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The Legionary Movement from Cold War Exile to Post-Communist Romania, 1986–1993

Francesco Zavatti

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the continuities and changes that far-right movements undergo throughout historical changes. It does so by focusing on the transnational and transgenerational dynamics through which the legionary movement fostered its existence from the settings of the Cold War exile to post-communist Romania. In order to illustrate these transnational and transgenerational dynamics, the paper compares the activities of the legionaries in their late Cold War exile with their activities in early post-communist Romania.

Keywords: legionary movement; transmission of memory; Cold War exile; 1989; post-communist Romania.

Introduction

The aim of this paper¹ is to shed light on the continuities and changes that far-right movements undergo throughout historical changes. It does so by focusing on the transnational and transgenerational dynamics through which the legionary movement was able to foster its existence from the settings of Cold War exile to post-communist Romania, and from exiled old Nazi collaborationists to the Romanian younger generations. In order to achieve this aim, the study applies knowledge from social movement theory, and from memory and far-right studies on the redeployment of the legionary movement in post-communist Romania. In order to present the changes and continuities undergone by the movement throughout the epochal change of 1989, the paper compares the activities held by the exiled group in late-eighties Spain with the activities held in Romania from 1989 to 1993.

¹ This research has been financed by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (*Östersjöstiftelsen*) through the research project *Memory Politics in Far Right Europe: Celebrating Nazi Collaborationists in Post-1989 Belarus, Romania, Flanders and Denmark*, based at the Institute for Contemporary History, Södertörn University, Sweden, between 2018 and 2021, under grant n. 40/17. The 2019 research trip to Bucharest, Romania has been financed by the Foundation Helge Ax:son Johnson (*Helge Ax:son Johnsons stiftelse*) under grant n. F18-0306. A previous version of this article has been presented orally at the conference “East-Central Europe from Communism to Populism. Political Agency, Institutional Design, Social Networks, 1990–2020”, held at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Bucharest on 30 October 2020. The author acknowledges the financial support provided by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for presenting these research results at the mentioned conference and he wishes to thank prof. Dragoș Petrescu for the kind invitation.

Previous research is relatively silent on the interconnections that existed between the late exiled Legion and the post-1989 movement in Romania. On the one hand, research on the Romanian exile has shown convincingly that the communist regime succeeded in infiltrating the legionary ranks in order to push them towards extreme moves, so that the representation of the Bucharest government among the exiled communities would improve by comparison. However, the activities of the legionaries were far from being exclusively dictated by the *longa manus* of Ceaușescu. Their activities shall instead be seen as an attempt to restore an interwar-era project that had been lost.² On the other hand, historical and ethnographic research on the re-establishment of the Legion in post-communist Romania has dug deep into the activities held, the discourses developed, and the conflicts that existed between small groups that equally professed antisemitism, anti-communism, and fanatic admiration for the “historical” Legion and its symbols.³ However, the peculiar dynamics that permitted exiled ideas to cross the epochal change of 1989 and return to the homeland are to date less known. According to Michael Shafir, the post-1989 Legion, together with the competing idolatrizers of Ion Antonescu, were groups of “radical return” who broke with the tradition of national-communism, which was instead fostered by groups of “radical continuity” (the post-1989 idolatrizers of Ceaușescu and the surviving milieu of the *Securitate*).⁴ The political clashes of an emerging civil society with the post-1989 authoritarian regime ruled by Ion Iliescu and the re-emergence of suppressed memory from the times of communism functioned as catalysts for the spreading of the ideas of radical return. The agency of the old generations of legionaries, both the exiled ones and those who had experienced the communist regime, played an important role in redeploying the antisemite and ultranationalist ideas of the Legion. The return of those instances entailed both transnational and transgenerational dynamics. The Legion had been officially ostracized from Romanian public life since early 1941. Yet, its apologetic memory was able to survive across epochal changes. While in Romania, from 1941 to 1989, the memory of the Legion has been silenced and repressed,

² Dinu Zamfirescu, *Cârțițele Securității: agenți de influență din exilul românesc*, Polirom, Iași, 2013; José Faraldo, *Dreams of a Better Past: Central European Exiles in Franco's Spain and the Projects of the Interwar Period*, in Carolina Rodríguez-López and José M. Faraldo, eds., *Reconsidering a Lost Intellectual Project: Exiles' Reflections on Cultural Differences*, Cambridge Scholarly Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2012, pp. 89–114 and Mihaela Albu, *Romanian Intellectual Elites in Exile Painful Experiences and Multifaceted Actions*, *ibid.*, pp. 115–135.

³ William Totok and Elena-Irina Macovei, *Între mit și bagatelizare: despre reconsiderarea critică a trecutului. Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu și rezistența armată anticomunistă din România*, Polirom, Iași, 2016; Cecilie Endresen, ‘The legionaries rise!’ *The neo-legionary movement in post-Communist Romania*, in „Südost-Forschungen”, 69/70, 2010, pp. 284–317; Cecilie Endresen, «Kristi soldater» i Romania: *Jerngardens postkommunistiske etterfølgere og deres verdensbild*, in „Nordisk Østforum” 26, no. 2, 2012, pp. 113–134.

⁴ Michael Shafir, *The Mind of Romania's Radical Right*, in Sabrina Ramet (ed.), *Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, Pennsylvania University Press, University Park Pennsylvania, 1999, pp. 213–232.

being transmitted exclusively orally in private, family settings, the exiled activists spent decades in cultivating and adapting the interwar political project in alien spatial and temporal settings.

In order to explain the survival of an interwar far-right movement within new temporal and spatial settings, the article adopts a *transnational* and *transgenerational* focus: it follows the activists' agency from exile back to the homeland, and the transmission of memory from old veterans to young enthusiast sympathizers. The article focuses on the activities held and the main network and power dynamics experienced by the Legion in late-eighties Spain (1986–1989) and in early post-communist Romania (1989–1993). The focus on the Spanish exile is justified by the presence in Madrid of the largest community of legionary activists since the post-war period, but also by the rich cultural and public activities held there and, no less important, by the wide personal networks developed by the legionaries exiled in Spain with the Francoist regime and, in the period under focus, with the post-Francoist far right. Since the 1930s, the legionaries had learnt how to go international, by networking with the fascist movements across Europe.⁵ After their defeat, from the exile, they continued to operate transnationally and to maintain their activities, supported by old and new Western allies, among whom old fascist networks, like the intransigent Falangists in Spain, but also powerful state organizations, among whom the CIA. The political and cultural shifts in the environments inhabited necessarily engendered change in the discourse of the exiled legionaries. Understanding changes and continuities is the key for understanding why (and how) old fascist instances have survived until the present times. This article does so by focusing on the transnational and transgenerational dynamics of the legionary activities in the Spanish exile and in post-1989 Romania.

Sources for this study are the reports written by *Securitate* agents and informants on the activities of the legionaries exiled in Spain and the Legion's publications from exile and from early post-communist Romania.

The fascist continuum

⁵ Raul Cârstocea, *Native Fascists, Transnational Anti-Semites. The International Activity of legionary Leader Ion I. Moța*, in Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, eds., *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, Berghahn Books, London, 2017, pp. 216–242; Mircea Platon, *The Iron Guard and the 'Modern State'. Iron Guard Leaders Vasile Marin and Ion I. Moța, and the 'New European Order*, in „Fascism”, 1, no. 2, 2012, pp. 65–90; Constantin Iordachi, *Mihail Manoilescu and the debate and practice of corporatism in Romania*, in Antonio Costa Pinto and Federico Finchelstein, eds., *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Europe and Latin America. Crossing Borders*, Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 64–94.

Even if the term “neo-legionaries” is used for distinguishing the post-1989 galaxy of groups from the interwar and Cold War groups, “legionary” better marks the continuity of a set of exclusionary and discriminatory ideals, most often fostered by the same persons throughout the decades. Their support for ideas of “organized intolerance”⁶ crosses the entire history of the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries until the present days. These groups operate by crafting discourses made of antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, with a clear interest in manipulating the public opinion by spreading conspiracy theories and by attempting to hijack pre-existing conflicts in the settings in which they operate. To be sure, “Legionarism” is the Romanian version of fascism. As argued by Roger Griffin, the post-1945 period is no “coda” of the fascist catastrophic springtime in the interwar and war times. The key to understanding fascism in the post-war era, Griffin writes, is to be alive to the fact that the myth of national rebirth can produce new adjacent properties spinning from the ideological core of fascism. After the post-war era, fascism showed a great ideological flexibility and organizational adaptability to the political and social conditions it inhabited. Across the historical change of 1945, it eventually mutated in its organizational forms, from movements to small groups and networks, and in its ideological tenets, from calls for purifying the nation to pathetic pleas for democracy, to the point that it became unrecognizable.⁷

Beside its fascist nature, it is rewarding to consider the legionary movement as a social movement, since its history of ultra-nationalism and violence fits with the definition.⁸ According to Caiani and Della Porta, social movements rationally calculate the material and symbolic resources available and the costs and benefits of protest actions.⁹ In the interwar period, the legionary movement could construct its martyrdom by exploiting the repertoires of First World War,¹⁰ of nationalist Orthodoxism,¹¹ and of the complex and paradoxical sets of radical, mystical, modernist, and anti-liberalism tendencies inherited from the culture of a small national state with many inferiority complexes.¹² Those tendencies were the constituent

⁶ Sabrina Ramet, *Introduction*, in Sabrina Ramet, ed., *Radical right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1996, pp. 13-15.

⁷ Roger Griffin, *A Fascist Century*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2008, pp. 156–206.

⁸ For the legionary movement as a social movement, see Roland Clark, *The Holy legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2015, p. 4.

⁹ Manuela Caiani, Donatella della Porta, and Claudius Wagemann, eds. *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy and the United States*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

¹⁰ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2009; Clark, *The Holy legionary Youth*, 2015.

¹¹ Christian Sandache, *Mișcarea Legionară și Ortodoxia: Portrete Românești*, Mica Valahie, Bucharest, 2013.

¹² Clark, *Holy legionary Youth*, 2015; Alberto Basciani, *Tra misticismo ultranazionalista e antiliberalismo: La Guardia di Ferro e la Grande Romania*,” in Laura Cerasi, ed., *Genealogie e geografie dell’anti-democrazia nella crisi europea degli anni Trenta*, Ca’ Foscari Digital Editions, Venice, 2019, pp. 201–220; Irina Livizeanu,

core of its repertoire, developed in the movement's propaganda and made socially acceptable by its sympathizing intellectuals.¹³ The legionary movement was built after the late 1920s on political opportunities, with a readiness to adapt its ideological repertoire and political action in an unstable political context. Changing skin and keywords often paid off: the movement was an important component of the interwar politics and cultures of Romania, which it uninterruptedly inhabited from 1927 until 1938. In the National Legionary State (1940–1941), the Legion turned into a Nazi collaborationist party, as it had promised to do for years in its propaganda. Once ousted by Ion Antonescu with the support of Nazi Germany, whose plans could not tolerate the Legion's unreliability, its hierarchs repaired to Germany, from where in 1944 they would establish a second Nazi collaborationist government that operated until the final defeat of the Axis.¹⁴

During post-war exile, the Legion underwent several changes, transforming itself from a united movement into a plurality of networks dispersed throughout the Western hemisphere and divided in small, conflicting factions. In order to normalize their political activities in the new exile context, the legionaries deflected the responsibilities of Nazi collaborationism, the destruction of the movement, and more generally violence and homicides committed in the past towards their adversaries within the movement and towards exponents of the exiled Romanian communities, as well as towards Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The most notable intra-group conflict in the Cold War times took place between Horia Sima, successor of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu at the head of the movement and prime minister of the National Legionary State, and Constantin Papanace, who had been very close to Codreanu and who became subsecretary of state at the ministry of finance under the same regime. The conflict had been raised already during the second German exile, but Sima's authority over the whole movement was also widely contested by other first-hour legionaries. In the early 1950s, a legionary command was set up by some of the Legion founders in order to contend the leadership of Sima.¹⁵ Such tensions would remain a constant during the entire Cold War period, and after 1989 they persisted among newly emerged conflicts.

Cultura și naționalism în România Mare 1918-1930, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1998; Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Religion, and Ideology: Romania's Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael*, in John Lampe and Mark Mazover, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, Budapest, Central European University Press, chapter 1.

¹³ Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past: E.M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania*, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, IL, 2005.

¹⁴ Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the others: a history of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania*, Hoover Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1970; Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime, 1940–1944*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2006; Iordachi, *Charisma, Religion, and Ideology*, 2006.

¹⁵ Ștefan Palaghiță, *Garda de Fier. Spre reînvierea României*, Buenos Aires, 1951.

The exile settings prevented the legionaries from establishing terrorist cells and implementing political violence on a large scale as they had done in the interwar and war periods. Their political opportunities in Romania were over. However, they continued their activities for as long as they could in exile, with the material and symbolic resources available, turning the limitations of the exile into opportunities to grant continuity to the Legion. They did so by reinventing the Legion, presenting it as an anti-communist entity, proudly sided with the Western powers in the struggle against the Soviet bloc. In order to disguise an antisemite and Nazi collaborationist movement as a more acceptable anti-communist one, they exploited the instruments through which they had been most proficient since the interwar era: memory work and political propaganda. Most of their public activities, which were implemented through meetings attended by exiled comrades based in several West European and American countries, but also through periodical publications which were distributed transnationally, were aimed at guaranteeing a continuity to the movement in a mix of continuities and changes: reorienting the political discourse for fitting the new Cold War anti-communism was sided by the constant commemoration of the fallen heroes of the interwar era.

With the aim of normalizing the Legion in the new Cold War settings, the legionaries resold themselves as anti-communist, as defenders of democracy (Papanace and his group also referred to themselves as Christian-Democrats, since they were supported by Catholic institutions in Rome), and as supporters of the United States' foreign politics and of the European Community.¹⁶ In their numerous periodicals, but also in brochures, books, and propaganda materials of sorts, they presented the occupation of Romania by the Red Army and the communist takeover as proven evidences of the justness of the legionary interwar politics and ideas. With a good degree of approximation and no real major shift, these features accompanied the entire exile history of the Legion, which remained a marginal actor at all levels.

The fall of the communist regime was a major window of opportunity for the legionaries. The repertoires they had conserved and adapted for half a century, mostly published in Romanian and ultimately targeting unreceptive exiled compatriots, could finally be readapted and redeployed extensively for the national audience. The goal of the legionary movement had always been to establish itself in the political and cultural context in which it operated. In 1990s' Romania, the legionaries simply continued to adapt their repertoires as they had done during the Cold War period, but with some notable changes. The new settings allowed open

¹⁶ See, i.e., the works by Constantin Papanace (1904–1986) and Horia Sima (1907–1993).

xenophobia, especially against the Hungarian minorities of Transylvania and against Hungary, but also ultra-nationalism and antisemitism; these were redeployed within a series of newly established parties, associations, and groups and through new media and public activities. New discursive opportunities were generated by incorporating into their repertoires the discourses emerging from those milieus that after 1989 reclaimed justice of the wrongs of the past regime but which in turn could only preserve their memory as substitute for a rightful retribution: the former members of the anti-communist resistance, political prisoners, exiled communities, and the Romanian Orthodox Church.¹⁷

A diachronic comparison of the main activities and dynamics of the movement in the latest exile years and in early 1990s' Romania will show the changes and continuities that the Legion underwent across the historical passage of 1989.

The latest years of the legionary exile: 1986–1989

Information on the legionary movement's exile is mainly contained in its cultural products and in the files of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives. One volume of *Securitate* files focuses on Horia Sima's activities in 1980s' Spain. Sima had reached Spain in the early 1950s and in common with all former top Nazi collaborators, he had received support from the Francoist regime and, after Franco's death, from the Spanish far right.

In the late 1980s, the exiled legionary activists were conscious that the Legion, in the last decades, had not sufficiently renewed its discourse nor cleaned up its image. They were conscious that the Legion was not appetible to the Western audience nor to the younger generations. Its terrorist-fascist character and its totalitarian aspirations had to be downplayed and, according to the opinions expressed by Aurel Rauta and Nicolae Roșca, both close associates of Sima, its nature should instead be presented as fundamentally democratic. Sima had already started to publish voluminous monographs that attempted to absolve the Legion

¹⁷ Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, *Retribution. Remembering. Representation: On Romania's Incomplete Break with the Communist Past*, in Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stokłosa, eds., *Geschichtsbilder in den postdiktatorischen Ländern Europas: Auf der Suche nach historisch-politischen Identitäten*, Lit Verlag, Munster, 2009, pp. 155–82; Michael Shafir, *Wars of Memory in Post-Communist Romania* in Oto Luthar, ed., *Of Red Dragons and Evil Spirits. Post-Socialist Historiography Between Democratization and the New Politics of History*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2017, pp. 59–86; Lavinia Stan, *Civil Society and Post-communist Transitional Justice in Romania*, in Simić Olivera and Zala Volčič, eds., *Transitional Justice and Civil Society in the Balkans*, Springer, London, 2013, pp. 17–31; Monica Ciobanu, *Criminals, Martyrs or Saints? Romania's Prison Saints Debate Revisited*, in „Cultures of History Forum”, 19 February 2018, DOI: 10.25626/0081.

from the attacks moved by its opponents.¹⁸ At the same time, the old hierarch asked his men to decrease the intensity of the offensive actions brought forward by the movement, due to the attention dedicated by the exiled media based in Israel to the presence of the legionaries in Spain and their request to deport them to Israel for prosecution.¹⁹ Since the fall of the Francoist regime, the exiled legionaries no longer enjoyed the protection that had been previously guaranteed by the dictatorship; they had become an embarrassment for Spain, which refused to grant asylum to the Romanian refugees who declared themselves legionaries.²⁰ At the same time, the Romanian refugees were numerically few and most of them did not want to have contact with the exiled legionaries.²¹ Furthermore, the legionaries were conscious, to a certain degree, that their activities were infiltrated by the *Securitate*,²² and the process against Valerian Trifa in the USA was taken as confirmation that their participation in the US-sponsored anti-communist global networks was no longer a guarantee of impunity from the atrocities that they committed in the past. Sima suggested to Traian Golea, a close associate and main activist of the movement who was based in the USA, to be cautious over attracting attention to the Legion at that moment. For example, Sima and Golea had in mind to reprint the volume that showed that the exiled legionaries had collaborated with the CIA in the late 1940s and early 1950s; however, they agreed that it was improper for Sima to draft any introductory remarks, as they wished to present the movement to the younger generations as anti-communist and to avoid the audience associating the movement with Nazi collaborationism.²³

The need to clean up their image also motivated them to select their Western far-right allies. They took distance from neo-Nazi groups, for example the National German Party, but they also paid attention to the context in which specific far-right groups operated; for example, they abstained from contacts with the Austrian far-right groups only after the Waldheim affair.²⁴ Still, they needed to collaborate with the Western far-right groups, since they were constantly searching for new forms of support and opportunities. In France, they were close to the National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen and to the *Troisième Voie* of Jean-Gilles Malliarakis.²⁵ In Spain, they remained close to the emerging far-right groups of the *Juntas*

¹⁸ Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (ACNSAS), Serviciul de Informații Externe (SIE), dosar nr. 15, vol. III, ff. 109–110.

¹⁹ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 113; ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 191, Letter to Simon Wiesenthal.

²⁰ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 102.

²¹ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, ff. 57–59.

²² ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 96.

²³ Horia Sima to Traian Golea, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, pp. 35–37.

²⁴ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 117.

²⁵ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 130.

Españolas and *Fuerza Nueva*, in a form of mutual support that had been ongoing since the early Cold War. In this latter period, the Spanish neo-fascists were also contributing to the Legion economically, by donating large sums; however, in the late eighties, the fear that the Spanish authorities would target the Legion with hostile measures discouraged the exiled from taking an active part in the public demonstrations of the Spanish neo-fascists.²⁶ Convinced that hostile forces were manoeuvring against his person, Sima refused to meet new people and drastically reduced his presence at public gatherings. He compensated by intensifying the combative tone of his written communications to the exiled legionaries.²⁷

Appointing close members in leading positions was a further strategy that Sima implemented to convince the old, disillusioned legionaries to return to action. However, this engendered negative comments from the associates who were less close to Sima but who still considered him as leader of the movement – they felt cut off.²⁸ By 1986, with the death of Pananace, Sima remained one of the few old leaders of the movement and he was by far the most active in maintaining its continuity with several publications and memorial activities held between Spain and West Germany. He invited his adversaries within the Legion to retrace their steps and follow the principle of discipline²⁹ but, from the answers reported by the *Securitate* informers, many legionaries in Spain, France, and West Germany kept the same hostile attitude towards his leadership.³⁰ This was also thanks to the work of the *Securitate*, which had been successful in spreading suspicion and mistrust within the ranks of the exiled legionaries.³¹

A further limit to the continuity of the Legion of which Sima and his associates were conscious was the ageing of its members: their average age was seventy years old. In 1988, the youngest members had started to notice that the health and energy of Sima, who dictated his writing to a comrade, were diminishing. Sima put forward the problem to his closest associates.³² They agreed that ‘even if some among its older members will die (they will not die all at the same time) [sic], the Legion will be reborn with another leadership, but its organization will not disappear’.³³ This made necessary the ‘recruitment, indoctrination, and use of some young persons who have recently emigrated from Romania or the engagement

²⁶ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 96, 130.

²⁷ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 115.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, ff. 105–106.

³⁰ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 113.

³¹ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 118.

³² ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 141.

³³ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 133.

with the descendants of the legionaries presently abroad'.³⁴ The action had no success, since only a few youngsters could be recruited, and many of them gave up their affiliation once ordered to take part in demonstrative actions.

Memory work was another tactic for guaranteeing continuity to the movement. Sima considered that the history of the Legion was not sufficiently known among the Romanian exiled communities, particularly among the younger generations. He explicitly ordered that each legionary should write memoirs, recollecting dates and collecting materials regarding the past of the organization, and publish them. On the one hand, he was personally interested in consulting new sources and acquiring new information from newly written memoirs that would help him to draft the history of the Legion during the Second World War and in exile.³⁵ On the other hand, his collaborators had more long-sighted plans: Nicolae Roșca wished to establish an institute of Romanian culture in Madrid where the old members could deposit the huge number of sources and literature they retained on the history and activities of the Legion, and where the new affiliates could have consulted them.³⁶ Those grand visions could not be implemented in exile.

At the end of the 1980s, Sima's leadership was on the brink of collapse. Almost all his loyal affiliates expressed harsh critiques once he proposed establishing closer contacts with King Michael. This twist from his previous anti-monarchist standpoint, dictated by political opportunity, cost him much in terms of credibility.³⁷ Furthermore, the appropriation and repartition of the Legion's funds that he operated, with no regard to the movement's needs or to the sensitivities of its affiliates were subject to critiques even by his closest collaborators.³⁸ In this context, a new information sheet ridiculing Sima and his closest collaborators had started to circulate among the exiled legionaries³⁹ and a new group that opposed Sima's leadership was established in West Germany in late 1988.⁴⁰ Lastly, the *Securitate* was continuing, successfully, to divide the ranks of the exiled Legion and to make them feel under threat.⁴¹ Then came December 1989, which the legionaries considered as a window of opportunity for the movement's rebirth in Romania.

1989: A window of opportunity

³⁴ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 57–59, 111.

³⁵ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 145.

³⁶ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 146.

³⁷ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 149.

³⁸ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, ff. 150, 163.

³⁹ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, ff. 124–129, 152–154.

⁴⁰ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, f. 151.

⁴¹ ACNSAS, SIE, dosar nr. 15, Vol. III, ff. 156, 160.

On February 23, 1990, the pro-governmental newspaper *Adevărul* informed the national audience that the legionaries were reorganizing and that they had promised to liquidate the country's enemies. There was no substance in that claim, while the hypothesis that the former *Securitate* forces had been manoeuvring for raising the societal fears of the legionaries' return and to identify the democratic opposition with the legionaries seem more plausible.⁴² Eventually, this identification, pushed incessantly by the governmental media, permitted to the National Salvation Front (FSN) to justify violence against the democratic opposition. On February 28, 1990, the decision of the FSN to participate in the first free parliamentary elections led the other parties to hold a demonstration against what the slogans identified as "neo-communist" power. The following day, a counter-protest organized by the FSN attacked the headquarters of those parties with the slogan: "Down with the kulaks and the legionaries".⁴³ The beatings and the deaths provoked by the miners of the Jiu valley in Bucharest in the *mineriade* were the means by which the new authoritarian power tried to silence any dissenting voices, accused of being legionaries and fascists. Ion Iliescu's call for renewed anti-fascist action proved to be a good propaganda advertisement for the *real* legionaries, which were by then marginal, insignificant actors. Later that year, through a circular, Sima attempted to gain visibility by rejecting Iliescu's claim that the Legion had interfered with the elections of May 1990.⁴⁴ However, he abstained from attempting to present himself as the champion of Romanian opposition: on the one hand, he considered all the new political parties as one with the new regime; on the other hand, he was genuinely afraid of the former *Securitate*.⁴⁵ For providing continuity to the movement in the new settings of the old homeland, he and his associates chose grassroots action.

In early 1990, Sima sent his associate Victor Corbuț to Romania in order to analyze the field. He established contact with Mircea Nicolau, who had been interwar legionary, anti-communist resistant and political prisoner for almost two decades. Sima appointed Nicolau as leader of the Legion in Romania, with the explicit aim of conducting the movement on his behalf. Evidently, Sima thought that he had found a legionary hero, a survivor of the communist prisons and therefore a living symbol of legionary martyrdom.⁴⁶

⁴² Francisco Veiga, *¿Quinta columna o piedra angular? Tendencias ultranacionalistas en Rumania tras la revolución de 1989*, in „Afers Internacionals”, n. 21, 1991, pp. 81-103.

⁴³ Stan Stoica, *România 1989–2005. O istorie cronologică*, Meronia, Bucharest, 2005, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Horia Sima, *Antologie legionară*, Vol. V, Omul Nou, Miami Beach, FL, 1994), pp. 522–523.

⁴⁵ Sima to Traian Golea, 9 March 1990, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁶ See the sources presented in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, and here: <https://www.buciumul.ro/?p=25027> (last access 30 October 2020). On the experiences of the legionaries in the

However, Corbuț had failed to identify the network of Nistor Chioreanu, who had been the third-in-command after the death of Codreanu, and who regularly hosted meetings with old legionaries and former members of the Fractions of the Cross youth organizations in his home in Bucharest.⁴⁷ A conflict immediately arose between Chioreanu's network and Nicolau. The legionaries of Chioreanu's network did not recognize Nicolau as leader. They reported to Sima that, during his imprisonment in the communist jails, Nicolau accepted, under threat by the prison's guards, to torture his comrades. The case of Nicolau provoked several attacks against Sima, who believed that the accusations were simply an indirect attack on his own leadership.⁴⁸

Among the legionaries returned to activity there were also those who had refused Sima's leadership since the interwar period, such as Șerban Milcoveanu. As in the old times, Milcoveanu's network refused to deal with Sima and his associates also after 1989. The intra-movement conflicts continued for some years, during which Golea proposed several times to the Romanian-based actors that the exiled would not interfere with internal Romanian affairs, and that in return the Romanian-based legionaries should promise to not meddle in their affairs. Eventually, the persistence of these conflicts convinced Sima to separate the organization in Romania from the one abroad once and for all.⁴⁹ This apparently Solomonic decision protected him from further attacks coming from post-communist Romania, which nevertheless he was still interested in penetrating.

After Corbuț's trip, Golea also travelled to Romania later in 1990 on behalf of Sima. He contacted several old legionaries and young sympathizers and he concluded that, despite several ideological orientations were certainly present, many were anyway willing to distribute the literature that the foreign legionaries were offering.⁵⁰ One year later, Golea returned to Romania, invited by the Romanian Cultural Foundation, in order to participate in the Forum of the Exile. He considered the Forum as an opportunity to enter into contact with the new regime, and also with the new nationalist forces.⁵¹ Once the news that Golea had been invited to the Forum of the Exile had reached the other exiled legionaries, several of them expressed disapproval, since they considered Augustin Buzura, president of the Foundation,

Penitentiary of Aiud, see Mihai Demetriade, *Victor Biriș, cel mai important agent de influență din penitenciarul Aiud (1957-1963)*, in „Caietele CNSAS”, vol. 5, no. 1–2 (9–10), 2012, pp. 11–148.

⁴⁷ See <https://www.buciumul.ro/?p=25027>

⁴⁸ Sima to Golea, 28 June 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 71.

⁴⁹ See <http://gardalegionara.blogspot.com/2013/07/colaboratorii-serviciilor-secrete.html> (last access: 30 October 2020).

⁵⁰ Sima to Golea, 9 March 1990, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, pp. 45–46; Sima to Golea, 4 November 1990, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 49.

⁵¹ Sima to Golea, 12 October 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, pp. 61.

to be at best ambiguous, and at worst an emissary of Iliescu. They considered the financial support given to Golea for the trip as given with interest.⁵² Sima, on the other hand, considered Golea's action as positive. He was convinced that no work of penetration could be done without dealing with the ruling elite. He thought that the task to reorganize the Legion in Romania and to extend its membership to the younger generations also required this kind of compromise. Sima was ready to accept that compromise, as he stated. In expressing this idea, he also added that dissidence made no sense, since there would be no adequate personality to act as a substitute for Iliescu. He believed that mediation with the government forces was necessary so that the Legion could once again take part in the democratic life of the country. Eventually, Golea could not get to talk to any state representative.⁵³ The grass roots contacts he took would reveal to be of much greater importance in consolidating the apologetic memory of the Legion within the new settings.

The transnational circulation of legionary publications

Thanks to his fieldtrips, Golea had found a way to introduce into Romania the legionary publications printed in exile. He contacted Ovidiu Guleş, a university student in Timișoara. Being aware of the legionary sympathies of Guleş, Golea tasked him with the editing and distribution of legionary books. Eventually, Guleş established the Gordiana publishing house, which distributed the "legionarized" monthly *Gazeta de Vest* and republished the "classics" of interwar Legionarism.

At the end of 1990, Sima suggested that Golea should create a warehouse in Serbian Banat, just across the border from Romania, and import a few books at a time.⁵⁴ In early 1991, over 150 copies of Codreanu's and Sima's writings were shipped from the USA to a legionary based in Austria. Another legionary (Nicolae Bojin) took the cargo and brought it to the warehouse, which was located in the small village of Uzdin, Serbia, near the Romanian border. Bojin succeeded in delivering the books to the legionaries in Timișoara.⁵⁵ Golea wished to reprint Ion Moța's Romanian translation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, but

⁵² Octavian Tarasevici to Traian Golea, 26 August 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, pp. 63–64.

⁵³ Sima to Golea, 27 October 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, pp. 64–65; Sima to Golea, 17 November 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 67; Sima to Golea, 24 January 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 69; Sima to Golea, End of 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 78.

⁵⁴ Sima to Golea, 4 November 1990, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Sima to Golea, 20 January 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 51; Sima to Golea, Note dated 4 February 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 51; Sima to Golea, 23 February 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 52.

Sima refused, since he was convinced that “the Jewish circles” had a strong influence on the Iliescu regime and that consequently this could jeopardize the action of penetration.⁵⁶ They printed other works by Moța and edited visual posters representing the monument to Moța and Marin in Majadahonda, Spain, to which the legionaries attached much importance since it was a tangible sign of their activities in exile.⁵⁷ The activities continued until Guleș wrote in the *Gazeta de Vest* that the legionaries were old and that new forms of political actions should be found. Sima, evidently offended, suspended the shipments, thus avoiding discussions.⁵⁸ They found other opportunities in Pitești, where legionary Octavian Voinea started the “Atlantida” publishing house, which published on the persecutions of political prisoners during communist times.⁵⁹

By the end of 1992, Sima and Golea had the idea of publishing books of memoirs on the anti-communist resistance; they had plenty of manuscripts on the subject, sent to them by the former partisans, and they wanted to exploit the narrative of anti-communist resistance since they considered that it would inspire the younger generations to embrace the values of the Legion.⁶⁰ At the same time, thanks to their financial resources, the old legionaries abroad contributed financially to the establishing in Romania of monuments aimed at celebrating former political prisoners.⁶¹ Sima would not live long enough to see those manuscripts published or those monuments erected.

Old and young legionaries: synergies and conflicts

The redeployment of the Legion in post-communist Romania also involved the activism of the younger generations. The intergenerational dynamics between old comrades and young militants included cooperation but also misunderstandings and conflicts. In Timișoara, Guleș had been one of the first legionary militants from post-1989 Romania. In 1990, he travelled to the mountains of Transylvania in order to interview the stepbrother of Sima, Eugen Rațiu, an old legionary and political prisoner. The latter expressed his admiration for Marian Munteanu,⁶² who two years later would eventually establish a new party with legionary

⁵⁶ Sima to Golea, 18 October 1990, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 48–49.

⁵⁷ Sima to Golea, 23 February 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Sima to Golea, 2 September 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 55.

⁵⁹ Sima to Golea, 12 October 1991, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Sima to Golea, 21 October 1992, 6 November 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 74–75; Sima to Golea, 14 nov. 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 76; Sima to Golea, 24 January 1993, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 78.

⁶¹ Sima to Golea, 24 January 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 71; Sima to Golea, 4 July 1992, in „Obiectiv Legionar” vol. 2, no. 7–8, 2004, p. 72.

⁶² Ovidiu Guleș, *Cum am cunoscut Legiunea Arhanghelul Mihail*, Editura Gordiana, Timișoara, 1992, pp. 18–21.

characteristics and apologetic intents. Golea had contacted Guleş since he was aware of this latter's support for legionary ideas.

In Bucharest, Şerban Suru, a young teacher and legionary activist, cooperated with Nicolau. This cooperation was soon broken by the conflict between the two. Suru copied the organizational forms, symbols and uniforms of the "historical" Legion, proclaiming himself to be the Legion's leader. Several old legionaries and young collaborators expressed resentment over Suru's behavior. At the same time, intra-generational conflicts were also present, over establishing hegemony in the Legion: Guleş often parodied the group by Suru, because of their use of interwar uniforms and symbols. Conflicts over "legionary legitimacy" often took the form of virulent personal attacks, as seen regarding Nicolau's past and Suru's uniforms. To give an idea of the mentality of these groups, a quote from *Gazeta de Vest* is illuminating: 'the legionary movement has become a capital to be stolen'.⁶³

A fascist movement between continuities and changes

1989 has been no coda of the formerly exiled East European fascist movements. As shown, these movements are trans-historical, but their developments across epochal changes are not always predictable. Once Sima had passed away in 1993, the legionaries' activities in Romania once again started, fully autonomous and free of the influence of the old hierarchy, and they would continue in successive decades. The early redeployment of old ideas of intolerance in the new political and cultural settings of post-communist Romania was only partially determined by the plans of a formerly exiled network. Certainly, transnational encounters and transnational circulation of literature, in a moment of drastic political and cultural change when the appeal to the nation and religion had become mainstream, served to signal the old legionaries that the moment for political action had returned and to popularize the legionary movement across younger generations. However, many groups under the communist dictatorship had already positioned themselves towards the Legion, whose discourse and symbols were forbidden in the public space but was kept alive through oral accounts in the private space. Former political prisoners and former members of the anti-communist resistance from the Legion's ranks did not need to wait for Sima's appeals to gather and elaborate plans for their return to the public scene. It transpired that during the long decades of communism they had developed an autonomous history of intestine conflicts that toppled the old divide between Sima and Pananace. Along these dividing lines, after

⁶³ In „Gazeta de Vest”, May 1993, p. 7.

1989, they developed cultural and political activities by establishing parties and foundations, with the greater aim of hegemonizing the mainstream discourse on anti-communism. The plan of the old leader to present the anti-communist resistance as a continuation of the interwar politics of the legionaries within the new context of the Cold War was developed in full autonomy, in the settings of post-communist Romania, by the former members of the resistance. The sufferings in the communist prisons became an important feature of the legionary discourse in the post-communist decades as well. The communist prisons' martyrs represented an element of continuity with the traditional discourse on the Legion's martyrs; both were highly exploitable means for calling for a national palingenesis. Sima and his old, formerly exiled comrades could contribute to transmit the ideal heritage of the old Legion in post-communist Romania, as witnessed by the diversified activities initiated by Nicolau (second president of the "Professor George Manu" Foundation), Suru and Guleş. However, they were not the drivers of this redeployment.

Sima did not expect the old comrades and the young sympathizers to raise their voices at once and in full autonomy. Convinced that the old communist power had simply mutated skin and that re-establishing the Legion would require mediation with the new rulers, he operated so that his assistants networked with as many people as possible. While in their sources they present their attempts to network with governmental actors as a failure, their networking at a grass roots level gave good results. Old comrades and young sympathizers popularized the Legion with their support – with several imported publications and pocket money to publish new ones. Ultimately, their attempts to mobilize the younger Romanian generations were a failure, as they had been when they targeted the exiled communities. After Iliescu had declared that a "legionary danger" existed, some curiosity was aroused among the university students, but just a few took up the torch or wore the green shirt, believing that the Legion could have a chance as a protest movement or that its ideas were timely. These few attempted to provide the old movement with a sort of ideal continuity, by reiterating the intolerant discourse in their publications and in their public gatherings; but they remained politically marginal. Their lack of success in the early 1990s shows that social movements hinder their chances of fostering their ideological core by searching for continuity at all costs during epochal changes. However, on the long run, the grass roots cultural activities and the work on memory gave instead proficient results. The groups that preserved and fostered Codreanu's, Sima's and Papanace's apologetic memory in Romania spent years in innovating the old apologetic discourse in the spirit of the early 1990s' anti-communism. Normalizing the memory of a fascist interwar movement and of its intolerant values was and still is mainly

done by high jacking the discourse on the anti-communist resistance, in which the legionaries were only a minority, and on the communist prisons' sufferings. Thanks to the memory work of these groups, and therefore partially of Sima and his associates in the early 1990s, the normalization of fascism in Romania remain a societal problem that grow year after year.

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