

George Cipăianu, *Catholicism și comunism în România. 1946-1955. O perspectivă diplomatică franceză* [Catholicism and Communism in Romania. 1946-1955. A French Diplomatic Perspective], Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Argonaut, 2015, 425 p. (Series: History, Documents, Testimonies).

The far-reaching changes that have been sweeping across the entire Romanian society since 1990 have made it possible for scholars to resume confessional and religious history as a research topic, which was banned during the Communist period or was completely dismantled by the official ideologues of that regime. This resurgence of interest in this topic has largely been driven by the Romanian historians' access to documentary sources preserved in the archives of various West-European countries. Professor George Cipăianu from the Department of International Studies and Contemporary History, the Faculty of History and Philosophy, "Babes-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca has had the opportunity to pursue a prodigious teaching and research activity abroad. Previously little-known documentary sources became available to him while he was teaching at the Paris XII Val-de-Marne and Marne-la-Vallée Universities. The documentary sources that inspired him are stored in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in France (Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères in Paris, série Europe, sous-série Roumanie). The investigations Professor George Cipăianu carried out in those archives led to his discovering documents concerning the situation of the Greek-Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Romania during the Sovietisation period, more specifically during the first decade after World War II (1946-1955). While all traditional layers of the Romanian society underwent systematic persecutions during those years, the treatment of the clergy was particularly heinous. It was the Catholic Churches that suffered the hardest blows, as they were deemed to maintain the link with Western Europe's spiritual life. Such developments were bound to outrage the French diplomacy, given the time-honoured traditional ties of France with both the Romanian political establishment and the Catholic communities in Romania. As a result, the Foreign Ministry in Paris exchanged several messages on this issue with the French Legation in Bucharest, but also with other French diplomatic missions abroad. This data was initially published in French in a study entitled *Catholicisme et communisme en Roumanie: 1946-1955, Une perspective diplomatique française* (Cluj-Napoca: European Studies Foundation Press, 2014). This French edition was received favourably by readers. However, this favourable reception also showed the need for publishing a Romanian translation of the original version of this book as well, since such an edition could prove useful for the entire Romanian readership. This translation by Liana Lăpădatu has now seen the light of print, providing readers with a fluent and clear Romanian text. The archival information selected most carefully by the author is very abundant and relevant and is preceded by sizeable introductory chapters,

which altogether amount to about 30% of the volume's scientific text, making information more understandable.

Right from the outset, the author emphasizes the Greek-Catholic Church as the prime target of the Communist authorities complying with orders from Moscow, since in 1946 the Soviet Government had taken steps to abolish the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine. In addition, the fraudulent parliamentary elections staged in Romania in the autumn of 1946 had formally legitimized the power of the pro-Communist government led by Dr. Petru Groza, which could thus start persecuting the Greek Catholics in Romania and adopt restrictive measures against the Roman Catholics. Naturally, the French Legation in Bucharest received this news with great concern, for the French Government still regarded the Romanian nation with great affection. However, the question was to what extent the French Government could still get involved in Romanian affairs after the war, since Romania was now under Soviet military occupation and was ruled by a government with an outright pro-Communist stance. Obviously, under these circumstances, the diplomatic, political and economic position of France was difficult. In any case, the Soviet military, diplomatic and ideological threat was looming large on all Western countries, so a French-German historical reconciliation was becoming ever more vital. Initiated under the Schumann Plan in 1950, this reconciliation led to the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community, prompting the pan-European economic integration. Although Russia had been France's traditional strategic partner, the Cold War context changed the prospects for French diplomacy in Eastern Europe completely and so the possibility of influencing events in Romania disappeared. Moreover, even though the Romanian diplomacy had traditionally embraced a Francophile orientation, in the Cold War context the Romanian governments openly stated their distance from the Western powers or even displayed hostile attitudes towards them. Against this backdrop, the French diplomacy could no longer intervene in favour of the Catholics in Romania.

However, the French diplomats posted in Romania could at least collect very useful information to be passed on not only to the French Government, but also to the Holy See, as the author notes in the chapter entitled "Catholicism in Romania from the Perspective of French Diplomacy."

As the main connection with the West, the Roman Catholic Church with its two rites represented the main opponent of the pro-Communist governing coalition. Consequently, the government led by Dr. Petru Groza launched its verbal attacks against Catholicism immediately after coming to power in March 1945. The authorities claimed the Vatican was a "citadel of obscurantism" and the main tool of the Anglo-American warmongering imperialists. By contrast, the Soviet Communist regime considered that the Orthodox Church could be used as a means of expansion and, to that end, the Greek-Catholic churches were to be merged with the Orthodox churches, as

pointed out by the author in Chapter V, entitled “Calvary of the Greek Catholics”.

On the other hand, as the author emphasizes, the Greek-Catholic priests and higher clergy carried out a relentless public exposure of the Government’s Marxist ideology and anti-democratic practices, even though they were well aware of the ordeals their brothers in faith from Ukraine had suffered. The fiercest ideological adversaries of the Communist power were Ioan Suciu, the apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Blaj, and Alexandru Rusu, Bishop of Baia Mare. The Government took measures against the Roman Catholic Church. The author analyses these measures one by one, starting with the unilateral denunciation of the Concordat with the Vatican on 17/19 July 1948, under the pretext of the “Vatican’s interference in Romania’s internal affairs”. Next came the education reform, under which churches no longer had the right to establish and administer schools. This was followed by the decree-law on the regime of religious denominations on 4 August 1948, blatantly violating religious freedom. Subsequently, these measures became harsher, targeting specifically the Greek-Catholic Church whose bishops were forced to retire. Not long afterwards, the Government decided to strike a death blow to the Greek-Catholic denomination by arresting all the bishops and publishing on 1 December 1948 the decree that abolished the Greek-Catholic Churches. All these measures were accompanied by the confiscation of all the real-estate property of the Greek-Catholic Church in favour of the Orthodox Church. The Communist Government expected to earn in return the loyalty of the Orthodox Church and largely achieved this goal, as the author shows. However, the Greek-Catholic priests and hierarchs resorted to passive resistance. Bishops Traian Frențiu, Ioan Suciu, Vasile Aftenie and Tit Liviu Chinezu preferred the martyrdom in prison to abandoning their faith.

Moreover, the Roman Catholic denomination did not receive a more favourable treatment from the Communist regime, as evidenced by the following sections of the introductory scientific study. The Communist regime endeavoured to at least uncouple the Roman Catholic Church in Romania from the Vatican’s jurisdiction. In an attempt to create an autonomous community in Romania, the so-called “priestly movement for peace”, the authorities convened several meetings in the traditional centres of Transylvania, but without much success, as the Bishop of Alba Iulia subsequently excommunicated those participants. The author points out that the official abolition of the Roman Catholic Church would have caused much more severe diplomatic complications than the dismantling of the Greek-Catholic Church and would also have seriously undermined the Romanian Government’s prestige abroad. Consequently, there were numerous attempts at setting up a dissident Roman Catholic authority, with the aim of reducing the relations with the Vatican to a minimum. However, the resistance demonstrated by the Roman Catholic hierarchs was so firm, in Bucharest as well as in Transylvania that the regime

retaliated with repressive measures by arresting Márton Áron, the Bishop of Alba Iulia.

As the study reveals, the representatives of the French diplomacy in Romania were very concerned about these developments, even though they could not intervene. An “old priest with the soul of a hero”, as George Cîpăianu very pithily refers to him, Monsignor Vladimir Ghika had very close ties to France. This harmless monk who had dedicated his life to caring for the sick and instructing the poor was considered a particularly precious spoil by the Security because he was well-known throughout the Catholic World. That is why on 18 November 1952 he was arrested in Bucharest, imprisoned and tortured, as the authorities sought to force him to disclose compromising information about the Vatican. During the interrogations, the old monk showed an outstanding strength of character, which is why the author has deemed it necessary to dedicate him a special chapter.

The author dedicates another special chapter to the Vatican’s reaction to the anti-clerical persecutions perpetrated by the Communist power. In this chapter, he underlines the fact that the possibilities for action depended largely on the quality of first-hand information. However, as the author argues, the totalitarian regime strove to cut off with the help of the *Securitate* any source of information for Rome. The main channel of information and action was represented by the Apostolic Nunciature in Bucharest, which was kept under permanent surveillance and control by the authorities. The nuncio had to obtain permission whenever he would travel across the country. In 1947, Monsignor Gerald Patrick O’Hara, an American by birth, became the regent of the Nunciature in Bucharest. Facing many dangers, Gerald Patrick O’Hara did however travel to Transylvania, where he met with the Greek-Catholic Bishop Iuliu Hossu and the Roman Catholic Bishop Márton Áron. When the Government took action for the abolition of the Greek-Catholic Church, the nuncio consecrated Greek-Catholic bishops to ensure the hierarchical continuity. He also kept in touch with the Greek-Catholic priests and urged Alexandru Cisar, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bucharest, and Márton Áron, the Bishop of Alba Iulia, to protect the Greek Catholics.

The Communist Government’s anti-Catholic policy was now unfolding in an escalating rhythm and the Vatican’s Nunciature could protest against the infringement of international law only, for instance, after the unilateral denunciation of the Concordat with the Vatican on 19 July 1948, or after the dismantling of denominational schools under the education reform of 1948. The most powerful protest since 1 December 1918 was sparked off by the abolition of the Greek-Catholic Church by a government decree which violated the provisions of the Paris Peace Treaty. Under those circumstances, the Nunciature’s presence in Romania was becoming increasingly uncomfortable for the Communist power, so on 4 July 1959, the Nunciature’s regent and his secretaries were declared *personae non gratae* and forced to leave Romania.

The introductory section of the volume ends with considerations on the “attitude of the Orthodox higher clergy”. It appears that – unlike the Catholic Churches – the Romanian Orthodox Church was officially “autocephalous”, so it could be indeed subordinated to the authority of the State, even though the latter openly avowed its atheism. Because of this, the authorities did not seek to destroy the Orthodox Church, but merely to ensure its full subordination. As a matter of fact, I. V. Stalin had also realized during the war that the Orthodox Church could be used to preserve the Soviet Empire and, later, to disseminate an expansionary propaganda. For the same reason, after the war, he limited himself to disbanding the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. He subsequently convened an Orthodox World Congress where the Russian Patriarchate was proclaimed the supreme authority of global Orthodoxy. As a result, after the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania was liquidated and its assets and believers were transferred to the Orthodox Church, the Romanian Communist regime limited itself to exercising control over the latter, particularly since Patriarch Iustinian Marina was fully serving the interests of the totalitarian state. Still, many Orthodox priests were arrested for their religious beliefs and for resisting the spread of the Communist ideology.

This preamble is very compelling and rich in value judgments showing that the Romanian Communist regime wanted to sever the ties with the Catholic Western world solely to demonstrate its obedience to the Soviet power. It is followed by 178 documents dated between 12 April 1946 and 29 December 1955, with the majority containing high value information which attests that the French diplomatic circles were kept abreast of the political developments in Romania, despite the numerous obstacles that hindered their activity. It also reflects the concern of the French intelligence milieu with the ever stronger derailment of Romania as it slipped under the total domination of the Soviet Empire. As the book shows, since its installation in June 1948, the Patriarch Iustinian Marina expressed himself in favour of the Romanian Orthodox Church’s accession to the “United Front of Orthodoxy” under the leadership of Patriarch Alexei of Moscow. He also started to launch attacks against the Greek-Catholic Church and the Vatican. Soon afterwards, in July 1948, the Romanian Government denounced the 1927 Concordat with the Vatican and launched its offensive against Márton Áron, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Alba Iulia.

In the latter half of 1948, most information sent from Romania to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to the accelerated process of abolishing the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania. Moreover, on 13 November 1948, Pierre Charpentier informed the French Foreign Ministry that the Nunciature in Bucharest believed a political trial awaited the arrested Greek-Catholic bishops, as they had not consented to being incorporated in the Orthodox Church. By contrast, in 1949, the information conveyed by the French diplomatic corps focused on the refusal of the Ministry of Religious

Denominations to accept the status of the Roman Catholic Church and on the libellous attacks of Communist authorities against Catholicism and the Vatican. All this would culminate in the arrest of Bishops Márton Áron and Anton Durcovici in June 1949. Unfortunately, the situation of the Catholic Church in Romania worsened over the years, reaching a critical moment on 12 July 1950, when Philippe de Luze informed Robert Schumann about the departure of the Holy See's Nunciature from Bucharest. Other information from 1950 referred to the regime's attempt to seize control of the Roman Catholic Church by creating a "dissenting church", an attempt which ultimately failed. As a result, in 1951 the French diplomatic corps was informed of a series of lawsuits filed against the Catholic dignitaries from Romania, headed by Augustin Pacha, the Bishop of Timișoara, for whom the death sentence had been requested. Unfortunately, the arrests continued over the following year, and on 24 November 1952 Renand Sivan, the French Minister in Bucharest, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris telegraphically about Monsignor Vladimir Ghika's arrest. The French diplomats' concern for the fate of this exceptional personality were voiced throughout the year 1953, as demonstrated by the documents published, but they could do nothing to save him, so he passed away in prison in May 1954. Meanwhile, disheartening news about the fate of the arrested Greek-Catholic bishops continued to arrive. However, on 29 November 1954, a note issued by the press service of the French Foreign Ministry confirmed that Bishop Augustin Pacha had been released from prison. In 1955, several diplomatic documents discussed the steps taken for the beatification of Vladimir Ghika.

The publication of this volume of documents by Professor George Cipăianu provides us with new testimonies on the oppressive essence of the totalitarian Communist regime in power in post-World War II Romania.

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