

## Book Reviews

**MIODRAG MILIN (EDITOR), *SÂRBII DIN ROMÂNIA ÎN SECOLUL XX [THE SERBS FROM ROMANIA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY]*, CLUJ-NAPOCA, ARGONAUT, 2012, ISBN 978-973-109-337-6, 328 p.**

The volume edited by Miodrag Milin<sup>1</sup> represents a collection of studies based on a series of unpublished archival documents, which capture a series of lesser known aspects from the recent past of the Serbian minority in Romania. The minority issue is addressed from the vantage point of the consequences of three “watershed moments” for the destiny of the Serbs on the present-day territory of Romania: the first was coeval with the reconfigurations entailed by World War I, the second marked the installation of communism, while the third is related to post-communism and, specifically, the beginning of the transition and the path to democracy in Romania. In light of this fragmentation, first is analysed the disruption of the traditional, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Banatian behavioural model in the interwar period and, respectively, during communism. As both “moments” brought about significant changes onto the community, the authors of the articles have attempted, based on the archival evidence gathered, on social history (“School and Society among the Banatian Serbs”) and individual memory (“A Bleak Romanian-Serbian War Story”), to identify the main causes of this regression, namely the national and nationalist state (inter-war) policies and, respectively, the characteristics of the (post-war) communisation process. It is to this latter phenomenon and its implications for the community under study that most of the pages of this volume are dedicated, the research starting from the problem of the reactivation of the unionist aspirations amongst the Serbs in Romania. Post-war uncertainty, augmented by the presence of the Red Army, is considered by the authors as one of the main reasons why after the liberation of Belgrade, the Serbs’ previous disappointments turned into a collective hope, a possible solution they saw being the annexation of the Banat to Tito’s Yugoslavia. However, as shown by archival documents, carefully selected from the Yugoslav and Romanian funds, the international situation (the USSR/Tito, Romania/USSR political compromise) and the relatively rapid formation of a pro-communist Romanian government (the Groza Cabinet), led to this illusion, sometimes fuelled by the Soviets, quickly turning against the local community: the most visible expression of (Romanian) “retaliations” included deportations to the Bărăgan Plain (“The Serbs’ Bărăgan”). Encouraged (also) by the Tito-Stalin conflict, the Stalinist repression conducted against the Serbs in Romania was therefore caused by a twofold set of factors: domestic, Romanian and international, “anti-Titoist.” This is evidenced in the volume by seven conclusive case studies, which capture the individual destinies of several political prisoners: “Laza Adamov,” “Bojidar Stanoievici,” “Stevan Leopojev,” “Miladin Silin,” “Zoraida Draghinov,” “Ljubinka Neţin Ifrim.” Presentations are given of three activists from the “opposite camp” (p. 181), consisting of those involved in the implementation of the minority policies adopted by the Romanian Communist Party. Their activity is also outlined by reference to documents and interviews (in Serbian): 1) Mirco Jivcovic, “The Activist Intellectual, between Illusions and Disillusionments; 2)

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<sup>1</sup> Miodrag Milin is a member of the Serbian Academy of Education, Belgrade (2007) and has a PhD in Historical Sciences from Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca; he is a researcher with the Romanian Academy and also a Professor at Aurel Vlaicu University in Arad. Besides Milin, the following researchers have contributed to the present volume: Alexandra Bogdanovici (Bucharest), Vladimir Cvetkovici (Belgrade), Cvetko Mihajlov (Romania), Andrei Milin (Timișoara), Coran Mrakic (Timișoara), Simona Neuman (Timișoara).

Alexandru Curici, “The ‘Party Soldier’: Obtuse and Then a Little Decrepit”; and 3) Milan Petrovici, “The Yugoslav Emigrant in Romania (by Chance).”

Obviously, in the case of the Serbs, too, the societal transformations initiated by the communist regime did not have an exclusively repressive political character. One of the predilect ways of transforming the community and, implicitly, the individual, regardless of nationality, was through culture, more specifically, through a compromise called *proletarian culture*, which concealed, in fact, the ideological agenda and aggressive propaganda of the party. Its manifestation in the Serbian community in Romania is exemplified by a case study of the newspaper *Îndrumătorul cultural*: this proved to be a means of repression, articulated in the national language, which was particularly aggressive against the Serbian identity. This state-sanctioned approach was seconded by the attack against the Serbian Orthodox Church: the collection of studies describes at large the manner in which the Security exercised control and supervision over this institution (“The Church under a Magnifying Glass”). The stage following the last “watershed moment,” the period of post-communism, concludes the volume, enumerating, by way of chronological sequences, the main institutions, personalities and events related to the Serbian community in Romania, starting from 20 December 1989 (“Veljko Unipan and the Romanian Democratic Front in Timișoara”) and ending on 28 April 2009 (“The 1990 Leader Confesses: ‘A Little Ceaușescu Lies Hidden in Everyone’”).

This historiographical undertaking, with an obvious restitutive character, as duly noted in the introduction, is part of a larger and, as yet, unfinished project carried out by the main contributors to the volume, which investigates the problem of the Serbian political prisoners in Romania. What deserves mention is that in this intermediate phase of the project, the collection of studies presented here makes known to the general public, through a series of tables and lists (pp. 221-258), the fact that there were nearly 1,000 Serb prisoners from an ethnic minority that barely exceeded 30,000. This and other aspects highlighted by the authors indicate an undeniable reality and a premise that still needs to be explored: according to this, the Serbs were among the groups that were most affected by the repressive side of Romanian communism and the twentieth century, except for the last decade, represented a “time of great trials and tribulations” for this community.

GRIGORE MOLDOVAN

**GUZUN VADIM (EDITOR), *RUSIA ÎNFOMETATĂ. ACȚIUNEA UMANITARĂ EUROPEANĂ ÎN DOCUMENTELE DIN ARHIVELE ROMÂNEȘTI 1919-1923* [STARVING RUSSIA. EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE ROMANIAN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS 1919-1923], TÂRGU-LĂPUȘ, GALAXIA GUTENBERG, 2012, ISBN 978-973-141-450-8, 663 p.**

The twentieth century “cultivated” the largest number of “killing fields.” This highly controversial and often disputed term for a century of extremes (Eric Hobsbawm), popularised by Sydney Schanberg’s documentary book<sup>2</sup> describing Cambodia’s tragic experience under the Khmer Rouge regime, also captures the theme of the volume of documents edited by Vadim Guzun and his collaborators. Thus, in *Starving Russia*, the coordinator of the “Oriental Affairs”

<sup>2</sup> Sydney Schanberg, *Beyond the Killing Fields, War Writings*, Washington, Potomac books, 2010.