

CEAUSESCU'S TRIAL AND EXECUTION

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Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian dictator who got shot in December 1989, after popular revolt movements against the communist regime and after the National Salvation Front took the power, was a head of state endowed with a peasant cunning and with an ambition for power on account of which he never had any scruples. He slyly got rid of his rivals and strategically appointed family members in key positions. He promoted a tribal type of communism. Similarly to all communist leaders, Ceausescu got in power as a Moscow subordinate. Towards the half and the end of his regime he played, however, the nationalist card out of tactics reasons: both in the foreign and domestic politics. At the beginning he wanted to seduce the Western World, offering the image of a communist independent from Moscow, then, towards the end, to make the Romanians' look turn away from the economic disaster and from the extreme poverty in the country, but also to shut out Gorbachev's influence, which signified a reformed communism the Romanian dictator was allergic to. During the hasty trial he and his wife were brought to, in December 1989, Ceausescu proved to be almost an autistic individual, shut out in his dictator clichés, a dictator who was never interested in the way Romanians lived and in what their needs were. There were two visible obsessions during the trial: his belief that the Romanians' popular explosion is exclusively due to a double conspiracy (external and domestic) and his desire to be allowed to speak in front of the 'working class' that he still credited as his ally. However, before the fall of his regime, in the meetings of the Executive Political Committee, Ceausescu, at least at verbal level, proved to be a head of state capable of any extreme repressive measure against his own people.

The trial he was brought to was considered by analysts – at home and abroad - a juridical catastrophe, a masquerade, an absurd play (in Eugen Ionescu's style), a political assassination. The trial was summary and brief (through lightning procedure, as the legal specialists call it) and the arguments for such a trial were the background stress and pressure of the ongoing revolution. Constantin Lucescu (*Procesul Ceausescu. Solutie*

justitiara a unui moment istoric [Ceausescu's Trial. Righteous Solution of a Historical Moment, 1997]), involved as a (rough) defender of the dictator, claims that even if Ceausescu had been put on a normal trial (that is not through a lightning procedure and not necessarily by an exceptional court), and had his trial lasted for years, still nothing more than what the dictator declared during the trial could have been found out since Ceausescu was obsessed by a single idea, namely that popular revolt had been plotted by 'foreign groups' from East and West!

Some actors of the December 1989 events claim that Ceausescu was captured on the 22nd of December, but nothing was publicly stated about this for a while so that possible faithful troops to the dictator would not find out. Some others consider that the new leaders of the Power (grouped in the National Salvation Front) negotiated with certain factions of the Securitate and Ceausescu's death was decided only after these factions capitulated and accepted the political change in Romania.

Some authors (Petre Roman) claim that the idea according to which Ceausescu had to be put to death belonged to Silviu Brucan (puppet master in the National Salvation Front). Some others (Andrei Kemenici, the head of the Targoviste garrison, where Ceausescu was executed) say that the puppet master of Ceausescu's trial was General Victor Athanasie Stanculescu. And, there are also voices claiming that the shadow conductor of the Ceausescu couple's trial was the adventurer Gelu Voican-Voiculescu, who joined Ion Iliescu's team, the new political leader (crypto-communist) immediately after the fall of communism in December 1989, in Romania.

There are some published works that deal almost exclusively with Ceausescu's trial and execution, having as witnesses the very actors of the events that took place in the Targoviste garrison. Two of these are authored by Viorel Domenico (*Dupa executie a nins [After Execution It Snowed]*, 1992; *Ceausescu la Targoviste. 22-25 decembrie 1989 [Ceausescu at Targoviste. 22-25 December 1989]*, 1999). In *Dupa executie a nins* the eight parachutists who made up the execution commando of the Ceausescu couple and a series of officers from the Targoviste garrison are interviewed. Some of the latter consider that the psychological and bellicose pressure on the military unit were meant to push towards the lynching of the Ceausescu couple, so that the Bucharest authorities would get

rid of the responsibility of a (relatively legal) trial, and Ceausescu should be put to death without any of the officials being held accountable for this (p.112-113). The things were, in fact, ambiguous in the garrison: many officers felt, on the one hand, that they betrayed their supreme commander and, on the other hand, they wanted to take the people and the revolution's side. The garrison, although a unit with strict, military rules, was dominated by certain chaos, due to the psychological pressure. According to a witness: "There were many, very many moments, entire hours, when anybody could save or kill Ceausescu" (p.119). Then, in the end, the things got clearer and all the officers, the entire garrison dismissed Ceausescu, although he was the supreme commander of the army. In *Ceausescu la Targoviste*, Domenico interviews General Andrei Kemenici, the one who held Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu in custody, at the Targoviste garrison. Kemenici declares that during the December 22-25 1989, in Romania there were more power centers that claimed priority over the life or death of the Ceausescu couple. In the end, only two alternatives were considered viable: 1. the couple's execution to take place within the unit, without a trial and 2. the dictatorial couple to be handed over to a commission representing the new authorities who should organize a trial. In any case, Kemenici says, the option of bringing Ceausescu back in power was left out. In the end, they opted out for a mix between the two solutions, i.e. the couple got a trial from an extraordinary commission that comprised members of the New Power (the National Salvation Front), and then, the dictator and his wife were executed in the unit's precincts. Kemenici states that until that end, outside and inside the Targoviste garrison there were some diversions, so that the couple would be executed without any trial; the barracks was attacked several times while the dictator and his wife were there, but there was not any precise purpose in the respective attacks.

Vladimir Tismaneanu (*Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel*) considers that Ceausescu's trial deliberately wanted to place the entire blame of communism and its depredations on the dictator, in order to preserve the power of the nomenclature and even of the anti-Ceausescu Securitate (faction that probably supported the popular revolt). This trial was purposely prepared by the newly formed Power (the National Salvation Front) so

that for Romania's entire disaster only Ceausescu was to be found guilty and not communism.

Gelu Voican-Voiculescu (considered by Dorian Marcu, in *Moartea Ceausestilor [Ceausescus' Death]*, 1991, to be the one who devised the couple's execution) admits that Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu were shot even before the order was given, even before they got to the execution wall. This happened because the captain of the execution platoon was too anxious, he opened fire before giving the order, thus the camera could record only the last seconds of the shooting. But, some other time Voican-Voiculescu concludes: "Ceausescu's death was the condition for the viability of our Revolution!" (Ardeleanu, Savaliuc, Baiu, p.109).

According to the majority of testimonies and analyses, Ceausescu was killed by captain I.B. who fired first, without resorting to the statutory order for the other subordinates to whom the mission was assigned.

In *Dupa executie a nins*, Viorel Domenico interviews the military who got the mission to execute Ceausescu. According to their testimonies and to those of some other actors in the garrison, Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu were shot by tens of bullets, their bodies being riddled (as in an extreme release). They were shot before the order was given; but not only by those who were part of the commando, it was a chaotic outbreak of all those who had guns and who, not being among the ones who were assigned the execution mission, were only spectators. In *Dupa executie a nins* one can read a series of morbid details about Ceausescu couple's death. For instance, one soldier declares that near the execution wall he picked a bone piece of Elena Ceausescu's skull, in order to keep it. Some other tells about the garrison dog which ate Elena Ceausescu's brain from the pavement. Many soldiers took out bullets from the execution wall as a *souvenir*; some even dipped a handkerchief in Ceausescu's blood (p. 165, 167).

In *Procesul Ceausescu [Ceausescu Trial]* (1996), Ardeleanu, Savaliuc and Baiu record some witnesses' statements supporting the idea that the bodies of the two Ceausescus were riddled by tens or even hundreds of bullets and that during the autopsy, Ceausescu's corpse was even mutilated.

In *Complotul Securitatii [The Securitate's Plot]* Antonia Rados supports the idea that Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu were briefly shot on their way to the execution court, and then, they were executed for a second time, although they were already dead, so that their execution could be officially taped. Rados claims that her statements are based on the data provided by foreign forensic scientists, who interpreted the execution in this light.

Some other authors consider that there is another version about Ceausescu's execution, besides the official one, namely a NKVD-KGB style assassination, with a bullet at the back of the head. That's why "*Ceausescu's exhumation would help to find many answers*" (Cernaianu, p.88).

Abusively projected in the collective mentality (Dracula, communist Hitler, Caligula, Nero, Macbeth, Anti-Christ, Stalin, Beria), Ceausescu did not need these epithets in order to stir horror: he was a cruel dictator with no scruples, but with his own special identity, the comparison with other bloody figures was not necessary. The way in which the media speculated the so-called common graves from Timisoara (containing the presupposed corpses of some protesters who had previously been tortured by the Securitate on Ceausescu's order), the inculcation of the idea of 'genocide', all these were devised by the representatives of the New Power, established on the 22 of December 1989, in order to highlight the myth of Ceausescu and Securitate (the dictator's main acolyte) - 'the monsters'. Neither Ceausescu, nor the Securitate needed such extreme negative and demonizing projection, simply because the dictator's performance and that of the body of internal repression were dark and violent enough. Some western journalists claimed that the filming of the mutilated corpses in the common graves from Timisoara represented "the symbol of the biggest media lie in the history of television" (Mommerency in Selys, p. 60), Ceausescu's demonization and with him, that of Securitate, being part of the claimed 'genocide' direction that would have taken place in December 1989. Since he was thus shrouded in this dark myth, Ceausescu's death was perceived as the violent assassination of a hideous 'monster'. His assassination during Christmas 1989 was even projected as a divine punishment: "A mystical approach would impose resignation for this solution, seen as the work of destiny, a sanction for having desecrated through demolition so many sacred churches" (Frunza, p. 32). Such interpretation traps always distort the identity of

the respective historical character, and his perception in the collective mentality. Ceausescu's violence and his gory and despotic character were proved on various occasions during his regime, but they should be analyzed as such, devoid of literary, folkloric or mystical projections, only at the level of political deeds. However, since he was hyperbolized as a 'monster', 'vampire', 'ogre', of course the dictator could be assassinated in an absurd, cartoon-like or extremely brutal style, without respecting the laws.

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