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# CONCERTATIO

## Actions of Repression Directed Towards the Democracy Movement December 1989 in Timișoara

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### **Introduction**

**T**HE YEAR 1989 was the year of democratic changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Romania began to follow that trend of protests and democratic reforms rather late, as the changes were difficult and painful (Tismăneanu 2014). Ceaușescu's country is a discordant note in the series of peaceful revolutions, because the repression forces of the communist regime decided to open fire, which led to 162 dead and 1107 wounded, until Nicolae Ceaușescu left his position of power on 22 December 1989. In Timișoara, a city located near the western border of Romania, where the revolutionary movement started on 16 December 1989, 73 dead and 324 wounded were registered before the dictator's escape (Szabo 2014, 32). 43 corpses were picked up from the morgue, taken to Bucharest, and incinerated. The massacre was possible as a result of the actions that the repression teams had organized (Hall 2000). In the evening of 16 December, those actions

were performed by the local forces of the *Miliție (Militia)*, the *Securitate*, the Firefighters, and the Rangers, with the involvement of the communist leaders in the administration.

In the morning of 17 December, several officials holding important positions began to arrive in Timișoara, one at a time, coming from Bucharest. On Sunday, but in the afternoon, the brigade led by the secretary for special problems of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Ion Coman, arrived as well. Important high officials from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense, the General Prosecutor's Office, and high-level activists of the party accompanied Ion Coman on his arrival. Some of them stayed with him permanently, but others coordinated the repressive actions from subordinate units divided into sections. Wednesday, 20 December, saw the arrival of Constantin Dăscălescu, the prime minister of the Socialist Republic of Romania at that time. Yet, he stepped aside (through the back door!) and was at no time available for a real dialogue with the protesters.

As regards the abovementioned command structure, there was no formal written decision to have it constituted. Yet, most certainly, such an order existed and operated, considering the centralist system and the pyramidal stratification of command specific to the dictatorial communist regime. Of course, there were situations when the lack of coordination between the party leaders (the Romanian Communist Party), those from the Army (the Ministry of National Defense, including the Patriotic Guards and the Civil Defense), and those from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (with several structures: the Militia, the Securitate, the Firefighters, the Rangers, and the Safety and Security units) gave the impression that the action was not conducted under centralized coordination. Yet, despite that dysfunctionality, the command structure was as real as it gets. Its role and actions can be clearly seen in the verdict given in the Timișoara Trial: "Through the concerted action of the forces under the command of the former secretary of CC of RCP, Ion Coman, the dissolution of the demonstrators was pursued in the first place, and not the annihilation of those who, by taking advantage of the events' evolution, committed acts of destruction or circumvention" (Orban and Rado 2010, 231). In Bucharest, Nicolae Ceaușescu and, in his absence, Elena Ceaușescu led the command structure, giving direct orders to the ministers and the secretaries of the Central Committee.

## The Officials who Organized and Led the Repression

**T**HE BUCHAREST team who coordinated the activities of the repression forces in Timișoara consisted of: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party; Elena Ceaușescu, the first deputy prime minister of the Romanian Government; Emil Bobu, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party; Manea Manescu, the deputy prime min-

ister of the Government; Tudor Postelnicu, the minister of internal affairs; Vasile Milea, the minister of national defense; Nicolae Popovici, the general prosecutor of the Socialist Republic of Romania; Maria Bobu, the minister of justice; Iulian Vlad, the director of the Department of State Security. There were several party activists involved, as the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party used to have considerable authority, while responsibility on the party line was of foremost importance to them (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006). The team commanded repressive measures, directed towards the people that manifested in favor of freedom and democracy, either by using the subordinates that led the institutions and military units in the area, or via the representatives from the center that were sent over from Bucharest or other locations in order to carry out actions against the protesters. Their actions were massively supported by the huge repressive system of the communist state.

Among those who came from the center to suppress the movement in favor of civil liberties in Timișoara, we find: Ion Coman, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, who coordinated all the activities of the repression forces; Gheorghe Diaconescu, the deputy of the general prosecutor; Nicolae Bracaciu, the deputy of the minister of justice; Ilie Matei, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (former prime-secretary of the Party Committee of Timiș County); Cornel Pacoste, the first deputy premier of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania; Nicolae Mihalache, the deputy head of the organization section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party; Constantin Nuță, the deputy of the minister of internal affairs and the chief of the General Inspectorate of the Militia; Ștefan Gușă, the army chief of staff and the first deputy of the minister of national defense; Victor Atanasie Stănculescu, the deputy of the minister of national defense; Mihai Chițac, the commander of the Chemical Units from the Ministry of National Defense and commander of the Bucharest garrison; Velicu Mihalea, the deputy chief of the General Inspectorate of the Militia; Emil Macri, the head of the Directorate for Economic Counterintelligence of the State Security; Nicolae Ghircoiaș, the director of the Forensic Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; Dumitru Rosiu, the head of the Judicial Service of the General Inspectorate of the Militia; Tudor Stanica, the head of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations within the General Inspectorate of the Militia; Mihai Onțanu, the deputy chief of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations within the General Inspectorate of the Militia; Gheorghe Carasca, the deputy chief of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations within the State Security; Dumitru Ștefan, the alternate of the chief of the Traffic Directorate within the General Inspectorate of the Militia; Filip Teodorescu, the alternate of the chief of the Counterintelligence Directorate within the State Security; Gabriel Anastasiu, the alternate of the chief of the Directorate of Internal Information within the State Security; Dan Nicolici, the head of the Information-Documentation Center within the General Inspectorate of the Militia; Gheorghe Glavan, the intelligence chief of the RAS (the Romanian Anti-terrorist Service); Gheorghe Manta, instructor within

the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party; Florea Carneanu, the alternate of the commander of the Antiaircraft Defense of the Territory; Dumitru Ionescu, an officer with the Army High Command; Teodor Ardelean, an officer with the Army High Command; Gheorghe Radu, the alternate of the chief of the Operations Directorate within the Army High Command.

## The Local Repressive Command

**A**T THE county level, the prime-secretary, a position Radu Bălan filled at the time, led the repressive command structure (called of “Defense” in the official documents). Vasile Bolog, the propaganda secretary, Florea Sofronie, Viorica Boiborean, Teodora Avram, and other members of the County Committee of the Party supported it as well. Petru Moț, the mayor (officially the prime-secretary of the Timișoara Municipal Committee of the Party) and Ioan Rotărescu, the secretary for organizational problems, operated at the municipality level. As the prosecutors recorded within the indictment that was put together for the arraignment of the defendants in the Timișoara Trial, there were merely repressive intentions and no attempt at engaging with those who came out on the streets. Here is what they say about Radu Bălan and Ilie Matei: “The demonstrators were brutally attacked in the evening of December 16, 1989 by intervention brigades of Militia and subunits of Securitate and Firefighters Troops, which used maces, tear gases, and water tanks against them. Through those acts of violence, the two defendants, who refused to discuss openly with the masses of demonstrators, manifested their overt intention to suppress any anti-dictatorial movement” (Orban and Rado 2010, 206).

Romeo Bălan showed that some communist leaders of the country at that time were aware that it was all about people who sought rights and liberties. Among them there was Minister Vasile Milea. For the purpose of opening fire on the demonstrators, he specified: “The demonstrators will be seriously warned, and then shot at the feet level.” And because demonstrators were involved, the Army had no reason to shoot them: opening fire was murder, because “the order referred to demonstrators and not hooligans and apaches” (Bălan 2011, 15–16). We must mention that, even against hooligans, legal measures did not refer to execution in the street.

If the people in the command structure of the repression coordinated many actions against the peaceful demonstrators, some of them seeing to their direct execution, there were officers who came from various areas of the country who, along with those from the local structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of National Defense, carried out a wide range of actions to limit the protest and identify its leaders in order to silence them. They collected information by trailing and infiltrating the crowds, by interrogating those who were detained within the Penitentiary and the Jail of the Internal Affairs Inspectorate of Timișoara, as well as

the wounded in the hospitals (Szabo 2013b, 100). Gabriel Anastasiu, the alternate of the chief of the Directorate of Internal Information within the State Security, specified that he came to Timișoara accompanied by subordinate officers, naming Lieutenant-Colonel Ioan Pop and Captain Adrian Bărbulescu, while Colonel Victor Achim was brought in from Drobeta-Turnu-Severin. Lieutenant-Colonel Gavril Oniceag and Costică Tănase were already in Timișoara, and were ordered to stay put (Rado 2013, 111). Colonel Nicolae Glăveanu from the RAS in Bucharest was also in Timișoara at the time (Radu 1990).

## The People from the Securitate

**T**HE TIMIȘ Securitate was involved via the activity of its chief, Colonel Traian Sima, and of his deputies, Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe Atudoroaie and Major Tinu Radu. Lieutenant-Colonel Petru Pele and Colonel Constantin Cîntărețu commanded the officers from the local Securitate, through Services I and II, and worked in teams to collect information. Another name that stands out is that of the chief interrogator, Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe Sălăjan (sometimes written as Gheorghe Sălăgeanu). Colonel Aurel Rogoian, lieutenant-colonels Felician Ceghi, Adrian Cârstea, Gheorghe Diaconescu, Dumitru Popescu (the head of the Special Anti-terrorist Unit—USLA), Constantin Tănase, Andrei Uram, Ștefan Demeter, majors Ion Adamescu, Adrian Bradisteanu, Nicolae Zarcu, Nicolae Mavru, Ion Ungureanu, Petru Veltanescu, captains Aurel Cighi, Vasile Grui, Mihai Pereschin, Vasile Petrea, Ion Țepeneu, Ionel Ionescu, Mihai Florian Vidican, Eugen Zaharia, Saul Beloia, Marin Vasile, Mihai Petenchi, first lieutenants Liviu Dinulescu, Marian Ștef, Liviu Baniac, Mircea Novac, Vasile Marian, Aurelian Cioabă, lieutenants Ioan Clava and Valerica Fulga, all acted under their command. Some of those mentioned above were officers responsible for various industrial sites and were there at the time of the revolutionary events. They tried to intimidate the workers, so that they would not discuss what had happened, did not take an attitude, and did not organize to come out in the streets for massive protests. The impeded events became, eventually, at the price of numerous victims, the reason for the fall of the communist regime.

Gheorghe Atudoroaie, one of the alternates of the chief of the Timiș Securitate, admitted, indirectly, the following aspects: “Around 7.30 pm, on December 16, 1989, I sent by order the officers from Securitate II to the economic objectives, without any munitions, with the mission to stay there overnight, as well, in order to control the state of mind of the working personnel, to firmly assure and secure the economic units, and to prevent events with grave consequences” (Rado 2013, 164). We can see in Atudoroaie’s declaration that his first objective referred to the people’s states of mind, as attacking the units was out of the question, while the reference to preventing serious events was simple rhetoric, to distract attention from the main

idea. The officers in the industrial sites supplied periodic reports, while Captain Aurel Cighi collected and processed them together with the chief of the Second Service, Major Zarcu.

## The People from the Militia

**T**HE CHIEFS from the center had as their subordinates Militia employees brought in from Bucharest and executing officers without any position besides those already mentioned. Among those, there were: Colonel Florescu and Lieutenant-Colonel Obăgila from the Directorate for Safety and Order within the General Inspectorate of the Militia, Colonel Ardeleanu from the Judicial Service, Colonel Lupu, Lieutenant-Colonel Beldeanu, Major Mihaiasa, Mihai Florea, Captain Neagu, all from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations within the General Inspectorate of the Militia. Among the Timiș Militia officers who acted against the population during those days we find Colonel Ion Popescu, chief inspector, Colonel Ion Deheleanu, the head of the institution, Lieutenant-Colonel Ion Corpodeanu and Major Ioan Popa, the alternates of Deheleanu, Colonel Constantin Ion, Lieutenant-Colonel Constantin Tufariu, Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe Farcasu, Colonel Fuieru, Lieutenant-Colonel Ioan Dumitrescu, Lieutenant-Colonel Ioan Haprean, majors Gelu Popovici, Iosif Veverca, Sabin Bădescu, Gheorghe Dragoș, Traian Bolosin, Pavel Rădulescu and Adam Mureșan, captains Pavel Țoia, Vasile Căndea, Mihai Matei, Ciocan, Flore Tocut, first lieutenants Dorin Iepure, Traian Olaru, Mircea Drăgan, Dorel-Aurel Mureșan, Codreanu, lieutenants Dorel Andras and Florin Dragomir. Lieutenants Ioan Bara and Mitariu were very active, especially in detaining the demonstrators, on the night of 16 December 1989.

Colonel Ioan Bunoaica and the chief of staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Tomuș, commanded the units of the Safety and Security Brigades in Timișoara and ensured their continuous coordination. Lieutenant-Colonel Ion Sasu, with his subordinate officers, among which Horia Septimiu Bodocan, led the units of Firefighters, in strong connection with the intervention teams of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of the Army. Firefighter units in the area came to support them. An officer called Dumitru Țăran led a team that came from Arad. The commander, Colonel Petre Teacă, coordinated from Bucharest the repressive actions that the Rangers were involved in. For a few days, their subordination changed from to the Ministry of National Defense to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The passing-receiving operation in Timișoara was over on 18 December 1989. Lieutenant-Colonel Neculai Nechita, the chief of staff at that time, and then the commander of the unit, as well as Lieutenant-Major Ion Clavac from the Rangers also became involved. Another name that stands out is that of Colonel Pantelimon Ciocoiu from Bucharest.

## The Army People

**T**HE ARMY had an overwhelming role in the repression, as the local forces gave their very best in that respect. We are talking about Colonel Gheorghe Rotariu, the commander of the local garrison and of the Antiaircraft Defense Division, Lieutenant-Colonel Constantin Zeca, appointed to command the 18<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division of Timișoara, and Nicolae Predonescu, the chief of staff of the same unit, the officer who first ordered the troops to fire in Timișoara, on 17 December 1989, around 4.15–4.30 pm, in Liberty Plaza. The shots came from the balcony of the building of the 18<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division of Timișoara (Szabo 2013a). Likewise, Lieutenant-Colonel Constantin Caraivan, who commanded the artillery of the 18<sup>th</sup> Division, Lieutenant-Colonel Ștefan Balaș, and Major Gheorghe Vlăduț played an important role. Important names in the repression were Lieutenant-Colonel Mihai Bulai, the former commander of the tank regiment at Giroc, Colonel Constantin Rogin or Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe Vișinescu from the same unit. Majors Vasile Paul, Dorinel Biriș, Captain Neagu, Octavian Pruneanu, and First Lieutenant Dorel Romanescu operated on Girocului Lane. Majors Gheorghe Borodan, Ioan Burci, Ion Dincă, Aurel Dima, Moise Iercosan, Octav Pleșca, Ioan Ungur, captains Nicolae Benghia, Marin Chiriac, Constantin Miu, Marin Ene, Dumitru Caseriu, Nicolae Ilie, Iordache Mare, Adrian Neagu, Gheorghe Oprișoreanu, Marin Pătrulescu, Florin Predescu, Tiberiu Savin, first lieutenants Daniel Botez, Constantin Gheorghe, Vasile Cindea, Maricel Cristea, Constantin Maiescu, lieutenants Traian Ardeleanu, Daniel Dinu, and Daniel Craiu also participated in the repressive actions. First Lieutenant Maricel Cristea, who came with Vasile Paul's unit from Lugoj, witnessed the repression measures on Girocului Lane and was the only one among those present who was honest and humane enough to relate what happened, indicating those responsible for the massacre.

Major Velicicu, the head of the Counterintelligence Service of the 18<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division, was also involved. Other officers involved were Lieutenant-Colonel Vasile Ceuca, Major Constantin Judele, First Lieutenant Adrian Vlădilă, but also Marius Bora and Dorel Rus. Other participants were Petrea Ioan Cristea, the chief of staff, Ion Partenie, Dănuț Eftimie, Gheorghe Vasile, and Ion Bădărău, officers from the Timiș Patriotic Guards.

Among the officers from the Ministry of National Defense who came to Timișoara for the repression, one who stood out due to his actions was Lieutenant-Colonel Ilie Gurschi, the commander of a detachment of paratroopers who came from the Army base at Deveselu, Dolj County. On 21 December 1989, the detachment was involved in counteracting activities at the Banat Polygraphic Enterprise, where they tried to prevent the appearance of the manifesto of the Democratic Romanian Front. At the same time, Gurschi was part of the group constituted in the morning of 22 December 1989 that was sent to capture the leaders of the Revolution from the

Balcony of the Opera House in Timișoara and destroy the amplification equipment. Tinu Radu, a member of the Timiș Securitate who took part in those preparations, testifies in that respect (Szabo 2013a). At the same time, Gurschi (with the soldiers under his command) saw to the evacuation of Prime Minister Constantin Dăscălescu and the other party and state leaders from the building of the former County Party Committee. Some of the victims among the Timișoara people recorded on the night of 22 to 23 December 1989 can be attributed to them, because they were the ones who acted in the Opera Plaza—Banat Museum—Central Hotel area, where several people were killed or wounded. Lieutenant-Colonel Daniel Dinu from the Ministry of National Defense was wounded in the left foot in the same area. In the evening of 22 December 1989, around 11 pm, he was patrolling in front of the Opera House. Corporal Ioan Kantor reported to him that an armed paratrooper had refused to identify himself and disappeared. A few minutes later, the soldiers left in the direction of the Banat Museum to look for the paratrooper and the civilians that accompanied him. Then shots came from that area and Lieutenant-Colonel Dinu was wounded by a ricocheting bullet (Milin 2007a, 2495).

## Other Institutions Involved

**H**EADS OF institutions or their employees also participated in the local repression teams. We should mention here Rodica Novac, the director of the Timiș Health Directorate, Ovidiu Golea, the director of the County Hospital and deputy director of the Timiș Health Directorate, Elena Topală, the president of the Timiș Court House, and Mihai Teperdel, the territorial inspector of the Department for Religious Denominations. Local prosecutors (coordinated by Laurean Tîlinca), as well as those brought over from other parts of the country (Bucharest, Arad, Caraș-Severin, and Hunedoara) acted at the order of the deputy general prosecutor, Gheorghe Diaconescu (military magistrate), whom Nicolae Popovici, the general prosecutor, dispatched to Timișoara. Mihai Ionescu, Ion Onofrei, Ioan Mihai Alexandru, and Gheorghe Mocuța came from Bucharest together with Diaconescu. The role of the prosecutors who were thus brought in was to interrogate the demonstrators held in the Timișoara Penitentiary, situated on Popa Șapcă Street. On the morning of 17 December, when he landed in Timișoara on a Tarom flight, Diaconescu went to the Timiș Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to organize the repression together with generals Constantin Nuță, Velicu Mihalea, and Emil Macrea (Milin 2007b, 3429). The prosecution did not issue any bench warrants during the Revolution period. Hundreds of people were arrested in Timișoara (around 800), while the issue of arrest came up in another 28–30 cases, concerning those found in possession of goods stolen from the devastated stores (Milin 2007b, 3533). The prosecution was not involved in the release of those who



were detained illegally, on whom no evidence had been found and who, at any rate, were there beyond the legal term of 24 hours.

But what is truly staggering is that the prosecutors did not make the slightest attempt to identify the persons who shot at the population! Of course, the corpses were examined, which required the arrival from Bucharest of additional prosecutors, Ovidiu Petrescu and Vasile Grevdea. Another team, which included many members of Romania's Government, came to Timișoara at around 1 pm on 20 December 1989. It was led by Constantin Dăscălescu, the prime minister of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Emil Bobu, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, a person very close to the Ceaușescu family, accompanied him. Nicolae Văidescu, the minister of the electro-technical industry, Eugeniu Rădulescu, the minister of the automotive industry, Maria Flușcă, the minister for light industry, and Ioan Toma, the general secretary of the Communist Youth Union, in fact the youth minister, were also part of the delegation. The ministers who were present in Timișoara had the task of going to the large companies under their jurisdiction to prevent the employees from taking to the streets and determine them to get on with their work. They did not even try to intervene, because the workers were already in front of the County Party Committee and in Opera Plaza (Victoriei). They merely had some discussions with the directors of the companies, most of which were empty of workers at the time. In fact, the ministers who came from Bucharest were surprised by what they found out in Timișoara, as in Bucharest the true magnitude of the revolutionary events had been unknown.

## The Repressive Strategies

**T**HE TEAMS who acted against the fighters for democracy, liberty, and a better life in Timișoara applied an entire range of repressive techniques:

1. *Intimidation.* First, intimidation techniques manifested themselves through the presence in the streets of several employees from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, either in uniform or dressed like civilians. Starting with the night of 16 to 17 December 1989, patrols of the Ministry of National Defense were sent in the city. Their presence had the purpose of discouraging people from getting together to constitute groups that would act in an organized manner. As early as 16 December, the demonstrators were intimidated by use of firefighter vehicles, Ministry of Internal Affairs automobiles, by the presence of the cars of those in high positions of power (with specific license plate numbers), as well as of Army vehicles, all of them a conspicuous and distinct presence in various places where demonstrators gathered. On Sunday at lunch, tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCS) came into action and occupied the city.

2. *Misinformation.* The most important act of misinformation took place on 16–17 December, when Nicolae Ceaușescu, the former general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party and the president of the Socialist Republic of Romania, was only informed that some shops had been broken into, and not about the fact that the protests concerned mostly democratic reforms. That act of cowardice on the part of the local communist activists, of Militia officers, and of the local members of the Securitate, favored the drastic, excessive measures dictated by Nicolae Ceaușescu against the Timișoara people. Previously, Ceaușescu had been informed that those involved were just a handful of fanatical churchgoers in the Reformed Church. Later, on 18 and 19 December, the Ceaușescu spouses were told another lie, according to which the demonstrators had attacked military units. In a speech broadcast on radio and TV, in the evening of 20 December, Nicolae Ceaușescu invoked the reasons above to justify the introduction of other drastic measures in Timișoara and around the country, not knowing that they were false. He was also misinformed as regards the involvement of some foreign agents and powers in the Timișoara revolt. Yet another piece of misinformation that was locally used was that the shot persons, removed from the morgue and taken to Bucharest in order to be incinerated, had fled across the border.
3. *Threats and preventive measures.* Beginning with 16 December, the Timișoara people were permanently threatened. There was a large variety of verbal phrases, combined with insults. They were used in an attempt to divert people from the sensitive issues. The families of those deceased were also threatened, as they were looking for their own. Many times, speech was accompanied by gestures, when the members of the forces of order raised bludgeons or weapons and pretended to fire. There were also threats involving the use of vehicles, when they moved towards the crowds in tanks and APCs. The city was blocked off, and on the main access ways checkpoints were set up to prevent the entrance of outsiders and the locals from leaving town. Telephone conversations were stopped, while the state of emergency was declared (Ban 2012).
4. *Violence.* The members of the repression teams resorted, beyond verbal violence, to a physical violence that is hard to imagine. People (men, women, and children, young or old) were slapped, punched, hit with wooden sticks, stones, crowbars, cables, rubber maces, and the stock of the weapons. Likewise, they were shot with submachine guns, flamethrowers, semi-automatic rifles (scoped), or machine guns from the APCs or tanks. Throughout the entire revolt, the demonstrators did not possess any firearms. From time to time, they also turned to bludgeons, stones, bottles, or jars (full or empty). They had a far more powerful weapon, though: the will to overthrow the regime (Szabo 2014, 16).

## The Ways of Annihilating the Demonstrators

**B**ETWEEN 16 and 22 December 1989, the repression in Timișoara developed along two coordinates: 1) direct actions against the demonstrators, resulting in arrests, beatings with various objects, as well as gunfire; 2) intelligence-gathering actions that were meant to identify the leaders of the demonstrators' groups, in an attempt to annihilate them (by detainment or shooting). Under these circumstances, the suffering of those wounded or arrested did not matter to the soldiers, Militia officers, people from the Securitate, firefighters, rangers, and party activists. The drama that Adrian Costin went through perfectly illustrates this. In the evening of 17 December, he left home to pick up his wife from a different district of the city. He joined some groups of demonstrators and, in 700 Plaza, he was shot in the shoulder, as shots started to come from the Opera Plaza—Timișoara Hotel area. That was an area where several victims were recorded. Although he was wounded, A. Costin did not go to the hospital; instead, he went home, accompanied by his friends, without having found his wife. Near the Northern Train Station, they were arrested, taken to the Transportation Militia, beaten, and required to write declarations concerning their presence on the streets. From there, along with other arrested people, they were taken to the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Timiș, where they were all brutally beaten by officers dressed in uniform or in civilian clothes. At dawn, they reached the Penitentiary. There, they were not beaten; instead they were interrogated as regards their reasons for taking to the streets and the shouted slogans.

Unlike other injured people, Adrian Costin informed the officials that he had medical problems with his shoulder. He was promised medical care, but no one tended to him. On 20 December, upon pressure from the demonstrators at the Opera House and the County Party HQ, he was released, along with other persons. The wound did not look well, so he went to the New Clinics to get medical care. He refused hospitalization. After the winter holidays, he went to a policlinic, where he received treatment. On 2 February 1990 surgery was performed on his arm, and the bullet was eventually taken out (Milin 2007b, 3142–3143). This is a complex case, but most of the victims recorded in the Timișoara Revolution of December 1989 went through one or more of the sequences mentioned: arrest, beating, shooting, and interrogation. All those tragic events came as a result of the order that Nicolae Ceaușescu issued: “taking measures,” including opening fire, “measures” put into practice by the repression teams, became the first priority.

## Guilt, Lies, and Retracted Declarations

**I**ON COMAN, who commanded the repression of the demonstrators for democracy and civic liberties in Timișoara, explicitly admitted either that he gave orders to fire, or that he passed on Nicolae Ceaușescu's order to shoot at the demonstrators: "I had the representation that by giving the order that the fire should be opened, there will be a massacre, which, fortunately, did not occur" (Rado 2013, 8). During the trial, Coman retracted many of the declarations he had previously made to prosecutors. In some cases, he was right, as in the case of the order to fire, which was passed on at around 2.30 pm. Vasile Milea gave the order from the Ministry of National Defense, while Tudor Postelnicu issued the order from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Both of them were ministers with competences in this respect, the only ones in a position to issue those orders. Later, in the declaration given during the arraignment, Ion Coman declared that he was informed of "only" 58 deaths, which, in his view, was proof that the number of those who had been shot was limited.

The easiest excuse, often invoked in court, was that the order to fire referred to hooligans, as they vandalized institutions and attacked the law enforcement or military units, an aspect that does not correspond to reality. Then, another excuse was that the shots were fired in conformity with the legal norms, that is, verbal warning, vertical warning shot, followed by firing at the legs. Yet, most of those hit by bullets had penetration orifices in the abdomen, chest, and head areas. Ion Coman reconfirmed the order to fire given by telephone by Nicolae Ceaușescu to the commander of the forces of repression within the Army, General Ștefan Gușă, as well as to the commander of the units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Constantin Nuță, around 6.30–7 pm, on 17 December, about an hour after he took command in Timișoara. Yet, as proven, the first gunfire victims appeared shortly after 4 pm, in Liberty Plaza in Timișoara, where soldiers from the 18<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division fired their weapons. Ion Coman declared that he had not allowed the use of heavy weapons, such as tanks and artillery, although it is clear that machineguns from the APCs were actually used. The former commander of the repression in Timișoara specified, at his arraignment: "Even from the moment I arrived, I forbade the use of heavy munitions against the demonstrators. I ordered gun shooting by infantry weapons (automatic rifles) only. I gave the order that tanks, cannons, APCs, helicopters, and planes will not be used" (Rado 2013, 17–18). Yet tanks, APCs, and helicopters were used. The tanks played an intimidation role, while the helicopters served to observe the movements of the demonstrators.

## The Fear Ceaușescu Provoked and His Misinformation

**A** FEW THINGS stand out as regards the actions of the huge mechanism of repression in Timișoara. First, Ceaușescu was told that the movement meant destruction caused by hooligans. No person in a position of power dared to mention to him either the slogans in favor of democracy and fundamental liberties, or the fact that the requests were basic: bread, heat, electricity, and medication. Another aspect is that the shooting often occurred after the devastation of industrial sites. When shots were fired, the targets were not those involved in their destruction, but the groups of demonstrators. Thus, fire was opened—and there were many victims—upon the persons gathered on the steps of the Cathedral, both in the evening of 17 December and on the night of 18 December. The Cathedral was not at risk of being devastated. Instead, nothing was done to stop the devastation of the stores across the street, a few meters from those who opened fire.

Cristian Liviu Câmpean was 13 years old when he was wounded in Liberty Plaza. His lucidity and fresh mind helped him to recall the following aspect, which he later related in court: “After everything was broken, then they opened fire. After!” (Milin 2007a, 2842). That was an aspect the court retained when they gave their verdict in the Timișoara Trial, an occasion to emphasize that the forces of order had the role of protecting people and goods, not the role of killing: “The forces that were supposed to assure the protection of the stores involved in the shooting against the demonstrators, and the result consisted of many dead and wounded” (Orban and Rado 2010, 267). As a matter of fact, the court recorded that there was no legal ground for the shooting, as the devastation of the institutions and stores did not in any way justify the use of guns, especially since innocent people were exposed to danger, some of them being killed, and others only wounded (Orban and Rado 2010, 313).

The conclusion that we may infer is that in Timișoara, between 16 and 22 December 1989, there existed a command structure of the repression. Even though it was not formally constituted, it acted directly against the persons who demanded civil and political rights. Out of fear and cowardice, the leaders of that command structure did not correctly inform Nicolae Ceaușescu about the protests. Instead, they supported his wrong decisions and actually commanded the repressive actions directed towards the insurrectionists. Moreover, they supported the decisions regarding the elimination of any of trace of the revolutionary actions, including that of incinerating corpses.

After the removal of Nicolae Ceaușescu from his position of power, it would have been natural for Romania to head in the direction of democratic values and construct a society in which fundamental rights and liberties would be respected. In fact, the right to justice was almost totally ignored. There was no retribution for

the practices and actions that the representatives of the communist regime had perpetrated. The conclusions of the *Final Report* of the Presidential Committee for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, a report greeted with remarkable hostility, were presented only on 18 December 2007, in the Romanian Parliament (Cesereanu 2008). A few days before, on 5 December 2007, generals Victor Atanasie Stănculescu and Mihai Chițac, two of those responsible for the Timișoara massacre, had finally been convicted. Their trial took a very long time because they both held very important positions within the first post-revolutionary government, the former as minister of the economy and then of national defense, and the latter as minister of internal affairs. In the Timișoara Trial, which started on 2 March 1990, against officers from the Militia and the Securitate, and against four leaders of the communist administration, few people were convicted. In such conditions, the lack of a sound judicial investigation that would shed light on the crimes committed in Timișoara and their authors affects Romania's efforts at building a society centered on the rule of law and accountability for committed actions. Within this context, research should be continued to identify all the persons involved in the repression, and their actions, for the moral purpose of bringing them to justice. □

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### **Abstract**

#### **Actions of Repression Directed Towards the Democracy Movement: December 1989 in Timișoara**

This study aims at accurately presenting the structure that directed the repression of the manifestations for democracy in December 1989, while detailing the actions that took place at that time. The repressive actions occurred under the coordination of a team. They were conducted directly from Bucharest, first through the agency of party and local administration institutions, alongside units from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of the Ministry of National Defense. Later, officials in control of the Communist Party, the Army, the Militia (as the police was called during the communist regime), the Prosecutor's Office, and the Securitate (the secret or intelligence service within the communist system) were also sent to Timișoara. On 17 December, around 4.30 pm, there was a shootout, and many people were killed and others were wounded. The repression forces occupied the city and made sure that the traces of the revolt were erased. The medical evidence was largely destroyed. Likewise, the authorities refused to engage in dialogue with the revolutionaries, as their only attempt in that respect occurred on 20 December 1989. Under such circumstances, the communist regime in Romania continued the repression until 22 December, at 12 am, when demonstrators toppled Nicolae Ceaușescu from his position of power.

### **Keywords**

repression, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romanian Revolution, Timișoara, authoritarian regimes