

THE SECURITATE ROOTS OF A MODERN ROMANIAN FAIRY TALE: THE PRESS, THE FORMER SECURITATE, AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DECEMBER 1989

By Richard Andrew Hall

Many analysts and observers of Romania lost interest in and shut down their investigations of Romania's December 1989 Revolution relatively early -- most in 1990, some "held out" until 1991. They either made up their minds and settled on a particular theory or became irretrievably cynical, assuming a Straussian-like stance that nothing new could come out or be written about the December 1989 events and resigning their audiences to platitudes like "We may never know." Perhaps most destructive of all has been the common, schizophrenic approach of declaring that, "The truth will never be known," but then displaying a very fixed and rather immovable understanding of those events. This is not only disingenuous; it has set back serious study of the December 1989 events. Moreover, it provides a convenient rationale for avoiding the ambiguity and challenge that come with seeking to make sense of this landmark event. Ten years of declaring that "We may never know" has predictably proven a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But as William Faulkner once said of his mythical Yoknapatawpha County (as apt a metaphor for Romania as there ever was), "The past is never dead; it's not even past." This certainly applies to the Romanian Revolution of December 1989. The December 1989 events remain "living history" -- the "present past" as Timothy Garton Ash would say -- and have continued to be the subject of controversy throughout the postcommunist era (see Siani-Davies, 2001). Thanks in large part to communications developments such as the Internet, few modern events have offered themselves so well to tracing the evolution of their historiography in their aftermath as the December 1989 events.

Blind partisanship, selective analysis, and a smug reluctance to reexamine earlier claims in the light of new evidence have driven the "mystery" of the Revolution of December 1989. Many who have written on the December events have simply failed to "stick with the story," and have certainly failed to keep their minds and options open. Romanian journalists, politicians, and other interested parties have routinely assimilated the revelations and arguments of former "Securitate" and "Militia" members with little hesitation -- all because the claims in question have dovetailed with their post-December 1989 political suspicions, prejudices, and interests. Similarly, they have routinely failed to reassess their understanding of the December 1989 events after previously undeclared former Securitate members publicly admitted their past ties. The public admission of Securitate ties should at the very least compel investigators to examine what an individual stated about the December 1989 events PRIOR to the admission. Unfortunately, in Romania it has not, and this has created tragic consequences for popular and scholarly understanding of the December 1989 events.

In the following three-part article, I examine three cases that illustrate these costly mistakes. In the first, I discuss the case of Gheorghe Ionescu Olbojan, a former Securitate officer who, prior to his public acknowledgement of this fact, disseminated disinformation designed to inflate the army's culpability for the December 1989 bloodshed in the interests of reducing the culpability assigned to the Securitate. In the second part, I explore the early history of the "tourist" myth, a scenario fabricated by the Securitate whose travels -- including into the work of respected Western scholars -- have been truly stunning. In the final part, I examine the hallucinatory revelations of former Militia officer Petre Olaru, whose claims in 1999 became the centerpiece of revisionist theories exonerating the former Securitate. This last example is evidence that this is far from a simply "historical" topic, but instead continues to this day.

ION CRISTOIU'S 'ZIG-ZAG' AS GATEWAY

In the early 1990s, perhaps no mainstream publications served more as a haven for former Securitate officers and informers than the weeklies edited by Ion Cristoiu, in particular "Zig-Zag" and "Expres Magazin." The Timisoara revolutionary Marius Mioc has gone so far as to call Cristoiu "the spearhead of the campaign to falsify the history of the revolution" (Mioc, 2000a). Cristoiu's two most famous alumni are undoubtedly 1) Pavel Corut, a former Securitate officer who wrote under this name and the pseudonym "Paul Cernescu" for "Expres Magazin" during 1991 and 1992; and 2) Angela Bacescu, who since writing for "Zig-Zag" during the spring and summer of 1990 has been a mainstay for the notorious "Europa," a veritable mouthpiece of the former Securitate (see Hall, 1997; for background on Corut, see Shafir 1993). Both strove during their tenure at Cristoiu's publications to minimize and negate the Securitate's role in the deaths of over 1,100 people in December 1989, particularly the Securitate's responsibility for the so-called post-22 December "terrorism" that claimed almost 90 percent of those who died during the events.

Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, Cristoiu's "Zig-Zag" and "Expres Magazin" were widely regarded as pillars of opposition to the rump Communist Party-state bureaucracy that made up the National Salvation Front (FSN) regime of President Ion Iliescu -- including a large proportion of the former Securitate. To the extent that Cristoiu and his publications became the object of suspicion and cynicism within the opposition, it was because of an alleged slipperiness and inconsistency in his treatment of Iliescu -- he was accused of cozying up to the regime when it appeared to benefit his interests (based on my own experience in discussions with various journalists and intellectuals in Romania between 1991 and 1994).

Probably no publication played a larger role in 1990 in rewriting the history of December 1989 than "Zig-Zag," edited at the time by Ion Cristoiu. Because those analysts who have commented on the role of "Zig-Zag" in 1990 have focused almost exclusively on the change in coverage -- a turn toward more favorable coverage of the FSN and President Iliescu after former Ceausescu court poet Adrian Paunescu took over editorship of the weekly from Cristoiu for a time during late 1990 and early 1991 -- it is important to note that much of the most damaging revisionism began long BEFORE Paunescu became

senior editor. As Marius Mioc notes, in an interview with Lucia Epure of the Timisoara daily "Renasterea Banateana" in September 1990, the notorious Ceausescu court poet Corneliu Vadim Tudor was asked which paper he enjoyed reading most (Mioc, 2000a). His response: "'Zig-Zag.' I like this boy, Ion Cristoiu." The reason for Tudor's appreciation of Cristoiu's journal is "easy to understand," according to Mioc, since that weekly "was the first [publication] that, after December 1989 (and especially after the May 1990 elections), began the campaign to rehabilitate the pro-Ceausescu theory of the revolution" (Mioc, 2000a). Indeed, in June 1990 when "Romania Mare" -- a publication that at the time was supportive of the Iliescu regime -- first began to appear, Tudor would list his favorite publications. At the top of the list with five out of five stars was "Zig-Zag," a publication that under Cristoiu had developed a reputation as a critic of Ion Iliescu and the FSN!

It is hard to state with certainty what exactly Cristoiu's role was in having his publications serve as a conduit for revisionist Securitate disinformation. This much is clear, however: Cristoiu was not unwitting for long about the backgrounds of the former Securitate personnel who came to work for him. Asked point blank about the Bacescu case in a book-length interview in 1993, Cristoiu was unrepentant. He claimed that he realized from the beginning that Bacescu was writing to defend the interests of the former Securitate but, since "there was something true in what the Securitate was saying," he allowed her to publish (Iftime, 1993, p. 126). Cristoiu stated that he had "no regrets" and denied that it was accurate to assert that "Zig-Zag" had been "manipulated," even though he admitted that Bacescu had shown up "without need of money...and she brought a lot of documents with her." Cristoiu justified Bacescu's sympathetic presentation of the Securitate in the December events as follows:

"Until April, 1990, the Securitate had been presented as a force of evil.... [Thus] [i]t was an absolutely new theme [to write that the Securitate had been innocent of the charges against them]. A shocking point of view in a period when the government was still glorifying the Revolution and always talking about martyrs..." (Iftime, 1993, p. 126).

Only in this way, Cristoiu concludes, was it possible to learn that "not a single terrorist had existed" in Sibiu -- the city in which Nicolae Ceausescu's son, Nicu Ceausescu, the so-called "Little Prince," was party first secretary -- a story which he maintains "was later confirmed" (Iftime, 1993, p. 127).

Despite Bacescu's unambiguous ties to the former Securitate since she transferred to "Romania Mare" and then permanently to "Europa" in late 1990, to my knowledge -- short of Marius Mioc -- no Romanian writer has gone back to compare what Bacescu wrote after leaving "Zig-Zag" with what she wrote while at "Zig-Zag" or to scrutinize the validity of the allegations she made about the December 1989 events in the pages of that weekly. Significantly, for example, the article written by Bacescu to which Cristoiu alludes as exonerating the Securitate in the Sibiu events was reprinted VERBATIM in Tudor's "Romania Mare" after she transferred to that publication in the second half of 1990 (Bacescu, 1990 a and b). Clearly, the publication of an article exonerating the Securitate by someone who did little to hide her connections to the former secret police --

first in a publication bitterly critical of the Iliescu regime and then in a publication supportive of the very same regime -- should have raised alarm bells and led to scrutiny of her claims. In the confused, stultifying, and slightly surreal context of post-Ceausescu Romania, however, it did not do so.

THE CASE OF GHEORGHE IONESCU OLBOJAN

Less well known than the comparatively high-profile cases of Corut and Bacescu is the case of Gheorghe Ionescu Olbojan. Olbojan's treatment by the Romanian press corps differs little from that of Corut and Bacescu. Like Corut and Bacescu, in the early 1990s Olbojan was writing in the pages of Ion Cristoiu's publications -- specifically "Zig-Zag" in 1990. By the late 1990s, journalists who wrote about Olbojan's publications did not hesitate to identify him as a former Securitate officer. A reviewer of Olbojan's 1999 book, titled "The Black Face of the Securitate," and Ion Mihai Pacepa in the satirical weekly "Catavencu" described Olbojan's allegations that Ceausescu was overthrown by the Soviet Union in conjunction with Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Israel, and bluntly stated that Olbojan was a disgruntled former Securitate officer ("Catavencu," 23 July 1999). Filip Ralu, a journalist working for the daily "Curierul national," was even more specific: Olbojan, he wrote, was a DIE (Foreign Intelligence Directorate) officer ("Curierul national," 19 March 2001).

Why so bold and so sure, we might ask. Because it was no longer a secret: Olbojan had admitted in print -- at least as early as 1993 -- that he indeed served in the former Securitate. On the dust jacket of his 1994 book "Pacepa's Phantoms," a polemic apparently in response to criticisms of his earlier book, "Goodbye Pacepa," his editor proudly touts the "latest raid effected by former Securitate officer Gh. Ionescu Olbojan" (Olbojan, 1994). Inside, Olbojan describes how he was recruited in the 1970s while at the Bucharest Law Faculty, finished a six-month training course at the famous Branesti Securitate school, and worked at an "operative unit" of the "Center" from 1978 to 1982 and then at the famous Securitate front company "Dunarea" until being forced -- he claims -- to go on reserve status in 1986 after violating certain unspecified "laws and regulations of security work" (Olbojan, 1994, pp. 17-19). According to Olbojan, as early as the fall of 1990 -- at a time when he was writing a series on the makeup of the former Securitate and when Cristoiu would address him with the words, "Olbojan, did you bring me the material?" -- he "pulled back the curtain of protection behind which he had been hiding for so long" and revealed to a fellow journalist his Securitate background (Olbojan, 1994, pp. 14-15). There is thus no doubt here: It is not a question of supposition or innuendo by this or that journalist -- Olbojan has publicly admitted to a Securitate past.

APRIL 1990: OLBOJAN WRITES ON THE REVOLUTION

In the ninth issue of "Zig-Zag," which appeared in April 1990 -- an issue in which Angela Bacescu wrote a famous piece revising the understanding of the deaths of a group of Securitate antiterrorist troops at the Defense Ministry during the December events, a piece that was vigorously contested by journalists in the military press (for a discussion, see Hall, 1999) -- Olbojan wrote an article entitled "Were The Corpses In The Refrigerated Truck DIA Officers?" (Olbojan, 1990). In the article, Olbojan attacked the official account regarding the identity of 40 bodies transported by the Securitate and by

the Militia from Timisoara to Bucharest on 18-19 December 1989 for cremation upon the express orders of Elena Ceausescu. The FSN regime maintained that these were the cadavers of demonstrators shot dead during antiregime protests, but Olbojan now advanced the possibility that they might have been the corpses of members of the army's elite defense intelligence unit, DIA.

Olbojan's "basis" for such an allegation was that nobody allegedly had come forward to claim the corpses of the 40 people in question and therefore they could not have been citizens of Timisoara. Mioc counters that this is preposterous, and that unfortunately this myth has circulated widely since Olbojan first injected it into the press (Mioc, 2000b) -- despite the publication of correct information on the topic. Mioc republished a list with the names, ages, and home addresses of the (in reality) 38 people in question and noted that it was published in the Timisoara-based "Renasterea Banateana" on 2 March 1991, the Bucharest daily "Adevarul" on 13 March 1991, the daily "Natiunea" (also published in Bucharest) in December 1991, as well as in the daily "Timisoara" on 29 November 1991 -- but significantly was refused publication in Tudor's "Romania Mare"!

THE IMPLICATIONS AND INTENTIONS OF OLBOJAN'S APRIL 1990 REAPPRAISAL OF THE TIMISOARA EVENTS

On the face of things -- in the spring 1990 context of a publication that appeared courageous enough to stand up to the rump party-state bureaucracy and with no public knowledge about Olbojan's past -- Olbojan's article could be interpreted as a laudable, if poorly executed, effort at investigative journalism or at worst as innocuous. But context can be everything, and it is in this case. It seems significant that Olbojan considers his April 1990 "Zig-Zag" article important enough to reproduce in its entirety in his 1994 book "Pacepa's Phantoms" and then discuss the impact the article had upon getting people to rethink the December 1989 events and how later works by other authors (including those with no connection to the former Securitate but also including the previously-mentioned notorious former Securitate officer Pavel Corut) confirmed his allegations (Olbojan, 1994, pp. 276-299).

The importance of suggesting that the cadavers transported to Bucharest for cremation were the bodies of army personnel and not average citizens may not be readily apparent. To make such a claim insinuates that the Iliescu leadership was/is lying about the December events and therefore should not be believed and may be illegitimate. It also insinuates that the events may have been more complicated and less spontaneous than initial understandings and the official history would have us believe: If those who were transported to Bucharest for cremation were not average citizens but army personnel, then is it not possible that Timisoara was a charade, a manipulation by forces within the regime -- perhaps with outside help -- to overthrow Ceausescu and simulate both revolutionary martyrdom and political change?

Moreover, it was significant that Olbojan maintained that the cadavers belonged not just to any old army unit but specifically to DIA. The army's DIA unit -- a unit which appeared to benefit organizationally from the December events, including having its chief, Stefan Dinu, for a time assume the command of the Romanian Information

Service's (SRI) counterespionage division (until his former Securitate subordinates appear to have successfully undermined him and prompted his replacement) -- would during the 1990s become a common scapegoat for the post-22 December "terrorism" that claimed over 900 lives in the Revolution and initially had been blamed uniformly upon the Securitate (see, for example, Stoian, 1993 and Sandulescu, 1996). If the 40 cadavers were indeed DIA officers, then anything was possible with regard to the post-22nd "terrorism" -- including that DIA, and not the Securitate's antiterrorist troops, had been responsible for the tremendous loss of life. Indeed, in his 1994 book "Pacepa's Phantoms," Olbojan claims just that: In December 1989, there allegedly had been no Securitate "terrorists," the "terrorists" had been from DIA, and it is they who were thus culpable for the bloodshed (Olbojan, 1994, pp. 276-291).

Nor can it be said that the timing of Olbojan's publication was of inconsequence here: The trial of the Securitate and Militia officers charged with the bloody repression of demonstrators in Timisoara in December 1989 had begun the previous month and was still in progress at the time of the article's appearance. Olbojan's allegation clearly had implications for the verdicts of this trial. Mioc has noted of Olbojan's account: "[T]he theory of the 'mystery' of the 40 cadavers would become the departure point for efforts to demonstrate the presence of foreign agents in Timisoara" (Mioc, 2000a). Indeed, during the Timisoara trial, reputed Securitate "superspy" Filip Teodorescu had attempted to implant this idea and would later reveal that among those his forces had arrested during the Timisoara events were two armed, undercover DIA officers in a Timisoara factory -- the massive influx of foreign agents supposedly having eluded the "underfunded and undermanned" and "Ceausescu-distrusted" Securitate (Teodorescu, 1992). For Mioc, Olbojan's echoing of Teodorescu's attempts to muddy the historical waters of the birthplace of the Revolution, and Olbojan's specific effort to sow wholly unnecessary confusion about the identity of the 40 cremated corpses (an issue which no one had considered the least bit suspicious until that time) cannot be separated from Olbojan's admitted collaboration with the Securitate and his warm praise of that institution throughout most of the 1990s.

OLBOJAN'S CASE AS TYPICAL RATHER THAN ABERRANT

Significantly, even at the time, Olbojan's account sparked innuendo in the press regarding his past, his credibility, his capacity for the truth, and his agenda in writing such an article. Unfortunately, but very tellingly, these accusations came not from the civilian press -- of any political stripe -- but from the military press. Colonel V. Gheorghe wrote in early May 1990 that Olbojan's account was merely "yet another face of the diversion," the latest in an emerging campaign attempting to exonerate the Securitate for the bloodshed, blame the army, plant the idea that the December 1989 Revolution was little more than a coup d'etat engineered from abroad, and cast doubt upon the spontaneity and revolutionary bravery of those who protested against Ceausescu and participated in the December events (Gheorghe, 1990).

Mioc notes accurately that "[I]n order for the [Olbojan's] disinformation to succeed, the article was written in an anti-Iliescu and anticommunist style," but he seems to imply that this was an exception (Mioc, 2000b). As the next two parts of this three-part article will

demonstrate, far from being an exception, such an approach -- in fact the dovetailing and entangling of Securitate disinformation with the agenda of the anti-Iliescu/anticommunist opposition -- was all too common and ultimately a key cause of the destruction of the truth about the December 1989 Revolution and the Securitate's institutional responsibility for the tremendous loss of life in those events.

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THE SECURITATE ROOTS OF A MODERN ROMANIAN FAIRY TALE: THE PRESS, THE FORMER SECURITATE, AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DECEMBER 1989

By Richard Andrew Hall

Part 2: 'Tourists Are Terrorists and Terrorists are Tourists with Guns...' *

The distance traveled by Securitate disinformation on the December 1989 events can be breathtaking. Bubbling up through the springs of popular rumor and speculation, it flows into the tributaries of the media as peripheral subplots to other stories and eventually wends its way -- carried upon the waves of consensus and credibility that flow from its acceptance among prominent Romanian journalists and intellectuals -- into the writings of Western journalists, analysts, and academics. Popular myths, which either have their origins in disinformation disseminated by the former Securitate, or which originated in the conspiratorial musings of the populace but proved propitious for the former secret police and thus were appropriated, nurtured, and reinjected into popular discourse, are today routinely repeated both inside and outside Romania. Frequently, this dissemination occurs without the faintest concern over, or knowledge of, the myth's etymology or much thought given to the broader context and how it plays into the issue of the Securitate's institutional culpability.

Take, for example, the "tourist" myth -- perhaps the former Securitate's most fanciful and enduring piece of disinformation. This myth suggests that in December 1989, Soviet, Hungarian, and other foreign agents posing as "tourists" instigated and/or nurtured anti-Ceausescu demonstrations in Timisoara, Bucharest, and elsewhere, and/or were responsible for the "terrorist" violence after 22 December that claimed over 900 victims, or almost 90 percent of those killed during the Revolution. The implication of such allegations is clear: It questions the spontaneity -- and hence, inevitably, to a certain degree, the legitimacy -- of the anti-Ceausescu demonstrations and the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime; it raises doubt about the popular legitimacy of those who seized power during the events; and it suggests that those who seized power lied about who was responsible for the terrorist violence and may ultimately have themselves been responsible for the bloodshed.

A robust exegesis of the "tourist" hypothesis was outlined on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the December 1989 events in the pages of the daily "Ziua" by Vladimir Alexe. Alexe has been a vigorous critic of Ion Iliescu and the former communists of the National Salvation Front (FSN) who took power in December 1989, maintaining that they overthrew Ceausescu in a Soviet-sponsored coup d'etat:

"The outbreak of the December events was preceded by an odd fact characteristic of the

last 10 years. After 10 December 1989, an unprecedented number of Soviet 'tourists' entered the country. Whole convoys of Lada automobiles, with approximately four athletic men per car, were observed at the borders with the Moldovan Socialist Republic, Bulgaria, and Hungary. A detail worthy of mention: The Soviet 'tourists' entered Romania without passports, which suggests the complicity of higher-ups. According to the statistics, an estimated 67,000 Soviet 'tourists' entered Romania in December 1989" ("Ziua", 24 December 1999).

It is worth noting that Alexe considers elsewhere in this series of articles from December 1999 that the Russian "tourists" were an omnipresent, critical, and catalytic factor in the collapse of communism throughout ALL of Eastern Europe in December 1989.

Nor has the "tourist" hypothesis been confined strictly to the realm of investigative journalism. Serban Sandulescu, a bitter critic of Ion Iliescu and the former communists who seized power in December 1989, led the third parliamentary commission to investigate the December 1989 events as a Senator for the National Peasant Party Christian Democratic (PNTCD). In 1996, he published the findings of his commission as a book titled "December '89: The Coup d'Etat That Abducted The Romanian Revolution." He commented on the "tourists" as follows:

"From the data we have obtained and tabulated it appears that we are talking somewhere in the neighborhood of 5,000-6,000 'tourists'.... Soviet agents [who] came under the cover of being 'tourists' either in large organized groups that came by coach, or in smaller groups of 3-4 people that fanned out in Lada and Moskvich automobiles. They covered the whole country, being seen in all the important cities in the country. They contributed to the stoking of the internal revolutionary process, supervising its unfolding, and they fought [during the so-called 'terrorist' phase after 22 December]..." (Sandulescu, 1996, pp. 35, 45).

DECEMBER 1989: NICOLAE CEAUSESCU INITIATES THE 'TOURIST' MYTH
Not surprisingly, the "tourist" myth originated with none other than Nicolae Ceausescu. This myth inevitably implies illegitimate and cynical "foreign intervention," and Ceausescu used it to make sense of what were -- probably genuinely, for him -- the unimaginable and surreal antiregime protests which began in Timisoara on 15 December 1989.

In an emergency meeting of the Romanian equivalent of the politburo (CPEX) on the afternoon of Sunday, 17 December 1989 -- the afternoon on which regime forces were to open fire on the anti-Ceausescu demonstrators in Timisoara, killing scores and wounding hundreds -- Ceausescu alleged that foreign interference and manipulation were behind the protests:

"Everything that has happened and is happening in Germany, in Czechoslovakia, and in Bulgaria now, and in the past in Poland and Hungary, are things organized by the Soviet Union with American and Western help" (cited in Bunea, 1994, p. 34).

That Ceausescu saw "tourists" specifically playing a nefarious role in stimulating the Timisoara protests is made clear by his order at the close of this emergency meeting:

"I have ordered that all tourist activity be interrupted at once. Not one more foreign tourist will be allowed in, because they have all turned into agents of espionage.... Not even those from the socialist countries will be allowed in, with the exception of [North] Korea, China, and Cuba. Because all the neighboring socialist countries are untrustworthy. Those sent from the neighboring socialist countries are sent as agents" (cited in Bunea, 1994, p. 34).

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE 'TOURISTS' ITINERARY AND ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO TOP SECURITATE AND PARTY OFFICIALS IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF DECEMBER 1989

Filip Teodorescu, who as head of the Securitate's Counterespionage Directorate (Directorate III) had been dispatched to Timisoara and was later arrested for his role in the repression there, maintained in March 1990 at his trial that he detained "foreign agents" during the Timisoara events ("Romania libera," 9 March 1990). In a book that appeared in 1992, Teodorescu described as follows the events in Timisoara on Monday, 18 December -- that is, after the bloody regime repression of anti-Ceausescu demonstrators the night before:

"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).

Teodorescu appears here to be attempting to account for the fact that on Monday, 18 December 1989 -- presumably as a consequence of Ceausescu's tirade the afternoon before about the malicious intent of virtually all "tourists" -- Romania announced, in typically Orwellian fashion, that it would not accept any more tourists because of a "shortage of hotel rooms" and because "weather conditions are not suitable for tourism" (Belgrade Domestic Service, 20 December 1989). Ironically, the only ones exempted from this ban were "Soviet travelers coming home from shopping trips to Yugoslavia" (!) (AFP, 19 December 1989).

Radu Balan, former Timis County party boss, picks up the story from there. While serving a prison sentence for his complicity in the Timisoara repression, in 1991 Balan told one of Ceausescu's most famous "court poets," Adrian Paunescu, that on the night of 18-19 December -- during which in reality some 40 cadavers were secretly transported from Timisoara's main hospital to Bucharest for cremation (reputedly on Elena Ceausescu's personal order) -- he too witnessed the role of these "foreign agents":

"We had been receiving information, in daily bulletins, from the Securitate, that far more people were returning from Yugoslavia and Hungary than were going there and about the presence of Lada automobiles filled with Soviets. I saw them at the border and the border posts, and the cars were full. I wanted to know where and what they were eating and how they were crossing the border and going through cities and everywhere. More telling, on the night of 18-19 December, when I was at a fire at the I.A.M. factory, in front of the county hospital, I spotted 11 white 'Lada' automobiles at 1 a.m. in the morning. They pretended to ask me the road to Buzias. The 11 white Ladas had Soviet plates, not Romanian ones, and were in front of the hospital" ("Totusi iubirea," no. 43, 24-31 October 1991).

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. 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).

Nor was Gheorghe Roset, head of the Militia in the city of Caransebes at the time of the Revolution, able to elude a visit from the "tourists" during these days. Writing from his prison cell in January 1991, he recounted:

"Stationed on the night of 20-21 December 1989 at headquarters, I received the order to issue an authorization for repairs for a Lada automobile that had overturned in Soceni, in Caras-Severin county, an order that was approved by the chief of the county Militia with the clarification that the passengers of this car were military personnel from the USSR. I was more than a little surprised when this car arrived in Caransebes and I saw that it was part of a convoy of 20 cars, all of the same make and with 3-4 passengers per car. Lengthy discussions with the person who had requested the authorization confirmed for me the accident and the fact that this convoy of cars was coming from Timisoara, on its way to Bucharest, as well as the fact that these were colleagues of ours from the country in question. He presented a passport in order to receive the documents he had requested, although not even today can I say with certainty that he belonged to this or that country. A short time after the convoy left on its way, it was reported to me that five of the cars had headed in the direction of Hateg, while the more numerous group headed for Bucharest" ("Europa," no. 20, March 1991).

A September 1990 open letter authored by "some officers of the former Securitate" -- most likely from the Fifth Directorate charged with guarding Ceausescu and the rest of the Romanian communist leadership -- and addressed to the xenophobic, neo-Ceausist weekly "Democratia" (which was edited by Eugen Florescu, one of Ceausescu's chief propagandists and speechwriters), sought to summarize the entire record of the "tourists" wanderings and activities in December 1989 as follows:

"11-15 [December] -- a massive penetration of so-called Hungarian tourists takes place in Timisoara and Soviet tourists in Cluj;

15-16 [December] -- upon the initiative of these groups, protests of support for the sinister 'Priest [Father Laszlo Tokes of Timisoara]' break out;

16-17-18 [December] -- in the midst of the general state of confusion building in the city, the army intervenes to reestablish order;

-- this provides a long-awaited opportunity for the 'tourists' to start -- in the midst of warning shots in the air -- to shoot and stab in the back the demonstrators among whom they are located and whom they have incited;...

19-20-21 -- a good part of the 'tourists' and their brethren among the locals begin to migrate -- an old habit -- from the main cities of Transylvania, according to plan, in order to destabilize: Cluj, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Targu Mures, Satu Mare, Oradea, etc." ("Democratia," no. 36, 24-30 September 1990).

The authors of this chronology then maintain that this scene was replicated in Bucharest on 21 December, causing the famous disruption of Ceausescu's speech and the death of civilians in University Square that evening.

Not to be out-done, Cluj Securitate chief Ion Serbanoiu claimed in a 1991 interview that, as of 21 December 1989, there were over 800 Russian and Hungarian tourists, mostly driving almost brand-new Lada automobiles (but also Dacia and Wartburg cars), in the city (interview with Angela Bacescu in "Europa," no. 55, December 1991). In February 1991 during his trial, former Securitate Director General Iulian Vlad, not surprisingly, also spoke of "massive groups of Soviet tourists...the majority were men...deploy[ing] in a coordinated manner in a convoy of brand-new Lada automobiles" (see Bunea, 1994, pp. 460-461), while the infamous Pavel Corut has written of "the infiltration on Romanian territory of groups of Soviet commandos ("Spetsnaz") under the cover of being tourists" (Corut, 1994).

REBUTTING THE 'TOURIST' MYTH

I vividly recall early on in my research of the December 1989 events being told emphatically, and not for the last time, by a journalist at the Cluj weekly "Nu" -- a publication staunchly critical of the Iliescu regime -- that the guest lists of Romanian hotels for December 1989 were nowhere to be found because they contained the secrets of the Revolution. Certainly, this rumor has intersected with the "tourist" myth and has been used as confirmation of the latter.

Significantly, Marius Mioc has sought to investigate the reality of this matter in Timisoara (Mioc, 2000). The numbers provided to the 17 December Timisoara Association (which Mioc heads) by all of Timisoara's hotels and by the State Tourist Agency for Timisoara lay bare two of the key components upon which the "tourist" myth has relied: a) that the records of the December 1989 manifests do not exist, and b) that

there was an unusually dramatic increase in the number of foreign tourists staying in Romanian hotels during this period. In fact, the opposite proves to be true, the number of foreign tourists -- and specifically those from other "socialist" countries -- declined in December 1989 both in comparison to the previous December and in comparison to November 1989!

Of course, as we have seen, proponents of the "tourist" myth have also suggested that many of the alleged foreign agents posing as tourists "avoided staying in hotels." But this still raises the question of why the Securitate allowed them into the country in the first place and why they then seemed unable to follow their movements and prevent their activities. A 1991 open letter by "a group of [Romanian Army] officers from the Timisoara garrison" perhaps provides the best riposte to the dubious logic underlying the "tourist" hypothesis:

"If they [the tourists] appeared suspect to the special forces of the Securitate and military counterintelligence, why did they not attempt to keep them under surveillance? During this period, did the Securitate and the counterintelligence officers not know how to do their jobs? Did they somehow forget why they were paid such weighty sums from the state budget?" ("Romania libera," 15 October 1991).

One must also ask: If it was precisely Soviet tourists who were most suspected at the time of being up to no good in the country, then why was it precisely they who were the sole group among "tourists" in the country at the time to be permitted to stay and go about their business unhindered?

HOW THE 'TOURISTS' ENTRY INTO THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DECEMBER 1989 PARALLELS THE EXIT OF THE SECURITATE

In commenting in August 1990 upon how the details of the state's case against him had changed since early in the year, Nicolae Ceausescu's son, Nicu, ironically highlighted how Securitate forces had begun to fade away from the historiography of the December 1989 events. In the August 1990 interview from his prison cell with Ion Cristoiu's "Zig-Zag" (mentioned above), 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 (for a discussion, see Hall, 1996). In August 1990, however, 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 1997a, 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." 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 overturning 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).

Thus, as the "tourists" began to enter the historiography of the December 1989 events, so the Securitate -- specifically the USLA -- began to disappear.

HOW THE 'TOURIST' MYTH NEVERTHELESS GAINED MAINSTREAM CREDIBILITY AND ACCEPTANCE

How, then, did the "tourist" myth gain credibility and acceptance in the Romanian press, given its rather obvious pedigree in the remnants of the Ceausescu regime, especially among former high-ranking Securitate officers and others most in need of an alibi/diversion to save their careers and avoid the possibility of going to jail? Although the reference to "tourists" during the December events probably entered the lexicon of mainstream reporting on the Revolution as early as April 1990 -- not insignificantly, first in the pages of Ion Cristoiu's weekly "Zig-Zag," it appears -- it was in particular journalist Sorin Rosca Stanescu who gave the theme legitimacy in the mainstream press.

Without specifying the term "tourists" -- but clearly speaking in the same vein -- Stanescu was probably the first to articulate the thesis most precisely and to tie the Soviet angle to it. In June 1990 in a piece entitled "Is The Conspiracy of Silence Breaking Down?" in the sharply anti-government daily "Romania libera," Stanescu wrote:

"And still in connection with the breaking down of the conspiracy of silence, in the army there is more and more insistent talk about the over 4,000 Lada cars with two men per car that traveled many different roads in the days before the Revolution and then disappeared" ("Romania libera," 14 June 1990).

Stanescu's article was vigorously anti-FSN and anti-Iliescu and left little doubt that this thesis was part of the "unofficial" history of the December events, injurious to the new leaders, and something they did not wish to see published or wish to clarify.

But it was Stanescu's April 1991 article in "Romania libera," entitled "Is Iliescu Being Protected By The KGB?," that truly gave impetus to the "tourist" thesis. Stanescu wrote:

"A KGB officer wanders in France. He is losing his patience and searching for a way to get to Latin America. Yesterday I met him in Paris. He talked to me after finding out that I was a Romanian journalist. He fears the French press. He knows Romanian and was in Timisoara in December 1989. As you will recall, persistent rumors have circulated about the existence on Romanian soil 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? Witness what the anonymous Soviet officer related to me in Paris:

'There existed an intervention plan that for whatever reason was not activated. I received the order to enter Romania on 14 December and to head for Timisoara. Myself and my colleague were armed. During the events, we circulated in the military zone around Calea Girocului [Giriocul Road]. Those who headed toward Bucharest had the same mission. Several larger cities were targeted. We were to open fire in order to create a state of confusion. I never, however, received such an order. I left Romania on 26 December.'

I don't have any reason to suspect the validity of these revelations. This short confession is naturally incomplete, but not inconclusive. What purpose would this elaborate, but aborted, KGB plan have had? The only plausible explanation is that it wasn't necessary for KGB agents to intervene. The events were unfolding in the desired direction without need for the direct intervention of the Soviets. But this leads to other questions: What did the Ceausescu couple know, but were not allowed to say [prior to their hurried execution]? Why is Securitate General Vlad being held in limbo? To what degree has President Iliescu maintained ties to the Soviets? What are the secret clauses of the Friendship Treaty recently signed in Moscow? Is Iliescu being protected by the KGB or not? Perhaps the SRI [the Securitate's institutional successor, the Romanian Information Service] would like to respond to these questions?"

Stanescu's April 1991 article did not go unnoticed -- despite its nondescript placement on page eight -- and has since received recognition and praise from what might seem unexpected corners. For example, previously-discussed former Securitate Colonel Filip Teodorescu cited extensive excerpts from Stanescu's article in his 1992 book on the December events, and he added cryptically:

"Moreover, I don't have any reason to suspect that the journalist Sorin Rosca Stanescu would have invented a story in order to come to the aid of those accused, by the courts or by public opinion, for the results of the tragic events of December 1989" (Teodorescu, 1992, pp. 92-94).

Radu Balan, former Timis County party secretary, imprisoned for his role in the December events, has also invoked Stanescu's April 1991 article as proof of his revisionist view that "tourists" rather than "non-existent 'terrorists'" were to blame for the December 1989 bloodshed:

"...[W]hile at Jilava [the jail where he was imprisoned at the time of the interview, in October 1991], I read 'Romania libera' from 18 April. And Rosca Stanescu writes from Paris that a KGB agent who deserted the KGB and is in transit to the U.S. stated that on 18 December [1989] he had the mission to create panic on Calea Girocului [a thoroughfare in Timisoara]. What is more, on the 18th, these 11 cars were at the top of Calea Girocului, where I saw them. I was dumbfounded, I tell you. I didn't tell anybody. Please study 'Romania libera,' the last page, from 18 April 1991" ("Totusi iubirea," no. 43, 24-31 October 1991).

In this regard, it would be irresponsible to totally discount the relevance of Rosca Stanescu's past. Since December 1989, Stanescu has undeniably been a vigorous critic of, and made damaging revelations about, the Securitate's institutional heir, the SRI, and the Iliescu regime, and he has frequently written ill of the former Securitate and the Ceausescu regime. Nevertheless, in 1992 it was leaked to the press -- and Rosca Stanescu himself confirmed -- that from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s he was an informer for the Securitate (for a discussion, see Hall, 1997b, pp. 111-113). What was significant, however, was precisely for which branch of the Securitate Rosca Stanescu had been an informer: the USLA.

THE 'TOURISTS' MYTH TRAVELS WESTWARD

Almost inevitably, the "tourist" thesis has made its way into Western academic literature. For example, in a book lauded by experts (see for example, Professor Archie Brown's review in "Slavic Review," Winter 1998), Jacques Levesque invokes as "rare evidence" that the Soviets were responsible for igniting and fanning the flames of the Timisoara uprising the following:

"...testimony of an imprisoned Securitate colonel who was freed in 1991 [he is referring to the aforementioned Filip Teodorescu]. He writes that the Securitate had noted the arrival of 'numerous false Soviet tourists' in Timisoara in early December, coming from Soviet Moldova. He also reports that a convoy of several Lada cars, with Soviet license plates and containing three to four men each, had refused to stop at a police checkpoint in Craiova. After the Romanian police opened fire and killed several men, he claims that the Soviet authorities recovered the bodies without issuing an official protest. To the extent that this information is absolutely correct, it would tend to prove the presence of Soviet agents in Romania (which no one doubts), without, however, indicating to us their exact role in the events" (Levesque, 1997, p. 197).

Levesque seems generally unaware of or concerned with the problematic nature of the source of this "rare evidence" and thus never really considers the possibility that the Securitate colonel is engaging in disinformation. This is indicative of how upside-down the understanding of the December 1989 events has become in the post-Ceausescu era -- and of the influence of the far-reaching and generally unchallenged revisionism of the events within Romania itself -- that Western writers invoking the thesis seem to accept the claims at face value, never even enunciating any doubt about why the Securitate source in question might seek to make such an argument.

* A memorable phrase from Andrei Codrescu's PBS special "Road Scholar" of the early 1990s.

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[Compiled by Michael Shafir](#)

THE SECURITATE ROOTS OF A MODERN ROMANIAN FAIRY TALE: THE PRESS, THE FORMER SECURITATE, AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DECEMBER 1989

By Richard Hall

Nothing is perhaps more indicative of the smug ignorance or delusional wishful thinking of rigidly partisan critics of Ion Iliescu and those who seized power in December 1989 than the coverage of the case of former Militia Sergeant Petre Olaru, which broke upon the Romanian press scene in April 1999. Tragically, the result of such blindly partisan analysis has been similar to that seen in the cases discussed in the first two episodes of this article -- in their zeal to target and tar Iliescu and other members of the "nomenklatura" with the greatest share of blame for the December 1989 bloodshed, these critics have eagerly embraced and promoted the wildest and most ridiculous fabrications of the former Securitate and Militia, fabrications designed to exonerate these institutions and their employees for the repression and bloodshed of December 1989.

Those who are inclined to view the December 1989 events as a "dead story" that lost its importance in Romanian politics after the early 1990s, or who claim that the historiographical revisionism in the media has had little impact on public opinion, generally tuned out reporting on the revolution -- out of fatigue and cynicism -- rather early on, and thus tend to be unfamiliar with more recent developments on this front. For example, a poll by the Center for Rural and Urban Sociology (CURS) on the eve of the 10th anniversary of Ceausescu's overthrow, revealed just how far media revisionism of the understanding of what happened in December 1989 has advanced. As the daily "Ziua" announced, a bare 11 percent of those questioned continued to believe -- in what not even the author of the piece could struggle to present in neutral terms -- in the "myth of the terrorists" -- those accused of responsibility for the over 900 deaths that followed Ceausescu's flight from power on 22 December 1989 and who were originally portrayed as Securitate members (most likely from the Special Unit for Anti-Terrorist Warfare -- USLA -- and the Fifth Directorate) fighting on behalf of Ceausescu ("Ziua," 17 November 1999). That almost 90 percent of those polled could admit to having changed their mind on this issue -- for during the events, nobody expressed doubt as to the either the existence, or the identity, of the "terrorists" -- must say something about the impact of media coverage, since from the beginning of the post-Ceausescu era debunking the "myth of the terrorists" has been at the forefront of reporting on the December 1989 events.

Nor, as the so-called "Olaru case" demonstrates, is it true to say that December 1989 has lost its value as an instrument in fighting contemporary political battles. For at least a year and a half -- from late 1997 through early 1999 -- former Militia Sergeant Petre Olaru, and those who promoted his claims, attempted to influence the administration of

President Emil Constantinescu and the leadership of institutions of the Romanian state, as the following discussion of the case elucidates.

'ZIUUA' BREAKS THE 'OLARU CASE': 'THE MOST SPECTACULAR INVESTIGATION OF DECEMBER '89 TO DATE'

On 5 April 1999, the so-called "Olaru case" first came into the public eye at a specially convened news conference at the Hotel Bucuresti ("Ziua," 6 April 1999). Presenting what they maintained was incontrovertible proof that the December 1989 events were from start to finish part of a KGB-engineered coup d'etat were: Sorin Rosca Stanescu, editor in chief of the daily "Ziua"; Serban Sandulescu, a senator representing the ruling National Peasant Party Christian Democratic (PNTCD), vice president of the Senate's Defense Committee, and head of the third parliamentary commission to investigate the December 1989 events; and Stefan Radoi, a former "Ziua" advisor and assistant to Sandulescu in his capacity as head of the aforementioned parliamentary commission.

The three explained how former Militia Sergeant Petre Olaru had approached President Emil Constantinescu in late 1997 with evidence of the KGB's role in the December 1989 events; how the state secretary for the Interior Ministry, General Teodor Zaharia, had conducted three hypnosis sessions with Olaru in order to "maximize Olaru's 'complete memory'"; and how in a meeting the previous night at the Presidential Palace, Constantinescu had allegedly asked Radoi to investigate the allegations of KGB involvement. As proof of Olaru's revelations they apparently showed excerpts from a fourth hypnosis session conducted with Olaru (which was shown on the Prima TV station). The next morning's edition of "Ziua" printed a copy of a letter the newspaper had sent to a whole series of Western embassies and well-known Western media outlets and watchdog organizations -- including CNN and Reporteurs sans Frontiers -- requesting "international protection for the witness Petre Olaru" ("Ziua," 6 April 1999).

Olaru had an amazing story to tell. December 1989 had found Olaru as a simple policeman in the village of Crevedia in Dambovitza county in the south of the country, not far from Bucharest. Actors, journalists, and intellectuals had reportedly made a habit of staying in summer houses on Lake Crevedia. On 14 December 1989 -- therefore a day prior to the first demonstrations in Timisoara that were to spark Ceausescu's downfall -- Olaru claimed he made "a routine inspection" of film director George Vitanidis' house (Olaru in "Ziua," 6 April 1999). Olaru said that Vitanidis had been suspected of engaging in illegal currency transactions and that this was the motivation for the inspection of his premises. To his astonishment, Olaru claimed, among Vitanidis's undergarments he allegedly found an unopened letter, sealed with the insignia of the Soviet Union on the back.

When Olaru opened and read the letter, he discovered that it was a detailed description of plans for a Soviet-backed coup d'etat, including the names of those who were to act in conjunction with the plan. It spoke of a "group of 60 excursionists with cars who were in Buzau and would disperse to the specified place" -- in other words, of "tourists." It even specified how many people it was anticipated would die in the unfolding of the coup:

"there will be 30,000-40,000 deaths," the letter read, but hastened to add, "it will be worth it." Vitanidis, the letter went on to say, had been selected to film the historic events, because the Soviets' original choice, film director Sergiu Nicolaescu, had changed his mind.

According to Olaru, he informed his superiors and later that day Securitate Director General Iulian Vlad came to Crevedia, leafed through the letter, and took possession of it, instructing Olaru not to mention its contents to anyone. Then, a week later, on 21 December -- thus in the midst of the upheaval and bloodshed in Timisoara -- army Chief of Staff General Stefan Guse showed up in Crevedia to try to find out the contents of the letter, of which by now he had heard. Ceausescu was overthrown the next day...but this was only the beginning of Olaru's ordeal.

PETRE OLARU: THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER MAN IN POST-CEAUSESCU ROMANIA

After Ion Iliescu, Petre Roman, and many of the others mentioned in the letter seized power in December 1989, Olaru claimed he became a focal point of attention among the country's new leaders. Prior to writing to President Constantinescu in late 1997, Olaru maintains that he was approached by a series of political celebrities, all either wanting to know the contents of the letter Olaru had allegedly seen (and of which he was no longer in possession) or warning him of the trouble he would encounter if he ever disclosed its contents. Olaru alleged that he was repeatedly offered large sums of money and other inducements, but consistently rejected the offers.

A copy of the "Report to Emil Constantinescu" Petre Olaru submitted to the Romanian president in late 1997 detailed the alleged approaches and threats as the following synopsis shows:

January 1990: Prime Minister Petre Roman comes to Crevedia and tells Olaru, "Sir, you are the man who can destroy NUMBER ONE [i.e. Iliescu]," and offers him help.

May-June 1990: General Nicolae Militaru, also mentioned in the letter as a co-conspirator, tries on several occasions to get Olaru to come to Sinaia to "discuss some problems." Olaru refuses to meet with him.

Early 1991: Director Sergiu Nicolaescu travels to Crevedia and tells Olaru, "...don't talk about anything with anyone -- even in the future."

March 1993: General Adrian Nitoi tries to ply Olaru with whiskey, but Olaru keeps mum.

June 1993: General Gheorghe Ionescu Danescu, minister of the interior, demands to know what Olaru knows; Olaru tells him he does not know anything.

September 1994: General Iulian Vlad tells Olaru not to worry, he won't talk.

August 1995: Colonel Stoica calls on Olaru to offer him a position in the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), but Olaru rejects it.

Summer 1995: Editor Ion Cristoiu offers Olaru 5 million lei to reveal what he knows, but in vain.

1995: Greater Romania Party (PRM) Chairman Corneliu Vadim Tudor's sister and Defense Minister Taracila contact Olaru trying to get him to talk, but to no avail.

February 1996: Corneliu Vadim Tudor offers Olaru 100 million lei to talk and then offers an additional 200 million lei when Olaru won't accept. Olaru continues to refuse to talk.

May 1996: Former Foreign Minister Adrian Severin contacts Olaru.

June 1996: Former Minister of Finance Florin Georgescu comes calling.

May-October 1996: General Buzea from the SRI tries to arrange a meeting with SRI General Marcu; Olaru refuses.

June-July 1996: General Suceava wishes to get in touch with Olaru.

Summer 1996: General Tepelea tries the same, also unsuccessfully.

September 1996: General Dumitru Iliescu of the Presidential Guard and Protection Service offers Olaru a transfer, an embassy post, or early retirement. Olaru turns him down on all accounts.

1997: Journalist Petre Mihai Bacanu of "Romania libera" unsuccessfully attempts to get Olaru to talk.

March 1997: Petre Roman comes calling again.

April 1997: The so-called "Refrigerator King," Novolan, an influential member of the ruling Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR) local branch, approaches Olaru.

May 1997: Two men sent on the orders of "Cotroceni" by Interior Minister Dejeu contact Olaru. ("Ziua," 6 April 1999, emphasis in the original)

It would appear that Olaru had become -- without a doubt -- the most sought-after man in Romania!

SKEPTICISM AND CYNICISM GREET OLARU'S REVELATIONS FROM SOME CORNERS

On 7 April, "Ziua" published the response of Presidential Adviser for Defense and National Security Dorin Marian to the claims made by Olaru and promoted by the daily

"Ziua," ("Ziua," 7 April 1999). Marian acknowledged that he had known of the "Olaru case" since late 1997. In November 1997, Sandulescu and Radoi had met with President Constantinescu to discuss the case. In December 1997, Olaru had sent his report to the Presidency. In his statement, Marian highlighted the reasons he had informed President Constantinescu in the fall of 1998 that he had concluded that Olaru's claims were "baseless" and "an ingenious combination of speculation that circulated in the mass media, especially during 1990 and 1991."

Marian pointed out that there was no extant copy of the document Olaru claimed to have come across in Vitanidis's home. Moreover, he noted it would be highly unusual that a letter detailing such prized secrets should have displayed such amateurish "tradecraft," without any effort at concealing names and operational instructions in "code words." The dates on which certain events were said to have transpired strained credulity -- for example, General Guse is known to have been in Timisoara from the 17 until the morning of 22 December and thus could not have been in Crevedia on 21 December as Olaru maintained.

Marian also commented that Olaru appeared to have displayed an amazingly insubordinate attitude for a Romanian noncommissioned officer faced with the repeated orders and threats of military and political superiors: "If these events had really happened, it is hard to believe that he would still be working for the Interior Ministry!" In four months of tapping Olaru's phone, Marian stated that Olaru received no threats and that in the conversations Olaru did have with notable personages they appeared not to know or recall who Olaru was. Finally, Marian expressed skepticism as to why Olaru was subjected to hypnosis rather than a lie-detector machine, and was cynical about the fact that Olaru had requested of the Presidency that he be granted an ambassadorial post abroad as a "means of enforcing his protection."

Cornel Nistorescu, editor in chief of the daily "Evenimentul Zilei," a competitor of "Ziua," and a sometimes protagonist in journalistic controversies with "Ziua" director Rosca Stanescu, was also having none of Olaru's hypnotic or uninduced recollections. In editorials on 7 and 8 April, he wrote sarcastically of his own dream, how he and Nicolae Ceausescu had bathed together and Ceausescu had invited him to travel in the presidential helicopter ("Evenimentul Zilei," 7 and 8 April 1999). Nistorescu suggested that claims as outlandish as Olaru's were not even worthy of a bad spy novel.

Nistorescu also noted how this was not the first he had heard of Olaru. He too had been aware of Olaru's existence and allegations for some time: for one and a half years Olaru's tale had been persistently and skillfully floated his way. As early as the summer of 1997, he revealed, two individuals had attempted to put him in touch with Olaru. The question was why? Nistorescu observed. According to Nistorescu, "one gets the feeling that insistent efforts are made to march [us] in the direction of Olaru's tale."

'ZIUA' AND COMPANY STRIKE BACK: 'OLARU'S ORDEAL CONTINUES'

In response to the dismissive remarks of Presidential Adviser Dorin Marian and

presumably to the cynical commentary of the likes of Cornel Nistorescu, Sorin Rosca Stanescu, Senator Sandulescu, and Stefan Radoi sought to fight back. Rosca Stanescu penned an editorial entitled, "Who is being duplicitous? Dorin Marian or Costin Georgescu? Or Both?," in which he insinuated that Marian and perhaps even SRI Director Georgescu -- who had failed to comment on the validity of Olaru's charges -- were either too fearful, compromised, or complicit to admit the KGB's role in the December 1989 events ("Ziua," 9 April 1999). Sandulescu and Radoi maintained that "Sergeant Olaru isn't crazy!" and "Ziua" published even more details of what they claimed was evidence that "Olaru's ordeal continued even into 1998" ("Ziua," 8 and 9 April 1999).

If 1990-97 had seen a parade of political celebrities making a pilgrimage to Crevedia trying to get Olaru to talk or remain silent, the year 1998, according to the details published by "Ziua," was even busier. After writing to President Constantinescu, Olaru claimed, he had been contacted by the following personages in 1998, as insistent as ever about the information Olaru held and willing to offer even larger sums of money than in previous years:

- Novolan, the PDSR "Refrigerator King," returns -- this time offering 200 million lei.
- The director of Antena-1 TV in Targoviste offers Olaru \$40,000-\$50,000 to talk.
- General Victor Atanasie Stanculescu offers "unlimited amounts of money or gold."
- General Paul Sarpe of the army's Defense Intelligence unit threatens Olaru's son.
- More representatives of the PRM seek out Olaru.
- Two more unidentified generals offer Olaru 400-500 million lei. ("Ziua," 9 April 1999).

"Ziua" continued to defend the veracity of Olaru's story in the days that followed. It published portions of Olaru's three hypnosis sessions with General Teodor Zaharia on 7, 12, and 22 November 1998. Sorin Rosca Stanescu became more explicit in his accusations against those who had cast doubt on Olaru's account. In an editorial entitled "Fear of the KGB," he excoriated the "cowardly fear of the government," and its wishful thinking that the KGB would "simply go away." He claimed that by now the SRI had weighed in -- although he did not say whether it had been SRI Director Costin Georgescu, whom he had criticized for his silence in an earlier editorial -- and that the SRI had informed him that "they don't believe Marian's theory that Olaru is crazy" ("Ziua," 14 April 1999). Rosca Stanescu even insinuated that Dorin Marian himself might possibly have KGB ties -- thus explaining his reluctance to believe Olaru or take Olaru's charges seriously.

Stefan Radoi also stepped out of the shadows, so to speak. When "Ziua" first broke the Olaru story on 6 April 1999, Rosca Stanescu had mentioned Radoi as a former

"information officer" until 1982, who had in 1990 become a close confidant of Corneliu Coposu, the long-persecuted head of the outlawed National Peasant Party during the communist era. In an interview with "Ziua" on 18 April 1999, Radoi admitted more precisely that he had been a member of the information service of the Securitate's USLA between 1979 and 1982. In the interview, Radoi alleged that "KGB and GRU agents were openly involved in the December 1989 coup d'etat," that the "terrorists" in December 1989 had acted to "create enough panic in order for the 'luminaries' of the 'revolution' [i.e. Iliescu, et al.] to seize power," and that the USLA troops accused of being the "terrorists" during the events had never fired on anyone, as they had never been trained in guerrilla warfare, contrary to what had been alleged ("Ziua," 19 April 1999). According to Radoi, Zaharia had been frightened by what he heard during the hypnosis sessions with Olaru -- thus causing him to abscond with the documents and tapes of the sessions -- and that "many of those mentioned on the Olaru list want to kill him."

Radoi's admission that he had been an USLA officer was significant -- especially in light of the fact that Rosca Stanescu himself happens to have been an informer for the USLA (between 1975 and 1985). Given that it was precisely the USLA that had been accused during the December events as being responsible for the lion's share of the bloodshed, it is difficult to regard their past as wholly irrelevant to the fact that they were now promoting a story that exonerated the USLA -- even if indirectly -- of being the "terrorists" and thus of responsibility for the bloodshed. In light of Radoi's position as an advisor to Senator Serban Sandulescu, Radoi's account of the December 1989 events and his claims regarding role of the KGB and GRU provided some insight as to the possible influence Radoi may have had upon Sandulescu in the latter's capacity as head of the parliamentary commission investigating the December 1989 events. Sandulescu had published his conclusions on those events in a 1996 book entitled "The Coup d'etat that Abducted the Revolution," a work that alleged that the December 1989 events were essentially a Soviet-engineered coup (Sandulescu, 1996).

THE BENEFICIAL CONSEQUENCES OF PROFESSIONAL AND ECONOMIC COMPETITION IN THE PRESS SCORE A VICTORY FOR COMMON SENSE

If the "Olaru case" was evidence of the still-troubling cultural and institutional legacies of the communist era, it was also evidence of the intrinsic benefits of the journalistic and personal competition characteristic of the postcommunist era (for a good overview of trends in the Romanian media's postcommunist development, see Gross, 1996). As we have seen, Cornel Nistorescu was having none of Rosca Stanescu's latest, proclaimed journalistic coup. But more important and promising from the journalistic point of view was the investigative response of the journalists at the daily "Cotidianul."

On 14 April 1999, "Cotidianul" published an interview with Dimitrie Vitanidis, the son of the man in whose house Olaru claimed he had found the "key to the secrets of the revolution" -- the letter with Soviet insignia unearthed during a "routine inspection." The interview was with George Vitanidis's son precisely because the director was no longer in a position to defend himself -- he had died in 1994. According to Dimitrie Vitanidis, no one -- including the staff from "Ziua" and the "officer" Radoi who had promoted the

allegations against his father -- had bothered to contact his family. The younger Vitanidis dwelt on the fact that if the letter had existed, as Olaru suggested, the KGB would have had to have been complete idiots. But he also said that the Vitanidis's chauffeur mentioned by Olaru did not in fact exist, and that there had been no such search of the house at Crevedia -- mainly because the house was uninhabited in December 1989 because it was too cold to stay in during the winter.

Approximately a week later, on 20 April 1999, an extraordinary news conference took place in Crevedia. Present were the mayor of Crevedia, the next-door neighbor of the Vitanidis home in Crevedia, and a group of peasants from a neighboring village who had had run-ins with the police officer Olaru during the Ceausescu era. The Vitanidis family neighbor, Ionel Dumitru, stated that he did not recall either the house-search or the existence of the alleged Vitanidis chauffeur mentioned by Olaru. The peasants recounted Olaru's less-than-stellar human rights record prior to December 1989. The town mayor opined that he believed Olaru had been "'helped' to invent this subject." Irina Dumitrescu of "Cotidianul," who rather cynically noted Radoi's previous affiliation with the USLA, remarked that no one from "Ziua," Prima TV, or Senator Sandulescu's staff was in attendance at the news conference ("Cotidianul," 21 April 1999; see also "Evenimentul Zilei," 21 April 1999).

BUT ROMANIA'S MODERN FAIRY TALE HAS DEEP ROOTS...

It is practically surreal that well over a decade after the December 1989 events, a well-known and perceptive critical intellectual and journalist from Romania could unabashedly argue to a Western audience in the pages of the journal "East European Politics and Societies" that accounts of the December 1989 events fall into two categories: those advocated by the remnants of the communist party-state (including the Securitate) and those advocated by "critical intellectuals, journalists, and representatives of the re-founded 'historical parties.'" According to Dan Pavel -- himself apparently a believer of Olaru's tall tale (see his article in "Ziua," 20 April 1999) -- "critical intellectuals, journalists, and representatives of the re-founded 'historical parties'" differ in their assessment of December 1989 because they have "asserted that Iliescu and his group were the masterminds of those bloody events (more than 1,000 victims) involving 'terrorists' that nobody ever saw in trials" (Pavel, 2001, p. 184). Pavel's clear-cut dichotomy of good versus evil and truth versus falsehood makes for a good morality play. Unfortunately, it bears little resemblance to reality and is, hence, deeply misleading. Perhaps most distressing of all, it is indicative of just how poorly many who have the capacity -- wanted or unwanted -- to shape public opinion in Romania know the story of what the former Securitate and its sympathizers have argued about December 1989, as this three-part article has demonstrated.

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