "luckily we rejected it." In fact, the officials claimed they only made offers of arms and munitions after Ceausescu's overthrow and that these had been rejected by the Romanian military, who only accepted medical supplies. Friderikusz pushed Karpati on the question of "which party or political faction" was advocating intervention, but Karpati declined to say, stating that he had already made it public years before in an article in the "Historia" magazine. [In the throes of the 1994 Hungarian parliamentary election campaign, however, the leader of the former communist party (MSzP), Gyula Horn, accused the deceased former Prime Minister Jozsef Antall and then current foreign minister Geza Jeszensky of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) as having asked in the days of the Revolution to be permitted to create volunteer detachments to intervene in Romania, but that the request was rejected. Jeszensky denied Horn's claim, saying that the MDF had asked Horn, who was foreign minister in December 1989, to request NATO intervention and had never proposed the idea of volunteer detachments. (see Dorin Suci, "Si totusi in '89 Ungaria pregatea o interventie armata in Romania," Adevarul, 26 April 1994).]

In what was emerging as a clear pattern, Karpati claimed that a year earlier Brandstatter had conducted a two hour (unfilmed) "pre"-interview with him—none of which ever saw the light of day. Thus, when she asked to send a film crew, he declined when she did not respond to his questions of the content of the film. Challenged about Nemeth's claim of Hungarian and CIA direct involvement in the Revolution, Borsics opined that Nemeth's words "may have been taken out of context...and I certainly have no knowledge of such things." Borsics also highlighted some basic factual inaccuracies in the account purported in the Brandstatter film—such as the Bicske "training camp" being 40 km from the Austrian border, when in fact it is 40 km from Budapest and at least 150 km from the Austrian border.

Friderikusz followed up once again with Karpati, inquiring how it was possible that Nemeth's account, at least as it appeared in the film, could be so different from his and Borsics'? "Was it possible," he asked, "that only he [Nemeth] was privy" to these secrets? Karpati responded emphatically:

"All I can say, is that during those days, every hour we were updating the Prime Minister, frequently we sat at his desk, marking on a map every move that was taking place in Romania, we spoke about troop movements, we talked about everything, and I believe that he would have heard everything from us first."

Finally, Friderikusz spoke to Sandor Aradi, the Hungarian military attache in Bucharest during the Revolution, who denied Brandstatter's thesis, claimed the film was full of doubletalk, and affirmed that the Romanian Revolution was first and foremost the work of the Romanian people, especially the Romanian youth. "Without a doubt," Aradi claimed, it was unthinkable that he could have held such a position and not had some information on the secret operations Nemeth had alleged.

Even at the political level, Nemeth's claims were rejected by other senior politicians from the time. A separate MTV 1 program conducted an interview with Imre Pozsgay, who claimed no knowledge of Nemeth's allegations and that Nemeth had discussed nothing of the sort (Magyar Televizio b, 2004). "If I didn't know about [the secret operations], then that means very, very few could have known," he stated,

"...sure the West and Moscow tried to apply pressure to Ceausescu, but a revolution, a societal uprising, a rebellion, that the security services could pull off such a thing...such a thing has never happened in the history of the world [!]."

Thus, besides Romanian figures who disputed their characterization and/or presentation in the film and the manner in which Brandstatter produced it, we have here at least five other key officials from the time, not only rejecting Brandstatter's thesis, but expressing dismay and disgust at how Brandstatter put the Revolution in "Checkmate"—Bearden, Karpati, Borsics, Aradi, and Pozsgay.

WAIT A MINUTE! HADN'T IT JUST BEEN AGREED THAT THE KGB DID IT?

Among those asked by "Jurnalul National" to comment on the Brandstatter documentary was former Soviet-era Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovski. Bukovski did not challenge Brandstatter's account, maintaining that he had not had access to the sources available to Brandstatter—thereby leaving open the possibility of a CIA role in Ceausescu's overthrow. At first glance, this was somewhat surprising, as Bukovski has long argued that the December 1989 events in Romania were the work of the US and CIA's principal adversary, the KGB. However, it is not so surprising when one realizes the primary role Bukovski gives to foreign forces in bringing about Ceausescu's overthrow, and his corresponding neglect of the internal dynamics of the Revolution inside Romania.

Bukovski's comments while visiting Romania in November 2003—that the KGB orchestrated the events of Ceausescu's overthrow—meant that the Romanian press had a field day on the 14th anniversary of the Revolution. As usual when it comes to the KGB thesis, it was Editor-in-Chief Sorin Rosca Stanescu's daily "Ziua" that gave Bukovski's comments publicity, although dailies such as "Evenimentul Zilei," "Romania Libera," and others soon chimed in. "Case closed," many editorialists, intellectuals, and politicians hastened to pronounce. Bukovski's comments were interpreted as gospel precisely by those who have for years accepted and promoted this theory and who recognize its utility in contemporary Romanian political debates. Bukovski's credibility is enhanced by his stature and integrity as a former Soviet dissident, and by his post-1991 access to Soviet archives and publication of the documents he was able to surreptitiously photocopy. But two critical points have to be made with regard to Bukovski's claim about Romania's December 1989 events. First, he alleges that the collapse of communist rule throughout Eastern Europe—including the fall of the Berlin Wall—were part of an elaborate KGB plot, hatched beginning from 1988. Second, he first made such allegations well-before he got access to those Soviet archives.

In a study dating from the late 1990s, the Romanian author Vladimir Alexe, who endorses a similar viewpoint on Romania's December 1989 events, quoted Bukovski's comments in 1990 on the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, as follows:

“Never has the role of the KGB inside the country [the USSR] or abroad been so important. The Soviet secret services are the ones that watched the overthrow of Ceausescu in Romania, launched the ‘velvet revolution’ in Czechoslovakia, [and] that took measures to overthrow Erich Honecker in East Germany, producing especially favorable circumstances for the destruction of the Berlin Wall (“L’Empire du moindre mal,” *Libre Journal*, Paris, nr. 1, sept-oct, 1990, p. 30).” (see Vladimir Alexe, “KGB si revolutiile din Europa de Est” in *Ziua*, 19 November 1999 and 20 December 1999)

In the wake of Bukovski's “bombshell” in November 2003, at least one Romanian commentator attempted to legitimize the credibility of Bukovski's claims by appealing to the fact that the documents substantiating Bukovski's claims are “on the Internet, anybody can access them.” It is true that Bukovski has published Soviet archival documents on the Internet, including from the period 1988 to 1991—however, none of them are about the December 1989 events in Romania (<http://psi.ece.jhu.edu/~kaplan/IRUSS/BUK/GBARC/pdfs/sovter75/sovter75-e.html>). Indeed, given the amazing antennae of the Romanian press for anything that substantiates their beliefs on this matter—and their deafness to anything that challenges those beliefs—one would expect that did such documents exist they would have been reproduced in the Romanian press by now.

Following Brandstatter's film, Bukovski returned again to the Romanian press scene in the summer of 2004 in a series of interviews in “*Ziua*.” Although the daily typically hyped Bukovski's comments—one could click on a file on their internet site devoted exclusively to “The Bukovski Scandal”—to make it appear that Bukovski had made stunning, new, and unassailable revelations, and Bukovski offered to provide documentary evidence for his views, he provided neither documentary evidence nor any new details—already, virtually non-existent—to his account.

As mentioned above, in commenting on what he referred to as the “Checkmate documentary,” Bukovski stated that he did not challenge Brandstatter's account, since he had not had access to the sources available to her. However, he did seek to strengthen support for his own argument of the events as predominantly a KGB coup by invoking the writings of the BBC reporter, John Simpson (“*Jurnalul National*,” 2 March 2004?). Simpson's writings have been invoked by others who have sought to evaluate accounts of the Revolution. For example, Krishna Kumar writes in his 2001 book reexamining 1989 in the region, that John Simpson had brought new, sensational revelations to the table in a 1994 “*Independent (London)*” article (Kumar, 2001). But the basis of Simpson's 1994 article is the report released by the Romanian Information Service (SRI) that alleges Russian and other East bloc “tourists” played a seminal role in sparking the Revolution. (Despite questioning other aspects of the SRI's contentions, Deletant unfortunately appears to accept this claim at face value—without recognizing how it contradicts and

ultimately negates his other arguments on the events (see Deletant ,1999, pp. 171-172.) That the SRI is the Securitate's formal institutional successor, and incorporated many of the personnel, structures, and culture of the Securitate, hardly lends the argument credibility. Moreover, one has to ask if Bukovski supposedly knows so much about the KGB role in the Romanian Revolution from his access to Soviet archival sources, how is it that he does not know about what would appear to be a key detail—the role of Russian and East bloc “tourists” in sparking Ceausescu's overthrow?

*From the television guide description of Newsletter MARS 2004/1 on the Internet.

**Marius Mioc, a direct participant in the Timisoara uprising and a researcher who has written some of the most detailed and insightful analysis on the events of December 1989, was sufficiently incensed with “revelations” that suggest that the events of Timisoara were stage-managed by foreign forces and that defended or denied the role of regime forces in repressing demonstrators that he published a newspaper devoted to the subject (Mioc 2004).

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THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AS GEOPOLITICAL PARLOR GAME: BRANDSTATTER’S “CHECKMATE” DOCUMENTARY AND THE LATEST WAVE IN A SEA OF REVISIONISM

By Richard Andrew Hall

Part 3: Ruse

A SECURITATE RIDDLE: SOVIET “TOURISTS” AND THE OVERTHROW OF THE CEAUSESCU REGIME

Although I have written a good deal on the “tourist” conundrum in the past (see, for example, Hall 2002), I have not formally addressed the role of foreign histories of Ceausescu’s overthrow in the historiography of December 1989, particularly in regard to this topic. In the wake of the broadcast of Brandstatter’s “Checkmate” documentary in February 2004, Vladimir Bukovski’s invocation of journalist John Simpson’s 1994 article on the topic (discussed in Part 2 of this series) suggests, however, that it needs to be broached in greater detail. Moreover, as the year-long look-back at the December 1989 events in “Jurnalul National” shows, the “tourist” question—somewhat surprisingly to me—has become more and more central to arguments about the Revolution, thereby amplifying what is already tremendous confusion over the events in the Romanian press and public. Of course, as has traditionally been the case, the Soviet/Russian tourists figure prominently, and, to a lesser extent, the Hungarian tourists. However, the stock of other tourist groups has also gone up. For example, the role of Yugoslav (specifically Serb) tourists has found a greater emphasis, and, seemingly out of nowhere, so have East German/STASI tourists! The principal sources for all of these allegations are, as usual, former Securitate and Militia officers, with some military (intelligence) personnel thrown in for good measure.

FOREIGN FORUM, ROMANIAN CONTEXT

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact first mention of “the tourists” and their alleged role in the Revolution, but it appears that although the source of the claim was Romanian, the publication was foreign. James F. Burke, whose name is unfortunately left off the well-researched and widely-consulted web document “The December 1989 Revolt and the Romanian Coup d’etat,” alludes to the “Romanian filmmaker” who first made these allegations (Burke, 1994). The claims are contained in an article by Richard Bassett in the 2 March 1990 edition of “The Times (London).” According to Bassett,

“Mr. [Grigore] Corpacescu has no doubt that the revolution here was carefully stage-managed—as was the case in Prague and East Berlin—by the Russians...According to Mr. Corpacescu a party of Soviet ‘tourists,’ all usually on individual visas, arrived in Timisoara two days before the first demonstration outside Mr. [i.e. Pastor] Tokes’ house. Police records trace them reaching Bucharest on December 20. By the 24th, two days after Ceausescu fled by helicopter, the Russians had disappeared. No police records exist to indicate how they left the country. (“The Times (London),” 2 March 1990)

But Bassett's interlocutor, Mr. Corpacescu, says some strange things. Bassett is not clear but it appears that Corpacescu suggests that the post-Revolution Interior Minister Mihai Chitac, who was involved in the Timisoara events as head of the army's chemical troops, somehow purposely coaxed the demonstrations against the regime because the tear-gas cannisters his unit fired failed to explode—the failure somehow an intended outcome. But beyond this, Corpacescu, who is at the time of the article filming the recreation of Ceausescu's flight on the 22nd—using the same helicopter and pilot involved in the actual event—makes the following curious statement:

“The pilot of this helicopter is an old friend. I have many friends in the police, Timisoara was not started by the Hungarian pastor, the Reverend Laszlo Tokes [i.e. it was carefully stage-managed...by the Russians].” (“The Times (London),” 2 March 1990)

The pilot of the helicopter was in fact Vasile Malutan, an officer of the Securitate's V-a Directorate. What kind of a person would it have been at that time—and how credible could that person have been—who has the pilot as an old friend and “many friends in the police?” And it would have been one thing perhaps two months after the revolution to talk about the presence of foreign agents “observing” events in Timisoara, but to deny the spontaneity of the demonstrations and denigrate Tokes' role at this juncture is highly suspicious. I have been unable to unearth additional information on Mr. Corpacescu, but his revelations just happen to serve his friends extremely well—particularly at a time when the prospect of trials and jail time, for participation in the repression in Timisoara and elsewhere during the Revolution, still faced many former Securitate and Militia [i.e. police] members.

THE FORMER SECURITATE AND MILITIA REMINISCE ABOUT THE SOVIET “TOURISTS”

A week after “The Times” article, the chief of the Securitate's Counter-espionage Directorate, Colonel Filip Teodorescu, mentioned at his trial for his role in the Ceausescu regime's crackdown in Timisoara that he had in fact detained “foreign agents” during the events there (“Romania Libera,” 9 March 1990). In his 1992 book, he developed further on this theme, specifically focusing on the role of “Soviet tourists:”

“There were few foreigners in the hotels, the majority of them having fled the town after lunch [on 17 December] when the clashes began to break out. The interested parties remained. Our attention is drawn to the unjustifiably large number of Soviet tourists, be they by bus or car. Not all of them stayed in hotels. They either had left their buses or stayed in their cars overnight. Border records indicate their points of entry as being through northern Transylvania. They all claimed they were in transit to Yugoslavia. The explanation was plausible, the Soviets being well-known for their shopping trips. Unfortunately, we did not have enough forces and the conditions did not allow us to monitor the activities of at least some of these 'tourists'” (Teodorescu, 1992, p. 92).

Reporting in July 1991 on the trial involving many of those involved in the Timisoara repression, Radu Ciobotea noted with what was probably an apt amount of skepticism and cynicism, what was telling in the confessions of those on trial:

“Is the End of Amnesia Approaching?...”

Without question, something is happening with this trial. The Securitate doesn't say, but it suggests. It let's small details 'slip out.'...Increasingly worthy of interest are the reactions of those on trial....Traian Sima (the former head of the county's Securitate) testifies happily that, finally, the Securitate has been accepted at the trial, after having been rejected by Justice. Filip Teodorescu utters the magic word 'diplomats' and, suddenly, the witness discovers the key to the drawer with surprise and declares, after five hours of amnesia, that in Timisoara, there appeared in the days in question, foreign spies under the cover of being journalists and diplomats, that in a conversation intercepted by a mobile Securitate surveillance unit Tokes was reported as 'well,' and that all these (and other) counterespionage actions that can't be made public to the mass media can be revealed behind closed doors to the judge....[Timis County party boss] Radu Balan 'remembers' that on 18 December at midnight when he was heading toward IAEM, he passed a group of ten soviet cars stopped 100 meters from the county hospital. (It turns out that in this night, **in the sight of the Soviets**, the corpses were loaded!).” [emphasis in the original] (Flacara, no. 27, 1991, p. 9).

The reference to the corpses being loaded is to an operation by the Militia and Securitate on the night of 18-19 December 1989, in which the cadavers of 40 people killed during the repression of anti-regime protesters were secretly transported from Timisoara's main hospital to Bucharest for cremation (reputedly on Elena Ceausescu's personal order).

Finally, as yet another of many possible examples, we have the recollections of Bucharest Militia Captain Ionel Bejan, which apparently appeared in print for the first time only in 2004, in a book by Alex Mihai Stoenescu (excerpted in “Jurnalul National,” 7 December 2004). According to Bejan, around 2 AM on the night of 21-22 December, not far from University Plaza, where at that moment regime forces were firing their way through a barricade set up by protesters (48 were killed that night, 604 wounded, and 684 arrested), he spotted two LADA automobiles with Soviet plates and two men and a woman studying a map and pointing to different locations among the surrounding buildings. Bejan recalled:

“One thing's for sure, and that is that although they looked like tourists, they didn't behave like tourists who had just arrived in town or were lost, especially as close by there were compact groups of demonstrators, while from armored personnel carriers there was intense warning fire and a helicopter hovered overhead with lights ablaze. **I don't know what kind of tourist tours somewhere in such conditions.** They left the impression that they were sure of themselves, they didn't need any directions, proof which was that they didn't ask us anything even though we were nearby and, being uniformed Militia, were in the position to give them any directions they needed. One thing's for sure when I

returned to that location in January 1990...the buildings displayed visible signs of bullet holes...[emphasis added]" ("Jurnalul National," 7 December 2004)

STRANGE "TOURISTS"...STRANGER STILL, THE REACTIONS OF THE AUTHORITIES

We can agree with Ionel Bejan in one respect. One thing is for sure: these were some very strange tourists. (They give a whole new meaning to the term, "adventure tourism.") As curious as the "Soviet tourists" themselves is how little the Romanian authorities who claim to have seen them did to stop them—or even try to collect more information about them. Why is it that no official questioned the enigmatic "Soviet tourists" or asked them to leave the area when, as Radu Balan claims, he saw ten LADAs outside the Timis county hospital at 1 AM in the morning the night the cadavers of protesters were being loaded onto a truck for cremation? Or, as Ionel Bejan claims, he spotted several of them in the center of Bucharest at 2 AM, when the area was essentially a warzone of regime repression? The regime had closed the borders to virtually all other foreigners, tourists or otherwise, it was trying to prevent any word of the repression from reaching the outside world, and yet Romanian authorities were not concerned about these "tourists" taking pictures or relaying what they were seeing?!

As I have written before, if it was obvious before 18 December, as these Ceausescu regime officials claim, that "Soviet tourists" were involved in the events in Timisoara, then why was it precisely "Soviet travelers coming home from shopping trips to Yugoslavia" who were the only group declared exempt from the ban on "tourism" announced on that day (see AFP, 19 December 1989 as cited in Hall 2002b)? In fact, an Agent France-Presse correspondent reported that two Romanian border guards on the Yugoslav frontier curtly told him: "Go back home, only Russians can get through"!!! The few official documents from the December events that have made their way into the public domain show the Romanian Ambassador to Moscow, Ion Bucur, appealing to the Soviets to honor the Romanian news blackout on events in Timisoara, but never once mentioning—let alone objecting to—the presence or behavior of "Soviet tourists" in Romania during these chaotic days of crisis for the Ceausescu regime (CWHIP, "New Evidence on the 1989 Crisis in Romania," 2001). It truly strains the imagination to believe that the Romanian authorities were so "frightened" of committing a diplomatic incident with the Soviets that they would allow Soviet agents to roam the country virtually unhindered, allowing them to go anywhere and do anything they wanted.

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE...A "SOVIET TOURIST" ENCORE IN 1990

Add to all of this (!), the allegations that the "Soviet tourists" were seen again on the streets during major crises in 1990, such as the ethnic clashes between Romanians and Hungarians in Tirgu Mures in March 1990 (for evidence of the reach of the allegation of KGB manipulation via the "tourist" mechanism both in December 1989 AND in March 1990, see Emil Hurezeanu, "Cotidianul," 23 December 1999; according to Hurezeanu, "It appears they didn't leave the country until 1991, following a visit by [SRI Director] Virgil Magureanu to Moscow"!). Then there is the famous April 1991 interview of an

alleged KGB officer—who spoke flawless Romanian and was in Romania during the December 1989 events—who the interviewer, the vigorous anti-Iliescu foe, Sorin Rosca Stanescu, claimed to have just stumbled into in Paris. Of all the reporters who could have stumbled into a KGB officer present in Romania during the Revolution—the only such case I know of—it was Rosca Stanescu, who, it turned out later, had been an informer for the Securitate until the mid-1980s—but not just for anybody, but for the USLA. Interestingly, although the article appeared on the non-descript page 8 of the primary opposition daily at the time (“Romania Libera”), the aforementioned Filip Teodorescu and Radu Balan invoked it in support of their contentions regarding the the “tourists” (for a discussion of this, see Hall 2002). Even more surprising, or not, depending on your point of view, in his April 1991 article, Stanescu attempted to tie together December 1989 with December 1990 (!):

“As you will recall, persistent rumors have circulated about the existence on Romanian soil [in December 1989] of over 2,000 Lada automobiles with Soviet tags and two men in each car. **Similar massive infiltrations were witnessed in December 1990, too, with the outbreak of a wave of strikes and demonstrations.** What were the KGB doing in Romania?” (emphasis added) (“Romania Libera,” 18 April 1991)

Indeed, what were they doing in Romania? But, more aptly:

WHO COULD THEY HAVE BEEN?

Some other recollections and comments may offer clues to the answer to this vexing question. For example, the Caransebes Militia Chief claims he helped a group of “Soviet tourists” coming from Timisoara on the night of 20-21 December when one of their cars—as usual, “it was part of a convoy of 20 cars, all of the same make and with 3-4 passengers per car”—went off the road (from “Europa,” no. 20, 1991, see the discussion in Hall 2002b). According to Teodorescu, the “tourists” greeted the militia chief with the phrase “What the hell? We are colleagues; you have to help us” (Teodorescu, 1992, p. 93). The militia chief opines that despite their Soviet passports, “to this day, I don’t really know where they were from.”

Nicu Ceausescu, Nicolae's son and most likely heir and party secretary in Sibiu at the time of the Revolution, claimed that he also had to deal with enigmatic “tourists” during these historic days (the following several paragraphs borrow heavily from Hall 2002b). From his prison cell in 1990, Nicu recounted how on the night of 20 December 1989, a top party official came to inform him that the State Tourist Agency was requesting that he -- the party secretary for Sibiu! -- “find lodgings for a group of tourists who did not have accommodation” He kindly obliged and made the appropriate arrangements (interview with Nicu Ceausescu in “Zig-Zag,” no. 20, 21-27 August 1990).

Interestingly, in the same interview Nicu discusses the “tourists” for which he was asked to find accommodations in the context of a group of mysterious passengers who had arrived by plane from Bucharest on the evening of 20 December 1989. We know that in the period immediately following these events, the then-military prosecutor, Anton

Socaciu, had alleged that these passengers from Bucharest were members of the Securitate's elite USLA unit (Special Unit for Antiterrorist Warfare) and were responsible for much of the bloodshed that occurred in Sibiu during the December events. Nicu Silvestru, chief of the Sibiu County Militia, admitted in passing in a letter from prison that on the afternoon of 19 December in a crisis meeting, Ceausescu's son announced that he was going to "call [his] specialists from Bucharest" to take care of any protests ("Baricada," no. 45, 1990). Ceausescu's Interior Minister, Tudor Postelnicu, admitted at his trial in January 1990 that Nicu had called him requesting "some troops" and he had informed Securitate Director General Iulian Vlad of the request ("Romania Libera," 30 January 1990.)

The rewriting of the story of the Revolution, the "tourists," and the "terrorists" was already in full swing, when in August 1990, Nicu wryly observed:

"...[T]he Military Prosecutor gave me two variants. In the first part of the inquest, they [the flight's passengers] were from the Interior Ministry. Later, however, in the second half of the investigation, when the USLA and those from the Interior Ministry began, so-to-speak, to pass 'into the shadows,' -- after which one no longer heard anything of them - they [the passengers] turned out to be simple citizens..." (interview with Nicu Ceausescu in "Zig-Zag," no. 20, 21-27 August 1990).

The impact of this "reconsideration" by the authorities could be seen in the comments of Socaciu's successor as military prosecutor in charge of the Sibiu case, Marian Valer (see Hall 1997, pp. 314-315). Valer commented in September 1990 that investigations yielded the fact that there were 37 unidentified passengers on board the 20 December flight from Bucharest and that many of the other passengers maintained that "on the right side of the plane there had been a group of tall, athletic men, dressed in sporting attire, many of them blond, who had raised their suspicions." The USLA, which were responsible for airport security and had "air marshals" on all flights (three in this case), refused to discuss the identity of these passengers with Valer. While investigations revealed that during this time there "were many Soviet tourists staying in Sibiu's hotels," they also established that "military units were fired upon from Securitate safehouses located around these units as of the afternoon of 22 December, after the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime." He thus carefully concludes:

"As far as the unidentified passengers are concerned, there are two possible variants: Either they were USLA fighters sent to defend Nicu Ceausescu, or they were Soviet agents sent to act with the intent of overthrowing the Ceausescu regime" ("Expres," no. 33, September 1990).

Clearly, one of these hypotheses is a lot more plausible than the other...As I wrote in December 1996, partly based on the statements of the Military Prosecutor Marian Valer who stepped down from investigating the Sibiu events in fall 1990, citing duress: "thus as the USLA began to disappear from the historiography and therefore history of the Revolution, so the Soviet tourists began to enter it." (Hall, 1996).

RED HERRINGS: THE CHRONICLES OF A FORMER COMMUNIST SPY CHIEF'S VIEWS ON DECEMBER 1989

Inevitably, too, in the wake of the Brandstatter film the Romanian media dragged out its old warhorse for such occasions, the former Director of communist Romania's Foreign Intelligence Service, General Ion Mihai Pacepa, the man whose defection in 1978 led to his being sentenced to death in absentia and whose sensational revelations about Ceausescu's repressive and profligate rule helped erode the myth of Ceausescu in the West. Pacepa's break from Ceausescu and the communist regime, and his stinging criticism of the administrations of President Ion Iliescu for their incorporation of and reliance upon former Securitate personnel, have led Pacepa to be lionized in the West and to be highly-respected and thoroughly-trusted among Romania's intellectual and media elites.

In the wake of Brandstatter's film, and, indirectly, in support of Bukovski's allegations, Pacepa's claims about December 1989 were once again invoked. Thus, for example, excerpts of an August 2000 interview on the Hungarian Duna TV channel (rebroadcast on Duna TV two nights before the debut of the Brandstatter film) were published ("Jurnalul National," 26 February 2004). In the interview, Pacepa maintained that there were no so-called "terrorists" during the Revolution—that the "terrorist" phenomenon was all a pretext used by the party-state officials who ousted Ceausescu to legitimate a Soviet intervention:

"Interviewer: What exactly was the essence of the the 'Dnestr' Plan?"

Pacepa: It was necessary to find a motive [to justify] the Soviet intervention, if the coup was to succeed by itself. Therefore it is very easy to understand. On 22 [sic. 23] December 1989, at 2 pm in the afternoon, Romanian Television announced: "The National Salvation Front has requested Soviet help because unidentified foreign terrorists are attacking Romania." Already on this day, Iliescu declared that the Ceausescu couple had been arrested and a trial would be held, only for Television to announce [later] that their trial and execution had taken place." ("Confessions of a Spy Chief" in "Jurnalul National," 26 February 2004)

Since the early 1990s, Pacepa has maintained that the events of December 1989 were part of a well-scripted Soviet plan—the so-called "Dnestr Plan"—to remove Ceausescu (for a summary, see Deletant, 1995, pp. 89-90). According to Pacepa, the Soviet plan was a response to the 1969 visit of US President Richard Nixon to Bucharest. Pacepa claims that Iliescu had been designated Ceausescu's replacement in accordance with this plan as early as 1971! Dennis Deletant cautions with regard to Pacepa's account:

"Pacepa's use of the term 'Front for National Salvation' smacks too much of an attempt to compromise the more recent Front for National Salvation, set up after the 1989 revolution, by suggesting that the seeds of it had been sown some twenty years earlier by Moscow. It is difficult to believe that such a name could have been chosen so many years earlier." (Deletant, 1995, p. 90)

Pacepa's claims are even more questionable than Deletant's moderate skepticism suggests. As I wrote in 1997:

“Moreover, it is intriguing to note that Pacepa revealed these details [i.e. those of the ‘Dnestr’ plan] only after the December 1989 events (in his 1993 book ‘The Inheritance of the Kremlin’). Although in ‘Red Horizons’ (his 1988 detail-filled, “tell-all” book on the Ceausescu and the Securitate) he mentioned cases in which alleged Soviet agents (including Army General Nicolae Militaru...) were caught, he did not mention anything about the so-called ‘Operation Dnestr’.” (Hall, 1997, p. 117).

Pacepa had no problem in “Red Horizons” revealing alleged Soviet agents in Romania and alleged secret plans by which Ceausescu's fabled “independence from Moscow” was all a Moscow-created ruse, yet he somehow did not feel the need or desire to outline Moscow's plan for further increasing their control over Romania through “Operation Dnestr?” This is hard to believe.

Furthermore, there is his amazing about face on the question of the “terrorists”/Ceausescu loyalists during the Revolution. At the time, Pacepa spoke of “Plan M” as the source of the “terrorists” (see AP, Bryan Brumley, “Ceausescu Had Planned to Flee to China, Former Security Chief Says,” 5 January 1990). According to Pacepa, “Plan M” called for Securitate forces to “retreat to hidden bunkers and wage guerilla war.” He spoke about the use of safe houses and of a maze of secret tunnels, descriptions that were similar to what was being heard from Romanian during and immediately after the Revolution. Significantly, Pacepa's details mirror many of the points in the so-called “Plan Z” for the event of an attempt to remove Ceausescu, the reputed 1987 copy of which was published in the daily “Evenimentul Zilei” in July 1993 and which apparently was still in effect in December 1989 (for a good discussion of the plan, see Deletant, 1995, pp. 84-88).

Pacepa's claim that Securitate forces were at the center of the Ceausescu resistance following his flight on 22 December echoed the claims of Liviu Turcu, a Securitate foreign intelligence officer who had defected earlier in 1989, who told David Binder of “New York Times” on 24 December 1989 that the “terrorists” were likely from the Securitate's Fifth Directorate (he estimated at 1,000-1,500 members) and the USLA (which he estimated at 1,000 members) (“New York Times,” 25 December 1989, p. A12.)

Of course, that was **then**. By 1993—and as we have seen from the quote from the 2000 interview, continuing long after that, to the present day—Pacepa was claiming that there had been no “terrorists,” that it was all just a pretext by the KGB agents who seized power from Ceausescu (Iliescu, Militaru, Brucan, etc.) for justifying Soviet military intervention (see, for example, his comments in “Evenimentul Zilei,” 10 April 1993; 29 April 1993). The Ceausescu had been shot KGB-style to prevent them from revealing to the Romanian people and the world that the coup-plotters were KGB agents, according to Pacepa. One must ask: if Pacepa possessed this knowledge prior to December 1989—and he claims that the plan originated in 1969—and therefore had suspicions that the “terrorist” phase was merely a diversion designed to serve as a pretext for Soviet

intervention, then why did he say what he said, and why did he not reveal his knowledge and voice his concerns before, during, or immediately after December 1989?

Finally, there is the problem of the similarity of Pacea's arguments on the Revolution with those of other former Securitate officers. True, they hate Pacea and Pacea hates them equally. But take, for example, the following quote:

“The **coup d'état** which ‘recovered the Revolution’...brought to power the FSN [the National Salvation Front] crew...[which] initiated the criminal scenario with Securitate-terrorists in order to spill blood and justify the assumption of power by people who had no business proclaiming themselves to be revolutionaries...[I]t was a diversion of the FSN in order to escalate the terror, suspicion, blood-letting, [and] chaos necessary to resolve the problem of taking state power and calling the Soviets.”

The source of this quote is not Pacea, but the well-known “protochronist,” “national communist” former Securitate officer Pavel Corut (Corut, 1994, “Cantecul Nemuririi [Song of the Undying]” (Bucharest: Editura Miracol, 1994), pp. 170, 172, quoted in Hall, 1997, p. 257). The point is, as the accusations of Pacea discussed at the beginning of this section demonstrate, Pacea's claims are identical to what Corut's alleges. By forcing an analytical, but also partisan ideological distinction by dividing protoWesterners from protochronists, as if the two were night-and-day and so easily identifiable, critical similarities such as this one—which demands attention and analysis precisely because it is unexpected—are ignored.

One of the precious few non-partisan deconstructions of the whole Pacea circus is Peter Banyai's penetrating article “Pacea: a tortenelem bizalmasa [Pacea: History's Confidant]” (Banyai 2004a; 2004b makes pretty clear that he is no shill for Pacea's adversaries within Romania). Banyai notes how Dan Pavel has compared Iliescu and Pacea and suggested that “our political culture has determined” that the criterion for where one stands on the political spectrum—and no less than democracy itself!—is where one stands on Pacea. As Banyai summarizes: “[According to Pavel,] [h]e who loves Pacea, he is a democrat, he who doesn't is a post-communist!... Thus has taken shape the Pacea myth in Romania. The latest among countless other self-deceiving revisionisms.” Banyai hits the nail on the head in this conclusion:

“How is it that Pacea has managed to pull the wool over the eyes of the greater part of Romanian public opinion with such primitive claims? Clearly, because it draws on what resonates best in the Romanian public. The conspiratorial mindsets, the Russophobia, the KGB-mania that make up the collective Romanian political psyche.” (Banyai 2004a)

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THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AS GEOPOLITICAL PARLOR GAME: BRANDSTATTER'S "CHECKMATE" DOCUMENTARY AND THE LATEST WAVE IN A SEA OF REVISIONISM

By Richard Andrew Hall

Part 4: The First Wave of Franco-German Revisionism, 1990

The great irony of the new wave of Franco-German revisionism—which argues that the December 1989 revolution in Romania was a CIA-engineered coup d'état—is that it was journalists and academics in precisely France and [West] Germany who in 1990 led the charge that that the revolution was largely a KGB-inspired and guided coup d'état. Just as the KGB gets a cameo in the new revisionism, so the first Franco-German revisionist wave assigned a part to the CIA and Western security services, but it was a bit and largely (dis)informational/passive role. Books and articles by Michel Castex, a French journalist, Olivier Weber and Radu Portocala, both French journalists with the latter an ethnic Romanian, and Anneli Ute Gabanyi, a Romanian German-based academic and former analyst at Radio Free Europe, spearheaded the promotion of the KGB coup theory throughout 1990 (for summaries of the arguments contained in these works, see, for example, Ratesh, 1991, pp. 81-85 and Shafir, 1990, pp. 30-31). The enduring influence of these theories on shaping the debate about the Revolution—and, ironically, highlighting just how new the Brandstatter-Durandin second Franco-German wave is—can be seen in a 1999 article by Andreas Oplatka in a German-language daily marking the 10th anniversary of the December 1989 events (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 22 December 1999, also invoked by J.F. Brown, 2001, p. 77, n. 7 as an excellent contemporary synopsis of the debate).

The relationship of the Franco-German revisionism to Romania was dynamic and flowed in both directions. Streams of thought intersected and converged. To some extent, it ended up becoming circular as time passed. Franco-German revisionism was based in part on interviews with and revelations from Romanian participants in the December 1989 events. The details and arguments of these writings would flow back into Romania—they were translated or reviewed—where they appeared to provide answers to the confusing aspects and unresolved questions of Ceausescu's overthrow. The theories were welcomed and trumpeted by the small, electorally weak, and continuously harrassed opposition to Ion Iliescu's National Salvation Front regime, who were primed to believe them based on what had happened since Ceausescu's overthrow and who desperately needed anything that could help them in a sharply unequal political contest. This bestowed foreign authors domestic confirmation of their revisionist accounts.

The Evolution of the Initial French Accounts

The engine of the French revisionism of the first half of 1990 was probably the weekly "Le Point,"—although French Television (FR3) and other dailies and weeklies also played a role. In the 1 January 1990 edition of "Le Point," Kosta Christitch wrote in an article entitled "Romania: Moscow's Hidden Game," that Ceausescu's "fate had [not

been determined in December] been sealed in Moscow less than a month earlier.” On New Year’s Day 1990, French Television broadcast the famous video which shows Ion Iliescu, Petre Roman, and Army General Nicolae Militaru talking on 22 December about what to name the(ir) group that had taken power, and in which Militaru claims that the “National Salvation Front has been in existence for six months already” (for details and a good discussion on this issue, see Ratesh, 1991, pp. 53-55, 81, 89-91). In the 8 January 1990 edition of “Le Point,” Radu Portocala entitled his article “Romania: The Hand of Moscow.” Portocala insinuated that Hungarian and Yugoslav media had intentionally exaggerated the number of casualties, particularly in the Timisoara repression [numbers which reached upwards of 10,000-12,000, when in actuality 73 died], while “at the same time, everything was put in motion to publicize that it wasn’t the [Romanian] Army that had opened fire [on the Timisoara demonstrators], but the Securitate.” On 5 February 1990, Portocala returned with an article, “Romania: Troubling Facts,” and on 30 April 1990, Olivier Weber wrote a piece, “Romania: The Confiscated Revolution.”

However, as Ratesh states, “...a fully developed conspiracy theory would not come to light until late May 1990, when the French magazine ‘Le Point’ carried a long and sensational article purporting to unveil the truth about the uprising” (Ratesh, 1991, pp. 81-82). The article, “Romania: Revelations of a Plot. The Five Acts of a Manipulation,” by Weber and Portocala, continued the themes that the authors had developed in their aforementioned articles, that Ceausescu’s overthrow was in fact a coup and that the communist bloc media had distorted information about what was happening inside Romania in order to propel Ceausescu’s fall. But it also included two new generally new themes, insinuating that foreign agents on the ground in Timisoara had had some role in the protests there—thereby undercutting the “spontaneity” of the Revolution—and that there had been no genuine “terrorists,” only “false terrorists,” part of a scenario for legitimating the coup d’etat. It was these newer themes that particularly became the focus of the Romanian media, and that prompted the most controversy.

It is difficult to overestimate the long shadow of the 21 May “Le Point” expose over the historiography of the Revolution. Translated by “Expres,” “Nu (Cluj),” and other key opposition publications in May and June 1990, it seemed to crystallize and explain all the doubts Romanians had about the December events—further confirmed, it seemed, by the manifestly unequal and unfair 20 May election results and then the miners’ rampage in Bucharest against demonstrators and the opposition press and parties during 13-15 June. The article’s trail shows up everywhere. American Romanianists Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman who, in an article written in November 1990 sensibly inveighed against treating the Front, the former Securitate, and other groups as homogenous wholes operating in lock-step on behalf of Iliescu, discussed the Weber and Portocala as the centerpiece of the debate over December 1989 (Verdery and Kligman, 1992, pp. 118-122). However, although they questioned it, their summary of their own views on the events seemed to repeat many of the arguments of the account.

The Weber and Portocala account also shows up in the travel account of Dervla Murphy—although cited to “Romania Libera,” the description and details of her discussion make it clear the “Le Point” article is the source (Murphy 1995). Thus,

Murphy floats the idea that perhaps the Reverend Tokes in Timisoara was in collusion with the coup plotters of the Front, and that “Soviet provocateurs and some Rumanian soldiers killed most of the victims—though everyone, in Rumania and abroad, was misled to believe the Securitate responsible.” It is telling, that although always somewhat skeptical of the notion of an external hand in sparking and fanning the Timisoara unrest, that in 1990, without having read the “Le Point” expose, but having followed English-language press and traveling for a month in Romania in July 1990 (I had first visited in July 1987), my own understanding was essentially along the same lines—how could it not be? My acceptance of the “staged war” theory would inevitably be strengthened in the following years by the accounts of noted Romanian emigres discussed below.

In Romania, Concern over the Unintended Consequences of the First Wave of French Revisionism

Certain key constituencies in Romania were not amused by the French revisionism in particular. In the wake of a demonstration in the cradle of the Revolution to mark nine months after the December events, Vasile Popovici of the Timisoara Society commented:

“The French press, in particular, with a penchant for excessive rationalization specific to the French, has attempted to accredit the idea of a KGB-CIA scenario, including in Timisoara. This fantasy variant demonstrates that those who sustain it have no idea of the real course of events in Timisoara and cannot explain in any way how people went out three days in a row (17, 18, 19 [December]) to die on the streets (Ciobotea 1990, interview with Vasile Popovici, “Vinovati sint mortii? [The Dead are to Blame?], “Flacara,” no. 40, 3 October, p. 3).

It is notable that in the same interview, Popovici who was no friend of the Iliescu regime, denounced the “attacks emanating from **anti-FSN** [National Salvation Front] publications upon the image of the popular revolt in Timisoara” [emphasis in the original; he included, the anti-Iliescu weekly “Zig-Zag” in the discussion, for more details on “Zig-Zag”’s critical role, see Hall 2002; Mioc 2000). Popovici underlined that the revisionism **started** in the anti-FSN press, and only then was integrated by the FSN press.

Specifically in reference to Olivier Weber and Radu Portocala’s 21 May 1990 expose in “Le Point,” (Army) Major Mihai Floca and Captain Victor Stoica declared: “We do not question the good faith of the French journalists, although the idea promoted by them is remarkably convenient to those who are just dying to demonstrate that, in fact, the ‘terrorists’ did not exist (Major Mihai Floca and Captain Victor Stoica, “Unde sint teroristii? PE STRADA, PRINTRE NOI (I), “Armata Poporului, no. 24 (13 June 1990), p. 3).” As this and other articles by the authors make clear, the reference is to the former Securitate—specifically, journalist Angela Bacescu in “Zig-Zag” (for a discussion, see Hall 1999).

Nor was the source of a key statement in Weber and Portocala’s article suggesting a fictitious “staged war” with fictitious “terrorists”—“There needed to be victims in order to legitimate the new power in order to create [the image of] a mass revolution,”

according to the source—credible (see Hall 1999, p. 540 n. 90). Its source was former Navy Captain Nicolae Radu, a virulently anti-Semitic interloper and mercenary, who would become a regular in the former Securitate's mouthpiece, "Europa," in 1991, alleging all sorts of conspiracies about December 1989 that inevitably bestowed a primary role on Romanian Jewry and the MOSSAD. If Nicolae Radu's claim about a "fictitious war with fictitious terrorists," sounds familiar from earlier parts of this series, it is: see, for example, the discussions of Dominique Fonveille (Part 2) and Ion Mihai Pacepa (Part 3).

As the above-cited observation by Floca and Stoica demonstrates, even if initially independent, streams French sensationalism and Securitate-inspired revisionism ended up converging and intermingling—a historical accident that redounded decidedly to the benefit of the latter. This was not only the case with the "terrorists," but also with the issue of alleged "foreign agents" on the ground in Timisoara and their alleged role in the uprising. It is undoubted, has been reported, and has been admitted publicly that at one point or another, particularly in monitoring regime treatment of the Hungarian Pastor Laszlo Tokes, around whom the uprising broke out, that embassy and consulate personnel from the Yugoslavia (which has a consulate in Timisoara), United States, Japan, and other countries (likely to include Hungary, the UK etc.) appeared in Timisoara during these events. It would be naïve to believe that there were no intelligence personnel among those at the scene among these countries' representatives. Of course, monitoring unfolding events is one thing, fomenting an uprising or monitoring the progress of a manufactured uprising by the countries for which they worked, quite another.

It is clearly the latter scenarios that foreign and domestic revisionists have alleged about Ceausescu's overthrow. There are glaring contradictions in the logic of these revisionist accounts on this score, however. For example, accounts of the first Franco-German revisionist wave allege that the Hungarian and Yugoslav media intentionally inflated the casualty counts in Romania to move the coup forward by fueling anger at the Ceausescu regime. In doing so, we are told, these communist services were likely doing the bidding or aiding the effort of the Soviet-backed coup plotters, and thus of the Gorbachev leadership. In their 21 May 1990 expose, Weber and Portocala mention the presence of "Soviet observers" in Timisoara since at least 16 December 1989, when the demonstrations really began to take shape. They cite Tanjug, the Yugoslav news agency, as the source of this claim. Since this claim was first mentioned in the 1 January 1990 "Le Point" article by Kosta Cristitich, I can only surmise that the Tanjug claim was published sometime during the last week of December 1989. (I have been unable to find this reference in FBIS, which translated many Tanjug dispatches at the time, but I have no reason to doubt that this is what Tanjug related. It is therefore unclear who Tanjug heard this claim from—a fact which as we saw in the case of Mr. Corpasescu in Part 3 is important, since the claim could reflect disinformation or rumor.) A similar claim turns up in Andrei Codrescu's book, *The Hole in the Flag*, in which he maintains that during the first week of January 1990, a Soviet journalist drinking-buddy for that night told Codrescu that he had been in Timisoara and that there in fact had been "a dozen TASS [Soviet news agency] correspondents" in Timisoara since 10 December 1989 (Codrescu, 1990, p. 171).

In essence, we are thus asked to believe that the exact media personnel who were behind a disinformation campaign to exaggerate the death toll in Romania and aid the Soviet-engineered coup, nonchalantly publicized the role of the Soviets in the uprising in Timisoara. This does not make a lot of sense, does it? Moreover, the presence of unhindered “Soviet observers” in Timisoara from 16 December—to say nothing, of the Codrescu claim, of “a dozen TASS correspondents” in Timisoara from the 10th—does not seem realistic. To begin with, Tokes only announced to his congregation on 10 December that the regime was probably going to deliver on their long-existing threat of evicting him on 15 December—meaning that either the “TASS correspondents” would have had to have had advance information of Tokes’ announcement or a certain amount of good luck/clairvoyance. Given the well-documented difficulties all journalists experienced in late 1989 in trying to get into the country, especially following the upheaval elsewhere in the bloc, it is hard to believe these “dozen TASS correspondents” would have received visas into the country, presenting themselves as such—they certainly did not do much reporting from Timisoara, as like other news associations it was only on the 23rd that a Soviet journalist filed a report from there.* Moreover, it is significant that on the morning of 11 December 1989, Budapest’s Domestic [Radio] Service announced that the day before three staff members of the ruling party daily “Nepszabadsag” were banned for five years for attempting to approach Tokes’ residence—their film and tape recordings were also predictably confiscated (FBIS, 11 December 1989, and “New York Times,” 12 December 1989). So, how then is it, that the Hungarian correspondents were expelled, but the “a dozen TASS correspondents”—apparently somehow keeping well out of sight, and feeling no compunction to write on the topic of the Hungarian correspondents—were allowed to stay?

Gaining a Foothold: Survival of the First...

Given the skepticism and outright rebuttals found in the Romanian press in 1990, how is it that the first wave of Franco-German theories was able to “corner the market” of historical understandings—let alone achieve legitimacy—in the West, especially, as we shall see, in the United States? I believe it is doubtful that the theories would ever have gained such exposure, traction, and staying power had it not been for their assimilation and dissemination by prominent Romanian intellectual émigrés in the United States, made worse by the fact that the pool of these critics was remarkably small and uniform in its political orientation. Given credibility by these emigres, the theories were then taken up by noted historians of Eastern Europe and social scientists, thereby reinforcing the validity of the theories to their audiences. One can no more understand the influence of the first Franco-German revisionist wave on English-language accounts of the Revolution without studying the role played by these émigré scholars in relaying them, than one can understand the content and context of Romanian accounts of the December 1989 events without knowing what the former Securitate argues about them.

It is telling that when one reads the analysis of the “mysteries of the Revolution” in National Public Radio commentator Andrei Codrescu’s engaging “The Hole in the Flag”

or in Matei Calinescu and Vladimir Tismaneanu's penetrating "The 1989 Revolution and Romania's Future"—both of which appeared in 1991—French sources dominate the discussion of what happened in December 1989. None of the skepticism about the accuracy of the French sources—as related in the comments of Popovici, Floca, and Stoica above—is voiced in these accounts.

The Walls Come Tumbling Down...

What is arguably still the best historical account of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, Gale Stokes' "The Walls Came Tumbling Down (1993)," repeats as fact a list of allegations regarding the trial of the Ceausescus that first were given publicity by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Matei Calinescu. (Even where Stokes cites others, those articles are usually themselves derivative and their arguments can be traced back to Tismaneanu and Calinescu). Based in large part on the broadcast of the full tape of the Ceausescus' trial and execution in April 1990, analyses in the French press, and the allegations of French forensic experts (which apparently derived solely from having watched the tape (!)), Tismaneanu and Calinescu clearly showed their preference in a 1991 article for the French theory of the events. They therefore write that the trial of the Ceausescus lasted nine hours but only "fifty-odd minutes" was shown on the tape, that the execution of the couple had been faked, since Nicolae had likely suffered a heart-attack—"during the trial or during a separate interrogation, possibly under torture"—that caused Elena to go into hysterics, which necessitated that she be killed on the spot "gangland style." (Stokes, 1993, pp. 292-293, n.118; Calinescu and Tismaneanu, 1991, p. 45-46, especially n. 14). They then go on to speculate that the 1 March 1990 suicide of the chief judge of the trial, General Gica Popa, "could have been an act of desperation by an essentially honest man" who would have had to go through "the criminal charade" of sentencing two corpses to death.

Of course, all of these judgments—and I contend this is the cornerstone of so many accounts/theories of the Revolution, although many researchers do not appear to acknowledge or realize it—are premised on their understanding of the identity and intentions of the "terrorists." For example, if one believes there was no real "terrorist" threat, then one can countenance a leisurely nine-hour trial and the idea that the Ceausescus died during a "separate interrogation, possibly under torture." On this question, Tismaneanu and Calinescu clearly reject the idea that those firing were fighting to topple the new leadership and restore the Ceausescus to power:

"In retrospect, the purpose of the reports of terrorism appears to have been to create apprehension among the populace and induce people to forgo further public demonstration against communism. It was used, in effect, to help the new power structure." (Calinescu and Tismaneanu, 1991, p. 45, n. 12)

As to the allegations made by Calinescu and Tismaneanu in their 1991 account: even at the time of their article, there were very strong reasons to question the validity of their information and speculation. Numerous testimonies by Army personnel present at Tirgoviste while the Ceausescus were there negate their claims (see, for example, the

interviews in “Ceusestii la Tirgoviste,” “Flacara,” 19 December 1990, pp. 8-10, which place the length of the trial anywhere between 50 minutes and one hour). As I wrote in 1997: “...even a year after the events, one of the eyewitnesses to what transpired, Maria Stefan, the cook in the officer’s mess, continued to maintain that the trial itself lasted ‘an hour’ (Hall, 1997, p. 342). When it comes to the question of Nicolae having been tortured prior to his death, Ratesh in 1991 notably stated that this version was “attributed to an official of the Romanian Ministry of the Interior”—i.e. likely former Securitate, and indeed given its utility for them it is not surprising that the former Securitate have sought to promote this idea in their literature on the Revolution (Ratesh, 1991, p. 76). Military and civilian personnel present at the execution are simply dismissive at the contentions of the French forensic experts that the Ceausescus were already dead by the time they were executed (they have effective counter-arguments regarding bloodflow—Nicolae’s greatcoat, Elena’s hysterical reaction by that point). They consider it ridiculous and the product of Westerners with no knowledge of the events (this comes through again on several occasions in the year long set of interviews in “Jurnalul National” during 2004).

In an otherwise excellent account by political scientists Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan that is commonly cited in the social sciences, the authors juxtapose Michel Castex’s book—described as marketing the “myth” of the “revolution as a KGB plot”—with Andrei Codrescu’s apparently far more credible book in their opinion (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p.345 n. 3). They note that to Codrescu “the whole revolution had been a fake, a film scripted by the Romanian Communists, with a ‘beautifully orchestrated piece of Kremlin music conducted by Maestro Gorbachev.’” Indeed, it is worth looking at the passage from which this quote is taken:

“Many people now believe—in the face of mounting evidence—that the mastermind of the Romanian operation was the KGB, that the Romanian revolution was a beautifully orchestrated piece of Kremlin music conducted by Maestro Gorbachev. What’s more, the operation had the full cooperation of the CIA. I recently bought a T-shirt in Washington, D.C., that says: ‘TOGETHER AT LAST! THE KGB & THE CIA. NOW WE ARE EVERYWHERE.’ Even one T-shirt can sometimes be smarter than all the news media.” (Codrescu, 1991, p. 206).

Codrescu in fact invokes Castex—especially his discussion of the Western media’s supposedly intentional inflation of casualties during the days of the revolution—in support of his thesis (pp. 197-198). There is thus little that differentiates Codrescu from Castex, and the distinction drawn by Linz and Stepan is simply incorrect.

Far better than the accounts of either Calinescu and Tismaneanu or Codrescu is that of Nestor Ratesh, former head of the Romanian broadcasting division of Radio Free Europe. His *The Entangled Revolution* (1991) is alternatively described as “sensible,” “sober,” and “authoritative,” by Romanianists and scholars who do not cover the country. For example, both Stokes, and Linz and Stepan, invoke his work. Sensible and sober Ratesh’s account is; authoritative, only from the standpoint of what was available in English at the time. Inevitably, Ratesh’s account is head and shoulders above those of fellow emigres Calinescu and Tismaneanu and Codrescu because he had performed more

research into the Romanian media. Unfortunately, I would argue, not far enough. He stumbles upon the bothersome parallel nature of accounts of the Securitate's actions during the Revolution by "Romania Libera's" Petre Mihai Bacanu, and "other journalists (of less credibility, however)"—most likely a reference to the aforementioned, Angela Bacescu—but he does not research further to see if this is coincidence or pattern, and thereby considers it anomalous (see my discussion in Hall 1999). Thankfully, he takes a critical eye to the Castex, Portocala and Weber, and Gabanyi accounts, and expresses skepticism when a "highly placed Romanian official" whispered to him in late June 1990 "a variation of the staged war theory,"—cautioning that the regime was at the time attempting to discredit the army (unfortunately, it was hardly so time-bound) (Ratesh, 1991, p.62). However, whether it is Bacescu or others, he only comes to notice them when they enter the openly Ceausescu nostalgic press, and thereby misses identifying their presence and impact in the opposition press, as Popovici, Floca, and Stoica did.

To my knowledge, Ratesh has not really weighed in on the Revolution since his 1991 book. Codrescu continues to present the December events as a stage(d) production that fooled the whole world, occasionally in his NPR commentaries and certainly in his talks across the US (Codrescu, 2002). Tismaneanu and Romania's liberal intelligentsia at home and abroad have yet to address the presence and consequences of Securitate disinformation in the anti-Front media of the early 1990s. This is not surprising: they missed it...and to acknowledge it now would require them to edit their ironclad, definitively-stated characterizations of that era, and perhaps, even to pause and reconsider their understanding of December 1989. As for the Revolution itself, Tismaneanu's most recent intervention on its 15th anniversary invoked the comments of former French Ambassador to Romania, Jean-Marie LeBreton, who concludes, unremarkably, that the December 1989 events were neither a spontaneous uprising/revolution nor a coup d'etat, but a combination of both ("Jurnalul National," 29 January 2005). Some habits die hard.

*Indeed, there appear to be no TASS dispatches from Timisoara throughout this period. According to FBIS translations, there appear to have been 3 TASS correspondents in Romania, in addition to one from "Izvestiya" and one from "Pravda," all of whom reported during these days from Bucharest. A fourth TASS correspondent reported from Timisoara on 23 December, after the flight of the Ceausescus, and when most foreign reporters were able to enter Timisoara for the first time. Once again, according to FBIS translations, during the events of 15-22 December, TASS correspondents in Bucharest had to rely on other news services and sources in Bucharest to find out what was happening in Timisoara.

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THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AS GEOPOLITICAL PARLOR GAME: BRANDSTATTER’S “CHECKMATE” DOCUMENTARY AND THE LATEST WAVE IN A SEA OF REVISIONISM

By Richard Andrew Hall

Part 5: Opportunity Lost

--“Now, three months after the revolution, everyone is with the people and the Army...So then who was shooting?...The idea that only the Army fired in December is being advanced with great skill...” (Major Mihai Floca, “Armata Poporului,” 14 March 1990).

Many Romanians and foreign observers will tell you the great “secret,” the most prized and protected issue in post-Ceausescu Romania, is who among the appatchiks who assumed power under the banner of the “National Salvation Front” knew one another before the December 1989 events, what were the dimensions and plans of this conspiracy, when was the “Front” formed, and what were their relations with the Soviet Union, etc. Nonsense. By comparison to the issue of the identity of the “terrorists,” the former are lightly guarded. The question of the “terrorists” is **THE** issue of the Revolution precisely because it has far more weighty criminal and moral repercussions and implications associated with it.

OPPORTUNITY LOST

There are, perhaps, few sadder stories of historical revisionism in modern times than that of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989. This is, of course, not because of the magnitude of the event or the number of lives lost (1,104)—unspeakably painful for their loved ones and for the citizens of the country, but a minor total in the scheme of the world’s great historical tragedies. Instead, it is because rarely have the victims and prisoners of a former political system played such an unwitting, zealous, and unfortunate role in serving, assimilating, and perpetuating a revisionist falsehood. In the case of the Romanian Revolution, this revisionist falsehood, it must be admitted, is undeniably seductive, popular, and deeply-embedded in the Romanian popular consciousness and the country’s observers abroad.

The beginning of the burial of the truth about the “terrorists” of December can be dated to 17 February 1990, when General Victor Atanasie Stanculescu replaced General Militaru as Defense Minister. Significantly, the same former Securitate and USLA personnel who are bitterly critical of Stanculescu’s actions during the days of the Revolution praise him for his actions later, particularly after assuming this post. For example, former USLA officer turned author, Teodor Filip (not to be confused with the aforementioned Filip Teodorescu), writes: “On the first day he was appointed, Stanculescu convened all USLA personnel (at least those engaged in ordinary missions) and addressed them with words of encouragement (Filip 1998, p. 109; for his criticism of Stanculescu during the Revolution, see, for example, p. 148).” Indeed, such a revelation—and likely the source

of Filip's claim—came from Gheorghe Ardeleanu, Commander of the USLA at the time of the December events, who told the former Securitate's journalistic mouthpiece in "Europa," Angela Bacescu:

"As is known, General Stanculescu came to the helm of the Defense Ministry, and upon this occasion, I addressed him, in the name of USLA personnel and their grieving families, thanks, recognition for all he had done to honor the memory of those who had fallen, by declaring them heroes post mortem and promoting them. In the first day after being named to the post, General Stanculescu came to our unit and before the entire group, addressed them with words of encouragement, and promised then, and he delivered on it, that the situation of those who had fallen on duty would quickly be resolved in the spirit of truth and human dignity." (from a 1991 interview, in Bacescu 1994, p. 123).

It was Stanculescu's public presentation of the former Securitate and in particular the USLA that was perhaps most appreciated. In the days after the appointment, while many domestic and foreign observers were scrutinizing Stanculescu's revelations on the bureaucratic makeup and membership of the Securitate—the first hard numbers, however flawed, to be released by the Front up until that time—Stanculescu was making critical, if generally unnoticed, revisionist statements about the USLA's role in the December events. (At the time, at least one foreign observer picked up on the suspicious nature of Stanculescu's revisionism and interpreted it as an attempt to rehabilitate the Securitate (Strudza, pp. 33-34). The Securitate's official institutional successor, the Romanian Information Service, SRI was unveiled in late March 1990.) In his comments to the press, Stanculescu not only denied that the USLA had been responsible for the "terrorist actions," but that they had any role in the repression in Timisoara and Bucharest during the week preceding Ceausescu's fall (ROMPRES 8 March 1990 in FBIS 15 March 1990).

We'll leave the first of these allegations alone for the moment. As for the second, it can only be called Orwellian, a true whopper among lies, that could only stand if the newspapers of the previous two months were disposed of and memories of those papers and the events purged from minds. In the same daily, "Libertatea," to which Stanculescu related this new understanding of the USLA's actions in December (26 and 28 February 1990), between 27 January and 15 February, transcripts of regime communications, including USLA communications, from the afternoon of 21 December and then again from the morning of 22 December, had been published under the headline "Dintre sute de...catarge! [From hundreds of "masts!" (the radio identification for USLA officers conducting surveillance)].* Although rather conveniently missing from the transcripts is the key period in the early hours of 22 December when regime forces opened gunfire in University Square, killing 48 and wounding 604 (684 people were also arrested), these truncated transcripts nevertheless reveal USLA involvement in the repression in Bucharest. According to the transcript, upon the orders of Securitate Director General Vlad, the USLA launched tear gas grenades at demonstrators. They also show USLA "intervention units" claiming to have "restored order" and one USLA member communicating in reference to protesters, "These hooligans must be annihilated at once. They are not determined. They must be taken quickly. The rest are hesitating."

The USLA had already been trying to “correct” the memories of citizens, prior to Stanculescu’s “clarification” of their role. When a participant in the demonstrations at Piata Romana in central Bucharest related on 12 January 1990 in “Libertatea” the role of the USLA in beating demonstrators there on the 21st and later the presence of the USLA among the gunmen who killed demonstrators in University Square in the early hours of 22 December, USLA chief Ardeleanu rushed to issue a public denial in the paper several days later. Particularly in Timisoara, the presence of the USLA among the forces of repression has been detailed by so many sources—including former USLA who participated—that there is not much point in seeking to prove Stanculescu’s contention false. Indeed, even elsewhere, beyond eyewitness/demonstrator contentions, the presence of USLA among repressive forces in the week of 16-22 December has occasionally been accidentally acknowledged by Securitate officials, essentially speaking to their sympathizers. The Securitate chief for Sibiu County, Theodor Petrisor, wrote in April 1991:

“On Monday, 18 December 1989, upon the order of the [Militia’s] Inspector General, I activated the antiterrorist intervention group. This group had been reorganized in September 1989 and was made up of Securitate officers who were involved in informational-operational services...Militia officers and officers from the joint units of the inspectorate. I’ll note that the existence of this group was to intervene in order to neutralize terrorist activities, not for other street actions. **In the command chain, the coordination of the group’s activity was the responsibility of the special unit for antiterrorist warfare (U.S.L.A.) in Bucharest.** [Emphasis added]” (Theodor Petrisor, “Revolutia din decembrie 1989 in Sibiu County (I),” “Europa” no. 22 (April 1991), p. 8).

None of this should come as a great surprise, since the USLA—employing their tell-tale A.B.I. armored vehicles, which they alone among regime forces possessed—participated in the repression of protesting workers in Brasov on 15 November 1987 (see “Jurnalul National,” 14 November 2004; the former USLA officer Marian Romanescu in Dan Badea, “USLA, Bula Moise, teroristii si ‘Fratii Musulmani’,” “Expres” (2-8 July 1991), p. 8), and since there was a juridical basis to their key role in combatting civil unrest, as confirmed by Interior Ministry Order 02600 (July 1988). Indeed, as recently as January 1990, in the first—and soon to be, almost last—trial to sentence those accused of participating in the repression before 22 December, one of the defendants was an USLA officer (Burian), charged with having opened fire on demonstrators on 21 December in the western city of Cugir.

Stanculescu’s “revelations” essentially opened up the floodgates of revisionism, some of it accidental and the result of the confusion Stanculescu’s comments had sewn, some of it very clearly motivated. Horia Alexandrescu, former editor of the primary Romanian sports’ daily during the Ceausescu era, and later editor of “Curierul National” and “Cronica Romana” among other dailies, wrote in March 1990 as editor of “Tineretul Liber” a multi-part series extolling the work of the USLA before December 1989, and arguing not only that they had not been the post-22 December “terrorists,” but that they had not played a role in the repression of demonstrators between 16 and 22 December.

Clearly, the most unexpected journalist to run to the defense of the USLA was Petre Mihai Bacanu of the daily "Romania Libera," who had been imprisoned earlier in 1989 for attempting to publish an underground newspaper and who arrived emaciated and haggard at television in the hours following Ceausescu's flight, direct from Securitate custody.

In his March-April 1990 series on the events of 21-22 December in Bucharest, Bacanu vigorously sought to make clear for his audience, on two occasions during a multi-part series, that the USLA had not been responsible for the repression of demonstrators at Bucharest's University Square on the night of 21-22 December. In fact, he clarified that "we have incontrovertible proof that the USLA officers had only one mission, to defend the American Embassy and the El Al Israel Airlines ticket office" (17 March 1990). To say that this was confusing to the researcher is an understatement, particularly as the "Libertatea" transcripts had clearly shown USLA officers discussing that their mission was to "block" the access of demonstrators to these locations (i.e. fearing that they would seek refuge there.) Moreover, despite claims to the contrary of civilian and military eyewitnesses in the Army daily, "Armata Poporului" in January and later in the Military Prosecutor's report released on 4 June 1990 (discussed Hall, 1997, pp. 219-224), Bacanu declared, "We must clarify that the USLA detachments did not fire a single shot, nor arrest a single person among the columns of demonstrators" (16 March 1990).

Significantly, almost four years later, based on what he claimed was "new" information from Army soldiers who had been in the square that bloody "longest night of the year," in an example of professional integrity, Bacanu admitted that he had been duped:

"Very many officers talk about these 'civilians' in long raincoats and sheepskin coats, who arrested demonstrators from within the crowd and then beat them brutally...No one has been interested until now in these dozens of 'civilians' with hats who shot through the pockets of their clothes...For a time we gave credence to the claims of the USLA troops that they were not present in University Square. We have now entered into the possession of information which shows that 20 USLA officers, under the command of Colonel Florin Bejan, were located...among the demonstrators" (28 December 1993, p. 10)

USLA Commander Gheorghe Ardeleanu admitted in passing in court testimony that USLA personnel operated in civilian clothes on this evening (Stefanescu 1994, p. 288). At the very least, it is clear that uniformed USLA personnel participated in the repression. An official at the National Theater—located next to the Hotel Intercontinental in University Square—claims USLA troops beat demonstrators and policed the building to see if any were hiding there (Vasile Neagoe, "Expres" 30 March-5 April 1990, p. 6). According to the Military Prosecutor's 4 June 1990 charges: "The witness [Spiru Radet] specified that one of the soldiers from the USLA troops, who had a machine gun in his hand, fired warning shots and then shot at the demonstrators. At that point, the witness was wounded in the hand by bullets and transported to Coltea Hospital" (in Bunea 1994, p. 88).

In April 1990, two important articles would appear in the opposition weekly, “Zig-Zag.” One was by Gheorghe Ionescu Olbojan, who sought to accredit the idea that 40 corpses transported from Timisoara to Bucharest for cremation were not civilian demonstrators, but members of those Army “special forces,” the DIA unit. As Marius Mioc has noted, this was a clear effort to muddy the understanding of the Timisoara uprising (Mioc 2000). The other article was by Angela Bacescu, who wrote that the USLA anti-terrorist troops had no responsibility for repression and bloodshed before or after 22 December; instead, they were victims of those events, cynically targeted to leave Romania defenseless. Bacescu would transfer to the Ceausescu nostalgic weekly “Romania Mare” in the fall of 1990, and then the former Securitate’s favored mouthpiece, “Europa,” where she has stayed ever since. Ion Cristoiu, editor of “Zig-Zag” at the time was later asked if Bacescu had infiltrated his opposition weekly. Cristoiu responded that Bacescu came with a lot of documents and no need for money, but that it was important that the former Securitate’s side of the story be told.** Olbojan would admit openly and in detail from 1993 onward that he had been a Securitate officer (for a discussion of all this, see Hall 1999; 2002a).

It was these articles, as I suggested in the last segment of this series, that set off writers in the Army press, with the intentions and ties of both Bacescu and Olbojan being questioned. Elsewhere, Octavian Andronic of “Libertatea” finally published on 10 May, a letter he had received from unnamed Army officers who had written in response to Andronic’s seemingly anomalous article in early January devoted to the bravery of the USLA in defusing bombs in the 1980s. The authors expressed dismay over Andronic’s article and wondered about his motivations in trying to burnish the image of the unit that was still considered at that time the source of the “terrorists.” It was only four months later, when Andronic’s views had been “vindicated” by the change in the official history of the USLA’s actions in December that he published that letter.

Nor was the damage wrought by Bacescu and Olbojan in the pages of “Zig-Zag” over yet. In June, in an article that would be republished almost verbatim in “Romania Mare” two months later, Bacescu wrote “The Truth about Sibiu” suggesting that there were only “imaginary terrorists” in Nicu Ceausescu’s town and declaring that all those Securitate and Militia people arrested were innocent and unjust victims (no. 15, 19-26 June 1990, p. 8). Meanwhile, in July (no. 19, 17-23 July 1990, p. 13), Olbojan would continue his push to turn the DIA into the villains of December, describing the unit as: “‘The special forces’ of the Defense Ministry troops [who] were used in diversion operations last December to create the impression that Interior Ministry forces were putting up resistance to the revolutionary wave sweeping Timisoara, Bucharest, [and] Sibiu.” In other words, the notion of a “fictitious war with fictitious terrorists,” whose victims were the Securitate and Militia.

AND NOW, WITH YOUR PERMISSION DEAR FRIENDS...BACK TO THE “TERRORISTS”

Let us ask: if this was a “fictitious war with fictitious terrorists,” “a staged war,” what would be evidence of it, and what information would falsify it? The “staged war” theory suggests that in reality there existed no “terrorists,” but just unfounded (if perhaps

understandable) suspicion and fear, confusion, and insufficient, poor, or inappropriate military training. This resulted in Army units, other forces, and civilians firing haphazardly at “phantoms,” at each other and at civilians in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or it suggests that there were “terrorists” but they were acting upon the orders of those who had seized power—Iliescu and his friends—or whose actions were known or understood by those officials, but allowed to continue because they were seen as legitimating their seizure of power. As we have seen, in the latter scenario, very frequently these “friendly terrorists” are identified as Soviet or other foreign “tourists”/agents, and or the Army’s DIA unit.

In either scenario, one must explain why, either intentionally or accidentally, during the events, the Securitate—primarily from the USLA anti-terrorist unit—was suspected and publicly accused of being the “terrorists” and responsible directly and indirectly for the death of 942 people and wounding of 2245. It is difficult to “prove” the first scenario, because it is essentially the process of proving a negative. It is possible to infirm it, however. If people who would have been in the position to know, to have access to such information, claim that there were no actual terrorists, then we have to take such an allegation seriously—although we also have to examine their credibility and if they might have some institutional or personal agenda. It should be pointed out, however, that if this or that Army officer or soldier speculates post-facto that because they found no terrorists, that therefore there were none and that they had intentionally been sent on a wild-goose chase designed to create military confrontations and victims to legitimate the seizure of power, this cannot be interpreted as confirmation of the thesis: since it is speculation, conflates personal experience with collective experience, and runs into the problem of proving a negative.

In the scenario alleging that there were terrorists but that they were intentionally serving those who seized power, we must have people from the institution, group, or unit, and/or would have been in a position to have knowledge of that information, make the allegations. To have someone from a different institution or political perspective make this allegation, does not necessarily invalidate it, but it is clear that the credibility of the allegation is substantially enhanced if it comes from one’s associates. Thus, the Army officer who suspects the Securitate of having been the “terrorists” is not as convincing as the Securitate officer who alleges the same thing—and therefore is at the very least taking an implicit risk by breaking ranks with his colleagues. Similarly, in the scenario where the DIA are thought to be the “terrorists,” one needs admissions from current or former members of the unit, or at least from senior Army officials who would have been in the position to know, in order for the scenario to be credible.

It is important to emphasize—particularly in the case of the historiography of the Romanian Revolution—that all “revelations” are not equal. This point has simply been lost on many analysts of the December 1989 events. “Revelations” in which an individual blames an institution of which he was not a member are less credible because 1) it is less likely that the individual would have access to knowledge about the actions of those he accuses, 2) the risk he incurs by such revelations is far less than if he were a member of that institution—in which case he violates a written or unwritten code of

loyalty to the organization, and perhaps more important, to his colleagues. “Revelations” that damage one’s institution or impugn one’s colleagues are, as we know, far more dangerous to the individual who makes them, if that institution is based on secrecy. In the Romanian context, it is clear that the institution most strongly based on secrecy—and with the capability and record of enforcing its maintenance—was the Securitate. To suggest that such laws of silence were—and, in particular, still are—stronger among those in the Communist Party, the military, or the nomenklatura as a whole is an extraordinary proposition.

What is significant in the case of the Romanian Revolution is that we have not just one, but several “whistleblowers” who worked in the former Securitate, and in two cases served in the USLA, who have admitted that components of the USLA were the hub of the December 1989 “terrorist” actions. The effort these individuals have gone to in order to mask their identities, the fear of retribution from the former Securitate they have expressed in their revelations, the lengths to which other former Securitate officials have gone to in order to publicly identify these “whistleblowers,” and the vitriol with which these former Securitate officials have attempted to discredit these whistleblowers and their claims, sharply differentiate these revelations from the ocean of accusations by other former regime members who have spoken or written on the topic. These circumstances also attest to their credibility: why do they fear to speak? Why do their former colleagues make such efforts to find out who they are and publicly identify them? Why the obsession of their former colleagues with silencing these “whistleblowers?”

It is precisely the admissions that exist and the gaping gaps in opposing accounts that lead me to conclude that the 1) terrorists existed, 2) they were primarily from the Securitate, and that 3) the core source within the Securitate was the USLA/USLAC.

Those who deny that there were terrorists or that their key component was members of the Securitate’s “Special Unit for Antiterrorist Warfare (USLA)” fighting to prevent the collapse of the Ceausescu regime have yet to confront or respond to the following four critical questions:

- 1) If there were no terrorists, why do there exist people who have come forward to declare their existence?
- 2) Why are the only people to declare that the terrorists came from their institution or unit those from the Securitate/Militia, and specifically the USLA?”
- 3) Why have former Securitate members made such efforts to discover the sources of these allegations, write with such vitriol against them, and threaten them?
- 4) Why has nobody from the Army come forward to state that the terrorists were from their particular unit? (Particularly significant considering that the “law of silence” in the Securitate/Militia was inevitably far more deeply-embedded and enforced than in the Army.)

* USLA’s chief of operations Alexandru Cristescu admitted elsewhere that those posted at observation points had sniper rifles (pusca cu luneta) and live ammunition (see “Lumea Libera,” 18 March 1995, p. 21). It is also very important to specify, given the events of

the next several days in the area of the Central Committee (CC) building and the allegations since, that both Securitate Director Vlad (“Dimineata,” 25 November 1996) and senior communist party official Silviu Curticeanu (“Jurnalul National,” November 2004) have admitted that on 21 December, the **Securitate** installed gunfire simulators in the area. Demonstrators who investigated the Romarta bloc in the following days, found several of them (“Expres,” 7-13 January 1992, p. 10).

**Although Cristoiu’s motives remain unclear, like so many in the post-Ceausescu media, he has displayed a “laissez-faire” attitude toward the former Securitate: publishing anything that comes his way, whether it be blatant revisionist falsehoods such as those of Bacescu or Olbojan, or documents incriminating the Securitate, such as the text of Order 2600 in “Expres” 1991, or a host of documents on the December events in 1993 in “Evenimentul Zilei.” The former Securitate have been somewhat serendipitous beneficiaries of the—perhaps inevitable given the situation at the time—mercenary and sensationalist temptations confronting those working in the post-Ceausescu media.

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THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AS GEOPOLITICAL PARLOR GAME: BRANDSTATTER’S “CHECKMATE” DOCUMENTARY AND THE LATEST WAVE IN A SEA OF REVISIONISM

By Richard Andrew Hall

Part 6: When Suspicion Meets Admission

--*The USLA*: “Who, we all remember, don’t we?, just how much *with* the people they were in the days of the Revolution... (emphasis in the original)” (Paul Vinicius, “Flacara,” 29 May 1991).

I. Suspecting/Blaming the USLA: Cloaking a Coup, Creating a Revolutionary Halo for a Bloodstained Army, or Accidental?

a) Where could the idea that the USLA was hostile to the Revolution have possibly come from?

To believe the revisionists, the idea that during the December events there existed “terrorists” and that the Securitate’s anti-terrorist special unit was behind the “terrorism” originated in the minds and announcements of Romanian Television reporters Teodor Brates and Alexandru Stark, General Nicolae Tudor and other military officials at the Television station, and/or General Nicolae Militaru, Silviu Brucan, Ion Iliescu and other members of the National Salvation Front. A popular belief among revisionists is that they were all in on this deception, the new political officials and television personalities. At their most charitable, revisionists will argue that the suspicion regarding the existence of “terrorists” and of the USLA specifically was based in an understandable and rational fear regarding the Ceausescu regime—but that ultimately these fears were misplaced, and that the suspicion of the USLA actually played a large role in contributing to needless bloodshed after Ceausescu fled. As in so many controversies surrounding the Revolution, little effort has been made in “process tracing,” working backwards to find the roots of claims and ideas.

It is significant that in 1990, the infamous Securitate cheerleader, Angela Bacescu, blamed all of the above personalities for creating “imaginary terrorists,” but also added another culprit.

“Among those [who showed up at Television on the afternoon of 22 December after Ceausescu fled] was this Cirjan, an ordinary thief, who entered with a false ID. He had been thrown out of the USLA, several years earlier, because he was stealing from passengers’ baggage, was dealing on the black market, and other such things, and [here] he is from the first moment shouting ‘Death to the Securitate’ and ‘The USLA are coming to shoot us’.” (Bacescu, “Romania Mare” 7 September 1990, p. 5a; see also her allegations against Cirjan in the 21 August 1990 edition)

A “Constantin Cirjan” appears on the list of the 38 “founding” members of the National Salvation Front read out on Television by Ion Iliescu. And, although I cannot verify that they are one and the same, it is possible that this Constantin Cirjan is the same as a Captain Constantin Cirjan of Romania’s special “mountain hunter” forces, whose recent training exercises are discussed on a web page (see geocities.com/romanianspecialforces/vanatoridemunte). It would certainly make sense, given that the “mountain hunter” forces were affiliated with the Securitate before the Revolution, and USLA training would likely have had many similarities with the current training of these “mountain hunter” forces.

This is significant. In other words, the point that so many revisionists highlight—how was it that even before the “terrorists” appeared, Television was warning about their appearance?—appears to have an explanation. We must ask: what would lead Cirjan to suspect this? From where would he have such information? Even if we assume for a minute that Bacescu has made up this episode, the question is why? After all, she already targets Brates, Stark, etc. for this allegedly false, intentional “rumor” about the existence of “terrorists” and the USLA’s contribution to them. True, Bacescu could be wrong, misinformed, or determined to find a scapegoat or settle scores with this individual. But the point is that she identifies the source of the USLA rumor as a former member of the USLA—in other words, someone with access to such knowledge. In other words, the “USLA rumor” appears to have originated not with Brates, Stark, or others, but from a former USLA member.

b) But what evidence exists to believe that Front officials at the time suspected the USLA? Were the public statements that the USLA were involved merely for public consumption, and did not reflect their actual beliefs—particularly in the event that they were lying to begin with and knew the USLA was innocent?

Despite expressions of suspicion of the USLA on TV and elsewhere, regime forces followed the so-called “Special Action Plan” that called for the combined participation of Army units alongside USLA and other Securitate units. In Bucharest and elsewhere, the USLA were sent out on patrol in pursuit of the “terrorists” (for example, Buzau and Arad, see *Armata Romana in Revolutia din Decembrie 1989*, p. 192, 209). With USLA Commander Ardeleanu having “joined” the Revolution from early on, and with the appearance of USLA cooperation, Front officials found it hard to believe that the USLA were the “terrorists.”

Yet they kept on getting reports that something was not right.* At the very least, Securitate Director General Vlad and USLA Commander Ardeleanu were not putting all their cards on the table, unwilling or “unable” to fulfill requests for maps of Securitate safehouses and architectural plans of key buildings that might have clarified from where the shooting was coming and what exactly was going on (Ardeleanu himself seems to have admitted this obliquely in a document drafted on 8 January 1990, see its reproduction in Dan Badea, “Cine au fost teroristii?,” “Expres,” 15-21 October 1991, p. 15). In theory, the USLA had either surrendered their registered arms on the 22nd, and/or were performing joint missions with the Army to root out the “terrorists.” The straw that

appeared to break the camel's back was the arrest of an armed USLA sergeant, Ion Popa Stefan, in the neighborhood of the Defense Ministry—he claimed he was on his way to the Defense Ministry to “surrender”. Commander Ardeleanu is said to have played dumb upon being confronted with the news: “I think it’s the hand of my chief of staff Trosca, he’s done this to me” (Lt. Col. Mihai Floca and a group of Army officers, “Eroi, victime sau teroristi?” “Adevarul,” 29 August 1990). Senior Army officers and Front leaders had had enough. They would try to call Ardeleanu’s bluff and give them a “loyalty test” of sorts.

One important admission from Commander Ardeleanu—one that has little alternative explanation given his accusations toward Army General Nicolae Militaru who instructed Ardeleanu to order USLA units to the building—severely undermines much that underlies revisionist accounts that Trosca and his men were intentionally lured into a diabolical ambush:

“...When I reported at the Defense Ministry [during the late evening of 23 December], I was asked to give details regarding the organization of the unit, its subdivisions, responsibilities, and attributes. After this, I was told that the Defense Ministry was being attacked from all around...Then, General Militaru announced that in the “Orizont” building terrorists had barricaded themselves and were firing on the Defense Ministry, ordering me to transmit to my unit an order that 3 intervention groups come to annihilate the terrorists. **He warned me that the order I would transmit would be recorded and that I should proceed with this in mind.** I transmitted the order to Colonel B.I. [Ion Bleort] who reported to me that by his side was Colonel Gheorghe Trosca, the unit’s chief of staff, who would take measures to execute the order. **Keeping in mind the importance of the mission I gave the order. I know that I pronounced the name of Colonel Trosca, and therefore those present knew that he would lead the group.**” [interview from 1991, in Bacescu 1994, p. 116]

This passage is critical for two reasons in terms of the revisionist accounts: a) it was Ardeleanu, not Militaru or anyone else, who chose Col. Trosca, and b) it was known that the USLA transmissions would be recorded. Furthermore, the passage testifies to the suspicion of Front leaders: why all the questions to Ardeleanu about the composition and activities of his unit?

The understanding of what followed, the famous so-called “Defense Ministry incident,” in which seven USLA members lost their lives after Army units out front of the building opened fire upon them, became even more confused after exchanges from the tape of USLA transmissions appeared in the press in early 1993 (Ioan Itu, “Armata Trage in Propriul Minister,” “Tinerama” 8-14 January 1993, p. 7—pretty much the entire article and discussion of this important incident shows up in Deletant, pp. 360-362). Those exchanges show Trosca communicating to an uncomprehending Bleort back at USLA headquarters—Trosca repeated himself several times—that “a column of six-seven TABs, two trucks with soldiers and two ARO, fired for ten minutes on the Ministry and then stopped.” In other words, Army units were firing on their own ministry. A few minutes after Trosca’s announcement to headquarters, Trosca reported that Army tanks

guarding the ministry had opened up fire on his USLA team's armored personnel carriers (ABI). The impression one gets after that is that the USLA personnel became tank fodder and that they never even fired a shot in response. The journalist Ioan Itu concluded from this, and Deletant appears to accept, that the USLA detachment had been attacked "because they had to disappear, having accidentally witnessed one part of the Army at war with another part of the Army."

Of course, there is more to this story. It was not just a few minutes between the arrival of the USLA detachment at the scene, their report of what was going on, and their coming under attack. Instead, they had stationed themselves in between tanks—as they had been instructed—for almost a half hour, without making contact with anyone among the Army personnel out front of the Ministry, a fact which caused obvious suspicion for those personnel. Moreover, according to officers interviewed in spring 1990, they witnessed gunfire from the guns on the USLA vehicles, three of the machine guns recovered from the USLA vehicles showed signs of having been fired, the gunbarrell of one the tanks had been blocked, and on the top of another tank a machine gun and signal lantern were found (Major Mihai Floca, "Crima?" "Armata Poporului" 6 June 1990, p. 3).

What is amazing, of course, if we take Trosca's transmission about the Army forces firing on their own ministry at face value, is that somehow this occurred "for ten minutes" and yet there is no report that the USLA detachment or the Army units defending the Ministry were hit or returned fire. And when the USLA detachment is attacked it is from the units guarding the Ministry...because they are embarrassed ?, afraid ? that the USLA personnel witnessed something they should not have seen? And why or how did these rebel Army units stop attacking the Ministry and what became of them? Furthermore, as Army General Tiberiu Udreanu relates:

"Personally, I have serious doubts regarding the use of '7-8 TAB-uri, two trucks of soldiers (two platoons) and two AROs' in a mission of this type, to be able to operate in the center of the Capital and to not be seen by a single person. And the survivors, because we are talking about hundreds of people, have kept this secret so tightly for over seven years?" (Udreanu 1996, p. 143).

Indeed, the latter point is significant, as one could imagine how once the content of the tapes were made public, that some lips might have loosened. And I ask the reader: which is more plausible, that Trosca—knowing his words were being listened to—was lying or trying to communicate something in code to his headquarters, or that hundreds of soldiers—including draftees and students at the military academy—could or would keep quiet about Army units intentionally attacking their own Ministry?

What happened after the firefight is even more intriguing as evidence of the genuine suspicion of the USLA on the part of Front leaders. USLA Lieutenant Stefan Soldea who survived the firefight outside the Defense Ministry relates what happened when he was taken to the building. Remember, here is an USLA officer, who participated in this key incident and his clearly defending his own actions and those of his unit, talking about his

experiences in the pages of the Securitate mouthpiece “Europa,” so hardly in a position to, as is often alleged, be somehow serving the Front leadership:

“A civilian, Gelu Voican Voiculescu, was in the office surrounded by the other generals [Army General Nicolae Militaru, Militia General Cimpeanu, Securitate General Iulian Vlad, and Securitate Fifth Directorate General Neagoe]...he began to interrogate me, ordering that my USLA commander, Colonel Ardeleanu go outside. He demanded information about the organization, make-up, and functioning of the unit, its address, what the unit’s members were doing at that moment, my personal information, after which he confronted me with Colonel Ardeleanu and asked me to identify who he was...” (“Crime care nu se prescriu,” interview with Angela Bacescu, “Europa” 28 July-5 August 1992).

Among the many interesting details that come out of Soldea’s interview is his complaint that the next day of his detention he “was forced to take a urinalysis test to see if I was drugged.” What does all this tell us? At the very least, it tells us that Voiculescu and other Front officials **suspected** that the USLA were the terrorists and **suspected** that—as the rumor circulated at the time (it turned out to be correct, but that is an issue for a different discussion)—they were drugged.**

This was an incredible and inexplicable charade to go through at the time if Voiculescu, who is always portrayed as one of those at the center of the alleged Front “staged war,” was attempting to stage such a confrontation. If the Front “controlled” the “terrorists,” why do this? Who exactly were Front leaders trying to impress/convince with this incident? Moreover, if this truly was a charade—such as is alleged of the Ceausescus’ trial and execution—why is there no record/tape of it? Would not this have been a great bit of counter-propaganda to the revisionists that could have been given to the media to protect their reputations and credibility?

c) What else would have made Front officials suspect the USLA?

We now have enough evidence to confirm that after the Ceausescus were executed on Christmas Day 1989, a meeting took place at the headquarters of the USLA that included senior Front leaders, with a tight military guard outside the building. USLA Commander Ardeleanu (Bacescu 1994, p. 142), former USLA Captain Marian Romanescu (more on him below), and Army General Tiberiu Urdareanu have all related this in their spoken and written comments on the Revolution. According to Urdareanu, who claims to have been present at the meeting, the new Defense Minister General Militaru took the floor in a speech that focused principally on the secretive nature of and confusion surrounding the USLA. Militaru stressed that now was the time for reconciliation between the Defense Ministry and the Interior Ministry (i.e. Securitate)—it had just been announced that the Interior Ministry was being dissolved in the Defense Ministry—and appealed at the end “for those involved in the genocide: put an end to it!” As Urdareanu concluded:

“From his [Militaru’s] discussion it was clear that, among other forces, the USLA were definitely taking part [in the terrorist actions], that they had prepared for this for many

years, and it was not known how much money their preparation had cost” (Urdareanu 1996, p. 137).

Urdareanu asserts that USLA Commander Ardeleanu also talked at the session:

“Colonel Ardeleanu, the USLA Commander, palely observed that it wasn’t they [the USLA] who were fighting, but that they [the “terrorists”] were acting in the name of the USLA, but his intervention went unnoticed.” (Urdareanu 1996, p. 137).

Five years before Urdareanu, former USLA Captain Marian Romanescu described Adreleanu’s comments to his troops as follows:

“On 25 December at around 8 pm, after the execution of the dictators, Colonel Ardeleanu gathered the unit’s members into an improvised room and said to them: **‘The Dictatorship has fallen! The Unit’s members are in the service of the people. The Romanian Communist Party [PCR] is not disbanding! It is necessary for us to regroup in the democratic circles of the PCR—the inheritor of the noble ideas of the people of which we are a part!...Corpses were found, individuals with USLAC (Special Unit for Antiterrorist and Comando Warfare) identity cards and indentifications with the 0620 stamp of the USLA, identity cards that they had no right to be in possession of when they were found...’** He instructed that the identity cards [of members of the unit] had to be turned in within 24 hours, at which time all of them would receive new ones with Defense Ministry markings.” (emphasis in the original) (with Dan Badea, “USLA, Bula Moise, teroristii si ‘Fratii Musulmani’,” “Expres (2-8 July 1991), p. 8)

Ardeleanu’s statement begs the question: if these were non-USLA personnel, why exactly were they trying to pass themselves off as USLA personnel...to the point of losing their lives? At the very least, his statement infirms the idea that the individuals with these identity cards were innocent victims—because otherwise he would likely not have stated that they had “no right” to possess these identity documents, but instead would have presented them as heroes who had died in the name of the Revolution. Ardeleanu’s comments can be interpreted as the beginnings of a cover-up, designed to reverse the popular understanding of the USLA’s responsibility for the December bloodshed.

It is odd that, at the time, even those who contested the seizure of power by the second-tier of the communist regime—and spoke in terms of a coup d’etat designed to staunch the revolution or that had been pushed ahead of schedule in order to take advantage of the popular uprising—did not question the existence of the “terrorists.” Would there not have been some first-hand accounts that contradicted the official and initial understanding if it had indeed been a “staged war?” Personal retrospective judgements based on the fact that the “terrorists” never came to trial or that someone never saw or captured a “real terrorist,” are not the same as doubts expressed at the time—suggesting that someone else other than the Securitate/USLA was behind the “terrorist” gunfire.

II. Revelations/Confessions/Admissions

Suspicion, of course, does not equal guilt. Even if circumstantially understandable, it can still prove unfounded. In the case of the Romanian Revolution, in order to prove the idea of a “staged war,” one has to have admissions from those in the DIA [the Army’s Defense Intelligence unit charged with search and diversion missions, accused by many of having been the “terrorists”] or Army personnel who would have been in a position to know such plans that this is what took place. What is significant is that there are none. Conversely, in order to substantiate the USLA’s role in the “terrorist” violence, one needs admissions from those who served in the USLA or Securitate personnel who would have been in a position to know such plans. These exist. The very existence of such revelations is extremely damaging for the theory of a “staged war” or accidental free-for-all between units all on the same side of the battle.

There is a great difference, of course, between alleging somebody else—foreigners, another institution, a rival—did something, and saying that your own institution, unit, commanders, etc. did something. The latter clearly appropriates more risk and opprobrium—especially if one is wrong. This issue in weighing declarations is rarely addressed in works on the Revolution, but is of critical importance.

To begin with there are the admissions, speculation, and alleged confessions of high-ranking Securitate personnel...regarding their own institution. Army General Dan Ioan, former head of the Military Prosecutor’s office maintained just this January (2005) that Securitate Director Vlad admitted that the “terrorists” were special forces of the Interior Ministry and Securitate (“Gardianul,” 29 January 2005). Although Vlad provided many possible formations and individuals within these categories—and it is possible they also participated—the focus of his comments was that “the terrorists could have been from the Special Units for Antiterrorist Warfare (USLA), Directorate V-a, more precisely elite sharpshooters.” Ten years earlier, Army General Nicolae Militaru maintained that during the days of the Revolution, Lt. Col. Dumitru Pavelescu, commander of the Securitate’s regular troops, had told him pretty much the same thing and that Order 2600 was the basis for the operation (“Cotidianul,” 25 May 1995). Aristotel Stamatoiu, head of foreign intelligence at the time of the Revolution, is quoted as having said “Who fired? Ask at the units specially-equipped and trained—USLA, Directorate V-a, Militia, and Securitate Troops etc.” (“Revolutia—vazuta de securisti,” 20 December 2003, at <http://www.hanuancutei.com>).

Then there is Interior Minister Tudor Postelnicu. He is quoted as having said after his arrest on 22 December 1989 and after the gunfire had begun: “Who’s firing?! The USLA!” (“Tineretul Liber,” 13 March 1990, p. 4). On 23 December, the following statement allegedly by him was read on Romanian Television and Radio:

“Appeal: To the Soldiers of the Securitate troops who are engaging in special missions that were ordered by the leadership of the T.S. [Trupele speciale]! I come as Interior Minister, specifically to ask you in writing, in the most categorical terms, to cease your actions of warfare because they have transformed into a crime against humanity! Think

of your children and families, because only this way can you receive legal clemency! Stop your actions of a terrorist nature and establish means of surrendering your forces to your commanders, to Colonel Pavelescu! Whoever permits you to continue these terrorist actions will be punished severely! This is the last warning I will give you to save your lives for a crime that is futile and irresponsible. Signed Tudor Postelnicu, former Interior Minister.” (Societatea Romana de Radiodifiziune 1998, pp. 244-245).

What is never explained of course by those who maintain he was forced to do this, or that he did it to gain clemency for himself from Front officials, is why either he or the Front would blame the Interior Ministry and Securitate. Iliescu and others were straightforward in declaring from the beginning in televised announcements that the Securitate had joined the Revolution (see the quotes in Hall 1999, pp. 516-517). If your goal is supposedly to incriminate someone so that you can seize power, but you admit publicly that the Securitate has sided with the Revolution, and you plan on maintaining the bulk of the Securitate in the new regime, why not blame unknown civilian loyalists, outside any formal structure of the Ceausescu regime’s institutions, as those villains? Why on earth would you plant any idea that the “terrorists” were associated with the Interior Ministry or Securitate? It simply does not make sense—unless of course you genuinely suspect them, as we have seen they did and good reason to do so.

All of these claims can of course be dismissed as “second-hand,” related by Army personnel at the center of the December events with an interest perhaps in protecting their own hides, or as the temporary kowtowing and doubletalk of people (Securitate and Interior Ministry) under arrest. These explanations, however, do not wash for the revelations of those discussed in the next installment.

* In place after place, over the course of the next few days, USLA personnel either tried to penetrate/infiltrate key buildings or were found furtively exiting zones from which there had been extensive gunfire, leading local Army commanders and others to suspect and move against them. See, for example, “Expres,” no. 27 and 34 (1991) on Caras-Severin county; “Flacara,” no. 21 (22 May 1991), p. 7, on Galati; “Gazeta de Sud,” 23 December 2002 (citing “Cartel (Craiova),” 8 April 1992) on Craiova; and *Armata Romana in Revolutia din Decembrie*, p. 210, on Arad.

**Many—I’d venture to guess most—Romanians and East Europeanists today chuckle knowingly—“how naïve!”—at the notion that, to the extent “terrorists” actually existed, they were drugged. Those who captured or treated them are less amused. See for example, the comments of Sergiu Tanasescu (“Cuvintul,” 28 March 1990) regarding the capture of an USLAC officer, and Doctor Zorel Filipescu (“22,” no. 48 December 1990 in Hall 1997, p. 269). The journalist Ondine Gherghut, who was a nurse at the time of the December events, also has no doubt that those who arrived at her hospital as “terrorists” were drugged (author interview, Bucharest, 25 June 1997). And the passage of time and domestic and foreign cynicism have not erased the memories of Professor Andrei Firica, director of the Floreasca Emergency Hospital in 1989 (interview, “Jurnalul National,” 9 March 2004). Finally, the former Securitate and USLA personnel who have

admitted the USLA and USLAC role in the “terrorism” all tell of them being drugged (see next installment).

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THE 1989 ROMANIAN REVOLUTION AS GEOPOLITICAL PARLOR GAME: BRANDSTATTER’S “CHECKMATE” DOCUMENTARY AND THE LATEST WAVE IN A SEA OF REVISIONISM

By Richard Andrew Hall

Part 7: Why the “End of Amnesia” May Not Come Anytime Soon*

II. Revelations/Confessions/Admissions

1) The Revelations of former Timisoara Securitate officer Roland Vasilevici

Two months after the violence that marked Ceausescu’s overthrow, when in Bucharest the official and media rehabilitation of the USLA was already underway (see Part 5), a three-part series entitled “Piramida Umbrelor [Pyramid of Shadows]” appeared in the cultural/political Timisoara weekly, “Orizont,” on 2, 9, and 16 March 1990. The articles appeared under the name “Puspoki F.,” but it was clear from the text of the articles that the author must have some connection to the former Securitate or Militia because he described the inner workings of these organs in their dealings with Pastor Tokes and their actions once protests began outside his residence on 15-16 December 1989.

Significantly, the author related the responsibilities and actions of the USLA, including their weaponry, munitions, clothing, and physical disposition—details which were later to be substantiated elsewhere. It was pretty clear in his discussion of the USLA and the “Comando” unit (a likely reference to the USLAC) that he believed them to have been the “terrorists” who had claimed so many lives.

In 1996, I asked Mircea Mihaies, the editor of “Orizont” at the time the “Pyramid of Shadows” series appeared, what recollection he had about the circumstances of the article’s publication (Mihaies, interview, Bloomington, IN 1996). He could not recall the situation, and I have no reason to question his lack of recollection. It is important to point out that at the time of the interview with Mihaies, I had no knowledge of Vasilevici’s book “Pyramid of Shadows”—I first learned of it in summer 1997—and therefore could not draw the comparison between the series in “Orizont” and the book. As a result, throughout my Ph.D. Dissertation, I cite only “Puspoki F.” and the “Orizont” series—believing them to have been the revelations of someone with access to the former Securitate’s methods and actions, but without realizing them to be Vasilevici’s (see Hall, February 1997).

Nevertheless, there is no denying that the text of the “Orizont” series is identical to the passages found in Vasilevici’s book (Editura Vest, 1991) of the same title as the series. This does not leave many explanations: 1) “Puspoki F.” is the source of both the “Orizont” series and of the work under Vasilevici’s name; 2) someone other than “Puspoki F.” or Vasilevici is the author of all the texts involved; or 3) Vasilevici was the source of the article published under the name “Puspoki F.” Clearly—and especially given Vasilevici’s later comments with William Totok and others—Vasilevici was the author of the series in “Orizont” (see, the 1995 interview in Totok, 2001, pp. 186-203;

Vasilevici had worked the surveillance of “Culte (churches),” specifically Roman Catholic, in Timisoara, under Radu Tinu).

2) The comments of former USLA Captain Marian Romanescu

In mid-1991, the revelations of former USLA Captain Marian Romanescu surfaced, first under his initials and later under his real name. Romanescu admitted the unit’s involvement in the repression of workers in Brasov in November 1987 and the juridical basis upon which the unit’s involvement lay (Order No. 2600). Furthermore, as we saw in the last installment of this series, he reported USLA Commander Ardeleanu’s comments at the unit’s headquarters after the execution of the Ceausescu. On the USLA’s actions during the week of 16-22 December, and particularly on his own actions during 22-25 December he was somewhat more reticent. However, he did supply information on the enigmatic USLAC (special unit for antiterrorist and commando warfare), referenced by Ardeleanu in his speech:

“**The USLAC Commandos:** Those who had and have knowledge about the existence and activities of the shock troops subordinated directly to Ceausescu remained quiet and continue to do so out of fear or out of calculation. Much has been said about individuals in black jumpsuits, with tatoos on their left hand and chest, mercenary fanatics who acted at night killing with precision and withdrawing when they were encircled to the underground tunnels of Bucharest. Much was said, then nobody said anything, as if nothing had ever happened. Superimposed above the Fifth Directorate and the USLA, **the USLAC commandos** were made up of individuals who ‘worked’ undercover in different places. **Many were foreign students, doctors and thugs committed** with heart and soul to the dictator. **Many were Arabs** who knew with precision the nooks and crannies of Bucharest, Brasov and other towns in Romania. (emphasis in original.)” ((with Dan Badea, “USLA, Bula Moise, teroristii si ‘Fratii Musulmani’,” “Expres (2-8 July 1991), p. 8)).

3) The comments of an anonymous former USLA recruit

As in the case of the “Puspoki” series, so it was in the case of the comments of a former USLA recruit. Asked about the significance of this short A.M. Press news agency dispatch on page 3 of the daily “Romania Libera” on 28 December 1994 (“Dezvaluiri despre implicarea USLA in evenimentele din decembrie ’89 [Revelations on USLA involvement in the events of December ‘89]”), Romanian journalists and intellectuals have no knowledge of it—not surprising—and dismiss it as unimportant. Strangely, a former USLA officer read it and was so incensed he immediately published responses condemning it and identifying and denigrating the similarly anonymous correspondent of the dispatch. Why such a zealous reaction?

Here are the comments of the recruit that precipitated the reaction:

“A youth who did his military service with the USLA troops declared to A.M. Press’ Dolj correspondent: ‘I was in Timisoara and Bucharest in December ’89. In addition to us

[USLA] draftees, recalled professionals, who wore black camouflage outfits, were dispatched. Antiterrorist troop units and these professionals received live ammunition. In Timisoara demonstrators were shot at short distances. I saw how the skulls of those who were shot would explode. I believe the masked ones, using their own special weapons, shot with exploding bullets. In January 1990, all the draftees from the USLA troops were put in detox. We had been drugged. We were discharged five months before our service was due to expire in order to lose any trace of us. Don't publish my name. I fear for me and my parents. When we trained and practiced we were separated into 'friends' and 'enemies.' The masked ones were the 'enemies' who we had to find and neutralize. I believe the masked ones were the terrorists." ["Romania Libera," 28 December 1994]**

Teodor Filip, a former USLA officer, was apparently intrigued enough by this article that he went to the trouble of tracking down the identity of the correspondent of the dispatch. According to Filip, the correspondent was Sterie Petrescu, who Filip claims was later expelled by both AM Press (Dolj) and "Romania Libera" for printing "scandalous disinformation," and removed in 1996 from his position as head of Dolj County for the anti-Iliescu regime "Civic Alliance," after which he had legal motions lodged against him (Filip 1998, pp. 109-111). Filip claims immediately after the above dispatch came out, he published rejoinders in the daily "Crisana Plus." In those responses, he rejected the claims of the dispatch in their entirety. According to Filip: "during the December 1989 events, not a single member of USLA was dispatched into the field...[and] the USLA did not commit a single act [of repression] against demonstrators" (Filip 1998, p. 111).

Fear

It is significant that all of the aforementioned former Securitate (USLA) members who have revealed the USLA's role in the December 1989 bloodshed have been "called out" and threatened. Marian Romanescu claimed harassment and "hostile surveillance," and initially tried to hide his identity (see details of his ordeal as recounted to Dan Badea, "U.S.L.A. in Stare de Hipnoza," "Expres," 9-15 April 1991); the anonymous USLA recruit, more explicit too—as if his anonymity were not enough—claiming that he feared for himself and his family. Then there is Vasilevici's case.

Despite the denial of any recollection or importance of the articles by "Puspoki F. (i.e. Vasilevici)," they did not escape the notice of the former Securitate. Thus, from jail, Radu Tinu, the Timis County Deputy Securitate chief, sought to counter the accusations "during March 1990, in the weekly "Orizont" in which a certain Puspok accused me of nationalism" (interview from 1991, in Bacescu 1994, p. 67). When Vasilevici was preparing to release his book, he maintained that he was "receiving many threatening and 'dead line' phone calls in the middle of the night" (interview with Mireca Iovan, "Cuvintul," no. 119 (May 1992), p. 8). He said two to three cars were posted outside his residence, and that he was accosted by six individuals when was on his way to the police station to file a complaint. A former colleague informed him that he "had been contacted by the same Radu Tinu [by now out of jail] and was instructed to alert the network with the goal of by all means impeding the publication of the book." According to the

“Cuvintul” reporter, when he spoke to Vasilevici by phone, Vasilevici was “very scared...such a man generally does not panic so easily.”

Vasilevici’s story seems plausible for a number of reasons. First, at a time when he would have gained notoriety with his revelations in “Orizont”—March 1990—he chose anonymity. Clearly, his story was more important than notoriety to him—a notoriety he probably did not seek, for reasons of personal security. Second, former Securitate have also attacked him viciously in their literature. In March 1992, retired Securitate Colonel Ion Lemnaru wrote in “Spionaj-Contraspionaj” about the 1990 pamphlet of Romeo Vasiliu, “Piramida Umbrelor,” identifying the author as Roland Vasilevici, publishing Vasilevici’s address, and then citing an extended section of the text of the pamphlet (identical to what is in the March 1990 “Orizont” article). The section that is cited precisely concerns allegations about the USLA’s role in the Timisoara repression and terrorism—this is clearly the focus of Colonel Lemnaru’s ire (“Piramida de minciuni a lui Roland Vasilevici,” “Spionaj-Contraspionaj,” no. 24 (March 1992), p. 7a). In late 1994, while giving an interview on a local independent TV station in Timisoara, Radu Tinu came to the station while Vasilevici was on air and tried to interrupt the broadcast! (“Romania Libera,” 28 December 1994, p. 3)

It was also not good to have been a former military prosecutor who resigned the post because he saw where things were going with the “terrorist” investigation. Marian Valer, who alleged SRI non-cooperation in the attempt to reconstitute what happened in December 1989, as well as the disappearance of maps captured at the time in Sibiu, said wryly in September 1990 that “Shortly after the publication of my resignation I sensed that I was benefiting from the services of Mr. Magureanu’s organization [i.e. the SRI...he was being surveilled]” (interview by Monica Marginean, “Expres,” no. 33 (September 1990), p. 2). When questioned by a military judge at the proceedings of a trial linked to the Timisoara repression—as to why his fellow SRI colleagues called to testify were not showing up—a SRI junior officer who had been a member of the Timisoara Securitate’s antiterrorist intervention group in December 1989 responded: “they don’t come, because they are afraid” (“Romania Libera,” 18 June 1991, p. 2a).

If this is how former Securitate whistleblowers and military prosecutors feel, what must be the situation for civilians and people of lower-rank in the Army? In summer 1990, “Expres” reported on two young men recovering in an Italian hospital from wounds inflicted during the December events (Victor Radulescu, “Excursii prin Contul Libertatea,” “Expres” no. 11 (August 1990), p. 5). They recalled how, at the Intercontinental on 21-22 December, “those in kaki [i.e. Securitate, likely USLA] shot us. The first two rows of troops [Army] shot tracers, while those behind them opened live fire.” The two, one injured on the 21st, the other on the 23rd, claimed that after they arrived in Italy, a certain 40 year old Iordan Cristian, who admitted to them he had been USLA, visited the hospital—he had been shot in the hand at an earlier time and recovered (!)—snatched any reading material showing photos of the 13-15 June rampage against the opposition in Bucharest, and kept them in a general state of fear. In addition, he asked them to surrender their passports, something which “made even the Italians realize something was not quite right in all of this.” Similarly, in an article that captures in a

microcosm the complexity and fluidity of the first years of the post-Ceausescu era, one-time leader of the small “Liberal Democratic Party,” Elena Serban, maintains she was blackmailed in 1990 by Radu Grigore (a name that was to crop up again in some of the more underhanded political affairs of 1991-1992) who threatened her that “...if I betrayed him, he would kill me, and that I only needed to remember he had been an USLA officer...who had been in charge of the USLA machine-gun detachments on the night of 21 December in University Square” (Dan Badea, “Securitatea—un joc in numeletrandafirului,” “Expres,” 8-14 September 1992, p. 9).

Army soldiers who had been posted out front of the Defense Ministry on the night of 23/24 December, and who vigorously contested the revisionist account of the event by detailing the suspicious behavior of the USLA detachment in question, reported after expressing their recollections, having “been warned to think long and hard since they have families and to stay on their own turf if they do not want to have problems” (see Major Mihai Floca, “Crima?” “Armata Poporului” (6 June 1990), 3, and idem., “Eroi, victime, sau teroristi?” “Adevarul” 29 August 1990, pp. 1-2). Residents of the apartment blocs surrounding the Defense Ministry told Army journalists that there had indeed existed “terrorists” and that they had fired on the Ministry building from these surrounding buildings. One family maintained that they had been visited in May 1990 by two individuals flashing “Militia” identity cards, inquiring what had happened in December 1989 in that location, and insisting that different parts of the Army had merely fired at one another—there had been no “terrorists.” Some residents maintained that a neighbor suspected of being a Securitate collaborator had been going around suggesting “how to ‘correctly’ interpret the incident with the two armored personnel vehicles [i.e. the USLA unit] on the night of 23/24 December.” The Army journalists concluded based on these interviews that “therefore, ‘the boys’ [a common euphemism for the Securitate] are [still] at work” (Mihai Floca and Victor Stoica, “Unde sint teroristii? PE STRADA, PRINTRE NOI,” “Armata Poporului” 13 June 1990, 27 June 1990).

Wherever the USLA showed up, even when supposedly fulfilling the “Special Action Plan” of coordination under such circumstances, they ended up in gunfights. Was it the suspicion so “illfounded” or tendentious launched by Television? A tragic error or misunderstanding?

Not even those who rose to influential posts in the early Iliescu administration were immune. According to the well-known Romanian actor, Ernest Maftei, who was in the one of the focal points of the December events, the CC (the Central Committee building), even members of the Front were being careful about what they said. Speaking in mid-September 1991, the 71 year-old Maftei was clearly disenchanted with Iliescu and the post-December evolution of politics. He had written for the daily “Dreptatea” of the opposition National Peasants Party (PNTCD) in 1990 and spoken against the Front at the famous 28 January 1990 siege of opposition party officials. He noted bitterly, how on 14 June 1990, he had been beaten by the miners who came to Bucharest to ‘defend’ the Front: “I’ll end on this note: so I was in the revolution so that I could be almost beaten to death on 14 June and my son end up unemployed...?” Nevertheless, it is significant what he said recalling the events in the CC on the night of 22 December after 11 pm:

Dan Badea (the reporter, DB): Who was it Dan Iosif [a civilian who was to become a key member and defender of Iliescu's circle from the December events onward] shot?

EM (Ernest Maftei: USLA! Sir, they ostensibly came to help us and instead they ended up shooting us!...In the sub-basement there were some men of ours, because there were some armored doors there and we didn't know what the deal was with them. And someone opened a door and saw lights on. So we got scared about what was there. Then the USLA came to help us. Yes! And when they went down, they shot all our people. Two of ours were killed there, they were revolutionaries, simple people who went there to die [as it turned out]. And then we realized that these guys would kill us. Then they ascended. They too had three dead. And so we surrounded them: "Undress we told them!" My god, it was awful.

DB: Dan Iosif claims that he didn't shoot the 15 USLASI...

EM: He's having you on, don't listen to him! It was necessary to kill them there. But he doesn't want to say it because he doesn't want it to be known because today the Securitate still rules. Precisely some of those who shot at us are now in power. Listen to me. **The USLA, the Fifth Column, were with Ceausescu** [emphasis added]. You don't think they would have killed us? My god!

DB: Who else besides Dan Iosif shot?

EM: Many, about 5, I don't know their names. Hell, if we hadn't shot them, we would have been dead! It was revolution, sir. It was civil war...(see interview with Dan Badea, "Iliescu putea sa fie eroul neamului, dar a pierdut ocazia! [Iliescu could have been a national hero, but he squandered the opportunity!]," "Expres," no. 36 (85) 10-16 September 1991)

Nor does such reticence on this subject appear to have disappeared after all these years. With the advent of the Internet, unverifiable bulletin board postings also pop up. On 23 December 2003, under the name of "kodiak," the following appeared: "In '89 I was a major in the USLA...and I know enough things that it would be better I didn't know...15, 16, 20, 30 years will pass and nothing will be known beyond what you need and have permission to know..." (<http://www.cafeneaua.com>)

Conclusions

This article began with an extended discussion of Suzanne Brandstatter's much-publicized and debated "Checkmate" documentary on the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, first broadcast in late February 2004 on the Franco-German television station TV Arte. Many who commented upon the film presented its thesis that 1989 events were a CIA-engineered coup as original. This is only partially true, as the French scholar Catherine Durandin had already been pushing the thesis in recent years. But the arguments of the Brandstatter-Durandin Franco-German school are indeed new—not to

mention, surprising—given that it was precisely journalists and academics in France and Germany who in 1990 zealously marketed the idea of the December 1989 events as a KGB-engineered coup.

On the surface, what has changed over the past decade and a half is the broader geopolitical context, from Romania's membership in the Warsaw Pact to Romania as NATO member and a key US ally in the Afghanistan and Iraqi military campaigns. This, the break-up of the Soviet Union, the decline of Russia as a major power, and perceived and real US hegemony on the world stage, have all contributed to the prism through which a historical event fifteen years ago is now interpreted.

Aside from the apparent numerous instances of selective editing and a director who had reached her conclusion before she had started interviewing—as related time and again by the now frustrated and, in some cases, angry interviewees—the Brandstatter film is beset by a major problem, in which she is hardly alone. Not being steeped enough in the history of December 1989, but particularly, not being steeped enough in the post-1989 historiography of those events, she is oblivious to the context and agendas of those whose “revelations” upon which she bases her argument. Thus, when Gheorghe Ratiu, former head of the Securitate directorate most identified by Romanians as the “political police” talks about secret CIA training camps in West Germany, Austria, and Hungary and of the trainees as having sparked the anti-Ceausescu uprising, she appears to accept it at face value. But this is not some “new revelation”; it was born in 1990-1991 when the former Securitate was intent on exonerating the institution and those directly involved in repression, including Ratiu himself.

Brandstatter, of course, as in the case of the French journalists of the first wave, can easily be forgiven for not knowing better the historiography of the Revolution or questioning the agendas of those who made these sensational revelations or the context in which such details and arguments were born. The same does not stand true, however, for those inside and outside Romania who have written on the December 1989 events. One simply cannot understand what happened in December 1989, if one is not familiar with exactly what the former Securitate have argued about those events since December 1989, in particular during the key period of 1990 and 1991. The etymology of details and arguments about December 1989, where—when, and how these were born—is imperative for understanding the Revolution.

The time for reifying Ceausescu's overthrow, for arcane and simply by now uncontroversial and unenlightening debates about whether it was a revolution or a coup—while making little or no effort to examine the specifics of what happened—for failing to address the Securitate's historiography of the events, for declarative statements about “the trick with the terrorists” or “the well-controlled chaos” without providing any proof, has passed. It has been a hallmark of my research on the Revolution from the start to deconstruct and test the arguments and claims of others who have studied this event. I ask that future investigations of the December 1989 events will address the many details presented in this article, particularly in the last two installments.

*Title inspired by phrase used by Radu Ciobotea in "Flacara" July 1991.

**Space does not permit me to discuss the tactics, ballistics' evidence, and equipment of the "terrorists." As I wrote in 1999, a major problem with research on the Revolution is the failure to "get out of Bucharest" and compare what happened in other locations. Such a comparison shows a clear pattern. In addition to prior sources discussed in Hall 1997 and 1999, see the following: "Orizont (Timisoara)," no. 5 1990; "Flacara" no. 8 1990 (on Caransebes), no. 51 1990 p. 11, no. 6 1991 p. 9 (Coltea Hospital, Bucharest), no. 39 1991, p. 4 (Dumitru Mazilu revelations), no. 29 1992, p. 7; "22," no. 5 1990, p. 10; "Tineretul Liber," 5 January 1990, p. 4a; "NU (Cluj)," no. 22 1990 (Gen. Rizea, Braila), "Cuvintul," nos. 1-4 January 1991 (Brasov), no. 7 February 1991 (Gen. Spiroiu and staff of "Opinia" exhumation on 14 June 1990 of those killed in Brasov); "Tinerama," no. 123 1993 (26 December 1989 description of "terrorists" at Bucharest morgue); "Expres," no. 24 and 27 1991 (Resita and Hateg).

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