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**The Political Apparatus and the Intelligence
Structures in December 1989 and Their
Politicization during the First Post-Communist
Decade**

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Introduction

The doctoral dissertation entitled *The Political Apparatus and the Intelligence Structures in December 1989 and Their Politicization during the First Post-Communist Decade* aims to analyze the structural relationship between the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) and its information-repressive apparatus, with a focus on the role and transformations of the Securitate during the final decade of the communist regime, the moment of rupture represented by December 1989, and the first years of the post-communist transition. The research is based on the premise that the communist regime in Romania cannot be understood exclusively through the study of the formal institutions of the party-state, but rather through the investigation of the functioning of an integrated political apparatus, within which the party and the security structures acted symbiotically, both in the exercise of power and in its reproduction. The approach seeks to explain the manner in which an authoritarian system, founded on political monopoly and information-repressive control, was replaced by a regime that claimed democratic legitimacy, yet in which the old structures and networks continued, to varying degrees, to influence public life.

Between 1945 and 1989, the RCP built a complex mechanism of social and political control, in which the Securitate occupied a central role, functioning as the principal instrument of surveillance, coercion, and neutralization of any form of opposition. This institution did not act autonomously, but under the direct coordination of the political leadership, a fact illustrated, among other things, by the overwhelming majority of its officers' membership in party structures. In this context, the dissertation introduces and operates with the concept of *political apparatus* in an integrative sense, designating the ensemble of relations, practices, and institutions through which the party and the state overlapped and mutually supported one another in the exercise of domination.

December 1989 represents a major inflection point in the analysis. The collapse of the Ceaușescu regime led to the formal dissolution of the RCP's political monopoly, but not to the immediate disappearance of the structures and networks that had sustained the regime. The dissertation investigates the actual role played by the Securitate during the revolutionary events, examining the controversies related to its alleged involvement in the "terrorist" diversion, as well as the hypothesis of an institutional redeployment intended to ensure the survival of the intelligence structures in the new political context. The second temporal dimension of the research concerns the first post-communist decade (1990–2000) and the changes that occurred at the level of the intelligence structures following Romania's accession to NATO and the European Union, a period marked by the reorganization of the intelligence

services and by major difficulties in establishing genuine democratic control over them. The establishment of new intelligence structures, particularly the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), founded in March 1990, was significantly influenced by the institutional, human, and operational legacy of the former Securitate. The politicization of the secret services, understood both as subordination to political power and as their use in internal political competition, represents one of the central themes of the dissertation.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- (1) a brief historical overview of the RCP and the Securitate;
 - (2) understanding the mechanisms through which these institutions were reconfigured or survived throughout the communist regime;
 - (3) the revolutionary moment seen through the eyes of employees of the coercive institutions, through the analysis of *Vitralii* and *Periscop*, followed by an analysis of the degree of politicization of the new intelligence structures (especially the SRI, established in March 1990) during the 1990s;
- (3.1) examining the manner in which the party–services relationship was reflected and contested in the public, media, and memorial spheres.

From a methodological perspective, the research is based on an interdisciplinary analysis, combining tools of contemporary history with perspectives from political science and intelligence studies. The sources used include archival materials from the CNSAS collections, official documents, press materials, memoirs, interviews, and publications authored by former intelligence officers. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of post-communist discourse regarding the Securitate, especially through the study of the journals *Vitralii – Lights and Shadows* and *Periscop*, which provide a relevant perspective on efforts at symbolic rehabilitation and reinterpretation of the institutional past. This represents a distinct contribution through the integration of sources less exploited in the Romanian academic environment: archives of the 1990s press, articles from *Vitralii – Lights and Shadows* (reserve/retired SRI personnel) and *Periscop* (SIE veterans), as well as oral history interviews. Through this triangulation, the dissertation seeks to move beyond both the uniform demonization of the Securitate and conspiracy-based explanations that deny any spontaneous component of the Revolution.

Through this approach, the dissertation aims to contribute to clarifying the relationship between institutional continuity and discontinuity in the Romanian transition, offering a nuanced interpretation of the manner in which the political apparatus of the communist regime adapted and reconfigured itself after 1989.

Chapter I – From Marginality to Power: The Trajectory of the Romanian Communist Party

The first chapter of the dissertation analyzes the evolution of the Romanian Communist Party from the status of a marginal political formation to the position of the core of absolute political power, emphasizing the mechanisms through which the RCP succeeded in institutionalizing itself as the principal actor of the political apparatus in communist Romania. The approach does not merely pursue a chronological reconstruction, but highlights the internal logic of the construction of political power and the manner in which the party transformed itself into a dominant structure capable of controlling the state and society. The chapter begins by contextualizing Romanian communism in the interwar and immediate postwar periods, emphasizing the marginal position of the RCP prior to 1945 and its dependence on the external geopolitical factor. The seizure of power was not the result of authentic internal legitimacy, but the direct consequence of the reconfiguration of power relations after the Second World War. Once installed in power, the RCP initiated an accelerated process of eliminating political opposition and subordinating state institutions, a process that led to the dissolution of political pluralism and the establishment of the party's monopoly. A central element of the analysis concerns the manner in which the RCP consolidated internal control through power struggles and successive purges, intended to ensure loyalty to the central leadership. The chapter follows the stages of this process, from the Stalinist period and the dominance of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej to the establishment of Nicolae Ceaușescu's personal regime. In this context, the party is presented not merely as an ideological structure, but as an adaptable political organism, capable of redefining its discourse and strategies according to the momentary interests of the leadership.

Special attention is paid to the period of national communism, when the RCP consolidated its autonomy from the Soviet Union while simultaneously intensifying its control over society. This apparent external independence did not lead to internal liberalization, but, on the contrary, to the strengthening of the political apparatus and the excessive personalization of power. The Ceaușist era is analyzed as the moment of maximum concentration of political power, in which the party became inseparable from the state, and official ideology was used as an instrument for legitimizing total domination.

The chapter highlights the fact that the RCP did not function exclusively through its formal structures, but through an extended network of institutions, mass organizations, and administrative mechanisms that enabled penetration of all levels of social life. Within this framework, the party appears as the central element of the political apparatus, coordinating and directing the activity of other institutions, including those with a repressive role.

The conclusion of the chapter emphasizes that the RCP cannot be understood solely as a political party, but as the principal vector of an integrated system of power, in which the distinctions between party, state, and society were deliberately blurred. This transformation explains both the regime's capacity to endure for more than four decades and the difficulty of the genuine dismantling of its structures after 1989. The analysis underscores the structural dependence on the repressive apparatus and the fact that, on the eve of 1989, the regime was internally delegitimized and externally isolated. During the Revolution, the role of the RCP appears paradoxical: the hard leadership ordered repression, while segments of the secondary echelons took advantage of the dictator's fall to seize power, fueling the hypothesis of personnel continuities in the new regime.

Chapter II – In the Service of the Party: The Secret Services and Their Relationship with the RCP

The second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the structure, functioning, and role of the secret services within the communist political apparatus, with an emphasis on the genesis and evolution of the Securitate and its direct relationship with the Romanian Communist Party. The chapter demonstrates that the Securitate was not an autonomous institution, but an essential instrument of political power, organically integrated into the party's mechanisms of control.

The analysis begins with a presentation of the institutional antecedents of the Securitate, emphasizing continuities and ruptures with previous intelligence structures. With the creation of the Department of State Security, the institution was explicitly configured as a political police force, having as its primary objective the protection of the regime and the neutralization of any real or potential opposition. The relationship between the RCP and the Securitate is defined from the outset as one of political subordination, in which strategic decisions were dictated by the party leadership. The chapter follows the process of institutional maturation of the Securitate, including stages of reorganization and modernization, as well as the gradual removal of direct Soviet influence. These transformations did not alter the essence of its political role, but contributed to the increased efficiency of the repressive apparatus and its adaptation to the party's new objectives. The organizational structure of the Securitate, both at the central and territorial levels, is analyzed as part of an extensive surveillance network capable of covering the entire territory and all social categories.

An essential aspect of the chapter is the examination of the modus operandi of the Securitate, with an emphasis on the use of the informant network, information control, and the preventive character of repression. The case studies presented in the dissertation, including

those concerning economic activities and the acquisition of foreign currency funds, illustrate the diversification of the institution's attributions and its direct involvement in supporting the regime's interests beyond the strictly repressive sphere. The relationship between the RCP and the Securitate is defined as a functional symbiosis, in which the party established ideological and political objectives, while the Securitate provided the concrete means of control and coercion. The membership of the overwhelming majority of Securitate officers in the party confirms this interdependence and highlights the deeply politicized character of the institution. The Securitate thus appears not merely as an executor of political orders, but as an integral part of the political apparatus, actively contributing to the reproduction of power.

The epilogue of the chapter emphasizes that the strength of the Securitate resided not only in its repressive capacity, but also in its institutional adaptability. This characteristic largely explains the survival of structures, personnel, and securitist mentalities after the collapse of the communist regime, constituting an essential premise for the analysis of the post-communist period addressed in the following chapter. The chapter concludes on the eve of the Revolution, when the party apparatus and the Securitate still appeared monolithic and loyal to the regime.

Chapter III – The Political Apparatus and the Legacy of the Securitate in Post-Communist Romania

The third chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the analysis of the post-communist period, taking as its starting point the events of December 1989 and continuing with an examination of the manner in which the intelligence structures and the legacy of the Securitate influenced Romania's political, institutional, and symbolic evolution during the 1990s.

The chapter addresses not only the formal transformations of institutions, but also the persistence of practices, mentalities, and networks specific to the former security apparatus. The chapter begins with an exploration of what the political apparatus and intelligence structures represented in the context of the events of December 1989. The dissertation highlights the ambiguous character of the role played by the Securitate during the Revolution, emphasizing the difficulty of formulating a univocal interpretation. On the one hand, the institution was publicly delegitimized and presented as a symbol of communist repression; on the other hand, the absence of a clear legal dissolution and the rapid transfer of structures and personnel to other state institutions created the premises for continuity. This situation facilitated institutional redeployment and the adaptation of former Securitate personnel to the new political context. The chapter examines in detail the debate regarding the nature of the 1989

Revolution, captured in the opposition between interpretations that support the spontaneous and popular character of the events and those that advance the hypothesis of a coup d'état. Within this framework, the role of the intelligence structures appears problematic and insufficiently clarified, while the theme of the “terrorists” is analyzed as a central element of confusion and manipulation during those days. The dissertation does not propose a definitive conclusion, but emphasizes the persistence of zones of uncertainty and their importance for understanding the Romanian transition.

A substantial section of the chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the post-communist discourse of former intelligence officers, through the study of the volumes and publications *Vitralii – Lights and Shadows* and *Periscop*, but not only these—other sources such as media and oral accounts are also taken into consideration. These sources are approached critically, as expressions of an effort to defend institutional memory and to reconfigure the image of the Securitate. The dissertation shows that, in these publications, former Securitate officers attempt to justify their activity, minimize the repressive dimension of the institution, and present themselves as information professionals loyal to the state rather than to a specific political regime. This discursive strategy reflects an attempt at symbolic recovery and reintegration into the post-communist public sphere.

In parallel, the chapter analyzes the manner in which the image of the Securitate was reflected in Romanian mass media during the 1990s. The written press, television, and the early forms of online media are presented as spaces of confrontation between antagonistic narratives: the total demonization of the former political police, on the one hand, and attempts at nuance or relativization, on the other. The dissertation highlights the fact that this polarization contributed to maintaining a fragmented and contradictory image of the Securitate in public consciousness. Another important aspect addressed is the contribution of oral history and documentary film to shaping the post-communist memory of the Securitate. Through the analysis of these sources, the dissertation brings to light the tension between official history and the counter-narratives promoted by former members of the repressive apparatus. This memorial competition is interpreted as part of a broader process of negotiating the past, in which responsibility, guilt, and legitimacy are constantly contested. The chapter shows that the disputes of the 1990s were not only institutional, but also symbolic and memorial: the legitimacy of the National Salvation Front, demands for lustration and declassification, and the conflict between the rhetoric of stability and the demands of civil society for reform.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the arduous process of establishing democratic control over the secret services after 1989. The dissertation shows that, in the absence of

profound structural reforms and a clear assumption of the past, the intelligence services continued to be perceived as opaque institutions vulnerable to political influence. This situation reflects the difficulties of the Romanian transition and explains the persistence of public suspicion toward the intelligence structures in the first years of the post-communist regime.

Final Conclusions

The analysis of the relationship between the political apparatus and the intelligence structures during the period December 1989 – the first post-communist decade highlights the deeply structural character of the link between party and security in communist Romania, as well as the persistence of this relationship in adapted forms after the fall of the regime. The dissertation demonstrates that the Securitate was not a marginal or auxiliary institution, but a constitutive element of the political apparatus, indispensable to the functioning and maintenance of the communist regime.

A first set of conclusions concerns the communist period, during which the Securitate acted simultaneously as a repressive instrument, a mechanism for producing political knowledge, and a guarantor of ideological order. This privileged position allowed the institution to develop its own organizational culture, but one that was profoundly dependent on the political directives of the RCP. The relationship between party and Securitate was one of symbiosis, in which the formal boundaries between party structures and state institutions were constantly blurred.

With regard to the events of December 1989, the research reveals the ambiguity and ambivalence of the behavior of the security structures. Far from being a unitary actor, the Securitate manifested both tendencies of loyalty toward the old regime and strategies of rapid adaptation to the new political reality. The absence of a clear legal dissolution and the rapid transfer of personnel and resources to the new force structures facilitated institutional continuity, despite the public rhetoric condemning the former political police.

During the first post-communist decade, the politicization of the intelligence services represented one of the main vulnerabilities of the democratization process. The dissertation shows that the new intelligence structures were integrated into a system of power dominated by political elites originating largely from the old apparatus, which significantly limited their capacity to function as neutral institutions subject to civilian control. Personnel continuities, informal networks, and the absence of genuine lustration contributed to the perpetuation of the influence of former securitist structures in Romania's post-communist political and economic life. An important contribution of the dissertation lies in the analysis of the manner in which

the Securitate was represented and reinterpreted in the public sphere after 1989. The study of *Vitralii* and *Periscop*, of the press, and of memorial discourses highlights the existence of a symbolic struggle to define the meaning of the past. This narrative competition reflects not only a historiographical dispute, but also a deeper conflict concerning legitimacy, responsibility, and institutional memory.

In conclusion, the dissertation argues that the Romanian transition cannot be understood without analyzing the role played by the political apparatus and the intelligence structures, both at the moment of the collapse of the communist regime and during the post-communist institutional reconstruction. The original contribution of the research consists in an integrated approach to the relationship between party, security, and public memory, offering a critical perspective on the structural continuities that shaped the evolution of Romanian democracy during the 1990s.

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