

Research report

Project

Disturbing the peace of Communist regimes. Unwritten histories of dissenters in the Romanian communist regime in the 1970s and 1980s

Ana Maria Catanus, Visegrad fellow, 8 May – 5 June 2023

The grant beneficiary, PhD Ana Maria Catanus, senior researcher at the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, Romanian Academy, was granted a Visegrad Fellowship for a month at the Open Society Archives in Budapest.

The project titled *Disturbing the peace of Communist regimes. Unwritten histories of dissenters in the Romanian communist regime in the 1970s and 1980s* intended a reverse approach to Romanian dissent. Considering the already published research on Romanian dissent that focused on the most active and visible top dissidents, the current project proposed a sort of "archaeological excavation" into OSA archives to dig out what we have identified as *low-profile dissidents*.

The approach to such a complex topic developed along methodological guidelines that included defining key concepts (dissent-dissident), identifying the persons that matched the dissident's set of features, and biographical analysis of the targeted persons.

In strict relation to how dissent and dissidents were coined in East-Central Europe and the Soviet Union starting with the mid-1960s, we can assess that dissidents were those persons who publicly manifested disapproval, opposition to the Communist leadership as a whole or in specific sectors (economy, social policies, education)¹ while living within the origin Communist country. The last feature is sometimes challenged by academics that see dissent as a general form of opposition within the origin countries and beyond them, in exile.

¹ See Nicolas Werth, G ael Moullec, *Rapports secrets sovi tiques. La societ  russe dans les documents confidentiels, 1921-1991*,  ditions Gallimard, 1994; Chantal Delsol, Michel Maslowski, Joanna Nowicki (coord.), *Dissidences*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2005.

In our view, dissent during Communism encompassed a range of actions/conducts developed in a transparent public way within the communist countries by individuals or groups. By taking public action within the origin country, these individuals were aware of the inevitable political pressures, harassment, arrests and even imprisonment. Despite the well-known consequences, some of these individuals opted for this type of conduct for a specific period (until choosing exile or until the fall of Communism). The choice for exile, or "exit"², according to Albert O. Hirschman classification inevitably changed their status. Even if they joined the militant exile and acted against the Communist regime, their personal status changed, being sheltered in a free democratic country, away from arbitrary political decisions.

To sum up, the current project targeted individuals, regardless of their social, economic, or professional background, that raised their voices against the Romanian communist regime while in the country.

More, it targeted individuals whose actions against the regime have not been yet analyzed or even mentioned in published works regarding Romanian dissent in Romania³, or abroad⁴.

During the stage documentation at OSA, we have identified, with the help of archivists, several funds with documents regarding the Romanian opposition in the 1970s and 1980s.

The research strategy at OSA was organized such as to identify and study the main funds related to Romanian opposition, such as HU OSA 300-60 – 3 Romanian Unit. That was the starting point for us to open towards new funds, such as HU OSA 300-5-190 Records of Vlad Socor.

The fellow identified important information for the topic in HU OSA 300-60 – 3 Romanian Unit boxes 1-18 and HU OSA 300-5-190 Records of Vlad Socor boxes 1-13, 22-29. However, it must be mentioned that general funds such as HU OSA 205-4-70 and 71 Romanian Subject Card Files or HU OSA 300-120-13 Subject Files Relating to Eastern Europe also provided helpful

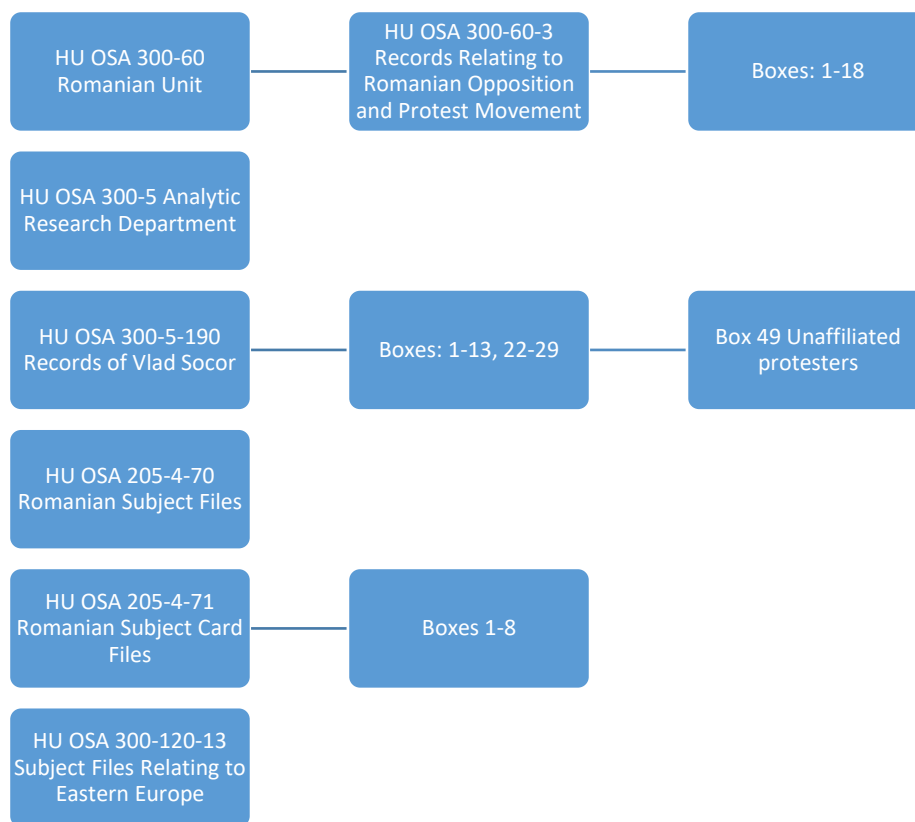
² Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970.

³ See Cristina Petrescu, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote: Resistance and Dissent in Communist Romania* (Editura Enciclopedică, 2013) and Ana-Maria Cătănuș, *Vocația libertății. Forme de disidență în România anilor 1970-1980/ The Call to Freedom. Forms of Dissent in Romania during the 1970s and the 1980's* (Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 2014).

⁴ See Barbara J Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe, CEU, 2003*; Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgoch (eds.), *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005; *Entangled Protest Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, edited by Robert Brier, 2013. Barbara J. Falk, *Resistance and Dissent in Central and Eastern Europe An Emerging Historiography*, `East European Politics and Societies` Volume 25, Number 2, May 2011.

information for identifying dissidents. For example, at HU OSA 205-4-70 Romanian Subject Files in boxes 67-77 the researcher could access essential biographical details of dissidents and sometimes additional materials to document their actions.

The following chart provides a clear view of the OSA files the researcher consulted during the fellowship.



Valorification of the research

Following the work at OSA, the grant beneficiary delivered, on June 13th 2023, an initial presentation at the Visegrad seminars. The public presentation titled *Disturbing the peace. Low profile dissidents in Communist Romania in the 1980s* discussed the archive findings and types of identified information.

Moreover, the research at OSA offered an impressive amount of documents and information that will be used in future work. We intend to embark on a revised analysis of Romania's dissent in the 1970s and 1980s to provide a more comprehensive, even if not complete,

view. The study intertwines the action of dissidents – the reaction of the Romanian Communist regime – and the different reactions of the Free World.

We intend to attain this objective by triangulating documents identified at OSA with other primary sources from the former Romanian Political Police (Securitate) and foreign archives (La Contemporaine – Funds related to human rights in Romania, French Diplomatic Archives).

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