

## A CASE OF ROMANIAN ESPIONAGE IN ITALY DURING THE 1950S: THE INQUIRY AGAINST DUMITRU DOBRE

**Abstract:** This study addresses a new subject related to the Romanian foreign espionage in Italy during the first years of the communist regime. Under discussion is the case of Dumitru Dobre, a chauffeur with the Romanian Legation in Rome, who was charged with espionage by the Italian authorities in 1951. The affair described in the study cannot be understood outside reference to the suit filed on charges of espionage in Romania “against the Vatican’s plotters,” which unjustly indicted Eraldo Pintori, the administrator of the Italian Cultural Institute in Romania, as a “spy” of the Italian State in Romania. All these accusations of Romanian or Italian espionage targeted the building of the Accademia di Romania in Rome, which the Italians wanted to confiscate, while the Romanians had turned it into the premises of the legation. The study presents the entire documentation preserved in the diplomatic Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from Dobre’s arrest until his expulsion from Italy.

**Keywords:** espionage, Romania, Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, legation

One of the pages of contemporary history that are still left in obscurity due to the limited accessibility of the sources concerns the affairs of Romanian espionage abroad immediately after the establishment of the communist regime in Romania. One of the illustrative cases for the first espionage affairs outside Romania is that of Dumitru Dobre, a chauffeur with the Romanian Legation in Italy, a case that was correlated with the developments surrounding the building of the Accademia di Romania in Rome and of the litigation masquerade referred to as the “lawsuit against the Vatican’s spies,” which took place in Bucharest in 1951. The case of the Accademia di Romania, which has been recently retrieved historiographically through the efforts of Mrs. Veronica Turcuș,<sup>2</sup> was an object of contention in the Romanian-Italian diplomatic relations, as the Italian authorities wanted to confiscate it, while the Romanian diplomacy had turned it into the premises of its legation.

The Dumitru Dobre case features as the first episode of espionage inserted among the pages of the diplomatic correspondence<sup>3</sup> housed by the Archivio Storico-

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<sup>2</sup> Veronica Turcuș, Mihai Bărbulescu, Iulian Damian, *Accademia di Romania in Roma 1922-2012*, Accademia di Romania, Roma, 2013, pp. 116-123.

<sup>3</sup> As regards the diplomatic correspondence on Dumitru Dobre’s case, we should note that according to the inventory rules of the Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the names of *pacco* or *busta* represent the entire set of correspondence for that year/those years, without there being an inventory based on *regeste* and without the pages being numbered *recto/verso*. Thus, the only reference points for an inventory call number are the document’s issuance date, or its registration date (if it came from the legations or the embassies to the central archive), and the package (*pacco*) or the envelope (*busta*), corresponding to the year in which the document was issued-received. For reasons that pertain to the archiving of Dumitru Dobre’s case under the Eraldo Pintori entry, the documents concerning the progress of the inquiry against Dobre are not kept under the year 1951 but under 1954, with the generic call number Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero Italiano degli Affari Esteri, Affari Politici 1950-

Diplomatico from Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it is blatantly connected to the case of Eraldo Pintori, an official of the Italian Cultural Institute in Bucharest, arrested in the Vatican's lot.<sup>4</sup>

In line with the Old Testament principle of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," the Italian authorities arrested Dumitru Dobre probably and primarily as a measure of retaliation for the arrest of Eraldo Pintori. However, in Pintori's case, things were somehow more complicated also for the simple reason that the Italian was the administrator of a building that did not function as an embassy, but as a cultural institute and was married to an Italian naturalised in Romania. This was at the antipode of Dobre's situation, as he lived in the building of the Accademia di Romania, under a regime of permanent surveillance and his conscience was besieged by the tense climate in which he activated. Pintori also had a history of a fairly long mission to Romania - true, prior to the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic on 30 December 1947 - and this transformed him, unawares, into a moving target for the repressive organs of the new Bolshevik-type public power. The level of current documentation on the case of Eraldo Pintori is included only in the recent book about the Accademia di Romania (the Italian diplomatic documents) and in several articles by Mihai Pelin (based on excerpts from the archives of the Securitate, those to which access was permitted before they were screened and handed over to the CNSAS). Although the suspect institutional trajectory of the chauffeur Dobre had perhaps been sensed or even ascertained, what is certain, according to the documents annexed herewith, is that the measure of arresting him on charges of espionage was applied only when the Romanian authorities had made it clear that releasing Eraldo Pintori was not on their immediate agenda. We should point out that Pintori's arrest was not singular, as the entire Western diplomatic world had been vexed by various arrests (we know that a low-ranking French diplomat had also been arrested), by violent acts of aggression (the premises of certain diplomatic residences had been trespassed through an infringement of code of inviolability that diplomatic residences fell under) or by the installation of tracking and interception devices.

The reaction of the Italian diplomacy to one of its officials being arrested abroad - who was on the point of leaving anyway, since the Italian Cultural Institute had closed down, on account of the Romanian party's denunciation of the 1943 Cultural Agreement - was rapid and urgent, of course, under the reasonable terms required by an action of this kind. This entailed informing the decision makers and reaching a mature conclusion in this regard. The decision, which we cannot visualise in its genuineness based solely on the documents available to us, looks more like a retorsion measure than an arrest *in flagrante* on charges of espionage. The order for the arrest of Dumitru Dobre was issued on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1951, more precisely on the morning, thereof as shown in the following secret communiqué issued by Zoppi,<sup>5</sup> the Secretary General of the Italian

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1957, Romania 1954, Pacco 1247, Pacco 1248. Since the documents in question are rather negligently disseminated in the two "packages," I decided to avoid overloading the critical apparatus by processing the Dobre case chronologically and accompanying the documents with the dates when they were issued.

<sup>4</sup> Veronica Turcuș et alii, *op.cit.* pp. 121-122.

<sup>5</sup> Vittorio Zoppi (1898-1967) was the Secretary General of Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs between the years 1948 and 1954.

Foreign Affairs Ministry: “*It is hereby communicated, as verified by the speaker and in keeping with your language and information norms, that on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, the authorities in charge detained, for actions against the political order, the chauffeur of this Embassy of Romania, DOBRE DIMITRI, the inquiry into his activity being still pending.*

*Romania’s charge d’affaires will be informed tomorrow morning, 23 May, but the reasons for the detention will not be revealed to him.”*

The despatch, made at the highest executive level in the ministry, informed the Italian mission in Bucharest about the fact that the Romanian authorities could at most have surmised, but were unaware of. The motivation for the arrest belonged to that category of interests that Soviet and pro-Soviet spies pursued in Italy: the overthrow of the political order. The Romanian authorities were answered thus in kind, as the reason of Dobre’s apprehension would not be communicated to them, just like Bucharest had not seen fit to motivate Pintori’s arrest in any way. This was also part of the psychological game stimulated by the intelligence services and played by the diplomatic powers in the hope to acquire information and obtain agreements to cease the arrest measure. This was a mere illusion, however, that the Italians had built, hoping that the Romanian authorities would react honourably.

The Romanian authorities responded immediately after being informed, and requested an emergency audience with the Protocol Department of the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry. Here they came across a character that was well aware of the Romanian case, in particular Baron Michele Scammacca, who had until recently been the Minister of Italy in Bucharest. In a confidential briefing from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May the same year, addressed to the minister, he recounted the discussions that had taken place between him and Romania’s *ad interim* charge d’affaires. The latter had taken note of Dumitru Dobre’s arrest and requested details. Proceeding with diplomatic rigor and full respect for the autonomy of the institutions in a liberal democracy, undoubtedly in a rather uptight manner, Scammacca informed the Romanian diplomat that his duty was to notify him only that the incarceration procedure had been applied to the embassy’s chauffeur, not knowing what had actually happened because the power to arrest and detain Dobre belonged to the specialised bodies dealing with matters of the Italian state’s security and not to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The head of the Romanian mission attempted to invoke the pseudo-diplomatic position of Dobre, claiming that the latter had been on a mission and that his arrest had been an abuse. The reply of the Italian director was that under no circumstances was such a standpoint acceptable, as Dobre had absolutely no diplomatic qualifications and that he was under no protection from the vantage point of international practices, the Italian authorities being fully entitled to detain him if they had evidence against him.

The Romanian party raised the issue of Dobre’s detention and claimed to have doubts about the quality of the services provided to him in custody, insisting that they would like to intervene and alleviate the conditions of the chauffeur’s detention through packages sent to him by the embassy. Scammacca hinted that those incarcerated would have access to packages only when the authorities agreed to this. On hearing the Romanian diplomat’s tirade that the assurances regarding the arrest conditions could not be trusted and that the Romanian party granted a very humane treatment to its Italian

prisoners, Scammacca, who was aware of the situation *in situ*, cut him short, indicating that the subject was not part of this specific conversation.

The insistence of the Romanian side on seeing and counselling Dobre as quickly as possible had a precise purpose: beyond the typical consolation naturally granted in such a moment, they had to find out, from the source, the circumstances of his arrest, whether there was any chance that the “mission” might have been saved or compromised and, of course, to give him instructions as to the tactics he was to adopt during interrogations and the pitfalls to be avoided. One matter that is not clear in the documentation is how the interrogations were made. It is certain that Dobre did not speak Italian. In fact, Scammacca and his Romanian interlocutor used French in their discussions.

We do not have access to all the documentation of the case in order to follow the police and intelligence procedures activated for Dobre. Perhaps the archives of the Italian secret services decided to submit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only the information that could be used to inform the Romanian side. That was the case only at the level of ministerial bureaucracy, because things were very clear at the top levels of the ministry and the Italian Cabinet, which aimed to have Pintori released at any price. Alcide de Gasperi, the Italian Prime Minister, must also have formally consented to this procedure. And yet, respecting the legal formalities, as the documentation suggests, a standard procedure was launched; its envisaged first immediate effect was the expulsion of Dobre Dumitru and, possibly thereafter, his incrimination before an Italian court. That would have been the case had the relationships been normal, but this is more than we can ascertain about the Romanian-Italian relations. Once the mechanism of Dobre’s expulsion had been activated, the necessary measures had to be taken to inform the Romanian embassy and transport the defendant to the border. The entire situation surely bears a resemblance to the expulsion of a *persona non grata*, but in this case, this was to occur immediately after arrest.

As mentioned above, some of the highest ranking Italian officials oversaw the Dobre case, in relation to the Pintori case, probably at the heeding of one of the founding fathers of Europe, the Prime Minister of Italy. More specifically, these were the Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlo Sforza<sup>6</sup> and the Minister of the Interior Mario Scelba.<sup>7</sup> They had a semi-official, secret correspondence occasioned by the arrest of Dumitru Dobre. We do not have access to the entire circumscribed correspondence, but only to a few copies, the most significant piece of which we shall present below:

Rome 9<sup>th</sup> of July 1951  
Secret no. 4/5339/68

*Dear Scelba,*

*I must return to the issue of the Romanian citizen Dobre Dimitri, the object of a previous correspondence, the last item of which is my letter no. 4/4942/65 of 23 June, whereby I informed you that our action had begun to yield the desired results.*

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<sup>6</sup> Carlo Sforza (1872-1952) was Italy’s Minister of Foreign Affairs between the years 1920-1921 and 1947-1951.

<sup>7</sup> Mario Scelba (1901-1991) was the Italian Minister of the Interior in the period 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1947 – 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1953 and Prime Minister of Italy between 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1954 and 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1955.

*Meanwhile, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June I received a notification from Bucharest that has strengthened our hopes: Mrs. Toma, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs has let the Italian Minister in Bucharest know that she expects to be able to issue “a definitive standpoint on the matter in about a week’s time” with reference to the case of Pintori.*

*I wanted to bring this fact to your attention because this leads me to believe, now more than ever before, that we should not “let go of” Dobre Dimitri, whose detention should be maintained for several more days. That is, until the promise contained in Mrs. Toma’s reply is carried out.*

*Reminding you of the considerations presented in the letter referred to above, I must express my confidence, in this letter too, that you will agree with my point of view; I do thank you in advance, however, should you wish to give me a reassuring answer on this matter.*

*Please accept, dear Scelba, the expression of my full consideration.*

*Carlo Sforza*

*To His Excellency the Honourable Mario Scelba, Minister of the Interior, Rome*

Basically, as witnessed in this letter, there was a concerted activity undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior in Italy for the release of Eraldo Pintori. This makes it quite difficult to determine the guilt or the non-guilt of the chauffeur Dumitru Dobre, but either way, it is clear that the arrest of the Romanian also served as a means of retorsion for the imprisonment of the Italian Legation official in Bucharest. The letter above, which mirrors the relationship between two ministers, enables us to see that there was a tacit agreement on the transgression of the rules about holding a person in custody without any charges being brought against him. The documentation does not reveal whether Dobre was assigned a public defender, whether he refused him or not, but there is a possibility that there was an infringement of the *habeas corpus*, of course, solely as a means of retorsion and only for a while. In any case, this document suggests a situation straddling the extremely volatile divide between what is just on a personal level and what is just for reasons of state: a complicated and negative situation for a Western democracy, which had nonetheless been triggered by the Romanian measures. Sforza had requested Scelba to extend Dobre’s detention by any means, in the hope that the Romanian authorities would unblock the Pintori case, as promised by Ana Toma,<sup>8</sup> Ana Pauker’s right hand and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Romania. The paradox was that Anna Toma’s husband, the famous Securitate General

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<sup>8</sup> Ana Toma (*née* Grossman or Grossmann, 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1912 - January 1991) was a Communist Party activist in Romania. In 1932 she became a member of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR). In May 1961, she was awarded the medal for the “40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Romanian Communist Party.” She was a teacher, a member of the underground PCR, and she served as secretary of the Central Committee for “Patriotic Defence,” which dealt with the defence and assistance of the communist political prisoners. She was married to Sorin Toma and after her divorce, she became the wife of Gheorghe Pintilie-Pantiuşa. For a while, she was deputy to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ana Pauker and, then, to the Minister of Trade. In his book *Will to Freedom: a Perilous Journey Through Fascism and Communism*, Syracuse University Press, 2000, p. 187, Egon Balas describes Ana Toma thus: “Anuța was a bright, extremely shrewd, energetic woman, hungry for power, whimsical, vindictive - a real bitch, and powerful.”

Gheorghe Pintilie, nicknamed Pantiuşa, was one of the people entrusted by the Security with the incarceration of the “enemies of the people,” a category into which Eraldo Pintori had been included.

The thing is that Dobre’s detention period was extended and the Italian authorities began to comply with the liberal constitutional regime at a snail’s pace. Since the legislation in force provided that for a foreign national who was a member, albeit not a diplomatic one, of an accredited mission in Italy, expulsion was the measure that had to be adopted immediately, followed only thereafter by indictment for the offence committed (and the documents do not make any reference to this, except for matters of a general or circumstantial nature). The Italian authorities drafted the decree for Dobre’s expulsion. Of course, it was hoped, with anxiety even, that the procedure undertaken by the Romanian side would be similar and that Eraldo Pintori would be granted the same treatment. An expulsion and, later on, a trial in which he could be defended by the legal representative of the Italian mission in Bucharest was the most that the authorities in Rome could hope for.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1951, the General Directorate for Public Security of the Italian Ministry of the Interior informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the procedure for the expulsion of Dumitru Dobre, who was in prison, had been started, but this was only the beginning of a process that the government in Rome intended to defer until they received some tangible proof of Romania’s goodwill.

The Romanian mission in Rome did not lag behind and, probably already being aware that the Italians’ hopes were futile, raised the diplomatic stakes. Thus, in a *note verbale* dated on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1951, the Embassy of Romania to the Quirinale argued that “as regards the case of Mr. Dobre Dumitru, chauffeur of the Embassy, who has been in custody for over six weeks, having been detained without any cause by the *Questura* in Rome, vehemently protests against the shameful instigation whereby it is attempted to prosecute him for facts to which he is completely foreign. The Embassy is well aware that Mr. Dobre’s behaviour is completely worthy of the position he held and that his conduct was irreproachable throughout his stay in the Italian Republic.” No reference made by the Romanian diplomats accredited in Italy was affected by the Pintori case. They had probably been instructed to consider strictly the aspects pertaining to the mission and by no means to address any related issues, which were to be settled at the highest level or through much more specialised intelligence structures. What was ridiculous in the utmost degree, but was diplomatically explicable and acceptable was the self-referentiality of the Romanian embassy, which was “well aware that Mr. Dobre’s behaviour is completely worthy,” as if it did not take into account the fact that the Italians, probably benefitting from the American ‘know-how’, knew the legal and professional situation of the diplomats and the persons with professional occupations harboured by the embassies and were informed about their relationship with the national intelligence services, as well as with the KGB. Of course, the textual hermeneutics of the *note verbale* reveals the entire linguistic artistry deployed here, which operated especially by making reference to the “shameful instigation” made against Romania, obliterating the fact that the instigation had started in Bucharest and that Dobre’s arrest

was just the symmetrical reaction often adopted in international relations, as an effect of habits entrenched back in history.

However, since Italy - which had recently regained its democracy after two decades of fascism - knew and saw fit to comply with the requirements of the constitutional regime, it accelerated the expulsion procedure of the chauffeur Dumitru Dobre after receiving this *note verbale*, despite the fact that the promises made by the communist authorities were not followed through in Bucharest. Thus, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1951, the Minister of the Interior Scelba published a decree which contained the expulsion decision “*Considering the fact that the named Romanian citizen, DOBRE Dumitru, son of Ioan and Elisabeta Store, born in Bucharest on 14 January 1903, has committed acts against the public order; Under Article 150, Sections 2 and 5 of ST (sole text) of the PS (public safety) Law, approved by the RD (royal decree) of 18 January 1931, No. 773<sup>9</sup>: in agreement with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the consent of the Chairman of the Council: DECREES that the above-named Romanian citizen DOBRE DUMITRU shall be expelled from the state’s territory. The Quaestor of Rome shall be responsible for the enforcement of this decree.*” Of course, the language is cryptic and standardised. To understand the grounds that cannot be inferred from this institutional communication, we need to resort to the aforementioned royal decree: Article 148 therein reads as follows: “*Salvo quanto è stabilito nelle leggi militari, il Prefetto può vietare agli stranieri il soggiorno in comuni o in località che comunque interessano la difesa militare dello Stato. Tale divieto è comunicato agli stranieri per mezzo della autorità locale di pubblica sicurezza o col mezzo di pubblici avvisi. Gli stranieri, che trasgrediscono al divieto, possono essere allontanati per mezzo della forza pubblica.*” The following article provides the exceptions, but Dobre could not benefit from them because he did not belong to the categories listed here: “*149. Le disposizioni di questo capo non si applicano ai componenti del sacro collegio e del corpo diplomatico e consolare.*” The article referred to in the decree is number 150. This, however, cannot be interpreted without the previous articles, as its text suggests. Actually, what does the article say? It stipulates that: “*Salvo quanto è stabilito dal codice penale, gli stranieri condannati per delitto possono essere espulsi dal regno e accompagnati alla frontiera. Il Ministro dell’interno, per motivi di ordine pubblico, può disporre la espulsione e l’accompagnamento alla frontiera dello straniero di passaggio o residente nel territorio dello Stato. Le predette disposizioni non si applicano agli italiani non regnicoli. Possono altresì essere espulsi gli stranieri denunciati per contravvenzione alle disposizioni del capo precedente. L’espulsione per motivo di ordine pubblico, prevista dal primo capoverso di questo articolo, è pronunciata con decreto del Ministro dell’interno, di concerto con il Ministro degli affari esteri e con l’assenso del Capo del Governo.*” Let us also add Article 151, as it will be the ground on which the litigation intention will be activated subsequent to Dobre’s expulsion. That article establishes that: “*Lo straniero espulso a norma dell’articolo precedente non può rientrare nel territorio dello Stato, senza una speciale autorizzazione del Ministro dell’interno. Nel caso di trasgressione è punito con l’arresto da due mesi a sei. Scontata la pena, lo straniero è nuovamente espulso.*”

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<sup>9</sup> The royal decree is still valid, but the article Scelba used was repealed on 28 February 1990.

Thus, as shown by the contents of the royal decree, the motivation behind the procedures of expelling Dumitru Dobre was of a military nature. Of course, since the charge pending for Dobre, a foreign citizen, was that of military espionage - the execution of his preventive arrest was within the competence of the Italian Interior Ministry - the reasons for his apprehension and imprisonment must be kept in the archives of the Italian military secret service, which are and may always remain inaccessible to us. In fact, the Italian authors on espionage matters claim that at that time the two services that were in conflict were the GRU -the Military Intelligence Service of the USSR - and Servizio Informazioni Difesa italiano of Italian military espionage. We can, however, ascertain that the accusation brought against the Romanian chauffeur was plausible but, at the same time, it could easily have been contrived. It was plausible because in the immediate vicinity of the embassy (which was located in the headquarters of the Accademia di Romania), there were and still are two well-fenced military objectives, hidden away from the public eye, one being located 750 meters east of the Accademia di Romania, incorporating a part of the Villa Borghese, while the other is on the banks of the Tiber, in the Flaminio district, about 1 km northwest of the Accademia di Romania. If we add to this that from of all the Soviet satellite embassies, Romania had, logistically, a privileged topographical position at the heart of the Parioli residential area, the posh embassy district, just 1 km away from the private residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Italy - Villa Taverna, we can get a picture as to how plausible, as well as how easily a dependent of an embassy from the socialist bloc could be incriminated as a spy. In any case, the charge based on the royal decree invoked above would have been that of military espionage and by no means of political espionage or the overthrow of the democratic state order. As obvious from the text of the decree and the appropriate legislation, the affair necessarily had to be brought to the awareness of the Italian Prime Minister, as mentioned before, so Alcide de Gasperi was informed in detail on the Romanian-Italian dispute.

The decree of expulsion having been issued and published, on plausible grounds of military espionage, the next natural step was to inform the Romanian party of the Italian authorities' intention, which was not immediate but deferred, in expectation of a possibly similar response from Bucharest. Accordingly, on July 19<sup>th</sup> 1951, the first secretary of the embassy, Anca Magheru was officially informed of the decree of expulsion, but even though this does not transpire from the minutes of the audience granted to Minister Scammacca, it was probably suggested to her that the time necessary to implement the decree would be slightly dilated. It was a very interesting audience, as Italian was used in conversation while issues beyond the strictly diplomatic sphere were discussed in French. Anca Magheru was the only person in the embassy who spoke fluent Italian. The details of the conversation marked the first successful attempt of the Romanian authorities to get in touch with Dobre after more than two months of detention. This moment had probably been awaited to assess how much of the information known to the Romanian chauffeur were in the possession of the Italian authorities, how to estimate what could be saved of the secrets or confidential matters Dobre knew about and, possibly, how to reorganise the diplomatic and administrative network in the event that the chauffeur had disclosed any information.



Things dragged on and only three weeks later did a new communiqué issued by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggest that on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August or shortly before, there had been a meeting with the head of Romanian mission, Comnacu at the ministry, and that the latter had been made aware of Dobre's situation over the past weeks of his detention. We have for the first time, however, documented evidence that Dobre was not held in Rome, but in another location, outside Rome, secret or not, we do not know. The agreement established with Comnacu provided, in the aftermath of the expulsion decree, that: *"the Romanian chauffeur, Dobre Dumitru, shall be brought back to Rome under escort in the shortest time possible, in civilian clothes and without handcuffs, and shall be dropped by the entrance to the Romanian Embassy in Rome; simple, cautionary measures of surveillance shall be adopted in his respect; once it receives from the government in Bucharest the necessary assurance concerning its employee Eraldo Pintori, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has decided to let Dobre Dumitru leave, within a reasonable period, as persona non grata, by way of execution of the expulsion decree. The Romanian Embassy shall be informed about this in writing."*

Elegant attempts were made to save the appearances. In order to avoid setting a negative example and to remain within an area of formal hostility, reaffirming thus the secrecy of Dobre's case, he was brought and left at the entrance of the Accademia di Romania (an area that is visually exposed to the cultural missions around, such as Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, etc.). Of course, after having been placed in the custody of the Romanian Embassy in Rome, Dobre continued to be surveyed from outside the objective, lest he should leave the premises and engage in practices that would not comply with his status as a person undergoing expulsion. Again, this internal memorandum reveals the binomial that was activated at the onset of the espionage affair: Pintori-Dobre. The Italians continued to patiently await some information or an action from Bucharest, which kept being deferred.

The Romanian Embassy urgently responded and requested exit visas for the couple Maria and Dumitru Dobre, after announcing that it acknowledged Dobre's being remanded into its custody.

At the level of the Italian legal system, however, things followed their natural course and there is a very interesting document preserved in the MFA archives in Rome. Issued by the General Directorate of Political Affairs and dated Rome, 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1951, it is addressed to Luigi Bianchi d'Espinosa, Councillor of the Court of Cassation and of the Minister of Justice. This note kindly requested the Minister of Justice in Rome *"to present to the presidents of the competent courts the possibility that the lawsuits that are to be held in Milan and Rome against the Romanian citizens Iacob Măgura, a former Commercial Attaché of the Romanian Embassy in Bern, and Dumitri Dobre, a former chauffeur of the Romanian Embassy, will take place behind closed doors."* We find now indirectly that in the Italian justice system, there was not just one pending case of (military) espionage, against Dumitru Dobre (tried in a civilian court because he was the citizen of another state), but another case, involving a member of the Romanian diplomatic apparatus accredited in Bern, Iacob Măgura (Leibovici, probably,

about whom there is an investigation report in the CC of the RCP archives).<sup>10</sup> We have no information about this case except for a few references in the archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, always in connection with the Dobre case. It must have been a case of economic espionage. Măgura took advantage of his status as a commercial attaché in Bern, and targeting the Italian canton in Switzerland and its connections with Lombardy, he attempted to gather sensitive information of an economic nature from Northern Italy. The request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a trial behind closed doors is interesting. The memorandum also provides the reason behind this request, otherwise easy to infer: “*This Ministry has recently contacted the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a view to releasing three Italian prisoners detained in Romania on political grounds and has obtained assurances that its request would be examined from a positive perspective. For its part, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while not intending to establish a connection with the issue of the release of our co-nationals, has manifested its desire to avoid any form of publicity on the trials mentioned above. And it is on this very matter concerning the release of our co-nationals in Romania that this Minister has confidence in the support of His Excellency, the Minister of Justice, so as to make sure that the trials we have referred to will be as discreet as possible, behind closed doors.*”

This document shows in detail the situation of the tense Romanian-Italian diplomatic rapport. The Italian party extensively and effectively endeavoured to establish the connection between the Dobre (possibly also Măgura) case and the case of Pintori (and other Italians) so as to reach a parity agreement, refusing to recognise the charges brought against Pintori (actually, the explanations of the Romanian side were often cryptic or partial, impossible to refute with the specific arguments of international law and by reference to the situation of incarcerated nationals). But it was obvious, as shown by the document, that the imprisonment of the Italians in Romania was political and was not a matter of criminal law. On the other hand, Italian diplomacy, of course, with the consent of the chief of cabinet, was willing to respond to the requests addressed by the Romanian side. The latter wanted to avoid, at any cost, any negative publicity against Romania and the Soviet camp that might have naturally been created around an ordinary trial. While Romania organised, after the model of the Stalinist trials, courts about which the entire nation was informed, with public prosecutors turned into genuine inquisitors of popular justice, Italy attempted to save whatever could be saved and play the card of Romanian political Pharisaism in order to appease the Romanian side. Of course, with hindsight, this situation was on the threshold between democracy and the limits of democracy, but we should see it in the much wider context of the reasons of state that led the authorities in the peninsular “boot” to do their utmost to bring Pintori home.

The Italian diplomacy did not yield so easily, and in a *note verbale* dated in August 1951, it reiterated to the Romanian party what the stage of negotiations was as regards the Dobre-Pintori binomial: “*During the recent negotiations held in the same time with the arrest in Bucharest of the Italian Embassy employee, Mr. Eraldo Pintori,*

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<sup>10</sup> Abbreviation for the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. <http://www.arhivelenationale.ro/images/custom/image/Radu/inventare%20grigo/unite%20cancelarie%20a nex e.pdf>

*and with the arrest in Rome of the chauffeur of the Romanian Embassy, Mr. Dobre Dimitri, it was agreed that the Italian authorities would not undertake legal proceedings against the named Dobre Dimitri, but limit themselves to ordering his expulsion, and, as regards the Romanian authorities, they would use a similar treatment in relation to Mr Pintori. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered assurances in this regard to the Italian Embassy in Bucharest, and the charge d'affaires of the People's Republic of Romania in Rome confirmed this commitment in a meeting he had with the General Director of Political Affairs, on the date of 22 August this year. Under these arrangements, on August 10<sup>th</sup> this year, the chauffeur Dobre Dimitri was released and was given a convenient deadline for leaving the Italian territory."*

As is apparent from the Italian *note verbale*, there were two plans on which the action unfolded. On the one hand, the Romanian authorities publicly and institutionally denied that there could be a coherent, logical connection of inter-dependence between the Dobre and Pintori cases. All these diplomatic communications issued by Bucharest vs. Rome denied any relationship in this binomial. On the other hand, the secret or confidential Italian communications suggest that the higher authorities in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted the interdependence of the two cases, with the observation that nothing of the kind transpired from documents subsequent to these discussions. Now the question is: was this a diplomatic game of *sine die* postponement the Romanians played, counting on the fact that Western democracy would not risk singing its reputation and would release Dobre, or was it a matter of positive intentions harboured by the second echelon, which were not approved by Ana Pauker and the repressive apparatus? We inclined to believe that the first version is the authentic one, since the second one it is not supported by evidence. However, it appears that the Italian authorities were willing to resort to the extreme measure of dropping charges against Dobre if the Romanian party ordered Pintori's release. It was an important action, of course, but one that failed to flatter Bucharest.

The expected progress did not occur, as might have been expected, so the Italian diplomacy, in agreement with the Ministry of the Interior in Rome, proceeded to enforce the decree of expulsion. This is suggested by an inter-ministerial communication issued by the General Directorate of Political Affairs in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and addressed to the General Directorate of Public Security in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Rome. The communication specifies the following: "*As regards the previous correspondence and the last Note no. 443/69014 of August 30<sup>th</sup> last year, the General Directorate is informed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs notified in writing, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August last year, the Romanian Embassy that the Italian authorities, without wishing the chauffeur DOBRE Dimitri to remain in Italy, issued a decree of expulsion against him; that, consequently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requests that the Romanian Embassy should order the departure of DOBRE Dimitri and his family as soon as possible and no later than the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1951, and has asked for guarantees (in this respect). As a result of this communication, the Embassy of Romania, by the note verbale dated 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1951, requested an exit visa for passport service no. 719 of the above-named Dobre Dimitri, for that of his wife and their daughter Maria. In another note, of the same date, 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1951, the*

*Embassy of Romania confirmed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Dobre Dimitri and his family had left Italy, as requested, by 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1951. The ministry is interested in knowing whether the departure of Dobre Dimitri and his family actually took place and request the Directorate to undertake the necessary investigations with the Border Authorities. It is assumed that Dobre Dimitri and his family passed through Brennero or through Tarvisio on their way back to Romania.”*

The Italian foreign affairs authorities practically realised that the connection between the Pintori and the Dobre cases, amid the complications registered by the entire Romanian-Italian situation, much as it was desired by the authorities in Rome, was only part of a complex set of problematic cases concerning Romania's relations with the Western countries, with the Holy See, with the Catholic properties in Romania, Romania's economic bonds in Italy, etc.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in order to adjust its policy of negotiation with the Romanian party in line with the new realities, they had to release Dobre's situation from that deadlock and deliver him to Romania. Obviously, being aware of the situation of confusion the Romanian diplomatic authority had maintained, they requested, in writing, assurances that Dobre had been repatriated.

The previous agreements, reflected in the aforementioned diplomatic communications issued by the Italian party fallen into abeyance, were reset and, as suggested by a much later diplomatic communication, the terms of the negotiations had changed. The Italian authorities did not stop the proceedings in the Dobre and Măgura cases and, although they did not accelerate them, they let them take their natural course. The advantage of the Romanian party was that the Italian justice system was known for its slowness and, procedurally, these trials did not justify urgent solutions, given the absence of the defendants from court. This time, we have the formal charge brought against Măgura, who was involved in the illegal export of strategic materials. Summarising the communication dated August 20<sup>th</sup> 1955,<sup>12</sup> we are informed that during the negotiations for the definitive release of Eraldo Pintori, the Romanian government wished the actions against Iacob Măgura, the former Commercial Attaché of the Romanian Embassy in Bern, and against Dimitri Dobre, the former chauffeur of the Romanian Embassy in Rome, to be suspended, as these actions had been pending at courts in Milan and in Rome. The Italian regulations did not allow interventions of this type, once the procedure had been started. However, since the potential sentence and conviction could not be practically enforced, since the two accused were in Romania, the opinion of the Italian party was that the government in Bucharest, which had adopted another political contour (Ana Pauker had been relieved of assignments, Stalin had died) was particularly concerned that these actions should not be made public. In the new negotiations, the Italian side attempted again to correlate, as before, the cases of the Italians imprisoned in Romania with the Dobre and Măgura problems. However, according to General Director of Political Affairs in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Romanian government did not intend to make a connection between the request addressed to the Italian Government and the matter of the release of the Italian

<sup>11</sup> Veronica Turcuș et alii, *op.cit.* p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> Ministero Italiano degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Storico-Diplomatico, Affari Politici 1950-1957, Romania 1955, busta 1284.

citizens, foremost among whom was Pintori, asserting, however, that such a request would no doubt be re-examined from a favourable perspective.

Under these circumstances, the General Director for Political Affairs suggested, in the communication he addressed to the head of the Italian mission in Bucharest, that “*it would be superfluous, though, if I informed Your Excellency that the one who answers our request might rush or delay the release of our co-nationals. Since it seems impossible that at least in the case currently underway at the Court of Milan a satisfactory response will come from us, allow me to suggest that the competent authorities should do everything in their power so that the proceedings in question will take place behind closed doors, particularly in light of their nature. This we could immediately communicate to this Government, and based on its reactions, we will evaluate its actual intentions on the matter that is of interest to us.*”

This diplomatic correspondence also stated that economic relations between Romania and Italy had been resumed, but there were still some “obstacles” Romania had placed in the way of Italian exports. It was believed, however, that once the Accademia di Romania chapter had been closed and Pintori had been released, “we will manage to clean up the field from the debris of the past, and the relations between the two countries will also improve in the commercial sector.”

We do not know what the outcome of the trial was, we do not know if it was quashed or not. It is certain, however that once the Eraldo Pintori case had been settled, the Italian party decided not to insist on this matter any further and to dedicate itself to a new, more constructive phase in the bilateral relations. There is, indeed, a pro-memoria from 1957,<sup>13</sup> referring to the Dobre and Măgura cases, but it seems to have been compiled under *beneficium inventarii*.

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<sup>13</sup> Ministero Italiano degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Storico-Diplomatico, Affari Politici 1950-1957, Romania 1957, busta 1375.